CONSOLIDATION

INTRODUCTION

The first two years of the project's development (1986-88) led to good working relations with eight schools in Strabane (three primary and five post-primary). From the early stages of consultation and negotiation we reached a point were the principle of a planned, structured approach to inter school contact was accepted, and work was initiated to put the elements of such an approach in place. The need for a structure emerged from our initial attempts to create inter school contact. This experience had highlighted a number of reservations about contact.

RESERVATIONS ABOUT CONTACT

Reservations about some early work involving inter school contact can be summarised under six headings:

1 Ephemeral

A common criticism of activities involving contact between pupils is that it often involves a 'one off' event, perhaps a visit to the theatre, with minimal preparation and very little follow up. As part of a more comprehensive programme such an event may have value, but in isolation there is little confidence that this can achieve very much to enhance pupils' understanding of each other. There is some evidence to suggest that contact of this sort, where planning is minimal and the possible consequences are not thought through, can create counter-productive effects (Robinson, 1981; Dunlop, 1987).

2 Links Within the Community

Some teachers were sceptical about links which concentrated solely on bringing pupils together at neutral venues well outside their own community, outside the country or linking only with schools in another part of the country. Their argument was that a variety of linkages are obviously important, but perhaps an opportunity was being missed to bring together young people who were growing up in the same locality but did not meet through school. There was also some disillusionment that holiday schemes (e.g. to the USA) had 're-entry problems', pehaps giving young people glimpses of a life style they could only hope to achieve through emigration.

However, there are also some problems with the notion that 'community' and 'locality' map neatly on top of each another. For example, the extent to which a place like Strabane could be called 'one community' when the town is mainly Catholic and most Protestants live rurally. In a similar way an emphasis on community is not helpful to schools which, for demographic reasons, find there is no obvious partner school in the neighbourhood.

A few teachers felt that schools were being less than honest if they encouraged inter school contact, but failed to give this cooperation a profile within the locality. In the words of one teacher *"teachers and schools have abdicated their traditional role as moral leaders in the community - they look over their shoulders too much...are worried more about falling rolls and what some people might say. They should give more of a lead....say what they stand for"*. Such a view is more moralistic than most teachers expressed. Nevertheless, even the pragmatists, who felt it was better to proceed without fanfare, saw some virtue in establishing links between neighbouring schools so that the schools' activities gradually established a local credibility.

3 Peripheral to the Curriculum

Much of early contact work took place out of school hours. This had a tendency to generate activities which were perceived as peripheral to the curriculum, such as sports and quizzes. This may have been compounded by a desire to make contact enjoyable, so that pupils came away with positive feelings. Whilst the socialising effect of such contact was recognised and valued, some teachers began to question the 'educational' aims and value of contact where the emphasis was on *"having an enjoyable time together"*.

4 Low Status

Partly related to the notion of inter school contact being peripheral to the curriculum was an associated notion that the work was low status. The reasons for this included its dislocation from the main aims of the curriculum, and an unstated level of institutional support. Often a single individual would be enthusiastic about the work and people would tend to see this as an idiosyncratic quirk rather than a professional educational commitment. Such people often felt isolated,

relatively unsupported by the institution and insecure or undermined by the 'stick' they took from colleagues for the amount of time they were out of school.

5 Number of Pupils Involved

There was some concern that relatively few pupils from the school would have the chance to be involved, either because of logistical problems or because participation is voluntary. Also, the 'one off' approach which relied on the commitment of individual teachers was more likely to throw up a hit and miss pattern. One child could go through the whole school and never have the opportunity of contact, whilst another may have been in classes which had many such opportunities. There was no coherent plan and no guarantee that a child entering the school would receive an accumulating experience of contact as they moved up through the school.

6 Type of Pupil Involved

Another concern mentioned by teachers was that, to achieve more manageable group sizes, schools may select pupils who present a good image of the school to participate in contact schemes. It was felt that such an approach is likely to omit pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds or pupils with behavioural problems, and these are the children who might benefit most from the socialising nature of cross-community contact.

