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# **CHILDREN'S GLOBAL THINKING**

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**Research Investigating the Engagement of  
Seven- to Nine-Year-Old Children With Critical  
Literacy and Global Citizenship Education**

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# **1 Introduction**

## **1.1 Research Focus**

This focus of this research is two-fold. Firstly, it investigates how children aged seven to nine years conceptualise global and justice issues. Secondly, it explores children's engagement with critical literacy strategies as part of a global citizenship education programme.

This research project is undertaken with the intention of providing an empirical basis to support the development of pedagogy integrating global citizenship education into different curriculum areas.

## **1.2 The Partnership**

This research is undertaken by Education for a Just World, a partnership between Trócaire and the Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (the College). The Partnership, formally launched in 2011, arises out of the Partners' mutual understanding of and commitment to global citizenship education. It brings together the College's expertise in education with Trócaire's significant development work around the world. The Partnership works to support global citizenship education, in Ireland and elsewhere, by undertaking relevant research, developing teaching resources and providing teacher professional development, at both pre-service and in-service level.

### **1.2.1 Trócaire**

Established in 1973, Trócaire is one of Ireland's largest development non-governmental organisations. Committed to supporting long-term development projects in the poorest countries and to responding in times of humanitarian crises, Trócaire recognises that tackling global inequalities also demands building public commitment to global justice. Development education is a core part of this work. Trócaire's development education unit currently engages in developing education programmes, working with early childhood, primary, post-primary and third level educators to support the incorporation of global and justice perspectives. These education programmes are influenced both by the global context in which Trócaire works and by the educational opportunities with which it engages in Ireland.

### **1.2.2 The Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education, St Patrick's College**

St Patrick's College, Drumcondra is a college of Dublin City University, specialising in teacher education at primary level. The importance of global, human rights and intercultural perspectives in education is well recognised in the College. These perspectives are integrated into courses across subject and discipline areas as well as being explored more deeply in discrete compulsory courses forming part of the Col-

lege education programmes. Since 2007, all education students at the College have participated in dedicated courses in global citizenship education, and their visibility in the education programmes continues to grow and develop. This has resulted in an increased interest amongst students in global education, and has created a demand for support and materials to explore these concepts in the classroom. The College's Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education (CHRCE) was set up in 2004, bringing together lecturers from across the College with an interest and expertise in this area. The Centre aims to develop and disseminate examples of excellence in the field of human rights and citizenship education. It serves as a focal point for the critique of policy and for the creation, evaluation, exchange and dissemination of information and resources.

### **1.3 Background to the Research**

The project builds on the previous work of the Partnership. In 2009–2010 the Partnership undertook research into young children's engagement with issues of global justice. Recognising a dearth of literature in this area, the Partnership conducted a qualitative study, in pre-school and infant classes, soliciting children's conceptions of poverty, fairness and the wider world. The research found that the children in the study demonstrated emergent understandings of poverty and fairness. They showed altruistic tendencies and were capable of seeing things from others' perspectives. Perhaps most strikingly, the research evidenced the dominance of stereotypes in children's conceptions of Africa, with children as young as three making associations between Africa and poverty. The report *Young Children's Engagement with Issues of Global Justice* (Ruane, Kavanagh, Waldron, Dillon, Casey, Maunsell & Prunty, 2010) documents this research project.

Arising from this research the Partnership developed a story-sack resource called *Just Children* which included resources and suggestions for integrating global citizenship education into early childhood education. Professional development at both pre-service and in-service level was delivered to support educators in their use of the programme, and the resource continues to be widely drawn on.

### **1.4 The Critical Literacy Focus**

Where the Partnership's research in early childhood education (Ruane et al., 2010) looked at strategies for supporting global citizenship education with young children, this research focuses specifically on the possibilities for integrating literacy and critical literacy into global citizenship education. The decision to focus this research on literacy and critical literacy within a global citizenship context arises from a number of factors.

The publication of the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy* in 2011 pinpointed literacy as a national educational priority. Furthermore, it affirmed an understanding of literacy to encompass critical approaches:

Traditionally we have thought about literacy as the skills of reading and writing; but today our understanding of literacy encompasses much more than that. Literacy includes the capacity to read, understand and critically appreciate various forms of communication including spoken language, printed text, broadcast media, and digital media. (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p.8)

The study also calls for approaches to literacy which support high order thinking and integrate literacy education across the curriculum. The priority given to literacy was reflected too in the findings of the *Growing Up in Ireland* study, where teachers were reported to dedicate more time to English than any other curriculum area (Growing Up in Ireland, 2009).

The prevalence of stereotypes amongst young children found in the Partnership's study of young children suggests the importance of supporting children's critical responses to global images. Furthermore, the success of the *Just Children* story-sack, following the 2011 research, indicates the possibility for using story, reading and writing activities in global citizenship education. Children's increasing access to information from a multitude of sources (McCoy, Quail & Smyth, 2012) makes their global connections and global learning ever more pervasive, possible and important and so increases the need for children to be discerning of the information and messages they receive.

Critical literacy is well recognised as a key skill in global citizenship education. Its importance here is reaffirmed by research documenting the extent of children's access to information (McCoy, Quail & Smyth, 2012) and the dominance of stereotypes (Ruane et al. 2010). The current focus on literacy, and within that focus critical literacy, endorses the exploration of strategies which integrate it with global citizenship education.



## 2 Literature Review

This review looks at the literature pertaining to three areas of study identified as relating to the research focus. Firstly, it considers the research in global citizenship education, its theory and practice. Secondly, it looks at research in critical literacy. Finally, it considers the literature relating to seven- to nine-year-olds' understandings of global justice issues.

### 2.1 Global Citizenship Education

#### 2.1.1 What is Global Citizenship Education?

While definitions of global citizenship education<sup>1</sup> vary there is broad consensus that it is concerned with global issues, supports understanding of the causes and consequences of injustice and inequality in the world, and encourages action to effect social change (Krause, 2010; Bryan, Clarke & Drudy, 2009; Fiedler, Gill, O'Neill & Pérez Piñán 2008; Davies, 2006; Oxfam, 1997). As an educational discipline, it is concerned, not just with knowledge, but with attitudes and values, skills and capabilities, behaviour, experiences and action (Regan, 2006). Amongst the skills regarded as core to global citizenship education are critical-thinking skills such as self-reflection, questioning, perspective consciousness and analysis, while attitudes to be promoted include a commitment to equality, democracy, human rights and sustainability (Krause, 2010; Bryan, 2008; Fielder et al., 2008; Davies, 2006; Regan, 2006; Andreotti, 2006).

Despite this broad consensus, differences in approaches to global citizenship education have been identified along multiple frameworks. Arthur and Davison (2000) differentiate between active and passive approaches. According to them, a passive or informative approach is concerned with the reproduction of historical and factual knowledge in the teaching and learning of global issues, while an active or participative approach encourages children to take ownership of their own learning. According to Arthur and Davidson, an informative approach develops the knowledge and skills required for children to participate in Western-style democracy. The active approach, on the other hand, "empowers individuals by developing levels of criticality in order that they might question, critique, debate, and even take leadership in proposing alternative models of structures" (Arthur and Davidson, 2000, p.11). Valuing process as well as outcomes, the democratic pedagogies of the active approach are seen as preferential to the passive and informative ones (Howe and Covell, 2010). Supporting child empowerment and responsibility, these interactive pedagogies are philosophically consistent with, as well as effective for, the delivery of Global Citizenship Education. On the other hand, informative approaches maintain teacher-

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<sup>1</sup> For the purposes of this report, the term Global Citizenship Education is used to be synonymous with other terms, including "global education" or "development education", the "global dimension" and "global justice education".

learner hierarchies and suggest that knowledge is objective rather than problematic (Fiedler et al., 2008; Regan, 2006).

Andreotti (2006) also differentiates between different approaches to global citizenship education. Analysing both the pedagogies and the theoretical perspectives adopted, she distinguishes between "soft" and "critical" approaches. Soft approaches she categorises as those that focus on respect for cultural differences, explore the consequences of poverty and promote global solidarity. These approaches appeal to the learner's humanitarian principles and present poverty as a lack to which we are morally obliged to respond. Critical approaches, on the other hand, highlight the importance of a post-colonial framework in exploring development issues (Bryan, 2008; Andreotti, 2006). Notions of power, voice and difference are central, in particular the asymmetrical power relations between the North and the South, whereby the North has dominance and "globalising" powers in comparison to the subordinate "globalised" nature of the South (Andreotti, 2006). A critical approach calls on learners to "recognise oneself as implicated in the social forces that create the climate of obstacles the other must confront" (Boler, 1997, p.257). Developing an understanding of responsibility "towards" the other, along with accountability, as opposed to responsibility "for" the other, along with empathy, is an underlying theme in critical approaches to global citizenship education (Andreotti, 2006, p.47).

These differing theoretical perspectives give rise to different pedagogical approaches. Spivak (2004, cited in Andreotti, 2006, p.45) states that in order to change this tendency to a global inequality perspective, educational approaches need to emphasise "unlearning" and "learning from below", so that traditional values, beliefs and myths of the supremacy of the global North may be challenged. In this way, new critical perspectives emerge through reflexivity and open dialogue (Andreotti, 2006). Critical approaches therefore prioritise open self-reflection and dialogue, establishing political and ethical grounds for action.

### **2.1.2 The influence of childhood discourses on global citizenship education**

Changing conceptions of childhood have considerably influenced approaches to and the implementation of global citizenship education at school level. Traditional discourses position children as the property of their parents, only acquiring rights and citizenship status on reaching adulthood. These discourses shifted, both nationally and internationally, from the 1960s onwards (Devine, 1999). A discourse based on the fulfilment of children's "needs" came to the fore, and normative prescriptions of childhood in terms of adult-oriented goals prevailed (Devine, 1999, 2003 and Smith, 2007).

This "needs" discourse in regard to children has had a significant impact on policy and practice relative to education and child citizenship. Devine (2002) found that in the primary school context children were positioned as passive subordinates relative to the dominant adult group, and that this had negative implications for their experiences of citizenship. Being denied crucial elements of citizenship, including responsi-

bility and accountability, children's conceptions of themselves as citizens, both now and in the future, were compromised. Robinson and Díaz (2009) found that paternalistic and needs discourses in relation to children have a significant impact on educators' perceptions of "children's experiences and understandings of diversity, difference and social inequalities" (p.171). Their research indicated that educators deemed social, economic and political events impacting on children's lives to be "developmentally inappropriate" for and irrelevant to children (Robinson and Diaz, 2009, p.7). Howe and Covell (2010) and Lundy (2007) also argue that lingering myths regarding children and childhood are responsible for a reluctance amongst teachers to engage children in global citizenship and human rights education. They maintain that many teachers believe children to lack the maturity and competencies necessary to exercise their rights appropriately and voice their opinions competently (Howe & Covell, 2010; Lundy, 2007; Fielding, 2001).

With the introduction of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), and postmodernist/poststructuralist conceptions of childhood and children, a second shift in discourses has emerged, namely from children's needs to children's rights. Within this emergent rights discourse, children are positioned as social actors with voice and agency; they are viewed as persons in their own right and participants in the construction of multiple possibilities of childhood (Smith, 2007). Socio-cultural factors and issues of gender, sexuality, race, class, (dis)ability and ethnicity are considered significant influences on children's experiences (James & Prout, 1997; Devine, 2003) and their construction of themselves as global citizens. Robinson and Díaz (2009) contend that, as active reflective agents, children "are acutely aware of the normalising discourses that operate in society and actively regulate and police their own behaviours and those of others according to these social norms" (p.7).

Robinson and Díaz (2009) also highlight the impact of new technologies on children's citizenship. The proliferation and pervasiveness of new media technologies gives children "access to adult information and adult worlds" (p. 9), thereby increasing children's access to and sources of information, enabling and widening their capacities in dealing with real-life social justice issues. As Ruane et al. (2010a) argue, globalisation has resulted in children's interconnectedness, undermining discourses of childhood innocence and naivety (p.12).

The shift from a paternalistic to a rights discourse in relation to children is evidenced in Ireland by the ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991, and policy changes which have emerged as a result, such as the National Children's Strategy (2000). The Primary School Curriculum (NCCA and DES, 1999), with its emphasis on child-centred and active and participatory approaches, also acknowledges the child as an active agent in his/her own right. Furthermore, the inclusion of Social, Personal and Health Education in the primary curriculum provides space and structure for citizenship and global justice in primary education. However, despite these developments, considerable research points to the continued existence of paternalistic discourses in relation to children, and the lack of active participation by children in school practice (Waldron et al., 2011; Cosgrove, Gilleece & Shiel, 2011; Kilkelly et al., 2004; Allan & L'Anson, 2004; Devine, 2002). These contra-

dictions raise challenges to achieving citizenship in schools and delivering critical global citizenship education.

### **2.1.3 Current practice and approaches to global citizenship education in Ireland**

In 2002, Kenny and O'Malley reported on the status of development education in the formal sectors in Ireland. The report argued that there was little evidence to suggest that development education was considered as an integral part of children's educational experiences. Three years later the outlook appeared more positive, with Honan (2005) claiming that development education had "come in from the cold" and had overcome its former status as a marginal "tag on" to the curriculum (Honan, 2005, p.20).

Niens and Reilly (2010), in their report entitled *The Global Dimension: School Approaches, Teaching and Learning in Northern Ireland*, offer a range of insights into global citizenship education within primary and post-primary schools in a Northern Ireland context. This wide-ranging study incorporated the perspectives of both teachers and children in an attempt to document understandings and attitudes to the global dimension in schools, as well as the extent to which children learn about global issues. Niens and Reilly (2010) found evidence to suggest that while support for global citizenship education is high, barriers to effective teaching and learning exist. The presence of development education in the classroom and in the curriculum appears to be largely dependent upon the capacity and willingness of teachers to incorporate it, and this is further dependent on support from the whole school structure and ethos. Furthermore, teachers' subject knowledge and confidence was found to be limited, presenting further challenges (Niens & Reilly, 2010). The teachers in Niens and Reilly's (2010) study raised concerns over the perceived pessimistic or challenging worldviews presented in approaches to global citizenship education as further obstacles and as potential factors in upsetting parents who may have divergent opinions.

Their findings in regard to challenges to the delivery of global citizenship education are supported by other studies, both nationally and internationally (Bracken & Bryan, 2010; Gleeson, King, O'Driscoll & Tormey, 2007). A number of studies have suggested that teachers tend to feel ill-equipped in terms of resources, knowledge and expertise in translating their own positive attitude toward to global citizenship education into classroom practice (Holden & Hicks, 2007; Clarke & Drudy, 2006; Davies, 2006; Waldron et al., 2011). Dillon and O'Shea (2009) found that recently qualified primary teachers in the Republic of Ireland, identified a lack of teaching resources; an over-crowded curriculum and time constraints as significant limitations to their incorporation of global dimensions in their teaching. These findings highlight teachers' lack of confidence and support as challenges to the successful delivery of global citizenship Education, particularly at primary level.

