Culturally responsive classroom-based assessment
A case study of secondary schools in Ireland

La evaluación en el aula con perspectiva culturalmente sensible. Un estudio de caso de escuelas de secundaria en Irlanda

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Abstract

This paper describes the current state of development in terms of the employment of culturally responsive modes of assessment in five secondary schools in Ireland. The study was part of a project, including partners from three other European countries, that sought to investigate the challenges and opportunities for culturally responsive assessment in the classroom. The first part of the paper explores key definitions, and modes of assessment suggested in the literature that have the potential to be culturally responsive. Next, the protocol for the case study, the profiles of the five schools investigated, the data gathering methods employed, and the case study findings are presented. Finally, the discussion and conclusion draws together the key points from the case study and addresses the tensions and challenges involved in implementing culturally responsive classroom assessment. As the literature underpinning the case study was drawn from several countries and continents, it is suggested that the findings derived from this research, with the range of issues and insights for culturally responsive assessment, are also relevant to education systems where student populations are culturally diverse.

Keywords: Classroom Assessment; Cultural Responsivity, Migration; Linguistic Diversity.

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Resumen

Este documento describe el estado actual de desarrollo en términos de empleo de métodos de evaluación culturalmente receptivos en cinco escuelas de secundaria (denominadas escuelas de segundo nivel) en Irlanda. El estudio formaba parte de un proyecto, en el que participaban socios de otros tres países, que investigaba la evaluación culturalmente sensible en el aula. Tras analizar las definiciones clave en este campo, se describen los modos de evaluación que la bibliografía sugiere como potencialmente receptivos desde el punto de vista cultural. A continuación, se presenta el protocolo del estudio de caso, los perfiles de las cinco escuelas investigadas, los métodos de recogida de información empleados y las conclusiones del estudio de caso. Por último, se presenta una sección de debate y conclusiones que recoge los puntos clave del estudio de caso y aborda las tensiones y los retos que conlleva la aplicación de la evaluación de las aulas con sensibilidad cultural. A pesar de ser un estudio a pequeña escala, puede ser relevante para otras jurisdicciones educativas con retos similares.

Palabras clave: evaluación en el aula; culturalmente sensible, migración; diversidad lingüística.

Introduction and Background

This paper reports on a series of case studies of culturally responsive assessment practices in five secondary schools in Ireland. The research, which was part of a project entitled 'Aiding Culturally Responsive Assessment in Schools' (ACRAS), was funded by the EU Erasmus+ research programme to investigate and support best practices in classroom assessment that is culturally responsive. The paper situates the case study within the ACRAS project's rationale and methodology before presenting the research as follows: definitions and context; promising culturally responsive assessment practices suggested by the literature; the protocol for the case study; the profile of the five schools; the method of collecting the data; the findings of the case study in terms of the beliefs, practices, challenges and supports related to school communities. The paper concludes with a discussion and reflection on the needs currently being experienced by schools in implementing culturally responsive classroom assessment that we suggest has implications for other jurisdictions.

The rationale for the paper relates to the well-documented lower achievement of students with a migration background compared to their indigenous counterparts (Brown et al. 2019; Bradshaw, O'Brennan & McNeely, 2008; Griner & Stewart, 2013; Raines, Dever, Kamphaus & Roach, 2012). Indeed, a study of PISA results for the four partner countries involved in this project (Austria, Ireland, Norway, and Turkey) indicated a considerable achievement gap between students with a migration background and their native peers (Herzog-Punzenberger et al., 2020).

As such, the motivation for the study was the aspiration to support diversity in education in general and in assessment in particular, something which has benefits for all students according to the OECD (2016).

The OECD asserts that it is important for students to acquire 'the ability to learn from and live with people from diverse backgrounds; and the attitudes and values necessary to interact respectfully with others' (2016, p.1). The aspiration to respond to

diversity is also enshrined in Irish educational legislation. The preliminary statement to the Education Act, 1998, states that the education system 'Respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society'. Section 6 (k) of the Act also states that one of the objects of the Education Act is: 'to promote the language and cultural needs of students having regard to the choices of their parents'.

