

Education and the Peace Process in Northern Ireland

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The proximity of Britain to Ireland has meant that much of the history of the two islands has been intertwined. For many centuries Ireland was subject to English rule. A series of events, including an uprising during Easter 1916, eventually led to a treaty that established the Irish Free State in 1921. This new state comprised 26 of the 32 counties in Ireland and it eventually became the Republic of Ireland with its own constitution and independent parliament in Dublin. When the Irish Free State was established in 1921 a substantial Protestant population in the six counties in the north of Ireland (mostly the descendants of English and Scottish settlers from the 1600s onward) wished to retain the union with Britain and a separate Northern Ireland state was established which had its own parliament until 1972 when direct rule by the United Kingdom parliament was introduced.

The population of the Republic of Ireland is approximately 3.5 million people most of whom are Catholic. The present population of Northern Ireland is 1.5 million, the majority of whom are of Protestant denominations, but estimates based on the 1991 Census suggest that the Catholic population has risen to over 40%. Voting at elections in Northern Ireland corresponds closely to a pattern whereby most Catholics vote for Nationalist parties (which aspire to a single, united Ireland) and most Protestants vote for Unionist parties (which wish Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom).

As the Civil Rights movement in the United States unfolded during the 1960s, a civil rights campaign emerged in Northern Ireland focused largely on grievances concerning social injustices against Catholics in housing, employment and electoral issues. Protest, counter-protest and State reaction gave rise to civil disturbances and street rioting in the late 1960s. This led to the deployment of the British Army in support of the local police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC). Although the army was initially welcomed in a peace-keeping role, relationships between the security forces and the Catholic community quickly deteriorated. Within this climate the Irish Republican Army (IRA) was able to organise an armed campaign around its stated aim to bring about the end of Northern Ireland state as a separate entity and have a single Irish state which includes the six counties in the north. The campaign of the IRA, and smaller nationalist paramilitary groups such as the Irish National Liberation Army (INLA), has lasted for over 30 years. It has been accompanied by violence from Loyalist (extreme Unionist) paramilitary groups such as the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF), the Ulster Freedom Fighters (UFF) and the Red Hand Commandos, the Loyalist Volunteer Force (LVF) and the Ulster Defence Association (UDA). Since 1969 more than 3,600 people have been killed as part of 'the Troubles' in Northern Ireland.

There have always been competing arguments about the underlying roots and nature of the conflict in Northern Ireland. The different political aspirations of Nationalists and Unionists are undoubtedly central to the conflict, but these map closely on to the labels of Catholic and Protestant which are often used to suggest that it is a religious dispute and this has led some to concentrate on the contribution which the churches might make toward a resolution of the conflict. Others have interpreted the Catholic and Protestant labels as indicative of two groups which differ in terms of culture and traditions and this emphasises an ethnic interpretation. Social differentiation, areas of deprivation and differentials in employment opportunity add an economic dimension and there are many who believe that if solutions in these areas could be found then conflict along the other fault lines would be ameliorated. The conflict in Northern Ireland is therefore a complex mixture of such interrelated issues.

The pattern of violence has changed at various times, but the use of violence has been a consistent feature of the conflict for almost thirty years. Whilst each death is felt acutely within the society, the total number of deaths is relatively low when compared to conflicts in many other parts of the world. This has led some commentators to question why the level of violence has not escalated in the same way that other conflicts have led to bloodshed on a larger scale. One reason suggested by Darby (1986) is that the conflict in Northern Ireland has various 'controls' which operate to maintain a relatively low level of violence. Such controls may include features such as campaigns 'waged by proxy' where only a small number of individuals from the different groups are actively involved in the violence. Another feature of the conflict is the existence of a narrow middle ground, but one which is enduring and active. Cross-community groups help maintain this middle ground by maintaining contact and communication between Catholics and Protestants especially at times of heightened community tension. In Northern Ireland it is not unusual for the bereaved to receive support and messages of sympathy from members of the other community. Such contact in the wake of sectarian murders and other atrocities may make it more difficult to 'dehumanise' the other

community and it is often the case that the relatives of those who have been killed issue public statements stating that they do not wish for retaliation or revenge on their behalf. In this respect the activities of peace and reconciliation groups may not have a direct impact which could claim to resolve the conflict, but it is tenable that, along with many other controls on the conflict, they have contributed to maintaining this narrow, but vital middle ground in Northern Ireland. It is in this context that the contribution that education can make to the improvement of relationships between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland has also become a focus for action.

