EN6064: History, Policy and Contemporary Issues in education

Essay: My self-selected extended education policy casing on... LGBTI+ Inclusion and Bullying

2024

It is hereby declared that this coursework item is entirely my own work, unless otherwise stated, and that all sources of information have been properly acknowledged and referenced.

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Checklist: [mark X if Yes]

Word count for my essay is 1,300-1,500 words (+ or – 10%) ☒

I have included PLA_2 & PLA_3 ☒

“My self-selected extended education policy casing on LGBTI+ Inclusion and Bullying”

History and Policy Final Assignment – Essay (~1300 to 1500 words):

INTRODUCTION:

This essay is an examination of the presence or lack thereof of LGBTI+ inclusion in post-primary school policy, and specifically, that of transgender students in second-level education. It will inspect intersectionality of identities, relevant research, and related policies and strategies in Ireland and the EU.

Looking at the ‘Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools’ from September 2013, it recognises that other factors have influence over bullying attitudes, but it also states that school-based initiatives can help counteract or reinforce efforts from parents and other outside influences to prevent bullying behaviour, (Department of Education and Skills, 2013). It does define bullying as repeated unwanted behaviour, and specifies that includes cyberbullying and identity-based bullying such as racism and homophobia, (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

An article ‘Emerging from the Shadows: Transgender young people in Irish schools’ mentions that 2020 saw the first research specifically into trans young people in post-primary schools, (Lacey, 2020). A 2021 piece from Ireland’s Education Yearbook noted, however, that intersectionality of identities has not been addressed enough. Most of the research done focused on white Irish trans young people, and often excluded the trans population of the Traveller and Roma communities, (Gavigan, 2021).

The Irish Government released a ‘National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy’ for 2019 to 2021 aimed at all LGBTI+ people and allies. This strategy recognises the intersectionality of identities, that LGBTI+ people can be of any age, ethnicity, ability, and have varying family situations and be of any religious beliefs or none. It is also recognised as a “living document” that may be amended, (Government of Ireland, 2019). There remains, however, no specific nation-wide or EU-wide LGBTI+ specific inclusion policy.

Some third-level institutions such as Maynooth and the University of Limerick do have ‘Gender Identity and Gender Expression’ Policies for staff and students, (Maynooth University, 2018; UL, 2022). Recognition of LGBTI+ students in second-level schools appears to remain usually within the school’s anti-bullying policies, with little elaboration of their inclusion in the general school environment. From research into the senior cycle reform, for example, though the RSE curriculum has expanded to include the possibility of covering more LGBTI+ topics, many teachers do not feel knowledgeable enough to

effectively teach the new curriculum, (NCCA, 2020). Key principles outlined in the anti-bullying procedures for schools outline the need for "A positive school culture and climate," and "Supports for staff," the elements of such a culture and climate is outlined, including "The school has a clear commitment to promoting equity in general and gender equity in particular in all aspects of its functioning," and that schools have the capacity to change to fit the needs of its students, (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

TRANS AND LGBTI+ INCLUSION AND BULLYING:

Clearly, the procedures for anti-bullying should be revised often and training provided to support their implementation (NCCA, 2020). While there is no specific LGBTI+ policy for schools in Ireland, there are some good examples internationally. The IGLYO: The International LGBTQI Youth and Student Organisation has complied a database of resources and policies from around the world, (IGLYO, n.d.). Some of these include the Belgian resource on 'Teacher Trainings on Gender and Sexual Diversity,' (School uit de Kast, 2024). There is also a policy available through the site on 'Inclusive Education in Schools' from Malta, (Government of Malta, 2019).

The anti-bullying procedures document encourages forming a network of school staff, students, parents, and surrounding community members, (Department of Education and Skills, 2013). However, lack of knowledge around LGBTI+ identities and issues can pose an obstacle. The key findings of research by TENI and the University of Limerick showed that "all the young trans and gender-diverse [TGD] participants felt marginalised in their schools," (Lacey, 2020). Factors such as a lack of discussion, representation, and supportive spaces caused many TGD students to feel shame around their identities, which caused minority stress and had a negative impact on their self-esteem. In Ireland's Education Yearbook of 2020, Lacey urges the Irish post-primary school system to address issues and form appropriate school policies and practices to combat specific challenges faced by trans students in schools. These issues can include: "misgendering, misnaming, restrictive uniforms, bathroom accessibility issues, staff prejudice, peer bullying, barriers to sports, and lack of supports," (Lacey, 2020). Protecting trans students' access to facilities in school is important for their physical health and well-being too, as young trans people often resort to restricting their intake of food and liquids to avoid distressing confrontations, and "this has serious medium- to long-term physical effects on their growing bodies, as well as major negative psychological effects," which could detrimentally impact these individuals for the rest of their lives, (Lacey, 2020).

