



Beyond what works: what matters in Irish Changemaker Schools.

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Executive Summary

Introduction

This report provides details of an evaluative study of Irish Changemaker Schools conducted at the request of Ashoka Ireland and funded by Tomar Trust. The evaluation, which was carried out under the project “*Beyond what works: what matters in Irish Changemaker Schools*”, commenced on 1st June 2018.

The purpose of the research evaluation was to identify emergent themes, values and attitudes that indicate potential reform of the education system. These data were collected in consultation with a sample of Irish Changemaker Schools with the following objectives:

1. To investigate what matters across the schools (identifying the value and impact assigned to particular activities and priorities by teachers and students, and to identify what really counts, over and above what can be counted).
2. To explore school culture, the dispositions of teachers and learners, and outcomes for learners beyond the testable.
3. To identify insights and learnings to help contribute to the development of Changemaker practices within existing schools and to the wider adoption of Changemaking practices by other schools.

Rationale

The rationale for this study reflects Ashoka’s ambition to challenge the increasing acceptance of global education reform that is inextricably linked to school improvement and student outcomes (Sahlberg, 2007), to one that offers an alternate vision and structured approach through the Changemaker Schools Programme and Changemaker Education Movement. The research is timely in light of the emphasis on entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation reflected in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) *Action Plan for Education* (DES, 2018) and as such, posits the findings as potentially supportive in contributing to and shaping Irish education reform.

Background

Bill Drayton founded *Ashoka – Innovators for the Public* in the United States of America in 1980, during a period in which the concept of social innovation was not to the fore, despite it being a period of international expansion of non-profit organisations and other providers of social innovation and initiatives across various sectors (Edwards-Schacter & Wallace, 2017). Drayton's recognition of global inequality meant that he understood it would require big ideas and ideals to question and solve global problems associated with the inequality that he witnessed. Ashoka would go on to help support innovators and entrepreneurs, 'fellows', who had long demonstrated their passion to solve some of the world's greatest social and humanitarian issues through small, simple innovative solutions. Ashoka fellows are supported, often financially, and always through a network of their peers to develop their ideas. There are approximately 3,500 of these social entrepreneurs currently spread across 93 countries.

Developing relationships with networks and systems is central to the role of social innovation and the social entrepreneur. Ashoka fellows have access to a number of network opportunities that assist the social entrepreneur in developing and supporting ideas and projects to elicit change in response to a social need. This pursuit constructively aligns with Ashoka's position in advocating for 'empathy-based' changemaking and responding to ever-changing challenges and constraints presented environmentally and socially. Becoming an Ashoka Changemaker means realising that environmental constraints, that could potentially inhibit human potential, are only one challenge to be overcome in the pursuit of social innovation and entrepreneurship. The changemaker will pursue their goal, fuelled with empathy-guided motivation and practice; will demonstrate resilience when they have to re-configure their plan, or their method; and will be supported in their endeavours through their network and partners.

Bill Drayton draws connections between 'empathy' and 'changemaking' with respect to children in consideration of the skills that are necessary for young people to keep pace and remain resilient. Ashoka explain that empathy is about more than treating others better, because it also means "doing better" (Why Empathy, 2018). It supports young people to find their voice and potentially make a positive impact on the world. For Ashoka, empathy facilitates communication, collaboration and leadership, and is a key component for developing the 'Changemaker school' where children, teachers and school leadership can benefit.

Context

Since 2012, Ashoka has supported over 280 Changemaker schools across Europe, Africa, Asia and the USA. Through this programme, Changemaker Schools are identified, recognised and supported as examples of schools that provide pupils with opportunities to create and lead from a young age, and that actively develop in their pupils the key skills that will unleash the full potential in themselves and others. A primary objective of the Changemaker Schools programme is to support and disseminate the work of these schools to catalyse changes throughout the education system and create educational reform.

Ashoka Ireland developed the Changemaker Schools programme in 2014, and currently there are 15 schools across the island of Ireland that are part of the network. There are four main areas of focus for Ashoka Ireland in selecting schools for inclusion in their network, which include: vision; active learning; innovation; and influence.

Ireland's Changemaker schools are innovative in many diverse ways which is why they are identified and nominated to the Ashoka network. The values of 'Creativity', 'Empathy', 'Leadership' and 'Teamwork' are the central pillars of the Ashoka programme, and these are taught, lived and practised in different ways across the schools.

Consultation

This evaluative study was designed to capture the lived experience of a sample of schools identified across the Ashoka Changemaker network on the island of Ireland. Purposive sampling and invitations to participate, led to a consultation process with six schools that represented a broad geographical spread north and south of the Irish border, and varied in size and ethos. One of the schools in the sample is identified as a special school. A case study approach was selected by the research team as most suitable to explore the lived experience and deep learning of individuals at each school. Participants in the case studies included principals, deputy principals, pupils, parents, teachers and other school personnel. Data collection included: individual interviews with principals/deputy principals; focus groups with pupils, teachers, SNAs, parents; school activity/classroom observations; and visual imagery chosen by pupils as representative of 'central pillars' of Changemaker schools or specifically representative of their school as decided by the children. Interviews and focus groups meetings were audio recorded, and subsequently transcribed, coded and analysed first as individual case studies, and finally, a meta-analysis of the complete data set. Ethical approval was sought and granted from Dublin City University (DCU) Research Ethics Committee, and ethical guidelines were adhered to throughout the study. Every

effort has been made to ensure anonymity of participants and pseudonyms have been used throughout the report to refer to participating schools.

Significant Themes and Framework

Following a thorough process of inductive and deductive coding across individual case studies, an analytical framework was developed by the research team in order to conduct the second stage of analysis across the entire data set. Data and findings are presented across the following thematic strands: Understandings of Leadership and Student Voice; Organisation and School Culture; Student Learning; Values and Priorities of Participants; and Changing the Education System – what matters in these schools.

Key Learning

It is evident from the data that all of the participating schools have strong, vision-driven, committed leaders who expressed commitment to distributed leadership and staff development. However, there is also evidence of charismatic leadership where staff expressed a degree of over-dependence on the person of the principal who they identified as essential to the spirit of the school.

Triangulation of data confirms that the cultures of each of the participating schools emphasised the values of care, collegiality and respect, thus reflecting the key pillar of empathy. Pupils in most of the schools had a strong sense of themselves as leaders in their school and their right to have a say and ‘speak up’. This was not evident in one of the schools where schools perceived leadership as the domain of the adults. It was also noted from the data that there was limited understanding among parents who participated in the Focus Groups of the purpose of the Changemaker award and the four pillars that are intended to characterise these schools.

A broad range of images were offered across schools by pupils with respect to their understanding of leadership; there are also some visual images which were chosen specifically to represent the concept of ‘voice’.

Two of the participating schools emerged as particularly committed to the Changemaker model. Principals of these schools are actively engaged within the network and the schools have intentionally adopted the ‘four pillars’ as underpinning their approach to teaching and learning. Where schools are engaged with fellow network members, participants spoke very positively on the impact of this engagement. The other schools showed varying degrees of engagement with the Changemaker brand.

There is evidence that the six participant schools had a limited sense of their own potential to lead change at system level, although two of the principals indicated their intention or hope to impact at system level through their own experiences or interests.

Most of the participating schools also belong to other networks. It is noteworthy that parents in particular, were naming aspects of the schools' work during focus group interviews which they assumed were relevant to the Changemaker focus, where in fact they were part of the schools' other network activity or designation.

Recommendations

There are four key recommendations which have emerged as a consequence of this evaluation:

1. Schools would appear to be unaware or unable to clearly articulate why they were nominated for inclusion in the Ashoka Changemaker School network. There is a necessity for further clarity on this process and purpose of nomination
2. Increase the visibility of Ashoka within the education sector and clarify a process of ongoing engagement to support a school's identity as a Changemaker school
3. There is significant scope for the role of a facilitator on a full-time basis to: interact with the schools; encourage them to become more involved in the network; and increase awareness of their Changemaker role and status
4. There is an opportunity for Ashoka to reflect on their interpretation of leadership and distributed leadership so that they can support schools to avoid the reality of charismatic leadership driving the value system. Addressing this may have a positive impact on sustainability of shared responsibility and practice for a school community within the network.

Introduction

Objectives of study

This report details the process and outcomes arising from the evaluation of Irish Changemaker Schools under the project heading "*Beyond what works: what matters in Irish Changemaker Schools*". The evaluation, which commenced on 1st June 2018, was proposed by Ashoka Ireland and funded by Tomar Trust.

The purpose of the evaluation was to identify the themes, values and attitudes emerging from Irish Changemaker Schools that indicate potential reform of the education system. In particular it aimed to:

1. Investigate what matters across the schools (identifying the value and impact assigned to particular activities and priorities by teachers and students, and to identify what really counts, over and above what can be counted).
2. Explore school culture, the dispositions of teachers and learners, and outcomes for learners beyond the testable.
3. Identify insights and learnings to help contribute to the development of Changemaker practices within existing schools and to the wider adoption of Changemaking practices by other schools.

Rationale for the project

Since the 1980s there has been an unprecedented emphasis on global reform in education within and across many countries worldwide. This has also been reflected in the increasing acceptance of the global education reform movement, also known as GERM, which has been inextricably linked to school improvement and student outcomes (Sahlberg, 2007). The scale and pace of policy changes has been enormous as countries strive to enhance student outcomes and school performance (Ball, 2013) through an emphasis on standardization of practices, test-based accountability and performativity and, a narrowing of curriculum to focus on core subjects such as literacy and numeracy (Sahlberg, 2007). This has been very evident in countries where education is used as a tool to recover from economic recession by securing competitive advantage through good performance on internationally bench-marked assessments. While GERM is promoted by many in education there is a growing awareness among educationalists and wider society of the need to challenge this model of reform.

Few organisations have provided an alternative vision and ambition to lead the change. Ashoka argues it provides an ambitious vision and structured approach to lead such change through the Changemaker Schools programme and the Changemaker Education Movement. While some individual countries such as Finland have resisted GERM, others, including Ireland, are beginning to place an emphasis on entrepreneurship, creativity and innovation as reflected in the Department of Education and Skills (DES) Action Plan for Education 2018 (DES, 2018) which saw the initiation of a Creative Schools Initiative being piloted and subsequently launched. Enabling

the creative potential of every young person and encouraging young people to become active, problem-solvers and creative citizens in their communities and towns is central to this and reflects the aims of Changemaker Schools, therefore potentially providing a 'perfect storm' for this evaluation to become transformative. Findings from these Changemaker Schools could play a central role in contributing to and shaping this reform in Irish education.

Background

Changemaker Schools Programme Overview

Ashoka Ireland developed the Changemaker Schools programme in 2014. Through this programme, Changemaker Schools are identified, recognised and supported as examples of schools that provide pupils with opportunities to create and lead from a young age, and that actively develop in their pupils the key skills that will unleash the full potential in themselves and others.

A primary objective of the Changemaker Schools programme is to support and disseminate the work of these schools to catalyse changes throughout the education system and create educational reform. There are currently 15 designated Changemaker Schools in Ireland and 280 globally.

The Changemaker Education Movement

The Changemaker Education Movement takes this vision for education beyond the boundaries of the designated Changemaker Schools, in a movement of educational change and transformation that aims to inspire more schools and teachers to lead education reform. The aim of this movement is to seed in schools across Ireland, Europe and the world - the leadership, innovation and skills that are in abundance in the designated Changemaker Schools.

To create this movement of change and disseminate the work of these schools, Ashoka sought support from Tomar Trust for two distinct but integrated pieces of work:

1. An evaluation: 'Beyond what works: what matters in Irish Changemaker Schools'. The insights and learnings from the evaluation aim to help shape the following:
2. 'Building the Changemaker Education Movement': Ensuring wide scale adoption of Changemaking practices that have been identified and distilled through the evaluation.

This report describes the process and findings from the evaluation described at number 1 above.

Literature Review

This review of the literature sets forth some theoretical insights about broader concepts such as social innovation and social entrepreneurship – concepts that underpin Ashoka’s global vision and their Changemaking programme for schools. It also offers a rationale to explain why Bill Drayton founded Ashoka in the early 1980s. This is followed by an examination of some of the global and local issues affecting us today in 2019. These merit consideration because they serve as an important reminder of why the Ashoka vision developed more than thirty-five years ago remains equally relevant today, especially in schools. The review then offers an insight into the Changemaker programme for schools, specifically as it relates to some of the educational programmes that it has developed, some of which are taught in the schools that participated in this research. An overview of what these schools are doing in terms of Changemaking is also provided in the Appendices.

The Social Entrepreneur, Social Innovation and the Ashoka Changemaker

“Social entrepreneurs are the essential corrective force. They are system-changing entrepreneurs. And from deep within them, and therefore their work, are committed to the good of all.”

Bill Drayton¹, Ashoka Founder

Drayton founded *Ashoka - Innovators for the Public* in 1980 in the United States and coined the term *social entrepreneurship*. Drayton founded Ashoka during a period of

proliferation and international expansion of non-profit organisations, third sector initiatives and social movements as providers of SIs in various sectors (healthcare, employment, education etc.) feeding the social (informal) economy sector. (Edwards-Schachter and Wallace, 2017: 71)

However, this coincided with a period of time where the concept of social innovation was not to the fore in any academic field. Notwithstanding this fact, Drayton’s recognition of global inequality, in addition to his Harvard liberal arts education, meant that he understood it would require big ideas and ideals to question and solve global problems associated with the inequality

¹ <https://www.ashoka.org/en/focus/social-entrepreneurship>

that he witnessed. Ashoka would help support innovators and entrepreneurs who had long demonstrated their passion to solve some of the world's greatest social and humanitarian issues through small, simple innovative solutions. The Ashoka 'fellows'

combine the pragmatic and results-oriented methods of a business entrepreneur with the goals of a social reformer (Sen, 2007: 536)

Ashoka 'fellows' are supported, often financially, and always through a network of their peers to develop their ideas to change systems, practice and society overall. While this may seem as a 'big picture' ideal, Drayton actually believes that every person has the potential to be a *changemaker*. Changemaking is not confined to adults. In fact, it is a concept that is being encouraged and developed at the primary level of education, right through to some of the world's most prestigious business schools (Sen, 2007) with a view to developing and nurturing the future generation to be adequately equipped and responsive to needs so that they have a confident launch pad on which to emerge as effective social entrepreneurs. Ashoka is not simply about developing the individual but rather developing the social sector overall, and indeed other sectors, since so much social innovation is far-reaching and often results in "multi-sector reconfigurations" (Zeigler, 2017). Social innovation cannot be considered in isolation nor can its practitioners.