The education system in Northern Ireland

A distinctive characteristic of the education system in Northern Ireland is segregation. The system is segregated by religion in that most children attend predominantly Protestant ('controlled') schools or Catholic ('maintained') schools; by ability (and some would argue social background) in that a selection system operates at age 11 to decide which children attend grammar schools (more than one third of children in second level education attend grammar schools); and often by gender (particularly in second level education where a quarter of the secondary schools and almost half of all grammar schools are single sex).

The current education system in Northern Ireland is relatively small. Statutory education involves approximately 0.3 million children within 970 primary, 166 secondary and 70 grammar schools. The system is administered by a central Department of Education and five local authorities (known as Education and Library Boards). There also exists a statutory Council for Catholic Maintained Schools and government provides funds for the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) to coordinate the development of a small but growing number of integrated schools (27 primary and 17 secondary in 1999). Integrated schools are attended by roughly equal numbers of Catholic and Protestant children and, in terms of pupil enrolments, represents less than 3% of the school population. The education system also includes 8 Irish language schools, some of which receive grant-aid from government, and 10 independent Christian schools associated with the Free Presbyterian Church which do not receive government funds.

Over the past twenty five years schools have been drawn more and more into the spotlight in terms of how their activities take account of the conflict within the wider society. A number of initiatives have emerged, including legislation and government policies, which ascribe a more prominent role for schools in the improvement of relations between the two main religious and cultural communities in Northern Ireland. In broad terms, these represent interventions in both the process of education (through curriculum reforms and increased contact between Catholic and Protestant pupils) and the structure of education (through consideration of equity issues between existing, segregated schools and support for the creation of new, integrated schools).

Early developments

The pioneer in developments in Northern Ireland was a Belfast school principal (Malone, 1973) who persuaded the then Northern Ireland Ministry of Education to fund a project on education and community relations which was eventually based in the Queen's University, Belfast. This was essentially a curriculum development project, with some elements of joint school activities and meetings. It had quite ambitious plans for the production of curriculum support materials, but the funds for these were not, in the end, made available. Shortly after Malone's project, two parallel projects were established at the then New University of Ulster, one of which became a social sciences curriculum project (Skilbeck, 1973, 1976; Robinson, 1981), and the other concerned religious education (Greer and McElhinney, 1984, 1985). These were experimental, relatively small-scale, and the success or otherwise of these projects is difficult to estimate. On the positive side they began a process and established a context which made future developments possible. On the negative side they did not become widely used or succeed in filling a permanent niche in the Northern Ireland school curriculum.

At the same time a large number of voluntary groups began to develop a role for themselves in this process. Many of these were able to supply resources of time, materials and personnel, to establish a variety of inter-school relationships between Catholic and Protestant schools. Others set up and ran residential courses where the issues could be debated and strategies developed. This trend has continued and a recent directory of such voluntary bodies indicates that more than twenty organisations are currently active in Northern Ireland in the field of community relations and schools (FOCUS, 1993).

These developments, taken as a whole, represented a patchwork of small, relatively isolated projects, geographically dispersed, each making a contribution towards the evolution of a more coherent and developed programme of work which included contributions to the main-stream curriculum, extra-curricular activities, conflict-resolution techniques, approaches to peace education, and inter-group contact (Trew, 1986). There is little doubt that this range of activities provided an enormous stimulus in that it created a team of voluntary workers, teachers and academics who had expertise, interest in and commitment to community relations work through the schools. They provided a rationale and legitimacy for future developments in this area. It is difficult to see how later, more ambitious, projects could have come into existence without the basis which these earlier attempts provided.