In terms of the approaches most often adopted by schools to global citizenship education, a number of studies (Bryan & Bracken, 2011; Niens & Reilly, 2010; Smith, 2004; Waldron et al., 2011; Waldron, 2004) indicate the prevalence of a charity

model of development, in which children are encouraged to value charity toward the world's poor rather than critique global justice issues. Niens and Reilly's (2010) study for example found that primary school pupils tended to have a limited understanding of interdependence and how their own behaviours may potentially impact on others and other parts of the world. Fiedler, Bryan and Bracken (2011) highlight the limited evidence of critical thinking amongst children, and the dominance of stereotypes and Western or Eurocentric assumptions and understandings of development. On the basis of a meta-analysis of development education research, Fielder, Bryan and Bracken claim that there is a clear need "for spaces within formal education settings at all levels where students can critically engage with the complexities of underdevelopment and the structural factors relating to interactions between majority and minority contexts" (2011, p.72).

## **2.2 Critical Literacy Education**

### **2.2.1 Literacy Education Context**

Extensive research centres on literacy education. Two opposing views have dominated the debate in terms of effective methods for teaching literacy: a whole language approach to reading (top-down model) and a skills-based approach (bottom-up model). Whole language approaches emphasise the natural development of literacy competence through immersion in real literature and daily reading and writing sessions. A skills-based approach is based on the premise that written language is learned through teacher-directed lessons and practised as discrete skills that are taught sequentially.

In recent years the call for an either/or approach to reading instruction has eased, and researchers now advocate a balanced literacy approach (Kennedy, 2009; Pressley, 1998; Pearson & Raphael, 2003). Reading comprehension instruction has emerged as a key focus within the balanced literacy framework (National Reading Panel, 2000; Taylor, Pearson, Clarke & Walpole, 2000). Current thinking suggests that we should incorporate comprehension at a deeper level and guide children to think beyond the printed text, to understand from a critical perspective. Critical literacy is advocated by several researchers as an essential element of effective literacy instruction (Comber & Nixon, 2011; Harrison, 2007; Taylor, Pressley & Pearson, 2000).

### **2.2.2 What is critical literacy?**

Research provides us with analysis of critical literacy but falls short of defining it with a generic or simplistic term. This highlights the complexity and variety of critical literacy practice. As McLaughlin and DeVogd (2004) suggest, it is a discipline which has emerged through practice rather than prescription. Taking place in diverse settings, it resists a "one size fits all" formula (O'Brien, 2001; Andreotti, 2006).

While a singular definition of critical literacy may not exist, there is considerable research identifying key aspects of its practice. Comber (2001a, 2001b) sets out some core dynamic principles of critical literacy pedagogical practices. She states that criti-

cal literacy engages with and subverts power structures, in that it analyses language to reveal power relationships and examines how power is used and by whom. To Comber it is engaged with local realities, using and redesigning texts for political and social intent and focussing on students' use of local cultural texts. It seeks to subvert taken-for-granted "school" texts and mobilise students' knowledge and practices.

She acknowledges the need for increased research to capture the multi-layered realities of critical literacy instruction contexts. However, based on current research and existing documentation of classroom practices, she identifies emergent themes which provide a useful analytical framework, namely the teacher's role, the child's role, the texts used and the importance of a critical discourse.

### **2.2.3 The role of the teacher in critical literacy education**

There is considerable unity in the research as to the teacher's role in relation to critical literacy work, that being the role of a mentor, facilitator, mediator or guide, as opposed to an authoritative source of knowledge (Kempe, 2001; Comber, 2001a; Vasquez, 2001; Fain, 2008). Sahni (2001) summarised her role as teacher as: providing a model, addressing questions, soliciting and making suggestions, providing texts, listening to, responding to and collaborating with the children as evaluator and sharing competencies with them to lead them to higher competencies. According to her, critical literacy involves a partnership between the teacher and the children. It requires a power shift to create a social setting grounded in equality.

Critical literacy, it is suggested can prove challenging for the teachers in that it destabilises usual classroom order and involves the uncertainty of openendedness (O'Brien, 2001; McLaughlin and DeVoogd, 2004). Damico (2012) advises the teacher adopt an open reflective stance and create a classroom space for children to pose and pursue questions and postulate theories. It is recommended that the critical literacy curriculum is negotiated with the children (Vasquez, 2001); that it is developed with their social realities in mind (Dyson, 2001), and that it is responsive to the particular needs of the children (Sahni, 2001). O'Brien (2001) deduces that critical literacy instruction is a difficult discipline for teachers, as there is no formula, set answers or guaranteed results. Comber (2001a) advises teachers to assemble their own theoretical, research and pedagogical repertoires over time, which should respond to changing times and circumstances. In doing so, she reflects Freire's assertion that "it is impossible to export pedagogical practices without reinventing them" (1998, p.xi). She recommends that teachers should adapt critical literacy approaches and methodologies that best fit their instructional goals and classroom settings, to make learning more applicable, meaningful and authentic.

### **2.2.4 The role of the reader in critical literacy education**

Prior to the 1970s, reading comprehension was perceived as largely a passive process, limiting the role of the reader and empowering the author (Tovey, 1976; Roehler & Duffy, 1984). However, theories such as Kintsch and Van Dijk's Representational Theory (1978) and Anderson and Pearson's Schema Theory (1984) later emerged, and the view of reading comprehension changed from being a passive to an active,

intentional process. Durkin, cited in the National Reading Panel (2000), notes that reading comprehension must be viewed as a strategic thinking process.

The reader's role is crucial in critical literacy (Green, 2001; Comber, 2001a, 2001b). Here, readers are viewed as active participants in the reading process and invited to move beyond passively accepting the texts' messages, to questioning, examining, or disputing the power relations that exist between readers and authors (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004).

Critical literacy is seen to acknowledge and analyse the pivotal role played by a reader's prior knowledge in the reading process (Cambourne, 2002; Green, 2001; Comber, 2001a, 2001b). To this extent it draws on the works of leading educational and literacy theorists. Bruner (1983) advises using children's prior knowledge as a starting point for all learning, stating that children learn as they participate in the recurrent practices of everyday life. Freire applied this ideology to literacy in *The importance of the Act of Reading* (1983), where he noted that reading is much more than decoding language, it is preceded with and intertwined with knowledge of the world. Rosenblatt's Transactional Theory (1978, 1994) supports context as a factor in reading comprehension. She suggests that readers' personal experiences shape their understandings of texts read, resulting in a unique personal interpretation. Her analysis of an aesthetic-efferent continuum (1994) suggests that readers' transactions with texts can be placed on a continuum from an emotional engagement for pleasure ("aesthetic") to seeking factual meaning ("efferent"). She notes that no reading experience is purely aesthetic or purely efferent, but readers continually choose which way to interpret and engage with the text being read.

Cambourne (2002), drawing on social constructivist theory, notes three main principles concerning the process of reading from a critical literacy perspective: that learning cannot be separated from context; that the learner's goal is central to what is learned; and that knowledge and meaning are socially constructed through negotiation, evaluation and transformation. In this sense Cambourne reflects Vygotsky's (1978) notion of thinking and learning as contextualised social practices, and highlights the individualistic experience of reading.

Damico (2012) maintains that reading from a critical perspective requires "reader reflexivity", an awareness of one's own values, bias and experiences as reader. Freebody and Luke (1990) encourage readers to act as textual critiques, whereby they employ a healthy scepticism toward texts, aware that texts are not neutral or unbiased. The centrality of the reader, and the importance afforded to both context and prior knowledge, lends itself to a child-centred approach to literacy.

The notions of power, voice and difference are pivotal for critical literacy, as it is based on the premise that all knowledge is partial and incomplete, constructed in our contexts, cultures and experiences. Andreotti (2006) advises that critical literacy affords readers the space to analyse their own and others' unique contexts and reflect on the implications of this on our thinking, beliefs and assumptions. Readers are encouraged to become active questioners of texts, aware of the way texts are con-

structured and of how such constructions position the reader (Green, 2001; Kempe, 2001; Dyson, 2001). Freebody and Luke (1990) recommend readers taking on the multiple roles of code breaker, text participant, text user and text analyst to engage in successful critical reading. Readers are very much empowered in critical literacy. There are no right or wrong pre-meditated answers, children's voices matter and their personal responses are considered valid. O'Brien (2001), in her analysis of a critical literacy programme she conducted with children, referred to the "fascinating insights" in children's responses, as they paid "extraordinary attention to detail, bringing their own existing knowledge to the text" (p. 44). Research highlights the potential for critical literacy lessons to be enjoyable for children (Dyson, 2001). Sahni (2001) comments that the children she worked with were excited at having a voice that counted. These studies highlight the child-centred, liberating and individual character of critical literacy programmes.

### **2.2.5 Texts for critical literacy**

Using "real books" as opposed to books from a reading scheme emerges as a dominant recommendation for critical literacy instruction from the research (O'Brien, 2001; Sahni, 2001; Fain, 2008). This literature recommends the practice of multiple readings of multi-layered texts, giving children adequate time and space to respond.

Lewison, Flint and Van Sluys (2002) engaged in an extensive review of critical literacy and identified four dimensions to its practice: disrupting the commonplace; interrogating multiple viewpoints; focussing on socio-political issues; and taking action and promoting social justice. They advocate choosing books to support each of these dimensions, for example books, those which include different perspectives from "the norm" and could therefore challenge stereotypes and commonly held assumptions.

Damico (2012) refers to the incorporation of "risky stories" that convey difficult social issues to promote critical literacy goals. He suggests that these stories can open up curricular and learning spaces for readers to engage with particular subject matters. Such stories can promote conversations and inquiry-based discussions, serving to enable self-reflection. He does acknowledge however that using "risky stories" can pose a psychological and emotional risk, as children may be confronted with a diverse range of complicated thoughts and feelings. He concludes that some teachers may feel ill-equipped to facilitate the potentially complicated responses from children after reading such stories.

The use of multi-modal texts is also recommended for critical literacy practice (McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004; March, 2007; Xu, 2007). O'Brien (2001), for example, used a broad range of texts, including advertising catalogues, to address her critical literacy targets. Similarly Towson (1995) used both wordless texts (in the form of cartoon strips) and text/image combinations. Luke and Freebody (1997) summate that critical literacy encompasses a wide range of possible texts, with the focus on reading the chosen text to assess how it works, and positioning oneself with a critical stance.

### 2.2.6 Critical discourse analysis

Several studies focus on discourse analysis, highlighting its centrality to critical literacy (Fain, 2008; O'Brien, 2001; Sahni, 2001). Discourses are understood in this context to represent the ways in which reality is perceived and created using language, complex signs, facial gestures, practices and pictures, among other things (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). A key aspect of critical literacy education therefore is deconstructing discourses: destabilising and enabling critique of the ways in which reality is represented to us.

Luke (2000) suggests ways that critical discourse analysis can be included in classroom practice. He recommends that children should be encouraged to identify diverse and multiple voices in texts and dominant cultural discourses, and to problem-solve. He proposes that learners discuss whose interests a text serves, how texts attempt to position the reader, which characters are silenced or marginalised and what sources of power operate where a particular text is used. He also encourages teachers to use a broad range of texts from different cultures and institutions.

Roberts (1998) quotes Freire's belief that dialogue is central to the literacy process and asserts that it provides the best way of tapping into the unique world of each learner's knowledge and experience. Dialogue, Roberts states, provides the means for each learner to enter the literate world of the coordinator (teacher or author), and is therefore an empowering and inclusive practice which promotes critical comprehension and transformation of the learner's social world.

A number of educationalists highlight the challenges of engaging children in critical discourse analysis and propose strategies to meet these. Towlson (1995) refers to children as active language users, capable of holding complex and exciting discussions. She advises that children's reflective analytic vocabulary often needs to be developed, in order to facilitate their participation in appropriate discourse. Similarly, O'Brien (2001) finds that children often lack the necessary language for critical discussions. She recommends offering children a range of possible media to respond to texts including drawing or writing. Kempe (2001) found that some children were disconcerted by the open-ended nature of critical literacy. The fact that all responses are treated with respect and validity unsettled some learners, who expected a correct meaning of the text to be determined by the teacher or the text itself. McCormick-Calkins (2001) advises that daily book talks be included in classroom practice from the beginning of primary school and that these should be child-led rather than teacher-dominated. Ruddell (1994) and McIntyre (2007) refer to the importance of supporting the development of children's abilities to engage in critical discourse through the use of appropriate higher-order questions and through modelling analytic responses to text.

### 2.2.7 Critical literacy and global issues

Critical literacy is inextricably linked to social and global issues throughout the literature. Gee (2001) refers to critical literacy as "socially perceptive literacy". The notion of reading both the *word* and the *world* emerges continually (Andreotti, 2006; Xu,

2007; McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004). Freire (1983) emphasises that nobody can read the word without first having read the world. He asserts that incorporation of the written word and critical discourse in unison with re-reading of text can result in transformation. Critical literacy can be viewed as being a form of transformative, reflective social action in this light. It implies a conscious, practical, dialogic attempt to understand, challenge and change oppressive social structures. Freirean critical literacy involves both an awareness of one's own particular orientation towards the world and also a willingness to participate in the process of building and rebuilding one's society (Roberts, 1998).

The perception that critical literacy is a precursor to action is well endorsed. Kempe (2001) and Fain (2008) both assert that critical literacy entails readers becoming active contributors for change and improvement to social injustice across the world. Vasquez (2001) advises that issues of race, class, gender and fairness be incorporated into conversations in classrooms. She advocates incorporating a critical perspective into our everyday lives to support children in understanding the social issues around them. Similarly, Arthur and Davison (2000) highlight the merits of developing individuals' critical abilities so that they might be empowered to question, critique, debate and even take on leadership roles in proposing alternative models and structures.

Andreotti (2006), as discussed above, advocates for critical approaches which try to promote change without telling readers what they should think or do. For her these approaches promote ethical and responsible action by creating the space for readers to access knowledge in all its complexity and engage with and reflect on global issues.

### **2.3 Seven- to nine-year-olds' understandings of global justice issues**

#### **2.3.1 Perspectives on children's moral thinking and learning**

The developmental psychology of Piaget (1932) has had a profound influence on current pedagogy and has much to say about the thought processes needed for moral consciousness. Piaget asserted that morality is a developmental process limited by young children's cognitive capacities, and thus he devised a test to find out more about children's moral judgement and reasoning, although feelings and emotions were not examined by the test (Russell, 2007).

Piaget's moral stage theory consisted of two distinct stages, the *heteronomous* stage and the *co-operation and autonomy* stage. The first stage infers that the younger child, as a *moral realist*, focuses on the consequences of an act, and due to his/her egocentric nature is unable to sympathise with the protagonist. S/he is concerned only with rules and duties and obedience to authority figures. From the age of six, children move into the second stage of *moral subjectivism*. Moral subjectivists judge moral acts based on the intention of the protagonist rather than the consequences of the act itself (Mitchell & Ziegler, 2007).

Piaget's model has been heavily criticised for its focus on psychological structures of the mind which do not consider the socio-cultural context of the child. Conversely, Vygotsky expounded the significance of the social world in cognitive development and highlighted the role played by more competent partners in the acquisition of ideas and skills with the development of his theory on the *Zone of Proximal Development*. It is a theory "which accords significance to the communicative, cultural contexts in which learning takes place" (Mercer & Fisher, 1992, p. 126).

Kohlberg (1981) refined Piaget's moral stage theory further, and has been the most significant and controversial theorist of moral thinking since the 1960s (Russell, 2007). Heavily influenced by Piagetian theory, he devised a more elaborate three-level, six-stage theory of moral reasoning which reflects Piaget's theory of cognitive development and, similar to Piaget, composed stories portraying moral dilemmas.

