Empathy, Social Values, and Civic Behaviour Among Early Adolescents in Ireland:

Policy & Curriculum Review & Key Informant Perspectives

UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre NUI Galway

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CONTENTS

List of Abbreviations

CASEL	Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
CSPE	Civic, Social and Political Education
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
ECEC	Early Childhood Education and Care
ESD	Education for Sustainable Development
HSE	Health Service Executive
ITE	Initial Teacher Education
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
PE	Physical Education
RE	Religious Education
SEL	Social and Emotional Learning
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education
TY	Transition Year
UN	United Nations
UNECE	United Nations Economic Commission for Europe
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
UNSDGs	United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs)
WHO	World Health Organisation (WHO)

Study Overview

At an international level, there is evidence that empathy values, social concern and civic engagement are declining among younger generations as a consequence of the increasing individualisation of society over recent decades (Hylton, 2018; Gudjonsen, 2016; Kidd, 2013; Levine & Liu, 2015; Putnam, 2016). Given the importance of empathy and related social values to social cohesion and democracy, it can be argued that it is of societal importance that values of empathy and care towards others are given due attention in research and policy. To date, however, there has been little research conducted on this topic among youth in Ireland.

This study aims to generate empirical evidence regarding the values and experiences of youth in Ireland towards a range of issues which reflect a sense of social responsibility towards others, including an analysis of factors that influence the development of social values and empathy. It also aims to review the degree to which national policy and curriculum supports the promotion of such values. The core research questions guiding this project are:

1. At an international level, what factors have been found to influence the development of empathy and pro-social behaviour among adolescents?

2. What are the values and behaviours of 12-16 year olds in Ireland in relation to empathy, social values and civic behaviour?

3. What factors in young people's social context are important in shaping empathy, social values and civic behaviour?

4. Are empathy and social values currently a priority in national policy for children and young people? Is this an issue of focus within the second level curriculum? Is there a need for a new or enhanced approach to teaching social values and empathy?

The methods used to address these research questions and resulting outputs are summarised in Table 1. This current report is Policy and Curriculum Analysis and Key Informant Perspectives.

Table 1:
Overview of research questions, methodology and outputs from the overall study

Research Question	Methodology	Output
1. At an international level, what factors have been found to influence the development of empathy and pro-social behaviour among adolescents?	Systematic literature review	**Peer reviewed journal article:** Silke, C., Brady, B. Boylan, C., Dolan, P. (2018) Factors influencing the development of empathy and pro-social behaviour among adolescents: A systematic review. *Children and Youth Services Review, 94, 421-436.*
2. What are the values and behaviours of 12-16 year olds in Ireland in relation to empathy, social values and civic behaviour? 3. What factors in young people's social context are important in shaping these social values and behaviours?	Quantitative cross-sectional research with a national sample of over 700 early adolescents in 12 schools in Ireland. Qualitative focus group research with 29 students in 3 schools in Ireland	Empathy, Social Values and Civic Behaviour among Early Adolescents in Ireland: *Scientific Report*
4. Are empathy and social values currently a priority in national policy for children and young people in Ireland? Is this an issue of focus within the second level curriculum? Is there a need for a new or enhanced approach to teaching social values and empathy?	Policy and curriculum review of 33 documents relevant to the Irish context Qualitative interviews with 11 key informants	Empathy, Social Values and Civic Behaviour among Early Adolescents in Ireland: *Policy & Curriculum Review & Key Informant Perspectives*
What have we learned from this programme of research? What are the implications for policy, practice and research?	Summary of overall findings and recommendations	Empathy, Social Values and Civic Behaviour among Early Adolescents in Ireland: *Composite Report* *Youth friendly summary*

Introduction to this Report

Empathy, the ability to understand and share the thoughts and emotions of others, is a foundational social skill in human beings. Empathy is thought to provide a basis for related attitudes and values such as social responsibility, care and justice (Cuff et al., 2016; Hoffman, 2000; Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011) and is seen as an important and even foundational skill for promoting prosocial behaviour, civic behaviour and social justice (Eisenberg & Miller, 1987; Segal, 2011; Hylton, 2018). It has been argued that empathy and other-oriented skills and values in youth contribute to the enrichment of civic society (Wagaman, 2011). Empathy is perhaps best considered as part of a nexus of interrelated 'other-oriented' or 'other-centred' skills, values and behaviours which operate at interpersonal, society-wide and global levels.

The importance of empathy, social responsibility and civic engagement for children and adolescents, and the positive outcomes associated with these skills and values, are reviewed in greater detail in the first report in this overall research project - *Empathy, Social Values and Civic Behaviour among Early Adolescents in Ireland: Scientific Report*. For the purposes of this report it is relevant to reiterate that adolescence has been identified as a crucial stage of empathy development (Van der Graaff et al., 2014; Chase-Landsdale, Wakschlag, & Brooks-Gunn, 1995) and furthermore, that research suggests that engaging in empathic and prosocial responding during childhood and adolescence can set the stage for social responsibility and citizenship in adulthood (Wray-Lake & Syvertsen, 2011). This recognition of the importance of promoting empathy and related prosocial values in children and young people is reflected in the significant and growing range of educational programmes designed to teach socio-emotional skills and values in formal and non-formal educational settings (Humphrey, 2013; Weare & Nind, 2011; Durlak et al., 2010; Durlak et al., 2011), and in the mainstreaming of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) as an educational policy concern across the world (Torrente, 2015; OECD, 2015). A key question for researchers, educators and policy-makers alike is therefore *how* can empathy be effectively promoted in children and young people? This question emerges as particularly relevant in light of evidence of generational declines in empathy, prosocial responding and civic engagement (Hylton, 2018; Putman, 2000; Konrath et al., 2011; Balsano, 2005).

This report examines the development and promotion of empathy and related skills, values and behaviours such as care, social responsibility, tolerance, prosocial responding and civic engagement in children and young people in an Irish context, with the aim of informing the development of policy and programme interventions in the areas of education and child and youth development. The emphasis, in line with the aims of the broader research project of which this is a part, is on adolescents attending second-level education. The report consists of two sections: a **Policy and Curriculum Review** and a **Key Informant Study**. The Policy and Curriculum Review examines whether and how existing policy in Ireland supports the development and promotion of empathy and related social values in children and young people. In order to further understand how policy translates into practice and how empathy and prosocial values are promoted in applied settings, a Key Informant Study was undertaken to explore the in-depth views of informants from a range of backgrounds including teaching, programme development and delivery, academia, educational psychology, school leadership and youth work, on approaches to promoting empathy and social values in young people. Therefore, while the Policy Review examines the strategies, guidelines and plans that inform how values can be promoted across a range of settings, the Key Informant Study seeks to explore the experience of those who are responsible for putting policy into practice.

To date, research on Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and the development and evaluations of SEL programme interventions have largely taken place in the United States. While these efforts have the advantage of having provided a significant body of evidence for the effectiveness of SEL and a range of evidence-based programmes for use in applied settings, it has the disadvantage of being context-specific. Policy-makers and practitioners in Ireland must rely on international evidence and programmes evaluated in different socio-cultural contexts in order to make informed decisions about how to apply SEL in an Irish setting. This research

is a first step towards understanding how we might promote empathy and prosocial values in an Irish context. It is anticipated that this Report will highlight both the opportunities and challenges faced by policy-makers and practitioners in promoting social values in children and young people in Ireland and suggest effective approaches to promoting the skills and values necessary to enhance social solidarity and connectedness.

01

Policy and Curriculum Review

The Context for Empathy Education in Ireland: A review of Policy and the School Curriculum

1.1 Introduction: Social and Emotional Learning

This review analyses policy and the school curriculum in the Republic of Ireland with a view to establishing what opportunities exist for promoting empathy and related social values in children and young people. In doing so it situates values promotion within the broad domain of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), an emergent contextual framework within which researchers and practitioners alike are engaging with the development and promotion of a diverse range of skills and values such as empathy, social responsibility, conflict resolution, decision-making, resilience, emotional regulation and civic engagement.

There is now a broad consensus that education must provide students with more than academic, cognitive and analytical skills if they are to be fully prepared for the challenges of work and life and that the education system should promote young people's social and emotional development. This evolution in policy thinking developed largely in response to emerging theory and research in the area of intelligence, in particular work on multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983) and emotional intelligence (Salovey & Mayer , 1990; Mayer and Salovey 1997; Goleman, 1995). In 1994, the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL) was established in the United States in order to apply theory and research to practice by promoting evidence-based SEL as an integral component of preschool, primary and second-level education. Other countries followed this lead in developing SEL programmes and integrating SEL into educational policy and school curricula (OECD, 2015; Torrente, 2015). The Handbook of Social and Emotional Learning (Durlak et al., 2015) published in 2015 testifies to the growing body of research and practice on SEL internationally over the past two decades.

There is a lack of precision and clarity regarding what components of learning should be included within a definition of SEL and indeed what this area of learning should be called (Humphrey et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2017). SEL is often referred to synonymously as '21st century skills', 'soft skills', 'character education', or 'non-cognitive skills'. CASEL (2018a), an international leader in SEL, provides a broad working definition of SEL as 'the process through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes, and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, establish and maintain positive relationships, and make responsible decisions'. CASEL (2018b) further outlines five core competencies that can be taught in a variety of ways across a range of settings.

Table 1:
CASEL, 'Core SEL Competencies', https://casel.org/core-competencies/

Competency	Component
1. Self-awareness	Identifying emotions. Accurate self-perception. Recognizing strengths. Self-confidence. Self-efficacy.
2. Self-management	Impulse control. Stress management. Self-discipline. Self-motivation. Goal-setting. Organizational skills.
3. Social awareness	Perspective-taking. Empathy. Appreciating diversity. Respect for others.
4. Relationship skills	Communication. Social engagement. Relationship-building. Teamwork.
5. Responsible decision-making	Identifying problems. Analysing situations. Solving problems. Evaluating. Reflecting. Ethical responsibility.

SEL is thus defined broadly and encompasses a range of skills, attitudes and values, some of which are self-focused (e.g. self-confidence, emotional regulation, goal setting) and others which might be described as 'other-oriented' (e.g. relationship-building, teamwork, respect). Empathy has been included as a core other-oriented skill within existing frameworks for SEL (Jones & Bouffard, 2012; CASEL, 2018b) and as such Empathy Education, which focuses on the teaching and learning of empathy skills (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009), takes place within the context of SEL. Given the scope of existing definitions of SEL, it has been applied to address a variety of issues including bullying, mental health, substance abuse, sex and relationships education, and has been implemented in a range of contexts within school and community settings.

There is increasing recognition amongst research and policy bodies that teaching social and emotional skills is essential for children and young people to achieve positive life outcomes (National Research Council, 2012; OECD, 2015). A substantive body of evidence suggests that universal school-based and out-of-school SEL interventions deliver consistent positive effects across a range of outcomes including improved mental health and positive health behaviours, improved social function, and better academic performance (Payton et al., 2008; Durlak et al., 2011; Durlak et al., 2010; Sklad et al., 2012; Weare and Nind, 2011; Catalano et al., 2004; Barry et al., 2013; Zins et al., 2004). For example, a meta-analysis (Durlak et al., 2011) of 213 universal school-based SEL programmes from kindergarten to high school showed that compared to controls participants in SEL programmes showed significantly improved attitudes and behaviours (e.g. better classroom behaviour, deeper commitment to school, decreased aggression), reduced emotional distress (e.g. depression, anxiety and social withdrawal) and better academic performance. The economic benefits of SEL programmes to society have also been calculated in terms of outcomes such as decreases in crime and reduced spending on physical and mental health problems (Belfield et al., 2015; Knapp et al., 2011; McDaid and Park, 2011). Regarding empathy, specifically, there is evidence that SEL programmes are effective in increasing levels of empathy in children and young people (Feshbach & Feshbach, 2009, Weisz & Zaki, 2017). Overall, research suggests that the impact of enhancing social and emotional skills on improving social outcomes outweighs that of enhancing cognitive skills (OECD, 2015: 53). However, some researchers have sounded notes of caution with regard to SEL programmes, arguing that the evaluation of SEL programmes is not being undertaken systematically or widely and that there is a scarcity of empirically-supported SEL programmes for adolescents (Malti et al., 2016; Yeo & Graham, 2015). Notwithstanding these reservations, this growing body of research on SEL has significant implications for the promotion of other-oriented skills, attitudes and values like empathy, tolerance, respect, social responsibility and civic behaviour, building a strong case for their development in children and young people through formal, non-formal and informal education.[1]

It is widely accepted that SEL can, and indeed should, take place in a wide variety of learning environments including within home settings, schools and communities (OECD, 2015). It is possible to identify six distinct approaches to delivering SEL. The first four apply to formal educational settings, the fifth recognises the role of non-formal education in facilitating SEL, and the sixth acknowledges the role of informal learning.

[1] Formal education is defined as education that is 'institutionalised, intentional and planned through public organizations and recognized private bodies' (UNESCO, 2012) leading to recognized qualifications. Non-formal education is also institutionalised, intentional and planned by a provider. However, its defining characteristic is that it is 'an addition, alternative and/or complement to formal education' (UNESCO, 2012). Non-formal education may short in duration and low in intensity and may lead to qualifications that are not recognized d as formal or to no qualification. Informal education is 'incidental' education, that is, it is not planned.

Approach	Description	Examples used in an Irish context
1. Intervention Approach	SEL is delivered as a discrete lesson-based programme intervention in formal education settings	FRIENDS, Incredible Years, Roots of Empathy
2. Subject Approach	SEL is delivered through school subjects that are seen as having strong SEL components	Physical Education (PE), Civic Social and Political Education (CSPE) Religious Education (RE), Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE)
3. Whole School Approach	SEL is integrated across the core school curriculum and embedded into the whole school culture/climate	Cross-curricular teaching of Development Education, Restorative Practice in schools
4. Extracurricular or Co-curricular Approach	SEL is delivered via extracurricular and co-curricular activities organised by or through schools	Sports, Student councils, Musicals, Science competitions
5. Non-formal Approach	SEL is delivered through non-formal learning programmes	Youth work programmes
6. Informal Approach	SEL takes place unintentionally and in a non-systematic way	Parental role-modelling, Peer role-modelling, Youth cafés

1.2 Aims

The aim of this review is to explore whether and how policy, including the school curriculum, supports the development and promotion of empathy and social values in children and young people. The review addresses the following questions:

1. What policy frameworks and elements of the curriculum include SEL, with particular reference to empathy and other-oriented skills?
2. What strategies and approaches are advocated for promoting SEL, with particular reference to empathy and other-oriented skills?

1.3 Method

Both formal educational settings, non-formal and informal settings were included within the scope of the review and policy documents were analysed with all three settings in mind. Three broad policy areas were identified as being most relevant to SEL: education, health and children and youth affairs, including community youth work. Systematic searches of the publications lists provided on the websites of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DYCA), the Department of Health, the Department of Education and Skills (DES), and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment were conducted, to identify policy and curricular documents with a significant or relevant SEL component. Where the timeframe of a particular policy has explicitly lapsed, for example the *Intercultural Education Strategy, 2010-2015* (DES & Office of the Minister for Integration, 2010) these documents were excluded from the analysis. In other words, only policy and curriculum that was current or included no explicit timeframe was considered for review and analysis. Figure 1 lists the policies that met the criteria of (1) having a significant or relevant SEL component (2) being current. The analysis in this report is based on a full reading of 33 policy and curriculum documents which met the criteria, with the aim of assessing how SEL is discussed and presented in policy e.g. what kind of rationale, if any, is provided for the promotion of socio-emotional skills in children and young people; which settings are seen as relevant for the promotion of socio-emotional skills; what approaches and strategies are recommended for promoting socio-emotional skills. The review begins with an overview of the international policy context for SEL. It proceeds to an in-depth review and analysis of Irish policy and the national curriculum, before concluding with a discussion of the current opportunities and challenges related to the delivery of SEL and promotion of empathy and related values in an Irish context.

Figure 1:
Policy documents by sector

International Policy	• WHO, Life skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools (1994) • UN Sustainable Development Goal 4 (2015)
1. Children and Youth	• Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (2014) • National Youth Strategy (2015) • National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making (2015) • High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families (2015)
2. Health	• Healthy Ireland (2013) • Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion (2013; 2015) • Schools for Health in Ireland Framework (2013; n.d.)