In 2006 the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), who advise the Minister of Education on curriculum and assessment for early childhood education, primary and post-primary schools, published a report providing guidelines for secondary schools on intercultural education, and in 2010 the Department of Education and Skills in conjunction with the Office of the Minister for Integration published 'the Intercultural Education Strategy 2010 – 2015'. These two publications strongly espouse the belief that diversity benefits all students in that it 'sensitises the learner to the idea that humans have naturally developed a range of different ways of life, customs and worldviews, and that this breadth of human life enriches all of us' (NCCA, 2006, p.i).

The literature also provides empirical evidence of the benefits for all students of the acknowledgement of and response to diversity. All students gain in language awareness (Hancock, 2017), well-being, self-efficacy, and motivation (DeBacker, Van Avermaet & Slembrouck, 2017), and learner autonomy (Kirwan, 2017).

Definitions and context

The project adopted definitions for 'culture,' 'assessment', and 'culturally responsive assessment' drawn from the extensive literature in the field. Culturally responsive classroom assessment falls within the broader context of culturally responsive pedagogy, as a key consideration is the overall quality of student learning and achievement.

Frierson, Hood, Hughes and Thomas (2010) refer to culture as 'a cumulative body of learned and shared behaviour, values, customs, and beliefs common to a particular group or society' (p.75). The OECD (2016) also provides an extensive reflection on the definition of culture: 'culture is a difficult term to define because cultural groups are always internally heterogeneous... cultural affiliations intersect, and each individual occupies a unique cultural positioning. People's cultural affiliations are dynamic and fluid ...' (OECD, 2016, p.7). This perspective on an individual's unique cultural and fluid positioning was adopted for the project.

Assessment, on the other hand, is frequently described as the process of collecting evidence about student knowledge or competence, making a judgement about student knowledge or the competence and the outcomes of the process (Black &Wiliam, 2012; Poole et al. 2018; Shepard, 2006; Wiliam, 2007). Murchan and Shiel (2017) state that 'notwithstanding the diversity of stakeholders interested in information about student progress, the most common uses to which assessment is put can be narrowed down to promoting learning and finding out what students have learned' (pp.4-5).

Assessment that promotes learning, formative assessment, is frequently 'implemented while teaching is underway, during lessons or during particular units of work' so that the 'information yielded is used to help students learn' (Murchan & Shiel, 2017,

p.5). Assessment that aims to find out what students have learned is generally termed as summative assessment as it sums up 'students' achievement at a particular point in time' (Murchan & Shiel, 2017, p.5).

The ACRAS project focussed on classroom assessment which may be either formative or summative. Indeed, in the everyday work of teachers and students, much classroom assessment is formative. Murchan and Shiel (2017) draw on several sources to propose approaches for embedding formative assessment that has become 'widespread across the globe and reflect a research-led desire to embed assessment within instruction' (p.62). The approaches they propose are:

- Identifying and communicating learning intentions
- Identifying and communicating success criteria
- Providing useful feedback
- Effective questioning
- Peer assessment
- Self-assessment (Murchan & Shiel, 2017, p.62).

The project used these approaches as elements of a conceptual framework to iden-tify good practices in culturally responsive classroom assessment. The case study of the five schools did not explicitly inquire about the use of these approaches, as the questions developed for school personnel were more open-ended to elicit information about beliefs and practice. However, the comments of teachers and students indicated levels of awareness or non-awareness and practice or non-practice of these methods, and they formed part of the analytical lens through which the data was coded. This is further addressed in the discussion and conclusion section of this paper. Accepting the OECD's reflection on culture, the term 'culturally responsive assessment' was adopted in this project to mean:

> Assessment that is sensitive to and takes cognisance of cultural affiliations. The context refers to cultural affiliations that may impact on values, experience and ways of thinking that are culturally influenced and impact on learning and assessment.