In Kohlberg's *pre-conventional stages* (1 and 2), the behaviour of the moral thinker is defined by the fear of negative consequence or reward. In the *conventional stages* (3 and 4), the conventions of one's society come into play and behaviour is determined by the expectations of the family or local community. Finally, in the *post-conventional stages* (5 and 6), one moves beyond societal or cultural conventions to develop abstract notions of justice, with the rights of others taking precedence over obedience to rules.

Criticism of Kohlberg's theory includes concern for its bias towards Western society and its failure to explain all facets of moral development with its focus on justice reasoning (Russell, 2007; Mitchell & Ziegler, 2007). Another significant criticism of his staged theory is its failure to acknowledge that children as young as four years of age are able to display various levels of moral reasoning (Williams & Williams 1970, cited in Russell, 2007).

Explorations and enhancements of traditional theoretical perspectives on how children think and learn have escalated significantly in recent years (Robinson & Jones Díaz, 2009; Ramsey, 2008). In a Polish study of the intellectual functioning of seven-year-olds, Uszyriska-Jarmoc (2005) examines the tendency of teachers to value analytical thinking over creative or practical thinking. Uszyriska-Jarmoc defines analytical thinking as that which aids the ability to memorise information, whereas creative thinking involves imagining, discovering and designing things. Practical abilities are defined as those which "are used to apply, utilise, implement and activate" (2005, p.672). The study supports findings which suggest a high degree of distinctiveness as well as mutuality between thinking types, and recommends that teachers support children's learning by constructing tasks which require all three types of thinking.

Children begin to develop an understanding that people with different past experiences will interpret things differently at about six to seven years of age (Lagattuta, Sayfan & Blattman, 2010). Lagattuta et al.'s study, conducted in the US, looks at four- to nine-year-olds' thinking about the impact of past experiences on people's interpretation of situations. The study concludes that six- to seven-year-olds (and to a lesser extent eight- to nine-year-olds) tend to over-extend the concept that people

with different past experiences will interpret situations differently, so that even where people should share similar ideas, the children in the study assumed they would not. This can be linked to more general findings that children tend to over-generalise principles they have just learned (Marcus, Pinker, Ullman, Hollander, Rosen & Xu, 1992; Pinker & Prince, 1998). The study suggests that it is necessary to examine children's understanding of when people should share common ground as well as exploring the development of their understanding of mental diversity.

Russell (2007) carried out an in-depth four-year study of a class of seven- to eight-year-old primary school children, which focused on the thinking skills and moral concepts children draw on to discuss a variety of complex issues including those of rights, justice, fairness and inclusiveness. Her study illuminates the "increasing competence of the children in a community of enquiry to reflect on moral issues, to engage each other, make reasoned judgements, justify their reasons, and change stance in light of opinions of others" (p.170). The study highlights the fact that more able pupils' scaffolding of others enables enhanced discussion, focus and advancement of the argument. This finding is thus consistent with Vygotsky's (1978) theory of the Zone of Proximal Development.

Russell's findings illustrate that children's ability to see a situation from another's perspective and to think outside the boundaries of rule-bound morality develops as they get older, as does their ability to reflect on their own thinking and beliefs. The findings also clearly elucidate the theory that seven- to eight-year-olds' notions of justice are hugely informed by "those who occupy positions of power" while "the locus of control was largely external" (p.175).

Most significantly perhaps, the study emphasises the need to foster creative, caring and critical young thinkers who are able to have concern for others and to take personal responsibility as global citizens of an ever-changing world. Coles (1997) endorses the potential of children to do so in his declaration that "elementary school children are not only capable of discerning between right and wrong, they are vastly interested in how to do so – it's a real passion for them" (p.105).

### **2.3.2 Perspectives on Children's Intergroup Attitudes**

The attitudes of children towards other groups are "complex and contradictory" (Ramsey, 2008, p.227). For example, in their study of eight- to ten-year-old children in mainly white schools, Troyner and Hatcher (1992, cited in Ramsey, 2008) concluded that the behaviour of children in intergroup relationships often did not reflect their explicit opinions. Similarly, Gash and Shine Thompson (2001) explain children's articulated ideas about "out-groups" as the way their "in-groups" expect them to think (p.1). Many researchers have expounded a variety of theories which seek to explain the complexity.

### **Cognitive-Developmental Theory**

Cognitive-developmental theory (CDT) (Aboud, 1988) contends that children's attitudes to other national, ethnic and racial groups are informed by their cognitive and socio-cognitive development. CDT is heavily influenced by Piagetian theory and proposes that up to the age of six to seven years, the egocentric nature of children ensures that they favour the in-group and exhibit strong prejudice against out-groups. Aboud argues that this prejudice is heavily reduced, however, between the ages of seven and eleven to twelve years, when the children begin to attribute more positive traits to the out-group and more negative traits to the in-group.

More recently however, Aboud (2008) has recognised the influence of socialisation on children's intergroup attitudes, predominantly children of an ethnic minority. Such children don't always exhibit the pronounced in-group bias in their intergroup interactions before the age of six to seven. She acknowledges the impact of the media, education and parental discourse on children's cognitive mindsets but argues that their impact is dependent on the children's own cognitive abilities.

CDT's assumption of a single pattern of development grounded in a common sequence of cognitive-developmental changes lacks a comprehensive justification for the inherent variety of developmental patterns in children's attitudes to out-groups throughout middle childhood (Barrett and Oppenheimer, 2011).

### **Social Identity Development Theory**

Recently, social identity development theory (SIDT) has been presented by Nesdale (2004, cited in Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011) which makes very different assertions to CDT regarding the development of children's intergroup attitudes. It predicts that there are four phases in the development of children's intergroup attitudes. Nesdale asserts that the first phase starts before the age of two to three, when children are unaware of cues regarding people's race, ethnicity and nationality. Such awareness is reported to appear in the second phase when children reach the age of three years, along with awareness that they are members of the in-group. SIDT claims that children reach the third phase at the age of four years, when they are likely to develop in-group bias, although this does not suggest that they dislike out-groups but rather favour the in-group. Finally, phase four commences from the age of seven years, when children are said to develop negative prejudice against out-groups as their focus moves outwards. However, Nesdale contends that not all children will enter phase four as it is dependent on their internalisation of prejudices held by members of the in-group.

CDT and SIDT are clearly polarised in their assumptions regarding the development of prejudice in children. SIDT does not support CDT's claim regarding the apparent reduction in prejudice towards out-groups during middle childhood. Nesdale, however, alleges that this perceived reduction is a result of children becoming more aware of social sensibilities regarding the expression of prejudice against out-groups and reflects explicit rather than implicit attitudes. Davis, Leman and Barrett (2007) reject this claim, however, in their study of the links between implicitly and explicitly measured ethnic intergroup attitudes in a group of black British and white English

children aged between five and nine years. They concluded that levels of implicit prejudice actually remain steady or decline after six or seven years rather than increasing, as SIDT would suggest.

### **Social Identity Theory and Societal-Social-Cognitive-Motivational Theory**

Unlike CDT and SIDT, social identity theory (SIT) does not make assumptions about the specific ages at which intergroup attitudes develop in children. SIT was developed by Tajfel (1978, cited in Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011), who held the view that an individual's self-concept is derived from perceived membership in a social group. Tajfel claimed that this perception prompts individuals to internalise more positive attitudes towards the in-group than out-groups, thereby providing a source of positive self-esteem.

Similarly, societal-social-cognitive-motivational theory (SSCMT), which was expounded by Barrett (2007) does not refer to any connection between age and the development of in-group bias and out-group discrimination. Unlike SIT, however, SSCMT does attempt to incorporate all the factors that influence children's intergroup attitudes within one comprehensive framework.

SSCMT acknowledges the role of the myriad sources of information available to children about other groups in the development of their intergroup attitudes. These sources include teacher, peer group and parental discourse and practices, education, the media and personal contact with members of other groups. As CDT and SIT propose, SSCMT acknowledges that the impact of these information sources is dependent on the child's cognitive and social identity processes (Barrett, 2007; Bartal & Teichman, 2005; Oppenheimer, 2010, cited in Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011). However, SSCMT goes further, to suggest that children's cognitive and social identity processes may be overridden by the specific contexts in which they live.

### **2.3.3 Children's sense of place**

Children have a natural desire and ability to learn about different places (Weldon, 2010). There is an array of research on children's acquisition of geographical knowledge of their own and other countries. Typically, children start to acquire knowledge of their own countries from the age of five (Barrett, 2005; Barrett, 2007), while knowledge of other countries increases significantly by about eight years. Such geographical knowledge is influenced by the mass media, television, foreign travel and school, while the child's social class, nationality, ethnicity and location impact further on their awareness of distant places (Bourchier, Barrett, & Lyons, 2002; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011).

In a study on children's understanding of distant places reported by Wiegand (2006), seven-year-olds in the UK were asked to write down the names of some countries that they had heard of. The majority of the children, however, mainly identified large land masses including Africa, America, Australia and India. Their knowledge of countries did develop as they grew older, but this knowledge was limited mainly to coun-

tries of Western Europe and didn't involve the countries of Africa or other parts of the South.

Scourfield, Dicks, Holland, Drakeford and Davies (2006) conducted a qualitative research study in Wales of eight- to eleven-year-olds' identification with place and space. They found that the children's knowledge of other countries differed greatly and was dependent on their own personal experiences, with some of the children of minority ethnic heritage having knowledge of countries they had visited themselves and with which they had strong family ties.

### **2.3.4 Children's formation of stereotypes**

A recent research study conducted by Exeter University and the Economic and Social Research Council in the UK looked at the impact of school partnerships between Britain and countries of the South on children's impressions of other cultures (Martin & Griffiths, 2012). They conclude that children develop negative stereotypes as a result of such partnerships and that the formation of these stereotypes is heavily influenced by the teacher's own view of the world.

Barrett and Oppenheimer (2011) claim that similar findings have been reported across a range of studies. They assert that children's national negative stereotypes are already formed by the age of five or six and developed throughout childhood until they form into strong beliefs by the age of ten or eleven years. However, while they acknowledge the influence of the teacher, they also identified other contributing factors, including the media, the curriculum, parent's own stereotypes and visits to other countries.

Weldon (2010) supports the study of distant places with young children in order to offset the possible acquisition of negative stereotypes of other cultures through advertising, family influences, and, as they get older, peer influences. She argues that children may develop negative stereotypes before they have any sound knowledge of the countries themselves and the people who live there. Picton (2008) conducted a pilot study on a secondary school in the UK on how teaching about Guatemala and the resources used impacted on the children's imaginings of Guatemala and its culture. He observes the essential role of teachers in critically engaging pupils with images of other places and equipping them with the skills they need to deconstruct and broaden perspectives, thereby challenging negative stereotypes.

The impact of the negative stereotypes held by others on the development of eight- to nine-year-olds' personal beliefs is challenged by research conducted in Australia by Augoustinos and Rosewarne (2001). Their study examined the responses of five- to six- and eight- to nine-year-old white children to white and black stimuli. Their studies showed that five- to six-year-olds' responses to black stimuli were largely consistent with their knowledge of pervasive stereotypes. Significantly however, eight- to nine-year-olds were considerably more capable of discerning between dominant cultural stereotypes and personal beliefs.

McKown and Strambler's (2009) US study of children aged five to eleven years reflects the findings of Augoustinos and Rosewarne, while acknowledging the role of parents in the development of cultural beliefs. They assert that children of this age "become able to infer others' stereotypes, they become knowledgeable about broadly held stereotypes and conversations with parents about race can promote the development of this new social understanding" (p.1656).

### **2.3.5 Children's conceptions of poverty**

By comparison with those of adults, studies of the perceptions of children about poverty are limited (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005). However, the existing research does indicate that children do think about the nature and causes of poverty. Leahy (1983, cited in Ramsey, 2008) conducted a research project in the United States on children aged six to adolescence on children's views of social class. The study showed that younger children up to the age of ten are more likely to describe wealth in concrete terms such as the type of home in which one lives.

Research undertaken by Chafel & Neitzel (2005) in the United States appraised young children's ideas about the nature, causes, justification and alleviation of poverty (sixty-four eight-year-old boys and girls from urban and rural settings, representing different races and socioeconomic status). The researchers found that many of the children had not yet internalised abounding adult norms and values about the poor, with significant numbers of children acknowledging factors other than the individual as causing poverty. The majority asserted the unfairness of poverty and economic inequality while suggesting that philanthropy or societal change is essential for the alleviation of poverty.

### **2.3.6 Children's constructions of power**

Similar to research pertaining to children's conceptions of poverty, there is a dearth of literature pertaining to children's constructions of power. However, the research recovered indicates that seven- to twelve-year-olds do have increasingly complex understandings of power in society as a whole. In an Australian qualitative study of twenty-seven children aged between five and twelve years, Howard and Gill (2000) utilised a developmental framework to examine children's constructions of power and politics. In their view, children's understanding of power, although mediated by society, cognitive ability, adults, etc., to a degree, is also informed by the power relationships in which they engage from the beginning.

The perception of power demonstrated by the younger children in the study suggests that their understanding of power is founded on themselves and their immediate context, while that of older children stretches to include familiar others and eventually unfamiliar institutions and locations outside of their own context. This model is in line with the theories expounded by traditional developmental theorists (for example Piaget and Kohlberg).

Howard and Gill's study concluded that for all children, power is organised hierarchically in the family, school and wider community, with older children more likely to

see power in terms of sharing fairly and to understand the role of rights and responsibilities in power systems. The study emphasised the importance of providing children with the space to examine, discuss and develop their emerging conceptions of power: “They need opportunities to consider issues about rights and responsibilities, fairness and justice and the mediation of competing claims” (p.377).

### **2.3.7 Children’s understanding of the environment**

While some recent research has been undertaken to investigate young people’s understanding of the environment, relatively little is understood about the way in which it is understood by children (Loughland et al., 2002). In their study, Loughland et al. conducted a phenomenographic analysis of Australian children’s understanding of the term “environment” (nine-, twelve-, fourteen- and seventeen-year-olds from seventy schools). The primary-aged children largely used nouns or lists to describe the environment, while the secondary students tended to use more sophisticated language. Despite the difference in language sophistication however, both groups appeared to have a similar understanding of the term “environment”. The study found that there were six distinct conceptions of the environment held across all age levels, from primary to second level education. These conceptions ranged from “the environment is a place” (p.192) to “interaction between nature and society” (p.195).

Aguirre-Bielschowsky, Freeman and Vass (2012) conducted a study of Mexican and New Zealand children’s conceptions of the environment. Their study also investigated children’s understanding of issues pertaining to the environment. Sixty-five city children aged nine to eleven were interviewed along with their teachers and school principals. The study concluded that while children from both countries understood the environment as nature, they rarely linked human or social causes to environmental problems. In both countries, children from schools with an environmental education programme were able to transfer the environmental skills and practices learned at school into their homes. It was found that the children involved in the study had limited access to nature, and while their personal experience of the local environment influenced their conception of the environment, its influence was further mediated by culture. Similar results were found for English primary school children by Barraza and Walford (2002).

It is clear from the above research that environmental education plays an essential role in enabling children to develop a deeper understanding of the environment, even at a young age, and in addressing the current environmental crisis globally. However, it also elucidates the need to provide children with more opportunities for contact with nature while engaging them in more meaningful environmental education lessons. Such lessons should encourage critical thinking and include emotional, social and active local and global dimensions (Scoffham, 2010).

