

# **An Evaluation of 'Lift Off'**

**The Cross Border Primary Human Rights  
Education Initiative**

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## **The context and support for Human Rights Education (HRE)**

The well-established move to protect the rights of a diverse range of groups in the education sector has necessitated the development of programmes that go beyond issues of national citizenship and look to more comprehensive human concerns (Lodge and Lynch, 2004; Suarez and Ramirez, 2004; Tomaševski, 2002). In the context of mass population movement and immigration, citizenship and democratic education can very much help nation-states face the challenge that balancing unity and diversity presents (Banks et al., 2005). As cultural globalisation increases and traditional notions of state sovereignty are eroded in some respects, human rights concepts are more likely to penetrate national curricula and national policies in education and elsewhere. Carter and Osler's (2000) review suggests human rights education provides us with a set of principles that can be applied to any professional or human working context and can provide a guarantee of pluralism and equality for all. Both the Republic of Ireland and Great Britain and Northern Ireland have ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Therefore each is obligated under international law to provide children with the right to an education and the right to learn about their rights and responsibilities.

The 'Lift Off' programme has been described, amongst other things, as a measure taken in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. The briefing paper states:

('Lift Off') was established at a time when human rights were increasingly being seen as the vehicle and means through which positive social change could occur on the island of Ireland. Under the terms of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement 1998, a priority was given to the creation of a 'human rights culture' in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

Along with the establishment of Irish and Northern Irish Human Rights Commissions (which have a responsibility for raising of human rights awareness), state and non-state organisations both North and South have collaborated to produce the programme. The directors of 'Lift Off' state the programme has incorporated a strong global justice perspective, given the extent of globalisation, diversity and increasing critical awareness of inequality in education on this island.

*Lift Off* (Amnesty International et al., 2001) claims that personal and social development are key outcomes for the programme. Indeed, Carter and Osler's (2000) research underlines the potential for developing conflict resolution skills and improving student behaviour through HRE. Their action research involved groups of teenage males in an English second level school. It suggested there is a potential for democratic strategies (such as circle time), active listening and teamwork activities to help students *and teachers* develop constructive relationships, manage conflict and develop a critical awareness of notions of power and trust in their school environment. Control in the classroom environment emerged as a significant theme in this study. The authors paint rather a bleak picture of teacher-centred, rigidly controlled classrooms that do not explicitly develop students' social skills through a culture of human rights:

Without progressive practice in social skills it is likely that students will either become more reliant on... two types of established response, aggression or passivity, or they rely more heavily on teacher control. This behaviour may only compound teacher perceptions of students as incompetent and immature. Many students feel marooned; a sense of insularity and inertia rather than solidarity and action may increase the possibility of future fission. Rights are claimed partially or incoherently. There seems to be little celebration of diversity (Carter and Osler, 2000, p. 351).

While this account concerns second level schooling, HRE is equally, if not more relevant in terms of discourses of power in primary schools. There is a developed literature on the importance of human rights and citizenship education in recognising voice of the child. Devine (2003) briefly details the evolution of the study of childhood and education and describes how formerly limited developmental psychology views on children as 'irrational', 'passive' and 'becoming' were replaced with the social constructivist perspectives of children as actively responding to the world and exploring their emerging identities and capabilities. More recent commentators have argued that the concept of childhood is socially constructed, with cultural and historical variations. Devine (2003) suggests the advent of mass, compulsory state schooling

Was a key component in the structuring of modern childhood, regulating, controlling and defining children's lives in a systematic society wide manner (2003, p. 3).

Thus, we may consider childhood as a construction which is framed to a lesser or greater extent by children's additional identity as pupils of our primary schools. Therefore the desire to help children enunciate their views, examine their position as 'subjects' of the school system and become critically analytical of the treatment of their contemporaries worldwide is a very relevant and necessary exercise. In an earlier article, Devine (2002) suggests that as children have been positioned as subordinate, minority players in their schools, education for and into citizenship must be conducted within a framework of children's rights. This education must take into account the dynamics of power which encompass adult-child; teacher-pupil relations within the school setting. Policy on this island has moved towards giving children a 'voice' in this regard some time ago. For example, the *National Children's Strategy* (Department of Health and Children RoI, 2000) appeared to mark quite a step in this direction. While it is fair to suggest that any school North and South may have education for human rights as a very relevant part of its agenda, Educate Together and Integrated Schools may be particularly singled out for their explicit focus on HRE and their active encouragement of student councils.

As Tomaševski (2001) suggests, one must grapple with human rights *in* education before approaching human rights education. *Right Start*, for example encourages the creation of a Human Rights Culture in the classroom, which includes a code of behaviour and fosters the notion that "human rights and responsibilities are not simply concepts, but a way of life" (Cross-Border Primary Human Rights Education Initiative, 2006, p. 5). Recognition of the child's voice is very much apparent in its approaches to learning. The 'Lift Off' materials can be regarded very much as child-centred and activity-oriented. The programme for 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup>/P4 & P5 states, "there is a commitment to ensure that the voice of the child is valued and that the skills necessary for the promotion and protection of human rights are developed through active and participative learning" (2003, p. 4).

### **Previous Evaluations of 'Lift Off'**

Two evaluations have been conducted of the 'Lift Off' programme before this, namely King and Austin (2002) and Morgan (2006). The former evaluation found that the main strength of the initiative was that it was responding to a 'real need'. Other strengths included the unique partnership, which involves agencies such as Departments of Education North and South, Amnesty UK and Irish section, teacher

unions, Education International, Human Rights Commissions and Curriculum bodies North and South. The curriculum materials and participation were also highlighted as positive features of the programme. Issues for consideration included the minimal use of ICT to ‘build bridges’, and difficulties with establishing and maintaining North-South links. Morgan’s more formative evaluation (February 2006) recommended that the programme be explicitly linked to curricular areas, highlighted the crucial importance of whole school implementation of the programme and recommended further research, which might capture the importance of the programme and thereby provide support to its dissemination.’ Lift Off’ has achieved a number of successes to date. For example, two Northern Ireland schools that have won best practice awards from the UK-funded ‘Impetus’ programme for HRE were using ‘Lift Off’.

### **Potential barriers to the ‘Lift Off’ Programme**

The extent to which the principles of, for example the *National Children’s Strategy* have found a place within primary schools in the Republic remains to be seen. While the revised curricula both North and South promote a child-centred view of education, high pupil-teacher ratios, overcrowded timetabling lack of resources and the global, market-driven push for ‘standards’ in schools arguably impinge on the extent to which teachers view themselves as having the time and space to consider education in such ‘progressive’ terms. Indications from research on the voice of the student at *second level*, to say nothing of the primary sector in the Republic are not altogether encouraging. Keogh and Whyte’s (2005) case study work suggested very differing views from Board of Management and student perspectives on what the role of the councils were. While students regarded their councils as an agency for making their school ‘a better place to be in’ (2005, p. 5), Boards of Management tended to see Student Councils as a resource with a consultative capacity.

The work of Cuban (2005) and others has established some very well accepted principles about school change and implementation of education programmes. One is that school context very much impacts on the implementation of policies and programmes. School cultures are regarded as complex, and the dynamics that influence the implementation of programmes are varied and unique to each setting. It is worth also considering here that ‘Lift Off’ is a programme that has been designed for use in schools located in very different parts of the island of Ireland.

Devine (2002) suggests,

It is important that education for citizenship is not confined to the curricular area alone but is conducted within a framework which acknowledges children's positions as actual citizens rather than as potential citizens in the making (Devine, 2002, p. 317).

A programme such as 'Lift Off', while having very reasonable expectations that may match the ethos of any school, has a very *explicit* approach that goes beyond simple curricular content. It is arguable that the programme is unlikely to sustain itself without the agreement and explicit commitment of the entire school community to its focus, e.g. the programme may not flourish in a school where the voice of the child is inconsistently heard. In addition, Cuban (2005, p. 12) states 'while public schools are critical actors, they alone cannot increase academic achievement among poor children and reduce societal inequalities'. Drawing from this notion, it is difficult for schools to foster an appreciation of human rights in a vacuum. For example, while human rights awareness may or may not impact positively on internal school behaviour, it is less likely that societal change<sup>1</sup> will be effected if parents or wider community do not place a premium on the human rights awareness, or mutual understanding. It is accepted that children construct social images of the groups they belong to and of other groups at an early stage of their socialisation, and Irish children are no exception (see Gash and Murphy-Lejeune, 2004). Taking the issue of conflict in Northern Ireland to illustrate this difficulty, the Special Rapporteur to Northern Ireland (Tomaševski, 2002) reviewed and underlined the influence of the home and community in quickly shaping young children's views:

Children as young as 6 (after the first two years of compulsory education) recognize the political significance of symbols such as parades or flags associated with the Catholic and Protestant communities, 34 per cent identify with their community and 15 per cent make sectarian comments. Such findings reinforce the thrust of integrated education, in particular the creation of "a common anti-bias language", especially for children aged 3 to 5, when they learn how to meet adults' expectations by behaving to attract approval<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> And indeed, it is less likely that children will apply HRE concepts learned in school to their wider world.

<sup>2</sup> These figures are quoted from Connolly, P. et al. (2002) *Too Young to Notice? The Cultural and Political Awareness of 3-6 Year Olds in Northern Ireland*, Northern Ireland Community Relations Council, Belfast, June 2002.

Efforts to promote mutual understanding through the education system have been well underway in Northern Ireland for many years. However, while the Schools Community Relation Programme (SCRCP) review has praised the commitment of stakeholders, the low strategic importance of the programme, time-consuming administrative procedures and low level funding have all been highlighted as concerns for its implementation (O'Connor, Hartop and McCully, 2002). These issues are useful to bear in mind in the present evaluation. Finally, from the evaluator's perspective, it may be difficult to measure 'results' from 'Lift Off' in terms of pupil behaviour or 'school atmosphere'. However, as the above review should indicate, this does not mean that increased awareness of human rights issues is any less desirable an 'outcome' than mathematic proficiency, for example.

## Objectives of the Evaluation

The objectives of this evaluation of 'Lift Off' are as follows:

- To assess the impact and relevance of the programme to primary schools in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland and;
- To identify the strengths and potential barriers facing the implementation of the Lift Off programme

## Methodology

### Quantitative Survey

The school questionnaire contained three sections, dealing with the school and its involvement in the programme (section A), the various features of the 'Lift Off' programme in the school and reactions to these (Section B) and the future development of the programme and how it should be implemented (Section C).

