

Teachers' Beliefs about Education and Children's Voice Practices in the Island of Ireland

Final Project Report

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1. Introduction

‘Children’s voice’ is currently being promoted at policy level in the Island of Ireland (north and south).¹ The term refers to children having a say in decisions that affect them, and by extension, participating as active citizens in varied community contexts including schools (Harris & Manatakis, 2013). Interest in democratic forms of school leadership that empower children has been underpinned by: legal standards, including children’s participation rights as outlined in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) which require that their views be given due weight when decisions are made that affect them; evidence on the positive impact of participation on children’s sense of belonging, engagement with school, well-being, and learning outcomes; and views that practising democracy in schools increases young people’s civic engagement later in life, their involvement in community building activities, as well as tolerance and respect for others (Lansdown, 2011).

Children’s voice initiatives may range from elected school councils to children acting as researchers, teachers, or members of appointment panels. The extent to which children’s voice is taken seriously by adults, in the context of such initiatives, also varies, ranging from the manipulation of a contrived children’s voice to children working in genuine partnership with teachers to transform schools (Czerniawski, 2012; Maitles & Euchar, 2006; Fletcher, 2005).

Different approaches to children’s voice often reflect different school cultures. Teachers’ conceptions of children, the nature of learning, and the purpose of schooling, inform their understandings of appropriate participation practices (Thornberg, 2010). Empirical studies (e.g. Boiadjieva et al., 2009; OECD, 2009; Bolhuis & Voeten, 2004; Wooley et al., 2004; Shechtman, 2002; Silvernail, 1992; Bunting, 1985; Jersin, 1972; Willower et al., 1967) have identified two main cultural orientations in schools, often referred to as ‘philosophies’ or ‘ideologies’. Even though these are termed differently by different researchers, they all converge in their conceptual core. The first emphasises teacher-child hierarchy, viewing children as subordinates in schools expected to comply with teacher decisions and absorb adult-controlled bodies of knowledge (education as reproductive). The second assumes equal teacher-child status, viewing children as partners of teachers able to self-regulate and co-create knowledge with others (education as transformative). Even though not explicitly articulated by all those researchers, the central question they intend to answer is whether the ‘nexus of control’ in education lies outside the

¹See the ‘National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision Making’ in the Republic of Ireland (ROI) and the ‘Children and Young People’s Strategy’ in Northern Ireland (NI).

child (i.e. system/school/teacher) or inside the child, thus restricting or promoting his/her autonomy.

The present study, funded by SCOTENS, set out to explore the cultural orientations of primary school teachers in the Island of Ireland, and to examine how they affect their understandings and practices of children's voice in schools. For example, in predominantly traditional cultures, children's voice projects may be illusory, only allowing participation in marginal decisions and deterring meaningful change as a result of this. In this study, for simplicity purposes, we refer to teachers' cultural orientations as 'beliefs about education'.

Four research questions were developed to guide the design and conduct of the study:

1. How do teachers' beliefs about education vary between schools with different characteristics in the two jurisdictions (north and south)?
2. How do teachers' beliefs about education influence their own (and their students') understandings of, and approaches to, children's voice?
3. Do such understandings/approaches differ between north and south?
4. How do teachers with different educational beliefs enter into dialogue with children and each other? What dynamics emerge out of such dialogic encounters and what power differentials are discerned?

The study adopted a mixed methods approach. It included a large-scale survey of primary school teachers' beliefs about education in Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (ROI) followed by deeper exploration of the culture and children's voice practices of four schools based on data generated through teacher interviews and children's focus groups.

It would not make sense to study children's voice in schools without involving children themselves (at least to some degree) as partners in the design and conduct of such research. Two Children's Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs) were, thus, formed (one in the north and one in the south) with the view to co-shaping, with us, questions asked in the study and collectively engaging with data interpretation. It was hoped that, as a result of such involvement, their experiences and understandings would be better reflected in research findings. We also believed their role as research partners would raise awareness of their rights and entitlements, empowering and mobilising them to discuss, collectively imagine, and take action towards a more democratic and just education in the future (Kleine et al., 2016).

CRAG activities and research methods are discussed in more detail in Section 3 of this report. In the next section, a review of relevant literature is conducted.

2. Literature Review

Within educational research and practice, 'children's voice' is not a new phenomenon. In the 1960s and 70s, children's voice research was already being pursued to better understand life in schools. Although this research showed that children's voice had a significant contribution to make, 'there was no general expectation, as there is now, that the data would be fed back to teachers and pupils as basis for informed action' (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007, p.21). Since the 1990s, there has been steadily increasing interest in the participation of young people in educational research and practice internationally.

2.1. Benefits of children's voice in schools

Children's voice work is acknowledged as opportunity to empower children to participate meaningfully and collaboratively in improving their school experience (Robinson & Taylor, 2007; Fielding, 2004). A prevailing argument in favour of children's voice is that children have expert knowledge, and an insider's understanding, of what it is to be a student (Leitch et al., 2005; James et al., 1998). They have important insights on teaching and learning which may serve as 'commentary on the curriculum' (Rudduck & Flutter, 2004). Research also indicates that students' active participation in changing the curriculum fosters in them greater understanding of *how* they learn and leads to a stronger sense of their own abilities (Mittra, 2003). Such practice encourages engagement with learning (Sebba & Robinson, 2010) and improves teacher-student relationships (Tangen, 2009).

Irish research has also shown benefits for students when their opinions are accounted for. These include improvement in the quality of their relationships with teachers and their sense of belonging and connectedness to school, and, as a consequence, an improvement in self-reported levels of confidence and wellbeing; a heightened sense of being 'cared for'; a general experience of comfort in their educational environment; greater engagement with schoolwork; and improved academic achievement (Simmons et al., 2015; Smyth, 2015; Flynn, 2014; Smyth & Banks, 2012; Anderson & Ronson, 2004). It has also been shown that the development of dialogue with students is important for fostering their personal intelligences, including empathy and awareness of their rights and those of others (Flynn, 2013; Smyth et al., 2010; Lynch & Baker, 2005; Noddings, 2005).

There is also a body of literature which argues that student voice work should go far beyond ascertaining perspectives from young people. It should move towards a democratic process of shared curricular development and co-construction, as well as a collective responsibility for developing solutions in educational environments, thus, rendering students citizens of today (Fielding, 2015; Shirley, 2015; Bovill et al., 2011). Ultimately, if children are not meaningfully involved in changing and improving their school experience, they are essentially denied the freedom to take control of their

own learning. They eventually become disengaged from their learning, and this disengagement increases as children get older. As a result, many young people finish school feeling they have learnt very little (Fullan, 2007).

2.2. What is children's voice?

It is one thing to talk about 'children's voice' in school and another one to specify what exactly it means in practice. Fletcher (2005) uses the term 'meaningful student involvement' instead of 'student voice' to ensure that student tokenism (i.e. asking students to express opinions without the power to change anything in education without adult permission) does not become part of the concept. Fletcher (2005, p.5) defines 'meaningful student involvement' as,

...the process of engaging students as partners in every facet of school change...Instead of allowing adults to tokenize a contrived 'student voice' by inviting one student to a meeting, meaningful student involvement continuously acknowledges the diversity of students by validating and authorising them to represent their own ideas, opinions, knowledge, and experiences.

When students are engaged as 'partners' in schools, they enjoy equal status and decision-making power with adults, being considered not only 'co-learners' but also 'co-leaders'. The degree of meaningfulness of such engagement depends on the number of students directly involved in school change activities and the sustainability of such involvement over time. Ideally, all students from all grades are engaged in system-wide planning and decision-making rather than selected individuals being invited to participate in certain decision-making areas that 'directly' affect them. Such strategic participation gives students the power to bring about genuinely transformative changes in their schools, reflect on (and learn from) the process, and hold themselves collectively accountable for their choices and actions as responsible citizens (Fletcher, 2005).

Meaningful student involvement can take different forms, such as students acting as full voting members of the school board; leading evaluations of teachers, curriculum, facilities, or peers; teaching younger children, peers, or adults; researching school problems to plan for solutions; and partnering with educators to make system-wide decisions relating to curricula, building design, budgeting, or hiring. Students may also act as education advocates effecting community support for school change, and work with local communities to call for social justice in schools (Fletcher, 2005). Figure 1 gives an overview of the different ways student involvement can take effect in schools.

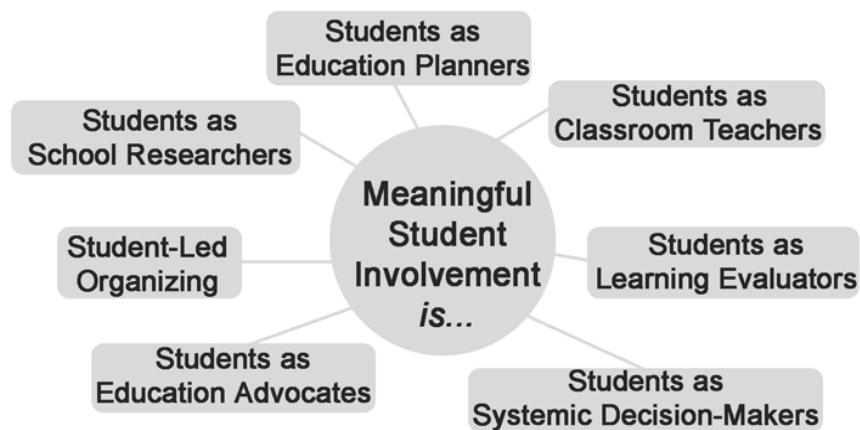
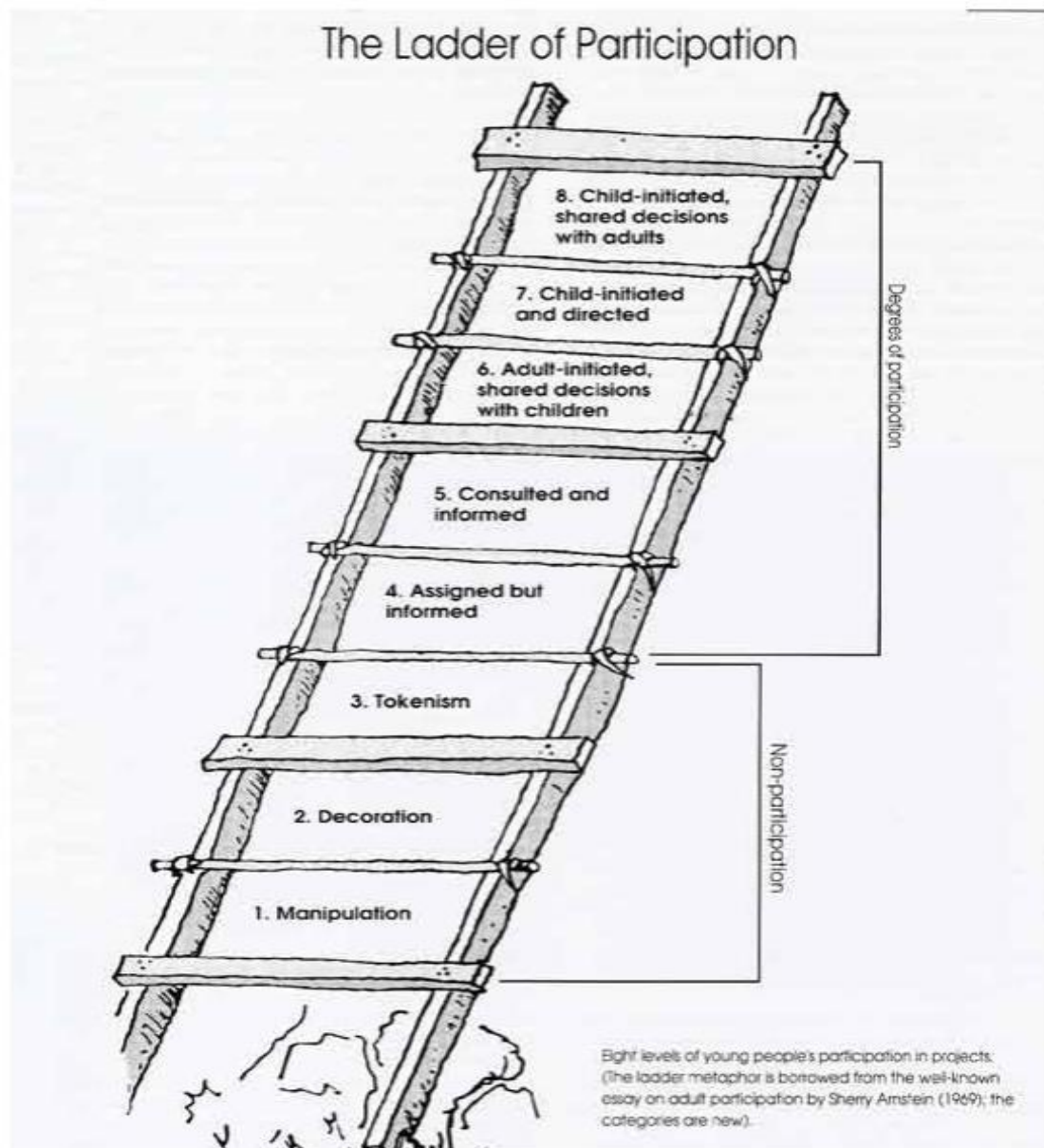


Figure 1: Forms of student involvement in school (Fletcher, 2005, p.11)

Yet, form does not guarantee substance. Student involvement initiatives may have minimal or maximal impact. They can either empower students or treat them in a disingenuous way. Hart (1992) developed a ‘Ladder of Participation’ to depict different degrees of student involvement in schools. The higher the rung, the more meaningful the student involvement is likely to be. Rungs 1-3 constitute models of non participation (or deceptive participation). Rung 1 refers to projects with a *manipulative* character in which children are used to support adult causes by pretending that these causes were inspired by children. More than often, children do not even understand the project’s intentions or their roles in it. Rung 2, *decoration*, is similar to the first rung, yet, here adults do not pretend a cause was inspired by children but use children to bolster the cause in an indirect way (e.g. including children’s photographs in promotional material). Rung 3, *tokenism*, refers to projects which appear to give students a voice, yet allow them little choice about the issue involved or how they communicate their ideas. Students are often selected by adults on these projects to represent other children without having previously consulted with peers.



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Figure 2: Roger Hart's Ladder of Participation (Roger, 1992, p. 8)

Rungs 4-8 are models of genuine participation. Rung 4 represents *assigned but informed* participation, when adults assign specific roles to selected children on adult-directed projects dictating how exactly they will participate. Yet, contrary to tokenistic projects, adults here are being explicit and honest about the process, clearly explaining why children are being involved in the project, while there is no pretence that the selected children represent their peers. On rung 5, students are *consulted and informed* i.e. given the opportunity to offer advice on activities run by adults. Even though final decisions rest with adults, students' views are taken seriously and children are informed about how their input was used. Rung 6, *adult-initiated shared decisions with children*, refers to adult-initiated projects in which

children genuinely share decisions related to design and implementation. Rung 7 represents *child-initiated and directed* projects in which there is no adult intervention. Adults, in these projects, may be involved only in supportive roles. Finally, rung 8, *child-initiated shared decisions with adults*, refers to projects initiated by children on which adults have been invited to share decisions as partners (Fletcher, 2005; Hart, 1992).

In contemporary schooling systems, many student voice initiatives lie on rungs 1-4, while others are, at best, on rung 5 (Fletcher, 2005). Robinson and Taylor (2013) report on a student (action research) voice project in a US school which proved to be largely tokenistic in character. The project initially aimed to give students the opportunity to investigate a school problem of their choice and plan for solutions. The study concluded that only some students were chosen (by teachers) to participate on the project (those adhering to school expectations); questionnaires collecting children's views were administered to some children only rather than the entire student population; student research meetings were always organised by adults and facilitated by a university researcher addressed as 'Doctor'; and the research topics chosen were uncontroversial in character and aligned with school agendas for improving achievement (i.e. 'how children learn best', 'why students have low aspirations'). It is doubtful, then, that students gave an authentic voice given the control and constant presence of powerful adults. It appears that preexisting (deep) school structures were not challenged by the project, which, instead, indirectly legitimised existing power relations.

2.3. Structural and cultural barriers to children's voice in schools

Structural barriers reported in the literature include mainly hierarchical decision-making structures and curricular constraints. School curricula - often designed at national level and enforced through inspection regimes - may dictate most of what happens in schools on a daily basis. This severely limits choice not only for students but also for adults at various system levels (Robinson & Taylor, 2013; Fletcher, 2005). Rudduck and Flutter (2004, p. 75) argue that there are difficulties in eliciting children's views on the curriculum beyond 'bits and pieces' such as, what does or does not engage them. This is often due to external requirements, such as the mismatch between the kind of teaching that engages students and that which prepares them for exams (Smyth, 2016).