Contact between Catholic and Protestant schools

During the 1970s it became clear that little was known about the two school systems - the state system of 'controlled' (Protestant related) schools and the 'maintained' system of Catholic schools. In 1976 a team of academics from the University of Ulster was funded from a Ford Foundation research initiative to carry out both a general survey within the Northern Ireland education system and a local case study. This was published in 1977 as *Schools Apart?* It attempted to understand the ways in which the two systems were different and included an important ethnographic study of differences between 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' schools (Murray, 1985). The findings suggested that the development of widespread integrated education was unlikely in the foreseeable future, but almost without exception, all interviewed expressed some anxiety about the effects, or even just the possible effects, of complete segregation. One possible way in which it seemed that these two views could be reconciled was for there to be as much contact as possible between pupils and teachers within the segregated system. A second research study, *Schools Together?*, set out to measure the amount of contact, of a sustained and important character, that actually existed between Catholic and Protestant schools. The results (Dunn, Darby and Mullan, 1984) suggested that very little contact existed even though quite extravagant claims are often made now about past levels of contact and cooperation between the two sectors.

A third, research and development project known as Inter School Links followed. It was experimental and interventionist in that it set out to create linked programmes between a set of schools in one town on a routine and sustained basis. This project operated for four years between 1986 and 1990 and produced two reports. The first report (Dunn and Smith, 1989) outlined a development process by which all schools the same town evolved regular, structured links. In the primary schools, Catholic and Protestant pupils were given opportunities to meet and work together on curriculum themes as part of the normal school day. Teachers in the post-primary schools worked together to create a programme of study in Irish history and this provided opportunities for joint field work and contact between pupils from the different schools.

The second report (Smith and Dunn, 1990) extended the project to schools in two other communities and evaluated some aspects of the work. The evaluation produced some evidence to suggest that the history programme had brought about a more questioning attitude amongst pupils toward interpretations of Irish history prevalent within their own cultural community. It also recommended that contact between Catholic and Protestant pupils appeared to be most successful when there was a strong curriculum focus. The project demonstrated that it was possible for such cross-community contact to become an accepted feature of the school curriculum and the evaluation also highlighted an extremely high level of support for such ventures amongst parents.

In 1987, midway through the project, the Department of Education introduced a scheme which provided approximately £0.4 million annually to encourage all schools in Northern Ireland to become involved in inter school contact. Levels of participation have increased annually and recent figures indicate that almost a third of primary schools and over a half of post-primary schools are now involved in some form of inter school contact which brings Catholic and Protestant pupils together.

The development of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU)

Although teachers and academics had been active from the early seventies, government was more hesitant and cautious about suggestions that schools should be involved with community relations issues. Its first public commitment of any sort was in the production in 1982 of a circular called *The improvement of Community Relations: the Contribution of Schools* which stated that "Every teacher, every school manager, Board member and trustee, and every educational administrator within the system has a responsibility for helping children learn to understand and respect each other". This signalled the beginning of formal government support. From its inception in 1983, the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development (NICED), a quasi-government curriculum development body, became involved in the issues of education and community relations, and established a committee with a brief to develop ideas about what it decided to call Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU). The NICED committee appointed two field-officers, one for second-level and one for first level, and eventually produced a guide to EMU for teachers (NICED, 1988) which tried to introduce schools to the procedures and techniques necessary for the promotion of EMU activities both within and between schools. This was superseded by the Education Reform (NI) Order, 1989 which specified that two 'cross-curricular themes' related to the issue of community relations are included in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. These are called Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage.

The statutory requirement to include these themes in the curriculum of all schools took effect from 1992 and the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council has produced guidance material which supports the definition that, 'Education for Mutual Understanding is about self-respect, and respect for others, and the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions' (NICC, 1990). The aims and objectives state that as an integral part of their education the themes should enable pupils 'to learn to respect and value themselves and others; to appreciate

the interdependence of people within society; to know about and understand what is shared as well as what is different about their cultural traditions; and to appreciate how conflict may be handled in non-violent ways' (NICC, 1990).

The Education Reform Order, 1989 also places a statutory responsibility on school governors to report annually to parents on steps taken to promote Education for Mutual Understanding. There is no direct assessment of individual pupils as part of EMU. Its aims and objectives form an integral part of programmes of study in all subjects. However, it has become clear that many schools also see the aims being communicated less formally by the nature of relationships within the schools, and between the school and the wider community. In this sense many schools claim that the aims of EMU are already implicit in their whole-school ethos. Whilst the themes are a mandatory feature of the curriculum, cross-community contact with pupils other schools remains an optional strategy which teachers are encouraged to use.