In their review of social innovation and social entrepreneurship, Phillips *et al.*, (2015) explain that greater links between the two concepts need to be developed. Not least because the traditional idea of the social entrepreneur as a "lone visionary" is obsolete in the context of the collective and collaborative, multi-sector modus operandi that are inherent to social innovation and contemporary entrepreneurship. Many themes running through social innovation research are common to social entrepreneurship (ibid).

Schumpeter's early theory in the field, which perpetuated the idea of the heroic entrepreneur, noted that in order to be considered one of these agents of change in the economy,

requires aptitudes that are present in only a small fraction of the population and that define the entrepreneurial type as well as the entrepreneurial function (Schumpeter 2011, p. 132 in Montgomery 2016)

Particular traits and characteristics define the entrepreneur and the Ashoka fellow - creativity, originality, entrepreneurial quality, ethical fiber, and social impact². The Ashoka fellow is defined

² <https://www.ashoka.org/en/focus/social-entrepreneurship>

as one of the world's "leading social entrepreneurs" of which there are approximately only 3,500 worldwide (askoka.org)³ across 93 countries. "They define the new roadmaps that allow people to thrive in this new environment, while providing solutions and demonstrating the how-tos. They are the ultimate role models in today's world"⁴.

Like other social entrepreneurs, they are

exceptional people ... serial entrepreneurs (who) take initial failures in their stride and push on relentlessly to find creative ways to reach their goals" (Sen, 2007: 536-537).

They are also the ones "most able" to deliver on social innovation (Leadbeater, 1997). Interestingly, the social entrepreneur is not the "locus" of social innovation. That lies in the social system that the entrepreneur and the enterprise inhabit (Phillips *et al.*, 2017: 444). Indeed, when concluding their review, the authors arrived at the conclusion that

social enterprises and social entrepreneurs exist within a social innovation system—a community of practitioners and institutions jointly addressing social issues, helping to shape society and innovation. (ibid, 454).

Central to the development of the social innovation and the social entrepreneur are the roles of networks and systems (e.g. cross-sectoral partnerships) and institutions which ultimately serve to support the entrepreneur to develop, apply, finance and scale-up their idea and ultimately, sustain it. This is central to the work of Ashoka, specifically the Ashoka Support Network (ASN)

a global community of successful, innovative leaders from a variety of fields who see entrepreneurship as the primary engine for economic and social development. ASN members engage with Ashoka and Ashoka Fellows based on their interests and skills: ASN members participate in [Ashoka Globalizer](#) events, serve on advisory boards for Ashoka Fellows, attend local/regional retreats with members of the Ashoka community, assist Ashoka staff with institution-building efforts, and congregate at the ASN Global Summits. The network currently includes more than 350 members in 25 countries⁵.

³ <https://www.ashoka.org/en/about-ashoka>

⁴ <https://www.ashoka.org/en/our-network/ashoka-fellows>

⁵ <https://www.ashoka.org/en/focus/social-entrepreneurship>

Access to this type of network is crucial for entrepreneurs and their social innovations. Citing the work of Lettice and Parekh (2010, p. 150), Phillips *et al.*, (2015) note that when entrepreneurs are unable to identify and engage with a meaningful network it has negative implications for their innovation, their morale and access to financial and other support. It is widely recognised that entrepreneurs and other actors in the social innovation field will not have all the resources they need to ensure their innovation comes to fruition. Engagement with networks and systems is crucial because

these interdependencies lead them to negotiate mutually beneficial outcomes. These multi-player games are stabilized and channelled by institutions, the rules of the game.”
(Pel *et al.*, 2014, p. 1)

Entrepreneurs working with Ashoka also have access to other network opportunities such as the Executive in Residence (EIR)⁶ and Changemaker⁷ programmes. These serve to assist the social entrepreneur who has demonstrated an idea worthy of development and support. However, what is of critical relevance for the current study is the Ashoka Youth Venture initiative that seeks to infuse changemaking into the culture of schools, universities, youth organisations and companies. And it is this to which we now turn as we explore how Ashoka has cultivated changemaking in schools.

Why do we need changemaker schools?

There is no doubt that significant social, economic, change has occurred globally in recent decades (Stiglitz, 2017; Inglis, 2007; Bauman, 2006). We have witnessed an end to slavery and colonialism, the women’s and civil rights movements, the rise of democracy and a technological

⁶ Through Ashoka's Executive in Residence program corporate executives work on-site with leading social entrepreneurs around the world for a period of two weeks to six months. During this time with the social entrepreneur, the executive tackles a challenge that is critical to the social entrepreneur’s ability to scale-up their impact. At the same time, by working with the world’s leading social innovators, the executives bring back lessons learned about new innovations, emerging markets, and leadership techniques. At the end of their on-site placement, the executive and social entrepreneur continue to collaborate virtually and gain the opportunity to create shared value partnerships for their organizations. <https://www.ashoka.org/en/focus/social-entrepreneurship>

⁷ Changemakers is an Ashoka program that rapidly accelerates the impact of social innovators’ work on critical social issues by building and nurturing networks of these leading changemakers. Ashoka Changemakers empowers these networks to ignite sweeping change in their fields. Changemakers has built a global network of hundreds of partners and more than 30,000 solutions from innovators in 200 countries by hosting more than 100 online challenges during the past decade with partners such as GE, Google, the Rockefeller Foundation, and many other innovating organizations. (ibid)

revolution⁸ and the rise of the climate justice movement and more recently, the rise of the #MeToo and Black Lives Matter movements. Various forces and catalysts have instigated and brought about such change and transformation.

Notwithstanding the benefits that globalisation has brought, today we are faced with significant complex social, economic, environmental, financial, geo-political and humanitarian issues – gender and racial inequality, drug epidemics, climate change, migration and the emergence of far-right political movements that are directly linked to global discontent with globalisation, particularly in Europe and USA (Stilgitz, 2017). The UK’s vote to leave the EU (Brexit) is a perfect example. The decision to leave has posed a series of highly complex negotiations about trade, national security, food security, national borders and the free movement of British, Irish and EU citizens to name but a few. Brexit was a shock to the global and European order as we knew it.

Generally, economic and social inequalities that have emerged as a result of globalisation are well documented. Its associated discontent and unhappiness are not limited to inequality in developing countries but are also in advanced societies, such as the United States where incomes for middle-classes have remained stagnant and poverty levels have risen (Stilgitz, 2017). People’s health has also been affected. In the USA, middle-aged white men’s mortality is increasing while in other parts of the world it is decreasing (ibid). And racial health inequality persists in the most perverse way – black babies and black mothers are more likely to die from pregnancy and childbirth-related issues compared to white women even when education is controlled for⁹ (Finger *et al.*, 2017), and black men are much more likely to die from a variety of illness compared to white people (Stilgitz, 2017; Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). They are also, and continue to be, along with other minority and marginalised groups, economically and educationally disenfranchised (Wilkinson and Pickett, 2009). A similar case may be made for Ireland’s Traveller and Roma population who experience significant inequality in terms of health (poorer health among older population, higher mortality and lower life expectancy, male suicide), education and employment (Watson *et al.*, 2017; National Traveller and Roma Inclusion Strategy 2017-2021).

Bauman (2006) explains that we are living in a time of significant change and fear. Changes to the global system have meant that we are less secure, social bonds are no longer as strong and

⁸ Ashoka - Empathy In Action <http://ashokau.org/wp-content/uploads/2011/06/Empathy-in-Action-Report.pdf>

⁹ US Department of Health and Health Services

solid as they once were, and neither are society's nor the state's structures secure enough to protect us. Ashoka too have also noted that

We are witnessing a flattening of longstanding hierarchies, in which rules are quickly made obsolete and the walls that separate geographies, cultures, and sectors are crumbling fast. (Ashoka, *The Science of Empathy*¹⁰)

Giddens (1990) also argues that we are facing significant risks. Since tradition no longer holds, we are now more reflexive – constantly re-evaluating ourselves, our options and our risks. Consequently, we can reinvent ourselves as required. However, some will be more effective than others who may be disenfranchised by poverty or other such constraining realities. Moreover, our environment, climate and weather are changing and presenting new and increasingly unpredictable risks (World Economic Forum (WEF), 2018) that are overwhelmingly affecting the poor e.g. heat poverty/environmental justice - not just in the developing world (Mani *et al.*, 2018) but also in US cities (Harlan *et al.*, 2006). Food security presents another global challenge (WEF, 2018).

Thus, in contemporary times Bauman (2006) suggests that we inhabit a fluid, unregulated, milieu - *liquid* modernity (Bauman, 2006, 2007). Here, solid and stable institutions no longer exist. Close social bonds that once held communities and society together have been weakened. Social relations are distanced and this relates to increased globalisation, interdependency and a more fluid form of modern society where existential security is reduced as solidarity weakens (Bauman, 2006; Inglis, 2008). The only certainties are risk and uncertainty and they are endemic. Bauman argues, that as a consequence, this requires people to be constantly ready to change and adapt according to what these, new and fluid forms require from us. This is not unrelated to the ever-changing society that Drayton (2018) discusses when advocating the need for greater empathy-infused practices at school, at work and in the community so that we are prepared to adequately respond to those risks and challenges that accompany such vast social change while simultaneously building resilience in ourselves and in our communities. In this way, we understand why Ashoka's *Start Empathy* programme acknowledges that in this environment

¹⁰ Ashoka. "The Science of Empathy.Pdf | Powered by Box." Accessed September 21, 2018. <https://ashoka.app.box.com/s/n2tobzkcqh2ip6d7746x8frasrctom5u/file/13964589689>

New rules, new openness, and new connectivity require different sets of skills just to keep up, let alone thrive¹¹

It is widely recognised from the social innovation and entrepreneurship literature that what drives an innovation and motivates the entrepreneur is often a social need that they witness or experience. All Ashoka fellows have responded to some social need in this way in their local environment – such as developing Childline for street children in Mumbai (Jeroo Billimoria, India¹²), or completing an inventory of forest plants/trees that make dye and have local women use the dye for fabric that they can sell in a sustainable way while sustaining and maintaining the forests. Thus, mitigating against the environmentally damaging methods of commercial business models in rural areas while simultaneously promoting meaningful rural development, environmental stewardship and women’s economic empowerment (Poonsap Suanmuang, Thailand¹³).

It is only through drawing on this empathy-based skill set that one can harness local resources and build collective cooperation in the local environment where true innovation and entrepreneurship will flourish. Interestingly, Ford (1992) in his book about motivation, goals, emotions and personal agency, documented how the local environment can play a negative role in one’s life. The environment can issue a negative context effect when it fails to adequately provide for people. He outlines how various environmental factors can support/disenfranchise the individual, and ultimately affect their motivation. For example, the environment must have the “material and informational resources needed for goal attainment” (Ford, 1992, p. 130). But what is of critical relevance for the current study is that he also argues that

the environment must provide an emotional climate that supports and facilitates effective functioning. Concepts such as warmth, social support, and trust focus on this facet of environmental responsiveness” (Ford, 1992, p. 130-131).

This idea constructively aligns to Ashoka’s position advocating for empathy-based changemaking where people will be equipped to adequately respond to the ever-changing challenges and constraints one’s environment presents, particularly in the context of the current global system. Becoming a changemaker means realising that environmental constraints, that could potentially inhibit human potential, are simply only one challenge to be overcome in the pursuit of social innovation and entrepreneurship. The Changemaker will pursue their goal, fuelled with

¹¹ Why Empathy? A Case for Promoting Empathy in Schools. Ashoka.

¹² <https://www.ashoka.org/en/fellow/jeroo-billimoria>

¹³ <https://www.ashoka.org/en/fellow/poonsap-suanmuang>

empathy-guided motivation and practice, will demonstrate resilience when they have to re-configure their plan, or their method and will be supported in their endeavours through their network and partners.

What is Empathy?

Definitions of empathy may be drawn from many different fields of study such as psychotherapy, where Elliot *et al.*, (2011) state that there is no “consensual” definition but gradually a general consensus has formed that it consists of “neuroanatomically based subprocesses” involving “mirror neurons” (ibid). Elsewhere, in philosophy, Belzung (2014) provides us with a far more tangible definition of empathy when drawing on the work of Gordon and Goldman, whose theory of simulation posits that

when we understand the other, we simulate the other’s point of view and we use this prospective to understand the other and predict his behavior (Belzung, 2014, p. 177).

When Belzung references the French neuropsychologist, Jean Decety, the definition takes on a profound simplicity - “to put ourselves in the shoes of another” (ibid). The author identifies three types of empathy: 1) affective empathy or empathy by contagion; 2) sympathy and 3) cognitive empathy. Affective empathy is evident among humans, and indeed other species, when one person yawns and then another yawns for no specific reason. Similarly, when one baby cries in a nursery, others will follow suit. In terms of sympathy, there is archaeological evidence that suggests sympathy was evident in prehistoric times. Archaeological remains of hominids (modern and extinct humans and apes) with “no teeth and paralyzed by rheumatisms” point to the fact that they would never have been able to survive without the “extensive help of their congeners” (ibid, 180). Thus, demonstrating that “mutual aid” existed in prehistoric times and sympathy “thus corresponds to the feelings of concern towards others” (ibid). Cognitive empathy, then, is

not only to the fact to worry about the other, to comfort him, but also to the fact to put yourselves in the shoes of the other, to understand his feelings, his intentions and his desires. It is about a capacity to enter in the other, even if his own mental universe is different of mine ...This type of empathy also allows us to help the other (Belzung, 2014, p. 181).