Yet, in the context of such structures, it is ultimately people's deeper assumptions (culture) and tacit acceptance of the system that exacerbate difficulties. Adults, for example, have learnt to do things *for* children, not *with* children; passing their control over to children may create in them fear of losing their professional dignity and status, while it renders results less predictable. Moreover, adults often believe they understand student needs and challenges better than children themselves, which makes them feel that listening to children is unnecessary (Robinson & Taylor,

2013; Fletcher, 2005; Kellett et al., 2004). It is, thus, easy for teachers to comply with outward signs of consultation and ultimately ignore children's views. Shirley (2015, p. 127) contends that,

...it is not simply greater voice that may be needed in educational change today, but rather greater skills in listening to our students and attending to our colleagues. The ability to open one's mind and heart to diverse perspectives, including those that could challenge one's own expertise and status, appears to be badly needed in the uncertain profession that is education.

This challenge with respect to 'greater skills in listening' echoes Lundy's (2007) caution that a common criticism leveled at Article 12 of the UNCRC 1989 is that it is easy for adults to promote tokenistic or decorative participation which is not only in breach of Article 12 but can be counter-productive. The process of student voice must involve a commitment to authentic listening (Flynn, 2014). Yet, even if teachers make a genuine effort to listen to students, they often face the challenge of not knowing how to deal with students' ideas, opinions, knowledge, or experience in practice (Fletcher, 2005).

Students may also resist participation because they are used to being told what to do rather than given choice and responsibility (Fletcher, 2005). According to Rudduck and Flutter (2004, p. 76) students need support in developing a language for 'talking about learning and about themselves as learners so that they feel it is legitimate for them to contribute to discussions about schoolwork with teachers'. Yet, power relations are so ingrained in schools that it is difficult for teachers and students to reach a level of trust that puts them on a par with one another. Students often internalise the voice of adults, (unconsciously) repeating what adults want to hear rather than expressing their authentic views (Fletcher, 2005). Such firmly fixed power relationships are one reason why Hart (1992) questioned whether adults and children can ever become genuine partners.

2.4. Teachers' educational beliefs and children's voice practices

As noted in the introduction, researchers have conceptualised school culture in terms of two opposing philosophies or ideologies: one emphasising teacher-child hierarchy, expecting children to comply with adult decisions and absorb adult-controlled bodies of knowledge; and one assuming equal teacher-child status, considering children as able to self-regulate and co-create knowledge with others. These ideologies have been operationalised and measured in different ways. In this study, we used three Likert-type scales to measure school culture, namely the *Educational Beliefs Questionnaire* developed by Silvernail (1992), the *Pupil Control Ideology (PCI) Form* by Willower et al. (1967), and the *Learning Inventory* by Bolhuis

and Voeten (2004). These were selected both for their conceptual relevance to the study and their complementarity.

The *Educational Beliefs Questionnaire* explores beliefs about the purpose of schools, the teacher's role, and the content/methods of teaching. It contains 21 statements with which respondents are asked to agree or disagree on a 5-point rating scale. These are divided into three subscales representing *traditionalist*, *progressivist*, and *romanticist* orientations. The traditionalist orientation views schools/teachers as transmitting to children predetermined facts and skills possessed by an 'elite' group. The progressivist orientation views schools/teachers as facilitating children to actively discover these facts and skills through inquiry. The romanticist orientation views schools/teachers as encouraging the free, natural development of the child with no interest in predefined sets of knowledge or skills. These orientations are not considered mutually exclusive, but may (simultaneously) form part of the philosophy of the same teacher. Previous studies have shown that teachers may be in general agreement with more than one orientations (especially with traditionalist and progressivist views) having no single dominant philosophy (Rideout & Windle, 2013; Silvernail, 1992).

The PCI Form covers similar ground, though it focuses more explicitly on the teacher-student power asymmetry in schools. It contains 20 statements with which respondents are asked to agree or disagree using a 5-point scale. Responses are added up to produce a score that lies between two opposite, and mutually exclusive, ideological ends ranging from *custodial* (higher scores) to *humanistic* (lower scores). The former emphasises external hierarchical control positioning students as subordinates to teachers. *Humanistic ideology* assumes equal teacher-student status, authorising students to act autonomously and self-regulate (Hoy, 2001; Willower et. al., 1967).

Finally, Bolhuis and Voeten's (2004) *Learning Inventory* explores beliefs about the nature of learning and children's intelligence, identifying two opposing views: a *traditional* and a *process* view on learning. Those with a traditional view perceive learning as an externally regulated, individualised activity, reproducing existing bodies of knowledge and depending on a type of intelligence that is fixed for each student. Teachers with a process view on learning perceive it as a self-regulated activity with social character, depending on a type of intelligence considered dynamic. The inventory contains 24 items each consisting of two opposite statements on the same topic, namely a more process-oriented statement and a more traditional statement. Using a 4-point scale, participants are asked to indicate which of the two statements they support more. Responses are added up and average scores calculated, with higher scores indicating a more process-view on learning.

The most widely applied scale of those described above is the PCI Form which has generated high reliability/validity indicators in studies conducted in the US, Turkey,

South Africa, Canada, Israel, Australia, and Greece, to name but a few (Giannakaki & Batziakas, 2016; Rideout & Windle, 2013; Gilbert, 2012; Karakus & Savas, 2012; Ngidi, 2012; Bas, 2011; Hoy, 2001; Abu Saad & Hendrix, 1993; Packard, 1988). Even though PCI primarily refers to teacher-student relationships, it has been found to reflect wider power asymmetries among all school members (including adults). In schools with custodial orientation, centralisation is high, with the principal having the largest control span; formal rules predominate; professional relations are rather impersonal; and opportunities for deliberative dialogue are limited (Lunenburg & Mankowsky, 2000). On the other hand, a humanistic school orientation is conceptually linked to what is known as 'learning community' (Stoll et al., 2006, p. 221) in which member interactions are lateral, personal, two-way, inclusive, and driven by a thrust for enquiry. Deliberative discussions on pedagogical matters are frequent and leadership is guided by constructivist thinking with all school members viewed as co-learners/co-leaders (Lambert, 2009).

It is interesting to note that teachers' need for external control (i.e. custodialism) is particularly fortified in schools serving low socio-economic status populations (Beachum et al., 2008; Gordon & Patterson, 2008) where students often express disruptive resistance not least because their needs/cultural capital are unrepresented in formal/informal curricula and structures, resulting in what Bourdieu termed 'symbolic violence' (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1990, p. 4). Moreover, in a recent study of a vocational school in Greece, teachers with custodial orientation described society as an objective, and largely fixed, entity, amenable only to modest changes. People had to adjust to this society (through the schooling system) whose hierarchical structure reflected natural inequities in human worth. Success or failure in this context was attributed to individuals, while societal arrangements were left unchallenged and tacitly accepted even by those disadvantaged by the system. On the other hand, teachers with humanistic ideology considered all people as equally worthy and inequities as socially constructed (and imposed). Rather than talking about a fixed society, they envisioned a type of education empowering young people to challenge the status quo and take collective action to transform it (Giannakaki & Batziakas, 2016).

As noted in the introduction, in the present study, we hypothesised that schools will practise children's voice in a way reflecting their fundamental philosophies or ideologies. Hence, schools with traditional (custodial) cultures are likely to be hesitant to pass control on to students, mainly applying initiatives on the initial rungs of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation. Student involvement is likely to become more meaningful (with projects on higher rungs of the ladder) as a school's ideology becomes more humanistic. In our literature review, however, we did not find any studies directly exploring the link between school ideology and children's voice practice. Hence, this study aims to fill this gap.

3. Research Methods

The study was initiated in September 2015 and concluded in May 2017. A mixed-methods approach was adopted in which the quantitative and qualitative components were given equal weight. First, a survey of teachers' educational beliefs was conducted in 19 schools during which 191 questionnaires were completed and returned (quantitative strand). Next, we carried out teacher interviews and children's focus groups in a sub-sample of four schools with different educational philosophies as reflected in their survey responses (qualitative strand). We refer to these four schools as 'cases studies' given that, in each of them, multiple types of data were generated to gain deeper understanding of their culture and the nature of children's voice initiatives they practised (Yin, 2009).

This sequential design was guided by the *triangulation*, *development*, and *expansion* intents (Greene et al., 1989). *Triangulation* was reflected in independently using a closed questionnaire and semi-structured interviews to explore the same phenomenon, i.e. teachers' educational beliefs, in the four case study schools. In this way, we tested the existence of convergent results across both data types. *Development* was reflected in the sequential timing of the two strands, which involved selecting case study schools based on the results of the preceding survey to ensure they represented different (divergent) sets of beliefs. The *expansion* intent was reflected in that, for certain inquiry components, different methods were used, as they could not have been studied using one method alone. The questionnaire survey was deemed most appropriate for measuring the educational beliefs of a large number of teachers and statistically identifying their socioeconomic and other determinants. On the other hand, semi-structured interviews and focus groups were considered most suitable for exploring teachers' (and students') conceptions of children's voice, the different ways they practised it in schools, and the rationale behind such practices. Data generated through these (different) methods were then integrated to detect the interplay between teachers' educational beliefs and children's voice practices in schools.

As already mentioned, we invited children to act as advisors at certain stages of the research process in accordance with the principle of participation (Groundwater-Smith et al., 2017). Two CRAGs, consisting of 8 children each, were set up to help us (researchers) find the best way to interview other children, in focus groups, about how they understood 'children's voice' and how they had experienced it through various school activities. Moreover, the CRAGs worked alongside the researchers to interpret data generated through these focus groups and to identify salient themes. One CRAG consisted of 8-year old students from a primary school in Dublin, while the other CRAG consisted of 11-year old students from a primary school in Belfast. These children were of a similar age to children who would be targeted in our main study for focus group participation.

In the remainder of this section, the sampling and instrument development approaches are described for each of the research strands (quantitative/qualitative). Ethical issues are also discussed, followed by an outline of CRAG activities. The section is concluded with a description of the data analysis strategies employed.

3.1. Teachers' survey

3.1.1. Sampling and response rates

The teachers' survey took place between February and October 2016. In NI, schools were sampled from Belfast, County Down, and County Armagh. In ROI, sampling was confined to the Greater Dublin area. Based on the official 2015/16 school directories of these areas (available from DENI and DES, respectively), 303 primary schools were identified in NI and 443 in Dublin (special schools excluded).

Two systematic samples of 15 schools each were drawn from these lists (one in each jurisdiction)². Invitations to participate in the survey were sent to their Principals (both by email and post) and were followed up with a phone call. Only three of the 15 schools in NI accepted to take part in the survey, and more schools were eventually sampled to boost numbers. Overall, 60 schools from NI were sampled and invited to take part in the survey. Eleven of them gave their consent, for an 18% response rate. Questionnaires were distributed to all teachers in these schools of which 66 were returned.

In Dublin, four out of the 15 schools initially sampled agreed to take part in the survey. Another 25 were later sampled to boost numbers. In total, 40 schools from Dublin were invited to take part in the survey, of which 8 gave their consent (20% response rate). Questionnaires were distributed to all teachers in these schools of which 125 were returned.

In sum, 19 schools from both jurisdictions took part in the survey, returning 191 completed questionnaires (66 from NI and 125 from ROI³). Questionnaires were delivered to schools, and collected, in person by the researchers.

²To obtain a systematic sample one picks every k^{th} element on a list of all population elements (e.g. schools). The value of k is determined by using the formula: $k = \text{number of elements in the population} / \text{sample size}$. To determine which of the first k elements is to be chosen, a number from 1 to k is drawn at random.

³The fact that fewer teachers (66) from more schools (11) returned completed questionnaires in NI compared with ROI (125 teachers from 8 schools) is due to schools in the Republic being larger in size than those in NI.

3.1.2. Questionnaire construction

The initial questionnaire (Appendix A) comprised three Likert-type scales – i.e. Silvernail's (1992) *Educational Beliefs Questionnaire*, the *Pupil Control Ideology Form* by Willower et al. (1967), and the *Learning Inventory* by Bolhuis and Voeten (2004) – plus a section on demographic and employment characteristics. It contained a total of 70 question items. All three aforementioned scales have generated good reliability indicators in previous studies (Silvernail, 1992; Abu Saad & Hendrix, 1993; Hoy, 2001; Bas, 2011; Gilbert, 2012; Rideout & Windle, 2013; Bolhuis & Voeten, 2004). Before distributing the questionnaire widely, a small-scale pilot was conducted to ensure the three scales worked satisfactorily in the geographical regions and education systems of our interest.

The pilot

The questionnaire was piloted with postgraduate students attending education courses at Trinity College Dublin (TCD) and Queen's University Belfast (QUB) who, at the time, held teaching positions or placements in local primary and post-primary schools. First, six students were interviewed to establish whether individual items could be accurately understood and to identify statements considered 'sensitive' for local teachers. Following these interviews, certain items were reworded or removed. The revised pilot questionnaire (Appendix A) was then anonymously distributed (both online and in paper format) to all students on selected education courses and 35 completed forms were returned. A recurrent comment in these forms was that the pilot questionnaire had been unduly long.

Data were entered into SPSS to assess the internal consistencies of the scales based on Cronbach's Alpha (α). Items lowering the value of Alpha were removed, followed by redundant ones, which, if deleted, did not alter it significantly. In this way, we reduced the length of the questionnaire from 70 to 50 items (Appendix B). Eleven were retained from the PCI scale ($\alpha=0.89$), 15 from the Learning Inventory ($\alpha=0.81$), and 19 items from the Educational Beliefs Questionnaire of which nine belonged to the *traditionalist* orientation ($\alpha=0.81$), five to the *progressivist* orientation ($\alpha=0.60$), and five to the *romanticist* orientation ($\alpha=0.63$).

Re-testing reliabilities with main survey data

As explained earlier, the finalised questionnaire (Appendix B) was distributed to all teachers in the 19 primary schools agreeing to take part in the mainstage survey (11 schools in NI and 8 in ROI). Scale reliabilities were reassessed based on the 191 returned questionnaires. With the exception of the Learning Inventory, other scales produced lower Alpha values compared to those calculated during the pilot. This may indicate that teachers who studied at university and took part in the pilot did not adequately represent those participating in the mainstage survey. Unfortunately,

time restrictions had not allowed us to test the pilot questionnaire with a more representative sample of teachers in schools.

We tried to increase internal consistencies by conducting further item analyses to remove items negatively affecting Alpha values. As a result, items 21 and 24 were removed from the PCI scale (Section A, Appendix B) resulting in an Alpha value of 0.73. Item 10 was also removed from the Learning Inventory (Section B, Appendix B) resulting in an Alpha value of 0.84 for that scale. Tables 1 and 2 present the items retained in the *PCI Form* and the *Learning Inventory*, respectively.

TABLE 1: Pupil Control Ideology (final)

| S/N – Section A, Appendix B | Statement |
|--------------------------------|---|
| 20 | Pupils are usually not capable of solving their problems through logical reasoning. |
| 22 | It is more important for pupils to learn to obey rules than that they make their own decisions. |
| 23 | School councils are a good “safety valve” but should not have much influence on school policy. |
| 25 | If a pupil uses obscene or profane language in school, it must be considered a moral offense. |
| 26 | If pupils are allowed to use the toilets without getting permission, this privilege will be abused. |
| 27 | A few pupils are just troublemakers and should be treated accordingly. |
| 28 | It is often necessary to remind pupils that their status in school differs from that of teachers. |
| 29 | Pupils cannot perceive the difference between democracy and anarchy in the classroom. |
| 30 | Pupils often misbehave in order to make the teacher look bad. |

TABLE 2: Learning Inventory (final)

| S/N – Section B, Appendix B | Opposite statements | |
|-----------------------------------|---|---|
| 1* | A. One can assist pupil learning the most by stimulating the pupils to search for answers. | B. One can assist pupil learning the most by precisely formulating the tasks. |
| 2 | A. When pupils collaborate they often learn the wrong things from each other. | B. Pupils learn a lot by explaining things to each other. |
| 3* | A. In school it is all right to also confront pupils with real-life problems that do not have solutions. | B. It is better not to confront pupils with problems they cannot understand. |
| 4 | A. When pupils discuss the subject matter together, they will not be any wiser in the long term. | B. When pupils discuss together, they learn to handle different points of view and acquire deeper insight. |
| 5* | A. Pupils should understand the reasoning behind definitions; in that way they will always be able to derive the definition. | B. It is important that pupils know definitions by heart, they should be able to say them in their sleep. |

| | | |
|------------|--|--|
| 6* | A. All pupils should be challenged to perform, even if they find this difficult | B. Some pupils cannot be expected to make much progress. |
| 7* | A. Pupils learn a lot from each other when they work together on the subject matter. | B. Pupils learn best when they work individually on the subject matter. |
| 8 | A. Pupils should only be given tasks at school that they are able to handle. | B. Pupils must be allowed to try things. They should be allowed to stub their toes. |
| 9 | A. A pupil's low achievement is often caused by the pupil's limited ability. | B. A pupil's low achievement often has a cause that can be helped. |
| 11 | A. We should not bother pupils with all kinds of contradictory views. School should offer unambiguous knowledge | B. It is interesting to make it obvious for the pupils that there are different solutions to problems and different explanations for phenomena. |
| 12* | A. Mistakes and bad marks are not a problem in themselves, provided that you help pupils to learn from them | B. Mistakes and bad marks are bad news for pupils. We should handle these cautiously. |
| 13 | A. Collaborating is too distracting. Learning is done best alone. | B. Pupils learn more by collaborating than they do when working on their own. |
| 14 | A. It is the teacher's responsibility to evaluate the pupils' learning achievements. | B. If pupils do not learn to evaluate their learning achievements, they have only learned half the lesson. |
| 15 | A. Learning will be most successful when an expert (teacher) is in charge. | B. Learning will be more successful as the pupils themselves take the initiative |

NOTE: Reverse coded items are shown with an asterisk.