*Section A* contained questions that inquired about the school, its size, location and gender of children in the school. They were also asked about the length of time that the school had been involved in the programme as well as the number of classes involved. *Section B* was concerned with the 'Lift Off' programme. Questions focused on the need for the programme and the awareness of the need for such a programme in the system. With regard to the 'Lift Off' programme, the participants were asked to rate the aims of the programme, the topics focused on, the support materials, the support personnel and the cross border dimension. For each aspect, participants gave a rating on a five points scale (from very good to poor) and were also given an

opportunity for open-ended comments after each one. They were then asked about the topics covered in the programme. These were listed and the schools were asked to say whether each topic was 'Very appropriate to 'Not appropriate' (5 point scale).

The questionnaire also inquired about the specific ways in which the programme helped children. These included helping children with regard to conflict resolution, helping children to understand other people's rights and helping children make decisions. For each of the 12 features, schools were asked to rate its helpfulness on a four point scale from 'Helps a lot' to 'Does not help'.

In this section of the questionnaire, schools were asked about the fit between the programme and other features of the curriculum. These included 'language and literacy' and 'ethical/religious education' for both North and South and with somewhat different versions relating to social and personal education (SPHE, Personal Understanding). The responses about the fit were on a five-point scale from 'fits very well' to 'Does not fit at all'.

The participants were also asked about any changes they might have observed in the school since the launch of the programme. These included 'children becoming more aware of issues that are central to human rights' and 'the school community becoming more aware of human rights'. Responses were on a four point scale ranging from 'Very much in evidence' to 'don't know'.

*Section C* of the questionnaire was concerned with the future and the full implementation of the programme. Schools were asked about the main barriers to full implementation of the programme including the 'overcrowded' curriculum, lack of in-service and not being linked to other aspects of the curriculum. For each of the nine factors, they were asked to rate the importance of each one in terms of preventing full implementation (four point scale from very important to not important). They were also asked about the specific ways in which the implementation of the programme might be enhanced. The list included more involvement of parents, more support from Government and shortening the programme (a list of seven possible actions). The rating was similar to those for the main barriers i.e., a four point scale from 'very important' to 'not important'. There was also an opportunity to comment on other possible changes that might help with implementation.

Based on lists of involved schools, questionnaires were sent to 51 schools which were involved in the programme. They were dispatched to school in the 3<sup>rd</sup> week in June 2006 with the request that the completed questionnaires be returned to St. Patrick's College within two weeks. By July 7<sup>th</sup> a total of 33 questionnaires had been received. Given that some of the schools had not been involved in the project in the current year, this response rate is regarded as satisfactory.

### ***Questionnaire Return***

Below is shown a profile of the schools returning questionnaires. From Table 1 it is clear that there is a good representation (given the size of the project) from the various kinds of schools, fourteen from the North and nineteen from the South. It is also clear that the schools in the programme have a significant involvement; only a very small number indicate that they have only one class and over half have more than two classes in the programme. The information on the length of involvement in the programme is also of interest. About two-thirds of the schools say that this is their first year in the programme and a relatively small number have been involved since the programme began.

**Table 1: Profile of Schools in Lift-Off Programme based on Returned Questionnaires**

<b>Gender of Students</b>		<b>Size of School</b>	
Mixed	27	2-4 teachers	9
All Girls	1	4-8 teachers	9
All Boys	5	9 teachers or more	15
<b>School Management</b>			
Catholic Denominational (RoI)	10	Controlled School (NI)	3
Educate Together (RoI)	7	Maintained School (NI)	9
Other Management (RoI)	2	Integrated School (NI)	0
		Other Management (NI)	2
<b>Length involved in the Human Rights Education Programme</b>		<b>Number of classes involved in the programme</b>	
Just this year	20	One class	3
Last two years	6	Two classes	15
Since the programme began	7	More than two classes	17

## **Qualitative Phase**

### ***Participants***

The first qualitative phase of this study consisted of group, pair and individual interviews with 15 teachers and 15 pupils from six schools north and south who were involved in the ‘Lift Off’ programme. Two teachers (one from a Northern Ireland school, and one from a school in the Republic of Ireland) were also interviewed with particular emphasis on the linking aspect of their work during a Teachers’ Forum day. The second phase of interviews was conducted with three stakeholders North and South. The ‘Lift Off’ team referred the evaluators to those who were available for interview.

Given that the qualitative phase was conducted in the last two weeks of the school year, the ‘Lift Off’ project co-ordinators assisted in contacting some schools and teachers to participate in the evaluation, but the final decision as to which persons/schools to interview rested with the evaluators. The participation of children in three schools in ‘Lift Off’ activities and in a discussion around ‘Lift Off’ was also

recorded for the purposes of this evaluation. The table below summarises the above information:

**Table 2: Participants in the Qualitative Phase**

<b>Location</b>	<b>Number of participants</b>	<b>School Background</b>
<i>Teachers' Forum</i>	1 Teacher	Urban Catholic, RoI
<i>Teachers' Forum</i>	1 Teacher	Urban Controlled, NI
<i>In-School</i>	2 Teachers; 7 children (Senior Infants and 2 <sup>nd</sup> )	Rural Catholic, RoI
<i>In-School</i>	1 Teacher	Urban Educate Together, RoI
<i>In-School</i>	3 Teachers, 4 children (5 <sup>th</sup> Class)	Town Church of Ireland, RoI
<i>In-School</i>	4 Teachers, 4 children (P3)	Urban Controlled, NI (multi- denominational)
<i>In-School</i>	4 Teachers	Urban Gaelscoil, NI (multi- denominational)
<i>In-School</i>	1 Teaching Principal	Rural Maintained, NI

As can be seen from the above table, teachers were interviewed from quite a diverse range of schools. The number of teachers interviewed in each school is inconsistent due to the varying number of teachers using 'Lift Off' in each school and in-school time constraints. All of the teachers had some experience of teaching the programme. However, this varied widely from people who had been involved in the writing of the programme to those who had only taught two lessons on the programme. Two were not engaged in teaching 'Lift Off' at the time due to their posts in teaching for special needs outside of the mainstream class. The majority of those interviewed were teaching junior classes and therefore, the *Right Start* programme (for ages 4-8). This pilot programme had been received some months after the 2005/2006 school year had commenced. While the data is somewhat limited in this sense, we can point out that three teachers had experience of teaching the senior class materials (namely *Me, You, Everyone* and *Lift Off*).

It was felt in the planning stage of the qualitative research that it would appear contradictory to the human rights approach (and indeed current research thinking) if children did not participate in this evaluation. Due to the age of two of the groups of children interviewed (i.e. between ages of five and seven) it was felt more appropriate

to engage them in some ‘Lift Off’ activities to set a concrete context for discussion about some of the themes of *Right Start*. The evaluator was experienced as a primary school teacher. It was not necessary to involve the 5<sup>th</sup> class children in any lesson activities, as they were more than capable of discussing the lessons in an abstract manner. The in-school data collection was conducted in the last week of the 2005-2006 school year, and for various reasons connected to this, it was not possible to interview children in all schools<sup>3</sup>.

Teachers were asked questions about the following:

- School descriptors such as school tradition, pupil background and community information
- School ethos and possible school policy context for Human Rights Education
- How the school became involved with the ‘Lift Off’ programme
- Evaluation of lesson ideas, curriculum materials and teaching approaches
- Teacher’s own approaches to using the materials
- Linking across the curriculum with Lift Off
- Experiences of linking with other schools involved in the programme
- Overall impact of ‘Lift Off’ on pupils and the school
- Satisfaction with the support element of Lift Off
- Views on the strengths of ‘Lift Off’ and potential barriers to its implementation
- Views on how implementation of the programme could be increased or enhanced

With children in P3 and between Senior Infants and Second Class, various activities from the *Right Start* programme were used. These included a joint reading of and discussion on the story *Not Now Bernard*, playing the ‘emotion dice’ game and writing our forenames inside an outline of our hands. The interviews/discussions were taped, transcribed and coded into quite structured categories (in a similar to the questions outlined above) using N-Vivo 7 software.

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<sup>3</sup> For example, given the short space of time between contacting some schools and actual interviews, there was not enough time to arrange parental consent for their children to be interviewed.

### ***Concern for respondents***

Teachers were advised that neither their identity, nor those of their schools would be revealed in the report. This is particularly important given that some teachers were teaching in politically sensitive areas. Given the small number of participants, the comments of individuals would be easily identifiable if even the type of school they taught in was attached to their remarks. Therefore, the only descriptor that is used with each participant is a geo-political marker, i.e. Northern Ireland or Republic of Ireland. At times (as will be apparent in the analysis) it was necessary to identify the type of school being discussed. Therefore, those involved were sent a copy of their remarks (including when possible identifiers were used) and asked to give their final consent to such comments being used in the report.

Investigating children's experiences was an all-too brief but important part of this research, which carries its own set of ethical and procedural issues with regard to the ability and power differential between adult and child, the task of representing children fairly, and issues of explaining the research to children (Hill, 2005). The teachers of the children who participated requested parental consent for their children to be interviewed. A teacher or classroom assistant was present with the interviewer for all interviews involving children. With the youngest participants, the interviewer set a context for the discussion by introducing the children to the tape, recording their voices, replaying them, and trying to ensure they were comfortable with their views being committed to tape. *Right Start* activities were then used to contextualise discussion on themes such as respect, tolerance and conflict resolution. The nature and purpose of the interviews was described in as much detail as possible to all pupil participants. The text on very young children's responses that were used was sent to the teachers of these pupils for comment and feedback (these teachers were present with the younger children), while the more senior children were privately sent a group copy of the text that concerned them.

## **Findings and analysis**

### **Questionnaire Results**

#### ***The Lift-Off Programme***

Schools were asked about the need for a Human Rights Programme and the awareness in the system of the need for such a programme. The results are shown in Table 3.

Overall, these results indicate that while it was the case that there was a real need for Human Rights Education, the awareness of this is not very strong in the system. The most common response was that there was a very great need, yet with regard to awareness, the most common response was that there was only ‘some awareness’. It is also of interest to note that while some of the respondents (i.e., 6) were prepared to say that there was only a small awareness, no one gave corresponding view with regard to perceived need. A preliminary breakdown of the results did not indicate any major differences between Northern Ireland and the South.