Figure 1 (cont.):
Policy documents by sector

3. Education: Policy	• Action Plan for Education (2016) • National Skills Strategy (2016) • National Strategy on Education For Sustainable Development (2014) • Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018) • Action Plan on Bullying (2013) • Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools (2013)
4. Education: Curriculum	• Síolta (2006) and Aistear (2009) • Primary school curriculum Introduction (1999) • SPHE Curriculum (Primary) (1999) • Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland (2015) • Learn Together (2004) • Framework for Junior Cycle (2015) • Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (2017) • Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines (n.d.) • CSPE: Specification for Junior Cycle (2016) • SPHE: Specification for Junior Cycle (2016) • Religious Education Syllabus. Junior Cycle (2000) • Ethical Education Curriculum Framework (n.d.) • Transition Year Programmes - Guidelines for Schools (c. 1993) • Senior Cycle Key Skills Framework (2009) • SPHE: Curriculum Framework. Senior Cycle (2011) • Religious Education Syllabus. Senior Cycle (2003) • Politics and Society: Curriculum Specification (Leaving Certificate) (2016)

1.4 The International Context for SEL

The development of SEL policy at national level has been influenced by a number of supranational programmatic efforts (Torrente et al., 2015) including the life skills framework developed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) and the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs). The WHO's *Life Skills Education for Children and Adolescents in Schools* (1994) defines life skills as abilities that enable individuals to effectively deal with everyday demands (WHO, 1994: 1). Skills are grouped under five areas: (1) decision making and problem solving (2) creative and critical thinking (3) effective communication and interpersonal relationship skills (4) self-awareness and empathy (5) coping with emotions and stress (WHO, 1994: 3). The WHO's framework is in wide use internationally, though the aim, focus and content of life skills programmes varies from region to region (Torrente et al., 2015).

The UNSDGs, in particular Goal 4 on education[2], has had a significant influence on the development of SEL in education systems by highlighting the necessity for fostering non-academic skills to prepare the rising generation for the specific challenges of the 21st century by ensuring that 'all learners acquire the knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development, including, among others, through education for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles, human rights, gender equality, promotion of a culture of peace and non-violence, global citizenship and appreciation of cultural diversity and of culture's contribution to sustainable development' (UN, 2015: 17). One obvious example of this influence is in the development of Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) which is embedded in Goal 4 as a component of the UN's response to the potentially catastrophic impacts of global climate change. ESD includes the development of social and emotional skills such as communication and respecting diversity. As part of the UN's Decade of Education for Sustainable Development (2005-2014) UN member states were required to develop national ESD strategies. The follow-up programme, the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development, is being coordinated by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which provides a range of resources for educators and policy makers (UNESCO, 2010). The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) also adopted a ten-year Strategy for ESD in 2005 (UNECE, 2005). A review published in 2016 found that 84 per cent of reporting member states consider that ESD has been included in national curriculum frameworks (UNECE, 2016, p. ix), reflecting the influence of such supranational efforts on the development of SEL policy at national level.

1.5 Irish Policy

1.5.1 Children and Young People

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (DCYA, 2014) is an overarching national policy framework for children and young people aged 0 to 24 years.[3] It establishes a set of six goals and five national outcomes which aim for children and young to (1) be active and healthy, (2) be achieving in all areas of learning and development, (3) be safe and protected from harm, (4) have economic security and opportunity, and (5) be connected, respected and contributing to their world (DCYA, 2014: 4). The policy expressly recognises the societal importance of raising physically and emotionally healthy young people and the development of social and emotional skills in children and young people underpins the policy outcomes in a number of ways. For example, under Outcome 1 the need for children to develop protective factors such as resilience, self-esteem, good social networks and to engage in community participation is noted, while under Outcome 2 the second stated aim is that children will have social and emotional wellbeing, which includes the capacity to self-regulate, to have empathy and to be emotionally resilient. The policy therefore focuses on both 'self-oriented' skills (resilience, self-esteem) and 'other-oriented' skills and values (empathy, community participation).

[2] Goal 4: 'Ensure inclusive and quality education for all and promote lifelong learning'.

[3] It superseded the *National Children's Strategy,* which focused on a younger age cohort and expired in 2010 (Government of Ireland, 2000).

The range of contexts in which learning, including social and emotional learning, takes place are noted in the policy and includes families, early years settings, schools and sports and youth organisations. Thus, formal, non-formal and informal learning are acknowledged as being important facets of children and young people's personal development. For example, the policy places an emphasis on supporting parents, which is listed as one of the six 'transformational goals', and it is noted that effective parenting can 'encourage learning and healthy living; promote the child's development of social networks; and support young people in taking steps towards greater independence and engagement in the world around them' (DCYA, 2014: 26), The policy also notes the benefits of 'authoritative' styles of parenting and refers to the 'benefits of 'positive parenting' in building a child's social and emotional capacities' (DCYA, 2014: 66). However, the specific commitments listed in the policy do make any reference to supporting parents to enhance their children's social and emotional development, focusing instead on issues such as financial supports for parents, encouraging parental involvement in their child's formal academic education and developing parenting supports for 'at risk' cohorts.

In terms of specific strategies and methods to enhance SEL, under Outcome 2, which deals directly with learning, the framework notes the importance of **student participation** in learning which is seen to foster emotional intelligence, social responsibility and intercultural sensitivity. It is further noted that the **learner-directed approach** is associated with the development of emotional regulation (DCYA, 2014, p. 67). **Project-based** work is also cited as enhancing independent thinking skills and effective communication. Notably, the framework acknowledges the importance of a **whole school approach** to tackling mental health and wellbeing (DCYA, 2014: 69). The importance of providing children and young people with a voice and opportunities for **participation** in decision-making is repeatedly highlighted as being central to their personal development and to their development as citizens in a democratic state. Listening to and involving children in decision-making constitutes one of the six 'transformational goals' listed in the policy. There is a clear recognition under Outcome 5 of young people's desire to contribute to society and that in order to foster this, young people must be exposed to **models** of caring behaviour, **made aware** of the needs of others, and **given a sense of personal responsibility** to contribute to society (DCYA, 2014: 102). The role of **curricular teaching** in schools, in particular the development of ESD and the teaching of civics and human rights, is noted. **Sport** and **play** are also highlighted as strategies for developing character and emotional health, whether in schools or community settings.

The National Youth Strategy (DCYA, 2015a) was derived from *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and sets out a number of objectives and actions under each of the five national outcome areas. Parents, the arts, culture, youth and sports organisations are all recognised as having a role to play in the physical, mental and emotional health of children and young people. Despite the significant emphasis on SEL in Outcome 2 of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the *National Youth Strategy* offers no SEL-related priority action under this heading. Instead, it is under Outcome 5 that most of the SEL-related actions are listed. These include the cultivation of a positive **whole school environment** for all students; supporting **social entrepreneurship**; developing **ESD**; and enhancing **volunteering** opportunities (DCYA, 2015a: 33). *The National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making* (DYCA, 2015b) emerged from Outcome 5 of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. In a sense, **participation** itself is seen as a strategy for fostering social and emotional skills, with the *Strategy* stating that 'Inclusion of children and young people in decision-making can … improve [children's] confidence, communication skills and ability to negotiate, network and make judgements' (DYCA, 2015b: 7).

The High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families (DCYA, 2015c) highlights the crucial influence of parents on a child's social and emotional development, their behaviour and physical health. It presents evidence on the role of safe, secure and supportive family environments, warm parent-child relationships and positive parenting in ensuring a child's socio-emotional development. It is significant that the Statement describes parents and primary caregivers as the most important actors in promoting positive social and emotional development in children and young people, and as such acknowledges the importance of informal learning within the home environment. Though the role of the *High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families* is not to outline actions or commitments, it refers to the need for both universal

preventative approaches such as parent-toddler groups, public health nursing, early years services, education and youth development, as well as targeted supports and services for vulnerable children and families or those in need.

1.5.2 Health

The *Healthy Ireland* (Department of Health, 2013) framework includes wellbeing within its broad and holistic definition of health (Department of Health, 2013). A series of actions to promote health under six thematic headings are outlined. Specific actions relating to the education sector are limited, relating to the implementation of **SPHE, PE** and the **Active Schools Flag** initiative in schools, while the role of youth work and parents is not emphasised in any significant way. The *Schools for Health in Ireland* (HSE, 2013; HSE n.d.) frameworks evolved independently of *Healthy Ireland*, emerging from Ireland's participation in the European Network of Health Promoting Schools (now the Schools for Health in Europe Network), established in 1992 as a joint initiative of the Council of Europe and European Commission. According to the frameworks, a 'Health Promoting School' is one in which 'Social, moral and civic values are promoted' and 'Students' emotional, psychological and physical well-being is promoted' (HSE, n.d.b: 7). They advocate for a **whole school approach** to health promotion, which focuses on four areas: the school environment; the curriculum and learning; school policies and planning; and partnerships with outside agencies.

Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion were developed for both primary and post-primary schools (DES, HSE & Department of Health, 2013; DES, HSE & Department of Health, 2015). They were developed by the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) and while the post-primary guidelines were developed in response to *Reach Out: National Strategy for Action on Suicide Prevention 2005-2014* (HSE, National Suicide Review Group & Department of Health and Children, 2005), the primary school guidelines are framed within the context of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* as well as educational legislation (DES, HSE & Department of Health 2015: 8). The *Guidelines* place the most significant emphasis on **whole school approaches** to the promotion of positive mental health through **school supports, planning** and **policies**. Where **curricular learning** is noted, the guidelines for primary schools point to *Aistear*, the framework in Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings, and subjects such as SPHE, RE and PE at primary level. In the guidelines for secondary schools, SPHE, RE, PE, Science and Home Economics are cited as the relevant curricular components for building positive mental health at secondary level. Notably, the role of **interventions** is also noted. The specific form these might take is not delineated but it is stated that the most effective mental health interventions involve one or more of the following: the learning of social and emotional skills (e.g. emotional regulation and resilience); a whole-school approach; continuous implementation (as opposed to a once-off intervention); the promotion of positive mental health; and the provision of social supports (DES, HSE & Department of Health, 2013: 8).

1.5.3 Education Policy

The main legislation governing universal formal education, the **Education Act, 1998**, defines the functions of a school which includes promoting 'the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students' (Government of Ireland, 1998). The *Action Plan for Education, 2016-2019* (DES, 2016a) outlines the state's high level aims across the education sector from early years to third level. To a very significant extent, the plan is framed within the context of economic development and the role of the education system in meeting future skills needs. In this respect it is closely related to the *National Skills Strategy* (DES, 2016b) which highlights the economic necessity of meeting the skills requirements of enterprise and employers, and the inevitably central role education and training will play in this process. Both the *Action Plan* and *Skills Strategy* take a broad view of the skills that should be acquired by pupils, placing an emphasis on 'transversal skills' (i.e. soft skills or transferable skills) such as communication, resilience, creativity and problem-solving (DES, 2016b: 68). However, the emphasis in the *National Skills Strategy* is fundamentally focused on meeting future economic

needs and creating a workforce 'armed with relevant knowledge, entrepreneurial agility and analytical skills' (DES, 2016b: 68). The Strategy provides a list of skills to be cultivated at each stage of the education system, and there an increasing emphasis on analytical skills from secondary school onwards (DES, 2016b: 54).

A similar emphasis on meeting the skills of the market is evident in the *Action Plan for Education*. However, the *Action Plan* explicitly acknowledges the importance of SEL, particularly in the first of its five high level goals, 'Improve the learning experience and success of learners', where it is noted that 'Fostering the personal development, health and wellbeing of learners and the wider school community helps to ensure that our children and young people develop resilience, have respect for diversity, learn to create and maintain supportive relationships and become active and responsible citizens in society' (DES, 2016a, p. 15). The *Action Plan* outlines detailed measures and targets for achieving each of its goals and objectives. The most relevant is Goal 1, Objective 1 'Enhance wellbeing in our school communities'. Specific strategies cited include the implementing the **Wellbeing area of learning** at Junior Cycle level, support for the on-going roll-out of a**nti-bullying training materials** for parents, teachers and boards of management, the expansion of **NEPS**, and the extension the ***FRIENDS*** resilience and anti-anxiety programme.

The *Action Plan on Bullying* (Anti-bullying Working Group, 2013) targets one specific aspect of student wellbeing: bullying. The plan outlines the nine core elements of a school-based approach to tackling bullying, which includes two elements relating to SEL: building a **positive school culture** and implementing prevention strategies such as **awareness-raising** and **evidence-based interventions**. The need to build empathy is noted briefly as a potential preventative measure, however, interestingly, it is parents' roles in building empathy that is emphasised rather than schools' (Anti-bullying Working Group, 2013: 84, 95, 97). As this suggests, the *Action Plan* refers to the role of informal and non-formal learning in tackling bullying. It is noted that activities such as **sports, youth clubs** and **the arts** can play a role in developing life skills such as self-confidence and resilience and **parents** are urged to model assertiveness, build empathy, teach conflict resolution skills, and foster resilience.

As a result of the *Action Plan on Bullying* a revised set of *Anti-bullying Procedures for Primary and Post-primary Schools* (DES, 2013) was published which advises schools on the importance of building a respectful, inclusive **whole school culture** through **curricular learning, programmes, extracurricular learning, and initiatives**. Specific **curricular subjects** and **programmes** at primary and post-primary levels are highlighted including SPHE, the Stay Safe programme in primary schools and Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in post-primary schools. The *Procedures* also suggest the **cross-curricular integration** of bullying into existing subjects like English, Art, Drama, PE, History and Geography where opportunities might arise to address values like diversity, prejudice and the misuse of power.

The *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development* (DES, 2014) is a broad educational strategy covering formal and non-formal educational settings. With regard to non-formal education, the *Strategy* refers to the role of youth work programmes in contribution to ESD by enhancing social and emotional skills such as self-esteem and decision-making; developing young people's social awareness and social solidarity; and enhancing their role as active citizens. Within formal education, the *Strategy* supports the **cross-curricular integration** of ESD themes across relevant subjects and the provision of ESD **programmes** (DES, 2014: 12). The *Strategy* notes that there are opportunities for teaching ESD in pre-school, where the two guiding frameworks *Síolta* and *Aistear* both reflect issues relevant to ESD, while at primary level elements of ESD are reflected in specific **curricular subjects** such as such as CSPE, SPHE, History, Geography and Science (DES, 2014: 13). **Initiatives** such as the Blue Star programme which applies to primary and secondary schools are also noted. The greater challenges of integrating ESD into the curriculum at secondary level is admitted, due the 'silo-isation' of subject areas and the exam focus (DES, 2014: 13). However, it points to the opportunities presented by the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2015), Transition Year units (short learning programmes on a variety of themes), and Politics and Society which was introduced as a subject at Senior Cycle level in 2016.

In 2018 the Department of Education published a *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* (DES, 2018), an overarching policy which outlines the place of wellbeing in schools and education centres (i.e. formal education) from early years to the end of second level education. It is aimed at a range of stakeholders with an interest in promoting wellbeing in education including parents/carers, schools, children and young people, and NGOs. The policy draws on existing guidelines and frameworks that address elements of wellbeing at particular educational stages (e.g. *Aistear, Wellbeing in Primary Schools: Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion, Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines*).

The *Statement* uses the broad definition of Wellbeing provided by the WHO: 'Wellbeing is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community' (DES, 2018: 10). Drawing on an ecological model of human development, the policy views wellbeing as relational and embedded within relationships. Notably, the *Statement* outlines the close link between the development of cognitive skills and socio-emotional skills, highlighting the 'mutually supportive relationships between wellbeing and the accomplishments of children and young people' (DES, 2018: 12). According to the *Statement*, emotional wellbeing should be considered as an educational end.