It is this type of empathy that Bill Drayton so avidly describes when speaking about changemaking and the necessary skills required of children today in order to keep pace and remain resilient. Moreover, empathy is also about being aware of one's own feelings and expression, only then are we effective when interpreting and dealing with the feelings of others. These ideas are central to the Ashoka *modus operandi*. For Ashoka, it is

The ability to understand the feelings and perspectives of others and to use that understanding to guide one's actions ... (it) is the mechanism through which we learn to take on multiple perspectives. It is deeply connected to our imaginative capacity and emotional intelligence, and has been touted as a critical skill in professions ranging from medicine, to business management and leadership, design and engineering, technology, and a range of other fields. Indeed, in an age of growing global connectedness, where each of us must learn to work in teams and across previously rigid boundaries, strong cognitive empathy will be increasingly essential for us to thrive¹⁴

However, Ashoka appear to be developing the concept of empathy even further. Drayton explains the idea of *applied empathy* (ibid) and in their *Why Empathy? The Case for Promoting Empathy in Schools*, Ashoka explain that empathy is not simply about “treating others better, it means *doing better*”. It permits all students to find their voice and potentially make a positive impact on the world. Ashoka argues that empathy has become a “key currency” in a world that is “defined by connectivity and change”. It is crucial for how we negotiate and navigate relationships, hence why it is important for success in school and at work. For Ashoka, empathy facilitates communication, collaboration and leadership and is a key component for developing the Changemaker school where children, teachers and school leadership benefit. In fact, increased empathy in schools leads to safer schools, higher teacher retention and improved effectiveness (Why Empathy). However, without this critical, composite skill set, children and families are at risk of being marginalised and left behind¹⁵. This is why empowering parents is important for ensuring the success of integrating any empathy-based programme into schools (Ashoka, Empathy In Action, 2011, p. 9). Details of some of Ashoka's programmes that teach empathy are available in Appendix 1.

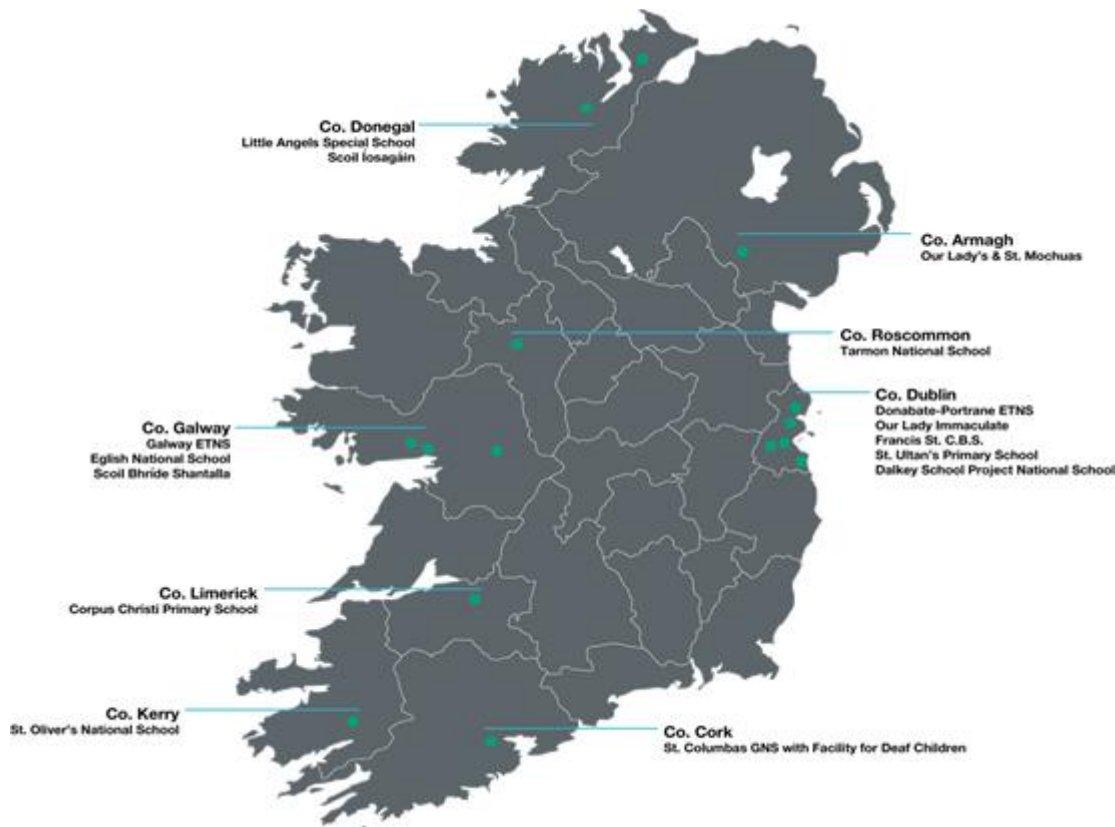
¹⁴ Ashoka. “The Science of Empathy.Pdf | Powered by Box.” Accessed September 21, 2018.

<https://ashoka.app.box.com/s/n2tobzkcqh2ip6d7746x8frsrtom5u/file/13964589689>

¹⁵ Ashoka *Every Child Must Master Empathy*

The Changemaker School

Since 2012, Ashoka has supported over 280 Changemaker Schools across Europe, Africa, Asia and the USA. There are 15 Changemaker schools in Ireland.



Map 1: Changemaker Schools in Ireland. Source: Ashoka Ireland¹⁶

Central to the Changemaker school programme are three key factors: 1) Selecting the School (which is usually nominated by an Ashoka Fellow), 2) Supporting the School (the school is connected to other schools in the network and supported by Fellows) and 3) Disseminating Best Practice (after gathering data from its schools and in collaboration with its media partners, Ashoka disseminates the best and most innovative educational practices that cultivate empathy, creativity, leadership and teamwork¹⁷

The Changemaker School is grounded in Ashoka's *Everyone A Changemaker* belief. The idea is simple, the Changemaker is

¹⁶ Source: <https://ireland.ashoka.org/changemaker-schools/>

¹⁷ Source: <https://ireland.ashoka.org/changemaker-schools/>

An empathetic leader, capable of working in teams to solve shared problems. (Start Empathy, 2013)

Key criteria are set for a school's inclusion into the Ashoka network. When identifying potential Changemaker elementary schools in a previous 'drive' in the US¹⁸, Ashoka identified the following selection criteria for a Changemaker Elementary school:

1. Institutional characteristics to lead a transformation in education
2. An individual Change Leader
3. A Change Team which may include teachers, students, parents, staff, and/or community members

In Ireland's selection criteria, there are four main areas of focus:

- Vision: School leadership must be committed to developing the skills of empathy, creativity, leadership and teamwork in order to develop all children as changemakers
- Active Learning: Experiential learning is key and pupils are active contributors
- Innovation: A culture of innovation exists in the school that is supported and driven by school leaders
- Influence: The school must be able to inspire other schools irrespective of its size/location¹⁹

It is only by using such criteria will its proposed model of education come to fruition. Ashoka puts forward a strong case for proposing a new model of education through the Changemaker school. Using creative teaching practices, primarily designed to developing empathy in children has the potential to deliver real and beneficial outcomes, not just for the children and teachers but for schools and the education system overall, such as

dramatic increases in pro social behavior and school connectedness, lower rates of aggression, disciplinary referrals, and absenteeism, and overall improvements in academic performance. (Ashoka, The Science of Empathy).

¹⁸ Start Empathy Schools Sprint, 2013

¹⁹ Source: <https://ireland.ashoka.org/criteria-1>

The development of teamwork, leadership and changemaking is crucial. The future of society depends on it²⁰. Indeed, an even greater goal of Ashoka’s educational drive is to “tip the world’s understanding so that it redefines success in growing up as beginning with the mastery and practice of empathy.”²¹. Ashoka has laid out its ambitious plans to “tip the planet” towards re-thinking education in this way. Firstly, they have 700 of the best Ashoka Fellows in various parts of the world who are ready and committed to “major pattern change” in education. Secondly, the Ashoka community and its “allies” will get five percent of influential schools to embrace empathy-based practice. From here, they can aim to gain critical mass. Thirdly, presenting the case to major and influential publishers and introducing them to the lead schools who are prepared to tell their story²². What Ashoka have done here is to essentially ‘practise what they preach’, and assemble a ‘team of teams’ and this is another important medium through which changemaking happens. This is a fundamental aspect of collaborative entrepreneurship.

As the rate of change in the world increases exponentially, social challenges are becoming more widespread and complex. Organizational structures that historically have sought to address such challenges are increasingly unable to respond efficiently. But a new, more nimble organizing framework is emerging—the team of teams. A team mobilizes to develop and advance a solution. It connects with and catalyzes other teams around the change objective. Solutions grow and spread quickly as synapses proliferate to share knowledge, experience and resources in pursuit of a shared vision. (Ashoka, Empathy In Action, 2011, p. 2)

The Changemaker Curriculum

In order to understand what the Changemaker school will teach, it is important to bear in mind some of the key skills and necessary requirements associated with working and living in an ever-changing world. Ashoka highlights this clearly in the following table, it is these composite skill sets that it endeavours to teach and develop through its Changemaking Schools programme and its *Everyone a Changemaker* vision so that children can grow and develop to become Chnagemakers themselves.

Table 1: Knowledge, Skills, Work Habits and Character Traits associated with C21st Learning

²⁰ Ashoka, Every Child Must Master Empathy

²¹ Ashoka, Every Child Must Master Empathy

²² Ashoka, Every Child Must Master Empathy

Knowledge, Skills, Work Habits and Character Traits associated with C21st Learning

- | | |
|---|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Critical thinking● Research skills and practices● Creativity● Empathy● Initiative● Public speaking● Cooperation | <ul style="list-style-type: none">● Civic, ethical, and social-justice literacy● Economic and financial literacy● Global awareness● Scientific reasoning● Environmental understanding● Health and wellness● ICT literacy |
|---|--|

Ireland's Changemaker Schools are innovative in many diverse ways. Indeed, it was this type of work that promoted their nominations to the Ashoka network in the first place. The values of Creativity, Empathy, Leadership and Teamwork are the central pillars of the Ashoka programme, and these are taught, lived and practised in very different ways in the schools. While some programmes such as Roots of Empathy (see Appendix 1) are taught in a number of schools, other initiatives and activities are unique and are developed to directly respond to the pupils' needs. Although there is significant diversity between how the schools teach, the Ashoka pillars are clearly identifiable. Details of some of the initiatives that these schools do are provided in Appendix 2.

Methodology

This study was underpinned by a social constructivist epistemology where it is accepted that knowledge is socially constructed (Vygotsky, 1987). The study wanted to capture the lived experience of each of the schools which were chosen as Changemaker Schools. It was agreed with Ashoka that this research would be carried out in six Changemaker schools. Purposive sampling was used where schools were invited to participate. The schools in this study represent a broad geographical spread, north and south of the border, and vary in size and ethos. One of the six schools in the sample is a special school. A case study approach was selected as the most suitable research approach to explore the lived experience and deep learning of individuals connected to each school (Stake, 1995). This was to explore each participant or stakeholder in their role as principal, vice-principal, staff, pupil or parent; their unique role and connection to the school was considered a key and important focus for this study. The study set out to research the key characteristics of Changemaker Schools as identified in the literature, including values such as creativity, empathy, leadership and teamwork. The research methodology was developed to

explore each of these key characteristics and to determine in what way they were experienced or lived within each of the schools engaged in the study.

Piloting of research instruments was undertaken to optimise the validity and reliability of the research (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2011). This was undertaken in another Changemaker school. A number of revisions were made to the instruments on the basis of pilot feedback. Data collection involved individual interviews with principals and deputy principals. This was in addition to conducting focus group interviews with teachers, pupils, SNAs, in some instances the school secretary, and parents. Observations were conducted in classrooms where teachers provided permission and where they were open and willing to facilitate in this mode of data collection. The process of one-on-one interviews which was used for this research study, in addition to the use of focus groups and observation in the classroom, ensured a rigorous triangulation of the data. These focus groups and interviews were conducted using an audio recorder. However, the name of the school participants were anonymised for this report and the following pseudonyms were applied to the schools: Ash, Dogwood, Elm, Lime, Maple and Twinberry. No contributions are attributed in such a way as to identify specific participants. Nonetheless, we could not guarantee that participants will not recognise other participants' inputs in the final report or that these will not be recognisable to other members of the school community. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw that participation at any stage without explanation with no negative consequences.

An integral part of the study was the involvement of pupils. This was reflected in capturing the student voice as an essential part of data gathering and analysis of the data. The ethical guidelines presented for this study adhered to using DCU Ethical guidelines and these were followed at all stages of the study. All participants were given a plain language statement and consent/assent form. Pupils were invited to be part of focus groups and this was organised following written permission and consent from their parents, teachers and principal. School personnel in the special school felt participation in a focus group was not suitable due to the nature of the pupils' special educational needs. However, the researcher did meet the student council and talk to several of the students. The focus groups were conducted in some schools by the researcher with a teacher present. Visual methods involving using hands, bodies and minds in the creation of an image, photograph or model were used to elicit data (Bengry-Howell *et al.*, 2011). This method was highlighted by Dr Fiona King in the Ethics Application for this study and this format was chosen to provide a valuable means of exploring the logical and the emotional dimensions of one's thinking (Korthagen, 1993), and to facilitate the pupils in particular to express their ideas more clearly (Buckingham, 2009). The children were invited to take photographs of their school and identify what makes it a Changemaker School. They were also asked to draw pictures (Moss *et al.*,

2007) of what leadership meant to them. The subsequent focus groups then allowed for children to speak freely and to provide their reflections on the photographs and drawings, to explain why they chose their drawing or their photographs and why these images best represented their school. This aimed to ensure that the photographs accurately represented what they had intended, and that each pupil and researcher developed what might be considered a 'taken- as-shared' (Cobb, 1990) understanding of the photographs and their associated narratives (McDonald, 2013). This also potentially mitigated an adult interpretation or "adulteration of the data" generated with pupil participants (Flynn, 2018). In this way, the project aimed to reach the pupils in a pupil-friendly way, and it was mindful that their input in relation to visual representations of their school was a very valuable and important part of this project.

