

O'Sullivan, Carmel, 2005, *Teacher Perceptions of the Implementation and Pastoral Impact of the new Primary Social, Personal and Health Education Curriculum: A Comparative Study.*

Abstract

The formal introduction of SPHE into primary schools in Ireland in 2003, as part of the Revised Primary Curriculum, is perhaps one of the most significant events to have occurred in Irish Education for many years. It provides schools with a blueprint from which to develop a truly holistic approach not only to the education of those children in its care but also to the development of its staff and school community in general. Given its key characteristics, ranging from such things as vision, communication, assessment, active learning methodologies to respect for difference and health promoting environment, it is clearly a subject that is at the very heart of every classroom, not to mention every home.

Having read various writers on the subject of Pastoral Care, I was immediately struck by the similarities between these characteristics and the key ingredients of a pastoral care programme. Up to now, primary schools did not enjoy the benefits of such a programme and perhaps the introduction of SPHE has the potential to remedy this. Any examination of the pastoral side of a school's work has to involve such areas as school ethos and environment; curriculum content — hidden and visible; the relationships in the school community; teaching methods and the 'whole school' — ness of its approach to planning.

This dissertation records the findings of a study, centred on attitudinal surveys, of teacher perceptions of the implementation and pastoral implications of the Revised SPHE Curriculum. By examining the progress of and attitudes to the Implementation of the SPHE Curriculum and the approach to pastoral care generally in schools, insights into the success indicators that may be at play here were identified.

This study takes a comparative form using data gathered from a larger sample of different school staffs. The presence of far greater levels of awareness of each of these indicators and a more positive attitude to their promotion, development and maintenance was found in the schools studied. There was also evidence of a measurable pastoral impact in these schools.