This project's focus on culturally responsive assessment was within the context of research on culturally responsive teaching and learning. To date, most of the literature on culturally responsive issues have addressed learning and pedagogy (Brown-Jeffy & Cooper, 2011). Based on a survey of research on culturally responsive pedagogy, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) present a conceptual framework 'that is grounded in over a quarter of a century of research scholarship' (p.80). Their conceptual framework includes five overarching themes and twenty-one concepts.

These themes and concepts illustrate the breadth of issues relevant to this topic: teacher professional knowledge, teacher practice including assessment, teacher unders-tanding of students, teacher attitudes, and teacher behaviour. Moreover, Brown-Jeffy and Cooper (2011) maintain that working on a combination of these elements 'is what truly makes one engaged in' culturally responsive pedagogy (p.80).

Another aspect of the context for research on culturally responsive assessment is that there is not an established, widely agreed repertoire of practice in the field. Hollins (1993) has observed that studies do not 'offer formulas, but they do offer insights' (p.98) for assessing students from diverse cultural backgrounds. Research also reveals assessment modes that can be culturally responsive rather than well-known, effective practice.

An essential facet in the work of the ACRAS project was the acknowledgement that culturally responsive assessment is connected to good assessment practice in general and, conversely, that good assessment practice is adaptable to being culturally responsive. This context of a broad range of relevant issues and a lack of well-established practice had implications for the protocol for the case studies and the findings.

Promising practices in the literature

As well as research-led approaches in formative assessment, insights gained from the literature suggested some additional modes of assessment that can be culturally responsive. While the literature indicates caveats about using these assessment modes, there is encouragement to pursue them for their potential, and subsequently, they were included in the data analysis framework employed in this research. Performance-based assessment and creativity assessment is proposed in this category.

Performance-based assessment is described by Baker, O'Neill and Linn (1993) as having the following characteristics:

1. Uses open-ended tasks
2. Focuses on higher order or complex skills
3. Employs context-sensitive strategies
4. Often uses complex problems requiring several types of performance and significant student time
5. Consists of either individual or group performance
6. May involve a significant degree of student choice (p.1211).

These characteristics imply that such tasks require much more than the recall of knowledge. However, authors such as Hood (1998), Johnson, Thompson and Wallace (1998) caution that performance-based tests require attention to validity and reliability issues, are challenging to construct, and require resources and time.

Creativity assessment is defined as 'producing something that is novel and useful' (Kim & Zabelina, 2015, p.136). This definition can include a wide variety of assessment tasks, and it is suggested that cultural bias can be addressed through creativity assessment (Hempel & Sue-Chan, 2010). Kim and Zabelina (2015) add that 'creativity assessment shows few differences across gender or ethnicity' (p.136).

Similar to the approaches to formative assessment noted in the previous section on 'Definitions and context,' questions asked of school personnel in the case study did not inquire directly about school use or non-use of these modes of assessment. However, as noted later in the discussion, comments and contributions of school personnel at times indicated their use.

Method

To get a broad awareness of the theory and practice concerning culturally responsive classroom assessment, the research began with a literature review of assessment practices that have the potential to be culturally fair. Following on from this, a case study protocol was developed to obtain information concerning the beliefs and practices of staff regarding culturally responsive assessment in the five case study schools.

A case study protocol is 'the procedural guide for collecting the data for a case study, including a set of field questions to be addressed by the researchers, representing the researcher's "mental agenda"' (Yin, 2014, p.240). The protocol included detailed data collection procedures, required data analysis, the case study report template to be used. The section of the protocol for the data collection procedures detailed:

- The profile of schools based on variation in setting, type, school size, the composition of students, and percentage of migrant students
- The provision of information on the project to participants in plain language, including a code of ethics
- The schedule of questions for interviews with principals, teachers, students and parents.

The interview schedule that was developed as part of the ACRAS project was constructed with an awareness that the term 'culturally responsive assessment' was not, at this stage, part of school discourse in Ireland (Nayir et al., 2019). In other words, questions had to be broad and open-ended enough to gain information on knowledge, practice, beliefs, and attitudes related to addressing the assessment needs of students from diverse cultures (See Appendix).

