Topic 1:
Power and decision-making in the school

Learning Outcomes

1.1   Processes of power and decision-making in school

1.2   Arguments concerning the need for rules

1.3   Ideas underpinning these arguments

1.4   Evidence concerning the effects of rules and rule-making processes

See specification for full details of the learning outcomes

TOPIC 1: Power and decision-making in the school

Possible Learning Activities

1.2 arguments concerning the need for rules

- Facilitate a simulation where students imagine that they are responsible for the setup of a new school. Invite students to discuss whether rules would be important, and how they would agree rules.

  - Do we need rules? Why/not?
  - Who should have a say in making the rules?
  - What are the advantages/disadvantages of the different approaches to rule making?
  - Who should have the most and least influence when it comes to agreeing school rules?
  - Should rules be kept to a minimum (e.g. focus on respect or safety) or are lots of rules needed?
  - How do we make sure that people stick to the rules?

- Select text/clip from William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* (or similar) and discuss the idea that without rules civilization is in danger of breaking down.

- Facilitate a **walking debate** (agree, disagree, unsure) using the 6 arguments concerning the need for rules in (**LO 1.2 bullets**) as your walking debate statements. Ask students to justify their stance with examples from the school or another local context. Invite students to move if their opinion changes, and ask them to explain their change of position.

- Organise students into groups to interrogate one argument (from LO 1.2) concerning the need for rules with prompt questions, for example:

  - Discuss reasons why a person/group might agree or disagree with this argument.
  - If rules were made this way who would benefit? Who would lose out or suffer?
  - Consider examples from your own school/local context where this argument applies.

- At the conclusion of the group work activities ask students to analyse how they worked together in their group:

  - Who decided how you worked to achieve your task?
  - Did you take time to agree how you would work together or did you carry out the task using accepted norms, i.e. were you able to complete the task without discussing rules?
  - Are rules always needed to maintain a sense of order?

  Links to 4.2 (developing skills in listening and communicating) and **4.3** (acknowledging differences and negotiating and resolving conflicts)

Useful resources

Desert Island Activity: Ryan, S. & Tynan, M.E. '*Laying down the Law*' pp. 7-9. See also a useful activity on the difference between rules and laws pp. 3-6.

Desert Island simulation activity to introduce the importance of rules and law.

William Golding (1954). *Lord of the Flies Novel* (pp.12-17: boys come together and decide on a leader; pp.140-142: Piggy is killed and Ralph is driven away)

Lord of the Flies movie (1990) (11.05-12.59 mins: boys come together and decide on a leader; 1.10.28–1.14.45 mins: Piggy is killed and Ralph is driven away)

Thinking about Thinkers

It is important to link the discussion with some of the big ideas from the political philosophers, such as: Thomas Hobbes – humans must give over freedom to a powerful state to protect us from ourselves; John Locke - individuals have rights, and the state must respect the rights of the individual, including the right to rebel against unjust laws; Karl Marx - those who rule should do so on behalf of everyone [as the ruling committee]; and Emile Durkheim – society is characterized by interdependence and order is maintained as a result of shared cultural norms and values, and not because a state enforces rules.

- Facilitate students' interrogation into the meaning of the terms 'left wing' and 'right wing'.

- Find different understandings of the terms 'left- wing' and 'right wing,' and different contexts in which they might apply, e,g., in describing political views, social views, economic views, religious, environmental views etc.

- Identify individuals or political parties that belong at different ends of the left/right spectrum. Keep in mind that sometimes a person or party might hold a 'left wing' or 'right wing' view on one issue and not on others.

- Invite students to carry out an audit of the letters pages in newspapers on a current controversial issue, such as the flow of refugees/migrants into the European Union, and identify the views that might be considered left or right wing.

- Facilitate an activity where students look at a set of political manifestos and identify, giving reasons, which ones they agree with and they disagree with. Which ideas might be considered left wing/right wing.

- Interrogate school rules through the 'left wing/right wing' lens.

1.1 processes of power and decision-making in school

- Facilitate a discussion on the reason why school uniforms are/are not a good idea. What purpose do they serve? Research evidence to support different arguments.

- Invite representatives from the different school structures (e.g. school principal, teacher on staff, school secretary, chairperson of the student council, member of the board of management, member of the parents association etc.) into class to talk about the development of a range of a school rules relating to safety (e.g. policy on internet safety or bullying) and the school policy in relation to uniforms.