Silvernail's (1992) *Educational Beliefs Questionnaire* produced the lowest Alpha values. *Traditionalism* gave a maximum Alpha value of 0.63 after deleting items 1 and 9 (Section A, Appendix B). *Progressivism* and *romanticism* produced Alpha values of 0.54 and 0.57, respectively, with no possibility of increasing these through item deletion. It seemed, overall, that the subscales initially identified by Silvernail did not work well with our main survey sample. We, therefore, decided to run an exploratory factor analysis to investigate if a different factor structure underlay the data generated with our respondents. The procedures followed are described below.

Factor analysis of the Educational Beliefs Scale

Preliminary diagnostics resulted in removing items 1 and 19 from the scale (Section A, Appendix B) due to being weakly correlated with all others ($r < 0.30$). The Principal Axis Factor (PAF) method was then run on remaining items⁴ followed by Quartimax rotation. PAF was deemed appropriate as our data violated the

⁴Bartlett's test of Sphericity on remaining items confirmed the existence of patterned relationships ($p < 0.001$), while the KMO measure suggested sampling adequacy (> 0.5).

assumption of multivariate normality (Yong & Pearce, 2013). A three-factor solution was identified based on the inflexion point on the scree plot. However, only three items (3, 17, and 18) loaded significantly (>0.30) onto the third factor, while a conceptual connection could not be discerned between them. Hence, PAF was re-run after fixing the number of factors to two only. The two-factor solution was a good fit⁵ and theoretically interpretable. All items loaded significantly (>0.30) on one of the factors (no cross-loading) except for item 9 which was removed from subsequent analyses (see Appendix C for a list of items and factor loadings).

TABLE 3: Educational Beliefs Scale (final)

| S/N – Section A, Appendix B | Factor 1 statements - Traditionalism |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| 15 | There are essential pieces of knowledge that all pupils should know. |
| 4 | Demonstration and recitation are essential components for learning. |
| 12 | Intensive instruction of skills and knowledge through repeated exercises is a good way of learning. |
| 11 | Factual knowledge is an important component of any learning. |
| 6 | There are essential skills all pupils must learn. |
| 18 | The pupil should be a receiver of knowledge. |
| Factor 2 statements - Progressivism | |
| 14 | Pupils should play an active part in curriculum design and evaluation. |
| 5 | Schools exist to facilitate self-awareness. |
| 7 | Teaching should centre around the inquiry approach. |
| 13 | Ideal teachers are constant questioners. |
| 16 | Right from the first year in school teachers must teach the pupil at his/her level and not at the level of the year s/he is in. |
| 8 | Pupils should be allowed more freedom than they usually get in the execution of learning activities. |
| 10 | Teachers should be facilitators of learning. |
| 2 | Pupils learning from other pupils is an important component of any learning environment. |
| 17 | The curriculum should focus on social problems and issues. |
| 3 | Schools should be sources of new social ideas. |

Table 3 presents items loading on each of the two factors. Factor 1 matches the *traditionalist* orientation as initially conceptualised by Silvernail (1992) and has been named as such ($\alpha=0.63$). Factor 2 includes a mixture of items from the *progressivist* and *romanticist* orientations as initially formulated by Silvernail. These (initially distinct) subscales came up unified in our data ($\alpha=0.69$). Factor 2 items point to a type of learning that is inquiry-based and experiential, mobilising students to actively

⁵37% of non-redundant residuals had absolute values greater than 0.50 (Reproduced Correlation Matrix).

participate in the process and co-shape learning activities - yet, without necessarily having a say on (or calling into question) the main outcomes of schooling, i.e. those predefined sets of knowledge/skills valued by traditionalists. We, therefore, decided to name the new subscale 'Progressivism', as we considered it conceptually closer to Silvernail's *progressivist* orientation rather than the *romanticist* one⁶.

It is worth mentioning here that all schools in our sample scored highly on both the *traditionalism* and *progressivism* subscales (\bar{x} =4.0 and \bar{x} =3.9, respectively). Both educational philosophies constituted strong (yet uncorrelated, r =0.12) elements of school cultures. This may indicate that, in the Island of Ireland, teachers (a) believe that an 'objective' (scientifically validated) body of knowledge exists with certain parts being more important than others (i.e. a traditionalist view conforming to standardised testing and external accountability regimes) and at the same time (b) are influenced by progressivist theories which are, nevertheless, only instrumentally applied as means to acquiring the set body of knowledge/skills considered important. In other words, teachers' talk has been enriched, over the years, with the rhetoric of student-centred learning but for instrumental, not transformational, purposes.

3.2. Case studies

The survey was followed by teacher interviews and children's focus groups in four schools referred to as 'case studies'. The selection of schools/people participating in this research phase is explained below.

3.2.1. Participant selection

Schools taking part in the survey represented different cultural orientations. In each jurisdiction (ROI/NI), we approached two of these that differed substantially in their educational philosophies as reflected in questionnaire responses.

Table 4 presents, for each questionnaire scale/subscale, the maximum and minimum scores⁷ of the 19 schools participating in the survey in NI and ROI. As shown, all schools scored above the midpoint on the *traditionalism*, *progressivism*, and *learning* scales. Hence, no substantial differences were observed between them in terms of these philosophical dimensions. On the other hand, the PCI scale generated the widest range of scores, differentiating between schools much better. We, therefore, decided to select case study schools based on PCI scores. PCI was also negatively correlated with the Learning Inventory (r =-0.38) and positively (yet weakly) correlated with Traditionalism (r =0.26). That is, teachers with a custodial

⁶As noted earlier, *romanticism* is explicitly focused on the free, natural development of the child with no interest in predefined sets of knowledge/skills (something not apparent in Factor 2 statements).

⁷School score = mean of teacher responses in a given school.

ideology tended to report more traditional views on learning, the nature of knowledge, and the purpose of schooling than those with a humanistic ideology (an expected outcome).

TABLE 4: Minimum and maximum school scores per scale/subscale

| | Pupil Control Ideology ¹ | | Learning Inventory ² | | Progressivism ³ | | Traditionalism ⁴ | |
|------------|-------------------------------------|------------|---------------------------------|------|----------------------------|------|-----------------------------|------|
| | Min. | Max. | Min. | Max. | Min. | Max. | Min. | Max. |
| NI | 2.0 | 3.2 | 2.7 | 3.5 | 3.7 | 4.2 | 3.8 | 4.6 |
| ROI | 1.9 | 2.5 | 3.3 | 3.6 | 3.8 | 4.1 | 3.9 | 4.2 |

¹5-point scale (from humanistic to custodial).

²4-point scale (from traditional to process view of learning).

³5-point scale.

⁴5-point scale.

Table 5 (below) shows the four schools selected and invited to take part in the qualitative phase of the study together with their scale scores. To protect anonymity, pseudonyms have been given in Irish. For the same reason, no information is provided with regard to school location, size, denomination, or other socio-demographic characteristics. In Northern Ireland, Bogha Báistí Primary had the highest PCI score (\bar{x} =3.2) while Ériu Primary had the lowest (\bar{x} =2.0). Turas Primary had the second highest PCI score in the Republic (\bar{x} =2.4)⁸ and Fios Primary the lowest (\bar{x} =1.9).

TABLE 5: Case study school scores per scale/subscale

| SCHOOLS (pseudonyms) | Pupil Control Ideology¹ | Learning Inventory² | Progressivism³ | Traditionalism⁴ |
|-----------------------------|---|---------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| Bogha Báistí Primary (NI) | 3.2 | 2.7 | 3.7 | 3.9 |
| Ériu Primary (NI) | 2.0 | 3.5 | 4.2 | 4.2 |
| Turas Primary (ROI) | 2.4 | 3.5 | 3.9 | 4.0 |
| Fios Primary (ROI) | 1.9 | 3.6 | 4.1 | 3.9 |

¹5-point scale (from humanistic to custodial).

²4-point scale (from traditional to process view of learning).

³5-point scale.

⁴5-point scale.

All school Principals were invited, and agreed, to take part in semi-structured interviews. All teachers were also invited to an interview and seven of them

⁸The school with the highest PCI score in ROI (\bar{x} =2.5) had requested, during the questionnaire survey, not to be approached in any subsequent research phases.

volunteered. Additionally, all 7-8 year old⁹ and 10-11¹⁰ year old students were invited to participate in focus group discussions. This ensured the creation of a small number of focus groups in which children would know each other and be of a similar age, which would ease discussions. At the same time, they would represent a good range of ages in the school. Of those volunteering, 38 were randomly selected (3-4 from each class). To protect the anonymity of individuals, no information on the number of participants per school is provided.

Interviews and focus groups explored understandings of, and approaches to, children's voice in the four schools. Details of the topics discussed and questions asked are given below.

3.2.2. Data generation

Interviews and focus groups took place between February and May 2017. Four face-to-face interviews with Principals and seven with teachers were conducted. Students participated in 11 focus groups, each bringing together children from the same class (who knew each other) and consisting of 3-4 participants. Overall, 20 children aged 7-8 years and 18 aged 10-11 years took part in these focus groups. Each interview lasted between 25 and 45 minutes and each focus group between 30 and 75 minutes. All were audio recorded and transcribed.

The teachers' interview guide (Appendix D) included 5 sections: professional experiences/roles, beliefs about education, experiences of personal voice in school, experiences of children's voice in school, and views on the future role of children's voice in school. The focus group guide (Appendix E) included questions about children's feelings when at school, things they do or do not enjoy there, experiences of personal participation in decision-making, relationships with others, ease of expressing oneself, personal conceptions of children's voice (and its possible limits), beliefs about schooling and the 'good' teacher/student, and things they would change in school if they could. Focus groups were supplemented with stimulus materials to ensure that all children – including the least vocal – had their views and feelings expressed. These included drawing activities and statement cards.

3.3. CRAG activities

A key element of our methodological approach was its participatory character. We worked with children who volunteered to act as co-researchers, helping us design focus group interviews and analyse the data generated. We set up two Children's Research Advisory Groups (CRAGs) in two primary schools located in Belfast and Dublin, respectively. The schools were selected on the basis of their

⁹P4 students in NI and 2nd Class students in ROI.

¹⁰P6/P7 students in NI and 5th Class students in ROI.

accessibility and diversity of student populations.¹¹ Each CRAG consisted of eight children: 7-8 year-olds in Dublin (Year 2) and 10-11 year-olds in Belfast (P6/7). Initially, all students from the respective year groups were invited to express interest in acting as co-researchers on the study. Of those volunteering, a random selection of eight children from each school was made, ensuring a gender balance in the groups.

Three meetings took place with each CRAG in each school. Each meeting was facilitated by two adult researchers. An outline of the activities conducted in these meetings is provided in Appendix F. After initial introductions and icebreaker activities, the first meeting introduced CRAG members to the concept and practice of research, and explained their role as advisors. The second meeting¹² introduced children to our own research project, inviting them to draft questions to ask other children in other schools and to also provide feedback to questions drafted by us (adult researchers). CRAG members also gave advice on general design issues, such as optimal focus group size, focus group location, age of children-participants, difficult words to avoid, and ways of ensuring all children-participants talked. Following these meetings, we (adult researchers) met to discuss input and feedback received from CRAG members before finalising the focus group guide used in case study schools (Appendix E).

Following data generation, a final meeting was conducted with the Belfast CRAG only (older children). CRAG members were invited to give their own interpretations of the responses of children who had taken part in focus groups. For each focus group question, they read 1 or 2 excerpts of children's (transcribed) responses considered most representative according to a preliminary thematic analysis. After reading each excerpt, we asked a number of reflective questions to instigate discussion with CRAG members. Examples included: *What are the children saying? Why do you think they are saying this? Is there anything that surprises you?* (see Appendix F for a full list of questions). The discussion was audio-recorded and taken into account in subsequent thematic analyses of focus group data (see section 3.4).

Each CRAG was given a £250 cheque as a 'thank you' for the children's contributions to the project in order for them to use collectively with their classmates in school. The cheque was only offered to them following our third (and final) meeting, so as not to be perceived as research incentive.

¹¹Both schools served students from diverse socioeconomic and ethnic/cultural backgrounds.

¹²In Dublin, this meeting was divided into two separate ones (on separate days) given the younger age of CRAG members.

3.4. Data analysis

Survey data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics, accounting for its nested nature (multilevel modelling), to examine: variation in teachers' educational beliefs within and across schools; north-south variations; and whether (or not) teachers' educational beliefs were related to school location, school size, or their demographic and other background characteristics.

To analyse case study data, we applied the principles of discourse analysis on linguistic material (interview/focus group transcriptions) as well as on visual material (children's drawings) (Schmid, 2012; Johnstone, 2008). Patterns of meaning were gradually identified through inductive thematic analysis. More specifically, codes were first developed by naming segments of data (text or images) deemed important and grouping these to form themes. Themes were then refined through an iterative analysis process which included re-reading data transcripts. Coding was conducted by the principal investigator (accounting for the recorded discussion with CRAG members in Belfast) and discussed with co-investigators until agreement occurred. As we (adult researchers) already had a grasp of the relevant literature, theoretical concepts unavoidably guided data interpretation. Pure induction cannot, therefore, be claimed.

4. Ethical considerations

All required permissions and ethical approvals for conducting research, in both jurisdictions (north and south), were sought. Actions included:

- Gaining ethical approval from the two universities conducting the study.
- Written informed consent from: school principals; teachers participating in interviews; and children participating in focus groups (and their parents). Written consent was also sought from CRAG members and their parents.
- All information letters and consent forms were adapted to the age of participants and their linguistic abilities.
- Effort was made so that consent was given free from influence. Participants were reassured that refusing to take part in the study would not affect, in any way, their relationship with the school, the two universities, or their colleagues/teachers/classmates. Participants were also free to withdraw consent retrospectively up until three months following data generation.
- In focus groups, we tried to represent as many student groups as possible (e.g. different genders, religions, races, SES, etc.). Stimulus materials were used to ensure that even 'quiet' children expressed their views.
- Participants were ensured their data would be kept confidential and anonymised.

Each participating school was offered a £100 cheque to cover for staff time used to facilitate the conduct of interviews and focus groups.

5. Findings

5.1. Survey

5.1.1. Demographic and background characteristics

This section summarises teachers' demographic and other background characteristics. The great majority of respondents, in both jurisdictions, were women. As shown in Table 6, percentages were very similar in both countries: 88% women and 12% men in NI, and 87% women and 11% men in ROI.

TABLE 6: Teachers' gender

| GENDER | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Women | 58 (88%) | 107 (87%) |
| Men | 8 (12%) | 14 (11%) |
| Prefer not to say | 0 (0%) | 2 (2%) |
| Total | 66 | 123 |

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

Table 7 shows the age composition of our teacher sample. In both jurisdictions, the largest proportion of teachers belonged to the 26-34 years category (26% in NI, 29% in ROI) followed by the 35-44 years category (20% in NI, 12% in ROI).

TABLE 7: Teachers' age

| AGE (in years) | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
|-------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| ≤25 | 6 (9%) | 15 (12%) |
| 26-34 | 23 (35%) | 40 (33%) |
| 35-44 | 17 (26%) | 35 (29%) |
| 45-54 | 13 (20%) | 15 (12%) |
| 55+ | 6 (9%) | 15 (12%) |
| Prefer not to say | 1 (1.5%) | 2 (2%) |
| Total | 66 | 122 |

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

In NI, 38% of respondents had a senior management role in their school, while the respective percentage in ROI was only 27% (Table 8). This might reflect a more layered hierarchical structure in NI schools compared to schools in ROI.