Furthermore, research by national LGBTI+ Irish charity, BeLonG To, indicated that "76% of LGBTQ+ students feel unsafe at school", "58% of LGBTQ+ students heard homophobic remarks from school staff," this unwelcoming atmosphere contributed to poor performance and well-being, with "1 in 3 LGBTQ+ students have skipped school to avoid negative treatment due to being LGBTQ+," and "1 in 10 LGBTQ+ students are unsure whether they will complete the Leaving Certificate," (BeLonG To, 2022). These quantitative results evidently support the need for specific policies, training, and practices to be created to assist the inclusion of LGBTI+ students in schools. BeLonG To also offers a quality mark for schools who show commitment to LGBT+ inclusion through embedding LGBTQ+ inclusion "across their school community, policies and practices," and 37 post-primary schools have successfully completed their programme to achieve this, (BeLonG To, 2024).

The importance of training, resources, and collaboration of all members of the school communities, are also recognised by the OECD as key to both teacher well-being and student success, (OECD, 2020).

The Department of Education's 2022 'Report on the implementation of aspects of anti-bullying measures in schools' also highlighted the importance of training and the co-operation of multiple community members and stakeholders in effectively putting policy into practice. This was identified by school principals surveyed as being implemented through practicing modelling of inclusive attitudes and behaviours which are respectful of diversity, and "ensuring that respect was central to the school ethos and culture." It also encourages the promotion of student-led anti-bullying approaches, such as "student-led participation, for example in their LGBTQI+ support group," (Department of Education, 2022). This shows some acknowledgement of the effectiveness of support groups, whereas in the 2013 document on anti-bullying policies did mention the importance of modelling behaviour but not as much emphasis was given to student-led groups, (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

CONCLUSION:

It is fair to say that the 2013 'Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools' document was a good start to more inclusive policies and strategies for Irish schools, as it did recognise the impact of cyberbullying and identity-based bullying such as racism, homophobia, and transphobia, (Department of Education and Skills, 2013).

The introduction of the 'National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy' from 2019 to 2021 was also a monumental step towards more targeted specific guidelines on how to include and

safeguard LGBTI+ people from discrimination and hate, (Government of Ireland, 2019). From TENI, the University of Limerick, and BeLonG To's research, however, it is evident that further specific school-based policies and practice centering LGBTI+ students are required to truly and holistically care for all aspects of these pupil's health and well-being, as well as enabling them to achieve their potential academically, (Lacey, 2020; BeLonG To, 2022).

The way forward to forming a national or EU-level policy on the inclusion of LGBTI+ students has some great international and national stakeholder resources available for support. While not an EU-wide site, the Belgian resource on 'Teacher Trainings on Gender and Sexual Diversity,' could provide a useful base for strategy and training for schools, (School uit de Kast, 2024). BeLonG To's LGBTI+ Inclusion programme and quality mark could also provide a useful framework for more inclusive practices, (BeLonG To, 2024).

While it is good that anti-bullying policies and procedures acknowledge the vulnerability of trans and LGB+ students, the inclusion of trans and LGB+ students should be present throughout the school's environment to support these pupils more effectively and sustainably, (Lacey, 2020).

Reference List / Bibliography:

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Government of Ireland. (2019). *National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy: 2019-2021*. Dublin.

Government of Malta. (2019). *A Policy on Inclusive Education in Schools: Route to Quality Inclusion*. Floriana.

IGLYO. (n.d.). *Browse our LGBTQI Inclusive Education Database*. IGLYO, European Union, Dutch Ministry of Education Culture & Science, European Youth Foundation of the Council of Europe. Database (iglyo.org) [Accessed: 23/4/2024].

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NCCA (2020) *Report on the review of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools*. Dublin: NCCA.

OECD (2020). *An implementation framework for effective change in schools*, OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 9, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/4fd4113f-en.