The period between the introduction of legislation to include EMU in the curriculum and its impact on schools provided an opportunity to consider the implications of EMU's transition from a voluntary activity to a statutory requirement. Initial research and evaluation confirmed that the inclusion of EMU in the statutory curriculum was largely unanticipated with less than a third of schools having a policy in place (Smith and Robinson, 1992). Further evaluation (Smith and Robinson, 1996) provided the stronger critique that many schools were adopting a 'minimalist' approach to EMU and this was attributed to a number of reasons including the following:

- Resistances within the system based around the perception that EMU had been imposed by government and suspicions that a hidden political agenda is at work.
- The evaluation highlighted major difficulties with the cross-curricular model of implementation whereby EMU was supposed to permeate the curriculum. This had given rise to problems about 'coherence' and 'progression' and confirmed the picture reported elsewhere (Whitty, Rowe and Aggleton, 1994) that the cross curricular themes were in danger of becoming too disparate and fragmented.
- The evaluation identified perceived gaps in terms of the education of young people for contemporary society in Northern Ireland (ibid, p.15) and recommended that a human rights framework might provide a firmer basis for work in EMU.
- The evaluation highlighted frustration within the system that EMU was not addressing important social, cultural and political issues which have a bearing on community relations in Northern Ireland. Teachers still expressed considerable reservations about addressing issues such as violence and sectarianism.
- Teachers expressed reservations about their confidence and capacity to undertake community relations work which is sensitive and challenging. There was a major criticism that government had introduced EMU to the statutory curriculum without appropriate investment in the training and professional development of teachers. The report recommended that a coherent strategy for training and professional development be developed at various levels within the system (ibid, pp. 87-88).

Equity Issues

At a structural level the conflict has also focused attention on relative advantage and disadvantage between the Catholic and Protestant communities in Northern Ireland. One aspect of this was a review of fair employment legislation by the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR, 1987) which indicated that Catholics were twice as likely to be unemployed as Protestants. In part this highlighted the ineffectiveness of the earlier 1976 Fair Employment Act and became the impetus for more rigorous fair employment legislation. Current legislation now requires employers to monitor the religious composition of their workforce and, where significant gaps exist, to adopt affirmative action measures including recruitment procedures which are likely to encourage applications for employment from members of the under-represented community.

The debate about the underlying explanations for unemployment differentials between the two communities also focused attention on the relationship between the labour market and the education system. In this respect the segregated system of schools once again came under closer scrutiny and Gallagher et al (1993) suggest that this needs to be understood within the historical framework whereby,

the importance of separate Catholic schools was not only ideological or cultural, but, in a very real sense, material. Apart from the Church itself, the Catholic school system represented the only significant social institution of civil society over which the catholic community, through the Church, exercised a degree of control ... In this context separate Catholic schools provided one of the few routes to social mobility in Northern Ireland, albeit largely into certain professional occupations involved in servicing the Catholic community.

In an effort to understand whether aspects of the segregated system of schooling had contributed to higher levels of unemployment amongst Catholics, the Standing Advisory Commission on Human Rights (SACHR, 1989. 1990,

1991, 1992) commissioned a number of research studies which investigated various explanations. In particular it was noted that a higher proportion of Catholics left school with low or no qualifications (Osborne, 1986; Cormack, Gallagher, Osborne and Fisher, 1992) and that more Protestants choose scientific subjects at school and university (Cormack and Osborne, 1987). This led to research which identified underlying differentials in funding between Catholic and Protestant schools (SACHR, 1991).