The coding for the analysis consisted of deductive categories following the questions: policies, practices, beliefs, challenges and supports, with inductive coding to represent topics found in specific cases.

School profile characteristics

Interviews were conducted with school personnel in five schools representing the various school types of secondary schools that exist in Ireland (Table 1).

Table 1

School Profile Characteristics

School	School Type	Demographics	Gender	Enrolment	Migrant student population	Number of teachers
1	Education and Training Board (State)	Edge of a city, newly residential area	Mixed	820	80%	63
2	Denominational Secondary	Satellite town	Girls	970	30%	75
3	Educate Together secondary school	Outer suburban, newly residential area	Mixed	395	60%	33
4	Denominational. private fee-paying, boarding school	Rural area	Boys	450	10%	35
5	Denominational Secondary	Inner city	Girls	392	38%	34

Documents and interviews

School websites were also scrutinised for mission statements and policies. All five schools expressed a warm welcome to students of diverse backgrounds on their websites. Table 2 presents the number of interviews in each school that consisted of interviews with school leaders, teachers, parents and students. However, an acknowledged limitation of the study is that despite requests to schools, a meeting with parents was only possible in one school. Finally, all interviews were audio-recorded, totalling approximately fourteen hours.

Table 2

Interviews conducted per school

School	Number of staff interviewed	Number of students interviewed	Number of parents interviewed
1	6	None	1
2	8	21	None
3	6	7	None
4	8	48	None
5	6	35	None

Results

The broad questions derived from the case study yielded a wide range of teacher awareness of their students' needs, but the questions also revealed a fairly narrow base to teacher professional knowledge, most notably in the field of culturally responsive assessment. Responses provided only a small amount of specific information on teacher practice in classroom assessment as teachers were mainly interested in talking about teaching and learning in diverse classrooms. The findings, therefore, ranged broadly across the areas that were the focus for teachers. The data from the five schools studied are amalgamated and presented thematically.

A key finding was the school staffs' understanding, awareness and observation of cultural diversity among their students. The definitions of culture proposed by Frierson et al. (2010) and the OECD (2016) referred to in the section on 'Definitions and context' were implied in teacher observations of their students.

The single most frequent comment of school staff regarding diversity of culture concerned language. Indeed, it was also clear that teacher professional knowledge on language acquisition and language proficiency was, in some schools, of a very high level.

Teacher respect for individual students also reflected awareness and acceptance that 'each individual occupies a unique cultural positioning' (OECD, 2016, p.7), and teacher comments reflected an awareness that individual students were experiencing tension or simply an evolution between their culture of origin and their adaptation to Irish culture.

Teacher observation about their students also addressed cultural dimensions in areas such as student levels of comfort with some topics, epistemology, approaches to assessment and social behaviour. The findings reported in this paper reflect the paramount position staff placed on language, interspersed with teacher observation about their students.

Policy

Schools 1, 2 and 5 have policies specific to students with a migration background. School 1 had a particularly detailed policy on Intercultural Education with both aspirational and practical objectives. Two girls' schools had a policy supportive of the wearing of the hijab. School 2 also had a multicultural policy that focused mainly on displaying images of cultural diversity in the school and celebrating diversity in cuisine and festivals. However, the policies in the five schools did not have a specific focus on assessment.

Key beliefs

Teachers' belief about fairness was evident in their commitment to providing assessment activities that addressed diverse cultural backgrounds so that students would not be disadvantaged either by a lack of language proficiency or by different cultural experiences and that students would have the opportunity to demonstrate their knowledge and skill. Several schools reported that everyone benefits from the diverse cultures in the school; it is part of the school culture to welcome and affirm difference. Principals and teachers in some schools also expressed the belief that all teachers are

teachers of language, as teachers in each subject discipline have to ensure that students understand the key words, and therefore the key concepts, of the discipline. In the situation where new students arrive with little or no English, most staff expressed the view that 'students learn the language best with their peers, so it is desirable to keep them with their peers as much as possible'.