The policy advocates a 'multi-component, preventative, whole school approach' (DES, 2018: 13) to promoting wellbeing, with interventions aimed at both universal and targeted levels i.e. aimed at the entire student population and those with particular identified needs. Specifically, the policy highlights the importance of a number of factors including:

- school environment and connectedness (i.e. **school climate**/culture)

- the daily experience of **teaching and learning that is democratic, inclusive and engaged**

- the deliberate promotion of social and emotional competencies, including **programmes delivered through SPHE**

- coherent **planning and policies**, effective **school leadership** and **collaborative cultures** that incorporate reflective practice

- the role of the teacher, including **positive teacher-student relationships** and **staff wellbeing**

In line with the approach noted above to health promotion in schools, four components of a whole school approach are outlined: (1) culture and environment (2) curriculum (teaching and learning) (3) policy and planning (4) relationships and partnerships. The *Statement* outlines indicators of success and statements of practice in the *Framework for Practice* section. The statements of practice cover an array of approaches to promoting Wellbeing from **subject teaching** to **evidence-based programmes, positive approaches to discipline, child/youth participation** in the school community, school **policies and plans** embedding wellbeing at their core, and **relationships** between teachers, students and parents/carers characterised by respect, openness and listening. The policy requires that by 2023 all schools and centres of education will use the School Self-Evaluation process to initiate a wellbeing promotion review and development plan.

1.6 National Curriculum

1.6.1 Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC)

Síolta (Centre for Early Childhood Development Education, 2006), the framework which assesses and supports the improvement of quality across Early Childhood Education and Care (ECEC) settings, takes a broad view of the development of the child and emphasises the importance of practitioners attending to the social and emotional development of children, for example, by promoting positive self and group identity and enhancing children's ability to identify and understand emotions. *Aistear* (NCCA, 2009) is the curriculum framework that guides the planning and provision of learning for children in ECEC settings from birth to six years, covering the child's first two years in primary school. *Aistear* is therefore aimed at all of those who care for children in their early years, including parents caring for children in the home, child-minders, and practitioners and teachers in day care, pre-school and school settings. The *Aistear* framework takes a 'whole child perspective' and places a notable focus on SEL, with children's personal, psychological and social development, including their physical health, creativity and wellbeing, receiving a similar amount of attention to cognitive skills. In place of subject areas or developmental stages, *Aistear* guides practice under four overarching, interconnecting themes: Wellbeing, Identity and Belonging, Communicating, and Exploring and Thinking. A number of these target the development of characteristics related to empathy, such as establishing a firm self-other distinction and showing respect for others and their differences. Under 'Identity and Belonging', learning goals include other-oriented skills such as working co-operatively, helping others, and respecting the needs and feelings of others.

1.6.2 Primary Level

One of the three high level aims of the revised Primary School Curriculum (DES, 1999a) is 'to enable the child to develop as a social being through living and co-operating with others and so contribute to the good of society' (DES, 1999a: 34). The curriculum is divided into seven areas - Arts education, Language, Mathematics, Social Environmental and Scientific Education, Physical Education, Environmental Education, and Social Personal and Health Education - some of which are further sub-divided into specific subjects. SEL is recognised across a number of these areas and **curricular subjects**. Within the Arts Education area, for example, Drama is said to involve 'every aspect of the child's personality: spiritual, moral, emotional, intellectual, imaginative, and physical.' (DES, 1999a: 54) and the potentialities of perspective-taking as a learning experience are noted. The particular contribution that PE makes to a child's social and personal development is noted (DES, 1999a: 55), while the aim of Geography is to foster a sense of local and global belonging in children, a respect for different cultures and a sense of social responsibility for our shared environment (DES, 1999a: 50).

Affective education is addressed most directly and obviously by SPHE. To a significant extent SPHE focuses on fostering the personal development, health and wellbeing of the individual child. However, there is an emphasis on other-oriented themes such as interpersonal relationships, respect for others, social responsibility and active citizenship in the stated aims and objectives. There are three strands in the curriculum: 'Myself', 'Myself and Others' and 'Myself and the Wider World'. Through the 'Myself and Others' strand students 'are given opportunities to learn and practise a wide range of communication skills, including the ability to resolve conflicts, to empathise, to be assertive, to co-operate and to work collaboratively with others' (DES, 1999b: 5). 'Myself and the Wider World' aims to develop a sense of social responsibility, belonging, care for the natural world, and a recognition of the interdependent nature of the social world.

The development and implementation of the curriculum for Religion Education (RE) in primary and secondary schools in Ireland is the responsibility of the relevant patron bodies governing schools. The *Catholic Preschool and Primary Religious Education Curriculum for Ireland* (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015) is used widely in schools under the patronage of the Catholic Church. Though essentially focused on faith-formation,

the curriculum includes SEL aims in line with the Primary School Curriculum. For example, it is noted that Catholic education promotes children's 'emotional and physical development, health and well-being' and 'develops interpersonal and intrapersonal skills, engendering a positive awareness of self, a sensitivity to others, self-discipline and responsible attitudes to self, others and the environment' (Irish Episcopal Conference, 2015: 17). The curriculum is divided into four interrelated strands - Christian Faith, Word of God, Liturgy and Prayer, and Christian Morality – which are carried through each of the stages from preschool to the end of primary school. The strand on Christian Morality, though firmly and explicitly grounded in Christian teaching, focuses most obviously on the development of other-oriented skills and values. For example, the aims of the Christian Morality Strand at Stage Four includes 'develop an awareness of social justice, ecological justice, universal solidarity and responsibility'. The main non-denominational patron body, Educate Together, have devised an Ethical Education curriculum *Learn Together* (Educate Together, 2004). The curriculum contains four strands: Moral and Spiritual, Equality and Justice, Belief Systems, and Ethics and the Environment. The aims of the curriculum focus on developing intercultural understanding and related values such as respect for diversity. It further focuses on developing children's moral capacity; raising awareness of justice, equality and human rights; developing a sense of care for the environment; and providing children with the skills and dispositions to become 'informed, socially responsible and fair-minded citizens' (Educate Together, 2004: 10).

1.6.3 Second Level: Junior Cycle

The *Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2015) reflects a significant change in thinking on educational approaches during the first three years of secondary school, extending something of the holistic child-centred ethos of ECEC settings and primary education to second level education. The *Framework for Junior Cycle* is the endpoint of a process of reform that aims to change the assessment process from a pressurised final examination to forms of assessment that allow for more active learning, increased student engagement and greater flexibility in delivering the curriculum dictated by local needs (NCCA, 2011a). Under the *Framework* learning across the curriculum will be directed towards the cultivation of a broad set of skills and values, while the *Framework* also places an increased emphasis on student and teacher wellbeing. The Junior Cycle is informed by eight principles, twenty-four statements of learning and eight key skills, a number of which have SEL at their core. For instance, the principles including 'Wellbeing' and 'Engagement and Participation'; the eight skills include 'managing myself' and 'working with others'; the twenty four statements of learning include that the student 'values what it means to be an active citizen, with rights and responsibilities in local and wider contexts' and 'takes action to safeguard and promote her/his wellbeing and that of others' (DES, 2015: 12).

The Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement (JCPA) is another relevant development with regard to student assessment at Junior Cycle; it replaces the Junior Certificate from 2017. The JCPA captures student achievements across a variety of assessment elements from more traditional forms of academic assessment such as state examinations and classroom-based assessments to student achievement, participation or progress in 'other areas of learning' that cover personal and social development and learning dispositions. The JCPA will therefore include, as part of Junior Cycle assessment, student participation in social, cultural, scientific or entrepreneurial activities that support the Junior Cycle statements of learning and key skills, such as for example, participation in a school musical, membership of the student council, membership of a school sports team, and taking part in debating competitions or a science fair (DES, 2017: 5, 11).

The SEL component of the *Framework* is addressed most obviously by a new area of learning called Wellbeing, introduced for students beginning second level in the academic year 2017/2018. Wellbeing will eventually be delivered over 400 timetabled hours spread across the three years of the Junior Cycle (by comparison the compulsory subjects English, Irish and Maths are covered over 240 hours). Schools have autonomy in designing their Wellbeing programme, however, the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* (NCCA, n.d.) places a strong emphasis on the role of the curricular **subjects** CSPE, SPHE and PE, which will be delivered as Short Courses of 100 hours[4] and **guidance counselling**. Other options for making up a Wellbeing programme

include elements of **existing areas of learning** e.g. art, music, home economics; **events** such as school retreats; **school-developed courses/units** that address an aspect of Wellbeing that is important for students; and relevant **courses and units developed by outside agencies** and organisations. It is noted that a **whole school approach** is fundamental to the implementation of Wellbeing, including the cultivation of a school culture that enhances wellbeing.

To a significant extent Wellbeing is self-focused, relating to the development of an individual's physical and mental health. However, it is also other-oriented in seeking to develop a sense of students' connectedness to the school and wider community and highlighting the role that young people play in their family, community and society (DES, 2015: 22). The *Wellbeing Guidelines* argue that wellbeing should be seen as relational rather than individual, noting, in particular, that CSPE

can help students develop a more holistic and ecological understanding of wellbeing as they become aware of the relationship between individual wellness, wellness in relation to others and the wellbeing of the environment. Without CSPE, there is the risk that discussion of wellbeing can feed into individualism and miss the opportunity to make links between individual wellbeing and collective wellbeing, between the personal and the political, and ultimately between our wellbeing and that of the planet (NCCA, n.d: 46).

The short course specifications for CSPE make explicit reference to the development of empathic thinking using **perspective-taking** and in each strand of the course students are expected to carry out an **action**, designed to promote the wellbeing of others, locally or globally (NCCA, 2016a: 6).

SPHE is more focused on the individual. The aim of SPHE is to develop students' positive self-perceptions and promote their physical, social, emotional and spiritual health and wellbeing. However, SPHE also includes an other-oriented focus on themes such as appreciating respectful and inclusive behaviours, understanding stereotypes, considering what creates a sense of belonging in a community and anti-bullying. The course specifications note specific methodologies such as **case studies** and **role play** that enable students to become more empathic and respect differences (NCCA, 2016b: 4, 6).

Religious Education at Junior Cycle is framed as an exploration of belief traditions which aims to 'foster an awareness that the human search for meaning is common to all peoples, of all ages and at all times' (DES, 2000: 5) as well as contributing to the spiritual and moral development of the student. The syllabus, which focuses on the Christian tradition, also alludes to fostering tolerance and respect for all beliefs. Most of the syllabus is focused on learning about different faiths, with the final section of the course focusing on morality and ethical decision-making. A broader Ethical Education curriculum has been devised for secondary schools under the patronage of Educate Together. The *Ethical Education Curriculum Framework* (Educate Together, n.d.) is a broad framework and separate Ethical Education curricula exist for Junior Cycle, Transition Year and Senior Cycle. The stated aim of the curriculum is 'to enable students to become informed and critically reflective young people who are committed to human rights, equality, active citizenship and the achievement of respectful, inclusive and sustainable local and global communities' (Educated Together, n.d.: 17). The curriculum is divided into five strands: Living Morally and Ethically; Belief Systems; Identity, Diversity and Intercultural Learning; Education for Sustainability; Ethical Citizenship. The framework suggests using a variety of **active learning methodologies** including whole class discussion, Drama in Education methods, visits, and practical projects. It also suggests the use of cross-curricular projects and advocates an integrated

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[4] From 2017 short courses in SPHE, CSPE and PE will be incorporated into the specification for Wellbeing (DES, 2015: 21).

cross-curricular approach to Ethics Education and a **whole school approach** to values education. For example, the *Framework* notes that the values of 'Respect, Equality, Democracy, Diversity and Community … are made explicit and are truly 'lived' in the school context' (Educate Together, n.d.: 15) and outlines how these values can be broadly embedded in school policy and ethos.

1.6.4 Second Level: Transition Year

Transition Year (TY) offers a space for maturation and for personal, social and vocational development between the exam-oriented junior and senior cycles (DES, [1993], p. [2]). Personal development, including social awareness and social competence, is highlighted as the first of the three aims of TY, ahead of the development of academic skills and work experience. The aims and objectives of TY therefore accord closely with the aims of SEL (although the *Guidelines* for TY do not appear to have been updated since 1993). Schools have autonomy in devising their own TY programme. In 2014/2015, 89% of schools offered TY with 65% of eligible students taking part (Clerkin, 2018).

The TY *Guidelines* outline that in TY, students undertake learning in traditional academic subjects, covering some elements of the relevant Leaving Certificate syllabus, and are exposed to a wide variety of subjects to support them in choosing their exam subjects for Leaving Certificate. TY students also undertake work experience as a core aspect of the programme and often engage in **volunteering activities** in the community. The *Guidelines* advocate 'interdisciplinary' study, that is a cross-curricular approach to learning on particular themes, while more active teaching methodologies are encouraged such as activity-based learning, team teaching, group work, work experience, community service and guest speakers. The *Guidelines* also provide a list of possible 'areas of experience', both traditional curricular subjects and other areas of learning, that foregrounds those focused on personal development e.g. Civic, Social and Political Education, Personal and Social Development, Philosophy, Health Education and Aesthetics Education (DES, 1993).

Though not referred to in the original *Guidelines*, particular learning **units** have been developed in conjunction with the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), some designed by outside agencies. The units cover topics such as poverty, the environment, creative writing, technology and human rights. An example is *Ireland – A Level Playing Field?* (Barrett & Richardson, 2007) developed by the Combat Poverty Agency which is designed to support students' community work by developing their understanding of poverty and social exclusion. The unit aims to foster social and emotional skills such as promoting respect and empathy for marginalised groups.

1.6.5 Second level: Senior Cycle

In line with the focus on skills development at Junior Cycle level, five key skills have been outlined in the *Senior Cycle Key Skills Framework* (NCCA, 2009): (1) Information Processing (2) Critical and Creative Thinking (3) Communicating (4) Working with Others and (5) Being Personally Effective. Working with Others focuses on the social skills necessary to work collaboratively. It is noted that students come to recognise that working collectively is important for social cohesion and engaging with diverse cultural, ethnic and religious groups (NCCA, 2009: 5). The learning goals under Working with Others include listening carefully to other points of view, developing empathy, respecting the views of others and expressing emotion in appropriate ways. Being Personally Effective concerns developing self-awareness, forming strategies for goal setting and taking action according to personal values. The learning goals under this heading include becoming more skilled at 'reading' social situations and responding appropriately. The learning goals under Communicating include developing empathy, responding perceptibly and recognising the emotional impact of an argument on others.

Despite the SEL components of the *Skills Framework*, opportunities for SEL narrow considerably at Senior Cycle level where the focus is primarily on academic learning and exams. **SPHE** is offered at Senior Cycle as an optional subject. The course focuses on five areas: mental health, gender studies, substance abuse,

relationships and sexuality education, and physical health and nutrition (NCCA, 2011b). The emphasis is on personal wellbeing, that is, on the emotional, social, spiritual, and physical wellbeing of the individual learner, though the strands do include learning objectives that are more broadly social. For example, one of the objectives under the mental health strand is to 'develop students' capacity to empathise with others through a greater understanding of different life experiences, motives and feelings of other individuals and groups' (NCCA, 2011b: 19). **Religious Education**, focused on the Christian tradition, is also offered as a subject, with a broader focus on ethics and values than the Junior Cycle syllabus (DES, 2003). For example, the strands include 'Moral decision-making' and 'Issues of Justice and Peace'. The recently-introduced subject **Politics and Society** contains elements of citizenship, ESD, intercultural education, peace education and human rights education. It aims to develop the learner's capacity for active citizenship through teaching on equality and the completion of a **citizenship project**. Developing empathy is noted as a learning outcome in the active citizenship strand (DES, 2016c: 29). The Politics and Society syllabus document includes a diagrammatic 'vision of the learner' at Senior Cycle (DES, 2016c: 6). The imagined learner is resourceful, confident, engaged, and an active learner. The social and personal development of students is to the fore in this vision of students who are self-aware, resilient, socially responsible, and who engage with ethics and values and show respect for others.