TABLE 8: Teachers in Senior Management

| MEMBER OF SENIOR MANAGEMENT TEAM | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
|----------------------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Yes | 24 (38%) | 33 (27%) |
| No | 38 (59%) | 87 (71%) |
| Prefer not to say | 2 (3%) | 3 (2%) |
| Total | 64 | 123 |

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

Table 9 provides information on teachers' years of experience in education (including leadership experience). In both jurisdictions, the largest proportion of teachers belonged to the 11-20 years category (32% in NI, 34% in ROI) followed by the 4-10 years (26% in NI, 27% in ROI) and the 21+ years (27% in NI, 22% in ROI) categories.

TABLE 9: Teachers' years of experience in education (inc. leadership experience)

| YEARS OF EXPERIENCE | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
|---------------------|------------------|---------------------|
| <1 | 2 (3%) | 6 (5%) |
| 1-3 | 8 (12%) | 14 (11%) |
| 4-10 | 17 (26%) | 33 (27%) |
| 11-20 | 21 (32%) | 42 (34%) |
| 21+ | 18 (27%) | 27 (22%) |
| Prefer not to say | 0 (0%) | 1 (1%) |
| Total | 66 | 123 |

As shown in Table 10, the majority of respondents in both countries (71% in NI, 68% in ROI) had qualified as teachers either through a Bachelor of Education (B.Ed.) degree or a BA/BSc with Qualified Teacher Status. All other respondents (29% in NI, 32% in ROI) had qualified through a one-year PGCE or other postgraduate teacher training course.

TABLE 10: Initial Teacher Training (ITT) qualifications

| ITT qualification | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
|--|------------------|---------------------|
| B.Ed. or BA/BSc with QTS | 45 (71%) | 78 (68%) |
| One-year PGCE or other postgraduate course | 18 (29%) | 37 (32%) |
| Total | 63 | 115 |

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

Very few of our survey respondents had a Master's degree. These included 8% of respondents in NI and 10% of those in ROI (Table 11). All of them had earned their Master's degree in the field of education.

TABLE 11: Teachers with a Master's degree

| MASTER'S DEGREE | Northern Ireland | Republic of Ireland |
|-----------------|------------------|---------------------|
| Yes | 5 (8%) | 12 (10%) |
| No | 58 (92%) | 103 (90%) |
| Total | 63 | 115 |

Note: Percentages may not add up due to rounding.

5.1.2. Educational beliefs and their determinants

Table 12 presents descriptive statistics of teachers' educational beliefs as measured through the Likert-type scales included in our questionnaire. Overall, responses of teachers in Northern Ireland conveyed a more traditional view of education compared with those of teachers in the Republic. The former were more inclined to view the teacher-child relationship as hierarchical in character and teachers as experts legitimised to exercise control over learners.

More specifically, teachers in NI produced an average score of 2.6 on the PCI scale compared with 2.2 in ROI, with higher scores denoting a more custodial ideology among the former. Mean score estimates on the Learning Inventory were 3.2 in NI and 3.4 in ROI, with lower scores denoting more traditional views of learning. Finally, mean scores on the traditionalism scale were slightly higher in NI ($\bar{x}=4.1$) compared with ROI ($\bar{x}=4.0$) and the same pattern was observed with regards to progressivist beliefs ($\bar{x}=4.0$ in NI and $\bar{x}=3.9$ in ROI). All differences were found to be statistically significant at the 5% level (two-tailed t-test of means) except for differences on the progressivism scale.

As already noted in the methodology section, ‘progressivism’ as initially conceptualised by Silvernail (1992), did not appear to be an appropriate scale for measuring student-centred (transformational) philosophies in our sample of teachers. Many of those who reported highly progressive views scored similarly high on the traditionalism scale. These teachers may have adopted progressivist rhetoric and techniques as means for achieving certain learning outcomes that are otherwise traditional in character and dictated by powerful experts located at central decision-making points of the system.

TABLE 12: Teachers’ educational beliefs scores

| SCALE | Northern Ireland | | | Republic of Ireland | | | <i>T-test of means</i> |
|--------------------|------------------|------------|--------------------|---------------------|------------|--------------------|-----------------------------------|
| | <i>Min</i> | <i>Max</i> | <i>Mean (S.D.)</i> | <i>Min</i> | <i>Max</i> | <i>Mean (S.D.)</i> | |
| PCI | 1.4 | 3.7 | 2.6 (0.53) | 1.2 | 3.6 | 2.2 (0.50) | t = 3.94 df = 189 p < 0.01 |
| Learning Inventory | 2.2 | 4.0 | 3.2 (0.39) | 2.5 | 4.0 | 3.4 (0.33) | t = -3.64 df = 189 p < 0.01 |
| Traditionalism | 2.7 | 5.0 | 4.1 (0.47) | 2.5 | 4.8 | 4.0 (0.44) | t = 2.42 df = 189 p = 0.02 |
| Progressivism | 3.0 | 4.8 | 4.0 (0.38) | 2.9 | 4.9 | 3.9 (0.43) | t = 1.81 df = 189 p = 0.07 |
| N | 66 | | | 125 | | | |

What influences teachers’ educational beliefs?

Following descriptive analyses of data, we run a series of regression analyses to identify which teacher and/or school characteristics (if any) were statistically associated with educational beliefs scores. Given the hierarchical structure of our data (teachers nested within schools) a likelihood ratio test was first conducted to examine whether between-school variability in educational beliefs was statistically different from zero. In other words, we wanted to test for the existence of significant school effects on teachers’ beliefs in which case it would be necessary to run a multilevel model. The term ‘school effects’ denotes that schools are shaping, in some way, the beliefs of their teachers, exerting a homogenising influence on how they think about education and rendering them more alike with colleagues from the same (or a similar) school than those from different schools.

As shown in Table 13, the likelihood test comparing a null multilevel model with a null single-level model gave statistically significant results for Pupil Control Ideology and Learning Inventory scores, but not for traditionalism or progressivism scores. It therefore appears that schools in our sample do shape teachers' control ideologies (i.e. whether they believe adults are status-bearers or partners of children in schools) as well as their perceptions of the nature of learning and human intelligence. It could be argued that these beliefs are part of a school's cultural identity. On the other hand, schools do not seem to influence teachers' beliefs as measured by Silvernail's (1992) traditionalism or progressivism scales; their views about what constitutes 'important' knowledge (traditionalism) and what learning methods should be employed to attain such knowledge (progressivism) are related more to individual teacher characteristics rather than forming a distinctive feature of a school as a whole.

TABLE 13: Testing for school effects on teachers' educational beliefs

| | -2Log-likelihood (single -level model) | -2Log-likelihood (multilevel model) | Difference | N |
|-------------------------------|---|--|------------------|-----|
| PCI | 299.137 | 277.530 | 21.607 (1 df)*** | 191 |
| Learning Inventory | 152.608 | 139.803 | 12.805 (1 df)*** | 191 |
| Traditionalism | 243.655 | 241.296 | 2.36 (1 df) | 191 |
| Progressivism | 204.018 | 203.988 | 0.03 (1 df) | 191 |

***Triple asterisks denote a statistically significant effect at 1% level.

Two multilevel analyses were conducted to identify factors associated with PCI and Learning Inventory scores. Explanatory variables entered included: teachers' gender, age, years of experience, senior management position, initial training through the BEd or BA/BSc QTS route, studies at Master's level, extent of deprivation of the school area¹³, number of enrolments, and country. The last three variables were entered as school-level variables.

Hox's (2010) strategy for multilevel models was applied: level 1 variables were initially added as fixed effects, followed by level 2 variables, random slopes/coefficients, and cross-level interactions. Tables 14-15 present only statistically significant results.

¹³In ROI, school area deprivation was measured on the basis of the 2016 Pobal Deprivation Index for Small Areas (<https://www.rte.ie/deprivation>) and in NI on the basis of 2017 Multiple Deprivation Measure for Small Areas (<https://www.nisra.gov.uk/statistics/deprivation/northern-ireland-multiple-deprivation-measure-2017-nimdm2017>). Both indicate the affluence/disadvantage of an area relative to others in the country and are comparable in nature.

Table 14 outlines results on PCI score determinants. Three consecutive models are presented: M0 (null), M1 with a teacher-level and a school-level explanatory variable, and M2 with one additional school-level variable. Differences between models are statistically significant at 5% and 1% levels, respectively. The significance of specific coefficients was assessed based on the ratio of their absolute values to their standard errors. If this was approximately 2, they were considered statistically different from zero. The relatively small sample size did not always allow for statistical significance at 5% level, but some coefficients with a p-value of 0.1 were considered as revealing interesting trends worth mentioning.

TABLE 14: Multilevel models for teachers' PCI scores

| | M0: Null Model | | M1: M0 + Master + Country | | M2: M1+Deprivation Measure | |
|---|-------------------|-------|------------------------------|---------|-------------------------------|-------|
| | Estimate | S.E. | Estimate | S.E. | Estimate | S.E. |
| Main fixed effects | | | | | | |
| Intercept | 2.432 | 0.075 | 2.282 | 0.092 | 2.280 | 0.079 |
| Master's degree | | | -0.232 | 0.120 | -0.234 | 0.120 |
| School context | | | | | | |
| Country: NI | | | 0.318 | 0.128 | 0.200 | 0.112 |
| <i>Multiple Deprivation Measure: Ref 2nd to 4th quintiles</i> | | | | | | |
| 1 st quintile (most deprived) | | | | | 0.515 | 0.264 |
| 5 th quintile (most affluent) | | | | | 0.316 | 0.199 |
| Random effect variances | | | | | | |
| School level | 0.077 | 0.034 | 0.051 | (0.025) | 0.033 | 0.019 |
| Teacher level | 0.218 | 0.023 | 0.213 | (0.023) | 0.213 | 0.023 |
| Variance partition | | | | | | |
| School level | 26.1% | | 19.3% | | 13.4% | |
| Teacher level | 73.9% | | 80.7% | | 86.6% | |
| VPC | 0.261 | | 0.193 | | 0.134 | |
| -2Log-likelihood | 277.530 | | 268.397 | | 263.600 | |
| Deviance from M0 | | | 9.13 (2 df)** | | 13.93 (4 df)*** | |
| N | 191 | | 191 | | 191 | |

**Double asterisks denote a statistically significant effect at 5% level.

***Triple asterisks denote a statistically significant effect at 1% level.

Careful observation of each model generates a number of conclusions:

- PCI is 26.1% attributed to school-level factors and 73.9% to individual-level factors (M0). Schools therefore play an important role in shaping teachers' control ideologies.
- Differences in teachers' PCI scores are partly explained if we take account of their Master's level studies. Those with a Master's degree have lower PCI scores (i.e. a more humanistic ideology) than those without such degrees, and this effect is the same across schools¹⁴. Educational foundations often have a prominent place in Master's courses. The latter often draw insights from anthropology, history, sociology, philosophy and political science, helping students critically assess and question dominant beliefs, policies and practices characterising the education system rather than emphasising techniques for 'effectively' managing classrooms or teaching subjects to improve results.
- Working in a school in NI increases a teacher's PCI score (namely their custodial orientation) compared with peers working in ROI.
- Teachers working in schools in areas at the top quintile of deprivation report more custodial ideologies (higher PCI scores) than teachers in other areas. Being in the most deprived area increases a teacher's need for control over children.

Table 15 presents results on Learning Inventory score determinants. Three consecutive models are presented: M0 (null), M1 with a teacher-level and a school-level explanatory variable, and M2 with one additional school-level variable. Differences between models are statistically significant at 1% and 10% levels, respectively. Observation of each model leads to the following conclusions:

- Views on learning are 24.1% attributed to school-level factors and 75.9% to individual-level factors (M0). Schools therefore play an important role in shaping teachers' views on learning and intelligence.
- Differences in teachers' views are partly explained if we take account of their age. Older teachers report higher scores than younger ones, viewing learning more as self-regulated social activity depending on a dynamic type of intelligence (process-views)¹⁵.
- Teachers in NI report lower scores indicating more traditional views on learning (being externally regulated and individualised) and intelligence (fixed rather than dynamic) compared with ROI teachers.

¹⁴After adding a random coefficient for 'Master's degree' in M2, its effect was not found to differ across schools.

¹⁵After adding a random slope for 'Age' in M2, its effect was not found to differ across schools.

- The more deprived the area a teacher works in, the more traditional views they report on learning and intelligence. Deprivation was added as ordinal variable in this analysis.

TABLE 15: Multilevel models for teachers' learning inventory scores

| | M0: Null Model | | M1: M0 + Age + Country | | M2: M1+Deprivation Measure | |
|--|---------------------------|-------------|-----------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------------|-------------|
| | Estimate | S.E. | Estimate | S.E. | Estimate | S.E. |
| Main fixed effects | | | | | | |
| Intercept | 3.324 | 0.050 | 3.364 | 0.070 | 3.241 | 0.088 |
| Age | | | 0.041 | 0.021 | 0.039 | 0.021 |
| School context | | | | | | |
| Country: NI | | | -0.225 | 0.082 | -0.222 | 0.071 |
| Multiple Deprivation: quintiles 1-5 (ordinal variable) | | | | | 0.063 | 0.033 |
| Random effect variances | | | | | | |
| School level | 0.034 | 0.015 | 0.019 | 0.010 | 0.011 | 0.007 |
| Teacher level | 0.107 | 0.011 | 0.105 | 0.011 | 0.107 | 0.011 |
| Variance partition | | | | | | |
| School level | 24.1% | | 15.3% | | 9.3% | |
| Teacher level | 75.9% | | 84.7% | | 90.7% | |
| VPC | 0.241 | | 0.153 | | 0.093 | |
| -2Log-likelihood | 139.803 | | 130.116 | | 126.997 | |
| Deviance from M0 | | | 9.69 (2 df)*** | | 3.12 (1df)* | |
| N | 191 | | 191 | | 191 | |

*A single asterisk denotes a statistically significant effect at 10% level.

***Triple asterisks denote a statistically significant effect at 1% level.

5.2. Case studies

This section presents themes identified through analysis of interview and focus group data. Those common across schools are first outlined, followed by themes conveying differences between custodial and humanistic cultures. No notable differences between NI and ROI were identified through the analysis of qualitative data generated in this project.

To protect participant anonymity, whenever an excerpt from our data is included, we do not reveal whether it's the principal of a school (in the case of interviews) nor

do we mention the age/year group of children-participants (in the case of focus groups). Only pseudonyms of participating schools, and those of children, are given.

5.2.1. *Common themes*

Adult voice in the centre, children's voice in the margins

When asked to identify places where they hear adult voices, most children pointed to very central (inner) school spaces, particularly the classrooms and the staff room. They described adult voice as heard most of the time in those spaces, when, for example, teachers transmitted knowledge to children (rendering learning a teacher-controlled, teacher-led process), demonstrated things children had to do, reprimanded those misbehaving, or made decisions (in the staff room). Teachers' voice was underpinned by the intention to control, rarely discussing or exchanging views on a par with children, or participating in their play.

Interviewer: Ok, interesting that all three of you, the first thing you wrote for adult voices was class. Why? Tell me why.

Orla: Because you always get told to do things.

Nancy: Your teachers are always there.

Dora: Your teacher talks to you. Because, like, when the teacher is telling us a new thing that we are doing today, then, like you hear their voice more.

(Ériu Primary NI, FG¹⁶)

When asked about children's voice, the majority of focus group participants pointed to the playground, bus rides/trips, and some indoor locations used for activities at the margins of the core curriculum (e.g. assembly, canteen, hall). They also mentioned non-core subjects such as PE and drama, as well as small chunks of class time offered to them as 'own/free time' in exchange of doing their work.

Interviewer: Where do you hear children's voice?

Carl: The playground.

James: Assembly.

Carl: Is there where the children talk though?

James: I think assembly.

Anna: Wait, what are you writing? The hall, OK.

Carl: Or like the last day of school, or school trips.

James: Or when we are riding the bus.

Anna: But, that's not inside of school.

Carl: But, it's with our school.

Anna: I think that's all the places.

(Bogha Báistí Primary NI, FG)

¹⁶FG: Focus Group.

Our data indicates that children's voice often took the form of background (play) noise ('shouting', being 'chatty'), performing teacher-defined tasks/roles (e.g. singing in choir, giving preset speeches), or at times, asking questions to teachers. A minority of students talked about hearing children's voices during focused class discussions/debates on social issues such as bullying or smoking not directly connected to core school processes. Students in ROI also referred to children-led bodies such as school councils and eco-councils, but in NI only a small minority mentioned such bodies as spaces where they heard children's voices more.

Our data shows that adult voices remained dominant in all of the above spaces whenever there was a need to control those misbehaving, resolve conflicts/disputes among children, or even coordinate activities/discussions more generally. Hence, adult voice was heard in, and influenced, a wider spectrum of school spaces than children's voice, remaining the most powerful almost everywhere. The sovereign presence of adults in the school was epitomised by two ROI students who, when asked where they felt they had most power in school, answered: '*...in the bathroom, and when you're by yourself*' and '*...in the toilet, you can flush the toilet*'.