Some teachers expressed the belief that students who have more than one language are 'quick to learn an additional language'. It was suggested that it is important to draw on the students' first language, although a minority considered that giving any attention to a student's first language hindered their development of proficiency in English. School staff expressed the following beliefs:

- Good classroom practice in every subject requires that teachers are trained to teach the language needs of the students in that subject for the benefit of all students
- Both written papers in examinations and textbooks should be screened for appropriate language, as they do not reflect the diversity of language we now have in our secondary schools.

Language practices

Schools 1 and 3 provided the most extensive reporting on practices related to language and assessment. Students speak a wide range of languages, and some interviewed students reported that they spoke three or more languages, although their writing skills in the languages varied. Teachers frequently commented that student oral skills are much better than their written skills.

In three schools, students new to the school are assessed with the Cambridge Language Test. For newly arrived students who do not communicate in English, the practice in the schools varied as some schools withdraw the student from class for up to two weeks of intensive English, while other schools withdraw the student from mainstream classes only during Irish class, which is five periods per week.

Any poor results on summative classroom assessment are analysed to check whether the low performance is due to language proficiency or test content. In other words, student performance in summative assessment is analysed as it relates to: (1) academic ability; (2) language acquisition; (3) the personality of the student.

In line with the literature (for example, Cummins, 2000; Herzog-Punzenberger et al. 2020), in schools 1 and 3, students are encouraged to use their first language in the classroom on the basis that students should continue to develop their first language as it helps them to develop concepts in English and also helps to acquire the English language. Schools reported that there could be up to 25 different languages spoken by students in any one class. As exposure to different languages fosters all students in exploring patterns in language, some teachers encouraged students to use their first language by asking, for example, 'What is that word in Polish? Romanian? Russian?' According to one teacher, 'Students share language experiences, saying, for example, 'That's like a word in my language.'

Drawing on the terminology that the student's first language helps students develop concepts in specific subjects (Nortvedt et al. 2020), to facilitate this, students in two schools must have a dictionary and read the material in their first language.

Classroom practices

In designing classroom activities, teachers appeared to draw on both their professional knowledge of language proficiency and their observations of students in terms of, for example, student level of comfort with some topics and epistemology. The observed difference in epistemology was that some students are not comfortable with uncertainty, and they focus on, as one teacher stated: 'getting the right answers'.

In the face of these observations and depending on the stage of students in the secondary cycle, at times, teachers voiced a preference for debate, negotiation and challenging student thinking and at other times acceptance of the student position. At the senior cycle level (students aged from 16 to 18), some teachers noted the reluctance of certain students to express an opinion but also stated that as Irish peers express opinions, these students were gradually more comfortable in voicing a personal opinion on, for example, a response to literature.

For development in proficiency for all students in accessing the curriculum, pre-teaching keywords in all subjects is a practice of most schools. Keywords are attached to students' desks and explained in several languages.

In some schools, many activities were conducted with the keywords before approaching blocks of text. One example of such an activity was the use of the 'four square', which includes the definition of the word, the different contexts of the word, the spoken word, and images of the word.

Teachers also made use of graphic organisers to visually display the key facts or concepts in each topic/unit. Questioning technique was also used to include wait time after asking questions to facilitate students thinking in another language.

Indeed, teachers appeared to regularly look for culturally relevant material focusing on identity as that is a significant issue for students of that age and suits students from all cultural backgrounds. An engaging writing exercise for students, for example, consisted of composing an acrostic poem with characteristics such as gender, age, country of origin and friends, etc.

Assessment Practices

Schools varied in their assessment practices that aimed to implement culturally responsive assessments. Most of the assessment practices reported here came from Schools 1 and 3. Teachers focus on developing assessment instruments for the classroom consisted of topics and methods that suit the particular cohort of students in their classes. Topics that were inclusive, but not intrusive, of cultural experience were used, such as oral and written tasks on: 'How do you celebrate festivals?' or 'If you were packing for a trip, what items would you include?'