As well as these six issues, debate has also concerned the type of contact most appropriate to Education for Mutual Understanding, and this is discussed in Chapter 3 where the diversity of practice is surveyed, along with comments on pedagogy.

LESSONS LEARNED

From the initial attempts at contact, and in response to the reservations mentioned above, the project consulted with school Principals and teachers and reached agreement on three main points about the future development of the project:

1 There would be a conscious attempt to **centralise work within the curriculum.** This meant that much of the contact would take place during the school day and involve pupils meeting on a whole-class basis. It was accepted that, since contact is voluntary, there might be some constraints on this.

2 It was important to **identify a coordinator,** that is someone who carried a sense of the overall plan and could cope with administrative arrangements.

3 **A planned, structured approach** would be needed to generate a programme of links related to the curriculum. From this, there would be some attempt to generate a whole-school approach leading to statements of policy.

DEVELOPMENTS WITH STRABANE PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Our previous report, *Inter School Links* (1989), indicates how the primary schools' earliest attempts had been a fairly fragmented series of events. The limitations of this had been recognised and led to the development of a structured programme in 1987/88. The original version was ambitious in that it linked a P4 class from each school on a regular basis, one day each week for a 19 week period. The programme involved the development of a theme on a cross-curricular basis. Within the programme pupils would work in mixed classes and travel to each other's schools according to an agreed timetable. The original version of the programme was considered unsustainable for two main sets of reasons:

1 Too Exhaustive

We had underestimated the extra workload which the programme entailed. This was not so much to do with the planning involved, as with its implementation. Contact was so frequent that teachers felt there was little time to reflect and make preparations between the weekly contacts. We had underestimated how much teachers rely on knowing each individual pupil for effective classroom management, class control, lesson organisation and, most importantly, for effective learning to take place. This may have settled out over time, but the energy involved in establishing new, settled patterns of working midway through the school year was considered too exhaustive.

2 Too Sensitive

Apart from the demanding nature of the programme an additional underlying concern was the extent to which frequent, regularised, class-based teaching of pupils in each others' schools was an acceptable way for the schools to proceed as part of an Education for Mutual Understanding programme. The extent to which such an approach could be perceived as a step on the road to institutional integration was raised as an issue.

Both sets of concerns suggested that a less rigid approach was needed and led to a revised programme for P4 pupils. The revised programme operated over a term. It led from a study of "Wind In The Willows" and was developed on a cross-curricular basis. It involved a preparatory period where each class was introduced to the theme in their own class, in their own school, over a number of weeks before moving to a variety of work which involved different types of contact. Types of contact included large group, educational visits involving all three schools; field work to the Ulster American Folk Park and a local site for environmental studies; the development of local trails which pupils completed in small, mixed groups; small group work on 'cooperative

relationships' completed using one school hall as the venue; and study of a common music programme. An element of mixed, class-based teaching was retained whereby pupils travelled to each others' schools on a set day for a three-week period. The programme was completed by a full-day, social outing involving all three classes at the end of the school year. An estimate suggests that a pupil involved in the programme would have had opportunity for contact with his or her peers in the other schools for 30 hours with 70% of the time involving structured, learning activity and the rest allowing time for less structured socialising. The schools were in close physical proximity to each other so a small amount of time was taken up by travel between the schools. Good quality work created by pupils was drawn together by all three schools and this was displayed in the schools, the local Teachers' Centre and made available for parents' evenings.

This programme was underway when our previous report, *Inter School Links*, was published. The need to see it through, and a desire to see similar linked programmes build up between each of the older year-groups in the schools, was one of the reasons for extending the 'Inter School Links' project for a further two years.

Aims of the Extended Project

The following five aims were identified for the project's extended involvement with the three Strabane primary schools:

1 to support teachers already involved in the P4 programme in running an ammended programme during 1988/89;

2 to support the co-ordinator in achieving the longer-term goal of establishing an inter school link in each of the other upper primary year-groups;

3 to explore the possibility of establishing a residential link with the P7 classes;

4 to monitor the level and type of links which take place between the three schools which do not arise directly from the planned programme;

5 to work with Principals and explore the possibility of creating a common policy on inter school work for the three primary schools.