Children participating under the auspices (control) of adults

Participants described varied ways of eliciting children's opinions on school matters before decisions were made (consultation). In schools with a more humanistic orientation, the range of structures put in place for this purpose was, at times, impressive: school councils, class councils, eco-councils, annual opinion surveys, worry boxes, focused timetabled discussions, peer mediation initiatives (to name but a few). It was apparent, though, that these had been initiated, and were always regulated, by teachers.

We have a student council and I'm in charge of it...we have two children from each class, 1st to 6th, and one of the other teachers and I meet with them sporadically and generally, what happens beforehand, you say to class teachers: 'will you get your student council people to talk to the class and see what they want brought up, see what they want to discuss...'

(Turas Primary ROI, Teacher 1)

The 6th class children are trained as peer mediators, so I train them in conflict resolution. So, if the kids want to resolve conflict, they would go to seek out 6th class peer mediators.

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 3)

Moreover, with the exception of school council, class council, and sometimes eco-council representatives, who were voted by peers (or at times, randomly selected '*out of a hat*'), other roles of responsibility had been assigned to students that teachers had selected.

There're a number of different initiatives in school....so on the yard, there's peer mediators, or playground helpers, and playground friends. So, for example, playground helpers are responsible for bringing all the toys and resources that are brought out in yard...There're also children who are toilet monitors...They have to apply, they have to say why they would be a good playground helper, for example, and they are selected [by teachers]. So, it's like a job application.

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 1)

Teachers retained responsibility for monitoring such student roles, intervening in matters deemed too serious for children to handle.

Adriana: Peer mediation does a good job, but when it gets into a big fight, the adults decide what to do because they have a bit more experience...

(Fios Primary ROI, FG)

Finally, school council input was filtered through the judgement of adults who owned the final decisions in the majority of cases.

Interviewer: And were your opinions listened to?

James: Ya, school council could tell them to Mrs. [name] is it? She listens and then she talks to the other teachers and sees if it's a good idea.

(Bogha Báistí NI, FG)

'Not much room in decisions really' / 'nothing really changes about the school'

The above comments were made by CRAG members when reading focus group excerpts relating to the types of decisions students were involved in and the ways their views were obtained. Indeed, focus group participants, when asked to give examples of school matters they were invited to give opinions on, mostly referred to break time games, yard equipment, how to keep the school clean/safe, fun and fundraising activities, school trips, after school clubs, free time games in class, computer resources, drama or PE games, project topics, voting for school councillors, or sometimes choosing their preferred learning method. Teachers participating in interviews gave similar responses. These were all peripheral areas of decision-making selected by teachers to ensure core school functions, aims, norms, and routines remained intact. Children were aware of this.

Adriana: Like, we get a say on what they think is right to have us get a say on.
Like we don't get a say on what we get a say on [laughs].

(Fios Primary ROI, FG)

Involvement in such peripheral matters was often seen as opportunity for children to develop skills rather than as collective decision-making in a democratic context aimed to transform education. Even on such peripheral matters, teachers would often give students a preset number of options to choose from, narrowing down even more the scope of their voice.

We have an art exhibition on Friday and ...I gave my children the option, I don't know if anybody else did, would we do an A4 frame or an A3 frame?

(Turas Primary ROI, Teacher 1)

Selective listening

Teachers in all schools were very selective in what and who they listened to. 'Valid', 'relevant ideas' and 'model children with no behaviour problems' (i.e. conforming to school norms/expectations) were listened to more. These often included children from 'supportive home environments' and girls (rather than boys) who would not make 'silly suggestions' or give 'try opinions'. If there was an outright clash between teachers' and children's opinions, the latter were usually relegated to second place.

Owen: Well, let's say there are less children on the blue side and more children on the purple side. If the teacher's on the blue side...

Interviewer: If the teacher's on the blue side and most of the children are on the purple side, what happens, you think?

Patrick: Technically, they don't take the children's side there.

(Bogha Báistí NI, FG)

When children's proposals were refused, justifications by teachers included their impracticality due to curriculum requirements, finances, or other external restrictions.

In Eriu Primary, children from one year group had been asked to vote for the class teacher they would like to have for that particular school year (from two options). In one of the interviews, a teacher admitted: *'We were quite happy that the pupil's choice was actually the choice of ourselves. Now, it might not have worked out that way, but it was important to get that voice and to say that we're taking that into consideration'*. It was unclear what would have happened if the voting outcome had been different. To avoid such unwanted situations, teachers sometimes voted alongside children with more weight given to their votes.

Cathy: Last Friday, we had to vote which art we liked most...

Elena: I didn't like that day because the teachers gave all their votes to Patrick, and they didn't give any to us.

Interviewer: So, the teachers were deciding.
 Louise: Ya, they gave them all to Patrick and none to Elena.
 Cathy: Ya, because the teachers all got a big handful of votes...
 Louise: It should have been fair, and everyone gets one vote. Teachers shouldn't get a big handful of votes and they all said for Patrick to win.
 Interviewer: Handfuls of?
 Louise: Tokens. And then you go and put them on the one you like.

(Ériu Primary NI, FG)

'Voice' as personal choice/freedom, not collective decision-making

Our data reveals that teachers (and students alike) conceptualised children's voice as opportunity for making personal choices. There was hardly any mention of children's voice as democratic deliberation in a community context leading to collective decision-making. This was apparent, for example, when teachers talked about allowing each student to have input in their Individual Learning Plan or about using surveys to identify students' personal preferences on specific matters and the difficulty they encountered *'to please everyone'* when many different choices emerged. Regrettably so, children's voice aimed at satisfying individual needs, hardly fostering a sense of community and collective responsibility in a democratic space. This, of course, shielded established system structures from organised resistance and overturn.

More voice, more conformism

Paradoxically so, in our case study schools, children's voice was often used as means to ensuring children complied with school norms and regulations. Rather than having a transformational character, it became the tool for ensuring student adaptation to the status quo. Being heard was often the reward for behaving *'in an acceptable manner'* while personal choice/freedom could be withheld as punishment for having been *'bold'* during the week:

Interviewer: And how often do you have Golden Time?
 Maya: Every Friday.
 Lina: Before we go home, like half an hour before we go home.
 Interviewer: So, what does the teacher say in Golden Time?
 Maya: She says like now it's Golden Time and you can go and play now... if you do something bold it goes down 5 minutes, but if you're good it goes back up.
 Interviewer: So, tell me, if you do something bold, what exactly happens?
 Maya: You move down the Golden Time chart and then you miss five minutes of your Golden Time.
 Interviewer: Ok, so after a week of hard work, you have fun in Golden Time. And do you get to choose what you want to do?

Lina: Kind of.
 Maya: You can go into the other class.
 Tony: You can play on the computers as well.

(Fios Primary ROI, FG)

Finally, 'listening' to 'difficult' students was used by many teachers as behaviour management technique. The aim was to temporarily appease those students' frustration (and calm them down) without really looking into what they were trying to communicate and understand the reasons behind their anger:

...with our 5th class boys, they feel nobody listens to them "Oh Mrs. ***, can we come talk to you because nobody is listening to us." And, you know, mostly they're just talking nonsense. But, I say, of course you can! [laughs] and I listen to them for ten minutes and off they go [laughs]. And nothing really changes because there isn't... They're a very difficult group.

(Turas Primary ROI, Teacher 3)

Ultimately, voice was used to please and jolly children so that they accepted to 'cooperate' in an otherwise oppressive context, i.e. do what the teachers (and the system) required:

It is important to give them voice cause it creates a good atmosphere but they should know that the teacher is in charge and that the curriculum creates limits.

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 2)

Multilayer hierarchy suppressing voice at all levels

A clear structural hierarchy, with multiple layers, operated in the education systems of both jurisdictions, with people at each level having more power over those at lower levels.

Interviewer: Ok, so who would you say has the most power in school?
 Nancy: The Principal.
 Dora: Then all of the teachers.
 Orla: If Mr. *** [the vice-principal] was still here, it would be him and then the teachers. But, he's not here anymore, so more the teachers.
 Interviewer: What about secretaries or classroom assistants?
 Nancy: Ya, above the students.
 Dora: Ya, and nurse *** [name].
 Interviewer: Would older students be above younger students?
 Nancy: Probably, ya... because we're older and they're younger and we know more stuff... they give us more to do.

(Ériu Primary NI, FG)

People at higher levels monitored the actions of those at lower levels, having the power of sanctions and rewards. Downward flows of information were carefully observed to safeguard the power of, and structures established by, authority-holders. Access to matters discussed by seniors could not be rightfully sought, unless seniors themselves gave necessary permissions.

We're under the process of maybe being amalgamated...And we were given a consultation document to fill-in way back winter time... Sometimes you're very aware that the decision has already been made [at a higher level] and this is just a formality... I think the decision it's further along than we know... I know that... [name]... was aware of a lot of what was happening, but due to confidentiality, she couldn't speak about it at an earlier stage...

(Ériu Primary NI, Teacher 1)

In the context of such hierarchical system, voice and participation were understood as having the opportunity to put forward proposals for change to one's seniors. Yet, the latter retained the power to approve or disapprove these proposals after consideration. Hence, teachers (often described as 'bosses' in the classroom) could approve or disapprove students' suggestions, senior managers would judge the feasibility of teachers' proposals, while the Board of Governors was the ultimate decision-making body for 'highly important' matters. This was considered normal and often necessary for the 'good' of the children.

My voice is valued in the school, absolutely...I have suggested a number of things over the years and they have always been welcomed, always been valued [by the Principal]... I suggested something again this year and it's being implemented with literacy... But I know if the principal felt that these things wouldn't benefit the children, they wouldn't have been included, not everything is.

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 1)

Important decisions are made by the governors with consultation by the teachers.

(Bogha Báistí NI, Teacher 3)

The lack of autonomy at lower levels often created work overload for seniors.

Adriana: Teachers listen to you most of the time, but, there's that tiny bit where sometimes... because maybe it's Monday and everybody's telling them news, that they wouldn't have time or they might get a tiny bit fed up listening to everybody.

(Fios Primary ROI, FG)

The capstone of this educational hierarchy was the National Curriculum (enforced by the Ministry) which regulated relationships and core school functions.

I don't think I could offer [to students] more of an input into how... how they have more responsibility for their school life as such? You know? Obviously their voice counts as far as things that aren't related to their education, but when it comes to education, their voice can go only so limited before we start missing curriculum targets and stuff.

(Bogha Báistí NI, Teacher 2)

References to this hierarchical structure were abundant in participants' narratives, often occurring without probing. At the same time, nobody seemed to question this hierarchy which was taken for granted; a known and unchangeable reality. It is not, then, surprising that all our research participants understood democratic participation as nothing more than 'consultation' (and with selected individuals only). More than often, however, such consultation was tacitly aimed at creating contrived consensus to curb people's resistance against this oppressive system. This was especially apparent in the way conflict was handled, i.e. as something to be feared, an unhealthy element of school life (putting stability in danger) rather than an essential component of democratic deliberation. Constant agreement signalled good relationships and those agreeable and helpful were praised.

I suppose it comes back to the relationship things again and again...I would do anything to avoid conflict.

(Turas Primary ROI, Teacher 3)

We have an amazing Parents' Association and they are willing to take on absolutely anything that is advised.

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 1)

From the above, it is concluded that participation in decision-making was largely deceptive, not only for children in schools, but also for adults operating at varied system levels.

Acceptance of an oppressive, yet necessary, system

A deeper look into our data unveiled a stiff, unyielding, schooling system severely suppressing people's voice and autonomy. Gatekeepers at all levels made sure serious change efforts were prevented on time. Paradoxically so, the very foundation on which this system had been built and firmly established was the tacit consent of people oppressed by it. Even though research participants (esp. children) often expressed discomfort with being subjected to the control of others, nowhere in our

data did we encounter a clear opposition to system norms and directives. The latter seemed normalised and never called into question.

Yet, oppression was omnipresent in people's responses, even getting in their way to satisfy basic needs and retain dignity.

- Interviewer: What decisions are the most important for you to have a say on in school? So, what things do you think you should have a say about in school?
- Tony: Um, if you feel like you just gonna get sick or something and then like, sometimes you're afraid to tell your teacher or something but then like, if you do throw up, it might be a little embarrassing or something.

(Fios Primary ROI, FG)

In this context, fake behaviour was often necessary to gain some power and get by.

- Interviewer: Um, when do you feel you have the least power?
- Carl: In the classroom, when the teachers are telling us to do work, we don't have power not to do it, we have to do it.
- Anna: And the teachers will plan like, the schedule and what we're going to do like, so we can't really change it.
- James: Unless you pretend you're sick or something and then you get to go out of the classroom, go home and you'll probably have no homework.

(Bogha Báistí NI, FG)

Hence, adjustment to the system meant 'putting on a face'; being inauthentic.

- Interviewer: And do you guys feel that you can be yourself in school? Or do you always have to be on your best behaviour?
- Orla: Best behaviour.
- Nancy: I have to fake sometimes because I'm literally not that good...Ya! I just fake it.

(Ériu Primary NI, FG)

The schooling system had been coated with the rhetoric of 'benevolence' and 'usefulness' which often justified its oppressive character. Moreover, it was injected with 'fun' activities offering to people a window of joy in their (otherwise dull) school routines. The seeming goodness of the system created personal conflicts that became apparent in children's contradictory responses, such as feeling both good and bad when in school, while acknowledging its absolute necessity for moving forward in life.

Interviewer: What words would you say to describe how you feel in school?
Dora: Bored.
Nancy: Ya, definitely bored apart from when we're doing reading and art activities.
Interviewer: Any other words other than bored?
Dora: Well, sometimes it's a wee bit fun.
Nancy: Maybe sad sometimes when you get shouted at.
Cathy: I would say independent.
Ainsley: I would say... I would feel all... tired...hungry.
Kai: Sad.
Interviewer: Sad? Why?
Kai: Because I don't like school.
Eli: Annoyed. Because we have to do work!

(Ériu Primary NI, FG)

Interviewer: Why do you think you should go to school?
Anna: Because if you want to get anywhere in life, if you haven't gone to school then you won't know how to buy your shopping because you don't know how money works...And if you want to get a good job, you'll have to go to school and learn well, and do well at your exams.

(Bogha Báistí NI, FG)

Interviewer: Tell me, why do you think you should go to school?
Louise: Um...to learn things and have a good education which also makes your future well ahead...and then also, you can make friends so you're just not by yourself.
Eddie: And if you didn't go to school then you'd grow up... and you wouldn't have friends and you might be lonely for the rest of your life.
Louise: And you might also not have a job, which means you wouldn't have money and you could die. Maybe not that harsh, but... [laughs].

(Turas Primary ROI, FG)

Moreover, by reading and re-reading interview transcripts, we came to realise that most teachers emphatically pointed to the importance of fostering '*respectful*' and '*trusting*' relationships with children. Even though, initially, this seemed to us a reasonable expectation for facilitating productive collaboration, we eventually came to realise that it basically helped prevent conflict and turmoil by ensuring everyone liked each other.

Teachers are expected to work really hard on having a very respectful manner with the children, we expect high standards of behaviour and we praise, we really try to focus on the good.

(Turas Primary ROI, Teacher 3)

Tracey: You have to be nice...and have everyone like each other.

(Bogha Báistí NI, FG)

Even though 'being respectful' and 'trustful' in a democratic context (in which people have equal power and are able to enter a conversation on a par with others) signifies healthy and creative relationships, in an oppressive context, being 'respectful' and 'trustful' is more likely to denote submission to, and compliance with, authoritative structures. So, a 'good' teacher-student relationship - of which '*respect*', '*trust*', '*humour*', '*warmth*', and '*parenting*' were often identified as important components by teachers – reduced chances of confrontation and ensured children willingly (and often uncritically) complied with and followed adult-defined rules. As one teacher put it, '*you can jolly them along to do stuff that perhaps they're not that keen to do*'. Only one teacher expressed concern that this type of relationship could overshadow students' authentic voice.

It's so easy to influence children and, you know, give them a voice and tell them what you're thinking... So, how do you give them an authentic voice? It's so easy to lead them. We could lead them any direction we wanted to. I'm thinking of Christina [pseudonym], the teacher who is voluntarily running the student council and she's absolutely fantastic, the children adore her. I'd say she could get them to do anything for her. I mean, she's really good on student voice...But you look at her and you think she could influence them.

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 3)

'Good' in the above context meant 'void of conflict', 'liked by others in the system', as well as 'in harmony' or 'in agreement' with system norms. In fact, when asked to described the 'good' student and teacher, the majority of children participants in the four schools depicted them as constantly 'agreeable', 'smiling', 'helpful', 'kind', 'nice', 'loving', and obediently fulfilling their duties.