    - Plan the questions, arrange the venue/time, record and transcribe the interviews
    - Present the findings to the rest of the class or in a wider school context
    - Discuss the processes of decision making and the balance of power between the various bodies involved
    - Create an infographic depicting the process of decision making and the roles of the different groups in the development of these school rules.

Political Alignment test
This could be adapted and used by students

See the various Irish political party websites:
Green Party: Policies
Fianna Fail: Issues
Fine Gael: Plan
Sinn Fein: Policies

Adapt *class 4: Democracy in a Meeting* (simulation activity) in Phelan, D. *Giving young people a voice*, pp. 28-38

Thinking about Thinkers
Revisit theorists mentioned above, and particularly the concept of a 'social contract'. Ask students to discuss whether schools operate according to a 'social contract'?

Create an infographic - www.canva.com; www.visual.ly; or http://www.easel.ly/ are free online infographic makers

- Use evidence from research which relates to student participation in decision-making to identify possible action points for your school in relation to some aspect of school policy.

  Link to 3.4 (identifying, evaluating and achieving personal and collective goals, including developing and evaluating action plans)

DES (2002) *Student Councils: A voice for students* (pp. 8-17)

ISSU Charter for Students' Rights

Is school participation good for children. A research study based on over 200 Irish schools.

ICCS 2009 International Report: Civic knowledge, attitudes, and engagement among lowersecondary school students in 38 countries, (particularly, p 134-136)

 'Voice, engagement and action: Mount Waverly Secondary College, Victoria (Australia),' pp. 11-15 This provides a comparative example from another context.

Dana Mitra, 'Increasing student voice and moving towards youth leadership,' A short research paper.

1.3 ideas underpinning these arguments

- Introduce students to the Stanford Prison Experiment: In 1971 Dr Philip Zimbardo of the Psychology Department in Stanford University asked 24 students to take on the roles of prison guards and prisoners in order to conduct a research study to see whether the behaviour of guards and prisoners came from their own personalities, or was caused by the prison environment. The guards were given some freedom to create rules, but were told in advance that they couldn't use physical violence.

  - Ask students to work in groups to imagine what they think ensued during this study and why?
  - View the trailer for the 2015 movie of the Stanford Prison Experience and ask students to compare their scenarios with the events depicted in the trailer
  - Facilitate a discussion about the use/ abuse of power and the enforcement of rules in this experiment
  - Read Peter Gray's critique of the Stanford Prison experiment and ask students to rethink their scenario and the experiment in light of what they read.

- Facilitate a whole class discussion about how power is exercised in their own environment using prompt questions such as:

  - How do schools get people to act in ways that they would not otherwise act?

The Stanford Prison Experience, movie trailer (2.30 mins)

Dr Peter Gray - *Critique of the experiment and the conclusions drawn by Philip Zimbardo*

Thinking about Thinkers
Discuss the views of Thomas Hobbes' in relation to the human condition, and counter-arguments put forward by Jean-Jacque Rousseau in relation to 'man's natural state'.

- What rules and ways of doing things are considered 'the best and only way'? (Prompt might include: streaming, appearance – uniforms & make up; subject options, streaming, exams and the points system, gender segregated schools, etc.)
- Who are the people within schools who benefit most or least because of the way things are organised?
- Who shapes our ideas on what's the best way of doing things?
- Can people who appear powerless exercise power?

- Invite students to apply the questions above to a specific school related example, e.g. school uniforms, streaming according to academic ability, the points system and examinations, admissions policies, gender segregated schooling, etc.
Direct students towards relevant articles from Kathleen Lynch's research on equality and power in Irish schools which they can use to inform this discussion?

1.4 evidence concerning the effects of rules and rule-making processes

- Invite students to examine a case study or other evidence detailing the school experiences of a particular student, e.g. a student who is a member of the Traveller community, a student living in direct provision, a student with a disability, etc, and answer the following questions:

   - What if anything is unique or different about this student's school experience?
   - Do they feel included/excluded?
   - Does this student have a voice/power to make themselves heard or to bring about change?
   - What does this tell you about power?

- Set up jigsaw learning in small groups using extracts from Lodge & Lynch (Eds.) *Diversity at School* (bottom right)

- Paulo Freire believed that education either functions as an instrument which is used to facilitate integration of the younger generation into the present system or it becomes the practice of freedom - the means by which people learn to deal critically and creatively with reality and discover how to participate in the transformation of their world.

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Based on their learning in this topic, invite students to discuss this view using data from an Irish or wider context to support their views.