1.7 Discussion: Opportunities and Challenges

In common with many countries, SEL is clearly acknowledged in high-level policy in Ireland as being fundamental to 21st-century education. Likewise, the curricular frameworks that have been introduced at all educational levels from early years to second level acknowledge the importance of developing social and emotional skills. While the policy support for SEL presents opportunities for promoting SEL across settings, there are a number of identifiable challenges to enhancing children and young peoples' social and emotional skills given the existing policy context. These opportunities and challenges are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: SEL Promotion: Opportunities and Challenges

Competency	Component
SEL is embedded in policy at all levels from high level frameworks and actions plans to the school curriculum	An ideological conflict exists between the high level educational aims of educating for the workforce and educating for active citizenship
Opportunities for SEL exist at all formal educational levels from early years to second level	Teacher Education does not include mandatory SEL components
The relevance and capacity for SEL across settings (school, youth work, community groups, parenting) is acknowledged in policy	SEL tends to focus on self-oriented personal skills rather than other-oriented skills and values
	The policy emphasis is on formal education over non-formal and informal education

Opportunities

1. SEL is embedded in policy at all levels

SEL is firmly embedded as a component of educational discourse in Ireland with policy and curriculum documents regularly referencing the holistic development of children and young people, using a lexicon that reflects international discourse on SEL. There is a clear acknowledgement of the rationale for SEL and its necessity. In particular, high level policy such as *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* recognises the societal importance of attending to the emotional health of children and young people through formal, non-formal and informal learning. Social and emotional wellbeing, including the capacity to self-regulate, have empathy and be emotionally resilient, is seen as 'fundamental' to the ability of children and youth to function in society and meet the demands of everyday life. It is also noted that social and emotional wellbeing drives learning attainment (DYCA, 2014: 66). Such a rationale is echoed in the *Action Plan for Education* where it is stated that fostering health, wellbeing and personal development prepares learners for active and responsible citizenship and the world of work (DES, 2016a: 14). At a more practice-oriented policy level, the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* draw on research evidence to remind educators that SEL supports academic learning and achievement, and that 'wellbeing and learning are inextricably connected' (NCCA, n.d.: 10).

2. Opportunities for SEL exist at all formal educational levels, though these narrow as one progresses through the formal education system

The curriculum at all levels affords opportunities to embed SEL and teach social and emotional skills in formal education using a variety of approaches. The curricular framework in ECEC settings places a very notable emphasis on the holistic development of the child and resonates to a very considerable degree with the aims and objectives of SEL. At primary level SEL can be taught through SPHE, programme interventions, and cross-curricular integration of SEL across subject areas. This opportunity is particularly realisable in the primary school, where students are generally taught by one classroom teacher who organises and plans learning across subjects and where the practice of subject integration is a fundamental component of teaching and learning. At second level, while TY has long afforded opportunities for SEL, recent developments at Junior Cycle offer further opportunities for enhancing the teaching of social and emotional skills. Of particular note is the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and the newly-introduced Wellbeing area of learning, which require cross-curricular approaches to teaching and learning, and the Junior Cycle Profile of Achievement which expands notions of assessment to potentially incorporate personal development. At Senior Cycle, the new skills framework is the first step in a reform and review process that is underway, with one aim being to eliminate the academic 'points race' at Leaving Certificate (McGuire, 2018). However, at the moment the Senior Cycle remains an unfavourable context for teaching social and emotional skills. There is therefore a narrowing of opportunities for SEL as one progresses through the education system, with a continued preference for subject-based teaching evident at second level relative to the more integrated or holistic model of educating the child undertaken at ECEC and primary level.

Challenges

1. Conflict between high level educational aims

There is a detectable ideological conflict at the heart of Irish educational thinking revolving around the dual objective of creating a future workforce equipped to meet the skills needs of the marketplace and the objective of creating well-rounded, connected, socially active citizens with high levels of personal wellbeing. Educational policy therefore reflects two distinct and arguably contradictory characteristics. The first characteristic is a commitment to meeting the skills needs of an open, globalised economy in a rapidly changing world. The needs of employers and enterprise for a workforce that possesses a range of skills, capabilities, attitudes and values are foregrounded in high-level policy relating to education. The second feature is a broad and holistic

view of human flourishing that encompasses the physical, social, cultural and spiritual needs of individuals and whole societies. The question of whether it is possible to create a cohesive policy framework that integrates these two objectives lies outside the scope of this review. At present, however, the primary thrust of high level educational policy is with the skills need of the labour market. SEL is more fully represented at a lower policy level, in the school curriculum. However, it is debatable whether the curriculum, which more directly influences practice, can succeed in achieving its SEL-related aims if the thrust of high level policy remains embedded within an essentially economic narrative.

2. Teacher training does not support SEL

The concerns noted above about the translation of SEL policy into practice are compounded by the absence of compulsory training in SEL within teacher education. The Teaching Council's *Initial Teacher Education: Criteria and Guidelines for Programme Providers* (Teaching Council, 2017) outlines the mandatory elements of all programmes of Initial Teacher Education (ITE) at primary and post-primary levels in Ireland. The list of sixteen mandatory elements does not include SEL or any discrete area commensurate with SEL. Only 10-20% of allocated time in ITE programmes is designated as 'discretionary', in which programme providers might offer non-mandatory courses and which therefore might include SEL training. This is despite the fact that the extensive list of learning outcomes for graduates of ITE programmes includes a number of outcomes that clearly relate to student SEL, teachers' social and emotional competencies and positive school culture (Teaching Council, 2017: 25-29). For example, it is noted that the graduate will be able to 'apply his/her knowledge of pupils' holistic development to his/her teaching and promote social responsibility' (Teaching Council, 2017: 27). It is difficult to see how such outcomes can be realised without a mandatory SEL component in ITE.

3. SEL tends to focus on self-oriented personal skills rather than other-oriented skills and values

The recent emphasis on promoting wellbeing in society is clearly exerting an impact on how SEL is being addressed in Irish schools and indeed SEL is increasingly framed through a wellbeing lens. The new Junior Cycle Wellbeing area of learning, in particular, is seen as a key vehicle for SEL in schools. The way in which SEL through Wellbeing is delivered will depend on the approach taken by individual schools. Schools have been given the freedom to design and develop their own Wellbeing programmes and the Wellbeing Guidelines suggest ways for schools to timetable their programmes. From this, it appears likely that Wellbeing in most schools will largely be comprised of pre-existing curricular areas, with SPHE, CSPE, PE and guidance forming the bulk of schools' committed hours. There is a danger, therefore, that instead of creating the potential for expanding SEL through a range of approaches and methods, schools will simply cluster existing learning under the heading of Wellbeing.

A separate issue related to the new emphasis on wellbeing is that the development of wellbeing is most often considered as a self-oriented process, in which an individual cultivates skills such as resilience and emotional regulation, along with various health-promoting behaviours. There is, therefore, a concern that if wellbeing becomes the dominant holding framework within which SEL is delivered, the greater emphasis will be on self-oriented skills over other-oriented skills such as empathy, social responsibility, connectedness and civic engagement. However, as the Junior Cycle curricular documents note, an individual's wellbeing should be addressed within a relational and ecological framework.

This issue of how SEL is conceptualised has particular relevance for empathy education. Policy and the school curriculum refer in a number of instances to resilience and emotional regulation, self-oriented skills which are fundamental to an individual's capacity to thrive. Empathy, as a fundamentally other-oriented skill, appears less often than these terms. Empathy's relative status, therefore, as a skill, capacity or value-orientation remains in question. For example, in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, terms related to empathy (empathy, empathic,

empathetic) appear once, while terms related to resilience appear nineteen times. Empathy or empathy-derived terms are not referred to in the *Junior Cycle Wellbeing Guidelines* which frame this new area of learning at Junior Cycle. Being resilient, however, is listed as one of the indicators of wellbeing and both it and related terms appear throughout. Empathy is also absent in the *Framework for Junior Cycle* and from the two high level policies guiding the education sector - the *Action Plan for Education* and the *National Skills Strategy* - unlike concepts like resilience, emotional wellbeing, emotional competence and creativity for instance. Further analysis would be needed to determine which social and emotional skills are most valued in policy and the curriculum.

4. Policy emphasis is on formal education

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, recognises the range of contexts in which SEL can take place including home settings, early years settings, schools and sports and youth organisations. Other policies similarly acknowledge the role of non-formal education and informal education, for example the *High-Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families*, which highlights the importance of the home environment for the development of socio-emotional skills and values; the *Action Plan on Bullying*, which emphasises the role of informal SEL in the home; and the *National Strategy on Education for Sustainable Development* which highlights the role of youth work programmes in enhancing SEL. However, the formal school environment is emphasised most often in policy as the setting in which empathy and related social values might be promoted. The potential for SEL in non-formal and informal settings is therefore acknowledged, but is arguably not fully harnessed in policy terms. Thus, while the *Action Plan on Bullying* recommends increased connections between formal education and the youth services in the community to prevent and tackle bullying, forging connections between schools, community groups and parents to promote children and young people's social and emotional development is not emphasised in policy more generally.

1.8 Conclusion

This review aimed to outline which policy frameworks and elements of the curriculum include SEL and what strategies and approaches are advocated for promoting SEL, particularly as they relate to empathy and related other-oriented skills and values. It has been found that SEL is acknowledged as important and relevant in Irish policy and that the school curriculum in particular includes a number of opportunities to teach SEL. The various challenges facing policy-makers and practitioners interested in promoting empathy and related values were also outlined. The Key Informant Study presented below follows from the Policy and Curriculum Review in exploring how empathy and prosocial values are promoted in applied settings, an enterprise bounded and informed by the policy context outlined in this Review.

02

Key Informant Study:
Promoting Empathy and Social Values in Irish Youth:
A Key Informant Perspective

2.1 Introduction

The Policy and Curriculum Review presented above examined the extent to which policy and the school curriculum supports the promotion of empathy and prosocial values across a range of settings and age cohorts. In order to develop a deeper understanding of how empathy and prosocial values are promoted 'on the ground'; that is, to develop an in-depth understanding of how policy is put into practice, a Key Informant Study was undertaken to gather the expert opinions of a range of professionals with experience of how empathy and related social values are promoted across settings. This present study presents the views of teachers, programme directors, programme facilitators, educational psychologists, youth workers and others on the applied practice of promoting socio-emotional skills and values in young people in Ireland.

As with the Policy Review, values promotion is situated within the broad domain of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), a contextual framework within which researchers and practitioners are engaging with the development and promotion of a diverse range of skills and values such as empathy, social responsibility, conflict resolution, decision-making, resilience, emotional regulation and civic engagement.[5] Although SEL programme interventions in school and out-of-school contexts have been well-researched, existing studies are mostly quantitative evaluations of programmes that employ experimental or quasi-experimental research designs to measure the impact of programme interventions across a range of measures (Durlak et al., 2010; Durlak et al., 2011). Qualitative approaches that explore the in-depth views of those involved in education, youth work, policy implementation and educational research are limited (Yeo & Graham, 2015). Gathering such views is arguably much needed, particularly given the volume of SEL programmes that are being developed and offered to practitioners such as teachers and youth workers. Moreover, research on the promotion of prosocial skills and values in Ireland is limited. A study that focuses on the Irish context is a necessary component of building a knowledge base on values promotion amongst Irish children and adolescents. This current research study proposes to address these limitations by undertaking a qualitative exploration of the views of a range of key informants on the promotion of empathy and related social values in children and adolescents in an Irish context.

2.2 Aims

The aim of this research is to explore participants' views on the promotion of empathy and related 'other-oriented' social values including care, social responsibility, tolerance and respect in children and adolescents. More specifically, the aim is to explore approaches to promoting and fostering empathy and social values in school and out-of-school settings with a view to informing policy and practice in the area of values promotion.

> The current study sets out to address the following research questions:
>
> 1. What approaches are used for promoting empathy and social values in young people?
>
> 2. How effective are the approaches used for promoting empathy and social values in young people?
>
> 3. What challenges or obstacles currently exist to the promotion of empathy and social values?

2.3 Method

This study sought to gather the perspectives of those working with children and young people in the area of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) and the development and promotion of values. The data in this study is based on qualitative semi-structured interviews with individuals who have experience of promoting empathy

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[5] For a full description of SEL see the Policy and Curriculum Review in this Report, pp. 11-13.

and related social values and who therefore have the knowledge and expertise to consider approaches to promoting positive social values in an Irish context and the challenges facing policy-makers and practitioners in this endeavour.

2.3.1 Data collection

The data collected in this study is based on eleven semi-structured interviews with key informants to explore their opinions about how to promote empathy and related social values in school and out-of-school settings. Participants were selected to capture a cross-section of professionals with experience of promoting values in young people and include teachers, youth workers, programme directors and facilitators, educational psychologists and academic researchers (see Table 2 below). All but one participant – an academic researcher – works with children and young people in an applied setting in the area of values promotion. Given the focus of the overall research project on empathy, care and civic behaviour in youth, participants working with an adolescent age cohort were sought for the study and all but one respondent worked with second-level students and adolescents.

Prospective participants were contacted via email by a member of the research team and invited to take part in face-to-face or telephone interviews at a time and place convenient to them. Participants were provided with an Information Sheet on the aims of the study. Researchers audio-recorded the interviews, with participants' consent, which lasted between 25 and 50 minutes.

Table 2: Research participants

Interview	Name	Occupation / Organisation	Sector	Setting
1	Respondent 1	Teacher	Education	Second level schools
2	Respondent 2	Teacher	Education	Second level schools
3	Respondent 3	Teacher	Education	Second level schools
4	Respondent 4	Vice-Principal & Teacher CPD Leader	Education	Second level schools
5	Respondent 5	Educational Psychologist	Education	Primary and Second level schools
6	Respondent 6	School programme Director	Education	Second level schools
7	Respondent 7	Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission	Independent Public Body	Primary and Second level schools
8	Respondent 8	School programme facilitator	NGO	Primary schools
9	Respondent 9	Youth Work Organisation	Youth Work	Youth work
10	Respondent 10	Youth Worker	Youth Work	Youth work
11	Respondent 11	Academic Researcher	Research	University

2.3.2 Ethics

The research was guided by the key ethical requirements of doing no harm and gaining informed voluntary consent. Participants provided informed written consent to take part in this research. Anonymity was guaranteed for participants and therefore all names and identifying information have been changed in the Report. Ethics for this study was granted by the NUI Galway Research Ethics Committee.

2.3.3 Data Analysis

Given the range and variety of participants' backgrounds, differing views, opinions and experiences on the promotion of empathy and social values across settings were anticipated by researchers. Thematic analysis was therefore used to analyse the data because of the need for a flexible approach, not bounded by or wedded to any pre-existing theoretical framework. Thematic analysis has also been described as "useful for producing qualitative analysis suited to informing policy development" (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 37) which further aligned with the aim of the study. The six-stage guide outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) was used as a roadmap for analysis. All interview responses were coded into thematic areas aligned with the research questions. The findings are presented in the following section.

2.4 Findings

Four key themes emerged from the data, with several sub-themes further emerging within these overarching themes. The four key themes identified were:

1. Views of the settings within which empathy and social values are promoted.

2. Views on effective approaches to promoting empathy and related social values

3. The role of policy in supporting the promotion of empathy and related values.

4. Views on the challenges and obstacles to developing, promoting and teaching empathy and related social values.

Findings are outlined in detail below.

2.4.1 Settings

All respondents discussed the role that schools can play in fostering empathy and social values and a number of respondents explicitly referred to the responsibility schools have in this regard. Two further settings for values promotion were discussed: the home and youth work settings. Notably, a number of respondents pointed to the crucial role parents play in the development of empathy and related values and, further to this, their role vis á vis the formal education system. For example, two respondents, Respondent 1 and Respondent 6, remarked on the role of schools in challenging potentially negative values that young people might be exposed to at home. Respondent 1, a teacher, noted that unless schools undertake this work, negative views imbibed at home *"might never be challenged or they might just continue"*.

Two respondents drew explicit parallels between home and school in explaining the role of schools in promoting values. Respondent 4, a Vice-Principal and teacher CPD leader, remarked that while teachers are not parents, *"we're there in loco parentis and we are, we have to be the parent when the parent isn't there … And we have to be empathetic and we have to be respectful … we have to model that because if we alienate them we're lost"*. Respondent 3, a teacher, described school as "*a mini society*" in which young people are learning how to act

in a broader social context. He stated his view that schools have moved from an authoritarian and punitive approach to behavioural problems to one in which the aim is to explain to students *"that is not the way that you can carry on in society and actually succeed in it"*, in other words to give a social rationale for why certain behaviours are inappropriate. Respondent 3 referred to discussions with colleagues who question whether schools have a responsibility to teach values, arguing that this is the preserve of the family. In contrast to this view he noted that *"realistically they spend 9-4 every day for 9 months of the year … so I think yes we do have a responsibility to actually teach [values]"*. Respondent 2 was the only respondent who disavowed a role for schools, expressing the opinion that schools do not have a responsibility in fostering values as this is effectively done by parents: *"I don't think it's up to schools because I think the parent is the primary educator, and of the kids that I witness in school, the ones that are most empathic, it is because of the homes they come from and the parents they have, not because of the school"* (**Respondent 2, teacher**).