Some teachers indicated that they adapt strategies on classroom practice for assessment, particularly keywords and graphic organisers. Within this, a range of graphics were used depending on the developmental stage of the students.

Different assessment activities can be developed with graphic organisers, for example, a matching exercise, a cloze test, a request to give examples, explanations,

comparisons, a request to evaluate the accuracy of a graphic organiser or to construct a graphic organiser. Assessment items in graphic organisers may also be plurilingual.

An example assessment task that honours students' first language and facilitates student development in English proficiency was a request to students with the same linguistic background to research a topic related to the curriculum in their first language. The students then gave a report presented to their class in English. Similarly, a student may be requested to research a topic in the first language with the help of a parent or grandparent or a family member living in the country of origin and then give a presentation in English to their peers. The findings of the project can be displayed in both languages. This type of project is significant in validating the student's culture of origin for the class where the student becomes the expert on the topic. These tasks also lend themselves to peer and self-assessment.

Two of the schools used differentiation in classroom formative assessment to cater to different English proficiency levels. One way of differentiating is to give students, for example, seven questions and suggest that they should do 1 to 4, then 5 and 6, then 7.

School 3 reported that the school has an online Virtual Learning Environment for communication between teachers and students. This facilitates exchanges about forthcoming assessments in terms of duration and samples and, according to several teachers, is useful for students with different proficiency levels.

Teachers have been given much support and advice on classroom assessment, particularly assessment for learning 'in the past ten years or so,' stated a principal. At the junior cycle level (students aged from 13 to 15), teachers 'are promoting varied ways of classroom assessment such as projects'. In order to build the capacity of teachers in designing classroom assessment that addresses the diverse cultural and linguistic needs of students, a group of four Special Needs teachers recently developed a workshop for teachers focusing on pre-teaching vocabulary, keywords, graphics suitable for all students. As a result, the group developed many resources and assessment strategies for teachers.

One principal stated that she considers it 'a challenge to help teachers to be more creative about classroom assessment' and believed that teachers follow a 'formula of teach a unit, give a written test and give marks to students'. In this regard, she appeared to challenge teachers to consider alternative methods of classroom assessment, such as 'portfolios, case study, or crossword'. In line with the literature on the importance of culturally responsive assessment (See, for example, Brown et al. 2021), the principal encouraged teachers to give detailed feedback on formative assessments so that individual students 'know how to improve their work in summative assessment. Indeed, the principal considered that the teachers need a repertoire of competence to teach and assess in a culturally diverse classroom'.

Teachers also mentioned a range of externally developed resources, some of which are online or developed by themselves for classroom assessment (Burns et al., 2019a).

Challenges

Schools articulated or implied various challenges both at a professional and at a system level for teachers, as well as challenges for students and parents. For example,

in some schools, principals and teachers demonstrated a lack of awareness of available research and resources for assessment in culturally diverse classrooms. A challenge for them is access to such research.

Teachers are at the coal-face in classrooms with students from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, faced with the challenge of implementing classroom assessment that is fair to all students. Accessing appropriate professional development that can provide the theory and practice that would support teachers in this challenge is difficult. The time spent finding and developing appropriate resources, especially for senior cycle, for use in classroom assessment also appeared to be an issue for teachers. The balance between challenge and docility in the face of diversity is a daily challenge for teachers.

The use of differentiated tests was also an issue for teachers; for example, when school 2 used differentiated assessments to adapt to their students English proficiency, some students achieved 80% or more. Reports to parents stated that it was a differentiated test. However, when students later had to sit an examination that was not differentiated, they, according to one teacher, 'achieved maybe 30%, and parents were puzzled about how their child's achievement deteriorated so much'. For this reason, it was decided in two schools to decrease the use of differentiated tests as the Junior State examination does not differentiate. A significant challenge for parents is understanding the assessment system both at school and at the national level. Indeed, teachers appeared to experience tension and a challenge between the language used in the State Certificate examinations and the plurilingual approach in the classroom.