Data analysis was an iterative process moving within and across the data sets. It was both inductive and deductive with researchers looking for some key themes e.g. leadership, creativity, teamwork and empathy while at the same time allowing the data to speak for itself and come up with new codes. Firstly, data were coded inductively and deductively by the researchers who had carried out the data collection. Two researchers individually coded half a transcript and compared codes. When they reached agreement of 75% they individually coded the rest of the transcripts. 65-75% is deemed characteristic of good reliability in qualitative research investigations (Bell, 2010). Secondly two researchers who had not been involved in the data collection phase put together an overall framework for data analysis based on the emergent themes. These will be outlined in the findings section. They subsequently coded all of the data to add to the trustworthiness of same and to reduce any bias.

Firstly, the findings related to the imagery will be outlined followed by findings from the interviews and focus groups, and finally the observations. Given the vast amount of data gathered and analysed it is important to note that selected responses from participants are included, for the purpose of exemplification.

Data Analysis and Discussion

Introduction

For the purposes of this report, participants' lived experiences are discussed using the following analytical framework which was developed at the meta-analysis stage of reading the data by the research team following a thorough process of deductive and inductive coding across individual case studies. The proposed framework covers the following thematic strands, as appropriate to the participants (pupils, parents, teachers, principals):

- Understandings of Leadership and Student Voice
- Organisation and School Culture
- Student Learning
- Values and Priorities of Participants
- Changing the Education System – what matters in these schools

This chapter provides a thematic overview analysis of the data from the participants across the six schools using the agreed framework and drawing on the separate analysis of each of the four participating groups.

Imagery

Pupils were invited to bring visual pieces to the focus group meetings which they considered important in significance to the central tenets of Changemaker schools, or representative of their particular school. This opportunity facilitated time for the children to consider and reflect on their choices and input to this data collection process.

Visual creative images included drawings and photographs. The idea of ‘leadership’ was captured across a broad range of illustrations which included the following imagery: a photograph of a pupil on a stage; pictures of ‘a podium’ and a set of stairs; a photograph of the President of Ireland; a football captain; and an image of an army sergeant, which was also identified as representative of responsibility and creativity. Pupils’ understanding of ‘empathy’ was offered in imagery such as a picture of ‘a doctor’; a picture of ‘shoebox appeals’; a ‘babbling babies’ image; and a photograph to represent ‘Peace Links’ in an active engagement with pupils and teachers from another school. The ‘Peace Links’ image was also chosen to identify an example of community engagement and involvement. Pupils’ representative experiences of ‘teamwork’ were demonstrated in a number of sporting images as well as school activities such as ‘fundraising through auctioning unwanted items’. The image of a ‘paint brush’ was offered in one school as an example of ‘creativity’; and an example of one pupil’s drawing of ‘The Statue of Liberty’ was shown in another. However, the theme underpinned several of the images that were brought to focus groups as significant in encapsulating pupils’ ideas about their respective schools. Images that were shared with this more general representation included the following:

- A microphone - to symbolise that everyone is heard
- A picture of a set of scales - to symbolise that everyone is equal

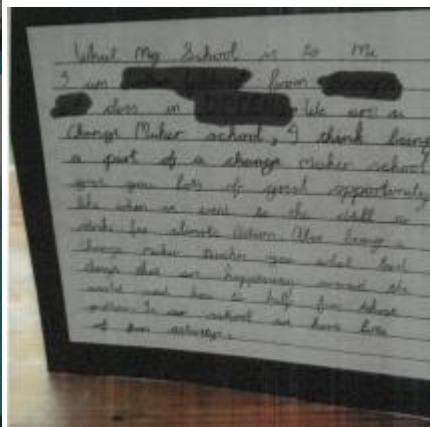
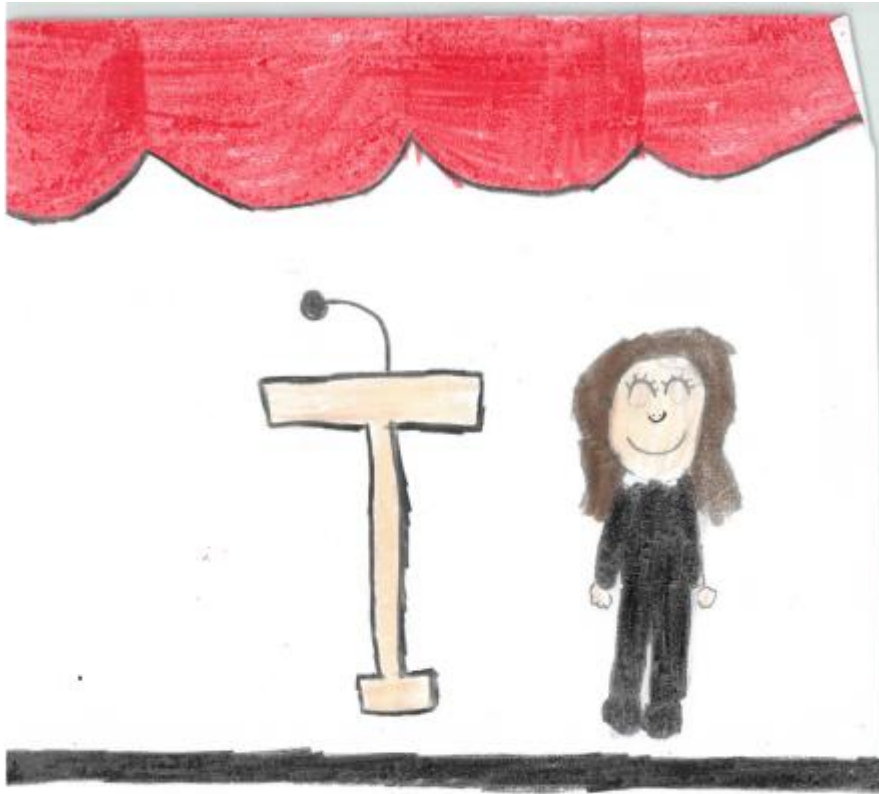
- A set of steps - because everyone is 'getting better'
- A picture of pupils' receiving certificates - indicating a sense of pride
- A poster to illustrate the importance of 'friendship' and that 'sexual orientation doesn't matter'
- A picture of a 'buddy bench' - importance of friendship
- The school garden - because it is a sensory experience which is beneficial for children who need to experience calm and relaxation and it was created by the students
- A picture of 'cooking' - symbolising the classes that adults and children can do together at the school





The children are
leaders in our
School because
we respect each other
and treat everyone
the same

We show the younger
classes that you can
be yourself and go
with your own mind.





Understandings of Leadership and Student Voice

Leadership emerged as a broad and complex theme for the principals and an important one for teachers, while there was a wide diversity of understanding of leadership evident among the pupils. Parent data indicated that they primarily saw leadership in terms of their children's engagement in the school context.

Principals' expressed understandings and practices of leadership included shared leadership, delegation, leadership by example. In Elm, the Principal described their attitude towards Leadership and outlined the benefits of having an evolved sense of Leadership.

Leadership, well I suppose, I find myself since I've been in this position, definitely my own, my own style of leadership and my own thinking about leadership, has evolved and is evolving, and some of that probably would have happened naturally, like I had done the Misneach course ... I've always been very interested in leadership, and not wanting, not wanting to be, the lone ranger, in any of this, I was always kind of conscious of, delegating responsibility in all of that, not necessarily very good at it, but, I was, I had a lot of the theory and stuff like that in my head, but I really feel like now, you know, I can do more in that line, because the staff are a lot more aware that we are all leaders. So, it's, it helps me to say ok, so that I don't have to rush in there and solve everything.
(Principal, Elm)

Teachers talked positively about cultures of shared leadership and collaborative team-work in their schools and some reported on positive, supportive relationships with their principals. From

the perspective of the teachers, Shared/Distributed Leadership is practised in many of the schools in this project and those teachers see this as an important feature of the culture of the school. Teachers reported that they work together as a team with their principals in most of their schools, rather than authority being exercised in a top-down, authoritarian fashion. In Dogwood, teachers explained that their school has:

... always been progressive and always wanting to do something new and trying a new thing. And the Principal, I suppose from (their) leadership style has always been (to) get people to take on what they want to take on. To run with something new, that it can only help the school environment kind of idea. It's culture created here (Teachers' Focus Group Dogwood)

However, teacher data also indicated that charismatic leadership was in evidence and that this could have the unintended impact of stifling teacher empowerment. In one school in particular, teacher positivity about the principal veered towards an over-dependence on the person in leadership. In that school, teachers viewed the individual who was the principal so positively that they feared that if that person was no longer the school leader *'certain things that made our school would be taken away'*.

It was interesting that pupils in these schools viewed leadership in terms of positive behavioural traits, such as adults or children doing *'something good'* or *'being kind'*. They also viewed leadership in terms of student voice when they talked about children speaking up either for themselves or for others.

It is worth noting that there were significant differences in evidence across the six schools as to how well-developed children's understandings of leadership (exercised by themselves or by adults) were. In-depth and sophisticated understandings of leadership by the children, what it means and how it is practised emerged in the focus group discussions with children in three schools (Elm, Ash, Twinberry). Evidence of limited understandings of leadership emerged in Maple. These pupils' understandings of leadership very much relate to their lived experiences of leadership in their schools, in terms of their own *'doing'* of leadership and how leadership is practised and embodied in their respective schools. As noted in the Methodology Chapter, school personnel decided against the children in Lime participating in a focus group due to the nature of their special educational needs, therefore it is not possible to comment on their understanding of leadership and student voice.

In some instances, school organisation and culture puts pupils front and centre in terms of helping them develop their own leadership capacities. Elm, Ash and Lime have established Student Councils in their schools. On the day researchers visited Elm, four students from the Student

Council were charged with the responsibility of taking the researcher on a tour of the school and its grounds. Similarly, in Lime, the head of the Student Council gave a tour of the school to the researcher.

In Elm, pupils have the opportunity to be 'Play Leaders' and 'Assembly Leaders' while in Lime, pupils were supported to lead assembly on a weekly basis. Similarly, in Ash, pupils have the opportunity to be 'House Captains'. These roles permit pupils to assume leadership responsibilities. For example, in Elm, the 'Play Leaders' serve to address issues that may arise in the school yard during lunchtime, thus providing the pupil with an opportunity to listen to 'both sides' and engage in meaningful conflict resolution before engaging with the teacher/adult on duty. Consequently, pupils in this school note that:

You can't really be a leader without listening to people's ideas (Children's Focus Group Elm)

This school is a great place to be a leader (Children's Focus Group Elm)

Similarly, in Ash, pupils explained that one must use praise and acknowledge the achievements of others in order to be a leader. 'School Captains' 'congratulate you when you won something'. They also believe that

Everyone can kind of be a leader if they do something good. (Children's Focus Group Ash)

In Twinberry, children associated being a leader with, standing up for oneself and having your own say, having a right to be heard. In this way, they understand themselves to be leaders because they are able to show the younger children how 'to [do] your own thing'. They also explain that they are *able to talk to the teachers if you want to*. One child noted

The children and the teachers are the leaders, because the children get to make their own decisions a lot of the time (Children's Focus Group Twinberry)

Some schools offer multiple channels through which pupils can demonstrate and assume a leadership role such as Student Councils, Class Leader, Play Leaders, House Captains and Buddy Systems. One Principal noted that being a Changemaker school meant she was more confident in offering such opportunities to the children and she noted that this was a result of her own ideas about leadership evolving since becoming a Changemaker school.

one thing we always did, was, like we had class leaders, class leaders, which I'm sure many schools have, that they take responsibility for different jobs, but I think, Changemaker somehow kind of gave us a little bit more of a, a push, to try new things with it. Like, we, from that, now I had toyed with the idea beforehand, but I definitely felt, more, confident, in having our students lead assembly, because I was, by that stage, I was kind of getting a little, bit, well I was kind of seeing, that what I did at assembly, anybody could do, and wouldn't it be better if the children could do it, and take turns and all the rest, so we started that, having them lead assembly (Principal, Elm).

However, the empowerment of pupils as leaders was not universally in evidence through the research. In Maple for example, pupils had a limited sense of what leadership means and this was linked to the fact that in this school one pupil noted 'leaders in the school are the adults', demonstrating that they did not see leadership as part of children's or pupils' remit.

Organisation and School Culture

Key value systems emerged that explain the emergence of particular types of organisational and school cultures in some Changemaker schools. School Principals noted that their schools were happy and fun places to be and learn. Their schools emerge from the focus groups as child-focused and friendly from the perspectives of children, teachers, principals and parents. Friendly and positive relationships between staff and pupils are cultivated through various daily routines.

In Lime, as in many other schools, the Principal noted that:

There's a lovely, lovely, lovely warmth about the staff and about the school in general, there's a really, really nurturing atmosphere, and it's not just nurturing for the pupils, it's nurturing for the staff as well. (Principal, Lime)

Teachers also noted the sense of being at ease and nurtured in their schools where those in leadership positions welcome and care for teachers, parents and children:

Principal's office is always open. And you can just then, it's like talking to a friend (Teacher's Focus Group Twinberry)

It's again what Teacher 1 was saying, leading from the top, sorry, like Principal's all about relationships and Deputy Principal. That's what they want, relationships. ...it's all about building relationships and home school. He links that relationship, so it's an open door policy

here. Parents will come, well they can come in. And I think if they didn't have, we didn't have, if the relationships weren't there, the connections weren't there, between the home school, Principal and then, as a result, teachers, we wouldn't get what we get from the children. We wouldn't get the same feedback from them, they wouldn't give as much as they give (Teachers' Focus Group Maple).

Parents commented on this sense of warmth and how it is built around the flourishing of the children but also the school's relationship with the wider community.

it's nearly like a partnership that they have. The teacher really isn't looked at as, kind of a hierarchy figure. It's kind of, they nearly go into partnership with the teacher. And how, how am I going to get the best out of this child? And they work together, yeah. They don't seem to be, you know, that fear that you have when I went to school, that doesn't seem to be here (Parents' Focus Group Twinberry).