**Table 3: Need for Human Rights Education and Awareness of Such Need within the System**

<b>Need</b>		<b>Awareness</b>	
<i>Very great need</i>	20	<i>Great awareness</i>	3
<i>Great need</i>	13	<i>Some awareness</i>	19
<i>Hard to say</i>	-	<i>Hard to say</i>	5
<i>Not a great need</i>	-	<i>Small awareness</i>	6
<i>No need at all</i>	-	<i>Little or no awareness</i>	-

With regard to each of the issues above, teachers were asked to write in an open-ended format comments to elaborate on their opinion. With regard to the need for Human Rights Education, some responses were of a general kind, in that they stressed the need for such education:

*‘Children need to learn to give and take... have rights and responsibilities from an early age’*

*‘We need to educate children against hate’*

*‘Having experienced the benefits of the programme and the difference it made to certain children’s attitudes... it became obvious that that there was a great need for this in the curriculum’*

Another view was that there were particular circumstances that made Human Rights Education necessary:

*‘With the increase in the number of pupils from different countries and different ethnic backgrounds there an ever-increasing need for HRE....’*

*'Children have a right to learn about their rights and that they have an Ombudsman...'*

*'Watch the news! We need to learn how to treat others... We also have to counteract what is learned in the home...'*

With regard to the *awareness*, most of comments centred around the reasons why the awareness of the need for such a programme is not as great as it might be. Among the comments were:

*'Other aspects of education received funding, support....and are geared towards scores and standards'*

*'I think a lot of teachers believe that skills such as empathy and compassion develop implicitly. On the other hand, I believe that human rights behaviour must be fostered... like everything in the primary school'*

*'Although I believe that Rights in Flight has been distributed widely, that is not to say that awareness has been correspondingly heightened'*

*'I don't think people reflect on rights and responsibilities in relation to day-today school issues... To a large extent we think of discipline problems within a traditional framework. Children should be able to stand up for themselves...we still have not reached the position where we accept negative opinions or appreciate that children should have a say on things that affect them'*

Schools were also asked to say which features of the programme they found good or poor. From Table 4 below is evident that the vast majority of schools expressed the view that the various features of the programme were 'very good'. This is very important to emphasise viz, that the vast majority gave the highest rating to every feature. This was the case with the feature that received the lowest rating, that is the cross-border dimension.

**Table 4: Rating of Features of the ‘Lift Off’ Programme**

	<b>Very Good</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Hard to Say</b>	<b>Not Good/Poor</b>
<i>The aims and ideas guiding the programme</i>	27	6	-	-
<i>The topics on the programme</i>	24	8	1	-
<i>Curriculum support materials</i>	22	9	1	1
<i>The in-service training supporting the programmes</i>	20	8	-	3
<i>The support personnel/service involved in the programme</i>	21	10	-	2
<i>Cross-border dimension</i>	17	9	4	3

Given that the ratings were very positive, and also that there are differences with regard to the various features, it is worthwhile to look at the differences between the features and see why these emerged. As noted above, the schools were offered the opportunity to comment on each feature in an open-ended format. The vast majority did not comment and those that did were also inclined to have expressed reservations. This limitation should be borne in mind in considering the comments below.

With regard to the aims and ideas guiding the programme, the comments were very positive indeed. They include:

*‘Very appropriate and suitable for all levels’*

*The programme clearly places human rights within a rights/responsibility framework’*

*‘Very relevant and linked well with other curricular areas including language, social studies and to a lesser extent maths and music*

*‘Clearly based on the most important issues facing the world’*

While the vast majority of schools were strongly supportive of the in-service training supporting the programme. However, a minority had reservations. It seemed that these reservations had to do with the voluntary courses.

*'There should be an in-service day specifically on HR education, no voluntary courses...the on-line summer course is a great option!'*

*'It is extremely difficult for staff to travel long distances on a Saturday'*

*'The days were good...but follow through depends on the willingness of participating schools and principals'*

More open-ended comments were made on the curriculum support materials than on any other. The majority of these were very positive. Comments included:

*'Lesson materials were very suitable and user-friendly'*

*'Samples of Fair Trade products should be given...rather than sending away and following up!'*

*'I would have liked better presentation in relation to emotions...'*

*'Lists of novels, videos... that might accompany each topic'*

The cross-border dimension was most commented on. The general drift of comments was that the idea was a good one but hard to bring about in practice. A sample of comments:

*'In theory this an excellent idea...but the cost was prohibitive'*

*'Good initial opportunities...but hard to follow through without money'*

*'I considered this aspect to be crucial....I made links with two schools ...but we did not succeed in involving the children to any great extent...'*

*'I would like to see more opportunities to link with schools in the North'*

### **Topics in Lift Off**

As noted above in the description of the questionnaire, the major topics in the 'Lift-Off' programme were listed and schools were asked to say how appropriate they thought each one was in the middle and senior classes. As can be seen from Table 5, the responses were exceptionally positive by any standard. Not only were all the responses positive but for two topics, every school gave the highest rating (rights and Responsibilities and Personal Opinions and Conflict Resolution). The responses to the others were also very positive and the very small and few misgivings are explained below.

**Table 5: Evaluation of Specific Topics in ‘Lift Off’**

	<b>Very Apt.</b>	<b>Appropriate</b>	<b>Hard to Say</b>	<b>Not very apt/inapt.</b>
<i>Rights and Responsibilities</i>	33	-	-	-
<i>Convention on the Rights of the Child</i>	30	2	1	-
<i>Stories of Rights in Conflict</i>	27	2	4	-
<i>Gender, Identity and Equality</i>	28	5	-	-
<i>Universal Declaration of Human Rights</i>	27	7	-	-
<i>Personal Opinions and Conflict Resolution</i>	33	-	-	-

In line with the other questions, schools were invited to make open-ended comments if they wished on the topics. About half did so for at least some of the topics and these are worth exploring.

With regard to Rights and Responsibilities the comments were uniformly positive. However, part of the theme of these responses was that children were sometimes not aware of the responsibilities:

*‘They know or they think they know their rights....but are not quite so hot on their responsibilities!’*

*‘Many children are aware that they have rights...but forget about their responsibilities’*

*‘Children need to know that rights and responsibilities are everyday concepts to be practiced in the classroom, yard and at home’*

With regard to the Convention on the Rights of the Child the comments were also positive but with small misgivings regarding complexity:

*‘This is for every child and very appropriate’*

*‘The convention is central to Human Rights Education...’*

*‘It is important to compare our situation with other parts of the world’*

*‘There is a need to simplify the material...’*

With regard to Rights in Conflict, the comments here were also very positive but as is clear from Table 5, a small number of schools found it 'hard to say', possibly indicating that they did not teach this module. Among the comments were:

*'Children have to understand that it is part of life that our rights conflict with others, story is a fantastic way of getting this message across'*

*'All children love stories. Real life stories engage interest and make learning real'*

*'Very relevant...many children have come from countries where there is conflict...and have left families in countries where there is conflict'*

*'I did not teach this section'*

There were also very positive comments about gender, identity and equality and of the very few other comments, they suggested ways of enhancing the content. A sample of comments are:

*'A rights programme must start with identity. Matters to do with equality must be considered within a rights context., e.g. matters related to disability should be within a rights/responsibility context.'*

*'Especially in senior classes, children may be thinking of their own identity as they develop...the issues of tolerance and acceptance are important'*

*'Increasingly important now that children are coming from countries where women's rights are not respected'*

*'This is relevant for senior classes only'*

The comments regarding the Universal Declaration of Human Rights were also positive and only with minor misgivings on complexity. Comments included:

*'It is appropriate that senior classes should understand the pivotal role of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.'*

*'It is important to compare our situation with other parts of the world'*

*'It is good for children to get a broader picture ....rights exist for children and adults everywhere'*

*'Some of this is a little abstract for children'*

The comments with regard to 'personal opinions and conflict resolution' were without exception, extremely positive:

*'The central point is that children know they have a right to express their opinions particularly in matters that concern them ...and that their opinions will carry weight'*

*'It is very important for children to learn the skills to resolve conflict'*

*'This is possibly the most important section...it is where rights come 'alive'. There is so much conflict in our world and as teachers we deal with it constantly in the classroom and in the yard. Everyone needs to learn how to deal with conflict in the most positive way possible and to encourage resolution and compromise'*

*'It is very important that children learn to be comfortable and confident expressing their opinions and listening to those of others'*

### ***Lift Off and General Aims of Education***

The participants were asked to indicate the extent to which the Lift-Off programme contributes the aims of education. For each of the 12 aims (listed on the basis of their broad relevance to the programme), the schools were asked to say how much the programme helped in the achievement of each aim (From 'helps lot to' to 'Does not help'. The full results are shown in Table 6.

**Table 6: Contribution of the ‘Lift Off’ Programme to the Aims of Education of Primary School Children**

	<b>Helps a lot</b>	<b>Helps somewhat</b>	<b>Hard to say</b>	<b>Does not help</b>
<i>Helping children understand their rights</i>	27	6	-	-
<i>Helping children understand the rights of others</i>	28	5	-	-
<i>Helping children to be more sensitive to the feelings of others</i>	28	5	-	-
<i>Giving children ideas about justice in the world</i>	26	7	-	-
<i>Promoting understanding of minorities in the country</i>	15	12	6	-
<i>Helping children make informed and responsible decisions throughout their lives</i>	20	11	2	-
<i>Helping children work as a member of a team</i>	21	9	3	-
<i>Helping children develop conflict resolution skills</i>	20	10	3	-
<i>Helping children to take responsibility for their actions</i>	23	8	2	-
<i>Helping children develop empathy, tolerance and mutual respect for others</i>	23	10	--	-
<i>Helping children develop a sense of their own identity</i>	22	9	2	-
<i>Helping children understand their feelings and emotions</i>	24	7	2	-

An important consideration with regard to the results shown in Table 5, is that the aims taken together are quite comprehensive and take in a great many of the ‘great aims’ of education generally. For example, included are understanding feelings and emotions, sense of identity, working as a member of a team and developing empathy, tolerance and mutual respect. Thus, endorsing the programme with respect to these features is a stringent requirement, given the range and diversity of the aims involved.

Bearing this in mind, the responses of school are very positive. The pattern of results with regard 'helping children understand their rights', helping children understand the rights of others' and 'helping children to be more sensitive to the feelings of others', are very similar in there is unanimity that the programme help a lot/somewhat to bring about these aims. Part of the reason for the high level of endorsement with regard to these aims, may be due to the similarity between the specific aims of the programme and these particular aspects of the aims of education. The same pattern emerges with regard to giving children ideas about 'giving ideas about justice in the world'

There are a number of more general matters, that are less tied specifically to the programme and the pattern is slightly different, particularly with regard to 'hard to say'. This can be found with 'promoting the understanding of minorities in the country' and 'helping children make informed and responsible decisions throughout the lives'. In each case, five schools indicated that they found it 'hard say' about the programme.

This pattern of results show well the programme fits in with the aims of education. Given the range of aims that were targeted and their importance, this is a very significant endorsement of the programme.

