

Student's name _____

Date _____

The Changing Face of Primary School

In the 70s and 80s almost 100% of the children attending primary school in Ireland were white, Christian and from homes where English was spoken as a first language. This has changed dramatically over the past decade and a half so that today there are few national schools, at least in the cities and larger towns, where there are not children who come from different ethnic, religious and linguistic backgrounds. For the majority of Irish people this is a positive thing and it will make Ireland a more interesting and vibrant country in the future. However it is also true that this change, which has happened very quickly, presents a challenge to primary school teachers and has changed how they do their job.

You are going to read an article from the *Irish Independent* which talks about these challenges and how teachers are adapting and changing in order to meet them.

Before you read the article think of three problems Irish national school teachers could have in dealing with a multi-cultural, multi-denominational, racially- mixed classroom. When you are ready compare your list with a partner.

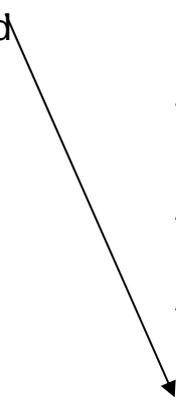
Potential Problems in the Classroom

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

In the left hand column are some words and expressions from the article which you may not know. Match them with an explanation from the right- hand column. You can use an English- English dictionary to help you.

- | | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1. Surge | Succeed in making or do what you want |
| 2. Estimated | Make sb. worry or unhappy |
| 3. Array | Touching sb. gently with a flat hand |
| 4. Achieve | A sudden, strong increase |
| 5. Patting | A large collection |
| 6. Upset | Calculated approximately |
| 7. Soul | A problem or subject for discussion |
| 8. Be aware | Able to make good, sensible decisions |
| 9. Amulet | Doing bad or harm |
| 10. Evil | Large playground toys |
| 11. Swings | A small object with magic powers |
| 12. Common sense | A person with the power and right to give orders |
| 13. Stitch | Know about and realize |
| 14. Issue | Spiritual or deepest part of a person |
| 15. Authority figure | Sew |
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Teachers learn foreigners' etiquette

By Michael Brennan (Irish Independent, 15 January 2007)

Teachers and childcare workers are learning how to avoid offending children from other countries.

The surge in the number of immigrants – now estimated at up to 10 pc of the population – means the classrooms and crèches are filled with an array of nationalities. Barnardos¹ is now running training courses to educate teachers and childcare workers about the “dos and don’ts” in foreign cultures. “When you are working with small children, you do expect them to look you in the eye – that’s how you achieve a good connection. But in some cultures, eye contact is a no-no” said training co-ordinator Imelda Graham.

Patting Buddhist children on the head might upset them because they believe the soul is located there. “Whether you’re communicating with children or adults, all things play a part, so you just have to be aware of them to have successful communication.”

Barnardos has trained teachers, childminders and parents around the country over the last three years. The five staff involved encourage the participants to find common-sense solutions to frequent problems, such as African children wanting to wear amulets to protect them from evil spirits. “If it is around the

neck, the school might be worried that if they were on a slide or swing, they might get caught. So they stitch them into the clothing," Ms Graham said.

The integration course is designed to be a middle way between the British approach of multi-culturalism (which has led to divisions between ethnic groups) and the French approach of assimilation (resisted by ethnic groups).

Another issue the training raises is that in some African cultures men are the authority figures, so some children do not have the same respect for their female teachers and require education about the approach.

1. Barnardos is a charity which promotes the welfare of children.

Decide if these statements are true (T) or false (F) according to the article.

1. Barnardos is running special training courses for primary school teachers because the children of immigrants are very badly- behaved.
2. If pupils don't look their teachers in the eye, teachers know they are telling lies.
3. African children think swings and slides and evil.
4. The head is a special part of the body for Buddhists.
5. Primary schools do not allow children to have amulets.
6. Barnardos' integration course is a compromise between the British and the French approach.

1	2	3	4	5	6

Teacher's notes

Time: 1.30 minutes	Focus: Cultural diversity in the classroom
Class organisation: Individual, pairs, whole class	Type of activity: Reading comprehension

For this activity you need...

1 worksheet per learner
dictionaries

In Class Procedure at a Glance

1. Find out how many students have children in primary school. Encourage them to talk about the schools beginning with factual information – class size, co-educational etc. before moving on to ask them what they think of the quality of education their children are receiving. In my experience the response is generally very positive though the subject of discipline frequently comes up.
2. Now read the introduction as a class and ask them if in their experience there is a wide diversity of nationalities in their children's classes
3. Give students a few minutes to come up with suggestions for some of the problems teachers might encounter. They will probably focus almost exclusively on language but try to get them to broaden out to cultural/behavioural differences. On two occasions where I have used this worksheet, students recounted cases of their children being bullied.
4. Put students in pairs to do the pre-reading vocabulary exercise. (This is to make the actual reading easier rather than to highlight vocabulary for memorisation)
5. Students read the article and do the comprehension questions individually. Then let them compare their answers in pairs.
6. Check the answers as a whole class getting students to justify their choices by reference to the text.
7. Check and see if there are any outstanding issues regarding the vocabulary.
8. If at any time you have focussed attention on verb patterns you might like to point out the use of the gerund after "avoid" in the opening sentences. Students might like to write an example of their own of something they avoid doing.