Notably, Respondent 9, a youth work organisation representative, described the importance of youth work settings in the context of what he perceived to be the shortcomings of the formal education system in addressing values formation. He expressed his frustration with the education system for its failure to provide support and guidance to young people in forming values, noting that, *"We're not educating them for life, we're not educating for the challenges. We are not equipping them with the skills, we're not equipping them with knowledge, we're not equipping them with the ability to actually critically analyse what is coming at them"*. In this context he referred to the importance of youth work organisations which *"give that extra non-family support network that expose young people to relationships that are different and that are I suppose character-forming are so important"*.

Respondent 4, a Vice-Principal and teacher CPD leader, pointed to the necessity for collaboration between schools and parents, alluding to a lack of knowledge on the part of parents with regard to how to develop and foster values in their children: *"I hope to really work with parents to educate them you know, insofar as there is nobody better … placed to do the right thing for their kids because every parent loves their child, they just don't know how to do it and they don't know if what they're doing is the right thing or is it valued"*. Alluding to new guidelines which urge more parental involvement in students' academic learning, he suggested this had potential for values education if schools could convince parents of the importance of fostering values within the formal education system.

Notably, with regard to school settings, a number of respondents expressed the view that primary school offered a more accommodating space for the promotion of values than secondary schools. Respondent 2, a secondary school teacher, explained this in terms of the fact that primary school children *"are with the same teacher all day and they are very familiar with them"* whereas the reality of secondary school was that pupils may have *"nine or ten or eleven or twelve or thirteen different teachers to deal with on a weekly basis and nobody really is keeping track of that child"*. She added that secondary school-age pupils require a more authoritarian attitude from teachers. Thus, while primary school teachers can be students' friends this relationship is not as easy to maintain in secondary school and in fact is counter-productive: *"It doesn't really help the students as much to do that because they actually need to know where the boundaries are really clearly"*.

2.4.2 Effective approaches to promoting empathy and related values

Respondents highlighted a wide variety of methods and approaches to promoting empathy and social values in children and young people and further discussed their effectiveness. Specifically, they highlighted effective school-based approaches (subject-based approaches, lesson-based programmes and whole school approaches), youth work approaches (youth spaces), and approaches that extended across all settings (experiential learning, role modelling and relationship-building).

Subject teaching in schools

A number of respondents pointed to SPHE and CSPE as existing curricular subjects at Junior Cycle level in which social values such as empathy are promoted and taught. Respondents felt that SPHE and CSPE therefore offered important opportunities for teaching values. However, respondents outlined concerns over the status of these subjects and how they are delivered. Two respondents, both teachers, commented on the fact that neither subject enjoys a high status within the curriculum. SPHE, which is not assessed by a final exam, was described as *"not a priority"* (**Respondent 1, teacher**), while CSPE, though currently assessed through a final exam, was seen to be taught as one class per week and *"normally gets landed as well on the end of the timetable"* (**Respondent 1, teacher**) while *"students don't necessarily take it very seriously"* (**Respondent 2, teacher**). The changes to the Junior Cycle that are currently being implemented will see both SPHE and CSPE delivered as short courses and assessed through Classroom Based Assessments. A further issue with regard to the teaching of CSPE was outlined by Respondent 1, who described the method by which teachers are allocated CSPE during the creation of the school timetable: *"you'll probably get different comments from Principals but it tends to be the Principal advocates the classes so your main subjects that you teach and then whatever class is extra … if there is one or two periods left at the end they'll put in CSPE so if the teacher does not necessarily have any interest in CSPE".* The lack of interest has an impact on the standard of teaching since it *"comes out then in the class. They're just getting through it for the sake of it"* (**Respondent 1, teacher**).

The sense that there is a hierarchy of subjects, with traditional academic exam-based subjects at the top and subjects like SPHE and CSPE which are focused on teaching social values at the bottom, was echoed in statements by Respondent 3, also a teacher, who stated that a hierarchy exists even if it is not stated openly. Interestingly, he suggested that this was related to pressures on school management from parents to *"get results"*, meaning that more academic exam-oriented subjects take precedence. However, he expressed the view that this prioritisation of particular subjects over others may change if values education is given a stronger emphasis: *"if the management can kind of foster an ethos where exams are extremely important but you know it's extremely important that your child is excelling emotionally as well … I would even see that as becoming more interconnected and even maybe teachers that would have seen a strong divide would now see that well you know good mental health will obviously, will lead to better exam results"* (**Respondent 3, teacher**).

Lesson-based Programmes in Schools

Views on the use of discrete lesson-based programmes or modules in schools were somewhat mixed. Respondent 8, who facilitates an SEL programme in primary schools, noted the *"very positive feedback"* her organisation receives from schools. The programme, she noted, enables students to *"show their softer side"* while teachers had an opportunity to *"observe children from a completely different perspective".* She explained that teachers are encouraged to build on the learning from the individual sessions throughout the school day, for example, by linking back to the session as a way of encouraging the children to think about their own behaviour, thereby enabling teachers to continue to *"explore feelings, but also explore behaviours from a much more, I suppose safe way for the children"* (**Respondent 8, programme facilitator**).

Respondent 3, a secondary school teacher, was very positive about the use of lesson-based school programmes on empathy and had delivered one such programme himself. Remarking that empathy is *"not addressed really in SPHE"* and that the Wellbeing guidelines do not explicitly reference empathy, he stated his view that empathy *"is important enough to be a standalone module that people do".* He felt that compared with other wellbeing programmes, the empathy programme and was well-received by the class as a whole, relating this to the fact that empathy has a universal significance: *"with empathy there just doesn't seem to be, 'I'm not into how I relate to other people', because you know it's fundamental to absolutely everybody".* He cited *"modules labelled as an empathy module"* as the best ways to promote empathy in schools. Contrary to some other respondents' views discussed below, Respondent 3 felt that 'compartmentalized' learning on a specific topic is the most effective for students, commenting that *"you almost need to narrow your peripheral vision with things and especially when it comes to psychological things".*

Other respondents expressed a cautiously favourable view of programmes as a potentially effective approach to teaching values. Respondent 1, a teacher, offered the view that lesson-based programmes which come with teacher resources *"make it a bit easier for teachers … if they just don't have the time, if a resource is done brilliant … it takes the pressure off them and they're more likely to do it"*. Respondent 4, a Vice-Principal and teacher CPD leader, remarked that *"I don't think that a twelve week module on empathy is going to be wasted"* but added that this approach must be complimented by the opportunities for empathy that arise through classroom methodologies such as group work. These opportunities *"have to be created by the classroom experience. So the module to raise awareness and to see some of the theory and some of the research and some of the facts around empathy is useful but I suppose then practice and opportunities to practice that"* (**Respondent 4, teacher CPD leader**).

Two respondents offered more critical views of lesson-based programmes. Respondent 5, an educational psychologist, warned that any programme must tie with a school's agenda in order for them to adopt it: *"It can be the best programme in the world but if a school doesn't see it as something that ties into their agenda they're not going to adopt it and therefore your programme is sitting on the side of the road basically and I've seen that happen fantastic innovations in schools"*. He further noted that there is a danger that a lesson-based school programme will be delivered as *"content and you deliver the content and then you deliver the programme and then you're finished, start middle and end"*. In his view, embedding interventions within a broader values framework connected to the school ethos and culture would be more successful than individual intervention programmes which, he cautioned, *"tend to be isolated with a single passionate teacher or a single passionate department"*.

Respondent 2, a teacher, offered a negative view on the use of lesson-based empathy programmes, expressing concern that the methodologies involved would not be embraced by students. She currently works in an all-boys school and remarked that *"it's very difficult to [do] any sort of group work or role play or anything like that with them because they're just incredibly cynical and their first instinct is to slag each other … Mixed schools you might have a slightly better chance … it really depends on individual classrooms, individual dynamics"* (**Respondent 2, teacher**).

Whole school approaches

In general, whole school approaches were advocated by respondents as the most effective method of promoting values. Whole school approaches are those that aim to address skills, learning outcomes or themes in a coherent way that involves the entire school community (i.e. students, staff, parents and the wider community). Whole school approaches can include curricular teaching, cross-curricular teaching, extra- and co-curricular activities, school policies, whole school planning and school culture.

Respondents referred to specific aspects of whole school approaches such as cross-curricular approaches, those in which skills, learning outcomes or themes are addressed across curricular subjects. A number of respondents expressed positive views of cross-curricular approaches to teaching values. Respondent 1, a teacher who teaches CSPE, stated that, given the time constraints and pressures that teachers are under in delivering the curriculum, cross-curricular learning was the best approach to teaching social values. Offering an example of a cross-curricular approach, she described attending a workshop on the UN Sustainable Development Goals demonstrating how to teach these across the curriculum, and outlined the potential of this approach: *"it was great to see that because you can see every single subject not just your traditional ones, all subjects … rather than just focusing on right, it's an isolated subject like, this has to be done as CSPE, because you're just not going to get everything covered in one class a week"*.

Respondent 6 is the director of a Development Education programme which has adopted a whole school approach incorporating a number of methods, for example, developing cross-curricular subject resources, providing funding for schools to undertake action projects and running an award programme that provides recognition for schools' work on Development Education. She noted the advantage of subject resources for

cross-curricular teaching in terms of achieving 'buy in' from schools as they can demonstrate to Principals and Vice-Principals that a programme is *"very doable"* and that subject teachers will be fulfilling learning outcomes set out in curricular documents. She sounded a note of caution, however, remarking that while subject resources were viewed positively by schools, a disadvantage of a cross-curricular approach was the danger that the learning might be disguised or lost: *"If you don't like maths anyway you're not going to care about the Global Citizenship dimension to maths … it becomes nearly too diluted or disguised and it's not kind of given maybe the space that it needs"* (**Respondent 6, programme director**). In this sense, encountering Development Education as a more explicit and defined area of learning in Transition Year could sometimes prove to be more effective, she noted.

The new *Framework for Junior Cycle* and the Wellbeing area of learning in Junior Cycle were both discussed as significant whole school approaches by respondents. The *Framework for Junior Cycle*, which was introduced in 2015, focuses on key skills and shared learning outcomes across subjects, with the result that *"the curriculum is more integrated"* (**Respondent 4, teacher CPD leader**) and *"Subject departments are less … siloed"* (**Respondent 4, teacher CPD leader**), introducing a collaborative approach to teaching and learning amongst staff. Wellbeing was referred to by a number of respondents as offering a potential space for SEL. For example, Respondent 2, a teacher, noted that this new area of learning was approaching wellbeing *"more holistically"*, trying to connect subjects such as SPHE, CSPE and PE and *"look at the overall wellbeing of the child which is welcome"*. However, some respondents expressed concerns over how Wellbeing might be implemented in schools, worrying about *"the wellbeing and the 400 hours in the Junior Cycle still being seen as oh we just have to fill that you know"* (**Respondent 3, teacher**) and questioning whether Wellbeing might just be "*a title for those existing subjects* [SPHE, CSPE, PE] *as they already are"* (**Respondent 6, programme director**). Respondent 4 acknowledged concerns that Wellbeing might be *"used or siphoned off into this that and the other"*, but stated that responsibility for the programme ultimately lay with school Principals.

Significantly, a number of respondents alluded to the fact that schools were already promoting and teaching SEL skills and social values, though this is not always explicitly acknowledged and recognised. Respondent 4, a Vice-Principal and teacher CPD leader, noted that Wellbeing *"isn't just an add-on and not only is it everywhere but it always was everywhere"*. The challenge is to *"pull together all of the good practice, acknowledge it and see it"* (**Respondent 4, teacher CPD leader**) as well as working towards enhancing wellbeing where deficits are apparent. This echoes comments by Respondent 6, a programme director, that when schools are encouraged to examine their school mission statements or school ethos, much of the time values are embedded in these *"but it's how often they're actually reflecting on whether, you know, how are they actually instilling that in students?"* Likewise, Respondent 5, an educational psychologist, stated that existing programmes e.g. anti-bullying, LGBT programmes, Development Education programmes, are underpinned by *"empathy and social values and social responsibility pieces"* and that therefore schools are already running programmes that enhance empathy but may not realise that they are doing so. The tendency in schools, he noted, is to "*wrap things around problems*" rather than *"thinking of whole solutions and whole cultures and ethos"*.

School culture was the facet of whole school approaches that respondents placed the greatest emphasis on as an effective approach to promoting empathy and related social values. In describing the components of positive whole school cultures, respondents referred to a number of elements from day-to-day interactions between teachers and pupils to specific activities such as 'tutor time'. For example, Respondent 4, a Vice-Principal and teacher CPD leader, described the implementation of Wellbeing in terms of *"the way we deal with students every day and our interactions with them, from when we come in in the morning and meet them in the corridor, whether we smile at them, whether we ask them how they are, how we treat them … show them the respect that we expect from them"*. Respondent 3, a teacher, described teachers' use of empathy to counter discipline problems such as name-calling, noting that *"I suppose teachers don't realise sometimes that they're always trying to get empathy out of students; that's what the question is; how would you feel if you were the only gay guy in the class and somebody was constantly calling you that? … we're trying to use empathy all the time to solve a lot of issues in school but maybe there isn't just a label on it"*. Respondent 2, a teacher, gave the example of *"tutor time"* an approach taken by some

schools in which a short period of time at the beginning of the day is allotted to allow class tutors to check in with students, for example by looking at student journals to see who is getting notes home and asking whether there is a reason for this.

Respondent 5, an educational psychologist who favoured a whole school culture approach to values promotion, stressed the importance of universal interventions i.e. those delivered to all students rather than targeting those with identified needs. Referring to how youth mental health is addressed through schools, he remarked on the recent evolution from a discussion about mental illness to mental health, moving away from *"intervention on the basis of diagnosis to looking at more whole school kind of intervention pieces that look at prevention and health issues rather than illness issues"*. Until recently, policy had been more individualised, focusing on the child who was not thriving e.g. with autism or social, emotional and behavioural difficulties: *"It has been a deficit model and we're moving towards a needs based model, which includes whole school needs"* (**Respondent 5, educational psychologist**). As a result, he noted, educational psychologists have moved towards supporting the delivery of universal programmes.

The crucial importance of school management in creating positive whole school cultures was remarked upon by a number of respondents who noted that *"the buy-in from the top down is the real key"* (**Respondent 3, teacher**) and *"the management of the school very much dictates the atmosphere in a school"* (**Respondent 2, teacher**). Respondent 2, a teacher, noted that *"a principal, the deputy principals, the year heads that model respectful behaviour will have a massive impact on a school as a result and they influence the feeling in a school, whether it's positive or negative"*.

Teacher Training

A number of respondents referred to the need for capacity building amongst teachers with regard to the teaching and promotion of values in their students. For example, Respondent 1, a teacher, cited the example of teachers' attitudes and the impact of this on teaching multiculturalism: *"Just because you're a teacher doesn't mean you're not racist … if that's the way they are how are they going to necessarily teach that [multiculturalism]"*. She felt Initial Teacher Education (ITE) was the best location for educating teachers with regard to promoting positive values, though CPD for in-service teachers would also be effective.

Two respondents described approaches to values education which targeted ITE or teacher CPD. Respondent 7, who works for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, noted that when developing teacher resources for teaching equality and diversity, it became apparent that teachers were *"nervous maybe about using [the] kind of methodologies that aren't very structured in the classroom"* and anxious about their capacity to lead class discussions. In response, her organisation developed a *"discussion tool"* with question ideas for teachers on the topic of equality in society and a resource for tackling controversial issues in classroom discussions. They also developed a training programme for in-service teachers and a resource for teacher educators (i.e. those who educate teachers). Respondent 6, a programme director, described her organisation's core focus on teacher education, specifically on building capacity to teach Development Education through ITE in third level institutions and CPD for in-service teachers. Notably, she expressed the view that to improve the implementation of programmes in schools accrediting teachers' ongoing work and learning is a necessary step, suggesting that accreditation of some kind might offset the perceived burden of running programmes: *"it will just again give us kind of more kudos when we're going into schools, that it is something that is actually going towards their … teaching standards or whatever it might be"*. She noted that Principals in particular are going to look at these issues when weighing up whether or not to accept this kind of work in this school.