### ***'Lift Off' and Other Areas of the Curriculum***

Schools were asked about the extent to which the programme fits in with several areas of the curriculum, including language and literacy, and SESE/Social studies. For each of five areas, the respondents were asked to say how they fit was, on a five point scale (from 'very well' to 'not well at all').

As can be seen from Table 7, the vast majority of the schools took the view that the programme fitted with very well or well with each of the areas listed. While this was the case for all areas listed, it was particularly so with SPHE and PSHE. As can be seen from Table 6, not a single school expressed any doubt about the importance of the 'Lift Off' programme with regard to personal and social education. We will return to this theme again since the development of the programme depends on its linkage with accepted and defined areas of the existing curriculum. For the moment the important finding is that schools took the view that there was an excellent fit between the programme and the existing curriculum.

**Table 7: Lift-Off and Areas of the Curriculum**

	Very Well	Quite Well	Hard to Say	Not very well/not well at all
Language and Literacy	22	9	1	1
SESE/Social Studies World Around Us	21	8	4	-
SPHE/PSHE Personal Understanding	29	3	-	-
Ethical/Religious Education	26	5	-	1
Education for Mutual understanding/in the wider community*	17	5	-	-

\* This question was included in many questionnaires that went to schools in the South and for obvious reasons, some left this blank

### ***Perceived Outcomes of the Programme***

Schools were asked about outcomes that might be evident as a result of participation in the programme. These centred on matters to do with human rights and the extent to which there were manifestations of the programme in the everyday interactions in school. In particular the emphasis was on awareness of human rights in the school community including teachers and children.

It is important to note that if the schools find evidence of outcomes under these headings, it is a strong indication that the programme was indeed having a powerful effect throughout the school. Another important point is that we deliberately chose an outcome which might not be desirable viz, ‘issues about human rights becoming a problem’ We did this partly to have at least some items on the questionnaire that required a departure from simply endorsing features that were positive.

In Table 8 we show the views of the participating schools with regard to these outcomes. The pattern of results emerging from this table is interesting and shows how seriously the participants took the evaluation exercise. With regard to ‘children becoming more aware of issues that are central to human rights’, well over half of schools took the view this outcome was very evident. Furthermore almost all of the others said that this outcome was somewhat evident.

Schools were given the opportunity to comment on the evidence of children’s greater awareness. Among the written statements were:

*‘The children became very involved in the whole programme...listening to their conversations showed me the impact of the programme’*

*‘A visit from an Amnesty representative highlighted the raised awareness and interest among the pupils’*

*‘Two of the children wrote speeches and took part in the HRE forum in Dublin Castle’*

The schools which indicated that this was ‘not evident’ said:

*‘The programme was done in the junior classes. Apart from the time spent on the lessons, the children did not seem to discuss what they had learned about’*

**Table 8: Outcomes of the Lift-Off Programme in Evidence in Schools**

	<b>Very Evident</b>	<b>Somewhat Evident</b>	<b>Not Evident</b>	<b>Don’t Know</b>
Children becoming more aware of issues that are central to human rights	18	14	1	-
Teachers more inclined to make human rights a part of the curriculum	14	17	2	-
The school community becoming more aware of human rights	11	17	5	-
Issues about rights becoming a problem in the school	1	8	19	5

As can be seen from Table 8, nearly half of the schools said that it was ‘very evident’ that teachers were more inclined to make human rights a part of the curriculum. Most of the others that this was somewhat evident and only two schools said that this was ‘not evident’.

Among the comments on this feature were:

*‘Teachers involved with the programme found that material very good and would use it again’*

*'Teachers' awareness was raised and having a whole school day meant that everyone got involved'*

*'Those involved are more aware and more sensitive to human rights'*

One of the schools that said this was 'not evident' said:

*'The programme was viewed in some of the classes as a programme of ten weeks....the 'everyday' dimension could be further expanded'*

With regard to the school community becoming more aware of human right, just one-third of schools said that this was 'very evident', about half said it was somewhat evident and five schools said it was not evident'. The comments included:

*'The programme certainly encourages this which is fantastic....not only is the class participating ...but others also benefit including parents'*

*'Again the visit from our Amnesty co-ordinator raised awareness of human rights a lot'*

*'It became part of our discussions...especially around the formation of a student council'*

One comment from a school, which felt this was not in evidence, was:

*'We could have made a bigger effort on this aspect'*

Finally, we included the item on human rights issues' becoming a problem'. This was deliberate since all of the items and questions have positive overtones. Because some schools found this item rather strange, they indicated they did not understand; hence the 5 schools saying they 'don't know'. The majority of schools took the view that this feature was 'not evident'.

Even among those that indicated that there was evidence for this feature, it is not necessarily a major difficulty. This is evident in the comments:

*'Issues around conflict resolution became relevant for some pupils'*

*'To the extent that children became more aware of their rights.....but whether this is a problem depends on your views'*

And of those who didn't know:

*'I don't know what you mean by 'problem''*

### **Implementation Issues**

A list was made of the possible barriers the full implementation of a Human Rights programme in schools and schools were asked to rate the relative importance of each one. A variety of items is included in the Table 9 including some which are inherent to the educational system and some which relate specifically to the Lift-off programme.

**Table 9: Barriers to the Full Implementation of Lift-Off Programme**

	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Quite important</b>	<b>Somewhat important</b>	<b>Not important</b>
<i>Overcrowded curriculum</i>	23	6	3	1
<i>Lack of in-service</i>	16	7	9	1
<i>Not relevant to children</i>	3	--	2	28
<i>Inadequate support</i>	5	8	7	13
<i>Too much content</i>	3	5	9	16
<i>Insufficient time</i>	17	7	4	5
<i>Difficulty of linking with other learning</i>	2	7	2	21
<i>Not having adequate leadership and support</i>	3	9	4	17

From Table 9, it is clear that some factors are of major importance to the full implementation of the programme. The single strongest factor that was endorsed as being ‘very important’ by the majority of schools was the ‘overcrowded curriculum’. In fact only one school took the view that this was ‘not important’ (the reading of this particular school was that they regarded the programme as being such major importance that nothing should prevent full implementation). It is also noticeable that insufficient time was next in importance and it is reasonable to conclude that these two factors are related to each other, i.e., the overcrowded curriculum is perceived as providing very little time for innovations.

While lack of in-service is frequently mentioned by teachers as a reason for failure to implement new initiatives, the strength of its endorsement the schools for ‘Lift-Off’ is quite striking. In this study, just half of the schools said that this factor was very important and only one thought that it was ‘not important’. It is likely that the provision of in-service contributes in a number of ways including teaching skills,

guiding on appropriate material and underlining the significance of an area in the curriculum.

The factors that were identified as not being important in the full implementation of the programme are as interesting as those regarded as being important. Perhaps, not surprisingly, given the positive response above, the schools rejected the idea that 'not being relevant to children was important in the full implementation of the programme. Close to 90% of the schools (28) said that this was 'not important'. The picture with regard to 'difficulty of linking with other areas of learning' was also strongly rejected as an important reason in preventing full implementation. Only 2 thought that this was very important and 21 said that it was not important.

With regard to the other factors presented in Table 9, it is noteworthy that opinion is divided with regard to the importance of 'inadequate support'. Part of the reason for this may be that the participants in the programme were very positive about the support from the 'Lift-Off' and may have formed their judgements on that basis. Others may simply have taken a perspective based on the 'system as a whole. As can be seen from the table, 'too much content was not widely regarded as a major matter in preventing full implementation of the programme.

Finally, a number of possible ways in which the programme might be changed with a view to better implementation, were listed and schools were asked to say how each would contribute (very important to not important). The possibilities included changes in the programme and its form to more changes at a system level.

Table 10 shows the importance to which schools attached to each of the factors that were listed. A number of factors emerged as being seen by schools as being of major importance in better implementation of the programme. The most important was 'more support from the Government'. The vast majority thought that this was very important and only one school regarded this as 'not important'. Nearly two thirds of schools took the view that increased in-service was very important and conversely a small number thinking it was not important. It is interesting that greater involvement of parents was thought by the majority of schools to be 'very important'. Obviously this is something is helpful to the implementation of any programme; the crucial issue being how this is to be brought about. There are two factors that are related in that they involve support for the programme, ie. an expanded support service and more

teaching resources. The majority of schools regarded both of these factors as being important with somewhat greater enthusiasm for the ‘expanded support service’.

As might be expected some of the ways that might potentially be helpful in the full implementation of the programme were not strongly endorsed. The least desirable change was around ‘shortening the programme’. Fourteen of the schools took the view that was not an important factor in bringing about greater implementation and only five thought that it was very important. Overall, there was not much enthusiasm for changing the programme to align it with other curricular areas. Just seven thought this was a very important factor while 12 said that it was ‘not important’

**Table 10: Ways in which the Human Rights Programme might be changed for Better Implementation**

	<b>Very important</b>	<b>Quite important</b>	<b>Somewhat important</b>	<b>Not important</b>
More support from government	26	4	2	1
Greater involvement of parents	17	8	6	2
Increased in-service provision	20	7	4	2
Expanded support service	15	9	9	-
Shortening the programme	5	5	9	14
Changes to the Lift-Off programme to align with other curricular areas	7	8	6	12
More teaching resources (e.g. DVDs)	12	11	8	3

### **Main Conclusions from the School Questionnaire**

A number of conclusions emerge from the results of the school questionnaire presented here. Firstly, there was unanimous agreement in the schools that there was a great need for the programme. This need arose from the inherent nature of the issues involved as well as the recent developments in the country. However, while there was a need for the programmes, the schools were less certain about the awareness of this need, largely because of the pressures from other areas of curricular change.

Secondly, there was a strong endorsement of the aims, topics, in-service training and supporting services for the programme. Furthermore, the responses to the individual areas in the programme were very positive and for two topics, every school gave the highest rating (rights and Responsibilities and Personal Opinions and Conflict Resolution). The responses to the other areas were also very positive.

Thirdly, when the participants were asked to indicate the extent to which the 'Lift-Off' programme contributed to a list of 12 aims of education, they took the view that the programme contributed greatly to these aims particularly those that bear an inherent relationship to the programme. Part of the reason for this may be that the vast majority of the schools took the view that the programme fitted with very well or well with areas of the curriculum. While this was the case for all areas listed, it was particularly so with SPHE and PSHE.

Fourth, the schools thought that several positive outcomes were evident as a result of participation in the programme. These were largely to do with human rights and the manifestations of the programme in the everyday interactions in school. In particular there was an awareness of human rights in the school community including teachers and children.

Finally when schools were asked about factors preventing the full implementation, they emphasised the importance of the 'overcrowded curriculum' and the lack of time. Better implementation would come about as a result of increased Government support and better in-service provision, relevant to the programme.