An unanticipated finding concerning recurrent funding revealed consistently higher levels of per capita funding in favour of Protestant pupils within primary, secondary and grammar schools (Cormack, Gallagher and Osborne, 1991). Various explanations were advanced to explain this including differences in school size and different provision of specialist teaching space (Cormack, Gallagher and Osborne, 1992), and implications that for historical and perceptual reasons of Catholic schools were less disposed to approach government for funding (Murray, 1992). The research concluded that the overall impact of a number of factors such as these had contributed to consistently lower levels of recurrent funding for Catholic schools (Gallagher, Osborne and Cormack, 1993). The Education Reform (NI) Order, 1989 included provision for the local management of schools (LMS) whereby each school is allocated a recurrent budget which is determined by a formulae largely dependent on pupil numbers. It is anticipated that one consequence of this will be a more equitable distribution of funds between all schools. Eventually, through monitoring, it should become possible to judge whether this new system of financial input has any significant impact on the educational outcomes from the different schools which serve the Catholic and Protestant communities.

A further equity issue concerns the capital funding of Catholic schools. Historically the voluntary nature of Catholic schools had meant that the school trustees were largely responsible for the buildings and capital development of schools. This changed over a period of time following the establishment of Northern Ireland until, by the late sixties Catholic voluntary maintained schools were receiving 85 per cent grant toward approved capital costs. Change toward fuller funding was incremental and involved a series of negotiations between the Catholic authorities and government. In general, the quid pro quo for higher levels of capital funding from government was a reduction in Church representation on school management boards. By the late 1980s a number of arguments contributed to a further change in the level of capital funding for Catholic schools. The introduction of a statutory curriculum meant that all schools are required by law to provide the same educational opportunities to their pupils. For many schools this meant upgrading or providing specialist teaching facilities and it was questionable whether government could place part of the financial burden for this on the Catholic community. It was accepted that the differential in unemployment levels between Catholics and Protestants was linked in part to school provision and the political drive to tackle this problem made it less acceptable to have differential capital funding between schools. The example of 100 per cent capital funding for Catholic schools in Scotland was cited and arrangements for 100 per cent funding of integrated schools illustrated that it is possible for schools to retain a distinctive ethos without any single interest group forming a majority within each governing body. The outcome of these arguments was that government, in consultation with the Catholic bishops, introduced a mechanism by which Catholic schools could opt for 100 per cent capital funding (Osborne, 1993) and legislation to make this possible was enacted in 1993.

Finally, the existence of grammar schools and a selective education system in Northern Ireland has also been the focus for research on equity in education. Early research (Gallagher, 1988) had indicated higher overall attainment levels amongst pupils leaving grammar schools and this had obvious implications for employment and career opportunities. A later analysis (Cormack, Gallagher and Osborne, 1992) indicated that fewer grammar school places were available within the Catholic school sector even if all grammar schools were enrolled to capacity. Government responded by announcing plans to increase the number of grammar school places available in Catholic grammar schools.

The research outlined above highlights how important it is to investigate and monitor equity issues within a divided society. These studies have concentrated on the relative advantage and disadvantage between Catholics and Protestants, the two major communal blocks in Northern Ireland. Over time it will also be important that the concept of equity which eventually evolves, is comprehensive so that it takes account of other minority interests in education and recognises other sources of division within the society.

The emergence of integrated education

In some ways the most dramatic development in education in Northern Ireland over the past twenty years has been the creation of integrated schools, that is schools which are attended in roughly equal numbers by Protestants and Catholics. In 1974 a group called All Children Together (ACT) was established, composed of parents in favour of children being educated together. This organisation opened up the arguments, promoted discussion and debate and allowed various strategies for the generation of change to be tested. The group lobbied successfully for legislation which would allow state schools to become integrated (Education (NI) Act, 1977), but this was only invoked on one occasion as an attempt to prevent a school closure. Eventually, some parents decided to establish a new school which would exemplify their commitment to integrated education and the first planned, integrated school, Lagan

College, was established in Belfast in 1981. This was followed by the opening of three further integrated schools in Belfast in 1985 and a pattern was established whereby at least one or two new integrated schools have been established in Northern Ireland every year since. In 1999 there were 44 integrated schools (27 primary and 17 post-primary) attended by approximately 12,000 pupils (just under per cent of the school population).

New integrated schools have all been initiated by groups of parents working together to establish institutions which are jointly managed and staffed on a cross-community basis. The aim of the integrated schools is that they should be attended by children from both Protestant and Catholic backgrounds, and should be open to children from other religious backgrounds and to children from backgrounds where there are no religious beliefs at all (Wilson and Dunn, 1989). In practice the schools are Christian in character and the founders, parents, teachers and managers have developed workable procedures for the teaching of religion.