Supports

School 1 reported significant supports that did not exist for the other four schools. School 1 belongs to an Education and Training Board (ETB) region with a cluster of secondary schools. The ETB has a centrally-located English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) Development Officer who supports the network of schools and individual schools. As part of her role, the ESOL Officer assesses all First-Year students in secondary schools via the online Cambridge assessment test. In addition, students who speak another language at home are tested each year to track and monitor progress and language needs. Information from the Cambridge assessment was shared with all subject teachers and was the basis for classroom strategies and assessments. Teachers voiced appreciation for the Cambridge Assessment programme as it gave 'reliable and accurate information' about students' language proficiency and needs.

The ESOL Officer also conducts courses for teachers in the cluster of schools to increase the number of subject teachers with language skills.

School 2 also reported much professional development of teachers in the past ten years in classroom assessment, particularly assessment for learning. In the five schools, teachers were supported by the school management in addressing the needs of students of diverse cultures. In line with the need to embed cultural responsivity in some schools, also reported on the encouragement from the school principal to have collaborative meetings of teachers, both formally and informally, to develop and share resources for classroom assessment.

Discussion and Conclusion

This case study of five schools was conducted within the context of a broad range of issues, some based on teacher professional knowledge, and many based on teacher observation of their students. The vast majority of teachers demonstrated their role as reflective practitioners in observing students and devising assessment tasks to meet student needs. In doing so, they were keenly aware of the tensions between the requirements of the State examinations and their classroom assessment tasks. In line with the literature (see, for example, Burns et al. 2019b), teachers were convinced that cultural diversity in the classroom benefits all students.

Good practice in classroom assessment

Culturally responsive classroom assessment is primarily based on what constitutes good classroom assessment for all students. The section on 'Definitions and context' indicated six approaches proposed by the literature as a guide to embedding good practice in classroom assessment. Some responses of teachers and students indicated awareness of and use of three of those approaches: effective questioning, peer assessment and self-assessment. Two of those approaches were not mentioned, which does not necessarily mean that they are not in use by the schools: identifying and communicating learning intentions; identifying and communicating success criteria. However, inferences can be drawn regarding the sixth approach: providing useful feedback. Many comments indicated a preponderance of feedback as marks on assessment. Associated with the marks were: misunderstanding by parents, efforts by a principal to encourage teachers to use specific feedback to facilitate student improvement, and student frustration with so many marks. The inference is that feedback on student assessment was not always useful.

Promising practices

As indicated earlier in this paper, the literature suggested some modes of assessment that have the potential to be culturally fair. Responses of teachers and students indicated that some assessment tasks were performance-based: oral presentations, projects and group work that involved the application of knowledge and/or skill. Similarly, students referred to their enjoyment of creative assessment when they 'produce an artefact'. It cannot be inferred that performance-based and creativity assessments were widespread in the five schools, but only that some such assessment modes were in use. Contributions from staff in school 1 and staff and students in school 3 revealed efforts to use such research-led practices in ways that are culturally responsive.

One principal referred to her conviction that written tests requiring recall of information were very frequently used in her school, and she was making significant efforts to encourage teachers to move to more performance-based and creative modes of assessment such as portfolios, case study and crosswords.

In conclusion, the need for culturally responsive assessment is a relatively new imperative in Irish education, and as this research has shown, it is not consistent across

the spectrum of schools as the level of diversity in schools differs greatly. National documents and statements of policy reflect an awareness at a system level that does not translate into appropriate and effective support for the schools that need assistance. Schools with varied profiles are addressing the needs of students from diverse cultures in different ways. Some teachers appeared to make efforts to address the observed needs of their students and parents. However, to effectively address students' learning and assessment needs from diverse cultures, teachers also need significant professional development, the support of policy at national and local levels, and the support of accessible resources. Schools also need adequate and appropriate support in assisting parents in understanding systems of assessment.

In conclusion, despite the small scale nature of the study with five schools and contributions from only a representative sample of school personnel, the case study analysis concludes that the need for more system-level supports for schools is urgent.