The project has now had a further two years working with the schools. The P4 link is running for the third successive year. It continues to operate on the principles outlined already with a variety of opportunities for pupil contact. The teachers involved have developed a good rapport and planning for the programme is accepted as a normal part of the school year.

The past two years have been concerned with establishing linked programmes between P5, P6 and P7 classes in the three schools. Initial progress was tentative, partly because other teachers were wary of the workload involved. A large part of this concern had been generated by the project itself, since other teachers in the schools may have sensed that the initial workload was demanding. However, once it was clear that teachers fully controlled the development of programmes some of this anxiety was alleviated. Publication of *Education for Mutual Understanding: A Guide* (1988) and early indications that EMU would form an important element of government's proposals for reform of the Northern Ireland curriculum may also have influenced teachers' perceptions of the importance of the project.

Current Practice in Strabane Primary Schools

Despite some initial hesitations, four linked programmes are now operating between the project schools. This means that the project's first three aims had been achieved by the 1989/90 school year. Three P4 classes were linked through a programme focused on the theme "Time". Three P5 classes were linked through the theme "Water". Three P6 classes were linked through study of the book, "Charlotte's Web". All programmes involved class-based work which was enhanced by opportunities for pupils to meet on at least five occasions per programme. Three P7 classes were linked through residential work which incorporated workshop activities supported by the Quaker Peace Education Project, designed to raise pupils' self confidence and self esteem by developing skills in talking, listening and cooperating in small mixed groups. In addition the schools have secured computer equipment with desk-top publishing facilities and one Principal has organised initial staff training on this system for all three schools. The aim is to use these facilities to further cement and augment linkages between the schools.

Other Links Between Strabane Primary Schools

The schools' participation in the project was focused on linking specific classes. However, comments from some Principals and teachers indicated that additional benefits were being generated. As the need to confer over linked programmes increased, so did the frequency of contact between Principals and teachers. Teachers became familiar with the environment provided by the other schools, with the way different approaches could be used, and they also became aware of a broader pool of resources. Invitations to events and performances increased between the schools. Over time a pattern of joint planning seems to have emerged which extends beyond the project and involves all three schools. Teachers have established relationships which have . allowed them to learn from each others' strengths or particular knowledge. Access to colleagues, teaching the same age group, is of extra importance to teachers

working in single-class entry schools. Initiatives have arisen from relationships established through the project, not directly connected to the EMU programmes themselves. Examples include, joint teacher planning of a scheme in mathematics and consultation over approaches to handwriting. There has been development toward joint in-service training for the Northern Ireland Curriculum whereby each school site will provide an aspect of the training for staff of all three schools. The extent to which relations between staff within schools have developed has been remarked upon by Principals. Comments from the Inspectorate suggest that communication within one school had improved, and this was confirmed by the Principal's comment that the development of a more structured approach to staff meetings was in part attributable to the structured approach of the EMU project. Some of these staff development issues are raised in more detail in the evaluative section on teacher perceptions later in the report. There is also evidence from teachers' comments that involvement with the project has encouraged some schools to think again about the school's relationship to parents.

Movement Toward Policy in the Primary Schools

The extended aims for the project also showed a concern to support the development of school policies on inter school contact. In all three schools the Principals have kept Boards of Governors informed about inter school contact. Support for the programmes from school governors and parents was particularly important during a period when a Free Presbyterian clergyman campaigned for parents to withdraw their children from 'EMU' and 'Choose Life' programmes in the Western Education and Library Board area. The basis for this was contained in a pamphlet by Foster (1988) which claimed that both programmes are based on a *"false analysis of the nature of the Ulster problem"* in that they encourage Protestant children *"to be brainwashed into accepting a share of the blame for the terrible events in Ulster"*, when the problem is not inter-personal relations, but inter-group and *"the blame lies fairly and squarely with the Roman Catholic community"*. Foster suggests that the programmes are a *"clandestine manipulation of children without the knowledge or consent of parents"*. Evidence from a survey of parents in the Strabane primary schools does not substantiate this claim and is discussed later in the report (Chapter 6).