## **Qualitative Findings and Analysis**

This section outlines the interviews conducted with teachers and pupils from eight schools in Summer 2005. It outlines the schools' approaches to 'Lift Off' and the impact it has had on them, teachers' views on the materials and the approaches they use, schools' experiences of linking and issues of whole school implementation. The possible barriers 'Lift Off' may face and the support it may require are also discussed. What was interesting about the responses from our participants was that they gave differing answers to a number of questions, but that the answers of one never clashed with or contradicted those of another. Perhaps the diversity of response may be attributed to the differing school contexts.

## **Pupil's responses**

It must be acknowledged that the data from the children is limited, given in particular the very limited amount of time that was available to speak to those who participated. Therefore what is presented here is a brief summary of some of the more relevant aspects of speaking with pupil-participants. The evaluator felt that the activities used (see methodology) were very appropriate to the needs and level of the children who were interviewed, and they appeared to derive a level of enjoyment from the activities. Topics that arose for discussion after the activities with the younger children included our names and identity, family, friends, feelings and respect. The Senior Infant pupils perhaps naturally found it difficult to talk about abstract concepts such as respect, but were very capable of identifying various feelings and recalling situations, that made them feel a certain way. In addition, the following child recalled a strategy for dealing with conflict, saying 'first you say 'go away'. If they annoy you again you say 'stop'. Then if they annoy you again you have to tell the teacher'. They also could identify less constructive reactions to conflict, e.g. 'doing it back to them'.

The second class pupils were aware that children's voices should not be ignored, a theme they recognised from the story *Not Now Bernard*, and appeared content that adults virtually always listened to them. They also acknowledged that they had a responsibility to listen to their peers, to take account of their feelings, and also to be aware that one can learn from others by listening to them. The P3 pupils described some of the activities they had taken part in as part of a wider approach to human rights education. One was a 'feelings chart', in order to help children identify their feelings and to 'help them' if they needed help that day. Some children were impressively articulate in describing their 'thinking groups', in which they had clipboards to write down solutions to various issues and/or conflicts that arose in the class. The children speak one at a time in these groups, and nominated a manager, reporter and scribe for each group. One child described how they used their groups to think of ways in which to help integrate children from other schools and other countries who had joined the class (C1): 'well, we just thought of solutions that might help cheer them up...' 'teach them English'. Another child described circle time activities in his class, when the children selected issues posed on a card, for which that they had to think of solutions. The children felt they could use these strategies in the yard, and one stated that when she had a conflict with someone they 'talked it

out'. As with the pupils in Senior Infants, these children could identify both positive and negative ways to deal with a conflict.

The 5<sup>th</sup> class pupils initially described human rights as 'what we are entitled to' and 'what we have the right to', and gave examples such as the right to life, name and nationality and education. They articulated that responsibilities accompany rights, and one child used the following example to illustrate what he had learned from his teacher: 'I can swing my fist, but that stops once it meets someone's nose'.

They particularly described conflict resolution and teamwork activities as useful in terms of resolving arguments in the yard, and indeed, as activities that are intrinsically enjoyable. Some comments ensuing from this were as follows:

C1: There doesn't have to be a loser for someone to win and...there's like another way to solve things

C2: And that we know our own rights

C3: You think outside the box

When asked whether the children could apply these principles to their lives, they agreed that they could:

C1: Definitely like em, one time we were 'killing' (slang for verbally arguing with) each other over football, and eventually we worked out that actually what we had done ended up being connected to one of the lessons.

However, two children did state that it is not as easy to apply these lessons to their lives in general. The children agreed that the topic fits into subjects such as SPHE and Drama, Religion, Geography and even PE, when conflicts arise over team selection. In terms of improving the programme, the children felt 'Croc' was not a great name for the *Lift Off* character. One also felt that Croc needed a distinct gender. However these were minor concerns: there were no major issues with the lessons; one felt that the presence of Croc was useful in terms of approaching the human rights content. Finally, one child acknowledged that linking with another school was useful in terms of learning about different points of view amongst peers. Another claimed that because the pupils from the linked school are from a less advantaged area, they could see 'how lucky' they were.

## **School approaches and the impact of ‘Lift Off’**

It was clear from the survey responses that ‘Lift Off’ is widely perceived as being very relevant and appropriate. Those interviewed at steering group level agreed the relevance of the programme for subjects such as citizenship education and SPHE. Indeed, the values-based aspect of the programme was viewed as a very fundamental strength that few could have a problem with. As one steering group member stated, ‘who can disagree with empathy? Who can disagree with trying to develop communication skills that are about listening as well as expressing oneself?’

All the schools we visited could be said to have an approach to education that ties in very well with the concept of HRE. When asked about what they perceived as the approach of the school, participants named a high quality of education, strong parental involvement and consultation, a caring environment and an emphasis on a child-centred education.

I suppose our ethos would try to encourage caring, because it’s the one thing that comes up again and again. You know, consideration for others. In the classroom, out of the classroom in the wider world.

Teacher, ROI

The context of teaching in quite a politicised area meant that some schools felt the need to directly link their approach to education to a human rights approach:

We just try to be very open and very honest and encourage transparency at every level, you know? We’re really big into people’s rights. Before even being involved in this project, you know, we’re standing every day of the week telling the children they have the right to this and that, they have to take responsibility for their actions, they have to help other people – partnerships.

Teacher, NI

It was noteworthy that different schools saw ‘Lift Off’ as fitting in different ways, and how ownership and relevance of ‘Lift Off’ was unique to each school context. Indeed, instead of becoming a hindrance to the programme, the researchers got the sense that the adaptability of the programme to diverse contexts was one of its strengths. One way it was framed in two schools was in a positive behaviour/respect way, where ‘Lift Off’ activities played a role in supporting the atmosphere of the school. The following teacher had alluded to the relevance of ‘Lift Off’ for foreign national children in her school, but went on to suggest:

Even without foreign (born) children in the school I think it's great because... the kids to work together, to get on together in the classroom, the corridors, the football fields, on the streets. And it just helps them that they learn their own self-esteem and they feel good about themselves. And it can help them then to deal when somebody calls them a name or something that they don't have to lash back, that they can say "I don't like that, I don't feel happy about you saying that".

Teacher, RoI

Teachers in two schools framed their participation in 'Lift Off' as another example of how the school/teacher in question involves their pupils in initiatives as part of a more progressive approach to education. A teacher in an Educate Together school stated 'I think a lot if the time the kind of children that come to this school come from families where issues would be spoken about anyway'. However, she later agreed 'I think there's something in it for everybody... for other schools it might be valid just to introduce the idea... I think any school could take something from it'. Yet another school, as already stated, highlighted a child-centred approach to education and talked about the presence of a student council in the school, all of which tied in well with children's rights.

Given that the majority of the schools visited had not been using 'Lift Off' for a very sustained period, it is important to note that respondents talked more about potential impact as opposed to current impact. The teacher quoted above felt 'Lift Off' was useful in terms of helping children to work together, solve conflicts and it also helps with self-esteem. It appeared that the schools where 'Lift Off' had the most impact was where it was used as part of a comprehensive school/classroom approach to self esteem and conflict resolution, i.e., in tandem with other activities or programmes. For example, one teacher described how, combined with a programme about the Social Use of Language and a solution-focus approach to conflict resolution, 'Lift Off' improved her pupils' communication skills, and made them less likely to be aggressive towards one another. She also felt that teaching for empathy was a big part of the 'Lift Off'/*Right Start* programme, the fruits of which would not be seen until her pupils were nine or ten, as at four years of age, they were naturally still quite egocentric. Evidence of the idea of early teaching on language and conflict resolution bearing fruit at a later stage was provided by this senior class teacher:

I think they (my class) are more articulate (due to 'Lift Off'). And I think they're better able to actually put across their points of view. They'd be

into saying ‘thing’ and ‘stuff’ and ‘but’. Whereas now they will actually say ‘he didn’t look at it from my point of view’, or, ‘he didn’t consider how I feel’.

Teacher, RoI

What may prove most telling about ‘Lift Off’s synchronicity with various school contexts is that two teachers suggested it labels or makes explicit ‘what goes on already’ in schools in terms of good teacher practice, student behaviour and atmosphere building. This ties in quite closely with open-ended questionnaire comments from the previous section, which suggested people do not reflect on rights and responsibilities in relation to day-to-day issues, and that more explicit teaching is needed around empathy and compassion, for example. These findings generally echo Carter and Osler’s (2000) earlier assertion that human rights education provides us with a set of principles that can be applied to any professional or human working context.

One final point to note was that schools are not encourage to develop a human rights policy within their schools in the ‘Lift Off’ programme. Certainly no school we interviewed had a separate human rights education policy. Rather, the concepts of human rights were viewed as implicit in the anti-bullying policy, the code of discipline, or the mission statements of schools. Given the extent of pressure schools are under to produce and maintain policies, it may not be wise to recommend more ‘paperwork’ for them. That said, ‘making the implicit explicit’ appears to be a very important part of HRE, given the results of both phases of this research. A very easy means of creating a policy that can be shared by all would be to publicly display the UNCRC in the school, as was the case in one school in the Republic. This school not only displayed the children’s rights, but also asked its pupils to identify accompanying responsibilities, thereby giving the children a voice in the policy-making process.

### **Lessons: opinions and approaches**

Teachers were, generally speaking very content with the teacher-written curriculum materials and lesson ideas in the three ‘Lift Off’ programmes, as were those at steering group level. Indeed, the fact that the lessons were written by teachers was regarded as a major strength of the materials. One more experienced teacher felt that ‘Lift Off’ had given her new teaching ideas, and it was felt by others that the (e.g.)

approaches to dealing with conflict were helpful for teachers as well as pupils. Teachers valued the simplicity of the materials and the relative ease and speed with which (particularly the junior class materials) could be ‘picked up’ and implemented. The clear learning objectives for each lesson were also praised. The teaching methodologies were also highlighted for the amount of active learning strategies used. In particular reference to junior class teaching, the following teacher commented:

It seems to me that this programme is a lot more readily accessible than, say, other programmes that could be construed as SPHE or whatever, in that they’re more immediate in the activities. More the junior end especially that you can go straight into them kind of thing and reach your objectives... it’s quite teacher-friendly as well as being child-friendly.

Teacher, RoI

While some teachers found some lessons too difficult for their junior class children to grasp, it was always recognized that teachers were supposed to be selective about lessons and some found the star rating system helpful in this regard.