It's all about the children, and that's all, you know, and it's evident I think from even, even before you get in through the gate, you know, in the mornings, it's just very evident...not just an education centre. It's very much part of the community. (Parents' Focus Group Ash)

Teachers also emphasised the importance of the sense of community as being fundamentally respectful and nurturing.

I think the sense of community in this school is so tangible, from the second you walk in the door, and, I think the children pick up on how people interact every different member of staff, might that be, the secretary, SNAs, everybody just has a huge respect for each other, and I think that really shows in the children as well, because they, we're such role models to them that they in turn treat each other, their peers with respect ... From the second I walked in the door, you can just feel the positive energy ... which is fantastic from the children, you know. When you come in the door, their interaction with each other. They all greet you, you know. In another school, they might walk with their heads down (Twinberry Teachers' Focus Group).

Parents linked this positivity to the mutual respect in evidence in the relationships in the school.

I've always found in this school, there's a really deep respect from teacher to child and child to teacher. It's not just the teacher at the top of the class. There's a real respect between,

there's an equalness in some way ... I think it's lovely ... because they're treated as equals, they actually have greater respect for their teachers. (Parents' Focus Group Dogwood)

Of critical relevance for the current study is that some of these schools are cultivating and striving to create a culture that centres on empowering the child and appreciating the child's own capacity to develop. Commitment to the holistic development of the child is evident. Often, these features are at the heart of what it means to be a Changemaker School but become a central element of the school's overall ethos.

Well, I think, first being a Changemaker school is, it's about empowering the children to believe that they are change-makers and to believe, this is first and foremost, to believe that they make a difference, and can make a difference and that they do that in the smallest and simplest of ways, but I think too, yeah, to empower them to believe that, they can make a difference and, I think a big thing we do in this school is, we embrace change. We embrace change and we're definitely, as a staff and with the students, we're not afraid to try new things. And I think being a part of the Changemaker network has given this a lot of validation. ... there's always been a lovely atmosphere here, in my experience, even before I became Principal, and I always thought something special, that you feel, when you come in the gates, that's always been there. (Principal Elm)

In Dogwood, the Principal noted that empowering children was central to being a Changemaker

I think, change-making is, is, trying to make the world a better place, you know. So, having a focus all the time on, what can we do to make the world a better place? That sounds very simplistic, but I think that's probably, you know, so in terms of being a Changemaker school, it's really about empowering the children. (Principal Dogwood)

Principals emphasised empowering children to speak, to share their opinions, to make decisions in a mutually respectful, nurturing environment as a core part of their educational vision. Some saw empowering children in this way as an impact of being a Changemaker school, while others saw it as a core part of the school's mission long before they were involved in Changemaker. The principal of Elm said 'we didn't change anything to become Changemaker'. Teachers' views reflected this noting that they were already involved in various initiatives prior to being awarded Changemaker status. 'What was going on in the school was always going on in the school anyway, you know, even before we got the Changemaker status' (Teachers' focus group, Ash).

Schools were diverse in terms of how they were 'doing' Changemaker. Some schools such as Elm were explicit in their use of the Changemaker central pillars of *Leadership, Creativity, Empathy, Teamwork* as a guiding framework for everything they do. In fact, they are painted onto a large wall in the school yard and visible to all, from various different positions while in the school yard. Consequently, the children there were well versed in the use of these tenets. These children see themselves as their first resource and 'port of call' through their practice of the 'What Can I Do?' *modus operandi*. Children are encouraged to analyse a problem/situation and consider what they themselves can do first to begin the problem-solving process. Their everyday lives in the school and at home, are embedded in the Changemaker framework. They are very articulate relating things they do during school and at home to each of the four principles, and their teachers and parents attested to this.

The school vision was clear in Twinberry, but not necessarily articulated through Changemaker's four pillars. The school aims to support students with SEN, help people in the community and encourages pupils to be who they wanted to be and who are respected for that. While this vision is not explicitly 'marketed' as an Changemaker one, what happens in that school, is very 'Changemaker-like'. Children there noted that it is a very supportive and amenable environment that works for the children.

*We get to be ourselves and we don't get put in a box or anything. The box builds around us.
(Children's Focus Group Twinberry)*

Elsewhere, however, in Maple for example, there were no indicators that participant students had a strong awareness of what specifically it means to be a Changemaker school. The central tenets are not articulated or particularly identified by students, although some aspects are certainly implicit across the activities and relationships they describe within the school. However, much of what is identified is not necessarily different to any other typical school, so it is not clear how the four principles of leadership, creativity, empathy and teamwork have been embedded. Interestingly, in Maple, teachers there did not embed their experiences in a Changemaker frame as staff in other schools had done. Like many of the other teachers in the focus groups, they noted that they were "up and running already" with various different initiatives in their school. They did not identify with the Changemaker framework or identity.

Some teachers and Principals noted that becoming a Changemaker did not change what they were already doing. Some participants explained that really embracing the Changemaker *modus operandi* required a period of learning and becoming. Some simply reconfigured or infused their practices according to the Changemaker values of Creativity, Empathy, Leadership and

Teamwork while others did not do so. Some teachers in Ash spoke about how becoming a Changemaker and settling into what it means to be a Changemaker and compared it to a journey – a process that evolved over time in their school.

You have to grow into a Changemaker, you just don't suddenly become a Changemaker school and then that's it. It's something that has to evolve in the school. It's a journey really ... We've really rubber-stamped that it's everywhere in our school. (Teachers Focus Group, Ash)

It doesn't happen overnight. (Maple)

Teachers across several schools noted that the long-standing, prevailing culture in their respective schools was that everyone helps out in whatever way they can irrespective of their role. Shared responsibility prevails and teachers work together. They also noted that this filters from the 'top down' whereby many teachers see their Principals engaging in tasks that are not necessarily the job of the Principal. In fact, this is related to why teachers in Ash believe they adjusted so easily to being a Changemaker school.

They get on very well, very professional attitude, the whole way down the school, and everybody, nobody's frightened to do anything. Nobody's frightened to approach anybody. (Teachers' focus group Ash)

Recognising effort and achievement in school is an important means of acknowledgment for the children. Rewards and awards of various means are offered to children on a regular basis. These awards are often linked to something a child does that reflects the Changemaker value system. If a child demonstrates empathy by helping another child, he/she may receive a sticker, a tap on the shoulder or have their name posted on a board. Principals were acutely aware of how valuable having a system of rewards and recognition was for the children themselves, who they reported responded very positively to the reward system in place. In some schools this facilitated keeping the Changemaker modus operandi '*alive and well*'. The principal of Ash talked about rewards '*keeping it very much alive on a daily basis*'.

The pupils expressed a significant degree of enthusiasm when speaking about the rewards systems that operate in their schools. In Elm, they receive a '*Tap*' on the shoulder to acknowledge something the pupil may have done well or achieved in terms of the four Changemaker principles. This, according to one teacher, '*makes them more aware that they're doing it as well*'.

They explained that such rewards/awards make them feel good, happy and excited and they can share this with their parents and once again be acknowledged and congratulated for their efforts and rewarded once again by being offered a treat from their parents. It was also an opportunity that *'your parents will be proud of you'*. Furthermore, the rewards system in Elm opened up channels of communication between the school and parents, and the children recognised this as being an important opportunity for their families to hear how well they are doing in school.

Similarly, in Ash, the pupils there noted that:

Anyone could give a sticker, like a changemaker sticker, but in the hall at the end of the week they have to say what they done who gave it to them. And then they get a sticker ... at the end of the year we have a winning house group. And then that goes towards ... the house group, towards your total and the winning group goes on the trip (Pupil Focus Group Ash)

For some schools, being part of a network was an opportunity to belong to a bigger community beyond their own school and locality and this in itself was seen as a recognition of their own positive contribution and value.

Being part of a group, being part of a group of schools, being part of a thing, has, they've really enjoyed it, they've enjoyed being part of a bigger movement, and they've taken it on board and it's like they, they, they, see where they're going and they want to be part of this, and we went up to Dublin, they went up to Dublin, on the bus to meet up with another Changemaker school, and, well they came back full of, they'd been talking to the children that were there (Parent Focus Group Elm).

The first time I heard of it was probably shortly after they got the award it was at one of the, the prize-giving, you know at the end of the year ceremonies, and it was Principal that announced it, and I remember at the time, I didn't, like you Tina, I didn't know what a changemaker school was, I didn't know that award existed, but I remember thinking, that sounds about right because they've really changed things for me, you know, in our family, they really did (Parent Focus Group Lime).

Student Learning

Pupils' learning experiences varied across schools. However, common themes of active, experiential and innovative learning were evident across all schools. While innovative teaching approaches and methods were also evident, the pupils' voices and experiences shed light on

important facets of their learning that were not in all cases, directly related to core curricular strands or subject areas. While pupils did not explicitly relate their learning to the four pillars, it was evident that their learning experiences were very much grounded in the Changemaker value system. Innovative and creative ways of teaching emerged in many schools.

It should be noted that some of the innovations pupils talked about to the researchers had nothing to do with being Changemaker schools but rather were rooted in other activities in which the schools were engaged, either independently or with other local schools. Parents talked about the benefit to their children of the school's international engagement through networks in which it was involved where they hosted children from overseas for several weeks:

I've been involved in it from the very start you know, so I mean, you know exposing our children to another world that they don't know exists, I mean, we host every year, and like last year, well the (children from another country) come over for 3 weeks, in March every year, and they stay in host families, so every week they stay with different families, you know, people are so great they open up their homes. (Parents' Focus Group Dogwood)

Some principals talked about the specific way in which their schools plugged into the Changemaker pillars in order to underpin positive improvements in learning. The Principal discussed how they are trying to be innovative with ICT in the classroom for the purposes of working under the Creativity Changemaker pillar. In keeping with 'Anti-Bullying Week' he set the task of using 'Scratch Tune' - an animation app.

I want you to tell me the story of a little boy, or a person being bullied and what they do in order to overcome that. That was the perimeter of their task. And they created a first live movie. Now, it was a silent movie, but the whole children in the whole school watched it - in silence! And this animation was taking place on the big screen. They absolutely loved it. And the boys that designed it loved it and they did it completely on their own (Principal Ash)

That principal associates such success with why the school is held in such high regard both locally and further afield.

Interestingly, during fieldwork it was observed how one school teaches and embeds the four Changemaker pillars not only through the practice of awards/rewards but also in the physical school environment.

Senior pupils on the Student Council took the researcher on a tour of their school. They came from 4th, 5th and 6th class. Everyone put on their jackets and wellies. The researcher was also offered wellies. One girl suggested that the tour commence in the Sensory Room but one of the boys wanted to commence the tour at the tunnel, towards the back of the school field. When the researcher explained that there was a meeting on in the staff room, it was agreed that the tour would commence at the polytunnel where the children grow vegetables. On the way to the tunnel, the pupils drew the researcher's attention to an outside wall. The four pillars were painted on the wall CELT (Creativity, Empathy, Leadership, Team) along with some pictures and a map of Europe. The researcher asked the students to tell her about the wall. They explained that they are awarded for demonstrating these skills/values. They 'tapped' or receive stickers depending on what they do. The researcher asked to hear their individual stories of being awarded

- A girl received an empathy tap for buying another student a bottle of water
- Another girl received a tap for teamwork when she helped others putting on their wellies
- A boy received a team tap when encouraging others to join in a team activity
- Another boy received a team tap when he assisted with tidying up the wellies
- A third girl noted that she is on her way to receiving a tap

When asked about if they enjoy being in receipt of the tap/sticker, one of the boys replied "you're glad you helped someone". (Researcher fieldnotes, Elm)

Another Principal describes how pupils are able to achieve curricular, developmental goals and milestones at their level. This Principal places tremendous value on the Changemaker schools network as a support structure for ongoing development.

then there's also the active learning, our kids are constantly actively learning, they're constantly doing. They're constantly learning. Even if you read down through some of the things, like critical thinking, research skills, practices, yeah. It doesn't look like critical thinking in the same way that it looks over in, you know, Mainstream School 1 or Mainstream School 2 but it's their critical thinking at their level and it's their research, you know. They're putting their arms into things. They're touching things. That's their research, they're finding out what works for them. It's the innovation that's here in spades, you know. And then, the influence... I said that to you already, you know, my own (sibling based overseas) and they're constantly, like, "what have you got for me today?" you know. And there are people worldwide looking at our website. So, we are out there, we are influencing people. And, I do think that, our, links now with the post-primary schools. It's going to be really interesting because they were kind of looking at us going, "what are you going to offer?" you know. But when I went to Post-Primary School 1 last week, and they said, "let's go to the board room", and I was like, "Wow" - we went to a board room! "How lucky are you?". But at the end of

*the conversation somebody said (to me), "stop talking about your plasma screens!!".
(Principal, Lime)*

In Lime, teachers linked pupil learning to the Changemaker values, for them "It's all about promoting their abilities and giving them independence and developing skills". This was very much evident during the fieldwork when the researcher observed lessons and the daily modus operandi of the school.

5 students (2 absent) 3 SNAs and teacher

- Communication devices to promote pupil voice
- Visuals and concrete materials to choose from to promote pupil voice
- Pupils who could walk would walk to interactive TV and point to themselves or put their photograph on to the screen with velcro
- Use of touch and hand over hand to support pupils making choices
- PECS to promote pupil agency - XX went to her board and chose an activity she wants to do after circle time
- Displays mostly include photographs of each child as part of their work sample e.g. their head on a gingerbread man, their photograph of themselves from home to represent who is in attendance at school today
- Display "We are all stars" with lots of stars and photos of each child in the classroom
- Circle time to promote pupils being part of a team/class where they have to learn to wait and take a turn.
- Individual learning times - one on one
- Discovery learning by feeling objects - lots of sensory materials
- Praise and affirmation is emotional with lots of clapping from all adults in room and use of lámh signs to affirm also. "Good choice XXX"
- Use of questioning pitched at each individual learner's level
- All contextualised within pupils' environment and life experience
- Pupil motivation through concrete and visual materials, songs, and active learning

In Elm, another teacher noted there that the Changemaker programme facilitates a child-centred approach by offering opportunities for meaningful learning and also an appreciation of the child.