### **2.3.8 Children’s sense of fairness and justice**

Kienbaum and Wilkening (2009) conducted a study involving children aged between six and nine years, as well as some adolescents, which explored the principles which children and young people rely on when allocating resources. The researchers

sought to ascertain whether the ability of older children to decide on resource allocation in more nuanced ways was due to increasing cognitive abilities or the development of values and principles related to fairness and justice between early childhood (six to seven years) and adolescence. The methodology required children to intuitively allocate candies to two children, differentiated in relation to need and effort put into previous tasks which were rewarded with candies.

While the findings were not conclusive, they indicated that need is the dominant value that children of early primary school age rely on when making distributive justice judgement, with effort gradually becoming more highly valued during childhood and into early adolescence. This contrasts sharply with the theories of Piaget and Denman, in that younger children were found in this study to have the ability to make cognitive distinctions based on need. This difference was ascribed to the different types of texts and tasks that were used as research tools in this study. The ability to integrate and interpret information and the ability to distinguish between different situational contexts also increases between childhood and adolescence.

## **3 Research Process**

### **3.1 Research Overview**

The focus of this research was to investigate seven- to nine-year-old children's engagement with global and justice issues. The research also aimed to identify teaching strategies which supported children's learning in critical literacy and literacy and global citizenship.

The research comprised a total of four visits to each of three middle-primary classes (a first, second and third class) in different schools in the Republic of Ireland. The visits involved a forty-five-minute whole class session followed by a fifteen- to twenty-minute small group session with four or five children. The purpose of the whole group sessions was to gather data on children's engagement with and pre-existing conceptions of global justice issues. The small group sessions also served to address this objective and utilised the same materials and approaches, but provided the researcher with the opportunity to pose further and deeper questions, asking children to justify their responses in a child-friendly and age-appropriate manner. This facilitated more complex responses from the children and allowed them time and space to work through their thinking and understandings of the issues.

The teacher of each class group was also asked to note any responses relating to the research topic and resources which might have arisen from the children in the days between each visit.

The field notes of the researchers and teachers also formed part of the data set. All activities were recorded using audio recording equipment for future transcription and analysis.

### **3.2 Site and Setting**

This research was conducted in three different primary school settings a first class, a second class and a third class, over a four-week period. Each setting was selected on the basis of its representation of children within the age range of seven to nine years old. Selection of settings was also based on achieving an even gender mix; in this regard setting 1 was a mixed school, serving both boys and girls, setting 2 an all-boys school and setting 3 an all-girls school. Setting 1 was multidenominational, under the patronage of Educate Together. Settings 2 and 3 were under Catholic patronage. Setting 1 was a school in an urban commuter belt which was until recently a rural town. This school has a large majority of children from ethnic minorities. Setting 1 was also a designated disadvantaged school under the Department of Education and Skills Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools Action Plan. Setting 2 was a suburban school with a diversity of socio-economic backgrounds. Setting 3 was an urban school with children also coming from a range of social-economic backgrounds.

Selection of participants was based on convenience or opportunistic sampling. Typically this involves researchers choosing the sample from those to whom they have easy access, and consequently the sample does not seek to generalise about the wider population (Cohen et al., 2007). Each school setting was selected on the basis of willingness to participate, age-relevant population (seven- to nine-year-olds), ensuring a diversity of school types, and the distribution of gender within the school.

### **3.3 Research Team**

The research team was made up of a lead researcher and three teacher co-researchers. All researchers were involved in designing the research process and structure and content of the school sessions. Two of the researchers were full-time teachers in school settings 1 and 2; however the participants were not their full-time class pupils. The third researcher was a teacher who was not working in the research setting at the time and was hence acting in a research-only role. Each of the teacher-researchers conducted the research in their allocated setting, with the lead researcher alternating between each setting.

### **3.4 Choosing a methodology**

#### **3.4.1 Paradigm**

Assumptions and understandings relating to the essence and nature of knowledge, as well as the basis, acquisition and communication of knowledge, determine the framework or paradigm within which research takes place (Cohen et al., 2007). Due to the conscious or subconscious influence of world views and ontological and epistemological assumptions on research processes, Lincoln and Guba (1989) call on researchers to make explicit the paradigm in which they are operating.

This research is grounded in an interpretive paradigm, which allows for insight into the complexity and constructed nature of human behaviour and knowledge. Within an interpretive paradigm, perceptions of lived experiences are social constructions of reality, which are fluid and relational (Cohen et al., 2007). The ontological assumption informing the interpretive paradigm is one where social reality and experience are viewed as products of subjective consciousness constructed cognitively, rather than viewing lived experience as an objective reality created in the external world and separated from cognition (Cohen et al., 2007). The epistemological assumptions of the research view knowledge as subjective and unique, constructed in social spaces, as opposed to viewing knowledge as objective and tangible (Cohen et al., 2007). This research is underpinned by these assumptions.

The inductive as opposed to deductive approach to research further places this research in an interpretive paradigm. In positivist paradigms, deductive approaches to the development of theory are espoused, whereby a researcher begins with a hypothesis to be tested, and based on the findings that hypothesis is either confirmed or rejected and the original theory revised accordingly (Bryman, 2008; Cohen et al., 2007). By contrast, an inductive approach to the construction or development of

theory is based on an interpretive paradigm, where research begins with a tentative question but has no hypothesis to test. The aim is that theory emerges from or is grounded in the data.

#### **3.4.2 Qualitative Research**

The interpretive paradigm informed the qualitative approach to this research, the aim being to gain a deep understanding of the experiences and perspectives of children with regard to global justice issues. The setting of the research, that of schools, is particularly suited to the qualitative approach. Cohen et al. (2007) describe school as a “messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions. It is multilayered and not easily susceptible to the atomization process inherent in much numerical research” (p.167). The qualitative approach allowed for an exploration into children’s engagement with and understandings of the issues as well as an examination of the multiple meanings and connections in the data (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative approaches allow for researchers to interact on a human level, face to face with participants, thus listening and responding to their experiences. It was this approach which facilitated the collection of rich and textual data.

#### **3.4.3 Participatory Research**

As well as its ontological and epistemological assumptions, this research was also underpinned by an ethical framework rooted in the conception of children as rights holders. Nutbrown and Clough (2009) have stressed that children should be afforded the right to be research participants rather than research subjects in order that their voices are heard and given due weight, as in accordance with Article 12 of the UNCRC. Connolly (2008) and Waldron (2006) argue that research with children should be premised on the recognition of children as socially competent, and strive for an emancipatory approach. The approach adopted in this research is participatory in that the research is conducted *with* rather than *on* children, striving to provide opportunities for children’s voices to be heard and for participation to be facilitated (Fielding, 2001; Waldron, 2006). The participatory approach to research with children complements the rights discourse taken by this research and the qualitative approach employed.

Participatory approaches demand openness, particularly openness to dialogue, openness to the complexity of experience and openness to the possibility of learning from others (Bergmark & Kostnius, 2009). This demand for openness informed the ethical considerations of the research; for example confidentiality, the multiplicity and individual nature of experience, and the choice of opting out were explained to participants in an effort to create an open environment, conducive to critical reflection and dialogue.

Facilitating children’s right to a voice is integral to participatory approaches and this was considered in the research design. Children’s right to a voice was explained and a discussion was held to stress the importance of voice in all matters relating to their lives, in particular to the research. In efforts to further children’s voice and participa-

tion in the research, efforts were made to involve them in data analysis during session 4 of the school visits. Morrow and Richards (1996) and Mitra (2001) warn that when children are not involved in the data analysis there is a tendency for adult researchers to translate "student speak" into adult words, which ultimately means that the integrity of the children's voices within the data is lost. Morrow and Richards suggest that children being involved in interpreting their own data may be "one step towards diminishing the ethical problems of imbalanced power relationships between researcher and researched" (1996, p.100).

The participatory and qualitative approach are married in their suitability to research with children, which according to Kostenius (2011) allows for deep and rich investigation into the subjective and open-ended experiences of children's realities.

### **3.5 Methods of Data Collection**

According to Greig et al. (2007, p.159), the Mosaic approach (Clark & Moss, 2001) to data collection acknowledges both the context and the child as co-constructors of meaning, thus appealing to the interpretive paradigm that informs this research. Furthermore, the approach embraces multiple types of data, and allows for flexibility and participation, thus demonstrating its suitability to qualitative research with children (Greig et al., 2007).

The Mosaic approach was developed by Clark and Moss, their aim being to "contribute to the development of services that are responsive to the 'voice of the child' and which recognise young children's competencies" (2001, p.2). The authors sought a framework for listening to children which is "multi-method, participatory, reflexive, adaptable, and focused on children's lived experiences" (Clark & Moss, 2001, p.5).

The data collection tools used in the Mosaic approach are called "listening tools", which are both visual and verbal. In this research, the "listening tools" consisted of photographs, discussions including reflections and interpretations, drawings with talk and text, and written stories.

### **3.6 Research Strategies**

The principle research strategy used was adult-child interaction through dialogue. This dialogue and discussion was largely teacher-led and occurred in the context of whole group discussions followed by small group discussions. The activities were designed to engage children, to give them choice over modes of expression, and to encourage their voices and opinions. Researcher questioning was key to the progress of each session and proved instrumental in gaining insights into children's responses. The research tools used were photographs, story and discussion and methods of data collection were through dialogue, drawing and writing.

#### **3.6.1 Photographs**

The photographs chosen for this research were selected specifically to: encompass a range of global locations and contexts; prompt discussion on local and global dimensions of justice issues; offer positive images of the developing world; appeal to children's sense of the familiar; allow children to identify similarities and differences between their lives and those of the children in the photographs; and provide stimulus for dialogue and critical thinking. A number of photographs were first selected, and these were piloted with a class. From this pilot, three photographs were chosen to be used in the research: a child under a tap in Burma, a Kenyan family eating their main meal of the day in their dining/ sitting room, and two boys running in an urban context in Guatemala.

The rationale behind using the photographs was their potential to engage children from the outset (Greig et al., 2007). It also allowed for flexibility on behalf of researchers in their presentation of themes and issues for enquiry.

#### **3.6.2 PowerPoint Story**

The PowerPoint story used in the research was one which was created by the researchers themselves in order to challenge children's thinking around global issues and test critical approaches to global citizenship education. The story was designed to appeal to children, encompassing familiar and simple features. The abstract and fictional context of the PowerPoint story, as a research tool, was intended to provide a safe environment within which to explore more complex and often emotive issues.

In terms of the aim of this research to explore children's engagement with global citizenship and themes related to justice, Anderson (2005) promotes teacher enquiry through the use of fictional texts, in order to promote thinking around issues related to citizenship and responsibility. Furthermore, the use of a fictional, invented story allowed for further flexibility in the design of the research tools.

The story itself encompassed nine slides and involved three characters: a red, a blue and a yellow person. The story is told first from the blue person's perspective. The story is then retold from the red person's perspective. Then the story is retold again, with both the blue and red person's perspective shown. The story was designed to be open to multiple interpretations (it used stick people and was therefore non-specific in terms of gender, location and age); to encapsulate different perspectives; and to be inconclusive and open to multiple endings. Furthermore, it was conceived to raise issues of wealth entitlement, resource exploitation and capitalism, environmental eco-systems and decision making. The story involves the blue person admiring the fruit on a tree, deciding to pick and sell the fruit to have money for his/her children and then offering to employ the red and/or yellow person. From the red person's perspective, they like the tree and the tree feeds the birds. The blue person has taken all the fruit and does not share the money or let others decide how the money is spent. They lament the loss of the birds once the fruit has gone.

### **3.6.3 Children's Drawings and Writing**

The rationale for using drawings lies in their suitability both to participatory research with children and to the Mosaic approach to data collection. Leitch and Mitchell (2007) describe how drawings can capture children's experiences in a more holistic way than written reflections or spoken word alone. Leitch claims that drawings have the potential to aid children in narrating "aspects of their consciously lived experience as well as uncovering the unrecognised, unacknowledged or 'unsayable' stories they hold" (2008, p.37). Leitch and Mitchell outline the essential rationale for using children's visual images as firstly to "enhance the breadth of data representation" and secondly to "reveal important insights unable to be elicited by more traditional verbal-oriented research methods" (2007, p.54).

The children were encouraged to add their own talk, text, labels or comments to their drawings. This ensured further descriptions and data within the drawings. According to Driessnack (2005, cited in Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009; Waldron, 2006) deficits exist in using drawings as a data collection tool when children's own words and interpretations of their drawing are not included. This led to the final stage of the data collection process, that of including children in the data analysis through their own and one another's interpretation of their drawings, which has been termed an "exhibition discussion" by Bergmark and Kostenius, (2009).

### **3.6.4 Exhibition Discussion**

An exhibition discussion provides an opportunity for children to interpret their own and each other's drawings. It creates an open space for dialogue, where the children's drawings are used as stimuli to gain deeper understandings and interpretations of their experiences and engagement with global and justice issues. (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009). The exhibition discussions provided children with further opportunities to put their own words and interpretations to their drawings and the drawings of others. Essentially what it entails is one child exhibiting their drawing and being prepared to be open to questioning, self-interpretation and reflection and interpretation by others. Children's input at this stage, facilitates their participation in the data analysis, they analyse and interpret their own and one another's drawings (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009).

## **3.7 Research Plan**

### **Week One**

The research process was explained to children and consent sought. The child's right to a voice was explained and discussed, modes of expression of voice and opinion were explored.

Each of three photographs were displayed one at a time; after looking at the first photograph the children were asked to identify what first came to mind when they looked at it. Questioning was used by the researcher to facilitate children in the development of a story line. Next the children were presented with the second photo-

graph, and following a whole class discussion they were asked to complete a story web themselves, with the question words Who? What? Where? When? Why? Feelings? The story web was used to scaffold the children's construction of a story. After the third photograph had been presented to the class and following a short discussion, the children were given a blank page and asked to write or draw what they thought may be happening in the photograph. Multiple modes of expression were encouraged and openness to multiple possibilities of a story line was emphasized.

Four to five children were selected from the whole class group to form a small group for further discussion and questioning. In an aim to maximize discussion, children were selected for the small group session on the basis of their enthusiasm and engagement with the whole class activity. The children brought their drawings/stories and story webs to the small group session to be used as stimuli for questioning by the researcher in attempts to gain deeper insights.

#### **Week Two**

The whole class activity comprised of the children working in pairs, with a set of the three photographs between them and a set of four "buzz"-words each, namely, "fairness", "money", "environment", and "who decides?" The children were asked to put each word, one at a time, on the photographs if they felt the word was suited to a particular photo, if any. After each word was placed, whole class discussion and questioning was facilitated by the researcher.

The small group session used the photographs and the accompanying buzz-words as stimulus to gain richer responses from the children. The researcher used "why" questions in an attempt to gain insights into children's understanding and how they rationalized their thinking.

#### **Week Three**

A story constructed by the researchers with three stick-figure characters was presented to the children. The story, which was read by the researcher, was told first from the perspective of the "blue" person and then from that of the "red" person. The same drawings were used each time to accompany the story as told from each character's perspective. The perspective of the third person was not presented, however a discussion followed centred around who the "yellow" person might be and what their involvement in the story might be. Questioning by the researcher was used to develop children's critical thinking in development of a story. The whole class was then asked to draw an ending to the story; words, sentences and labels were encouraged as additions and compliments to the drawings.