With the current level of resources available to schools, it is difficult for an individual school to address the varying needs of migration background students in isolation. In other words, this paper argues that it is necessary to consider a wide range of issues when addressing culturally responsive assessment. On the one hand, this research highlights that schools in Ireland have overwhelmingly embraced migration background students through, for example, celebrations of different cultural traditions. However, on the other hand, understanding the learning needs and the requisite supports required for culturally responsive assessment to flourish in schools is entirely different.

As the literature underpinning the case study was drawn from several countries and continents, this overview of five schools in Ireland, with the range of issues and the insights for the practice of culturally responsive assessment, is relevant in educational systems where student populations are culturally diverse.

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Apéndice

Questions for staff interviews

Student Population Characteristics

1. In your experience: Has the student composition in your school recently changed? Is there an increased/decreased number of students from migration background? What migration groups do the students in your school come from?
2. Has this changed the atmosphere/climate in your classrooms? If yes, what kind of change happened?
3. How many different languages are spoken by your students?

Practices

4. How can teachers best cope with diversity of students? Can you give some practical examples for what you are doing to cope with diversity of students?
5. Is there teaching material which is helpful for teaching in diverse classrooms? Who is providing / producing this material?
6. How can teachers use the languages of their students as a resource in the classroom?
7. If you think of assessment: Are students from migration background reacting differently to assessment situations?
8. Is it appropriate to adapt assessment situations to the needs of students from migration backgrounds?
9. If yes, in what way assessment can be adapted? What types of assessment can be adapted, are there other types which cannot? Can you give practical examples for what you are doing to adapt assessment to the needs of students from migration backgrounds?
10. Is there assessment material which is helpful for assessment in diverse classrooms? Who is providing / producing this material?
11. Are there other support measures (e.g. professional development, consultants etc.) which are helpful for teaching and assessment in diverse classrooms? Who is providing / producing support measures?
12. Is there special collaboration among staff with respect to teaching and assessment in diverse classrooms? What are the focus and the results of this collaboration? Is it helpful for your teaching and assessing in diverse classrooms?

Policies/strategies

13. Does your school have an explicit policy on assessment? Or an agreement within staff?
14. If yes, what are the main ideas? Is this relevant for students with a migration background? In what respect?
15. Does your school have an explicit policy on coping with diversity? Or an agreement within staff?

16. If yes, what are the main ideas?

Evaluations

17. In general, do you think that the knowledge and competences of students with migration backgrounds are fairly recognized by the usual assessment strategies in your schools?
18. For what proportion of the group of migrant students in your class will academic success be possible? Why is that?
19. What do you see as the benefits of teaching and learning with students who have a migration background?
20. What do you see as the challenges of teaching and learning with students who have a migration background?
21. What support measures would be helpful for coping with diversity in your classrooms?

Questions for student group interviews

1. Do you like to go to school? Why (not)? What are the good sides and the awkward sides of going to school?
2. How many languages are spoken by this class group?
3. Do you have opportunity to use all the languages you speak?
4. How is assessment usually done in your class?
5. Are there situations other than tests in which you can show what you know?
6. How do you experience typical assessment situations? Are they easy, difficult?
7. Can you show the teacher and your peers what you know?
8. Do teachers realize what you know and what you can do – not just with respect to school knowledge, but also to other knowledge acquired in non-curricular situations?

Questions for parent interviews

1. Do your children like to go to school? Why (not)?
2. What are the good sides and the awkward sides of going to school?
3. What problems do you encounter with respect to schools?
4. Do you observe your children growing in the appreciation and use of language?
5. Do you support your child with his/her school homework?
6. Do you know how the competencies of your child are assessed?
7. Is the knowledge of your children appreciated by the school? – not just with respect to school knowledge, but also to other knowledge acquired in non-curricular situations?
8. Do you know what measures teachers are taking to assess the competencies of all children in the class group?
9. Do you participate in school activities? Are you encouraged to do so?