Interviewer: How do you think a good teacher looks like?

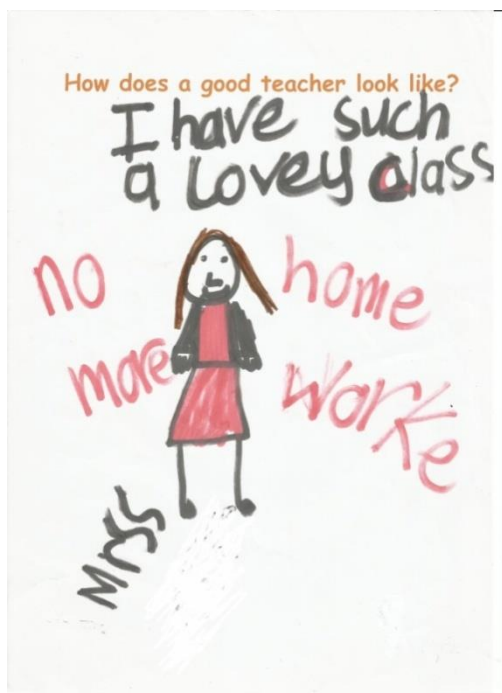
James: Always has a smile on their face, a happy face, and likes the children. Doesn't look like they just went to school and they don't care about anything and, like has like a cool tie and looks good. And is good to the children and has parties.

Anna: Like, treats you equally and is nice to you and understanding... And like consistent so, if like, being a teacher for so long they can kind of get

bored being a teacher...they should keep being a good teacher for their whole teaching thing. Won't get tired of teaching.

(Bogha Báistí NI, FG)

Children's drawings below are in line with the above descriptions. The teacher is in the centre, sets students' obligations, while being nice, offering them rewards for having been good, and keeping them happy (a '*benign dictator*' as one teacher put it). The student is also happy as they have a 'nice' teacher and is willing to do all the work the teacher asks for, without objection.



Drawing 1: The Good Teacher



Drawing 2: The Good Teacher



Drawing 3: The Good Student

Longing for freedom, yet without vision

When asked what they would change in school if they could, most children noted they would reduce the amount of work required (e.g. less homework), extend free or fun time (e.g. longer breaks, more time for fun activities), cut down time in school altogether (a shorter school day), and allow themselves greater scope for personal choices whilst in school (e.g. eating what they like, wearing what they want, sitting with whom they fancy, choosing where to go on school trips, doing only the work they enjoy, going home if bored). The above indicated a clear need for greater freedom in shaping the reality of their daily lives as human beings (i.e. greater self-determination).

Some other students suggested specific alterations which, nevertheless, were marginal in character and did not affect core school structures and processes.

- | | |
|--------------|--|
| Interviewer: | Is there anything that you'd change in school, if you could? |
| Kyle: | I'd get some mats on the concrete so if you fall, you don't hurt yourself or get bad cuts. |
| Rolando: | Have in the yard, a mini trampoline. |
| Louise: | I would build every child a little place and give everyone a computer so they wouldn't have to do writing. |

(Turas Primary ROI, FG)

Others could not come up with any ideas for change at all, *'I think it's [i.e. school] just like perfect', 'Ya, school is school'*.

Our interpretation of the above responses was that, on the one hand, children felt a strong (quasi instinctive) desire for greater freedom and self-control. This desire was clearly expressed. Yet, on the other hand, children's change proposals remained piecemeal, abstract, and incomplete, being unable to concretely visualise a different type of school that would allow students greater ownership and self-control. Nowhere in their responses did we find any elaborated thoughts on possible alternative ways for doing things such as teaching and learning or decision-making. Furthermore, there was no mention of students discussing and collectively deciding, as responsible citizens of a democratic community, on core matters such as curriculum, school rules and regulations, assessment and certification, attendance, selection and enrolment (to name but a few). Collective decision-making in a community context - beyond the confines of the established hierarchy and those of the individual - was something children were unable to envision; something unknown to them. They basically talked about 'escaping' from the system (or the system itself allowing them more freedom) as individuals, while remaining individualised in their choices. The concept of voice as 'collective responsibility' and 'collective action' for the good of the community seemed to be beyond the scope of their cognitive maps.

Similarly, some teachers, when asked to identify matters or ways children could have more say in school, found it difficult to think of anything more than what was already being implemented, while others mentioned greater consultation with them in areas which, nevertheless, remained marginal in character and did not alter the foundational structures of the system (e.g. having a say in the purchase of computer software, project topics, Individual Learning Plans, or car parking rules). Acceptance and internalisation of the system rendered people unable to envision something essentially different from what they already knew, restricting their imagination and limiting the horizon of possible alternative realities.

5.2.2. Differences between school cultures (custodial vs. humanistic)

Despite the notable commonalities in the way student voice was conceptualised and experienced in the four case study schools, we still found important differences between those with a humanistic ideology (Ériu and Fios Primary) and those with a more custodial one (Turas Primary and Bogha Báistí). Interestingly, the main differences were identified in teacher (not student) narratives. They mostly concerned teachers' espoused theories - i.e. their understandings of the purpose of schooling, the nature of learning, what it means to be a student, and the teacher-student relationship – and much less their actual practice (though we did discern some differences in this respect as well).

More specifically, teachers in schools with a more custodial orientation, when asked to identify important lessons children take away from school, they talked about core curriculum subjects (e.g. literacy, numeracy, STEM) plus a number of skills necessary to cope with life or the world 'out there'. These were basically skills for becoming an accepted member of, and adjusting to, society *as is*. They included 'appropriate' behaviours, such as knowing how to express feelings, how to play with friends, how to build relationships, how to deal with conflict, as well as other practical skills, including managing information, using technology, keeping oneself safe, having a healthy diet, or becoming employable. This kind of '*how to*' learning was driven by external requirements and imposed on children through the 'have tos' of the formal and informal curricula.

I would say I have traditional ideas. The 3 Rs - Reading, Writing, Arithmetic – are really important, i.e. the basics. And more recently what they refer to as Read, Count, Succeed. And skills as well. Social skills, how to be part of society, to be wise in society, IT, child protection as they live in a more dangerous world now than we lived in the past, to be employable, ethics/morals, to be good citizens, healthy eating, wise choices in life e.g. in terms of health, good and bad choices about peers...

(Bogha Báistí NI, Teacher 3)

I'd say, learn to express their emotions, behave appropriately, build relationships, all of those things... it's about teaching them skills for coping throughout life...

(Turas Primary ROI, Teacher 3)

Teachers in schools with a more humanistic orientation, when asked to identify important lessons children take away from school, focused on the natural (rounded) development of every child and on learning throughout life with happiness and joy. They also emphasised equality (that nobody is better than others) and acceptance of others for who they are. Finally, some talked about empowering students to participate in their communities, speaking up and making a difference for all, even if, sometimes, this meant challenging the status quo.

The most important lessons for children would be that life is a learning process and that learning doesn't stop... Nobody ever knows everything, it's a continual journey. And for me, it would be the enjoyment of learning things... Also, for me...someone who knows that their voice can make a difference, that's something that I want to encourage. But, that does go against the grain a wee bit....

(Ériu Primary NI, Teacher 3)

...being well-rounded individuals when you leave the school, being happy and content.

(Ériu Primary NI, Teacher 1)

Moreover, when asked to identify the qualities of a 'good student' teachers in more custodial cultures gave responses that pointed to a well-adjusted (conforming) individual; someone who has internalised all the 'important lessons' and 'how to' behaviours described earlier by the same people.

Um, I think one that behaves... follows the rules in school and the classroom. I think one that achieves their ability, so... they are making sure that they're doing their best most of the time... Um, and I think also, just a third thing I was just thinking of, probably that they're a good person, as in to other people and to myself [the teacher], that they respect their friends and me [the teacher] as well, and that they're considerate.

(Turas Primary ROI, Teacher 2)

Those with a humanistic orientation talked about a student who is able to develop all their natural gifts, is in touch with their authentic self, is happy, content, accepting of others as equals, and sometimes, challenges the status quo.

A good student, it is all the natural gifts that are there with children.....

(Ériu Primary NI, Teacher 3)

Some of these teachers felt uncomfortable with the stereotypical term 'good student' which did not resonate with them.

See, I just have a, um, a problem with the word even 'good', you know? Um, it's not a term I would like to use. In achieving what they want to achieve, what exactly does good mean? ...So you know, like, a good student is, for me, conjures up the idea of schools years ago where a child sits there and does what they are told. But, that's not what I consider a good student to be. But, they're the words that are conjured up for me... Maybe somebody who is happy, and walking into the school with a smile on their face and mixing with their friends.

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 1)

It is worth noting that teachers in humanistic cultures talked about 'allowing learning to happen' rather than 'making learning to happen', seeing learning as natural process of living instead of an externally induced/controlled function.

You know, so it's that whole idea of allowing everybody to be themselves and allowing everybody to learn and that none of us have the right to stop other people from learning...

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 3)

As regards the teacher-student relationship, even though all teachers (irrespective of school) emphasised the power imbalance and the need for distance between teacher and child, those from schools with a more humanistic orientation pointed to the importance of such a relationship being a happy one, something not mentioned by any teacher in custodial cultures. A few others talked about teachers treating children '*as adults*' while making an honest effort to understand their interests, accepting them for who they are.

Decision-making in humanistic cultures was based on consultation with a wider range of stakeholders (teachers, auxiliary staff, parents, children, and other community members) than those involved in schools with a more custodial orientation. Such consultation also concerned a wider spectrum of school matters, made use of multiple data generation techniques, while it was often considered '*a learning process*' rather than a purely managerial function.

...when decisions impact the whole school, we try to take a more holistic view and have all stakeholders involved...So, for example, we sent out a questionnaire to parents and we got our school council and our focus groups together. And we said look, what do you think of what's going on... Other issues came out of the consultation beyond the one issue that we wanted to address, but it enabled us to look at it more holistically, take everybody's perspective into account and make decisions and move forward, and explain the rationale with staff. This is why we're doing it, this is why children are brought to the table, this is what parents are saying, this is what the canteen are saying because they are also brought into it...Then we had some focus groups, maybe 6 from each class...as far as I'm aware, it was random children...We also tend to have lots of round table talks where everybody is asked to contribute, where we do thrash things out openly and I suppose come from a co-operative type of facilitative learning approach...

(Ériu Primary NI, Teacher 3)

In more humanistic schools, even though hierarchical structures persisted and final decisions rested with those at higher levels, student and teacher voice was a planned priority in development plans and embedded in curriculum areas.

...we're re-writing our World Around Us to be able to go in more directions and be more student-led. So, it's an area that is constantly being developed.

(Ériu Primary NI, Teacher 2)

Additionally, teachers took active steps to promote equality and ensure everyone (not just the most vocal individuals) had the same opportunities to be heard.

I mean, between our whole staff, we have become very conscious of using the word staff instead of teachers, S & As, caretakers... You know, that we are a full team... I suppose even taking that step to see us all as equal, gives everyone an opportunity to have their voice...even our curriculum, by its nature and what's involved in it, it gives the children a voice straightaway.

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 2)

I think some children put themselves more forcefully across, but one of the things that I love about the student council...is that we try and help children identify what's the qualities of a good leader...what is the role of a leader if you're looking for a leader? And then children will put in a certain amount of time, if it's something that they would really like to try. And over the last few years, while I felt that some children were quite vocal within the class, they didn't always go for student council roles. But, I did find that the children who had individual needs, and wouldn't have been very vocal within the class, were very much interested in preparing a campaign and doing it and as a result made excellent student counsellors....

(Fios Primary ROI, Teacher 1)

Finally, these schools had introduced a wider range of student voice initiatives – e.g. more committees, roles of responsibility, opinion surveys, ICT-based/online schemes, or more voting instances (including sometimes voting for a teacher) – extending, in this way, the scope of student influence.

Yet, paradoxically so, schools with humanistic cultures 'suffered' from a wider gap between teachers' espoused philosophies and their actual daily practice. So, even though teachers advocated humanistic practices, in reality these were severely limited due to system constraints. This became evident through the analysis of children's narratives who often felt suppressed to a degree very similar to that reported by children attending schools with a more custodial orientation.

6. Discussion and conclusion

This study explored the educational beliefs of primary school teachers in the Island of Ireland with the view to examining how these affect their understandings and practices of children's voice in schools. A survey of the educational beliefs of 191 teachers from 19 schools (8 from ROI, 11 from NI) was first conducted, followed by teacher interviews and children's focus groups in four of these schools to explore the interplay between those beliefs and the way children's voice was conceptualised and practised. The four schools were purposively selected to represent different cultures

(i.e. sets of beliefs) as measured in the initial survey. Findings are summarised and discussed below.

Of the three scales used to measure educational beliefs, Willower's et al. (1967) *Pupil Control Ideology (PCI)* was the one that best differentiated between schools by generating the widest range of scores, followed by Bulhuis and Voeten's (2004) *Learning Inventory*. As explained, PCI measured two opposing ideologies, namely a custodial ideology emphasising hierarchical control in schools and positioning children as subordinates to teachers; and a humanistic ideology assuming equal teacher-child status, authorising students to act autonomously and self-regulate. On a similar vein, the Learning Inventory identified two opposing conceptualisations of learning, namely a traditional view of learning as an externally regulated, individualised activity, reproducing existing bodies of knowledge and depending on a type of intelligence that is fixed for each child; and a process view of learning as a self-regulated activity with social character, depending on a type of intelligence considered dynamic. Scores on these two scales were found to be significantly correlated, that is, teachers with a custodial orientation tended to report more traditional views on learning, while those with a humanistic orientation were more likely to report process views on learning.

Multilevel analyses revealed significant school effects on teachers' educational beliefs as measured by the above scales. In other words, schools shaped to a large extent, and homogenised, teachers' beliefs about student control, learning, and intelligence, rendering teachers from the same school more alike in their ways of thinking than those from different schools. This is consistent with research conducted in the US and reported by Hoy (2001) according to which newly qualified teachers, even though expressing humanistic views upon completion of their initial training courses, became more custodial in perspective during their initial years of teaching by having to adjust to rather traditional school cultures. Other studies showed that those unable to change their espoused philosophies and adjust to the control orientations of the schools they worked in, eventually suffered from burnout due to strong peer pressures and/or decided to leave the profession (Wiley, 2000; Dewitt, 1999).

Our multilevel analyses also revealed that teachers holding a Master's degree had a more humanistic orientation than those without such qualification. Initial Teacher Training (ITT) courses are often closely aligned to central education policies (having to be approved by authority-holding boards) preparing trainees to enter the existing schooling system and serve it well. Master's programmes have a different character. They are more detached from system mandates and more likely to foster transformative thinking through the study of educational foundations that help students critically assess and question dominant beliefs, policies and practices (Hartlep & Porfilio, 2015). Hence, it is not surprising that Master's level studies foster humanistic thinking among teachers in the Island of Ireland.

Furthermore, older teachers in our sample were more likely to report process views on learning than younger ones. The former may have reached what Katz (1995) refers to as 'maturity stage of development' in which they have built professional confidence, feel comfortable to pass control on to students (so that the latter become leaders of their own learning), and have started to reflect on their educational philosophies asking deeper questions about the nature of learning or the purpose of schooling. Younger teachers, on the other hand, who are at earlier developmental stages, often feel the need to keep things under control to ensure the achievement of certain targets and secure acceptance/recognition by colleagues and students alike (Katz, 1995).

Finally, teachers working in areas at the top quintile of deprivation reported more custodial ideologies and more traditional views on learning than those in wealthier areas. This can be explained if one considers that teachers' need to retain control over children is fortified whenever they perceive a significant threat to their professional status, which is often the case in schools serving low socioeconomic status students who adopt disruptive behaviours to resist authority and its bearers (Beauchum et al., 2008; Gordon & Patterson, 2008).

Interestingly, teachers in ROI had a more humanistic perspective and reported more process views on learning than their NI counterparts, even after controlling for all other variables. Our earlier analysis of quantitative data had also shown that NI teachers were more likely to hold senior management posts than those in ROI. The greater percentage of teachers holding senior management posts in NI schools may be, in fact, related to their more traditional (i.e. controlling and directive) cultures. Having opportunities to move up the ladder of authority and control *as an individual* may constitute a central work incentive for teaching professionals in NI that is much stronger and meaningful than collaborating laterally with colleagues or students.