The small group session consisted of children discussing who the "yellow" person might be and their perspective and motivation in the story. Researchers asked children why they might think that or follow a particular line for a story.

#### **Week Four**

The rationale behind the final session was to facilitate children's participation in the data analysis, thereby providing further and additional interpretations of the data. Children's drawings from week three were selected and, provided children were willing to participate, they were presented to the class. The child explained their drawing and answered any questions the class might pose, thereby participating in the "exhibition discussion" (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009). Researchers modelled the appropriate questioning needed to gain interpretation of the data, for example, to the author, "why did you include that in your drawing?" or, to the rest of the class, "why do you think A included X in his/her drawing?" This interpretation or exhibition discussion continued for the whole group session, with a range of drawings and interpretations presented.

The small group session was carried out in the same way as the whole group session, with the researcher aiming to gain deeper and richer responses from the children.

### **3.8 Data Analysis**

Qualitative data analysis involves "making sense of the data in terms of the participants' definitions of the situation, noting patterns, themes, categories and regularities" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.463). Cohen et al. (2007) remind us that qualitative data analysis is heavy on interpretation and that multiple interpretations are frequently possible, claiming that this becomes both "their glory and their headache" (Cohen et al., 2007, p.463). In this regard, openness and reflexivity on the part of the researchers is essential in approaching qualitative data analysis (Bergmark & Kostenius, 2009).

A researcher employing a qualitative approach to data analysis needs to ground all interpretations and conclusions directly in the evidence collected (Denscombe, 2007). This can become challenging for researchers in aiming to be sensitive to the world views and experiences in the data and at the same time being aware of the influence of their own world views and potential biases in interpreting the data. This subjective nature of qualitative data analysis is itself one of its criticisms, and researchers need to exercise caution and disciplined analysis in their engagement with qualitative data (Guba & Lincoln, 1989).

A grounded theory approach informed the data analysis strategy in this research. This approach is inductive rather than deductive, whereby theory is grounded in the data and emerges from it. Glaser (1978) suggests that with regard to grounded theory, data collection and analysis is systematic and integrated, in which data patterns are implicit, waiting to be discovered rather than having the researcher explicitly discover them. The attraction of grounded theory is that it is faithful to how people act and takes account of inconsistencies, contradiction and relatedness in actions (Cohen et al., 2007). It is a systematic process of analysis and review, from which theory emerges.

For this research the data was reviewed by members of the research team and themes were identified. The data was then coded under the emergent themes.





## 4 Results

This chapter provides an overview of findings drawn from the data gathered. These findings are grouped under the following themes:

4.1 Children's perceptions on the wider world, including conceptions of Africa; conceptions of Asia and India; conceptions of the relationship between developed and developing countries; responses to racial characteristics; and the responses of children of African heritage.

4.2 Children's perceptions of poverty and wealth, including poverty and wealth in Ireland.

4.3 Children's views on power and authority, including the authority of parents and wider power structures.

4.4 Children's views on the environment.

4.5 Children's views on fairness and social justice, including conceptions of fairness and views on social justice issues.

4.6 Opportunities for the development of critical literacy and global citizenship education with seven- to nine-year-olds.

This chapter presents the findings. Discussion on these findings, in the context of the literature review, is provided in chapter five.

### 4.1 Children's Perception on the Wider World

All sessions, to a greater or lesser extent, elicited the participant children's conceptualisations of different countries around the world. Sessions one and two, attaining children's responses to photographs taken in three different developing countries, gave rise to varied responses which indicated children's awareness and perceptions of different continents and countries in the world. In the discussions relating to the PowerPoint story used in sessions three and four, there was some consideration given of the possible location of the story. On occasions this added further insight into children's ideas of the world around them.

The children's awareness of countries and continents appeared informed by their own family experience, by media and fundraising campaigns and, to a lesser extent, by work that they had undertaken in school. The places other than Ireland to which the children referred in their discussion included France, Spain, Australia, Africa, Congo, Nigeria, Zambia, Asia, India and America. In the case of France, Spain, Australia and in some cases America, the children tended to identify these places having visited them themselves or having seen photographs or heard stories from friends or relatives who had visited these countries. As is discussed below, children of African heritage discussed African countries from a difference perspective and drew on differing personal experience in this regard.

"Africa" was most often identified with photographs one and two (the latter of which was taken in Kenya, the former which was taken in Burma). When asked where they had learnt about Africa, the children most often said it was on the television or from fundraising campaigns, sometimes in school, sometimes in the media generally. The quote below is indicative of the nature of these responses.

Alex: He had to walk ten miles to get a shower.  
Researcher: What makes you say that?  
Alex: Because he lives in Africa and they have to walk ten miles to get water.  
Researcher: Where did you hear that they have to walk ten miles in Africa?  
Alex: On an ad.  
Researcher: Where, on,  
Alex: On telly.  
Researcher: Oh right and when you're looking at this, you're thinking Africa.  
Alex: Yeah.  
Researcher: Why?  
Alex: Because it looks like Africa.  
Researcher: But what does Africa look like to you.  
Alex: Like I think he's an African.

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

#### 4.1.1 Children's Conceptions of Africa.

"But in Africa they don't smile, only when they have like money and lots of food and all that, and when they get all that stuff they won't be sad, they'll be smiling and when they get people's help."

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

The majority of children in two of the three research settings identified the first and second picture and sometimes the third as well as having been taken in "Africa". When asked why they located the photographs in Africa, a typical response was that the environments looked like Africa or that Africa was poor and this picture showed somewhere which was poor. From the findings emerges a conceptualisation of Africa which can be described as dominant amongst the participant children. This conceptualisation could be characterised in the following ways: "Africa" was referred to in general terms with little reference to particular countries (see below for exceptions to this); Africa was poor; people in Africa have to walk for a long way to get water; people in Africa who had basic provisions were lucky; people in Africa who had basic provisions had received them through aid. The quotes provided are illustrative of this dominant conception.

Liam: I think this is Africa and normally African people can't survive but they have a home so they can survive. So I feel happy for them.

Conor: I think the people in the picture were a poor family because they ate little food.

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

Jack: I rubbed it out because I put Africa in.

Researcher: And what do you think?

Jack: It's not Africa.

Researcher: Why?

Jack: Africans don't have homes.

Phillip: Because in Africa they're black and they kind of have no food and they have no water. You know like we have food and water"

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

Researcher: Okay. And Sally I forgot to ask you what makes you think that the photograph is in Africa?

Sally: Well if you see the background it's kind of like, it's all kind of like deserty.

(Setting 3, Class Session 1)

Mark: In Africa.

Researcher: You think it might be Africa, why do you think it might be Africa?

Mark: Because I think there is, there's a lot of, animals there, and there's trees.

Researcher: A lot of animals and a lot of trees. Can you see animals in the picture?

Mark: No.

(Setting 1, Class Session 1)

Helen: I think it's in Africa because it only looks like there's only one water fountain and if he needs to find another one he'd have to walk for a very long time.

(Setting 3, Class Session 1)

As these references illustrate the dominant conception of Africa, held by the children in the study was a stereotypical one. Africa was perceived as universally poor. As is discussed further below, this poverty was understood in extreme terms. The strength of the motif of children needing to travel far to collect water was also strikingly evident in the findings.

#### 4.1.2 Children's Conception of Asia and India

Although far less prominently than Africa, a few of the children in each of the research settings located photographs one and/or two as having been taken in India or

Asia. Where they did this, their reasoning was based on the environment they saw, the association with poverty or the people in the photograph's skin colour or features.

Fiona: Well I think they might be in India because they don't really have that much things that we have. And like they're a bit, it looks a bit hot even though you can't see windows.

(Setting 3, Class Session 1)

Researcher: Why did you pick India?  
Conor: Because they're black.  
Researcher: Right.  
Conor: Not all African people are black.  
Researcher: Right and are Indian do you think Indian people are?  
Conor: Yeah.

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

Helen: I think they live in Asia and in a little cabin because they look poor and I don't think poor people could buy a house.  
Researcher: Okay and is there anything in the photographs that makes you think they live in Asia and that they look poor?  
Helen: Because their skin colour and Asia is hot.

(Setting 1, Class Session 1)

The children who identified the pictures as India or Asia therefore did so on much the same grounds as those who identified the pictures as having been taken in Africa. Their conceptualisations were similar and reportedly arising from media sources, books or work done in schools. Conor's comments to the researcher in Setting 2, Class Session 1 might also suggest that he understood India to be in Africa, highlighting the uniformity of the children's conceptions of these continents.

#### **4.1.3 Children's Conceptions of the Relationship Between Developed and Developing Countries**

The children's discussion about the photographs provides an indication of their conception of the relationship between developed and developing countries. A strong theme emerging from the data was the dependence by developing countries (perceived mainly as African and to a lesser extent India or Asian) on Irish or International charity.

Researcher: Okay but who decided to put the shower there? Who decided to make that the shower?  
Adam: I think that, probably builders over there, or Ireland wants to help them.

- Researcher: Okay.  
 Adam: Ireland probably helped them or other countries.  
 Researcher: Why do you say that?  
 Adam: Because they have very short bricks.  
 Researcher: Okay.

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

- Sally: They probably will decide to go to Ireland because they know that we, we're giving them money so if they come here, they'll know we have some money. And they're going to thank us and they're going to thank us.

(Setting 3, Class Session 1)

The children were asked who they thought had taken the photographs and why. Their responses to these questions in particular provide evidence of children's conceptions of the relationship between the people portrayed in the photographs and themselves. In general the children indicated that the photograph was most likely taken by a journalist or researcher or someone wanting to show people what it was like in the country. No child in any of the research settings suggested that the photograph might have been taken by someone from the country depicted in the photograph.

- Alan: Like someone Dublin might have went to that, might have went to there and like they might have had a camera and they must have took a picture of him.  
 Researcher: Why do you think, why, is there any reason why he might have taken it,  
 Alan: And he sent it around to all the countries in the world.  
 Researcher: Why,  
 Alan: So they can see how poor they are.  
 Researcher: Okay.  
 Ben: I think it was a tourist and then all of us would agree with Alan it was, it was like show how poor they are. I think a tourist.  
 David: I think somebody took that because they wanted to show how poor they are and how much we have to help them.

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

- Researcher: A tourist, okay and why might the tourist have been there?  
 Fiona: Well to see what it's like in a different country.  
 Researcher: Okay good, yeah. Any other ideas yeah?  
 Susan: Maybe someone that was helping the people there. Like for the poor and the, and they were taking photos to show everybody else what it's like.

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- Researcher: Okay and is there anything in the photo that makes you think that or is that just something that comes to your mind?
- Susan: Just something that came to my mind.
- Researcher: Okay thank you, thank you. Eva what do you think, who might have taken this photograph and what were they doing there?
- Eva: Maybe some people went over to do sort of research on Africa or the country and just see what normal people would do on a daily basis.

(Setting 3, Class Session 1)

The responses to these questions again reflect the association made by the children in the study between poverty, Africa and Western charity. However, they also illustrate a perspective on developing countries characterised by the objectification, passivity and disempowerment of those countries. The location of the photographs is presented as somewhere looked on by "all the countries of the world" to see "how poor they are". It is a place on which we do research and which we visit to "see what it's like in another country". The children's discourse reflects a relationship in which "we" or developed countries are the active and powerful subject, and developing countries are the static, powerless object of our interest, study and charity.

### 4.1.4 Children's Responses to Physical Characteristics

In general, the children made relatively little reference to the skin colour of the people depicted in the photographs. In locating the photographs, only a minority of the children in each research setting based their location on the characteristics of the people shown. Where skin colour was mentioned, the children more often than not did not adopt traditional associations between particular features and particular locations. Children identified the first picture as being taken in Africa because the child "looks African" (although they were not African or Black). Similarly some children located the second photograph as being taken in India on the basis that they were black or looked Indian, when the photograph was taken in Kenya.

- Researcher: Why did you pick India?
- Ben: Because they're black.
- Researcher: Right.
- Ben: Not all African people are black.
- Researcher: Right and are Indian do you think Indian people are?
- Ben: Yeah.

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

### 4.1.5 Responses of Children of African Heritage

Interestingly, in the rural multicultural first-class setting there was markedly less identification between the photographs, Africa and poverty. In particular, there was a difference between the responses of children of African heritage and other chil-

dren in the class, in relation to the connections they made between the photographs. While many of these children also identified the first and second photograph as being taken in Africa, they tended to identify a particular country rather than the amorphous continent. This country may or may not have been the country of their heritage or a country with which they had connections.

- Researcher: You think it might be South Africa, why do you think it might be South Africa Peter?  
 Isabella: Because they want, there won't be electricity if you're only in Africa, the first part.  
 Researcher: Okay but in South Africa they have electricity.

(Setting 1, Class Session 1)

- Researcher: Tell me where do you think the house is Abeo?  
 Abeo: I think the house is in a part of Nigeria.  
 Researcher: Why do you think it's in a part of Nigeria?  
 Abeo: I think it's in Lagos.  
 Researcher: Why do you think that?  
 Abeo: Because, I think,  
 Researcher: Why might this be Lagos?  
 Abeo: I think it's because, because, he has very dark skin and he has very dark skin and I think what they're eating is the food from Nigeria.  
 Researcher: Okay, okay excellent. Have you been to Nigeria?  
 Abeo: When I was small.  
 Researcher: When you were small and you've seen the food they eat and you think it's the same.  
 Abeo: Yeah I even eat it in Ireland.

(Session 1, Class Session 1)

## 4.2 Children's Perceptions of Poverty and Wealth

The children's responses to the photographs and their discussion around the theme of "Money" elicited findings in relation to their conceptualisations of poverty and wealth. These conceptualisations were extended, in the third and fourth session, to attitudes towards wealth distribution and social justice.

Emerging from the findings was a dominant understanding amongst the children of poverty as a state of extreme deprivation and despair. Many of the children, across the research settings, identified poverty as a total lack of clothes, food and/or water. Several children also felt it necessitated unhappiness. The reference below is illustrative of this perception.

- Researcher: Would you say that they are poor?  
 Peter: Yeah I would say they are poor because they only have kind of like those clothes.

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- Researcher: Oh so the clothes is what's making you think,  
Alex: No I don't think they're poor because then they wouldn't be smiling, they'd be really sad.

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

In each group, the discussions relating to the second photograph were particularly insightful in this regard. The photograph, showing a family having dinner in a home in Kenya, challenged the children's thinking in relation to poverty. On the one hand the children identified the picture as being in a developing country (most often "Africa"). They recognised the people in the picture as being poorer than people living in Ireland and commented on perceived deficiencies in their home set-up. However, the depiction of food, furniture and a radio in the set-up contradicted their understanding of poverty (and often Africa).

- Researcher: What what makes you feel that they are very sad Mia?  
Mia: Well because they don't have the things like us.  
Researcher: They don't have things like us.  
Mia: No.  
Researcher: And what in the photograph makes you think that they don't have things like us.  
Mia: Like a proper table.  
Evie: They might not be you know, sad.  
Researcher: Why would you say that Evie?  
Evie: Because they're probably just living their normal lives and because they don't look that poor, no.  
Researcher: You don't think they look poor. What in the photograph would make you say that?  
Evie: Because they have good food and the nice chairs (laughs).  
Saoirse: They're lucky that they have like shelter and food.