The Education Reform (NI) Order, 1989, included a number of provisions for the encouragement of the development of integrated schools, created a mechanism for funding and placed a statutory responsibility on government to support integrated education.

The increasing number of integrated schools, the fact that they had generated a central organising council, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) and the new atmosphere of general government support, also led the government to include mechanisms in legislation to transform existing schools into integrated institutions, although this route may be more problematic (Moffat, 1993).

The schools have attracted considerable research interest. Studies have been completed on their impact on parental choice of school (Cairns, 1989); the views of parents (Agnew, McEwan, Salters and Salters, 1992); the role of parents and teachers (Morgan, Dunn, Cairns and Fraser, 1992); friendship patterns (Irwin, 1991); and a number of postgraduate studies.

Despite the strides which have been made within the past two decades, the movement for integrated education faces difficult strategic issues concerning further development at secondary level within the competitive climate of a selective education system, and at a time of government financial constraint on capital development. The introduction of a policy of 'open enrolment' may also pose difficulties for the schools in terms of maintaining pupil enrolments which draw from both cultural traditions in equal proportions. In recent years there has been a significant shift away from the creation of new integrated schools towards the 'transformation' of existing schools to becoming more integrated. In practice this has mainly involved existing 'Protestant' schools trying to make the school more open and inclusive and the challenge of transforming the culture and ethos in this way is only beginning. Policies to support the transformation of schools are also likely to have a differential impact on the Protestant community so long as the Catholic authorities hold fast to the view that they have a moral commitment to provide a Catholic education for Catholic children. The outcome may be a sense of loss within the Protestant community of its schools whilst the Catholic sector remains largely intact. In the longer term such a dynamic may have a negative impact on relations between these two communities.

Prospects for structural change

At a structural level the segregation within the education system in Northern Ireland appears to be resistant to change. Most children continue to be educated in predominantly Catholic or Protestant schools and equity issues tend to be addressed in terms of these two blocks. However, the past twenty years have also brought new types of school which, despite their small numbers, introduce a potential for change and raise questions about the overall administration and control of education within the society.

The 1980s saw the emergence of new integrated schools, founded by parents from both communities, now funded by government and incorporated in legislation. There is also the appearance of Irish language schools where all instruction is through the medium of Irish. There are now seven of these at primary level, and a secondary school has recently been established in West Belfast. In addition there are ten Independent Christian schools, mostly attached to the Free Presbyterian Church which was founded by the Reverend Ian Paisley. The model for these schools appears to be the Bible Christian schools in the southern states of the USA. They are financially independent of the state and are normally quite small, although they enrol children of all ages from 5 to 18. The schools follow a curriculum which eschews such things as the teaching of evolution and adheres to fundamentalist interpretations of the Bible on moral and sexual issues.

So there are, currently, three new types of school, all relatively small, but all healthy and growing, albeit slowly. Apart from the integrated schools, very little research has been carried out on other types of new school, and it is not at all clear what social forces are at work to make them appear now. Taken together they represent a relatively small, but significant potential for fragmentation or diversification within the overall school system. It may also be of

significance that none of them is secular and it is unclear whether such diversity in school type is constrained by or a consequence of the current conflict.

The educational process, power relations and 'democracy'

There is little doubt that the 1970s and 1980s have seen significant changes with regard to certain aspects of the school curriculum and how the educational process is perceived in Northern Ireland. The introduction of a common curriculum for all schools has provided an opportunity to develop programmes of study which take account of the two main cultural traditions in Northern Ireland, particularly within sensitive subjects such as history and religious education (Richardson, 1990), and many schools now routinely provide their pupils with opportunities to meet and work with pupils from another cultural tradition.

There has been considerable movement away from the situation in the early days of the conflict when schools regarded themselves as 'oases of peace', providing children with an environment relatively protected from the violence, but also insulated from the social issues around them. There is still debate about the extent to which schools can play a reconstructionist role in leading change, but changes have been accepted at a number of levels and there is an expectation that teachers will increasingly find themselves dealing with issues which are socially relevant, related to the conflict and at times, controversial.