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PLA 2 – Reflection: Senior Cycle Reform Process (~300 words):

Our team assigned focus area for Peer Learning Activity 2 was the Senior Cycle Reform Process. We investigated the NCCA's 2020 'Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report' in terms of stakeholder input and the impact this may or may not have on the outcome of this review, (NCCA, 2020).

We each read and responded to different sections of the report, which I divided into portions among us and consulted Mary and Gavin to see which sections they would like to take. I took pages 5 to 30, looking at the "Introduction" and "Overview" of the process, and examining the "purpose, vision, and principles" of senior cycle education, (NCCA, 2020). I also formatted the design of the PowerPoint.

I noticed an absence of or limited input from certain marginalised groups as stakeholders who should be included in the policy making process, such as disabled or SEN individuals and not enough insights from people from other cultures, particularly those coming to Ireland as refugees or asylum seekers.

Gavin found that not enough effective development went into the RSE curriculum, (Pound et al, 2017). He also noted that teachers found they were uncomfortable with it as they lacked knowledge, and students found it too biologically focused, with not enough emphasis on emotions, (NCCA, 2020).

Mary found that there was a good emphasis on a holistic approach, including more diverse methods of assessing and teaching which are needed for all students to achieve their potential. She was concerned, however, that there may be an absence of sufficient support for teachers to have the time and ability implement changes.

In another peer group's review on the OECD's 2020 review also had some interesting insights such as that the subject choices are growing, along with greater recognition for alternative pathways in education such as apprenticeships, (OECD, 2020).

Reference List / Bibliography:

NCCA (2020) *Senior Cycle Review: Advisory Report*. Dublin: NCCA.

NCCA (2020) *Report on the review of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) in primary and post-primary schools*. Dublin: NCCA.

OECD (2020) *Education in Ireland: An OECD Assessment of the Senior Cycle Review*. Paris: OECD.

Pound, P. et al (2017)*' What is best practice in sex and relationships education? A synthesis of evidence, including stakeholders' views'* Sexual health research, Vol.7(5) doi: https://doi.org/10.1136/bmjopen-2016-0147991.

PLA 3 – Reflection: Theory-informed policy analysis (~300 words):

Through PLA 3 we experienced viewing a policy through a particular lens. Ours focused on viewing the 'Looking at Our Schools' (LAOS) document of 2022 through Maxime Greene's educational philosophy. It was interesting but challenging to consider her perspective and insights and apply them to the LAOS document. Gavin chose Greene's 1993 paper on Diversity and Inclusion for us to focus on. He questioned whether Greene's goal of students experiencing "real world applications" came through in the LAOS document and in practice, (Greene, 1993).

I wrote two response slides. I noticed myself was that the LAOS document had some admirable goals set out such as the "inclusion of all students" and the "centrality of student wellbeing", (LAOS, 2022). I wondered how it differs in practice, given there appears to be no fixed rules on how to implement and account for these values in a school. Though they have a rubric for assessment it seems like much leeway is given to how these values are being defined in each separate school. When considering stakeholder input, whose ethos is overruling others?

They did go through a piloting project which lasted 3 years before the document's publication, (McNamara, 2012). However, the degree to which the difference between schools when the pilot occurred to now was accounted for, particularly given the recent impact of COVID lockdowns on education, is also not immediately clear.

I found the Policy Analysis Town Hall event very valuable as we got to hear different outlooks on the LAOS document and how it connected with other pedagogical frameworks. One group examined the lens of Democratic Teacher Pedagogical Well-being, with a focus on teaching a learning. They cited the importance of training, resources, and collaboration between teachers, students, parents, and communities, as key to both teacher well-being and student success, (OECD, 2020).

Reference List / Bibliography:

Greene, M. (1993). *Diversity and Inclusion: Toward a Curriculum for Human Beings*. Teachers College Record.

Inspectorate and Department of Education. (2022). *Looking at Our School 2022: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools and Special Schools* [Preprint]. Available at: https://assets.gov.ie/25260/4a47d32bf7194c9987ed42cd898e612d.pdf (Accessed: 31 March 2024).

McNamara, G. (2012). *From Looking at Our Schools (LAOS) to Whole School Evaluation Management, Leadership and Learning (WSE-MLL): The Evolution of Inspection in Irish Schools over the Past Decade*. Dublin City University.

OECD (2020). *An implementation framework for effective change in schools*, OECD Education Policy Perspectives, No. 9, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/4fd4113f-en.