> *"If teachers were getting accredited for the work and … the Teaching Council was kind of recognising that or whoever it might be that is accrediting it, that would help for sure. All these little things kind of help give recognition to the work"* (**Respondent 6, Programme director**)

Youth spaces

Respondent 10, a youth worker, referred to the importance of providing supportive youth work spaces for young people outside a formal educational setting. Speaking about youth spaces such as youth cafés, he reflected that *"the very, very basic thing; the real foundation is that they're in; they're welcomed in; it's not a competitive environment. There's no expectation of them and they can actually go in there; they can breathe. Because there is huge stressors on young people otherwise"*. He further noted that research with young people reflected this need for an accommodating space: *"They want a space to be able to hang out, to meet other young people; they want staff not to be up to there with administration; they've a chance actually to listen to them and to build relationships and see what kind of cool things they could do"*. He remarked that inclusion in such spaces may eventually lead to civic engagement and other project work that fosters social values.

Experiential learning

A number of respondents alluded to the importance of experiential learning across settings with respondents, noting that *"You learn by doing"* (**Respondent 9, youth work organisation**). On empathy it was noted that *"empathy is a skill, practiced, developed"* (**Respondent 9, youth work organisation**) and that perspective-taking is difficult to develop *"without actually being in a situation where they have to put it into practice"* (**Respondent 8, programme facilitator**). Respondent 11, an academic researcher, expressed the view that learning affective dispositions such as caring and empathy involves both experiencing these dispositions and practicing them. Commenting that *"nurture creates nurture"*, she remarked that empathy and other caring dispositions are a form of *"inheritance"* bequeathed from family, neighbourhood and society and don't *"arise naturally"*. In regard to learning values, she noted that *"I don't think it's like learning you know the fine points of grammar in French because it is an affective disposition and it's something that you have to have the capacity to do; it's not just having the words. You need to have the capacity to do it. You need to be resourced"* (**Respondent 11, researcher**). An intellectual understanding of concepts like care and empathy therefore *"has to be complemented by experiential dimension and the living out and the living through of what you proclaim to value if you do value empathy, care etc."*. She recommended a combined approach to promoting values stating that *"we have to teach children both through practice and learning … It's a bit like music; the theory of music, there is theory. There's also the practice and if you can't do the practice you'd hardly call yourself a musician"*.

Respondents provided some specific examples of how experiential learning can take place in school and youth work environments. In a school context, two respondents described whole school approaches that embedded a form of experiential learning in their approach. Respondent 6, the director of a Development Education programme, noted that one of the hoped-for outcomes of her organisation's programme is *"getting students to take action at a local level"*. The funding her organisation provides to schools is designed to enable them to undertake actions in their communities, such as an awareness day or a 'plastic free' initiative that might spill out into the local community. Respondent 7, who works for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, described a whole school intercultural education award that likewise encourages action. Respondent 1, a teacher, referred to the action project students undertake as part of CSPE at Junior Cycle level and described the charity work undertaken by TY students. However, while acknowledging the importance of action projects and experiential learning in schools, she sounded a note of caution, remarking that the quality of this form of learning depends on the school and teacher: *"if a teacher is under pressure what they do, and a lot of the time teachers will go for the easy option and something that is handy and quick and easy to do and there mightn't necessarily be that much thought put into it"* (**Respondent 1, teacher**).

Youth citizenship projects in out-of-school settings were described as *"inspiring"* (**Respondent 10**). Respondent 9, a youth work organisation representative, described the importance of providing opportunities for experiential learning through active citizenship projects since if you give young people these opportunities and experiences: *"they will continue to do them because it's, not only is it collective action for the common good, it is not only good for society, it's also good for the person you know? We are at our best; we are feeling our best when we're*

doing something for others". Respondent 10, a youth worker, noted that action projects reflect the fact that young people *"want to get involved and with a small bit of guidance they will"*. Interestingly, he placed a greater emphasis on the indirect effects of collaborative work, which can bring young people together who may not otherwise encounter one another. As he stated it *"If you have lads kicking a football together or doing robotics projects together ... it does take away some of those prejudices that would be there … You can see the other. It's very hard to continue to be racist to someone or, be they from Eastern Europe or Africa or whatever like that when you know that their name is John and you've worked on a project together"* (**Respondent 10, youth worker**).

Relationships and role modelling

The perceived importance of parental modelling and modelling in schools has been outlined above. A number of respondents expounded further on the importance of role modelling and relationship-building in school and youth work settings for the promotion of empathy and related values.

In a school setting Respondent 2, a teacher, reflected on how schools might role model social values and cited mentoring or buddy systems, which she had seen working successfully, as an approach to modelling empathy between peers. She also considered how schools might better recreate the role modelling that takes place in the home environment, commenting that boarding schools are perhaps the only schools that can do this, as *"you see the school more as a family, as your family rather than day schools where you are only in nine to four and it's very much just get through this and get home"*. She suggested that some 'day schools' recreate this environment with breakfast and homework clubs, which can provide a sense of the school *"looking after you"*. Compared with her own city-based school where the students go into town at lunchtime, she suggested that in schools located in rural areas *"you have a chance to maybe create an atmosphere at lunch time of how people treat each other, activities, board games or chess or whatever they can do. You have a chance of modelling that empathetic behaviour a bit more. So it depends on the school"*. Respondent 10, a youth worker, pointed to the crucial importance of interpersonal day-to-day interactions between youth workers and young people, in particular of having staff and volunteers who role model values and behaviours, including empathy.

> *"I think that's vital having staff that are aware more or less at all times will be polite, decent, empathetic towards each other and the young people and the volunteers and when they go out to McDonalds that the staff take the lead of being very polite to the person serving them … and when the young people see that; given the chance the young people are oriented toward empathy and toward decency but just they need someone to show them that's OK and that they don't have to be these tough vicious lads, being rude to someone serving you shows that you're cool"* (**Respondent 10, youth worker**)

Respondents also highlighted the importance of relationships. Respondent 11, an academic researcher, remarked on the importance of caring teacher-student relationships, noting that *"you can't educate without love … If you don't really care for your students you really can't educate them"*. Respondent 2, a secondary teacher, reflected on the fact that certain teachers, such as sports coaches, may have the capacity to build a better personal connection and more open and trusting relationships with students than classroom teachers. Respondent 10 likewise pointed to the importance of relationship-building between youth workers and young people. However, here he remarked on the need for staff to enjoy secure working conditions as prerequisite for a successful relationship-based approach to empathy development. As he stated it, if staff are changing every few months *"there's no chance to build on any empathy with young people or with the staff as a kind of body"*. He further highlighted the importance of a 'top-down' empathic approach from regional managers, which *"diffuses down"* to young people via staff who are enabled to support one another and engage empathetically with youth. He contrasted this with an *"authoritarian approach"*, which he felt was sometimes taken by teachers in schools.

2.4.3 The role of policy

A number of respondents discussed the role of policy in promoting empathy and related social values. Respondents discussed the role and impact of policy on practice across settings, remarking on the translation of policy into practice, the advantages of aligning practice with policy and on policy directions in recent years.

Schools

The three teachers interviewed expressed varying views on the gap between policy and practice. Respondent 3 felt that in general, policy in the area of SEL *"does translate as it is supposed to"*. However, he cited the concerns sometimes voiced by school management that schools *"are expected to do everything"*. In this context SEL *"can turn to just a ticking the box exercise unfortunately"*. By contrast, Respondent 2 felt that there can be a stark difference between the content of the curriculum and what happens in the classroom, commenting that *"the number one dictator of the success of any policies or any curriculum is pupil-teacher ratio"* and that until there was investment in reducing ratios *"none of these curriculums or policies are really going to succeed"*. As an example of the impact of pupil-teacher ratios she pointed to her experience teaching SPHE: *"You want them to discuss, you want them to feel comfortable speaking but in massive groups it's just so hard"*. Respondent 1 felt that with regard to the translation of curriculum into practice, *"a lot of things come down to how busy the teacher is at the time … And as I say I just think that's getting worse"*. She also suggested that *"It's great and all saying all these different guidelines and the department of education but I definitely think if there's resources there already teachers are more likely to do it"*, suggesting that curricular guidelines in the absence of resources may not be sufficient for implementation.

Respondent 4, a Vice Principal and teacher CPD leader, felt that there is no need for further policies in the area of SEL. However, he expressed his view that it is necessary to integrate existing policies at the school level: *"I believe that it's practice now but practice based on some kind of agreed rationale … Which policy and what part of which policy and how they're all knitted together. How they are all brought together"*. He referenced the *Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice* as an example of policy that advocates an integrated approach involving the creation of school policies, the establishment of wellbeing teams, and making connections with educational psychologists. However, Respondent 3, a teacher, expressed concerns with regard to Wellbeing that *"there's no policing of [Wellbeing] as such … it's a bit of we'll see what happens kind of attitude"*. He remarked on obstacles to the implementation of Wellbeing, such as if a school doesn't contain *"a group of people who are interested in taking that over or the culture of the staff could be very unionised and it could be saying 'well nobody do that' you know"*, adding that he sees the implementation of Wellbeing as a *"5-10 year change"*.

Respondent 6, a programme director, gave her perspective on the key role of policy in programme implementation. Her organisation's work is directly linked to two high level policies and she noted that aligning their work to this policy context *"helps in terms of getting buy in from schools. I think that's one of the most important things for us, that they're seeing that this is something that is actually … appropriate or relevant and they can see the value of it"*. She further referred to the importance of coordinating their work with elements of the school curriculum such as the principles, statements of learning and key skills outlined in the *Framework for Junior Cycle*. This was about aligning their programme *"to the work the teachers are already doing"* which helps to persuade teachers that the programme is not *"something extra"*. More broadly, her organisation was trying to align the programme's competencies to global frameworks, in particular the PISA Global Competence Framework and to the Council of Europe's *Competences for Democratic Culture.*

> *"I think [schools] want you to some extent to be able to speak the language or to kind of … just to not burden them with this whole extra area"* (**Respondent 6, programme director**)

Youth work

Respondent 9, a youth work organisation representative, stated that the biggest challenge facing youth work was a lack of appreciation of universal youth work which targets all young people rather than specific cohorts

designated as disadvantaged or 'at risk'. As he stated it, *"there is no appreciation of the generic, of the universality you know, that this is good for all young people and that if it's not targeted, if it's not reaching the most disadvantaged then there is no value to it"*. He referred to *"progressive universalism"*, a term used by former UK Prime Minster Gordon Brown, as a preferable model in which all young people should have the ability to engage in services, which are then *"tiered"* depending on more specific needs. He further noted his concern that in the absence of universal access to youth services, commercial interests focused primarily on brand engagement can move into this space (he gave the examples of the Sky Academy and Nike Best). Respondent 10, a youth worker, echoed these views, noting that spaces such as youth cafés have *"to be open. Ok the work is always targeted at the disadvantaged young people but you have to leave space for every young person to come in"*.

2.4.4 Challenges

As well as outlining effective approaches to promoting empathy and social values, respondents also discussed the challenges to promoting values in applied settings. This section outlines the various challenges discussed by respondents across the range of methods and approaches described above.

Socio-economic climate

Respondent 9, a youth work organisation representative, remarked that values formation was being challenged by the erosion of older societal certainties. The place of institutions like religion and the family, the security of lifelong jobs, and the surety of lives that were *"mapped out"* have been replaced with *"a life of change, of uncertainty"* resulting in pressures on young people. Respondent 10, a youth worker, echoed these views when he remarked on the impact on children of the adverse conditions experienced by their parents, for example a lack of state supports compared with previous generations, unaffordable mortgages or rents, and difficulties in accessing healthcare, which collectively put *"a kind of stressor on the society"*. A further fallout of societal changes, for Respondent 10, is that young people are growing up with a sense of *"competitiveness"*. Society, he noted, has *"become harder"*.

Notably, two respondents expressly cited the macro socio-economic system, specifically neo-liberal capitalism or the *"Thatcherite/Reaganite political philosophy"* (**Respondent 10, youth worker**), as a significant challenge or obstacle to the delivery of empathy and social values education. Alluding to current problems in housing and healthcare in Ireland and the experiences of young working people who are struggling financially, Respondent 10, a youth worker, remarked that *"you can understand how empathy could be beaten out of people if they can't have the basics … So you can see where young people are coming from to some extent. If I'm empathetic in this society I'm going to be the soft one who is considered foolish"*. Given this wider societal context, he expressed some doubt on how far empathy education could go: *"maybe the young people's response is correct of not being empathetic; even with modules and empathy and philosophy and youth work and different things like that you can do a certain amount but it's quite possible you can't do as much as you would like to do"*.

Respondent 11, an academic researcher, reiterated the view that neo-liberalism and capitalism *"undermines care because it rewards people for competition and possession"*, promoting individualism over human interdependency and connectedness. She described empathy and related values as operating on three levels: the interpersonal level of intimate care relations between individuals, the secondary level of care relations which take place between individuals in social settings such as neighbourhoods, workplaces and schools, and the tertiary level of the state in which care is expressed for general populations. She remarked that *"it's very hard for individuals to develop those values and dispositions in society which at the secondary care level and the tertiary care level i.e. the state and the global political and economic order, doesn't reward people for that"* (**Respondent 11**). In this context, she expressed some reservations with regard to focusing on the teaching of interpersonal empathy in schools, given that empathy is a *"socio-political phenomenon"*.

Pressures on the curriculum

A number of respondents referred to the challenge of including values education in schools given the time pressures exerted by the existing curriculum, with one teacher referring to the fact that teachers *"have never been busier"* (**Respondent 1, teacher**). Respondent 8, who facilitates a programme in primary schools, noted that there *"are so many programmes out there that … sometimes it's difficult to make a little space for programmes"*. Respondent 7, who works for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, felt that because of this competition for space, values education tends to be placed in Transition Year or within subjects like CSPE, both which are already very full. Respondent 6, a programme director, referred to her organisation's efforts to ease the administrative burden of running the programme on teachers. She remarked on one negative impact of running programmes in an overcrowded curricular, citing feedback from teachers who feel *"they might be starting to just like scrape the surface and then that's it"*.

Some respondents referred to the potential of the new *Framework for Junior Cycle* to offer some additional opportunities for values education, in particular the introduction of Wellbeing as an area of learning. However, Respondent 1, a teacher, expressed the contrary view that the new Junior Cycle would put added pressure on teachers since the school day was being shortened to accommodate the additional correction duties associated with the introduction of Classroom Based Assessments (i.e. continuous assessment marked by class teachers). Another teacher, Respondent 2, agreed with this assessment and expressed the view that schools could not do more to promote social values at present given the time constraints.

> *"I think teachers are absolutely at the pin of their collar between covering the school day and all the extracurricular activities they are already doing you know, without pay, from sport to debate to theatre to all of these kind of things. It's just, it's very, very manic and the structure of our school year because it's a shorter school year maybe than a lot of countries, it's a race to get curriculum covered, and now with the new junior cycle there is almost less time now because of all these classroom based assessments and you're chasing students to do projects, chasing, chasing, chasing, chasing and there is just very little time"* (**Respondent 2, teacher**)

A number of respondents discussed methods of approaching the teaching of values in this pressurised context. Respondent 5, an educational psychologist, noted that instead of viewing programmes as a request to do *"more work"*, teachers need to be convinced that *"actually what we have got here is something that is going to cover an awful lot of bases that cause an awful lot of difficulties for you … promoting skills that are going to be massively useful for every child and that are going to prevent some of the difficulties that schools have to navigate"*. Programme developers therefore need to *"resonate with that context and be seen to be useful rather than another burden basically"*. This view was echoed in a number of comments from respondents previously alluded to, for instance Respondent 6's views on the need to align programmes with the aims of the curriculum to ensure that teachers see this work as *"appropriate or relevant"* and Respondent 4's views on the importance of programme developers providing a *"rationale for why this is necessary"* and how it can help in addressing specific issues such as classroom management.