Links to 2.3 *(social class and gender as important social categories)* **and 5.3** (the idea of equality in relation to rights) **and 5.6** (evidence on the right to education) **and 7.1** (representations of national identity made available to young people)

Streaming:
Journal.ie: *'Streaming' in schools is bad for students - ESRI'*
Admissions policies:
The Irish Times: *Census figures raise concerns of ethnic segregation in schools*

See Kathleen Lynch's publications on these topics

Thinking about Thinkers

Discuss the views of Thomas Hobbes' in relation to the 'social contract' and how it might relate to school life.

Discuss Paulo Freire's banking concept of education as set out in Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Ch 2

Discuss Kathleen Lynch's research on how education can function to perpetuate inequalities.

Student who is a member of the Traveller community:
Primary Concerns (Pavee Point Traveller and Roma Centre), video (25.23 mins)

Student living in direct provision:
RTE Doc on 1 radio documentary: The Outsiders: Our teenage life behind barriers

Jesuit Centre for Faith and Justice, *'Living in Direct Provision – Resident voices'*

Migrants Centre Ireland (2015) *Young, paperless and powerful*, a short video about being an undocumented young person in Ireland (4.35 mins)

Student with a disability:
Irish Wheelchair Association, *'The view from here,'* short video (12:18 mins) looking at a day in the school life of an Irish student and wheelchair user

Watson, D., Banks, J. & Lyons, S. (2015). *Educational and employment experiences of people with a disability in Ireland: An analysis of the National Disability Survey*, pp. 2-3.

Anne Lodge and Kathleen Lynch (Eds.)
Diversity at School.

Students can view and listen to extracts from Paulo Freire's Pedagogy of the Oppressed on youtube

How will students show evidence of their learning?

What am I looking for?
Sample criteria for success

Examples of ongoing assessment related to Topic 1

- Discuss Locke's view that rules should be as few as possible. Relate your ideas to school life and back up your arguments with evidence.

  'Let therefore your rules be as few as is possible, and rather fewer than more than seem absolutely necessary. For if you burden him with many rules, one of these two things must necessarily follow, that either he must be very often punished, which will be of ill consequence, by making punishment too frequent and familiar; or else you must let the transgressions of some of your rules go unpunished, whereby they will of course grow contemptible, and your authority become cheap to him. Make but few laws but see they be well observed, when once made.'

  John Locke, *Some Thoughts Concerning Education*

- Ability to use the language of reasoning to come to a personal conclusion and back it up with evidence
- Ability to relate ideas from political theory to the student's personal experience or wider context

- Compare and contrast what two or more thinkers have to say about the exercise of power, and explain how their ideas might relate to school life.

  - Steven Lukes in relation to the three faces of power.
  - Vaclav Havel: The Power of the Powerless
  - Michel Foucault: Discipline and Punish

- Capacity to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of different arguments
- Ability to use the language of reasoning to come to a personal conclusion and back it up with evidence
- Ability to relate ideas from political theory to the student's personal experience

Provide students with a piece of unseen data and ask them to summarise and discuss its findings.

Useful websites:
http://www.cso.ie/en/statistics/statisticalyearbookofireland/
http://www.cso.ie/en/interactivezone/
http://www.censusatschool.ie/

- Ability to identify key findings in research data
- Ability to judge the reliability and usefulness of information/data
- Ability to relate the findings to their own experience or local context
- Ability to relate the findings to some key concepts and theories studied in the course

In small groups, take a school document (e.g., policy on behaviour, acceptable use of internet, etc) and describe the process that led to the creation of this set of rules, who was involved, who was consulted, how is it used, what's good about it, what needs to change, who should be involved. What conclusion would you draw from this for how school policies are best developed? Capacity to analyse the strengths and weaknesses of an argument

- Capacity to analyse and evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of a school policy document
- Ability to build an argument and draw conclusions informed by evidence from research and social/political theory
- Openness to considering different perspectives, and capacity to exercise democratic practices in their groupwork

In small groups, do a comparative analysis of processes of power and decision making in your school with another school, either In Ireland or abroad. The analysis should include consideration of how decisions are made, how roles and responsibilities are shared, the roles of different people in making rules/decisions on school life, etc.

- Ability to cooperate with others towards achieving a collective goal
- Ability to gather relevant data and analyse it
- Capacity to draw conclusions based on the evidence gathered and related to some key thinkers and/or ideas studied in this topic

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Arising from the learning in this topic invite students to agree an issue on which they would like to take action related to their own school, draft an action plan, identify a clear aim and rationale for the action, seek out any organizations/help/resources needed to implement the action, etc.

(This task will present opportunities to demonstrate skills related to **Topic 3 and 4)**