In this respect schools in Northern Ireland have been part of a more global movement which looks to education to take account of cultural diversity and conflict within societies. In Britain this has been reflected in the debates surrounding multicultural education, anti-racist education and demands from ethnic minorities for separate schools (Lynch, 1986; Troyna, 1987; Banks, 1988; Massey, 1991). In the Republic of Ireland it is anticipated that controversial issues will be addressed by the introduction of Civic, Social and Political Education as a compulsory component of the school curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 1993). Further afield, deeply divided societies such as Israel have thrown up broadly similar educational strategies as Northern Ireland including inter-group contact, curriculum programmes and new forms of institutions. Lemish (1993) suggests that some of these may merely represent morphological change at a relatively superficial level which does little to challenge the existing power relationships within the society. Other initiatives may have the potential to bring about deeper, structural change, but Lemish suggests that the extent to which this is possible may be related to how deeply democratic principles operate within the society.

In the United States McCarthy (1992) has examined the ideological assumptions and desired outcomes of multicultural education programmes designed to replace earlier, assimilationist approaches. He concludes that cultural understanding programmes fall short of their aspiration to generate more harmonious relationships within society when they "abandon the crucial issues of structural inequality and differential power relations in society" and "end up placing an enormous responsibility on the shoulders of the classroom teacher". The educational strategies which have emerged in Northern Ireland over the past thirty years are inter-related. Each places a different emphasis on how religious and cultural diversity might be addressed by the education system, but they all interact within the same social and political environment. The classroom teacher will have difficulty nurturing tolerance and respect of difference whilst basic inequalities within society remain unaddressed. Similarly, when members of a particular group feel that the state does not adequately take account of their interests, they are likely to demand separate institutions to protect their traditions and beliefs. Tension between social cohesion and pluralism is therefore inevitable.

Developments post the Belfast Agreement

Ceasefires and cessations to violence were announced by paramilitary groups for the first time in 1994. This created the opportunity for a process of political negotiations to take place leading to the Belfast Agreement in April 1998 which provides the basis for sharing political power through the establishment of a locally elected Assembly. In recent years, the Belfast Agreement has been the most significant political development in terms of a peaceful resolution of the conflict in Northern Ireland and its implications within the society have been wide ranging.

The Agreement represents an attempt to establish new democratic structures to replace the 'culture of violence' which has existed in Northern Ireland over the past 30 years. It seems clear that these structures will only be successful if they contribute toward the development of a fair and just society, based on a respect for human rights and sensitive to diversity. One implication is that the need to promote values that support pluralism, human rights and democracy has become a central concern for all those seeking a 'sustainable peace' in Northern Ireland. It is clear that the education service has a vital role in helping young people to take their place as adults and citizens in a society which aspires towards these values.

Partly in response to the new climate created by the Agreement, the Department of Education have established working groups to determine what the emphasis of future work should be. Part of the critique is that initiatives such as Education for Mutual Understanding have played an important role, for example, by introducing a new

vocabulary about 'respect' and 'tolerance' and by breaking down cultural isolation through inter group contact programmes. However, although EMU has been strong on intercultural learning it has been weaker in terms of social justice issues and in developing political literacy. A number of projects have responded to this through the development of resources and methodologies that engage young people with controversial issues related to identity, culture, religion and politics (for example, the Speak Your Piece project, 1996-99). For the immediate future it seems likely that some of the lessons learned from these initiatives will be taken forward through mainstream policies attempt to:

- introduce more explicit programmes for citizenship and education for democracy as part of the formal curriculum;
- encourage the development of a more multicultural curriculum which takes into account a broader range of diversity of religious and ethnic groups;
- provide better training and support for teachers since educators need professional development that challenges their own values in these areas;
- develop strategies which encourage more school ownership of programmes and the values they promote;
- better attempts to understand the processes by which all schools can become more inclusive, given the broader political and social transition about to take place within the wider society.

Ultimately it may not be the individual strategies which matter so much as the extent to which they enable all members of society to experience new and just relationships.

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