Academic focus in senior cycle

Respondents remarked on the academic focus of the curriculum in secondary school. In this context, a number of respondents pointed to Transition Year as *"a window when there is less emphasis on academia; they are not so worried about homework"* (**Respondent 2, teacher**). However, Respondent 1, a teacher, remarked on the change from Transition Year to senior cycle: *"when they get into fifth year you see, a lot of that is kind of gone then because they're so again, it's probably the Irish curriculum is just very exam focused"*. Respondent 3, a teacher, felt that the exam-focused years of the senior cycle (i.e. fifth and sixth year) were an obstacle to values education. As he noted, issues such as how students are coping or relating to others are *"on pause for two years and just study the material that will get you into the college you want to go to or whatever"*.

Significantly, Respondent 3, who is also a guidance counsellor in his school, made the point that the academic focus does not align what some employers are now looking for: *"they don't really care what degree you did you know; they want to know what kind of person you are and what you got involved in in school and college. So the school system might be promoting that this academic completely focused stuff … the schools maybe are still a little bit behind"*. He alluded to parental pressure to ensure students obtain certain college courses as one reason for the continued emphasis placed on academic learning and achievement by schools. The task in this context is to convince schools that *"if you [had] a student body that was extremely educated in empathy, you know, that could lead to the real success"*.

'It depends on the teacher'

A number of respondents referred to the challenge of achieving 'buy-in' from the entire teaching staff of a school as opposed to relying on *"the champion"* teacher (**Respondent 6, programme director**) or a small group of interested teachers with a personal commitment to a particular area of values promotion. Respondents expressed the view with regard to values education in schools that *"it really does depend on the teacher and their personal interest in something"* (**Respondent 1, teacher**). Respondent 3, a teacher, noted that while emotional competency education was coming into schools through Wellbeing at Junior Cycle, schools are left to devise their own programmes and as such *"Unless you get somebody who really does want to address issues such as empathy then it could just become a bit of a space filler"*. However, notwithstanding this view, Respondent 3 depicted the interested teacher as crucial, since a personal passion is *"impossible not to just let … out while you're in the classroom and you actually enjoy teaching it"*, which has positive implications for student learning. He expressed the view that to take values education seriously in schools *"you would be looking for core teachers who are … interested in this kind of stuff"*. He added that "*it's surprising how little questions like that are asked*" of staff, echoing the description of how subjects like CSPE are timetabled expressed by another respondent.

Respondent 7, who works for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission, made the further point that even with enthusiastic teachers and 'buy-in' from Principals, the absence of a conducive culture within a school can inhibit the efforts of these staff members: *"a teacher might be really enthusiastic about bringing something into the curriculum but if something isn't happening at the whole school level it can be hard for them to influence that culture sometimes as well"*. For this reason Respondent 7 saw the advantage of whole school approaches such as the intercultural education programme previously mentioned, which formally recognises a school's status once it has met certain criteria. Respondent 6, a programme director, also endorsed this approach in terms of gaining traction with the entire teaching staff. The school award run by her organisation gives the programme a "*boost*" and persuades other teachers to come on board at the early stage of a school's engagement, which makes the programme *"a bit more sustainable"*. Once a number of teachers are committed, there is *"more joined up thinking"* because *"they are recognising that it's linked to their subject areas which is still their bread and butter"*.

Quality Assurance

Two respondents expressed concerns with the quality of programme delivery in schools. Respondent 9, a youth work organisation representative, discussed the advantages and disadvantages of running programmes in schools. Noting that while schools can provide programmes with scalability and *"critical mass"*, *"you can't stand over the, how it's done and how it's delivered and the message it's giving … there's no quality assurance about how it's done and I would worry about programmes like this you know the mind-set change it needs within the education system to think and [do] this"*. His organisation runs programmes inside and outside schools, focusing on out-of-school settings. The balancing of opportunities for scalability and ensuring quality control is an unresolved issue for Respondent 9.

"It's about how you can get them to the level and the quality that we need and that's the questions I have … this is not about out of school as opposed to in school … It's about if it's in schools does it deliver to the same quality level. And if it is I have no problem with it, you know? But I'm not sure we have the infrastructure for that to happen" (**Respondent 9, youth work organisation**)

Similar concerns were raised by Respondent 6, a programme director, with regard to her organisation's targeting of ITE as the key site in which to build capacity. She stated that in working with teachers rather than with students *"we're limited in terms of directly building the capacity of students and there can be a disconnect between wheat you want the teachers to do with the students and what actually happens"*. Notwithstanding that, she noted that her organisation recognised teachers as *"a really important multiplier effect in terms of sustainability"*.

Teacher Training

Two respondents referred to different issues surrounding teacher training. Respondent 7, who works for the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission described her experience with regard to running in-service training for teachers on human rights and equality issues. She noted that her organisation had good take-up when they were able to provide financial aid for substitution costs (i.e. to pay for substitute teaching cover) to allow teachers to attend training but that once this funding is not available *"you're in a different situation around take up"*. Respondent 6, a programme director, noted a potential obstacle to the promotion of SEL or values education due to the fact that they do not form a compulsory part of ITE. As such, she noted, you are reliant on teacher training institutions *"to actually value it … because otherwise you know they don't have to do it … if there was a change of directorship there it could all fall to the wayside"* (**Respondent 6, programme director).**

Lack of coordination of SEL

One respondent referred to the need to coordinate work on SEL and values promotion to a greater degree. Respondent 6, a programme developer, noted that her own Development Education organisation has been mandated by the government to promote and deliver Development Education in schools but that there are a number of NGOs and other organisations offering programmes and resources to schools. She cited the Irish Development Education Association as an "*umbrella organisation*" which attempts to ensure that all work in this area aligns, engages in best practice and links to the curriculum. She commented that a similar coordinating body that embraced a wider values education remit would be a worthwhile enterprise, pointing to research that suggests the inherent complementarity of social and emotional learning programmes, and as such suggested a "*mapping exercise*" of work on values education.

SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

- Parents were seen to play a crucial role in the development, fostering and promotion of empathy in children and young people

- Within the school system, primary school was seen as a more conductive space for values promotion than secondary school

- Subject-based approaches in schools are relevant for teaching social values. However, SPHE and CSPE have a low status in the curriculum

- Lesson-based programmes in schools may be effective in promoting values. However, lesson-based programmes may not be implemented or delivered effectively e.g. they may be delivered as 'content' or teachers may be reluctant to use active methodologies

- Within the school system, whole school approaches were favoured by respondents above others as an effective and sustainable approach to promoting empathy and social values, with a particular emphasis on the cultivation of a positive school climate

- Schools are delivering SEL and promoting socio-emotional skills in a variety of ways, though they may not explicitly acknowledge their work in this area

- Time pressures on teachers and an academic focus, particularly in senior cycle, are a significant challenge to the promotion of empathy in school settings

- SEL within schools tends to devolve to small number of interested teachers on the staff i.e. whole staff buy-in can be difficult to achieve

- Providing a rationale for SEL to parents, teachers and school managers to achieve 'buy-in' was seen as important in order to align SEL to their interests, needs and work

- There was a recognised need for further capacity-building in teachers with regard to promoting values in schools through Initial Teacher Education (ITE) or Teacher CPD; in this regard the lack of mandatory SEL in ITE was noted as a challenge

- Programme implementation can be difficult to monitor in school

- Experiential learning, relationships and role modelling were seen as effective methods of promoting values across settings

- Youth work and youth spaces were acknowledged to be significant settings for the promotion of empathy and social values

- Management e.g. school leaders and youth work programme managers can play a significant role in cultivating a positive climate for the promotion of values amongst both staff and young people

- Policy was seen to play a significant role in promoting values with school settings. However, issues with implementation were noted

- Youth work policy was seen to have veered away from universal youth work, which was seen to be relevant for promoting values in young people

- Social norms associated with macro-level socio-economic factors were seen to challenge the promotion of values in children and young people

- There is a lack of coordination regarding the promoting of values in children and young people

2.5 Discussion

The aim of this study was to explore the perspectives of a range of key informants from a variety of backgrounds on the promotion of empathy and related social values in children and young people. Respondents offered their views on the settings within which empathy and social values can be developed and promoted, effective approaches to promoting empathy and social values, the role of policy in supporting the promotion of values, and the challenges to the promotion of values across settings. Considering the applied orientation of the overall research project, the discussion below examines the findings in terms of opportunities and challenges for promoting values across settings.

Opportunities

Opportunities
Parents were considered to play a crucial role in developing empathy and related social values.
Subject-based approaches in schools were seen as relevant for teaching social values.
Lesson-based programmes in schools were seen to be potentially effective in promoting values.
Universal, whole school approaches were considered effective in promoting empathy and social values, particularly the cultivation of a positive school climate.
Schools were seen to be delivering SEL and promoting socio-emotional skills in a variety of ways, though they may not explicitly acknowledge their work in this area.
Youth work settings were viewed as providing relevant out-of-school environments in which social values can be developed and promoted.
Experiential learning, role modelling and relationship-building were all cited as effective in promoting empathy and prosocial values across settings.
Management e.g. school leaders, youth work programme managers were seen as playing a significant role in cultivating a positive climate for the promotion of values amongst both staff and young people.
Policy was seen to support practice in values promotion e.g. by providing a rationale to practitioners.

A notable finding of this research related to the perceived importance of parents, who were viewed as having a critical role in role modelling and teaching values to their children. A number of studies suggest that parental modelling of empathic attitudes and behaviours and parental encouragement of prosocial responding have positive effects on adolescents' levels of empathy and prosocial behaviour (Mussen & Eisbenberg, 2001; Farrant et al., 2007; Lai et al., 2015; Carlo et al., 2017). The findings in this research further suggest that policy-makers interested in promoting prosocial skills and values should pay due attention to the home environment and the role of parents and caregivers. Further research exploring how Irish parents promote empathy and social values in their children would be beneficial and assist in developing targeted initiatives with regard to parental education and the dissemination of information to parents and other family members.

The findings highlighted a range of potential approaches for promoting empathy and related social values across settings. In particular, respondents highlighted school-based approaches (subject-based approaches, lesson-based programmes and whole school approaches), youth work approaches (youth spaces, action/

citizenship projects), and approaches that extended across all settings (experiential learning, role modelling and relationship-building). The variety of approaches cited by respondents is noteworthy in itself, however, particular findings on these approaches merit further discussion. It is notable that respondents felt that subject-based approaches using SPHE and CSPE and lesson-based approaches were relevant, but with certain limitations discussed in the section below, 'Challenges'. Of the school-based approaches discussed, whole school approaches were favoured by respondents as the most effective approach to promoting values in schools. This corresponds with research on SEL that has found whole school approaches to be effective for developing personal, social and emotional skills and promoting positive mental health (Weare & Nind, 2011; Durlak & Wells, 1997; Wells et al. 2003; Green et al, 2005). Respondents also favoured *universal* approaches to the promotion of values in schools, aligning with international practice guidelines on health promotion in schools (WHO, 1997) which have exerted an increasingly influence on policy in Ireland (DES, HSE & Department of Health, 2013). The universal approach advocated for schools contrasts with the findings about youth work, where it was suggested that youth work policy has moved away from a universal approach towards needs-based interventions with specific cohorts. The concerns raised in this research echo the wider, ongoing debate on the issue of universalism in youth work in Ireland and internationally (Norris & Pugh, 2015; Devlin & Gunning, 2009; Barrett, 2003). Significantly, developing a positive school culture or climate was the component of a whole school approach viewed most positively by respondents. A significant body of international research has demonstrated the positive impact of school culture on levels of empathy and prosocial responding (Wray-Lake & Syvertsten, 2011; Wray-Lake et al., 2016; Barr, & Higgins-D'Alessandro, 2007). School culture was described by respondents as including day-to-day interactions between teachers and students and positive teacher-student relationships, while methods such as 'buddy systems' (i.e. mentoring), 'tutor time' and activities at lunchtimes were noted as contributing to building a positive school climate.

The findings from this study reflect the importance of creating opportunities to promote values in youth work settings. The findings suggest the positive impact of youth spaces such as youth cafes and the role of citizenship or other action projects in out-of-school settings in fostering empathy and social values. Research in an Irish context has demonstrated the positive outcomes associated with youth cafes (Brady, Forkan & Moran, 2018; Forkan et al., 2015) and citizenship programmes run by youth organisations (Brady et al., 2012). Related to the findings on action projects, it was found that developing skills like empathy involves 'hands-on' experiential learning. This accords with research on the positive effects of service to others on adolescents' development of social responsibility (Youniss & Yates, 1997; Scales et al., 2000) while researchers and theorists interested in promoting SEL have argued for the importance of experiential application of social and emotional skills (Zins et al., 2004). Finally, the importance of role modelling and of close and trusting relationships between adults and young people across settings was noted, notwithstanding the challenges to creating an environment in which students feel comfortable and 'at home' in schools.

The importance of management in driving culture change and enabling work on values promotion across settings was also highlighted in this study. This finding reflects research which has demonstrated that school leadership can have a critical influence on school culture and climate (Engels et al., 2008) and it has been suggested that SEL requires 'transformative leadership' in schools (Elias et al., 2006). Finally, the importance of policy was noted in this study. Not only can SEL policy translate into practice, but policy was seen as important in providing a framing rationale that can be used by programme developers and those promoting SEL in schools. However, as discussed below some issues with the implementation of policy were also noted.

Challenges

Challenges
The prevailing socio-economic climate was seen to often prizes values at odds with empathy and prosocial values, undervaluing or mitigating against them
SPHE and CSPE were seen to have a low status in the curriculum
Lesson-based programmes may not be implemented or delivered effectively e.g. they may be delivered as 'content', teachers may be reluctant to use active methodologies
Teachers may suffer under intense time pressures related to the delivery of an overloaded, exam-focused curriculum leaving little time for SEL or a school culture conducive to SEL
SEL within schools tends to devolve to small number of interested teachers on the staff i.e. whole staff buy-in can be difficult to achieve
Parents tend to prioritize examination results over SEL
SEL is not embedded in Initial Teacher Education
Programme implementation can be difficult to monitor in schools

A number of significant challenges to promoting empathy and related values were discussed by respondents. One significant finding is that the promotion of empathy and 'other-oriented' social values takes place within the context of often competing ideas and value orientations, in particular the neo-liberal values of individualism and competition. The finding that macro-level socio-economic factors such as the rise in competitiveness associated with neo-liberal capitalism is negatively impacting the formation and expression of values in young people is an issue of concern. For example, Olsen (2013) has argued that neo-liberalism has had a negative impact on empathy levels. Such concerns suggest the need to adopt a holistic and socio-ecological approach to the promotion of other-oriented values that focuses on a range of settings including families, schools, communities and the state. Furthermore, it is arguably only holistic approaches such as the whole school approaches advocated by respondents that are capable of mitigating against the effects of individualism and intense competition

With regard to approaches used in formal education, while subject-based approaches such as through SPHE and CSPE were acknowledged as important, it was noted that there is a tendency for these subjects to have a low status within the curriculum. This finding echoes research on the implementation of both SPHE and CSPE in Ireland which has highlighted challenges connected with the low status accorded to these subjects (Nic Gabhainn, O'Higgins & Barry, 2010; Redmond & Butler, 2003). It is also notable that lesson-based programmes promoting empathy and related values were found to be of mixed efficacy within the education system. In particular, it was noted that they may be delivered somewhat passively as 'content' or (somewhat by contrast) isolated with a single passionate teacher. It was also found that teachers are sometimes uncomfortable using active learning methodologies or feel that such methodologies may not be suitable with particular classes (Devine, Fahy & McGillicuddy, 2013).

Perhaps the most significant challenge noted in a school setting is the pressure to deliver the prescribed exam-focused curriculum under which teachers work, leaving little room for SEL. In particular, the lack of any social and emotional learning during the exam-focused senior cycle emerged as a significant challenge

to promoting values at present. It was also noted that SEL tends to devolve onto a small group of committed and interested teachers on a school staff and that achieving whole-staff support can be difficult. The findings suggest that a major challenge in secondary schools relates to the school environment that develops in the context of students moving between multiple classes and teachers during a frenetic day, leaving little time for the development of supportive, empathic and caring teacher-student relationships. It is perhaps unsurprising in this context that respondents suggested that primary school is the most conducive setting for promoting values in schools. Recent changes at Junior Cycle level aim to ease some of this academic pressure and attend to students' social and emotional development, notably the introduction of the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (DES, 2015) and Wellbeing. Both of these change also encourage greater collaborative teaching efforts. While both developments were acknowledged by respondents, some doubts were expressed as to the implementation of Wellbeing. In the context of such challenges, this research suggests that teachers need to be convinced of the value, importance and relevance of SEL, in particular, that SEL will support them in meeting prescribed curricular outcomes and tackling classroom management and behavioural problems. One potential recommendation from this research is that policy-makers and educational bodies should disseminate knowledge on the inherent value of SEL for students and wider society to teachers and school managers, explaining how SEL meets the specific concerns of teachers and schools (e.g. reducing problem behaviours, improving academic achievement, teaching key skills as part of the curriculum). Programme-developers should likewise ensure that programmes align with existing curricular aims and outcomes and provide a rationale for why programmes address the specific needs of teachers and schools.