Drawing on interview and focus group data, we found important differences between case study schools with opposing ideologies (custodial versus humanistic). Interestingly, such differences were discerned in teacher (not student) narratives; they primarily concerned teachers' espoused *theories* about education (at the level of 'rhetoric') rather than actual practices. Those in humanistic schools talked about learning being a natural process of living, imbued with joy and internal drive. Education, for them, should allow every child to develop naturally, connect with their authentic self, establish a sense of equality with others, and participate in community change. Teachers in custodial schools viewed learning as an externally induced/controlled function; education, for them, should help students develop certain skills necessary to adjust to, and become accepted members of, society *as is* without attempting to transform it. Some also stressed the importance of helping students 'do their best' and 'stand out', indirectly conveying a view of an unequal (competitive) society. Much of what humanists suggested in our study echoed what progressivist theorists - such as Pestalozzi, Froebel, Montessori, or Dewey - have

advocated (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.) reaffirming the construct validity of the scales used in our initial survey to differentiate between school cultures. Moreover, our findings accord with previous research conducted by Giannakaki and Batziakas (2016) in Greece who, through teacher interviews, explored in more depth the ways of thinking that lied behind numerical PCI scores.

Despite notable differences in the educational beliefs of teachers in custodial and humanistic schools, our data showed that children in both school types had to comply with oppressive hierarchical structures and make their way through unjust/undemocratic rules and norms that severely circumscribed their voice. This became evident through the analysis of focus group data as students from humanistic schools often felt suppressed to a degree very similar to that reported by children attending schools with more custodial orientations. Thus, in humanistic schools, the gap between teacher rhetoric and daily practice was regrettably wide.

In both custodial and humanistic schools, children's voice was conceptualised and practised as 'consultation with children' on specific matters with final decisions always resting with adults. Other times it involved assigning, to selected children, roles of responsibility regulated and monitored by adults (e.g. toilet monitors, playground helpers, peer mediators). Hence, children's participation always remained under adult control. The sovereign presence and control of adults – who occupied all school spaces – was epitomised by the responses of two children-participants who emphatically pointed to the toilet as the place where they had most power in school.

Moreover, children's participation almost always concerned peripheral aspects of school life (e.g. non core curriculum subjects, activities outside the classroom) which ensured core school functions, structures, and norms remained intact. Even then, teachers were very selective in who and what they listened to. Suggestions made by 'sensible' students, which were considered 'valid' and 'appropriate', were more likely to be accepted. If teachers did not agree with a proposal, its rejection was often justified on the basis of external constraints/obligations. Paradoxically so, children's voice often became a behaviour management tool to 'calm down' 'difficult' students and ensure they complied with school norms and regulations rather than promoting transformative school change.

The above forms of participation could be classified on rungs 4 or 5 of Hart's (1992) Ladder of Participation (*'assigned but informed'* and *'consulted and informed'*) yet their often deceptive character rendered them nothing more than tokenistic actions (rung 3). This is in line with previous studies on children's voice practices in schools which point to the difficulty of rendering participation a meaningful project (Czerniawski, 2012; Thornberg, 2010; Maitles & Euchar, 2006). In schools with a more humanistic orientation, such participative initiatives were more frequently encountered. They concerned a wider spectrum of school matters, involved more representative samples of children (and sometimes parents), and constituted a

priority in development plans. Yet, they remained limited in their power to bring about meaningful school change.

Apart from children, adults were also subjugated to an oppressive hierarchy that transcended the entire education system, severely limiting their voice and professional autonomy. Participation, in this context, was understood as having opportunities to put forward proposals for change to one's seniors, who, nevertheless, retained the power to approve or disapprove them. In other words, collective decision-making had degenerated to nothing more than selective consultation.

These findings correspond with previous research in custodial school environments which uncovered the existence of wider power asymmetries among all school members (rather than just teachers and students) placing certain individuals in higher ranks of authority than others (Giannakaki & Batziakas, 2016; Lunenburg & Mankowsky, 2000). People tacitly accepted such asymmetries, attributing them to differences in innate human qualities and abilities. Underneath such justifications lies the fundamental assumption that society is inherently unequal and that responsibility for success or failure lies with individuals. Thus, system injustices are left unchallenged, curbing people's resistance against oppressive school structures (Giannakaki & Batziakas, 2016; Grimaldi, 2012; Rassool & Morley, 2000).

What was perhaps most striking in teachers' and students' talk was its seemingly *apolitical* character; research participants did not appear to either critique or actively support existing educational structures. Yet, system norms and directives were tacitly accepted by the very fact of not being questioned. Teachers' apparent neutrality was only deceptive, as schools cannot detach themselves from political purpose. As Freire argued (1990), all education is politically committed aiming either at reinforcing the status quo (through a 'banking' approach to education) or empowering students to transform it (through two-way dialogue and cooperation). To project an image of *apolitical* professionalism, teachers in our sample had internalised a rhetoric about 'respectful' and 'trustful' relations (free from conflict) which would promote harmonious coexistence and learning in schools, when, in reality, they solidly supported the system by reducing chances of confrontation and overturn.

What was also clearly sensed in participants' narratives was a notion of students as a sum of largely disconnected individuals gathered together in the same space to pursue largely separate and independent learning/development paths. To ensure harmonious coexistence, they had to learn to 'respect' and 'tolerate' others (even those who differed in a number of ways) so that they did not impede their learning, development, and wellbeing. Nowhere in our data did we find any mention of students entering into dialogue with peers and/or adults as a *collectivity* committed to the *common* good. Participants' way of thinking was largely individualistic; the concept of democracy had lost its classical meaning and degenerated to 'freedom to

choose or do what one likes without bothering others' rather than taking collective responsibility for reinstituting the reality of one's group through genuine deliberation in a politically conscious manner, which resonates with Castoriadis' (1991) understanding of an 'autonomous community'.

Participants' apolitical way of thinking coupled with the absence of collective identities created for them a vision impasse. This held even for teachers with progressive ideologies who could probably sense that the current system did not promote what their readings of progressive pedagogues propounded, yet, they could not come up with an alternative proposal.

For children's participation to become meaningful, teacher education should provide opportunities for trainees to live democratic deliberation and decision-making as part of their professional preparation. The importance of such endeavour lies in the unfortunate reality that democracy is rarely experienced in schools, communities, or work environments. Hence, initial preparation courses should include democratic projects that nurture collective responsibility through deliberative dialogue, leading to collective action and collective accountability. Such change is more likely to foster democratic cultures in schools (not possible to thrive in current hierarchies) than merely studying progressive education theories that have been emptied from political meaning. Finally, we believe that the term 'student voice' should be gradually replaced by a different one – perhaps 'student democracy' – so that projects with a tokenistic character cannot fit into the concept.

7. References

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APPENDIX A

Pilot teachers' questionnaire

This is only a pilot questionnaire.

The data you provide will only be used to assess the validity and reliability of the instrument, and to make amendments to the question items it comprises. Your responses will not constitute research data and will not be reported in any outputs of the study (e.g. research reports, articles, etc.).

Thank you in advance for your collaboration!

Do you work (or have you worked) as teacher or other education specialist in primary/post-primary education in Northern Ireland or the Republic of Ireland?

- ☐ Yes (please continue with completing this questionnaire)
☐ No (please do not complete this questionnaire)

Section A¹⁷

Below are a number of statements about schools, the curriculum, teachers, pupils, and the teaching and learning process. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each one of them by ticking the respective box.

| | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly agree |
|---|--|-------------------|----------|-----------|-------|----------------|
| 1 | The curriculum should contain an orderly arrangement of subjects that represent the best of our cultural heritage. | | | | | |
| 2 | Pupils learning from other pupils is an important component of any learning environment. | | | | | |
| 3 | Schools should be sources of new social ideas. | | | | | |
| 4 | Demonstration and recitation are essential components for learning. | | | | | |
| 5 | Schools exist to foster the intellectual process. | | | | | |
| 6 | Schools exist to facilitate self-awareness. | | | | | |
| 7 | There are essential skills all pupils must learn. | | | | | |
| 8 | Teaching should centre around the inquiry method. | | | | | |
| 9 | Pupils should be allowed more freedom than they usually get in the execution of learning activities. | | | | | |

¹⁷Items 1-21 of this section make up Silvernail's (1992) *Educational Beliefs Questionnaire* (items 1, 4, 7, 10, 13, 14, 17, 20, 21 belong to the traditionalist subscale, items 2, 5, 8, 11, 15, 18 to the progressivist subscale, and items 3, 6, 9, 12, 16, 19 to the romanticist subscale). Items 22-41 constitute Willower's et al. (1967) *Pupil Control Ideology Form*. Reverse-coded items are shown with an asterisk.

| | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly agree |
|-----|---|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 10 | Pupils need and should have more supervision and discipline than they usually get. | | | | | |
| 11 | Teachers should be facilitators of learning. | | | | | |
| 12 | Schools exist to preserve and strengthen spiritual and social values. | | | | | |
| 13 | Factual knowledge is an important component of any learning. | | | | | |
| 14 | Intensive instruction of skills and knowledge through repeated exercises is a good way of learning. | | | | | |
| 15 | Ideal teachers are constant questioners. | | | | | |
| 16 | Pupils should play an active part in programme design and evaluation. | | | | | |
| 17 | There are essential pieces of knowledge that all pupils should know. | | | | | |
| 18 | Right from the first grade teachers must teach the pupil at his/her level and not at the level of the grade s/he is in. | | | | | |
| 19 | The curriculum should focus on social problems and issues. | | | | | |
| 20 | The pupil should be a receiver of knowledge. | | | | | |
| 21 | The teacher should be a strong authority figure in the classroom. | | | | | |
| 22 | It is desirable to require pupils to sit in assigned seats during assemblies. | | | | | |
| 23 | Pupils are usually not capable of solving their problems through logical reasoning. | | | | | |
| 24 | Verbally reprimanding a defiant pupil is a good disciplinary technique. | | | | | |
| 25 | Beginning teachers are not likely to maintain strict enough control over their pupils. | | | | | |
| 26* | Teachers should consider revision of their teaching methods if these are criticised by their pupils. | | | | | |
| 27 | The best principals give unquestioning support to teachers in disciplining pupils. | | | | | |
| 28 | Pupils should not be permitted to contradict the statements of a teacher in class. | | | | | |
| 29 | It is justifiable to have pupils learn many facts about a subject even if they have no immediate application. | | | | | |
| 30 | Too much pupil time is spent on guidance and activities and too little on academic preparation. | | | | | |
| 31 | Being friendly with pupils often leads them to become too familiar. | | | | | |
| 32 | It is more important for pupils to learn to obey rules than that they make their own decisions. | | | | | |
| 33 | School councils are a good "safety valve" but should not have much influence on school policy. | | | | | |
| 34* | Pupils can be trusted to work together without supervision. | | | | | |

| | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly agree |
|----|---|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 35 | If a pupil uses obscene or profane language in school, it must be considered a moral offense. | | | | | |
| 36 | If pupils are allowed to use the toilets without getting permission, this privilege will be abused. | | | | | |
| 37 | A few pupils are just troublemakers and should be treated accordingly. | | | | | |
| 38 | It is often necessary to remind pupils that their status in school differs from that of teachers. | | | | | |
| 39 | A pupil who destroys school material or property should be severely punished. | | | | | |
| 40 | Pupils cannot perceive the difference between democracy and anarchy in the classroom. | | | | | |
| 41 | Pupils often misbehave in order to make the teacher look bad. | | | | | |

Section B¹⁸

In the following table, please indicate whether you agree more with statement on the left or with the statement on the right, using the following scale:

- (1) I quite agree with the statement on the **left**
- (2) I agree somewhat more with the statement on the **left** than I do with the one on the right
- (3) I agree somewhat more with the statement on the **right** than I do with the one on the left
- (4) I quite agree with the statement on the **right**

| | Statements on the <u>left</u> | Circle the no. applying to you | Statements on the <u>right</u> |
|---|---|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1 | One can assist pupil learning the most by stimulating the pupils to search for answers. | 1 2 3 4 | One can assist pupil learning the most by precisely formulating the tasks. |
| 2 | When pupils cooperate they often learn the wrong things from each other. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils learn a lot by explaining things to each other. |
| 3 | School is compulsory for pupils thus you can expect motivation problems. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils lose their motivation in school if everything is presented in a pre-digested way. |
| 4 | In school it is all right to also confront pupils with real-life problems that do not have solutions. | 1 2 3 4 | It is better not to confront pupils with problems they cannot understand. |
| 5 | When pupils discuss the subject matter together, they will not be any wiser in the long term. | 1 2 3 4 | When pupils discuss together, they learn to handle different points of view and acquire deeper insight. |
| 6 | Pupils should understand the reasoning behind definitions; in that way they will always be able to derive the definition. | 1 2 3 4 | It is important that pupils know definitions by heart, they should be able to say them in their sleep. |
| 7 | All pupils should be challenged to perform, even if they find this difficult. | 1 2 3 4 | Some pupils cannot be expected to make much progress. |

¹⁸All items in this section correspond to Bolhuis and Voeten's (2004) *Learning Inventory*.

| | | | |
|----|---|---------|--|
| 8 | Pupils learn a lot from each other when they work together on the subject matter. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils learn best when they work individually on the subject matter. |
| 9 | Pupils should only be given tasks at school that they are able to handle. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils must be allowed to try things. They should be allowed to stub their toes. |
| 10 | Basically pupils are perfectly capable of working on their own. | 1 2 3 4 | In general pupils are not able to work on their own. |
| 11 | It is important that pupils are kept informed about facts and have a thorough knowledge of them. | 1 2 3 4 | It is important that pupils learn to think on their own and to pass their own judgement. |
| 12 | A pupil's low achievement is often caused by the pupil's limited ability. | 1 2 3 4 | A pupil's low achievement often has a cause that can be helped. |
| 13 | Showing respect for each other does not mean that you have to accept everything. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils should learn to behave themselves at school and to comply with rules of behaviour. |
| 14 | We should not bother pupils with all kinds of contradictory views. School should offer unambiguous knowledge. | 1 2 3 4 | It is interesting to make it obvious for the pupils that there are different solutions to problems and different explanations for phenomena. |
| 15 | The school's task is to help pupils to become brighter. | 1 2 3 4 | Bright pupils were already bright when they entered school. |
| 16 | If I do not tell pupils exactly what to do, nothing worthwhile will be achieved. | 1 2 3 4 | I think pupils achieve better results when they have a certain amount of freedom in how they work. |
| 17 | Mistakes and bad marks are not a problem in themselves, provided that you help pupils to learn from them. | 1 2 3 4 | Mistakes and bad marks are bad news for pupils. We should handle these cautiously. |
| 18 | Utilising knowledge is not learned by memorising lists and rules. | 1 2 3 4 | Old-fashioned learning by rote is the most effective way to learn part of the subject that I teach. |
| 19 | Cooperating is too distracting. Learning is done best alone. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils learn more by cooperating than they do when working on their own. |
| 20 | It is the teacher's responsibility to evaluate the pupils' learning achievements. | 1 2 3 4 | If pupils do not learn to evaluate their learning achievements, they have only learned half the lesson. |
| 21 | Low achievers can make progress when the teacher manages to help them in the right way. | 1 2 3 4 | Low achievers remain low achievers, no matter what the teacher does. |
| 22 | Learning will be most successful when an expert (teacher) is in charge. | 1 2 3 4 | Learning will be more successful as the pupils themselves take the initiative. |
| 23 | Smart pupils became smart (partly) because of a positive environment. | 1 2 3 4 | Smart pupils will always do well. |
| 24 | Unpleasantness is part of life. We have to deal with that in school as well. | 1 2 3 4 | We should keep outside the school all unpleasantness we can do nothing about. |

Section C

What is your gender?

- ☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your age?

- ☐ ≤25
☐ 26-34
☐ 35-44
☐ 45-54
☐ 55+
☐ Prefer not to say

How long have you been working as teacher or leader in primary/post-primary education, in general?

- ☐ Less than a year
☐ 1-3 years
☐ 4-10 years
☐ 11-20 years
☐ 21+ years
☐ Prefer not to say

Are you currently a member of Senior Management/Leadership in your school?

- ☐ Yes
☐ No
☐ Prefer not to say

What formal training did you receive to gain Qualified Teacher Status? Please describe.

Please write any other comments you may wish to make in the box below(comments on the appropriateness/relevance of this questionnaire to teachers in NI/ROI are welcome):

Thank you very much for completing this pilot questionnaire!!

APPENDIX B

Final teachers' questionnaire

In completing this questionnaire you do not need to spend a lot of time on each question item and spontaneity is encouraged.