Teachers in two different schools had opposing views on what format the programme materials should take. Two junior class teachers in one school felt the *Right Start* materials need to be broken up into lessons in much the same way as the *Lift Off* materials for third and fourth are presented. The reasoning for this was that there was too much content in the junior materials, and that having ten lessons would make it more manageable and more ‘doable’ for some teachers. However, a teacher in another school felt the senior class materials could benefit from using the junior class approach, as she felt the senior class approach put pressure on teachers to finish the materials in ten or twenty weeks. Looking at the experience of junior class teachers with *Right Start* in her school, she stated:

I think it’s easier to dip in and out and take it, as I said in an incidental way and just build it, that if the situation arises, it’s appropriate. Because the infant one is so mixed into the curriculum, talking and listening, creative studies and things, it just happened, it just evolved in itself and I know they found it very easy to incorporate.

Teacher, NI

Clearly personal teaching style has some role to play in forming such directly opposite views on the materials. It is also necessary to point out that no other teacher took issue with the format of the lessons. As an addendum to this discussion, two teachers felt it important to note that senior class materials would be less difficult to

teach if/when the children had experience of the junior class programme. One of these teachers felt some elements of *Me, You, Everyone* (formerly *Rights in Flight*) were difficult and perhaps somewhat abstract, stating 'I'm not sure how relevant *Rights in Flight* will be without having done all that background stuff'. A number of teachers who had just begun the programme felt they would have a greater handle on it in the coming year.

Teachers took broadly similar approaches to how they taught the programme, particularly at the junior end. Many referred to how they 'dipped in and out' of the *Right Start* materials in a somewhat informal, incidental manner at various times during the year. It was assumed that the programme could be 'slotted under' various headings such as SPHE, SESE, oral language development, and perhaps Religious Education. The programme was generally not viewed as an 'add-on' to the curriculum.

### **Linking activities**

It was interesting that almost every school already had some experience of linking with another school before 'Lift Off' came along. Three of the four Northern schools mentioned participating in the EMU (Education for Mutual Understanding) Initiative. Most other schools had to some degree been in touch with a school on the island of Ireland and some further afield. This may indicate to some extent that these schools are already predisposed to a programme like 'Lift Off' being in place in their schools. However, linking with other schools in 'Lift Off' was quite haphazard in the six schools for various reasons that are outlined later in this section.

People shared quite similar views on why linking was important for the pupils. The main reason why linking was viewed as beneficial was because it was felt it gave children an insight into how other children live and increased their awareness of similarity and difference. This ranged from small issues such as children realising their peers may/may not wear a uniform in another school to children from different traditions realising they are not as different as their upbringing may have led them to think. Perhaps two of the more compelling reasons offered from one teacher why linking may be important were as follows:

It's massively important... in a community that doesn't have a broader racial or ethnic mix. And there are these children who live practically within feet of our children who they don't know.

They don't play with them, and then you don't know do they interact, do they think that, do they see that all our rules for each other, and all our fairness to each other applies to those children?

Teacher, NI

This teacher implied that the linking aspect of the project may be all the more important as it may help teachers to help children apply skills learned in 'Lift Off' outside of their own school setting. A teacher from a rural school in the Republic, who had not yet linked with a 'Lift Off' school suggested to link with a NI school 'would be lovely to have because often the North, information for us here is often very negative and political'. Another infant teacher described how her teddy bear linking activity proved very fruitful in terms of oral language and literacy development, e.g. through Language Experience Approach (LEA) stories of the teddy's experiences.

However, as far as could be ascertained, only one school was making progress with linking activities in a structured manner. The teacher interviewed in this school stated she 'could have been an organiser rather than a teacher'. This is not an insignificant factor in the success of linking, given the amount of administration it takes (during school hours) to organise. The following teacher in a small school summed this up:

We have very little time for administration, especially in a school like this, it's very - problems are magnified by twenty. Because you're trying to do three roles and you don't - see to get time in the office to phone and organize another school - if they're not in within the first ten rings that's it, that's it for another week, I don't have the time for that.

Teacher, NI

A number of teachers were concerned that links would not be superficial or tenuous, and that a relationship needs to be developed over time

I think if you can, if you sort of know that they're there, or even give it to the class and build up a relationship over the years might be a better way than just sort of firing a school at a group of people and saying 'you've got to contact these people and you've got to do this'.

Teacher, NI

Finally, a teacher in an area of conflict in the North made the point that it was more important that her school linked with a school from the other side of the community than linking with a school in the south. She stated:

I see big benefits of twinning with schools but I think in our situation... we would benefit as much from twinning with a school you could walk to in five minutes, but you wouldn't dream, you know the people wouldn't dream of going anywhere near, you know? We've got a Polish boy started in our school and the parents and the kids have been wonderful. A little boy from Albania, they've been wonderful. But if I brought a (child from the other community) into the school, it's, they would just die at the thought of it. It'd be horrific for them.

Teacher, NI

Perhaps the level of concern teachers had over linking, combined with the lack of progress made thus far may indicate that schools need greater support in making links happen. But it is also necessary to emphasise that the schools we went to were at a very early stage in 'Lift Off' implementation. While the 'Lift Off' team may be able to provide some administrative help, it may be more helpful for schools to be given days off in order to facilitate this process. Given the potential of such activity it may not be unreasonable to suggest that the support team focus more on this aspect of the programme in future. On a more positive note, a southern-based steering group representative felt that Education Centres might provide a very useful means of teacher networking in the future.

### **Whole School Implementation**

One school had each of its four teachers implementing the 'Lift Off'. It could not be claimed that a 'whole school approach' was in operation in an explicit way in any of the other schools. This was the case for various reasons. Two teachers from one school had only begun the *Right Start* materials during the same school year, but stated they would be 'very strong advocates' of the programme to their fellow staff members. Indeed, all those interviewed were quite confident that other teachers would be open to using 'Lift Off' in their classrooms. It is also arguable from earlier data that because 'Lift Off' apparently labels 'what schools are already doing', it may not be a huge stretch to implement it across the whole school. A teacher who had only taught two lessons on the *Right Start* programme stated

I know people always feel, people tend to feel there's just so much out there that it's a bit boggling... but, people seem to be impressed with this one. It's em, it's very different.

Teacher, RoI

A teacher in the same school explained how growing interest in the programme could make it a substantial part of the school's SPHE approach combined with the *Walk Tall* substance misuse prevention programme. There was a general consensus that the need for a programme like 'Lift Off' was quite apparent, and therefore its uptake in schools should not prove problematic. However, as our survey findings suggested, there was a difference between *perceived need* for the programme and *awareness of that need*. Some schools had done some whole school activities linked to 'Lift Off', from displaying the conventions of the Rights of the Child in the main school hall, to holding a festival of world cultures. However, it is difficult to say what the impact of such activities is on the implementation of the programme in schools.

There may be some identifiable factors that may help whole school implementation. The following teacher paid particular tribute to her principal, whose leadership has facilitated programmes like 'Lift Off' becoming part of her school's wider approach:

Somebody coming into the school now who hadn't been in it for five years would barely recognise it. It's a change of leadership and a change of leadership style. I mean it wasn't just, top down, 'you do what I say and that's it' any more. Everybody has a say in what goes on, including the kids, you know the kids are consulted a lot about decisions.

Teacher, NI

Indeed, having the principal teaching the programme (as was the case in one school) meant the whole school implementation of 'Lift Off' appeared more likely to happen in the future, even with teacher protestations about curriculum overload. The following teaching principal was the only person teaching the programme in her school, but felt confident about its success across the school:

I - obviously in this position I'm frequently coming into the staffroom saying 'right. We're going to trial...' 'Right, I've heard about this project' and I suppose, they'll look at me sometimes and think 'oh not something else'. So I've sampled the activities and the materials and I'm in a position to tell them from a teacher - classroom teacher's point of view that they are useful, that they will be of benefit, that they can be integrated very easily, and they're not to view it as another layer of work or another new task.

Teacher, NI

One of the steering group who was very involved in the implementation of 'Lift Off' felt its success very much depends on whether the principal is involved in name only, or is really engaged. In addition, the leadership of certain teachers can be helpful. One

teacher felt that it was difficult to implement the programme across the school until ‘someone comes and explains it to them’. Teachers’ views on in-service training for ‘Lift Off’ are explored later in these findings. An important issue to flag here is that in most schools, the ‘Lift Off’ co-ordinators had only been in touch with perhaps one of the staff. Perhaps if the co-ordinators had greater freedom to speak to entire schools staffs, whole school implementation may be improved (bearing in mind that there were only eight school contexts reported on here).

## **Barriers and potential supports to the implementation of ‘Lift Off’<sup>4</sup>**

### ***Overcrowded curriculum***

An overcrowded curriculum was the most frequently rated barrier to the implementation of the ‘Lift Off’ programme in the survey. There were varying views on this issue at interview stage. The following statement would back up the survey finding:

We’re so overburdened by the amount of information. Everything that comes in our door for teachers, anything in the media, schools...this (*Right Start*) is wonderful as well, but the bottom line is you’re gonna say look, no more, because we can’t fit, we have so many things pulling out of us at this stage.

Teacher, RoI

The teacher quoted above stated that those ‘marketing’ the ‘Lift Off’ programme need to be careful about the approach taken towards teachers. She felt teachers need an incentive to implement Lift Off, such as being given days off for training. However, another teacher commented that ‘because the materials are so self-explanatory, you don’t need to be a very experienced teacher to look at the book and take out of it and manipulate it to the way that suits your teaching style or classroom/children’. Her suggestion was that in-service might be of more benefit to introducing new teachers to the programme. The issue of attending workshops on a Saturday was raised again by one teacher, as was mentioned also in the survey. However, in-service training did not raise the strength of feeling in the interviews that was in evidence in the survey.

One important concern raised from a Northern Ireland perspective dealt with the forthcoming revised Northern Ireland curriculum. One teacher stated ‘I just hope it

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<sup>4</sup> It must be noted here again that when speaking about the barriers to Lift Off, a number of teachers had low levels of experience with the programme and were looking forward to greater implementation in the coming school year.

gets the place it deserves in the new curriculum; it's not swept under the carpet. It's just I think teachers are going to be running to the hills when this new curriculum starts'. Therefore from this teacher's point of view, a lack of strategic placement of 'Lift Off' in the revised curriculum could prove a very substantial barrier to its implementation. One of the steering group voiced her concern about the future of 'Lift Off', given how close she felt it was to becoming very successful:

It's quite common for a project to be supported and funded for five years and then at the end of the five years, the funders and the organisers and the supporters – they pull out. But the programme is only just gaining momentum and I really feel that 'Lift Off' is beginning to gather... momentum.