(Setting 3, Class Session 1)

As is reflected in this reference, many children in the study considered those perceived to be living in developing countries as lucky once they had access to very basic services and infrastructure. It reflects the dual perceptions of, on the one hand, the people in photographs being poor compared to "us", but on the other hand, being "lucky" in relation to others from the country in which the photograph was understood to have been taken. This duality, though particularly challenging in the second photograph, was evident in the children's responses to all three photographs. In relation the first photograph the child was poor "because she had to walk for miles to get water" and "didn't have a shower like us". But she was lucky because she had water where others might not. In relation to the third photograph the boy was poor because he didn't have many clothes but was lucky because he had a home.

Many of the children derived reasons why the people in the pictures might be as they perceived it "better off" than they expected families to be. These reasons in-

cluded that they had a job; that they had spent money but possibly more than they could really afford; and most often that they had been given provisions by others.

Researcher: Okay you think they're a poor family. What made you think that they're poor?

Amy: Well I think the food made me, that made me say that they were poor maybe it's because, maybe because they don't, like I'm not saying, like they have a home and it's good but maybe they don't have that much money. They had lots of food but I'm not sure, And like money and clothes and a home.

Ben: That's why I think it was made too because... They must have had a lot of money to buy that, a house. But they used too much of it and they must, they used all old things so they might, they might they only, they might have, because if they knew like you're left with a little bit of money, you might be left with a bit of money so they might, they may have bought lots of stuff and they buy, must have bought the house with furniture in it and, and they have only have a little bit of money left.

(Setting 1, Class Session 1)

Toby: I don't, I don't think, I just think they're happy because they have to give them something to eat.

(Setting 2, Class Session 1)

In seeing the people in the photographs as unusually well-off for their location, the children not only described them as lucky but as owing gratitude for their fortuitousness. One boy forcefully communicates this perspective:

Andy: I think it's not fair because, they have a house and they have lots of things. They have things to eat, to sit on and they have things to do they they're not happy. They should be grateful to god.

(Setting 2, Class Session 2)

These findings suggest that the children recognise the photographs as having been taken in developing countries, have a perception of developing countries being essentially poor, and have an understanding of poverty as extreme deprivation. The findings highlight the extent to which access to even basic provisions and self-reliance contradicts children's conceptions of poverty and developing countries.

#### **4.2.1 Children's Perceptions of Poverty and Wealth in Ireland**

While Ireland was recognised as being richer than the places depicted in the photographs, the data suggests that the children perceived Ireland's economic position as

“neutral”, neither rich nor poor. Across the research settings the children's responses suggested little awareness of wealth or poverty in Ireland.

James: I don't think it's in Ireland because there's only a bit of poor people kind or a they're not really in the, everyone so like five poor people that's all in Ireland.

(Setting 2, Small Group Session 3)

Lily: I don't think it is Ireland, because there aren't really any rich people in Ireland.

(Setting 3, Small Group Session 3)

As the quotes given above reflect, the children in general position Ireland economically as “the norm” against which the places depicted in the photographs are poor. Furthermore, they demonstrated little awareness of economic inequality in Ireland, not recognising either poverty or wealth as being a characteristic of segments of the Irish population.

### **4.3 Children's Views on Power and Authority**

In the second session the children were asked to discuss “who makes decisions” in relation to the photographs. The PowerPoint story also introduced the theme of decision making. These stimuli gave rise to discussion, eliciting the children's ideas concerning decision making and power structures.

#### **4.3.1 Children's Views of the Authority of Parents**

Nearly all the children who expressed views on the relative power of children and parents demonstrated a belief in the necessity of and wellbeing provided by the parents' authority. The quotes given below are illustrative of these responses.

Fergal: I think it's best for the parents to decide because the parents know what it was like to be a child so the parents know the most so maybe the adults should make the decisions.

(Setting 2, Class Session 3)

Japnoor: A parent they try to keep you safe but you, maybe if you don't listen to your parents sometimes and they're telling you the right thing then you don't listen to them, something bad is going to happen and that, if you, it's your fault and you don't listen to your parent. You have to listen to your parents, they're only trying to keep you safe and keep you from getting hurt. So that's, so you always listen to your parents and you listen to parents over, you never ignore your parents, your mum and dad.

(Setting 1, Class Session 2)

Across the research settings, there was evidence of decision making being used as a reward or treat. While respecting the authority of their parents, children gave examples of occasions, particularly birthdays, where they were allowed to make decisions and expressed their appreciation of these occasions.

### 4.3.2 Children's Views on Wider Power Structures

Where the researcher instigated and supported discussion regarding power structures in the school and community, children were both highly engaged and able to consider and articulate their ideas. Despite this capacity, the findings suggest that power structures, within the school, locally and/or globally, had not been previously explored with the children in any of the settings. The whole class discussion, set out below, was reflective of the children's responses across the research settings.

- Researcher: Who decides things for children in here, us, like who decides for you guys? James?
- James: You, like the teachers.
- Researcher: The teachers, yeah who else makes decisions for teachers, or for children?
- Peter: Mams.
- Researcher: Mams,
- George: And Dads.
- Researcher: Your Dads. Anyone else?
- Alex: Nannies.
- Researcher: Who?
- Alex: Nannies.
- Researcher: Your nannies.
- James: Uncles,
- Brian: I have one, the boss teacher, the Principal,
- Researcher: Yeah and who decides for the teachers, for the Principal, who decides for the Principal?
- Brian: The teachers,
- Jack: The Mams.
- Alex: And Dads.
- Researcher: Maybe the mums, who decides for the Principal,
- Peter: Teachers.
- George: The Principal's mam.
- Researcher: The Principal's mum?
- Alex: No.
- Martie: There's nobody.
- Researcher: Excuse me, who decides for the Principal now, let's think about this. Yeah,
- Cian: The Parents Association.
- Researcher: Yeah the parents association,
- Jack: Board of management.
- Researcher: Board of management yeah they're higher than the principal, they're kind of in charge.

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- Alex: Is it the,  
Researcher: Is there anyone else who makes decisions about schools?  
Jo: Well the government.  
Researcher: Yes, the government.  
Jo: Yeah the government.  
Researcher: Tell us what they do.  
Jo: The government owns all of Ireland because the government is like, I went into the, the Leinster House,  
Researcher: Yes.  
Jo: And there's loads of people, prime ministers like, you have to vote on things and all that,

(Setting 1, Class Session 2)

As this discussion illustrates, the majority of children saw direction as coming principally from a family member – parent, wife or sibling – rather than authoritative structures or institutions. Only a minority of children showed an awareness of power structures within the school or wider community. However, across the settings this discussion particularly engaged the children and demonstrated their capacity to consider their social and political context.

With the exception of the government and the school's board of governors mentioned in the context above, the only state authority particularly referenced across the research settings was the police. There was no indication of any understanding of the wider legal and political structures surrounding the police.

- Researcher: Is there anybody who could stop people taking each other's ideas?  
Alex: Like it's only, when you have to like go to the restaurant and do something and then after that you, I think the police might come. You, or you either call the police saying that you're not liking them and they keep copying you.  
Researcher: And can the police do something about it?  
Alex: Yeah.  
Researcher: What can the police do about it?  
Alex: Like they can say that you have to, like, go to a different place or if you don't move it, they're going to shut it down and they're going to break it into pieces.  
Researcher: And do you think that would be good if the police did that?  
Alex: No.  
Researcher: No, why wouldn't that be good?  
Alex: Because it's, it could be sad for them but if I was the police I would just move it somewhere else.

(Setting 2, Small Group Session 3)

#### 4.4 Children's Views on the Environment

In session two, the children were asked to identify aspects of the photographs which they associated with the word environment. In sessions three and four, the Power-Point story stimulated discussion regarding the value of trees and birds and respect and care for nature. These discussions suggest certain characteristics of the children's conceptualisations of environment and environmental issues.

Children's understanding of the word environment appeared to be developing at this age, with some of the younger children involved in the study conveying uncertainty about the term. In general the associations children made with the word environment were to do with rubbish, cleanliness and tidiness. The environment was more often associated, by the children, with the natural environment than the built environment. There were examples in the data of children associating the environment with pollution, with God and with life and death. Below are examples drawn from the data, illustrative of these different associations.

Adam: It's about keeping the world tidier.

(Setting 2, Class Session 2)

Maria: I think this was the environment because they, they're keeping, keeping the place clean. That's what I think. This one, I see this one, because these, do you see the way, all the ground is not as all, it's not messy and they're keeping it all clean.

Researcher: So your environment is about keeping clean?

Maria: Yeah keeping the world clean

Researcher: Thank you okay.

Maria: Because if it wasn't there'd be rubbish everywhere and usually bold people, bold children or big people throw their rubbish and don't but I always when I when I did get something, I always put my rubbish in my pocket and wait until I get home and put it in the bin.

(Setting 3, Class Session 2)

Luida: There's lots of environment because there's a, there's a lots of trees and grass and bushes and rivers.

(Setting 1, Class Session 2)

Phillip: Like the environment is, you know motorbikes, they have smoke like, smoke makes the environment.

(Setting 1, Class Session 2)

Researcher: What do you think of that, being bad for nature?

Adam: It's being mean to, it's being mean to God too because God created nature. And it's being mean to everybody who, who helps the environment. Maybe, maybe,

maybe there is no fruits that they're using, that's the only tree that has fruits.

(Setting 2, Small Group Session 3)

Freya: It's really important to keep the environment clear because people die. You need to clean up rubbish or the sun comes closer then you die.

(Settings 3, Small Group Session 2)

## 4.5 Children's Views on Fairness and Social Justice

The children were asked to discuss the issue of fairness in relation to the photographs. Their discussion on the PowerPoint story also involved reflections on fairness. The data therefore provides evidence of different attitudes and conceptualisations of fairness held by the children. Fairness was understood most prominently by the children as inequality, however there was also significant use of the word "fair" to mean "not good", dishonest behaviour or ungrateful behaviour. One child explained that "fairness is about being kind".

### 4.5.1 Children's Views on the concept of "fairness"

When discussing the concept of fairness in relation to the photographs, many of the children either described inequality within the context of the photograph as unfair or inequality between the situation in the photograph and outside situations as unfair. The first quote reflects the former, while the second reflects the latter.

Paul: it's not fair, he has, he only has, he doesn't have anything. He has shoes, he only has pants and he has trousers. He doesn't have a top and he has a top so,  
Researcher: I see.  
Paul: So it's not fair, they should share, he could share his clothes, his, and maybe give him to use the clothes he doesn't use and now they may fit him, and they, then he, then he can use them and that's being fair but, but in that picture it's not fair because he doesn't have any clothes so I agree with James.

(Setting 1, Class Session 2)

Researcher: Okay so what do you think, what do you think makes that unfair,  
Killian: I think the thing that makes it unfair is that because the girl has to bath under there.  
Researcher: So if everyone had to bath like that would it be fair then?  
Killian: No. If everyone had to bath under there and then for example if one country, like if Ireland had to bath under

- there and then England got showers, that wouldn't be fair for the whole country.
- Researcher: And what would be unfair about that?
- Killian: Because they, they just, they won't really have to, they can just, turn, press the button that makes it go on and then they can stop it and make it and they can stop it and make it work again but I think this one it just keeps on going.

(Setting 2, Class Session 2)

A few children's responses in relation to fairness focussed on a perceived lack of appreciation by the people in the photographs for what was taken to be their position of relative wealth.

- Zafiya: I think it's not fair because they're, they have food and all and their faces are very mad.
- Researcher: Okay so explain that to me. You think it's not fair because
- Zafiya: Yeah because they, they have all that they need and they have a mad face
- Researcher: And what how should they be feeling? What should their faces be like?
- Zafiya: They should be feeling happy because they have a house to live in.

(Setting 3, Class Session 2)

#### 4.5.2 Children's views on social justice issues

The children's discussion around the PowerPoint story encapsulated not only conceptualisations of fairness, but their different value judgements around social justice issues and wealth distribution. As outlined in chapter three, the PowerPoint story involved a nine-slide story with three characters: a red, a blue and a yellow person. The story is told first from the blue person's perspective. The blue person picks fruit from a tree, sells it, has money for his/her children and then offers to employ the yellow and red person in fruit picking. The story is then retold from the red person's perspective. The red person likes the tree, eating its fruit and watching the birds eat the fruit. The red person feels the blue person should share the money he has made from picking the fruit so they can all decide how the money is spent. The red person notes that all the fruit is gone and all the birds have gone too. The story is then retold, with both the blue and red person's perspective shown. In this way the story is open to multiple interpretations and endings, and raised issues of wealth entitlement, resource exploitation and capitalism, environmental eco-systems and decision making.

The children's conceptions of fairness in relation to the PowerPoint story focussed on treatment of the environment and being good to nature, sharing money, and letting others share the fruit from the tree.

As might be expected, the PowerPoint story elicited different responses from the children and a variety of issues were raised. Some children stressed the damage done by the blue person in picking the fruit, and the negative impact this had on the birds, the environment and the other characters. A few felt that the red person would not want to and should not work for the blue person. Some focused on the blue's person pursuit of money and, while criticising it, suggested that the drive for money was a very normal human characteristic. The majority of children in this study, however, focused on whether or not the blue person was sharing the money that he had made and treating the yellow and red person equally.

Bobby:            Yeah. It's kind of fair and it's kind of not because he's, he's paying the yellow person to work for him but it's not fair because he's not paying the red person and he's just moving him out.

(Setting 2, Small Group Session 3)

The blue person was often characterised as greedy in his pursuit of money, and the red and the yellow people as poor. In their assessments of the characters, several children commented on the fact that the blue person, despite his perceived greediness, had shared the money with his children. These responses are noteworthy because the blue person's behaviour is judged critically not for what he is depicted as doing in the PowerPoint, picking the fruit and providing a job, but for what he is presumed to then do, not pay the red person or treat the red and yellow person equally.

These results suggest that the pervading focus of the participant children in regard to justice issues is the idea of sharing. The story presents a conflict and challenge which in actual fact cannot be resolved by sharing, as it presents a situation where characters want different conclusions. However the children elaborate the story to one where the challenge becomes resolvable by sharing and equal treatment.

#### **4.6 Opportunities for Developing Critical Literacy and Global Citizenship Education with Seven- to Nine-Year-Olds**

The PowerPoint story used in sessions three and four, and the work undertaken by the children in responding to this story, provided a mechanism for exploring possible opportunities for developing critical literacy and global citizenship education in first to third class settings. The children were asked to consider the story, the different perspectives provided and the perspective of the yellow person, which was not provided. They were then asked to draw and write the rest of the story. In the final session the children were invited to ask questions and interpret the stories of their peers.

Despite the limited duration and depth of the intervention, this aspect of the research provided considerable insight into possibilities for and issues arising regarding critical literacy and global citizenship education in this context. All the children across

the research settings were able to engage in the discussion and had explored different possible endings and questioned and interrogated the stories of their peers.

The children's stories were presented in different forms: some were just written text, others drew pictures to accompany written text. Some did pictures with speech bubbles. Others crafted comic strips. Some examples of the stories, taken either from the transcripts or directly from the children's work are provided below:

they all became friend again. The blue person never stole again and the yellow person isn't shy anymore

(Setting 2, Class Session 4)

Little Lily wanted to work for Big Bob but Big Bob said no. Little lily was upset over this but big Bob came up with a great plan he said if I give you seeds for new fruit will you work for me? Of course! Said Medium Max THE END!