Section A¹⁹

Below are 30 statements about schools, the curriculum, teachers, pupils, and the teaching/learning process. Please indicate the degree to which you agree or disagree with each one of them by ticking the respective box.

| | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly agree |
|----|---|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 1 | The curriculum should contain an orderly arrangement of subjects that represent the best of our cultural heritage. | | | | | |
| 2 | Pupils learning from other pupils is an important component of any learning environment. | | | | | |
| 3 | Schools should be sources of new social ideas. | | | | | |
| 4 | Demonstration and recitation are essential components for learning. | | | | | |
| 5 | Schools exist to facilitate self-awareness. | | | | | |
| 6 | There are essential skills all pupils must learn. | | | | | |
| 7 | Teaching should centre around the inquiry approach. | | | | | |
| 8 | Pupils should be allowed more freedom than they usually get in the execution of learning activities. | | | | | |
| 9 | Pupils need and should have more supervision and discipline than they usually get. | | | | | |
| 10 | Teachers should be facilitators of learning. | | | | | |
| 11 | Factual knowledge is an important component of any learning. | | | | | |
| 12 | Intensive instruction of skills and knowledge through repeated exercises is a good way of learning. | | | | | |
| 13 | Ideal teachers are constant questioners. | | | | | |
| 14 | Pupils should play an active part in curriculum design and evaluation. | | | | | |
| 15 | There are essential pieces of knowledge that all pupils should know. | | | | | |
| 16 | Right from the first year in school teachers must teach the pupil at his/her level and not at the level of the year s/he is in. | | | | | |

¹⁹Items 1-19 of this section make up Silvernail's (1992) *Educational Beliefs Questionnaire*. (items 1, 4, 6, 9, 11, 12, 15, 18 belong to the traditionalist subscale, items 2, 7, 10, 13, 16 to the progressivist subscale, and items 3, 5, 8, 14, 17 to the romanticist subscale). Items 20-30 constitute Willower's et al. (1967) *Pupil Control Ideology Form*. Reverse-coded items are shown with an asterisk.

| | | Strongly disagree | Disagree | Undecided | Agree | Strongly agree |
|-----|---|----------------------|----------|-----------|-------|-------------------|
| 17 | The curriculum should focus on social problems and issues. | | | | | |
| 18 | The pupil should be a receiver of knowledge. | | | | | |
| 19 | The teacher should be a strong authority figure in the classroom. | | | | | |
| 20 | Pupils are usually not capable of solving their problems through logical reasoning. | | | | | |
| 21 | Too much pupil time is spent on guidance and activities and too little on academic preparation. | | | | | |
| 22 | It is more important for pupils to learn to obey rules than that they make their own decisions. | | | | | |
| 23 | School councils are a good "safety valve" but should not have much influence on school policy. | | | | | |
| 24* | Pupils can be trusted to work together without supervision. | | | | | |
| 25 | If a pupil uses obscene or profane language in school, it must be considered a moral offense. | | | | | |
| 26 | If pupils are allowed to use the toilets without getting permission, this privilege will be abused. | | | | | |
| 27 | A few pupils are just troublemakers and should be treated accordingly. | | | | | |
| 28 | It is often necessary to remind pupils that their status in school differs from that of teachers. | | | | | |
| 29 | Pupils cannot perceive the difference between democracy and anarchy in the classroom. | | | | | |
| 30 | Pupils often misbehave in order to make the teacher look bad. | | | | | |

Section B²⁰

In the following Table, please indicate whether you agree more with the statement on the left or with the statement on the right, using the following scale:

- (5) I quite agree with the statement on the **left**
(6) I agree somewhat more with the statement on the **left** than I do with the one on the right
(7) I agree somewhat more with the statement on the **right** than I do with the one on the left
(8) I quite agree with the statement on the **right**

| | Statements on the <u>left</u> | Circle the no. applying to you | Statements on the <u>right</u> |
|----|---|-----------------------------------|--|
| 1* | One can assist pupil learning the most by stimulating the pupils to search for answers. | 1 2 3 4 | One can assist pupil learning the most by precisely formulating the tasks. |
| 2 | When pupils collaborate they often learn the wrong things from each other. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils learn a lot by explaining things to each other. |

²⁰All items in this section correspond to Bolhuis and Voeten's (2004) *Learning Inventory*. Reverse-coded items are shown with an asterisk.

| | | | |
|-----|---|---------|--|
| 3* | In school it is all right to also confront pupils with real-life problems that do not have solutions. | 1 2 3 4 | It is better not to confront pupils with problems they cannot understand. |
| 4 | When pupils discuss the subject matter together, they will not be any wiser in the long term. | 1 2 3 4 | When pupils discuss together, they learn to handle different points of view and acquire deeper insight. |
| 5* | Pupils should understand the reasoning behind definitions; in that way they will always be able to derive the definition. | 1 2 3 4 | It is important that pupils know definitions by heart, they should be able to say them in their sleep. |
| 6* | All pupils should be challenged to perform, even if they find this difficult. | 1 2 3 4 | Some pupils cannot be expected to make much progress. |
| 7* | Pupils learn a lot from each other when they work together on the subject matter. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils learn best when they work individually on the subject matter. |
| 8 | Pupils should only be given tasks at school that they are able to handle. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils must be allowed to try things. They should be allowed to stub their toes. |
| 9 | A pupil's low achievement is often caused by the pupil's limited ability. | 1 2 3 4 | A pupil's low achievement often has a cause that can be helped. |
| 10* | Showing respect for each other does not mean that you have to accept everything. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils should learn to behave themselves at school and to comply with rules of behaviour. |
| 11 | We should not bother pupils with all kinds of contradictory views. School should offer unambiguous knowledge. | 1 2 3 4 | It is interesting to make it obvious for the pupils that there are different solutions to problems and different explanations for phenomena. |
| 12* | Mistakes and bad marks are not a problem in themselves, provided that you help pupils to learn from them. | 1 2 3 4 | Mistakes and bad marks are bad news for pupils. We should handle these cautiously. |
| 13 | Collaborating is too distracting. Learning is done best alone. | 1 2 3 4 | Pupils learn more by collaborating than they do when working on their own. |
| 14 | It is the teacher's responsibility to evaluate the pupils' learning achievements. | 1 2 3 4 | If pupils do not learn to evaluate their learning achievements, they have only learned half the lesson. |
| 15 | Learning will be most successful when an expert (teacher) is in charge. | 1 2 3 4 | Learning will be more successful as the pupils themselves take the initiative. |

What is your gender?

☐ Female ☐ Male ☐ Prefer not to say

What is your age?

☐ ≤25 ☐ 26-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55+ ☐ Prefer not to say

How long have you been working as teacher or leader in schools, in general?

☐ < 1 year ☐ 1-3 years ☐ 4-10 years ☐ 11-20 years ☐ 21+ years ☐ Prefer not to say

Are you currently a member of Senior Management/Leadership in your school?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Prefer not to say

What formal training did you receive to gain Qualified Teacher Status? Please describe.

Thank you so much for completing this questionnaire!!

APPENDIX C

Educational beliefs scale: two-factor structure

| S/N – Section A, Appendix B | Statement/Item | Factor 1 (Traditionalism) | Factor 2 (Progressivism) |
|-----------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------|
| 15 | There are essential pieces of knowledge that all pupils should know. | .583 | |
| 4 | Demonstration and recitation are essential components for learning. | .556 | |
| 12 | Intensive instruction of skills and knowledge through repeated exercises is a good way of learning. | .520 | |
| 11 | Factual knowledge is an important component of any learning. | .462 | |
| 6 | There are essential skills all pupils must learn. | .413 | |
| 18 | The pupil should be a receiver of knowledge. | .376 | |
| 14 | Pupils should play an active part in curriculum design and evaluation. | | .532 |
| 5 | Schools exist to facilitate self-awareness. | | .504 |
| 7 | Teaching should centre around the inquiry approach. | | .495 |
| 13 | Ideal teachers are constant questioners. | | .458 |
| 16 | Right from the first year in school teachers must teach the pupil at his/her level and not at the level of the year s/he is in. | | .453 |
| 8 | Pupils should be allowed more freedom than they usually get in the execution of learning activities. | | .412 |
| 10 | Teachers should be facilitators of learning. | | .378 |
| 2 | Pupils learning from other pupils is an important component of any learning environment. | | .349 |
| 17 | The curriculum should focus on social problems and issues. | | .332 |
| 3 | Schools should be sources of new social ideas. | | .321 |
| 9 | Pupils need and should have more supervision and discipline than they usually get. | | |

NOTE: Factor loadings lower than 0.30 have been suppressed.

APPENDIX D

Teachers' Interview Guide

General Experiences

1. How long have you worked at this school?
2. Can you give a brief description of your school, and the student and teacher demographic?
3. Can you please describe your role in the school?
4. Have you had any other roles in the past?

Beliefs about Education

5. What do you believe are the most important lessons and/or topics for students to learn in school?
6. In your opinion, what are the qualities of a good student?
7. Again, in your opinion, what does a good relationship between teachers and students look like?

Experiences of your personal Voice in your School

8. Where do you feel you have the most influence in your school?
9. Where do you feel you have the least amount of influence in your school?
10. How are important decisions made in your school?
 - Who is involved?
 - What is the process in making those decisions?
 - *If they do not give a specific example in their answer then add:
 - Can you go through an example of a major decision made in your school and who was consulted and how?
11. So, do you feel that your voice (specifically yours, not teachers in general) is valued in important decisions in your school? Why or why not?
12. Do you feel that teachers' voices are valued equally in your school? If yes, what types of teachers are listened to more/less?
13. Overall, how would you describe your relationship with your colleagues?

Experiences of Children's Voice in School

14. In what areas of school life are the opinions of children taken into account?
15. How are the opinions of children obtained?
16. In your classroom, what decisions are the students involved in?
17. (If not answered in number 16) Do your students have any influence on what they learn? If yes, please give examples.
18. Do you think your school gives students an appropriate amount of input into school decisions? Why or why not?
19. Do you feel that students' voices are valued equally in your school? If yes, what types of students are listened to more/less?

20. Do you think the students themselves feel valued in your school? Why do you say this?
21. Have the students asked to have input on any decisions that they currently have no influence on?

Looking to the future role of Children's Voice

22. Are there any areas of the school or your classroom that you believe students' opinions should be taken into account, but currently are not?
23. In your opinion, which direction do you feel the power of children's voice is going? Are they gaining more and more influence? Losing influence? Or staying the same?

APPENDIX E

Children's focus group guide

1. How do you feel when you are at school? What do you enjoy most? What do you enjoy the least?
2. Where do you hear children's voices in your school / where do you hear adult voices?²¹
3. Do you think your teachers are interested in your opinion? How do you know that?
4. Can you think of any examples when you were asked for your opinion on school decisions? Were your opinions put into action? How / why not?
5. Do students in your year get along? How do you see that?
6. Is everyone in your class treated the same? Why / why not? How do you feel about it?
7. Can you be yourself around others in your school and openly share your feelings? Children? Adults?
8. Why might it be difficult for children to speak out (be heard) in school?
9. What decisions are the most important for you to have a say on? Why?
10. Are there any decisions that only the adults should decide on in school? Why?
11. Where do you feel you have the most power in school? Where do you feel you have the least power?
12. Why do you think you should go to school?
13. How would you describe a good teacher/how would you describe a good pupil?²²
14. What would you change in your school if you could? Why?
15. How much of a say do you have in what you do in school?²³

²¹Give the children markers and a large piece of chart paper with the two questions written onto it. Ask them to discuss each question and write their answers underneath using their markers. *Then ask aloud:* 'Of those places, draw circles around the places where you think children's voice has the most influence.' Ask them to do the same for adults. Record the conversation and collect the paper.

²²Give the children markers and a large piece of chart paper. Ask them to work together to depict what they think is a 'good teacher' using both words and drawings/sketches. Ask them to do the same as regards the 'good pupil'. Record the conversation and collect the paper.

²³ Give each child a printed card with the following rating scale: (1) None at all (2) A little (3) Quite a lot (4) Very much. Ask them to circle the answer that best expresses how they feel. Collect these anonymously.

APPENDIX F

Outline of CRAG activities

MEETING 1: Introductions and capacity building (approx. 1 hour)

- Introducing the researchers
- Purpose of research
- Purpose of CRAG
- Overview of literature/vocabulary/scope
- What will be done during Meeting 2

BREAKDOWN OF ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTIONS

- Researchers, BRIEF synopsis of the project.
- Student introductions / Icebreaker activity
- What is 'research'? Explain both concept and process to children interactively.
- What a CRAG is and why it is important.
- Research questions for project. Explain to children that, ideally, they would have been involved in shaping the research questions, but due to resource limitations we could not involve them in earlier stages of the project.
- Go over agenda.

INTRODUCTION TO BROADER CONCEPTS

- Pose questions to children linked to broader concepts to get them thinking about the wider topic.

ACTIVITY A: Split the children into two groups of 4. Give each group a large piece of chart paper with one of the below questions (1a and 2a) written onto it. One group will be thinking about children, the others about adults in the school. Have the four children write down answers around the page.

1a. Where do you hear children's voices at school?

Then ask aloud: Of those places, draw circles (or several circles if you want to emphasise) around the places that you think children's voice has the most influence.

2a. Where do you hear adult voices at school?

Then ask aloud: Of those places, draw circles (or several circles if you want to emphasise) around the places that you think adult voice has the most influence.

ACTIVITY B: Give the same groups a second piece of chart paper with one of the below questions (1b and 2b) written onto it. Have the four children in each group write down answers around the page.

1b. Thinking of these places, who are the children whose voices are mostly heard? (Ask CRAG members to describe these children's characteristics).

2b. Thinking of these places, who are the adults whose voices are mostly heard? (Ask CRAG members to describe these adults' characteristics).

Ask the two groups to share their answers with the rest of the 'research team'.
Allow discussion for questions, disagreements, etc.

FEEDBACK TO STATEMENTS

In order to make CRAG members more familiar with various theories/perspectives on the topic of children's voice, have a discussion on whether they believe a particular statement is 'Always True', 'Mostly True', 'Sometimes True', 'Rarely True' or 'Never True'. On separate cards (large and laminated preferably), have theories written out related to children's voice in schools. Have CRAG members put these theories into one of the 'True' categories (you can do this in various ways, depending on the space available). *Remind children to try and think generally rather than just their personal experience.* Have a discussion with them before a final decision is made. The important part of the activity is the discussion, not the final decision. Example statements:

- It is the teacher who decides what activities children will carry out in the classroom.
- Children are invited to express opinions on school matters, but teachers are those having the final say.
- Children and teachers are seen as equals in school. They work together as partners.
- Children are asked for their opinions about the quality of education that teachers offer.
- Children in school are allowed to initiate projects without teacher intervention.
- Children are given enough information to understand why teachers make certain decisions in school.
- All children have the same opportunities to express their opinions and influence school decisions.
- Children have a say in what they learn in school.
- Children in school have a say in attendance policies.
- Children have a say and influence decisions about after-school activities.

BRAINSTORM: WHAT HELPS CHILDREN HAVE THEIR VOICES HEARD?

Referring back to the chart papers used in the first activity, return to the areas/contexts of the school that they already mentioned and pose the above question. Using post-its, have researchers write down the suggestions of children, and place the post-its beside the areas they refer to on the chart paper. The facilitator can also prompt using areas/contexts of the school that were not written on the chart paper in the first activity.

OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH PROJECT AND METHODS

Now that students have an understanding of the broad concepts related to the research and are seeing some complexities around it, give them a more specific explanation of the project, why it is being done, and what is hoped to be gained from it. Also go over the data generation methods that will be used and the role the CRAG will play in influencing the student focus group questions.

QUESTIONS AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

MEETING 2: Developing focus group questions/activities (approx. 2 hours)

BREAKDOWN OF ACTIVITIES

INTRODUCTIONS

- Greetings.
- Overview of the meeting's goals.
- Reminder of research project and questions.
- Reminder of activities done during the last meeting (display on the wall if possible).

CHILDREN'S FEEDBACK/ADVICE ON FOCUS GROUP DESIGN

(*Be sure to discuss why they are making that suggestion, and encourage discussion if there are opposing views.)

- Advice and feedback on focus group questions (researchers' draft questions should be supplied).
- Advice on focus group **size** (options should be given to choose from).
- Advice on age level of focus groups (options should be given to them).
- Advice on how to ask focus group questions and what hands-on activities might help children to better express their views on specific questions (options should be given to them).
- Advice on where to conduct focus groups in schools (examples should be given).
- Advice on how to ensure all students in the focus group contribute.
- Advice on what vocabulary terms should be covered at the beginning of the focus group meetings and how best to do this.

MEETING 3: Analysis of focus group data (approx. 2 ½ hours)

For every focus group question, provide each CRAG member with a print-out of selected excerpts of children's responses. Then, ask CRAG members the following reflective questions to instigate discussion (audio record the meeting):

- What are the children saying here?
- Why do you think they are saying this?
- Is there anything that surprises you?
- Anything that shocks you?
- Is there anything you agree/disagree with?
- Is there anything you would like to know more about?
- What else would you ask these children?
- Does anything confuse you?
- What do you think is most important? Why?
- What do you think is least important? Why?