Stakeholder, NI

This participant hoped that the help of curriculum support services could be engaged to a greater extent in terms of formalised in-service for the materials and HRE. Returning to issues of making HRE explicit within the curriculum, one stakeholder stated:

I think (explicit versus implicit issues) is six of one, half a dozen of the other. I think there are certain teachers who, based on their own experience and maybe their own particular interests or philosophy... will take it in its implicit form, and maybe make it come alive in the classroom. And at the same time maybe for other teachers because the explicit references aren't there, maybe to some extent it's not as living an experience for children in classrooms. At the end of the day, I'm not sure. There's probably an argument for both... But if you look then at how teachers take the curriculum and make it a reality for children, they're obviously not just using curriculum documents, they're using great programmes... So again I think it's down to individual teachers as well in terms of the extent to which they take the whole area of Human Rights Education and make it a living reality for children.

Stakeholder, ROI

Therefore, perhaps it may be more important to look at more issues of in-service than curriculum frameworks. Another very interesting point made by the above participant was that curriculum is now looking now very much towards building skills and attitudes as opposed to content knowledge, which may be where programmes like 'Lift Off' may have greater impact. This point is developed in the 'in-service' section towards the end of the analysis. Another steering group member, while agreeing that issues of curricular compliance etc. were important, felt it was more important to 'sell' the following to schools:

What are the benefits that people will find in terms of students' engagement in their experience of school, their sense of empowerment, their sense of mutual respect for each other, their sense of empathy and communication skills and so forth?

Stakeholder, RoI

### ***Awareness of the programme***

Indeed, as the survey quite strongly suggested, awareness of the programme and the need for more high profile attention being drawn to it was viewed as something that needed to be addressed. One teacher in the South suggested 'Lift Off' could do with a 'spread' in the INTO's *InTouch* magazine (which is, in theory, circulated to every INTO member). In terms of awareness of the programme, one teacher suggested that she understands well that the programme is not meant to be viewed as an 'add-on' to existing curricular requirements. However, she felt she understood this because it was her second year of teaching it, and because she had been to various Teacher Forums. She suggested that perhaps those who had not had this experience might not grasp this as quickly. It may be fair to suggest that even if those piloting the 'Lift Off' programme are at pains to point out the fact that it should complement rather than add to the curriculum, it cannot be expected that teachers will understand every facet of the materials without prior engagement with them.

### ***School and wider community factors***

This section may be perhaps one of the more important to consider in the qualitative findings. One steering group member commented on the fact that there was a much smaller number of controlled schools participating in 'Lift Off', suggesting 'human rights (in Northern Ireland) is seen as being the domain of the Catholic community, and the Protestant community are very suspicious of it'. However, she also pointed to the fact that the programme is gaining attention in these schools, due for example to an article on 'Lift Off' written in the Ulster Teachers' Union<sup>5</sup> paper.

One issue referred to in the literature earlier in this document about the wider community is important here. A small four-teacher school was the only school we visited that had all teachers using the 'Lift Off' programme. This school was located in, to use the teachers' words, a 'very politicised community'. A teacher teaching in a school in the other main Northern community described the difference between

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<sup>5</sup> Most Protestant teachers in Northern Ireland join the Ulster Teachers' Union.

teaching HRE concepts in school and the likelihood of these concepts translating into the community:

You know, maybe a century will have to go past before that is ever really dealt with. And... you can forgive someone who didn't really directly hurt you. You know, you can learn to get along with them. But, it's so close to home. They think, they feel so strongly about their beliefs that the (person from the other community) must feel as strongly about them. So there's never any give and take.

Teacher, NI

This political context understandably appeared to be a very important factor in the school's uptake of the programmes such as 'Lift Off' – managing the day-to-day reality that some of these children face<sup>6</sup>. Having to counteract education that comes from home was mentioned by a few of the teachers we interviewed, and was mentioned by a survey respondent also. One teacher remarked 'if you can't educate the parent, educate the child in the hope that it filters through that way'. In the survey, increased parental involvement was third highest on the list of priorities to improve implementation after increased Governmental support and increased in-service. The presence of strong political debate and feeling in some areas possibly meant teachers and schools were quite motivated to view education from a human rights point of view. As already stated, the increasing presence of minority ethnic groups (particularly in the Republic) meant that individuals in those schools felt 'Lift Off' was an important resource for increasing mutual understanding. Connolly et al.'s (2002) work underlined how quickly young children's views mimic those of their community. We can only judge 'success' for the 'Lift Off' programme in very limited terms without taking the wider community's influence into account. As we have suggested from Cuban's work (2005), schools are only part of the equation.

### ***In-service***

The issue of in-service, as stated already, did not garner much attention from interview participants. However, it may be important to re-frame this question. An interesting point was raised by one member of the steering group which requires further investigation: it is arguable that the predominance of a whole class teaching culture in the south (still evident in the NCCA curriculum review of 2003) may clash to some extent with a democratic view of teaching settings and 'shared leading'.

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<sup>6</sup> Another was that a teacher in this school had been quite involved in the promotion of 'Lift Off'.

While it was acknowledged that teachers might adopt a more democratic teaching style in subjects such as SPHE, it is important to query how consistently democratic our classrooms are across the school day, and subsequently, how easily HRE can develop as a philosophy within schools. In addition to this, this participant highlighted how teachers in the south have identified teaching approaches and methodologies as the key place they need support (perhaps as opposed to subject matter) through the NCCA review. She made the point that in regard to in-service, this may be where the greatest potential is for the development of HRE. This links to the point made earlier about fostering children's skills and attitudes as opposed to transmitting 'lists of facts' to them. Here may be a key direction for in-service for HRE: instead of focusing on the content of lessons, it may be more appropriate to focus on developing skills and attitudes which can explicitly filter across the curriculum in schools. In addition, making in-service in general a less top-down, more localised, democratic experience may be important for 'Lift Off'. This participant felt that 'in-service at a national level serves certain purposes. But you have to question the amount of commitment and buy-in when in-service is constantly 'done to or 'delivered' to schools'. Interestingly, another stakeholder felt a less grassroots and more formal, top-down approach was needed in terms of bringing 'Lift Off' to a wider audience. Perhaps ideally, a combination of both approaches would be useful.

### ***Other issues***

It is not surprising that the Gaelscoil teachers felt it would be helpful if the programme materials were translated into Irish. In addition, two participants felt that the 'Lift Off' website had not been developed sufficiently. Given the difficulty with maintaining contact with linked schools, the expectation children now have to participate in e-learning, and the potential for sharing teachers ideas on a web forum, they felt it was a disappointment that this aspect of the programme was not more developed. This is largely unsurprising, given that the use of ICT was highlighted as an area for improvement in the original evaluation (King and Austin, 2002). However, it was acknowledged that difficulties persist around school facilities and the amount of time it takes to set up this service. The newsletter was mentioned by a small number as a means of encouraging a greater culture of communication and shared practice around teaching 'Lift Off'.

## Summary and Conclusions

This section summarises the data from both phases with a view to formulating recommendations for the Cross Border Primary HRE Initiative.

All participants agreed there was a need for a human rights education programme. Generally it was the case that those who had experienced the ‘Lift Off’ programme saw the materials as necessary to help educate children about their rights and responsibilities, give them a greater ‘voice’ in schools, develop a comprehensive rationale for positive behaviour strategies, and help children cope with the increasing diversity in school and society:

I don’t think people reflect on rights and responsibilities in relation to day-today school issues....To a large extent we think of discipline problems within a traditional framework. Children should be able to stand up for themselves...we still have not reached the position where we accept negative opinions or appreciate that children should have a say on things that affect them’

Teacher (Questionnaire Response)

Even without foreign (born) children in the school I think it’s great because... the kids to work together, to get on together in the classroom, the corridors, the football fields, on the streets. And it just helps them that they learn their own self-esteem and they feel good about themselves.

Teacher (Interview)

Interviewees most regularly highlighted the potential ‘Lift Off’ has for helping children solve conflicts that may arise. However, it is important to note at this point that those who participated were already initiated into the ‘Lift Off’ programme to some degree. The need perceived by our survey participants was accompanied by the view that awareness of this need is not as strong. Indeed, teachers interviewed put forward the view that the programme needed greater attention in the education community. The view that ‘Lift Off’ captures the work already being done in schools was expressed a number of times. This, combined with the perception that ‘Lift Off’ needs greater awareness, may lead us to suggest that HRE needs more explicit mention in stated curricula:

I think a lot of teachers believe that skills such as empathy and compassion develop implicitly. On the other hand, I believe that human rights behaviour must be fostered.

Teacher (Questionnaire Response)

However, one participant felt that helping teachers focus on developing skills and attitudes that work across the curriculum may be more important than the above issues. This may shift the emphasis over to in-service as an important future consideration as opposed to curriculum documents. Indeed, it may be easier to make HRE more explicit in schools by other means, such as displaying the UNCRC openly in the school.

It may come as no surprise to the co-ordinators of the programme that the topics and teaching materials were almost universally praised, which echoes previous evaluations and feedback from Teachers' Fora. The view that they were teacher-written, easy to access, suitable for a number of levels, and well linked to a number of curricular areas were cited as factors in their success:

I think it's easier to dip in and out and take it, as I said in an incidental way and just build it, that if the situation arises, it's appropriate. Because the infant one is so mixed into the curriculum, talking and listening, creative studies and things, it just happened, it just evolved in itself and I know they found it very easy to incorporate.

Teacher (Interview)

The children who participated in the study appeared to understand their significance and enjoyed participating in them. The survey respondents deemed little or no topics in the materials as inappropriate. There was mild disagreement about the preferred format of the lesson materials, which was largely down to personal teaching style and was to be expected.

In terms of the impact or outcomes of these lessons, survey respondents felt children were becoming more aware of human rights issues, that they themselves were more likely to make human rights a part of their curriculum, and that the school community was becoming more aware of human rights issues. The qualitative phase found teachers feeling children may have helped their language skills, and given them greater ability to cope with conflict. Some interview respondents felt that the impact of the programme may be seen to a greater extent when children were older.

I think they (my class) are more articulate (due to 'Lift Off'). And I think they're better able to actually put across their points of view. They'd be into saying 'thing' and 'stuff' and 'but'. Whereas now they will actually say 'he didn't look at it from my point of view', or, 'he didn't consider how I feel'.

Teacher (Interview)

Linking and/or cross-border activities were viewed as an excellent initiative. Linking was described as beneficial in terms of giving young children an insight into how other children live, and in terms of increasing their awareness of similarity and difference. This was viewed as particularly important in areas that do not have a broader racial or ethnic mix. In addition, linking may be one means of trying to ensure that skills learned through HRE go 'beyond the classroom door' and are applied with equal consistency in wider society:

It's massively important... in a community that doesn't have a broader racial or ethnic mix. And there are these children who live practically within feet of our children who they don't know. They don't play with them, and then you don't know do they interact, do they think that, do they see that all our rules for each other, and all our fairness to each other applies to those children?