I've been a teacher for over 20 years, well over 20 years, I also started teaching in (another country) and came here. So I have a kind of a, I've seen the difference in the two different systems as well. And the emphasis that can be placed on academic, performance as based

on standardised tests that are ridiculously limited, are culturally biased, are extraordinarily limited. And yet we focus our entire education system on the results of these tests that happen once a year, in schools...And don't get me started! But anyway, the point is that I've come from a system in (another country) where everything is based on standardised testing, at the extreme and then league tables and schools pin it against each other and all that nonsense. And children's innate abilities and natural tendencies are just thrown by the wayside. Their creativity is neglected. You have people like Richard Branson who came through the English system as a dyslexic, and basically spent his teenage years feeling totally inadequate, and now he's a multi-billionaire! We were focusing, and we are in our education system, entirely in the wrong places, we should be looking for the talents and skills the children have and bringing them through. ... but the point is, that this [Changemaker] allows children's abilities to shine. And from the point of view of a [support] teacher, I get a chance through this programme, to see, the children that might have been falling through the cracks, suddenly shine. (Teachers' Focus Group Elm)

However, there was not universal positivity about the programme among teachers. One teacher²³ did not speak so favourably about student learning in a Changemaker school. This teacher was not against the Changemaker modus operandi per se, rather she/he felt that Changemaker 'comes slightly before the academic focus'. They specifically explained: 'I'm conscious that I don't want to be seen as kind of bashing' Changemaker.

This particular teacher was concerned that Changemaker 'tagged' initiatives and all other non-traditional and non-curricular-based learning was having a negative effect on pupils' learning of the formal curriculum. The teacher made specific reference to her/his inability to cover key aspects of their curriculum due to pupils being absent from their class to work on other activities. This teacher also criticised the lack of structure during the school day/week.

...the focus isn't really on academic like. And with all the different activities, like, that they do – between the fresh air stuff, the day just kind of becomes very disjointed ... because there's so many activities going on. And I know that has benefit for kids in other aspects. But, just from my own perspective, I would feel that there should be more of an emphasis on academic. I would like... (it's) important for say, kids to have...their rudimentary skills of, like, reading and writing as they're moving up through the levels. And I know, there is a place with

²³ This teacher cannot be identified by their school for anonymity reasons.

activities. But, I feel the outside activities, the outside influences often overtake the academic focus. (Teacher Focus Group)

Values and Priorities of Participants

Distinct value systems exist across all schools. At the outset, most schools specified that they want their children to be happy, to learn, to be active, agentic, skilled people as adults by virtue of the type of education they receive at school. While most of these values were embedded in schools' modus operandi prior to being awarded their Changemaker status, many Principals reported that being a Changemaker school provides them with greater opportunities and confidence to meet the needs of their specific pupil community without having to 'check' themselves against the official curriculum. In Ash, children in the focus group noted that creativity was also about "being more, like, adventurous'. Teachers talked about creativity as extending across the curriculum, in their everyday teaching practice:

...even within delivering the curriculum, I think we do really well in terms of being creative. ... We take on new strategies. New ways of doing things. Sometimes, there's so many new ways of doing things, you just want to be left alone to do whatever you were doing! (Teachers' Focus Group Dogwood)

Teachers also describe creative engagement outside the curriculum that gave an opportunity to enable pupils to take on leadership roles. In Elm, pupils become Assembly Leaders or Captains – avenues through which they can learn and embrace being leaders.

In Ash, the Principal noted that the Changemaker framework permitted their school to focus in a more meaningful way on what exactly they wanted their children to achieve, to do so creatively and to use the Changemaker status to support innovation.

The children certainly need skills to be able to cope with social media. And, hence, one of the programmes that we have introduced into our school – we would never have thought of previously. Even I suppose, well, being a Changemaker school allowed me to see it in operation in other schools – is mindfulness.... So, whilst our school evolved in a direction because of the Changemaker status, I thought it was a very good follow. (Principal, Ash)

Teachers also focused on student wellbeing as being a core priority for them. In Lime, yoga had been implemented as an important Changemaker-led teaching exercise, particularly for pupils

with sensory-related SEN. Teachers there noted that it had been “massive”. In Dogwood, a significant emphasis was placed on developing positive mental health through a whole-school approach.

Empathy was noted as being of core importance in the schools. Many schools used a diversity of non-traditional initiatives and methods to teach their children. Buddy systems were in place in a number of schools to encourage the development of empathy and leadership (Ash, Twinberry, Dogwood). Changemaker’s Roots of Empathy programme (see Appendix 1) was also taught in some schools (Ash, Maple, Dogwood). Indeed, the Roots of Empathy babies have gone on to become pupils in one of the schools in the Changemaker network.

Pupils are aware that their schools and learning experiences are very much child-centred, places where empathy is being shown to them and where they are learning to care for one another. Pupils appear to enjoy positive relationships at school with their teachers, principals and fellow pupils. Pupils in Maple explained that their Principal’s efforts ensured that they were awarded the Changemaker School title. When asked to talk about their Principal, one replied

Our Principal is kindest, caring and we can always come back to him, if we’re stuck on anything or need help with something. Like, if we’re up in secondary school, we graduate from this school, the door is always open to come back. ... the teacher says, like whilst you leave, the door is always open so you can always come back (Maple)

In Twinberry one pupil noted: ‘the teachers want us to be happy.’ Some pupils in Elm said they were proud to practise empathy. They noted the importance of being kind, and helping one another. They were also aware of more macro-level, global issues such as the war in Yemen and the issue of homelessness as they related to empathy. They spoke about their fundraising efforts for charity and how they helped others in their communities.

Similarly, in Ash, pupils had a ‘buddy’ system. This ran between two senior classes and two junior classes. They met weekly to play. The younger children were reassured by having their older ‘buddy’ and the older children enjoyed looking after their younger ‘buddy’. The pupils in this school also participated on the ‘Roots of Empathy’ programme. The idea of empathy was also evident when children in this school were speaking about creativity. When asked about an example of creativity one suggested that they could make the Junior class children a card saying ‘Welcome To Our School’.

Twinberry had a SEN unit. Pupils there are committed to inclusion and helping their peers with additional needs. When asked why the new unit important to the children, they replied:

*Because they have a learning disability and they're not able to talk and we need to help them.
(Pupils' Focus Group Twinberry)*

During observation in Twinberry, the researcher noted that even though mainstream and SEN pupils are integrated during a particular lesson, it was difficult to detect any stratification among the pupils. The pupil-teacher interaction reflects the positive and mutually respectful relationship between pupil and teacher.

All children are included. It is difficult to know who the pupils with ASD and other additional needs were.

No instruction at any stage about being quiet or paying attention. Very respectful and high expectations. Changing groups happened seamlessly. Attention gained by one teacher through clapping hands and children mirrored this and stopped talking.

Researcher felt like they were on a TV show where there was such fun and enjoyment... Very relaxed.

Teacher modelled making a mistake.

"Oops I forgot..."

"Is it good to make mistakes?" She asked.

"Why is it good to make mistakes?..."

"Yes we are learning."

Twinberry operated a buddy system. Pupils there were partnered with a child with SEN. But this meant that some of the 'buddy' children were unable to play with their friends due to their 'buddy' responsibilities. Consequently, they approached the Principal who then 'sorted it out'. While the pupils were committed to supporting their SEN friends at school they were also aware of their own 'rights' and were willing and able to seek fairness and equality for all. Like so many other examples throughout this report, this is simply another that demonstrates how interlinked each of the four Ashoka pillars are to each other and how they extend into various, different aspects of school life in some, not all, schools. In Maple, pupils there created a Sensory Garden which offered particular benefits for pupils with SEN.

The focus on empathy and creativity encouraged teamwork and collaboration. Pupils in Elm stated that they were proud of their teamwork, not simply because they could work together but because they could:

Show that you do need help sometimes to make a change in the world. (Children's Focus Group Elm)

Children in the focus group in Ash identified changemaker activities with 'working together and you're doing something nice for the school'.

Changing the Education System - What Matters in these Schools?

There are two components to the discussion in this section. First, how are schools managing change and approaching school reform? Second, in what ways (if any) are these schools contributing to systemic improvement?

Managing Change and School Reform

A core driver of change at school level is vision on the part of the Principal. Vision for the school influences the understanding and enactment of change and reform. It also impacts on the school leader's willingness to support staff in their professional development, such as supporting opportunities for engaging in continuing professional development (CPD). Moreover, keeping the child 'front and centre' is important for most Principals when considering change and reform at school, and especially engaging the children in the change and reform process in some schools by listening to the student voice. They recognise that change is a slow and gentle process that at times may require a sensitive approach. Depending on the type of change that is being undertaken, some Principals are bold in their approach to initiating change and 'making it happen'. Others simply express a willingness to try something new, like the Principal in Twinberry who related his attitude to change as being similar to his attitude towards being a Changemaker.

I think you know I suppose you have to evaluate it first and see is it an absolute non-runner and obviously that goes straight to the bin if you like. But, I think if, if it is a chance at all, we're willing to try it and see. And I think then, that's a bit like giving the kids the freedom when they come off the bus at the soccer tournament. You know, you have to try it and see, and you can, depending, a bit like, my attitude to the changemakers. We're trying it, you know. We're giving it a chance, you know. It's, and then you can dismiss it, if, at any stage, if you think it's not relevant. Or you embrace it and give it more of your time and your energy, if you think it's working. (Twinberry).

Principals recognised the core importance of shared leadership in enabling them to realise their vision for change in their schools. All Principals reported that they practise a model of shared leadership in their schools. They said that they welcome open and transparent discussion and engagement with their staff. Moreover, they were of the view that they strive towards inclusivity and ensuring that all voices are heard. They welcomed debate, and the opportunity to hear staff at all levels – teaching, learning support and ancillary.

The Principal in Lime explained how she engaged with staff.

I would always ask for suggestions from the staff and for ideas from them and bring them along (to events) ... I will, anything that we're, any new initiatives that are coming up, or anything like, this is I know, I can't believe it myself, but this is sitting on my desk nearly all the time, you know, looking at our schools, and I'm constantly dipping in and out of this, and constantly bringing it in to the team meetings, what are we doing here? What do we need to do? What can we do? What, what, have you any suggestions? So, you know, we would all sit together as a team and go through the domains, through the full domains, so what does this look like in our school? What can we do to improve in this area? Have you any suggestions? Have you any ideas? And they're really enthusiastic, and they're enjoying that, so we've a whole list of suggestions to go forward, and to work on, can't do it all in the one go, but, we've a whole list of things that we're looking at implementing, and we'll take those one at a time. Obviously, the schools going to constantly evolve and we'll have to constantly evolve with it to meet the needs of the pupils as they, as they change because they do change. (Principal, Lime)

These principals reported that they understood shared leadership as an opportunity to involve pupils as well as teachers and parents. The same principal described engagement with the Student Council about a homework policy:

I'm thinking, lovely sunny days still in September. May, June, the same. Kids will be out playing. And then December because it's so stressful on families. So, I've taken those four months out and, you know, putting in things like, say. "May we read?". The Student Council did a lot of work on it. (Principal Lime)

Teachers indicated that they were happy to take initiative in this culture of shared leadership.

The Principal's leadership style has always been to get people to take on what they want to take on. To run with something new, that it can only help the school environment kind of idea. Its culture created here. (Teachers' Focus Group Dogwood)

Teachers also recognised the important role that their Changemaker status had played in enabling them to access CPD opportunities, also a very important factor in enabling change. Membership of the Changemaker network was recognised by teachers as providing a community of practice and opportunities for peer learning from colleagues in other schools in the network.

You learn from other schools, you know, I suppose we all evolved because we were with other schools and we got feedback from other schools and what they were doing, and, so it's, you know, it's all, it's an evolution, you know. (Teachers' Focus Group Ash)

Principal had gone on one of the networks, the Ashoka Networks, and I think we're learning different ideas the whole time from the other schools ... it gives huge opportunities for other schools, to come and for us to meet at other schools and to go and see how they're doing something or, what kind of slant they've taken on it, is that something that we could do? Is there something we could be doing better? (Teacher's Focus Group Dogwood)

A number of Principals referred to staff development as a means to ensure systemic improvement was an ongoing process in their schools. In Elm, staff attended their summer courses or undertook other training. They then took responsibility for leading other programmes or initiatives in the school based on the training they had done themselves. For example, one teacher there led the Healthy Schools programme, another took responsibility for the Erasmus initiative. Similarly, in Ash, one staff member had responsibility for the Roots of Empathy programme (See Appendix 1). This type of staff development, along with the willingness of the Principal to embrace and promote a shared leadership framework at school, meant that all staff members were leaders in their own right. The Principal in Elm noted that being a Changemaker school facilitated this process whereby staff did come to see themselves as leaders.