(Child's story, Setting 3)

Red "There I picked up all the fruit off the tree so give me my money"

Blue "I'm not gonna give him the money I'm gonna take the fruit and go!"

Yellow "Dad he is finished give him the money"

Then after that, the girl took the money and gave some to the man. And then the blue guy (her father) said sorry and they lived happily ever after the end.

(Child's story, Setting 1)

The red person and the yellow person aren't to happy with their new life working for the blue person sucks. I want my old life back with my family the red person said. I'll ask him can we leave and go back home said the yellow person. Can we go home now. No Way. Why not cos I said so. Please I said no. Yeah why not said the red person we never agreed to work for you you took all my fruit and the birds are all gone said the red person and your also rich. You are to I gave you all mu money. You got your silly fruit back my life sucks mine does to. Stop shouting let be friends again yeah!

(Child's story, Setting 3)

As illustrated above, the majority of the participant children in their stories sought to find resolution to the problems posed. The stories written were often concluded with the characters all sharing the money, buying seeds or planting new trees.

Interestingly, as these examples illustrate, the characters were often developed into typecasts of villains and victims. The red person was poor and exploited, while the blue person was greedy and exploitative and didn't pay the red person or share. Several children even interpreted the stories describing the blue person as a bully. Where this occurred the story was often concluded either by the red and yellow person getting their own back on the blue person (setting up their own tree and leaving him friendless), there was an "unhappy ending" where the blue person was victorious and the other characters upset, or, most often, the blue person was converted and made friends with the others.

A lot of the children in the study portrayed the yellow person as a character who arbitrated the satisfactory resolution to the story. This was most often as a heroic child but for some children, the yellow character was more of an authoritative figure: a guard or a "mystery guy" or "secret agents" (Setting 1, Small Group Session 4) "Watching out to see if everyone's being fair and everyone gets some money" (Setting 1, Small Group Session 4).

As stated above, the PowerPoint story raised issues concerning wealth entitlement, ecosystems and the environment, who makes decisions, employment and capitalism, amongst others. Some of these issues, however, were responded to in the children's stories considerably more than others. Most of the stories highlighted the intent of the blue person to make money and the loss of the fruit to the birds and other characters, and considered who did the work and who had money. Very few however responded to the question raised in the PowerPoint about whether or not people and children should be able to decide how they should spend the money. Equally, the issue of whether the blue person was entitled to money having worked hard or whether the red person was entitled to preserve the tree was not responded to. These findings suggest that children are more familiar and experienced in a discourse regarding sharing and being kind rather than a discourse about deeper justice issues of wealth entitlement and power and authority.

In session four the children were asked to question, interpret and discuss each other's stories. Below are provided some illustrations of the discussion which took place, one from each setting.

- Researcher: So you would like the birds to come back. How might, how do you these people might get the birds back?
- Oisin: Em, you could, you could plant more seeds and then the, the fruit will grow back on the trees.
- Researcher: And when the fruit grows, how might that affect the birds?
- Oisin: The birds will, will come back and eat the fruits.
- Researcher: Very good, that's a good idea isn't it Sean, a beautiful picture, Do you have another question for Oisin?
- Sean: No. I'm just getting like an idea how to get the birds back.
- Researcher: Yeah great.

Sean: Well maybe if they plant lots of different plants with fruits in them and flowers so then lots of different birds come back instead of just an ordinary kind.

(Setting 1, Small Group Session 4)

Cian: I wouldn't pick at the tree, because there's tonnes of jobs in the world, and you know like the job, you know the government took loads of jobs. And then there is like in, you know the, in, a public school hall, you know the, like one day I was looking outside the window and I saw tonnes of people getting their jobs and all that.

Researcher: Okay. So you think he shouldn't take the job taking fruit from the tree.

Cian: No.

Researcher: Just take a different job.

Cian: Yeah.

Researchers: What do you think Finn, the yellow person about the job, he's saying, oh you know I really love the tree but I really need the money, so what happens?

Finn: I think he'd take the money.

Researcher: Really, and do you think that's what people do?

Finn: No. But that's not, that's not the best thing in life.

Researcher: And what do you think he will do, this person,

Finn: I think he will say yes. He mightn't, he mightn't not be with the red person and he might be with the blue person. But for the money.

Researcher: And what makes you think that?

Finn: He might, he might just want money for his children or his family. He might be poor.

(Setting 2, Small Group Session 4)

Researcher: Why didn't they want to work for the blue man?

Ciara: Because he was being mean to them

Researcher: But they worked for him anyway?

Ciara: Yeah, they were going to quit so they were only going to get a bit of money to grown their own tree and then get their own job.

Susan: I have, it's not really a question but I think that the yellow and red person were being nice working for the blue person and he was being mean to them.

Researcher: Do you think it is nice for people to work for other people?

Susan: Yeah.

Researcher: And the people who work, do they get anything?

Susan: Well if he was being mean to them, and they probably got money and then went off which wouldn't be that nice.

- Ciara: Yeah because they left the blue person out?  
Susan: Well it wouldn't have been nice if he was nice but he wasn't so it's fair.

(Setting 3, Class Session 4)

These examples are illustrative of the nature of the discussion stimulated by the methodology used. As is evidenced above, the children were facilitated in the sessions to assess ethical choices and also to consider, from their experience, how people behave in regard to ethical choices and why people act in the ways they do. For example, in the discussion set out above from Setting 2, Small Group Session 4, Finn and Cian debate how the yellow person is likely to act where he believes he should not take the job but needs the money. Furthermore, the results include examples of the children thinking through possible consequences of pursuing certain forms of action; for example in Setting 2, the children considered how the other characters might act if the red character used angry and violent language. There were several examples in the findings where the discussion relating to the story involved considering and assessing possible solutions to problems that arose. In the discussion from Setting 1, included above, for example, the children explore ways to encourage the birds to return.

In general, however, the questions posed to the children solicited responses which explained behaviour based on the characteristics and personality of the characters and encouraged children's judgement of people, as can be seen in the discussion from Setting 3 included above. The children explained behaviour because the characters were "being mean" or "being kind" or "not nice" or "unfair". The questioning rarely encouraged children to assess different possible resolutions in terms for example of who or what benefitted, in what ways, what was prioritised, how the situations depicted in the children's stories could have been avoided or resolved differently.

In the discussion, the children were often asked, both by the researcher and by their peers, where they got their ideas from and/or where they had encountered scenarios like those reflected in the stories. In response, the children cited films, television, stories told by their parents, the news and their imagination, as well as occasionally personal experiences. The extent to which children drew on the narrative and the structure represented in stories was clearly expressed by one child in the final session in Setting 3.

- Researcher: Do you think it would end up with them being able to be friends at the end?  
All: Yes.  
Researcher: Why do you think it would end like this?  
Sabhdh: Because nice stories do have happy endings.  
Researcher: Do you think in life most things do work out with a happy ending?  
Sabhdh: No not really.  
Researcher: What happens in life?

Sabhdh: Well I think life can be sad or life can be bad or life can be good.

(Setting 3, Small Group Session 4)

There were examples, principally in children's responses to the photographs in Sessions 1 and 2 but also to lesser extent in their responses to the PowerPoint story, where children supposed that, because something was absent from the image, it didn't exist. Below is an example of this type of response.

Researcher: And why is that one unfair?

Matt: Because one boy is running around in his pants and he doesn't really you know, actually have anything to wear and this boy's laughing at him because he's running around in pants.

Researcher: And what makes that unfair?

Matt: It's because he doesn't have any clothes except pants and,

Researcher: He doesn't have any, he doesn't have any. Do you think he doesn't have any clothes anywhere?

Matt: Yeah and if he landed on the stones with his, in bare feet he's, the stones would actually hurt his feet.

(Setting 1, Class Session 2)

In relation to the discussion relating to this, the third photograph, a minority of children did consider that the child's lack of clothes in the photograph might not reflect his wider circumstances. A couple of children from Setting 1 who had experience of travelling outside of Europe suggested that the child might not be wearing clothes because it was very hot. However, the majority of children across the setting in relation to all the photographs did not consider that the photographs might only be partial or an inaccurate reflection of their subjects' circumstances.



## 5 Discussion

This chapter provides an analysis of the findings set out in chapter four. It discusses the results of this study in the context of the literature reviewed in chapter two. The discussion is set out under the following headings:

- 5.1 Children's developing world awareness: personal and social influences.
- 5.2 The dominance of a Eurocentric approach to developing countries.
- 5.3 Poverty as extreme and external.
- 5.4 Possibilities for exploring power structures.
- 5.5 Judging behaviour: reasoning and regurgitating.
- 5.6 Tidying up your planet: environment as duty.
- 5.7 The world and the word: bridging the divide in critical literacy.

### 5.1 Children's developing world awareness: personal and social influences

The findings, set out in chapter four, support the conclusions of previous studies regarding children's developing knowledge of places in the world (Barrett 2005; Barrett, 2007; Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011). Like the children in Wiegand's study (2006), children were mainly able to identify large land masses (Africa, America, Australia, India), and for the majority of children it was only countries in Western Europe, perhaps where they had been on holiday, that they could name. As with other studies (Bourchier et al., 2002; Holloway & Valentine, 2000; Wiegand, 2006), the influence of personal experience and the media as well as education on children's knowledge of the world was also highlighted. Many of the countries which the children were able to name were popular holiday destinations. They referred to countries which they had visited or that someone they know had visited. They talked about countries they had seen on television. Children of African heritage appeared more often to be able to name specific countries in Africa. This supports Scourfield et al.'s (2006) findings suggesting that children's knowledge of other countries depends on their own experiences, with some of minority heritage having knowledge of countries with which they have family ties.

While the findings are consistent with this previous research (Barrett 2005, Barrett, 2007; Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011), a closer analysis of the children's responses brings into question the influence of historic connections between Ireland and other countries around the world and the influence of these connections on children's global learning.

As outlined in the previous chapter, the places other than within Ireland to which the children referred in their discussion included France, Spain, Australia, Africa, America, Asia, India, Congo, Nigeria, and Zambia, with Africa being the most often referenced. Despite the inclusion of photographs taken in Burma and Guatemala, no child referred to Latin America or to other Asian countries. The findings therefore call into

question why children showed greater awareness of certain countries than others. Children's greater awareness of countries in Western Europe can be understood as a result of personal experience and familiarity. In the case of America and Australia, a variety of reasons would explain their familiarity to children, including cultural ties, emigration, cultural exports such as television and films, and language, many of which have been previously identified as likely to increase familiarity (Ruane et al. 2010a; Wiegand, 2006), as well as the fact of America's superpower status. However, the findings particularly highlight the fact of children's greater awareness and conceptions relating to Africa and African poverty than to other developing countries and their poverty.

Why children are so much more familiar with Africa than with other developing countries could be attributed to different, varied and possibly interconnected factors. Fiedler et al.'s (2011) mapping of the history of development education in Ireland refers to the agenda being set by Irish missionaries. As Irish missionaries' work was predominantly in Africa, the findings could be understood to reflect the influence of this legacy. The fact that the countries mentioned by the children were nearly all former British colonies might suggest the residual influence of colonisation on understandings of the world in Ireland (Bryan, 2008; Andreotti, 2006). The predominantly English-speaking character of the countries mentioned might indicate that language is a factor. Identity theories of developing bias and discrimination towards other groups (Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011; Barrett, 2007) and race-based prejudice (Augoustinos & Rosewarne, 2001) could also be understood to contribute to the dominance of Africa in conceptions of the wider world. Certainly, the fact that children's knowledge of the world is informed by a myriad of sources, as discussed above, indicates that the particular conceptions and awareness of Africa is not just a result of classroom practice, but reflects wider social discourse.

### **5.2 The dominance of a Eurocentric approach to developing countries**

Consistent with previous research, the findings suggest a tendency amongst the participant children to hold and project stereotypes in relation to developing countries (Fiedler et al., 2011; Niens & Reilly 2010; Martin & Griffiths, 2012; Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011; Weldon, 2010). Children perceived Africa as universally poor and often described poverty to be a famine or drought-like state. Across the research settings, many children alluded to people in Africa needing to travel far to get water. Several children associated Africa with animals, desert and a less developed environment. These findings not only suggest the dominance and influence of stereotypical images of developing countries, particularly Africa, in the media and in education (Martin & Griffiths, 2012; Ruane et al., 2010), but also support research highlighting children's tendency to overgeneralise and over-extend rules (Lagattuta et al., 2010). They highlight the need for educational interventions which explore diversity and different perspectives within countries and continents (Weldon, 2010), and which not only challenge dominant stereotypes, but encourage children to recognise plurality, diversity and complexity (Picton, 2008).

The perceptions on developing countries suggested by the research findings reaffirm previous research focussing on the influence of media campaigns (Ruane et al. 2010), particularly fundraising campaigns, on shaping children's ideas about poverty. Children referred to learning about developing countries not only in school, but having "seen a programme about it once on telly" or having been "told about it" by a parent. The fact that children drew on notions of emergency appeals, Irish builders working in developing countries, Irish charity towards developing countries and economic migration suggests not only the pervasiveness of these activities in the Irish media, but the extent to which children absorb these dominant discourses.

Furthermore, the discourses evident in the children's responses not only espoused stereotypical images of developing countries, but were characterised by notions of Western benevolence and African deficit. To this extent the research supports previous findings pointing to the dominance of charity-based conceptions of developing countries (Bryan & Bracken, 2011; Niens & Reilly, 2010; Smith, 2004; Waldron et al., 2011; Fiedler et al., 2011). Children regularly assumed that the people in the images, understood as living in developing countries, had been in some way supported by Ireland or other countries. Bearing in the mind the evidence, in the findings, of children's engagement with fundraising appeals, it is perhaps not surprising that this dominates children's understanding of the relationship between Ireland and Africa. The children made no reference to other links between Ireland and developing countries, for example trade links. This suggests the need for education that highlights interdependence between countries (Niens & Reilly, 2010).

The impact of education and media programmes about developing countries was also suggested at by the children's reasoning about who took the photographs used in Sessions 1 and 2 and for what purposes. As discussed in the previous chapter, the children, across the settings, felt the pictures had been taken by journalists, researchers or visitors to the country who wanted to show people what it was like. The responses characterise developing countries as the objects of research, study and charity campaigns, and they support findings suggesting the dominance of a Eurocentric perception of developing countries (Fiedler et al., 2011). The relationship characterises Ireland as an active agent and negates the agency of the people portrayed in the images; this suggests the need for education which recognises the initiative of all people in their own lives and social contexts. The fact that no child suggested the photograph might have been taken by someone related to the subjects of photograph also suggests that the children, in answering this question, did not draw on their own experience of photographs being taken. This might be seen to suggest an alienation and differentiation between themselves and the subjects of the photographs, supporting research which regards children in middle childhood as likely to over-extend differences between people (Lagattutta et al., 2010) and perceives prejudice and group identity to increase at this age (Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011).

### **5.3 Poverty as extreme and external**

The research has important findings in relation to children's conception of poverty, adding to what is an under-researched area (Chafel & Neitzel, 2005). Contrary to

Leahy's proposition (1983, cited in Ramsey, 2008) most children in this study used the terminology of poverty and of being poor. However, as is suggested by Leahy (1983 cited in Ramsey, 2008), their discussion in relation to poverty very much focussed on concrete objects like food, homes, furniture and clothes.