A related finding was that parents continue to put pressure on schools to achieve academic results for their children, suggesting the need to persuade parents of the relevance and importance of SEL as part of the children's formal education. Recently, policy has emphasised a partnership approach to education and the importance of parental involvement in children's education across both academic learning and wellbeing (DES, 2016a; DES, 2018). The findings in this study support the view that schools need to find practical methods of involving parents in their child's social and emotional development. Family/parental involvement in education and school-family partnerships have been promoted as part of the educational agenda in Ireland and internationally to further positive educational outcomes such as improved attendance, better grades and test scores, and higher school completion rates (Henderson & Mapp, 2002; Fan & Chen, 2001; Jeynes, 2005). While parental involvement and school-family partnerships have tended to focus on academic outcomes, research has also demonstrated positive outcomes in the socio-emotional and behavioural domains (Nokali, 2010; Hill et al., 2004). Furthermore, research evidence suggests that collaboration between schools and parents increases the effectiveness of school-based SEL interventions (Durlak et al., 2011). Researchers have called for increased familial involvement to promote SEL (Albright & Weissberg, 2010). The model of involvement between parents and schools should arguably be one of mutual two-way collaboration, in which both schools and parents acknowledge the importance of both home and school environments in developing and promoting socio-emotional skills and social values.

The lack of compulsory ITE and of adequately-resourced in-service teacher CPD on SEL was cited as an obstacle to promoting values in schools. This concern has been echoed internationally, for example in the United States where research has shown that the promotion of SEL competencies of teachers is given little emphasis in state-level teacher education programmes (Schonert-Reichl et al., 2015) and teachers report having had limited training in responding to students behavioural needs and supporting SEL targeted at positive mental health outcomes (Reinke et al., 2011; Walter et al., 2006; Koller et al., 2004). This current study therefore suggests the need for capacity-building in teachers in terms of embedding values education in ITE and providing CPD to in-service teachers to ensure that existing SEL policy will be reflected in practice, and that teachers are grounded in the relevant methodologies necessary to teach social and emotional skills and adopt whole school approaches to SEL. Embedding SEL in ITE could also potentially address a further concern raised in this research, that of the quality of programme implementation in schools. One method of encouraging engagement with SEL suggested by this research is to provide teachers with accreditation for on-

going teacher learning through engagement with SEL programmes. A process of accreditation for in-service teachers by the Teaching Council is underway through their framework, *Cósan* (Teaching Council, 2016), with implementation due to begin in 2020.

2.6 Limitations

Despite the implications of the research presented above, a number of limitations associated with this research should be outlined. Firstly, the current research was qualitative in nature and represents a small number of key informants. Generalisations about the validity of the findings therefore cannot be made and the importance of future qualitative studies must be acknowledged. Secondly, as informants came from a variety of professional domains, future research may benefit from investigating the opinions of a greater number of informants from one of these backgrounds e.g. teachers, youth workers or educational psychologists. In particular, as only two informants came from a youth work background, future research might target a fuller exploration of the perspectives of those working with young people in youth work settings. Also missing from the perspectives above are those involved with children and youth in other community settings e.g. sports clubs, libraries and arts and drama initiatives. It is also important to note that most respondents worked with secondary school-aged children and young people and that further research that examines values promotion in younger cohorts would be particularly beneficial. Thirdly, while interviews were chosen as the method of data collection, future research might benefit from conducting focus groups to encourage more dynamic discussions in which participants are challenged with a variety of viewpoints and experiences. Finally, future research would benefit from gaining the perspective of other informants who were discussed throughout the research on approaches to promoting empathy and social values, in particular, young people, parents and curriculum developers/policy makers.

2.7 Conclusion

This research provides relevant insights into the promotion of empathy and related values amongst children and young people in Ireland in a variety of settings. The research produced a number of interesting findings. In particular, the research study highlighted the need for values education across settings i.e. to adopt an ecological framework to values promotion. Further, the research recommended prioritizing whole school approaches that embed socio-emotional skills and values across the curriculum and the life of the school. The research also outlines the key challenges to promoting values, particularly those related to the school environment and the curriculum in secondary schools. However, further research is required to add support to the findings noted above and inform policy and practice on the promotion of empathy and related social values.
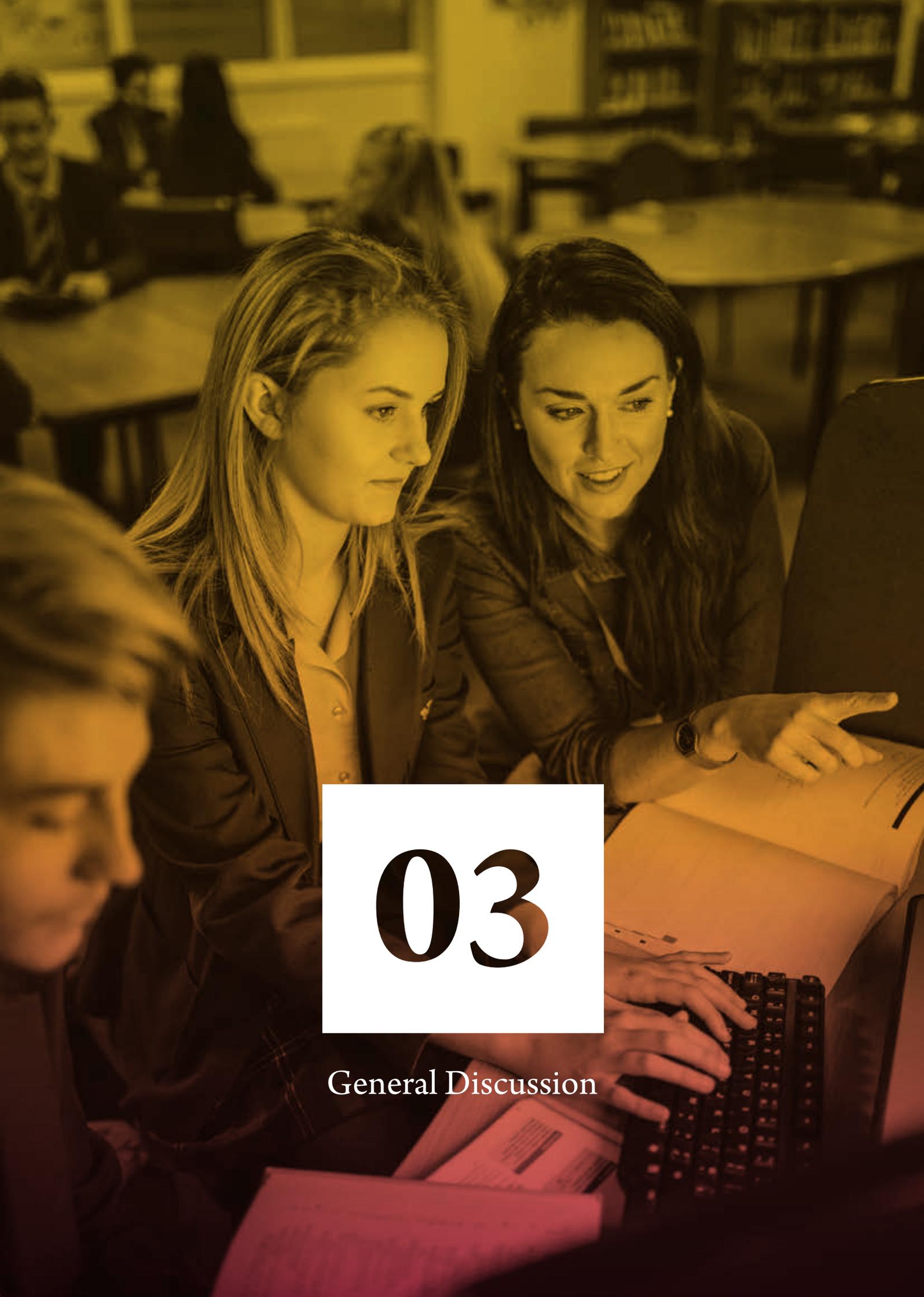
03

General Discussion

The Policy and Curriculum Review presented above examined how existing policy in Ireland supports the development and promotion of empathy and related prosocial values in young people while the Key Informant Study explored the views of professionals from a range of backgrounds on effective approaches to promoting empathy and social values in youth. Overall, both the Review and Key Informant Study suggest that the policy context in Ireland does support the delivery of SEL and the promotion of 'other-oriented' skills, values and behaviours like empathy, care, tolerance, social responsibility, prosocial responding and civic engagement. Both the Review and Key Informant Study outlined the wide range of potential approaches to promoting prosocial skills and values across a range of settings and as such, highlighted the opportunities for promoting values. However, both the Review and Study also helped to identify a number of significant challenges and obstacles to the effective promotion of these key skills, values and dispositions in children and young people. The discussion below expands on the issues that emerged from both the Policy and Curriculum Review and Key Informant Study under a number of headings.

A Socio-ecological approach to Promoting Empathy and Social Values

The Policy Review demonstrated that the promotion of prosocial skills and values is supported across settings, though the focus is on values promotion within the formal education system. This reflects both the central place of schooling in the lives of children and young people and the holistic aims of the school system to promote 'the moral, spiritual, social and personal development of students' (Government of Ireland, 1998). The Key Informant Study meanwhile pointed to the importance of parenting practices and youth work in promoting values and, furthermore, to the relevance of experiential learning, role modelling and relationship-building to developing prosocial skills and values i.e. to the importance of approaches which can be applied across formal, non-formal and informal learning.

Adopting approaches that traverse settings is supported by research, which has pointed to the range of contextual factors that influence the development of empathy and prosocial responding in young people, including family, school, peers, community, media, sports membership and culture (Silke et al., 2018; Davis, 2018; Zaki et al., 2014). It follows that policy-makers should adopt an approach that takes into account the myriad settings and factors that can be influenced by policy in order to promote empathy and related skills and values. This Report, in line with Report 1, therefore highlights the importance of adopting a policy perspective on the promotion of empathy and social values that is socio-ecological in nature, reflecting the fact that a child's socio-emotional development takes places within a relational context (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). A socio-ecological perspective would arguably require a more cohesive and coordinated approach to the promotion of prosocial skills and values than exists at present.

A Coordinated Approach to Promoting Empathy and Social Values

One key issue to emerge from both the Policy Review and Key Informant Study is the need for a coordinated approach to the promotion of prosocial skills and values across settings. One recommendation that might be made is therefore for an overarching policy framework on SEL which covers a diverse range of settings (home, school and community settings), approaches and age cohorts. An overarching policy would be aided by an inter-agency approach to SEL across settings, involving the establishment of a network or coordinating body which would provide a coherent approach to the promotion of empathy and related social values across settings. Such a body would ensure that policy and practice align; that adequate training is made available to practitioners; that teachers, youth workers, programme developers, NGOs and other relevant stakeholders work together; and that resources are invested and applied in the best possible way. This model of coordination exists at a smaller scale with regard to Development Education, where the Irish Development Education Association (IDEA) oversees the promotion of Development Education in Ireland across settings and age cohorts (Irish Development Education Association, 2018).

The need for further research

A coordinated approach to policy will however require further research evidence. While this report analysed policy and presented the views of a number of Key Informants, one important piece of outstanding research concerns the promotion of prosocial skills and values in practice across settings. Such research would involve an extensive 'mapping exercise' of SEL delivery in schools, youth work and community settings. For example, in schools, such research might examine how much time is given to the delivery of the SPHE curriculum and which components are emphasised; what lesson-based interventions are being delivered in schools; what kinds of whole school approaches are being adopted in schools and how are they implemented? Existing research that examines social and emotional outcomes has tended to focus on particular subjects, particular stages in the curriculum such as Transition year (Smyth et al., 2004; Jeffers, 2007; Clerkin, 2012), or particular outcomes such as mental health (Dowling & Barry, 2017). Equally relevant, given the importance of promoting values across settings is further research on the ways in which parents promote values and the promotion of values amongst youth in community settings through youth work, sports and arts organisations. Such research would enable policy-makers to reflect on how policy impacts practice and where the gaps in provision lie.

SEL and existential threats

Despite the increasing support for SEL evident in Irish policy and practice, it is worth noting that such support is neither secure nor guaranteed. In this regard, it is relevant to note the continued emphasis placed on academic achievement in the formal education sector, a view that emerged strongly from the Key Informant Study. The success of Ireland's education system is still largely judged according to the country's relative performance in international measurement initiatives, most obviously the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), a triennial international survey evaluating education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. PISA focuses on academic and cognitive skills such as maths, reading and science though in more recent cycles it has measured collaborative problem solving and in 2018 will measure global competence. The continued focus on academic results and cognitive skills, and their measurement, represents a potential threat to the place of SEL in formal education.

As an illustrative example, Clerkin (2018) has outlined how, in the aftermath of the PISA results in 2009 and 2012, Transition Year, an important space for personal and social development in second level education, was criticised in the media as damaging students' maths and reading ability. Moreover, during the recent economic downturn, the abolition of Transition Year was advocated on cost-saving grounds (Clerkin, 2018). It is also noteworthy in this regard that the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People, 2011–2020* (DES, 2011) states that 'the curriculum cannot include everything that might be desirable'. The Strategy describes literacy and numeracy as 'core skills' that need to be safeguarded (DES, 2011: 44). The *Strategy*, which was published in the context of an economic recession, noted that 'difficult choices have to be made. We will have to ensure the most efficient use possible of available resources and in many instances re-prioritise spending away from desirable but ultimately less important activities' (DES, 2011: 15). The points made above illustrate the vulnerability of spaces within formal education for personal development, even those like Transition Year, which have been part of the educational landscape for decades.

The place of other-oriented skills and values

Finally, this report has raised the question of which skills and values are emphasised in Irish SEL policy and practice, and whether 'other-oriented' skills and values are targeted to the same degree as self-oriented skills. The Policy Review noted that high-level educational policy emphasises education to meet the skills needs of the workforce, while it was also suggested that policy tends to emphasise personal skills such as resilience over other-centred skills like empathy. The Key Informant Study highlighted a related concern that the expression of prosocial attitudes and behaviours are frustrated or discouraged by prevailing social norms that encourage opposing values such as individualism, competition and aggression. Such concerns tap into a broader debate

about the aims of SEL within liberal and neo-liberal conceptions of the role of education (Lynch, Lyons & Cantillon, 2007). While the increasing emphasis on Emotional Intelligence and SEL in education can be seen as countering the emphasis on academic skills, examination results and education for economic labour, and while it is possible to view SEL as a progressive and even radical development within education, it is important to note that SEL is often described and indeed justified in terms of its capacity to enhance students' academic achievement and to create workers equipped for the uncertainties of the future economy (OECD, 2015; World Economic Forum, 2016). While such aims are rational responses to the rise of AI and the automation of processes of production, they suggest that SEL sits comfortably within traditional neo-liberal views of education. SEL, which is often referred to as '21st century skills', can at times appear as part of an effort to create an efficient workforce for the future of global capitalism, rather than to embed other-oriented skills and values of empathy, care, social responsibility and civic engagement for the greater social good.

Conclusion

This report examined the development and promotion of empathy and positive social values in young people with the aim of informing the development of policy interventions in the areas of education and child and youth development. It presented a Policy and Curriculum Review and a Key Informant Study that focused on how empathy and related 'other-oriented' skills, values and behaviours such as social responsibility and civic engagement are promoted in children and young people in Ireland.

It is hoped that this report points the way to further relevant research on youth empathy and social values and offers relevant information for policy-makers and practitioners across settings given the critical importance of promoting values in children and young people for the future of society.

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