I think for us as a staff again – I keep going back to it – but professional development is huge. And we're constantly engaging in professional development. ...there are people here who are pursuing Masters, there are people who are pursuing PhDs but, at a much more basic level, it's hands-on, you know, methodologies, and, so we would use the SESS a lot, and everybody is, we have, we have a staff record of CPD, and I can see at a glance, who's done what. So I know that, almost everybody in the school now, including the substitute teachers, would

have done Lamh for example, and the same with PECs, most of us have done Teacch, 2-day and the 5-day Teacch, most of us have done intensive interaction, most of us have done things like, ABBLs, and T-Tap and PEP3 which are assessments, there's so much that everybody has done, you know on a practical level, so we're constantly engaging in that, but as well as that, we engage an awful lot, in CPD or in technology, so, the inclusive technology, and you will have seen today that technology is a massive part of what we do, it's huge, it's huge. (Principal, Elm)

Principals also recognised the value for them of CPD opportunities and peer-learning that membership of the Changemaker network provided for themselves as school leaders. One relatively recently appointed principal explained:

I think it's crucial, it's massive. I'm new, so I'm and I'm a new principal, so, it's kind of like a double whammy, but, I just completely value that, that support network. And I, from the Ashoka point of view, but also just as a new principal. So, I have a few different support networks going, and they're all really, really, essential to me, going forward. And I, you know, I wouldn't like to not be a part of any of them. So, the Changemaker one is, it's just, even there are emails coming in regularly from the other Changemaker principals and it's just the knowledge of what's going on out there. And you can see, it gives me confidence. (Principal Lime)

Contributing to Systemic Change

The participants in this research made a small number of suggestions about the ways in which their schools could contribute to systemic change rather than confining their vision of change to their own institution. One Principal specifically identified the value of some of her pupils' heritage. Specifically, their oral history and their tradition of story-telling. Yet, what she witnessed at school was a lack of confidence among the children when it came to the skill of oracy. She has implemented various initiatives in the school to address this issue. Some children have excelled and won awards through various activities. Oracy, she believes should be treated with the same degree of importance as literacy and numeracy. Not only does it give the children a skill-set to use to articulate and be confident about their heritage but it gives them a life skill (oracy) and confidence, but to a means of competently dealing with adversity as they move on through the education system and beyond. She has recognised the link between skills training and its potential for empowerment for the child but also recognised the wider impact that such creative thinking could have on the whole education system.

I'm studying myself at the moment and my particular area, my passion is public speaking. So, we do that in the school. I'm preparing a submission for the NCCA at the moment, because I believe I make a difference too, and I just want to, well, I want to send in a submission to see if I can, in some way, impact, a certain inclusion of public speaking skill training in primary school in their new framework for the new curriculum. ... I don't know if you've heard of Robin Alexander, in the UK, he's written documents for Government trying to promote oracy and have it recognised on the same level with literacy and numeracy. And especially I suppose, I don't think it's any coincidence in some ways, my location here working with children in a DEIS school, children who have a very rich oral tradition, and come to school and you know, maybe have certain difficulties expressing themselves in the literate language of school but, and who are going to need representation. And people who can truly understand them and maybe from their own community, who can speak up for them. But better still if they can each speak up for themselves and help create their own futures that way. So definitely, that's one skill I would see as needed. (Principal, Elm)

Thinking differently and having a creative approach to problem solving at school was noted in Dogwood. The Principal there explained that traditional ideas about creativity confined it to 'art and music and things like that'. But she insisted that:

creativity is way more than art and music isn't it? You know creativity is about, you know, looking at a problem and saying, how are we going to solve it? ... Conflict, you know, people need to be very creative in how they deal with conflict. I constantly, if I was to pick a skill that I'm best at, it's where somebody is misbehaving and I'm trying to think of a creative solution to it.

She offered an example of how she applied this in practice. She described the situation for a child with SEN who experienced difficulty in the classroom (despite a teacher's supportive attempts to assist him and enable his learning). In collaboration with his parents, they agreed that he would spend a little time every day with the School Caretaker engaging in activities that he enjoyed:

what he really wants to do is fix things and make things and do things. We're going to get him motivated to get an hour with the Caretaker ... So, creativity comes into all aspects of school life. (Principal, Dogwood).

Her inspiration for this idea came from a recent visit to another Changemaker school where they engage in 'therapeutic' activities to help meet the needs of their children. She acknowledged that 'my favourite bit about changemaking is visiting other schools and seeing what they're doing'.

It would appear that some schools are themselves impacting the system through exchanges of ideas within the various networks to which they belong, including the Changemaker network. Individual schools hope to engage with and influence the wider education system in order to positively contribute at system level in the future. One principal had attended a conference in the UK and had observed how that system uses training schools not only for the initial professional development of teachers but also for the initial professional development of many other professionals. She wondered if her school could become such an expert hub.

They're training schools, and we're kind of like, ohh, wonder will we ever get to be a training school? Because, we, in everything but name, we are a training school, we have teachers at postgraduate level, we've got undergraduate teachers and we've got nurses, we've got, we'll have visiting student SLTs, student OTs, student physios, student psychologists, everything, so we are, in everything but name (Principal, Lime)

What is most interesting are the insights of the children in the Changemaker schools and how their experience of their school winning that award became part of a network which opened up opportunities for them both to see themselves as changemakers and to make active contributions to systemic change.

In their discussion, pupils made several, diverse, references to initiatives that were happening in their schools that set them apart from other schools. For some, their schools offered opportunities that other schools do not offer to their pupils and they indicated awareness of this. Opportunities such as public speaking, shared education, being involved in the Young Enterprise competition, Erasmus projects and other international exchange programmes, in addition to the specific culture in their school, were all mentioned in their discussion as examples of things that were important to them at school. Consequently, most pupils have identified that they are different to other schools who are not part of the Changemaker network. Their perspective was influenced by the opportunities that they saw as being available to them. Some pupils also commented on how their school differed to other schools because of the types of positive relationships that existed in their schools amongst their peers, teachers and management.

In Elm, a whole-school approach was taken to public speaking (based on the principal's commitment, outlined above). This initiative is passionately supported, and indeed driven, by the Principal. She sought to address children's lack of confidence through encouraging them to

participate in public speaking activities. One child had the opportunity to speak at a Functional Health/Medicine Conference that was attended by approximately six hundred adult delegates. The child spoke about being a pupil in a Changemaker school and told delegates about all the activities they engage in at school to promote a healthy school such as their 'daily mile' and healthy school lunches. The child's parents also attended the conference.

Concluding Comments

The literature review noted that key selection criteria for schools to be considered for the Changemaker network in Ireland included a school leadership with vision and commitment to developing skills of empathy, creativity, leadership and teamwork in order to develop all children as changemakers. It stated that such schools must be committed to active, experiential learning to which pupils are key contributors. Such schools need to have a culture of innovation supported and driven by the school leader. Such schools must be able to inspire other schools regardless of school size or location.

What was evident from the data reported in this paper was that all the schools that took part in the research had strong, vision-driven, committed leaders who expressed commitment to distributed leadership and the development of their staff. What also emerged, however, was evidence of charismatic leadership where staff expressed a degree of over-dependence on the person of the principal who they saw as an inspirational leader, essential to the spirit of the school in a way that they believed no-one else could be.

Ashoka's own literature stresses the importance of empathy as a key currency in a globalised world experiencing rapid change, characterised by Bauman (2006 & 2007) as liquid modernity. Such empathy extends beyond understanding of the 'Other' and understanding of the self, it also encompasses the building of resilience and the ability to strive to 'do better'. The data that emerged from the interviews and focus groups, backed up by the observations of the researchers visiting each of the schools, demonstrated that the cultures of each of these schools emphasised care, collegiality and respect, thus reflecting the key pillar of empathy. Parents described feeling welcome and included; pupils described the level of care they experienced from all adults in the school and from each other; teachers described their principals as caring of them both personally and professionally.

The Ashoka literature highlights the importance of leadership for all members of the school community including parents and noted that the empowerment of pupils and parents is of critical importance. The data reported on in this chapter indicates that pupils in most of the schools had a sense of themselves as leaders in their schools and had a sense of their right to speak up, their

entitlement to exercise their student voice. This was not evident in Maple, where pupils perceived leadership very much being in the domain of the adults. It was also noted from the data that there was limited understanding among parents who participated in the Focus Groups of the purpose of the Changemaker award and the four pillars that are intended to characterise these schools.

It was clear from the data that two of the six schools (Lime and Elm) had committed heavily to the Changemaker model. The principals of these schools were actively engaged in the Changemaker network, the schools had intentionally adopted the four pillars as underpinning their approach to teaching and learning. It was reported across the interviews and focus groups that empathy was actively supported and rewarded in the two schools and prominence given to the voices of children and collegiality of teachers was treasured. Other schools also showed varying degrees of engagement with the Changemaker brand. Some cherry-picked elements that suited the existing school agenda (e.g. Twinberry) while others were already engaged in many of the described activities through their prior identities or membership of other networks (e.g. Dogwood). The principals of two of the schools (Maple and Ash) indicated that they had little engagement with the network due to their other commitments (primarily to their own local communities and their immediate needs). The principal of Maple stated that: *'it probably would be a criticism of us in terms of the Ashoka, I don't know, but like definitely it wouldn't be something we'd be kind of, shouting from the rooftops'*.

It was clear from the data that the participating schools had varying degrees of commitment to the Changemaker network and to the specific embedding of the Ashoka values. The Ashoka Support Network is intended to support individual social entrepreneurs. Phillips *et al.*, (2015) recognise that entrepreneurs can only really flourish in a supportive context such as a network of likeminded people. It is interesting to note that not all schools given the Changemaker award are engaging with the other schools in the network. Those schools which did engage with fellow network members talked very positively about the impact on principals, teachers and pupils of visits and sharing of changemaker approaches and strategies.

It was also clear from the data that the six schools participating in this research had a limited sense of their own potential to lead social change at system level. The data had two specific examples where principals (Elm and Lime) hoped to impact at system level through interests or experiences of their own. This points to a number of possibilities. First, there seems to be relatively little knowledge in the education system as a whole about the Ashoka network – there are only 15 primary schools involved in it on the island of Ireland (Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland). Second, among those 15 schools with the award, there are ranges of engagement with the network and evidence that not all of them highlighted their Changemaker status in a public way. Most of these schools also belong to other networks. Parents in the focus

groups were naming aspects of the school's work that they assumed had to do with Changemaker which were actually part of their other network activity or designation. Ashoka itself may need to consider its own visibility in Ireland in order to maximise its opportunities for influencing change at education system level.

Recommendations

In light of the findings, this report would like to make four recommendations. Firstly, Ashoka Ireland might consider the issue of schools being unaware or unable to clearly articulate why they were nominated. Some participants referred to certain initiatives they were undertaking that led them to being chosen, however there was no clear consensus or articulation within or across the school communities about why they were nominated. While the four pillars were clearly evident in some of the schools some members of the school community were less clear as to what being a Changemaker school means, for example parents and pupils in some schools.

This might help with the second recommendation that suggests that the visibility of Ashoka could be further enhanced within the education sector. Where schools have been identified as Changemaker schools there were different levels of commitment and buy-in and for some schools there appeared to be very little evidence of change following this award. Ashoka might consider how long schools can hold this award or what steps are involved in keeping this award, for example, commitment to professional learning around the Changemaker values, evidence of influencing/ inspiring other schools, which would align with the selection criteria. If schools had to engage on an ongoing basis with the award then this may support their own identity as a Changemaker school, increase their involvement with Ashoka and in turn raise the visibility of Ashoka.

Thirdly, in order to support the second recommendation above it is recommended that Ashoka consider having a full-time person to facilitate interaction with the schools so as to encourage them to become more involved in the network and more aware of their Changemaker status and Ashoka. While there is some networking going on at present this appears to be dependent on the time and availability of those who are already working on a full-time basis. The importance of entrepreneurs being able to identify and engage with a meaningful network to avoid negative implications for their innovation, morale, access to support was highlighted by Phillips *et al.*, (2015). Given the evidence in this report we would highly recommend Ashoka to have a person whose remit it is to support the schools, develop the network, raise the visibility of Ashoka and to continue to enhance the social impact of this work on the wider education sector. For example, given the increasing emphasis at national policy level on entrepreneurship, creativity and

innovation as reflected in the recent Creative Schools Initiative (DES, 2018) Ashoka could be very well placed to contribute to this discussion and evidence how Changemaker schools are already doing this. This could lead to a wider dissemination of such practices in the education system thereby aligning with Ashoka's mission.

Fourthly, while Ashoka acknowledges the importance of leadership to drive the vision within the schools and promotes distributed leadership, the reality on the ground is somewhat different. It is recommended that Ashoka reflect on their own meaning of leadership and distributed leadership so that they can support schools in avoiding the reality of a charismatic leader(s) at the top driving the value system. This may have implications for sustainability where a principal retires or moves on. It may be worth considering this as part of the networking also where a variety of teachers/staff are involved and not primarily the principals.

It is hoped that the above recommendations are helpful in terms of supporting Changemaker schools and Ashoka to continue enacting their values thereby contributing to the wider social system. It was a privilege to engage with this research and we wish you and the schools all the best going forward.

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Appendix 1:

Teaching Empathy through Changemaking

Teaching empathy to encourage the next generation of changemakers is not limited to the official classroom curriculum (Ashoka, *Empathy in Action*, 2011, p. 8). In fact, many “system leverage points” exist outside of the official curriculum that are fertile ground for cultivating empathy. Ashoka cite mentorship programmes and school athletic programmes as prime examples of leverage points where a school’s DNA can be hijacked and empathy be made a central part of it (ibid). Previous work with Ashoka Fellows acknowledged that there is more of an emphasis on hard skills rather than soft skills at school and recommended that empathy be “extracted” out of the soft skills we teach (*Empathy In Action*, 2011, p. 8). Numerous programmes exist that teach empathy and encourage the development of pro-social and emotional behaviour among children at school. Two are outlined below.

Empathy cultivating programmes for schools:

Roots of Empathy

In 1996, Ashoka Fellow and social entrepreneur, Mary Gordan developed Roots of Empathy in Canada. It is an evidence-based programme that aims to generate and develop empathy in children. It has been proven to reduce aggression and promote pro-social behaviours such as social/emotional competence and empathy (rootsofempathy.org). Parents bring their baby into the classroom every three weeks during the year where children can observe the baby and learn about the baby's development. They learn about the loving relationship that exists between a parent and child and also about an infant's vulnerability. This provides a model of responsible parenting for children. An instructor, who visits the classroom before and after each family visit, helps children to identify and understand the baby's feelings. Children are then encouraged to reflect on and identify their own feelings. This is an example of 'experiential learning' where the baby becomes the teacher.