Perhaps what was most striking about the children's conceptions of poverty was the extent to which it was interwoven with and linked to their understanding of developing countries or regions, particularly Africa. When asked to explain why they thought the picture was set taken in Africa, several articulated, because it looked poor. Similarly, when children were asked why they thought the people in the picture were poor, they said because it was taken in Africa. Children did not perceive that poverty existed in any meaningful way in Ireland. This suggests that it is not simply that children have stereotypes about Africa, but that their very understanding of poverty is based on images of people living in extreme deprivation in developing countries.

Furthermore, the findings here suggest not only that the children regarded people living in developing countries as poor and dependant on charity, as previous research has documented (Ruane et al., 2010; Niens & Reilly, 2010; Martin & Griffiths, 2012; Barrett & Oppenheimer, 2011; Weldon, 2010), but that they understood that poverty as extreme deprivation. The findings suggest a conceptualisation of poverty based not just on fundraising campaigns, but on emergency appeals or images of famine. The images, depicting people's access to very basic facilities, challenged many of the children's understanding of developing countries, and was explained by them as exceptional for the continent and fortunate for the individuals depicted.

The children's understanding of poverty as extreme deprivation, and the marrying of the concepts of poverty and developing countries, impacted on their approach to global justice issues. Children assumed the people depicted in the photographs would be poor, identifying them in developing countries or regions, principally Africa. As in Chafel and Neitzel's study (2005), these assumptions, which saw poverty as a priori, restricted the children's consideration of the causes of people's poverty. Furthermore, some of the children in this study, perceiving the people in photograph as better off than they anticipated people from developing countries to be, commented that the people in the pictures should be happy or grateful for the things they had, and that it was unfair that they did not appear to be so. As in Chafel and Neitzel's study, economic inequality was seen as unfair. However, some children in this study identified greater injustice in the economic inequality perceived between the characters on the photographs and others in their community, than between themselves and the characters in the photographs.

This dominant conceptualisation of poverty reflected by some of the children in this study is problematic in a number of ways. It adopts a discourse which suggests there is no entitlement to more than basic needs, and does not perceive the people in photographs as rights holders or as equal to people in Ireland. Understanding people only as victims of poverty and recipients of aid, the conceptualisation presents little acknowledgement of individuals' autonomy. The expectation of gratitude for very

basic provision suggests that there is a need to strengthen the concept of equality and solidarity in education for global citizenship.

The results indicate not only a need to challenge children's ideas about developing countries, but for more nuanced and deeper explorations of poverty, equality, human rights and social justice in education. They support Andreotti's (2006) call for "unlearning" of assumptions and perceptions and for spaces for students to critically engage with developing issues (Fiedler et al., 2011). The foregrounding of extreme and emergency examples of poverty also provides further explanation of why development education is regarded as "depressing" and "unsuitable for children" (Niens & Reilly, 2010). It suggests that teacher reluctance to incorporate development education in their teaching is as much to do with how they conceive developing countries as it is to do with how they perceive child capacity.

#### **5.4 Possibilities for exploring power structures**

The results of the research also provide insight into the way in which children view themselves as citizens, and their relationship with adults and wider power structures. Children's discussion of "who makes decisions" in relation to the photographs and their discussion arising from the PowerPoint story points to opportunities for further developing children's exploration of power and authority.

Children's acceptance of dominant discourses (Robinson & Diaz, 2009) were reflected not only in their perceptions of developing countries but in their conceptions of adult-child relationships. Concerns that paternalistic attitudes towards children still prevail (Devine, 2002; Robinson & Diaz, 2009) were reflected in the children's acceptance of adult authority and child vulnerability. Interestingly, in the children's stories written in response to the PowerPoint story, the child character was often the change-maker, encouraging the parent to do the right thing. This might suggest that children regard themselves as positive influences on their parents. However, bearing in mind children's distancing of the construct of a story from real life, the stories, instead, could be regarded as reflecting children's replication of common story structures. The stories echo children's programmes and films, in which a young hero brings about change. The children could be seen as reproducing these plots instead of portraying their own lives. In contrast to the representation of children in the child-hero endings to the stories, discussion relating to children's role as decision makers was limited, and where it occurred it generally espoused child irresponsibility and adult superiority. The fact that children did not particularly respond to the question raised in the sessions regarding who should decide, and did not challenge traditional adult-child dynamics, suggests that ideas regarding child voice and participation are weakly felt by children as against concern for their protection and welfare (Cosgrove et al., 2011; Kilkenny et al., 2004; Allan & L'Anson, 2004.)

While the findings suggests that the concept of child voice is marginal in children's experience, so too is exploration of local and global power structures. Reflecting previous research indicating a reluctance to engage children in citizenship education (Howe & Covell, 2010; Lundy, 2007), this study points to limited inclusion of social

and political contexts in education. In line with Howard and Gill's (2000) findings, children's awareness of decision making processes was restricted to private rather than community or national arenas. Despite the evidence of limited inclusion of citizenship in education at this level, the children in this study showed both an ability and enthusiasm to engage in discussion about and exploration of power structures and processes supporting assertions of children's capacity to deal with real-life justice issues (Robin & Díaz, 2009). Furthermore, while children's awareness of official power was limited, there was some evidence of children questioning the moral validity of laws and authoritative figures.

Howard and Gill's findings (2000) in relation to children's limited engagement with the role of rights and responsibilities was also reflected in this research. Children's understanding of power and authority, particularly in relation to the police, suggests a conception of authority which is hierarchical and patriarchal rather than democratic. While parent authority was presented as protective, the authority of the police was presented as autocratic, even oppressive. Children's limited awareness of democratic systems may be developmental (Howard & Gill, 2000) or indicative of a tendency amongst teachers to divorce human rights and human rights education from its political and legal context, and to approach human rights in general terms (Waldron et al., 2011; Osler & Starkey, 2010). The references made suggest a place for further exploration of the controls and protection, rights and fair procedures which mitigate against oppressive authorities (Howard & Gill, 2000).

### **5.5 Judging behaviour: reasoning and regurgitating**

There was evidence in the findings of children across the research settings engaging cooperatively in moral reasoning, justifying their positions and changing their stance pursuant to the arguments of others. In this sense the research supports other studies which highlight children's growing capacity to think beyond rule-bound morality (Russell, 2007; Coles, 1997; Kohlberg, 1981; Piaget, 1932). Coles's assertion of children's passion for moral discussion was also reflected in the findings, which recorded significant enthusiasm towards the discussion. In considering the PowerPoint story, in general, the children condemned the blue person's behaviour on various grounds: he was bad to nature, took food from the bird, upset the other people, wanted money, didn't share, was greedy and was mean. In their discussion of the PowerPoint story and of the photographs, some of the children questioned the moral virtue of laws and the behaviour of authoritative figures, notably the police. To this extent, the findings suggest children's ability to judge moral acts based predominantly on the intention of the protagonist (Piaget, 1932) with more limited evidence of children considering the consequences of the actions for others (Kohlberg 1981).

However, the vocabulary and tone of the children's discussion around moral acts was highly dogmatic and reflective of adult to child direction. Children frequently drew on the vocabulary of sharing, greed, kindness and meanness to appraise the behaviours they came across in the sessions. By contrast, there was little evidence of children considering social influences on the behaviour of the characters or principles for resource allocation, besides sharing (Kienbaum & Wilkening, 2009), despite

the stimulus raising these questions. The discourse used by the children highlights the influence of adult rhetoric and social context in defining children's moral judgments (Vygotsky, 1978; Russell, 2007). It also suggests a need for a more critical discourse to be used with children in discussing moral dilemmas and assessing people's choices (Andreotti, 2006; Russell, 2007; Coles, 1997).

### **5.6 Tidying up your planet: Environment as duty**

The discourse employed by children in relation to the environment, like their moral reasoning, reflected adult to child direction regarding good behaviour. The majority of children in the study understood the word "environment" to be about tidying up and keeping "the world" clean. Some children also demonstrated an awareness of issues of pollution. There was evidence too of children's awareness of the importance of the environment, for example the value of trees, both to birds and to humans, and several children articulated people's intrinsic valuing of the environment, sometimes in a religious (God's creation) context, as is referenced in chapter four. These different reflections on the word environment, however, all point to children's learning here being in the context of environmental care and responsibility. Children's understanding of the word "environment" focussed on what they had to do or not do to it, or why they had to look after it. Their discourse reflects paternalistic attitudes to the environment and instructive approaches, focussed particularly on littering and tidiness, and highlight the central role played by education in constructing children's environmental understanding (Aguirre-Bielschowsky et al., 2012; Scoffham, 2010).

The children's focus on environmental responsibility in this study however contrasts with the conceptions of the environment held by the majority of the children in Loughland et al.'s study in Australia. While Loughland et al. (2002) found that the majority of children involved in their study took an objective focus, describing the environment as a place, the majority of children in this study understood the environment in a relational context, with people being responsible for it and, to a lesser extent, dependant on it. Only a minority of children here took an object focus, perceiving the environment as a place which contains living things.

The findings also contrast with those of Aguirre-Bielschowsky et al.'s research conducted in Mexico and New Zealand (2012). Their observation that the children involved with their research rarely linked environmental problems to human causes contrasts to this study, where the children foregrounded human responsibility for environmental problems. Children's understanding of the environment as nature (the predominant understanding held by children in the Aguirre-Bielschowsky study) was, however, evidenced in relation to some children in this study.

While these findings suggest children's recognition of responsibility towards the environment, their understanding projects a detachment from the natural world. The environment, as portrayed by the children in the study, is about tidying up and keeping clean, rather than being about the plants, animals, buildings or spaces around us. In this respect, the findings support Scoffham's (2010) demands for education which

provides more contact with nature and encourages critical thinking and emotional and social engagement with the world around us.

### **5.7 The world and the word: bridging the divide in critical literacy.**

The findings from the research highlight both the possibilities for and the challenges in using critical literacy approaches for exploring global citizenship issues. The research documents the empowering and enjoyable potential for critical literacy (Sahni, 2001), with children noting the changing classroom dynamic during the research sessions as against regular practice (Kempe, 2001; Comber, 2001; Vasquez, 2001; Sahni, 2001). The potential for using critical literacy pedagogy to support key citizenship skills was also recorded in the findings. The use of the PowerPoint stories supported children's problem-solving abilities, negotiating skills and assessment of realistic and unrealistic behaviour, as well as their discussion of moral and justice issues, skills regarded as key to citizenship education (Regan, 2006; Fiedler et al., 2008). To this extent the research suggests the possibility for using analogous and open stories to explore core citizenship issues. It also suggests the use of this pedagogy for supporting support children's analytical and creative as well as practical thinking, as advocated by Uszyriska-Jarmoc (2005).

While an integrated critical literacy and global citizenship approach supported core skill development, the knowledge dimension (Regan, 2006; Davies, 2006) proved more problematic. Children's prior knowledge plays a pivotal role in critical literacy (Cambourne, 2002; Green, 2001; Comber, 2001). While Comber suggests using local cultural texts to mobilise students' knowledge and practices, this study used images from different and distant countries, and an abstract story. For the majority of children in the study the realities depicted in the "texts" were unfamiliar places. A key challenge arising from the research, therefore, was how to facilitate children's critical engagement with a representation without their being familiar with the reality depicted in that representation. In looking at the photographs, children often understood them to represent "the complete picture" and were challenged in considering what was not shown in the photograph or possible alternative representations of the reality captured. It was only a minority of children, often those with experience of different locations, who suggested the photograph might be depicting one circumstance rather than the full set of circumstances.

While the research foregrounds challenges to including global learning in critical literacy work, it also highlights the importance of and the potential for including critical literacy in global citizenship education. The discussion relating to the photographs teased out the strong assumptions which the children brought to the images. The extent to which children's understanding of the photographs was informed by their prior knowledge and public discourse in relation to developing countries reaffirms Freire's theory (1983) that knowledge of the world precedes and is intertwined with reading the word. While Damico asserts that "reader reflexivity", an awareness of one's own values, bias and experience, is essential for critical literacy, the extent to which the discussion relating to the photographs solicited children's expectations

and prejudices towards developing countries suggests that it is also a suitable starting point for global citizenship work.

The differences between the children's approach to the photographs and the PowerPoint story highlights the significance of using different genres of texts in critical literacy and global citizenship education. While the children approached the photographs as a representation of reality, they tended to view the story as fiction and consider it in relation to the conventions of other stories. In the writing task, they wrote its resolution not according to what they perceived might happen in reality, but what most often happens in stories. There was limited consideration of the story as an analogy for real situations, most likely because children were predominantly unfamiliar with the "real-life" issues suggested. The abstract and open-ended nature of the PowerPoint study enabled the children to explore philosophical issues in a theoretical context (Andreotti, 2006). If stories are to be used to focus on socio-political issues, to take action and to promote social justice (Lewison et al., 2002) or to develop children's understanding of the wider world, the study suggests the need for teachers to mediate children's linkages between the fictional and the actual world. While critical literacy might therefore play a role challenging an acceptance of a text or photograph as fact and objective (Green, 2001; Kempe, 2001; Dyson, 2001; McLaughlin & DeVoogd, 2004), global citizenship education might require teachers to support children's bridging the divide between stories and reality.



## 6 Recommendations

This research project was conducted with the purpose of informing the development of teacher support materials in the area of critical literacy and global citizenship education. Accordingly this chapter provides recommendations for such development arising from the findings and discussion set out in chapters four and five respectively.

1. *Deeper and broader understandings of poverty:* The children in this study tended to understand poverty as a denial of all basic needs and only in the context of certain global locations. Exploring poverty in different circumstances and different contexts may support children's engagement with the complexity of global and justice issues.
2. *Wider world knowledge:* The findings of this study indicate that children's knowledge of the world tends to focus on the Global North and Africa and that their understanding of African countries is informed by fundraising campaigns. In doing so, they support calls for education which widens and deepens children's knowledge of developing countries and which supports awareness of the emerging economies.
3. *Exploring our global relationships:* The findings highlight the dominance of aid in children's understandings of the links between people in Ireland and people in the Global South. This suggests the importance of exploring the concept of interdependence in global citizenship education.
4. *Moral reasoning rather than moral messages:* The study affirms children's capacity and enthusiasm for philosophical discussion, yet suggests that ethical behaviour is taught to the children through a dogmatic rather than exploratory approach. The study suggests that space be provided for children to discuss moral and justice issues through open philosophical discussion, rather than conclusive directions.
5. *Global learning to accompany critical literacy:* The study illustrates the challenges in conducting critical literacy work using representations of distant and unfamiliar contexts. In this sense, it finds that critical literacy is most easily conducted in relation to local texts. However, the findings, which highlight children's adoption of essentialised depictions of developing countries, point to the importance of critical literacy in relation to text reflecting global unfamiliar realities. Accordingly, in this context global learning is essential to support and complement critical literacy skills. Including multiple and alternative perspectives on places around the world is required to challenge and complexify children's understandings of developing countries and support their critique of dominant images.

6. *Emotional and positive environmental education:* The study's findings suggest that the environmental education experienced by the children has focussed on their environmental responsibilities. An approach that supports children's attachment to the environment, including their emotional, social and cultural connections, is recommended to complement the focus on environmental care and conservation.

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