Teacher (Interview)

I see big benefits of twinning with schools but I think in our situation... we would benefit as much from twinning with a school you could walk to in five minutes, but you wouldn't dream, you know the people wouldn't dream of going anywhere near, you know?

Teacher (Interview)

Unfortunately, linking was not an easy experience due to the strain it places on teacher time and resources, an opinion expressed in both phases of the research. Indeed, linking appears to depend to a large extent on the personal interest and motivation of individual teachers, which may not be enough when hoping to reach a wider audience with the programme. However, it was acknowledged by some interviewees that link building takes time, and it is important not to be impatient about this aspect of implementation in particular. A number of teachers were concerned that links would not be superficial or tenuous, and that a relationship needs to be developed over time

I think if you can, if you sort of know that they're there, or even give it to the class and build up a relationship over the years might be a better way than just sort of firing a school at a group of people and saying 'you've got to contact these people and you've got to do this'.

Teacher (Interview)

Just over half of all schools responding to the survey had only one or two classes participating in the 'Lift Off' programme, and only one of the eight schools cited in the qualitative phase were implementing the programme across the board. Therefore, 'Lift Off' has to some degree an inconsistent profile in schools at present. While those

interviewed felt confident about their colleagues taking the programme on, it was interesting to note that few teachers interviewed mentioned gaining the principal's support in implementing the programme across their school. It appears there is a question around who should take responsibility in a school for the implementation of the programme. To re-iterate a point made above, the personal initiative of individual teachers (who are under pressure for time and resources) is unlikely to be enough to ensure the mainstreaming of the programme, and 'Lift Off' may need to consider directing future efforts more at school management level. As Tomasevski (2001) suggests, one must grapple with human rights in education before approaching HRE. Therefore, it is important that there is a human rights 'culture' exists in a school in order for HRE lessons to take root in classrooms. Issues concerning the wider school community ideally need to be addressed. Having to 'counteract education that goes on in the home' was mentioned more than once by interview participants as a reason why 'Lift Off' was needed. In addition, it is significant that 'greater involvement of parents' was rated third highest in terms of ways 'Lift Off' could be better implemented in future.

The barriers facing 'Lift Off' are not new, and have very little to do with the materials themselves or the structure of the programme. Issues of time and resource allocation come to the fore: survey respondents cited an overcrowded curriculum, lack of in-service and insufficient time as the most important barriers to its full implementation. Given these findings, it may also be unsurprising that 'more support from government' was most frequently referred to as a very important means of improving implementation. The second most important was increased in-service training. It appeared in interview that the lessons are quite self-explanatory, particularly at the junior end. One interviewee inferred that teachers might need greater help around approaches and methodologies across their teaching which facilitate a democratic classroom. This ties in with the notion of fostering a human rights 'culture' in order for HRE to succeed. Methodologies such as student selection of learning materials, shared learning and modelling of critical thinking; and structures such as student councils may be regarded as some of the means by which the scene is set for more successful HRE. Interestingly, teachers interviewed did not explicitly connect such methodologies with the programme, and this may be an area for direction in in-service training. An expanded support service also featured in the survey as an important

means through which 'Lift Off' could be better implemented. While those interviewed were full of praise for the support they received from the project staff, support appeared to be isolated to individual teachers in schools, and as indicated in the previous paragraph, more support contact with school administration and the wider staff may be necessary to improve implementation in those schools.

## Recommendations

The recommendations that are made below are made in the spirit of the findings of the evaluation. It is clear that the participants in the pilot project regarded 'Lift Off' as a very worthwhile initiative and one that could make an important educational and social contribution. At the same time they recognised the difficulty of establishing 'Lift Off' as a teaching resource at a time of overload and indeed of further changes in what schools are being asked to do.

The suggestions we are putting forward are with a view to enabling the programme (or at least parts of it) to become an inherent support for curriculum in both jurisdictions. We recognise the difficulties of the over-crowded curriculum and the demands on time; nevertheless the approach and strategies in this programme have such potentially beneficial and far-reaching effects that every effort should be made to have the programme become a supporting feature of primary curricula both North and South.

1. **Given the very positive findings of this study, we recommend that the Departments of Education and Curriculum Support take a more active role in promoting Lift Off' use in primary schools North and South.**

In making this recommendation, we are conscious of the problems that occur when a new programme is 'imposed' from Departments of Education. As the research makes it abundantly clear, only if teachers 'buy' into a change process and willingly take on the innovation, will real change take place in the experiences of students. Our findings have highlighted the impact 'Lift Off' may have across the curriculum. Departments of Education and Curriculum Support may need to do more to promote 'Lift Off' as a useful resource for developing positive behaviour, language skills and attitudes to diversity in formalised in-service training and through teacher centres in various curricular areas. One means of improving the participation of the Departments of Education would be to encourage greater involvement of the respective Education Inspectorates at local level. Of particular note here also is the implementation process of the Revised Primary Curriculum in Northern Ireland and any larger scale plans the NCCA may take on board to provide in-service on intercultural and/or diversity education in primary schools.

2. **The initiative to mainstream the programme should be set in the context of changes in Irish society.** Of these changes some of the most important concern diversity and the need to focus on the relationships between communities as well as individuals. Teachers reported how helpful 'Lift Off' has been in educating all children about the needs of pupils of diverse backgrounds. The 'Lift Off'/HRE framework is important in that it is an approach/philosophy that accommodates

the changing nature of student backgrounds and school contexts. This, again, is a feature of the programme that warrants strong attention from the Departments of Education in particular. Additionally, study participants felt that parental involvement could be improved with regard to 'Lift Off'. Given the importance of a diverse range of voices being heard in schools, the co-ordinators of the programme may wish to make greater contact with parents' groups and community groups in further implementation of the programme. Finally, the developers of the materials may give consideration to developing and adapting resources for specific needs, e.g. Irish language materials, supplementary visual and audio aids, and/or materials for pupils with less developed English proficiency or literacy skills.

3. **Given the greater prominence that the voice of the child has received in public spheres in Ireland, particular attention should be given to linking with the work of other government departments.** The study showed how 'Lift Off' very much responds to the need to equip children with lifelong social skills, in a manner that includes rather than discounts their own perspectives. This was referred to by teachers working in very diverse educational districts. Therefore key statutory and non-statutory agencies, which give prominence to children's perspectives and experiences, should be involved in supporting and promoting 'Lift Off' and consulting with the 'Lift Off' team. These include the Children and Young People's Unit (NI), National Children's Office (RoI), the Commissioner for Children and Young People (NI), the National Children's Advisory Council (RoI), the Children's Rights Alliance (RoI), the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (NI), the National Youth Council (RoI) and the Ombudsman for Children (RoI). The 'Lift Off' project team may wish to link with the Pavee Point, given their expertise with their Voice of the Child Project.
4. **The implementation of the programme in schools should focus as much on the culture of human rights as on the curriculum features of the programme.** It is important note how 'Lift Off' meets the aims of e.g. the RoI *Primary Curriculum* (NCCA, 1999). New curricular developments (such as the NI Revised Primary Curriculum) should acknowledge the fundamental role 'Lift Off' can play in meeting curricular aims over time and across various areas of primary education. The study noted the importance of the critical role of the principal in programme implementation and fostering a whole school approach to 'Lift Off'. Given that some teachers continue to cite the overcrowded curriculum as a barrier, the 'Lift Off' team must continue to emphasise the manner in which 'Lift Off' meets many cross-curricular aims without being an add-on subject, to school administrations. Additionally, it is important that the 'Lift Off' team communicate with more than one/two teachers from each school staff, in order to further support the individual teachers who are already implementing the programme. Therefore the co-ordinators of the programme must gear more of their school advisory and liaison work towards principals and whole staff groups.
5. **Particular emphasis should be placed on the opportunity for professional development for teachers, which the programme affords.** At a time when professional development is a central feature of educational change, the 'Lift-Off' initiative gives a singular opportunity for an innovative approach. It is

recommended that the successful Teacher Fora be continued, but perhaps it may be held more often, in different locations to suit teachers coming from different regions. This training should continue to give recognition to the fact that 'Lift Off' captures/makes more explicit many of the positive skills and attitudes developed through education. Further professional development in the Fora should give prominence to skills and attitudes that can be adapted across the curriculum, as opposed to the content of the programme. The central role experienced and new 'Lift Off' teachers play in Teacher Fora is crucial and should be maintained. However this may be supplemented by the employment of additional skilled facilitators in teaching methodologies by the 'Lift Off' team.

6. **The Cross-border dimensions of the project should be retained and developed.** Linking was found to be a very worthwhile enterprise, which helped increase children's awareness of their peers and different ways of living and being. The difficulties in making links happen should not be under-estimated. Given the finding that school links need to be developed very gradually, it may be appropriate for the 'Lift Off' team to formally suggest an annual theme for linking for each cluster group/school, which is adaptable at local level. This may involve an art project, letter writing, 'teddy bear' project etc. It is also crucial to readdress the appropriate use of technology that might well enhance opportunities in this regard. The expansion of the 'Lift Off' web site (with a teacher forum and networking possibilities for schools) is an issue that warrants serious consideration. Most importantly, it should be constantly communicated to schools that linking is a worthwhile process that takes time and continuous negotiation. Greater funding to alleviate the administrative burden linking creates is an important step, given the amount of personal initiative linking depends upon. Schools may be encouraged by the 'Lift Off' team to develop a rationale for linking with a particular school in order to support the process further.
7. **The precise methodology for further development of 'Lift Off' needs further examination.** The issue of raising awareness of the programme through articles in teacher magazines and through teacher education and networking points needs greater consideration. There is a need to explore these possibilities in more detail, possibly through some further work that would build on the experience to date. The help of the UTU and INTO would be vital in this regard.
8. **Further research on HRE in the Irish context should be encouraged and promoted.** The findings of this and previous evaluations suggest HRE is an area that deserves much greater attention from 3<sup>rd</sup> level institutions involved in teacher education. It is important to raise the profile of HRE at third level by cultivating research culture around HRE in the island of Ireland. This may be facilitated through creating greater opportunities to study HRE at postgraduate level. The Centre for Human Rights and Citizenship Education in St. Patrick's College, Dublin may consider developing links with other teacher education colleges North and South, as well as with the 'Lift Off' team in this regard. It would be important for this network to continue to benefit from and link with the experiences of school districts internationally (e.g. Hampshire, UK).

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