This "emotional literacy" taught in the program lays the foundation for safer and more caring classrooms, where children are the "Changers". They are more competent in understanding their own feelings and the feelings of others (empathy) and are therefore less likely to physically, psychologically and emotionally hurt each other through bullying and other cruelties. In the Roots of Empathy program children learn how to challenge cruelty and injustice. Messages of social inclusion and activities that are consensus building contribute to a culture of caring that changes the tone of the classroom. (rootsofempathy.org)

While the programme links to the affective aspect of the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, it is also cross-curricular linking to other subject areas such as language and music (barnados.ie). The programme is used in schools throughout Ireland. For example, in 2013, 79 classes in Co. Donegal used the programme (Health Service Executive, 2013).

Tools of the Mind

Lev Vygotsky was a Russian psychologist who believed that mental tools would help develop mental abilities just like physical tools develop our physical abilities. Children can become masters of their own behaviour when they have developed mental tools such as self-regulation. These tools can help transform a child's cognitive, social and emotional behaviours. His ideas were harnessed by Dr. Elena Botrova and Dr. Deborah Leong who developed the Tools for the Mind curriculum (toolsforthemind.org). It is an innovative curriculum that also aims to assist teacher professional development.

Tools teachers focus on helping children become intentional and reflective learners, creating a classroom in which instruction in literacy, mathematics and science reflect children's learning capacity, rather than age-level expectations. (toolsofthemind.org)

Play is central to the Tools curriculum. "Intentional Make-Believe Play" is planned with children before their themed play commences. Each child is given a role and hold certain responsibilities in that role. Children draw a picture of their plan and this serves as a reminder of what they have to do while also building literacy as they gradually learn how to write through the Scaffolded Writing approach in the Tools programme. Play usually also involves having to partner with another child. Multiple opportunities exist to challenge and support the children as they develop self-regulation along with a host of other academic skills.

Appendix 2:

What Changemaker Schools are doing in Ireland?

(Source: <https://ireland.ashoka.org/changemaker-schools/>)

The Ashoka Changemaker schools in Ireland are diverse in terms of their locations, backgrounds, ethos, and the student populations and communities they serve. A host of various different programme and activities are currently in place in these schools that seek to foster empathy, creativity, leadership and teamwork. The following table presents a ‘snapshot’ of what these schools are doing. How they engage with their students and cultivate in them, changemaking abilities from teaching them sign-language and public speaking to having senior pupils design curriculum and care for younger pupils.

Source: <https://ireland.ashoka.org/changemaker-schools/>

Corpus Christi Primary School, Moyross, Co. Limerick

145 pupils Transforming a chronically disadvantaged community. Empathy-based learning is central to Corpus Christi’s holistic education. The school partners with the Irish Horse Welfare Trust to implement Equine Assisted Therapy and Equine Assisted Learning programmes. There are also robust woodworking, art therapy, and mindfulness programmes that can be therapeutic for students. Engaging parents in their children’s education is a core part of the school’s philosophy.

Donabate Portrane Educate Together National School (DPETNS)

Almost 500 pupils. Built around their motto “learn together to live together”, DPETNS extends this idea as far afield as Cambodia, where they have developed a teaching partnership with local youth organisations. Here, older students have the opportunity to teach younger students from their partner school, and peer-to-peer learning in other forms takes place throughout each day at DPETNS.

Eglish National School, Ahascragh, Co. Galway.

45 pupils. Eglish National School serves 45 students in rural County Galway, 70% of whom are from the Travelling community and a third of whom have a special education need.

Empowering students is a strong theme at Eglish National School and helping them develop their communication skills is a key part of this. The “LET’s Stand” programme gives children public

speaking practice, and students are generally encouraged to have open conversations, while teachers build a learning environment where everyone's voice is heard and respected.

Francis Street, Christian Brothers' School, The Liberties, Dublin 8

145 pupils - For a school committed to breaking cycles of disadvantage, one might be surprised to learn that every child in Francis Street practices yoga. Not just a middle-class pastime, it is one of many methods used in Francis Street to help the boys regulate their emotions, concentrate in class and be better equipped to empathise with others. Through the 'Friends For Life' positive mental health programme, the boys develop coping plans for anxiety, while working with Rainbows Ireland, they learn to manage the grief that many sadly endure. This environment focused on each individual's emotional well-being is the foundation that allows the boys to thrive as they move through the school. Self-expression is another critical phase for the pupils in Francis Street. Determined to stamp out bullying and reverse a culture where calling attention would make matters worse, the school adopted the policy of a 'Telling School'. By positively reinforcing the expression of different playground issues, but also the children's ideas more broadly, the nature of telling on another pupil is taking on a new meaning. This is further supported by the school's approach to discipline, where children resolve issues themselves through restorative justice programmes.

Galway Educate Together National School, Galway City.

Approx. 300 pupils. The school has a strong focus on active and experiential learning through initiatives that range from the filmmaking programme to Playworks, a programme developed in the United States and piloted in Ireland for the first time at GETNS. This is an example of the school's openness to try new ideas and share them with other schools, through its connections with nearby schools and also the Educate Together network across the country. In the GETNS aquarium, residents like Barry the butterfly and Patricia the prawn are not simply a spectacle. In the last couple of years, the 6th class has helped create lesson plans for other classes, with the aquarium at the centre. These range from explorations of the types of animals in the aquarium for younger children to lessons about ocean biodiversity for older students. The use of the aquarium as a focal point that brings learning to life is indicative of the active learning that GETNS encourages in its students, and the involvement of older students in building curriculum is just one of the many leadership opportunities available at the school

Little Angels School, Special School, Letterkenny, Co. Donegal.

98 pupils. One school motto is “Technology makes things easier for us but for people with special needs it can make things possible,” and this is brought to life through the use of iPads, eye-gaze devices and Talking Tin or BIGmack communication devices, together with techniques like Picture Exchange Communication System and Lámh signing, that help children communicate, as over 90% of students are non-verbal. Switch-accessible activities, motion-sensing Kinect technology, and other creative technological tools allow students to become active learners. In addition to numerous artistic and athletic activities (there is a robust drama programme and students have the opportunity to participate in the Special Olympics), students also get to involve themselves with many aspects of the school’s operation. For example, they can help with shopping for the school, produce assemblies, play a role in the “green schools” initiative or work in the garden. Senior students can get work experience with the “Bubble Car Wash” and cook for the entire school on special occasions (Irish Stew for St. Patrick’s Day, Lamb Stew at Easter, etc.).

Our Lady Immaculate Junior National School, Darndale, Dublin 7.

240 pupils up to age 8 Working with St Catherine’s College Rathmines and St Patrick’s College of Education, Our Lady Immaculate developed “The Play Project” to integrate teaching with play. Teachers throughout the school were trained in teaching through play techniques, making it a sustainable part of the school’s culture. More recently, the school has worked with the Marino Institute of Education to pilot a project that encourages parents to read with their children. This is just one example of Our Lady Immaculate’s excellent track record of engaging parents, as well as the local community in general. The school runs literacy programmes and peer groups for adults, as well as a community lending library. It also makes its meditation space available to the community at times.

Our Lady’s and St. Mochua’s Primary School, Armagh/Cavan

176 pupils. Core to the school’s philosophy is ensuring that no student leaves without experiencing a leadership role. This can be in sports, student councils, eco-committees or the House Cup, where teams are formed throughout the whole school and older students take on the role of teacher to younger pupils. Older students also take this leadership outside of the school, engaging with the local business community in hands-on engineering projects that develop real-life improvements to the school grounds. In the past, these and similar projects have been developed with Queen’s University and presented at Stormont. Enterprise is a recurring theme throughout life at OLSM. The student-organised Swap Shop runs all year round, culminating in Young Enterprise Week, an exhibition of the pupils’ own ideas and projects.

Beneath this, and amid all other curriculum requirements, OLSM places a great emphasis on developing the emotional and cultural intelligence of their students. Through Roots of Empathy, the children follow the development of a new born child on visits throughout the year, following a simultaneous lesson plan to help them understand their own emotions and those of their classmates.

Scoil Íosagáin, Bunrana, Co. Donegal.

Approx. 700 pupils. One recent project of Scoil Íoságin's student council was to fundraise for 'The Free Wee library,' a program that would establish small libraries around the school where students could participate in book exchanges. In this project we see some of the elements that are essential to the school as a whole: student leadership, intellectual opportunity and the cultivation of a tight community among students.

This community is developed in the after-school art club, which promotes self-expression through painting and gives students from the mainstream and special needs classes an opportunity to work on group pieces together, and in the drama group, "Páistí le chéile," which includes pupils of all abilities, including those with emotional and behavioural difficulties. Students also take initiative in fostering this community when they participate in the Buddy system, in which students from mainstream classes pair with students in the special classes, or when they become Classroom Assistants, who support pupils in the junior classes and special classes.

St. Columba's Girls National School, Douglas, Co. Cork.

Approx. 500 pupils. With a long history of catering for deaf and hearing impaired children, every child and teacher in St. Columba's learns sign language. Where absorbing knowledge from dictation alone is impossible, communication extends beyond the verbal and into the physical. As a result, the school is naturally and uniquely interactive, where the girls can't help but be involved and in charge of their learning.

Children with other disabilities are integrated seamlessly, as are those from all 39 nationalities represented in the school. The children are also closely connected with the elderly community, engaging in several creative activities together. Most strikingly, this holistic approach creates a unique atmosphere of co-operation and calmness - turning what some could consider a major communication challenge into a perfect learning environment. This environment is as likely to be seen outdoors as inside. With a specially constructed outdoor classroom, a bog garden, vegetable beds, hens and walking trails, St. Columba's use their unusual amount of space to great effect. Given the responsibility of planting and maintaining their learning landscape, the children do

more than speak with their hands. Exploration and adventure go hand in hand with the outdoor learning experience, with a huge outdoor climbing frame recently constructed to help children work together and build courage and confidence.

St. Oliver's National School, Killarney, Co. Kerry.

768 Pupils. In the very centre of St. Oliver's is a large fish tank, with 43 differently coloured fish, each representing one of the many nationalities that make up the school's population. Creatively decorated by the students, the centrepiece serves to reinforce the school's culture of celebrating diversity and drawing inspiration from nature. Within sight of the tank is the 'Golden Letterbox', a similarly pristine piece of the school's furniture with a distinct purpose. Each day, the letterbox accepts praise and support from anyone in the school, with the recipients' parents notified with a simple but powerful phone call at the end of each week.

Cooperation and collaboration is woven into the fabric of the school. In recent years, the classrooms were reshuffled to place 6th class children beside Junior Infants, giving rise to natural mentorship and care. Older pupils are also given more formal leadership roles to support and inspire the younger children in the school. In a Catholic school that is closely connected to the church, this community spirit defines the school far more than any one doctrine. While time is made each day for spiritual reflection, it is no surprise to see children turning towards Mecca to say their prayers. St. Oliver's is a school where religion is about the values that unite people, rather than the politics that can cause separation.

St. Ultan's Primary School, Cherry Orchard, Dublin 8.

420 Pupils. At St. Ultan's, you'll find students playing and composing music in the orchestra. You'll find children taking full responsibility of planting and maintaining the school's vegetable beds. You'll find them taking ownership of the school's operations through the student council. You'll find them practicing meditation, alongside their teachers. Classroom teachers work with in-class support teachers to build his wide array of hands-on learning opportunities for students, because the school has attempted to shift some focus away from textbooks in the education it provides.

Serving an area of high social and economic disadvantage, the school has a philosophy of integrating care and education. This ties in with the active learning techniques that compel students to become engaged and invested in their education. It also manifests itself in the Intervention Care Education Initiative, which is core to the school. In the Early Education Care Unit, students build social skills through the "Chatter Matters" and "Talk Boost" programmes. After school programmes are also available, as well as a robust meditation programme, that is also made available to parents. Children with special needs are integrated into the community,

and in recent years the school's Autistic Unit has been extended, for example with a sensory room and a sensory garden. Finally, Restorative Practice is a central part of the school's function; teachers and students learn to resolve conflicts and problems with respect, listening, and fairness.

Scoil Bhríde Shantalla, Co. Galway

A primary school based in the West side of Galway city. We are situated in the heart of Shantalla and our school serves Shantalla, Westside, and the surrounding districts although we welcome students from all parts of the city.

Our ethos is Catholic but children of all races and creed are warmly welcomed into our school community. We also cater for a large international population and currently have children from 19 different nationalities.

The school has a proud educational tradition including a hugely successful literacy programme – we are currently the model school for reading recovery in Galway – But, we also deliver a wide range of extracurricular, and after-school programmes to our students, including: Homework support, digital media & film making, dance & drama, musical programmes, woodwork, cookery, art therapy and a wide range of sporting activities.

We also run courses for parents and remain the only Irish school to be awarded the prestigious European Alcuin award for our seminal work in developing positive home-school relations.

Dalkey School Project National School, Dalkey, Co. Dublin

The Dalkey School Project National School or DSPNS was founded by a group of parents, who wished to have their children educated in a multi-denominational school. When it opened in September 1978 in Dun Laoghaire it was the first such school in the country. Since 1985 the school is located in Glenageary Lodge, Glenageary, Co. Dublin and has now grown to well over 200 pupils and 13 teachers. There are now 84 Educate Together primary schools and 13 Educate Together secondary schools in the country.

Dalkey School Project National School strives to create a happy, friendly, inclusive, educational environment where each child is unique and valued. We are a welcoming school where diverse talents are appreciated, and the school community works together respectfully. We cooperate to

have a peaceful and safe atmosphere in which to learn and teach. We nurture each person's potential and aspire to excellence.

Tarmon National School, Castlerea, Co. Roscommon

Tarmon N.S is situated 4km North-East of Castlerea, Co. Roscommon. It is a Roman Catholic school under the patronage of the Bishop of Elphin. Our school promotes the Catholic ethos and values while respecting the rights of every person regardless of their denomination.

In Tarmon we strive to develop each pupil spiritually socially and academically recognising each child as an individual with different interests, talents and capabilities. Tarmon N.S provides a safe, inclusive, community environment within which each child is cherished and encouraged to achieve his/her potential.

The school was built in 1890 though there is evidence of a school existing in Tarmon during the 1860's. Over the past one hundred and fifty years the past pupils and staff have created a wonderful legacy of social, academic and sporting achievements of which we are all proud.