The experience of the project supports the view that schools should be explicit with parents about their involvement in inter school contact. One important way which this can be achieved, in the formal sense, is through written policy statements endorsed by Boards of Governors who have ultimate responsibility for curriculum matters in the school. The three Strabane primary schools are currently at a stage where it seems a matter of course for much of the practice in Education for Mutual Understanding to be formally translated into written policy statements. A central part of such policy

will obviously be the commitment to inter school contact in the upper primary years through the structured approach encouraged by this project. However, movement to broader policy statements will also need to take into account how the concept of EMU is handled at the lower end of the school, how it is reflected in curriculum activity and materials, and whether contact between younger age groups (P1-3) is seen as desirable or necessary.

Debate about the extent to which school policies strike a balance between approaches which emphasise cultural and/or religious **similarity**, and policies which reflect **difference** will clearly have to take place. In our experience discussion of this issue seems the one explored in the least depth by schools involved in inter school contact. Yet in policy terms it is central, setting the fundamental orientation which the schools expect teachers to pursue. The absence of such debate is unsuprising since, in Northern Ireland, the issue of similarity and difference between the two communities has been characterised more by polite and tactful circumnavigation rather than open debate. With little precedent to guide them teachers, governors and others concerned with school policy are unsure how discussion can get underway, and how such a debate can be conducted and sustained as part of the policy-making process. Part of the difficulty is that teachers and policy-makers are themselves members of the respective communities in Northern Ireland, so they too are challenged to find new ways of relating to the 'other community' as they develop policies affecting how children are educated.

Although there is still some way to go toward the formulation of comprehensive, formal school policies in EMU, it would be wrong to underestimate the huge strides which the project schools have made in the past few years in building a system of contact which is coherent, structured and ongoing. When asked about written policy one Principal commented that the work in EMU had developed from the practical experience of operating programmes and making ammendments along the way. The move to policy statements was therefore seen as neither problematic, nor traumatic, but a natural progression. This was contrasted with other curriculum areas which have also recently moved to a more central place in the school curriculum where, in attempting to respond, schools have *"made a rush for formal policy statements about what should be done"*. This seems to have contributed to a certain amount of fatigue amongst teachers who feel bombarded by policy statements.

Comments in the later section on teacher perceptions (Chapter 5) support the view that changes in behaviour are more likely to change attitudes, rather than the other way round. Our experience suggests a functional distinction between the way the educational system as a whole and individual schools experience policy statements. In broad terms it appears that statements of

policy are most potent with respect to the way the overall system operates, that is, policy statements from government and regional educational authorities have a powerful effect on what teachers feel they should be doing. However, within the school itself teachers are more likely to be convinced by the authority of what it is possible to achieve rather than a school policy statement which is largely aspirational. This suggests that the future success of EMU will depend less on a down-the-line, managerial approach, and more on the amount of energy devoted to in-service approaches which work intimately with particular schools or groups of schools in developing 'tailor-made' approaches to EMU. This may initially appear slower and more expensive than the sort of 'cascade model' usually adopted, but this must be weighed against a longer-term commitment that EMU takes root as a regular and natural part of the school curriculum.

Finally, despite the lack of formal policy statements a parental survey indicates that all three primary schools have been remarkably successful in communicating to parents both the nature and purpose of the inter school link programmes as part of their commitment to EMU. This is reported in a later section (Chapter 6) and suggests that written policy statements by the school may be less potent than other forms of communication from the school to parents.

DEVELOPMENTS WITH POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN STRABANE

Work with the five post-primary schools in Strabane developed in a similar way to the primary schools in that initial activities had been a series of loosely related events rather than a well-defined, curriculum-based programme. Review of the situation in 1987-88 had led to the history department from each school coming together to plan programmes which would lend themselves to the development of EMU and involve contact between pupils from all five schools. History was seen as an area of the curriculum which lends itself to the development of EMU. It allows pupils to confront evidence about historical events which are often the cause of division in Northern Ireland. The project was able to establish a relationship with history teachers through an already established interest group on local history. The approach agreed was that units of study would be jointly developed by teachers and gradually introduced to all pupils in Forms 1, 2 and 3 over a three-year period. Each unit would be taught over a term and, as part of the programme, one class from each school would be involved in a series of activities involving contact with the other schools. Titles for the units of study were:

1 *Peoples of Ireland* - a development study which was introduced to Form 1 pupils in the school year 1988-89 and operated for the second time in 1989-90

2 *The Ulster Plantation in Strabane Barony* - introduced to Form 2 pupils in the school year 1989/90

3 *The Williamite Wars and the Seige of Derry* -introduced to Form 3 pupils in the school year 1990/91

Peoples of Ireland

Regular meetings of the group of history teachers during 1987/88 led to the production a booklet called 'Peoples of Ireland'. The booklet *"aims to introduce pupils to the multi-cultural origins of society on the island of Ireland by an examination of the varied settlements throughout the centuries"*. It looks at different groups who have settled in Ireland from earliest times, pre-history, Celts, Vikings, Normans, various plantations, through to more recent immigrations and emigrations. It asks who these groups were, when and why they came and encourages discussion about the contributions they made and how earlier settlers may have been affected by newcomers. Key historical concepts such as assimilation, plantation, push-pull factors in immigration and emigration, and the notion of nationality are involved. The booklet was launched at a reception in the local Teachers' Centre, attended and supported formally by school Principals and education authorities, and well reported in the local press. In producing the booklet and operating the programme the group received financial support from the Department of Education, Cross Community Contact Scheme and the Western Education and Library Board.

The programme operated for the first time in 1988/89. An introductory exercise involved pupils carrying out a survey and research on the origins of local surnames as a way of opening up the idea that various groups have settled the island throughout history. It also gave some opportunity to show that not all Catholics are descended from Celtic ancestors and not all Protestants from British families. The programme was taught over a single term, although teachers found they needed more time to cover the material they had created.

Although all first year pupils studied the unit, an important aspect was the opportunity for one class from each school to participate in contact activities. Altogether 135 pupils were involved and a higher representation of Catholics reflected the greater number of maintained schools. There was also a substantial gender imbalance with twice as many girls involved as boys. The teacher group are currently looking at the implications these imbalances have for the programme.

Contact involved both the sharing of work and actually working together. As a beginning, results of the initial exercise on surnames were exchanged between schools and teachers helped pupils examine the spread of surnames within the community. This was followed by a joint visit to the Ulster American Folk Park where

pupils worked in mixed groups. A video was made of this visit and this, along with other visual material, was shown to the whole group to stimulate discussion at a further meeting in the youth wing of the controlled school. The next stage of the contact programme involved a residential trip to Dublin to visit the Viking Exhibition, the National Museum, and on the way, Newgrange and Monasterboice Abbey. This took place in December 1988 and proved very popular with pupils. Because of the large numbers involved only half the contact group attended this residential. The other half later visited Carrickfergus Castle and preparation for this involved a visit to the technology centre in Omagh were pupils worked together on problem-solving exercises related to Norman castles. Later in the year the whole group came together again on a visit to Enniskillen Museum and Devenish Island where once again they worked in small, mixed groups. Some evaluation exercises were completed in relation to this first attempt at the Peoples of Ireland programme and these are reported in a later section (Chapter 4).

When the programme was complete the teachers met to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the programme and suggest ammendments for its introduction to a new wave of first-year pupils the following year. Amongst their concerns was the amount of material they had tried to get through and this was tackled by revising the booklet to produce sets of worksheets for pupils. There was a desire to bring about more balanced ratios in terms of gender and cultural background. Fairly detailed discussion took place concerning the quality of contact with the suggestion that large-group contact has limitations. It was suggested that thought be put into how more intimate, small-group activities could be generated. Nevertheless, the success of the residential work suggested that it be included again along with some work geared toward joint displays. Teachers were also concerned that increasing use of the programme by the schools, and the commitment to create a second-year unit, would mean that time would need to be set aside to introduce other teachers to the work. Teachers have also looked at how an evaluative dimension could be built into the programme to enable them to judge how pupils attitudes are being affected.

As well as introducing the first-year unit the teacher group also began to develop a unit for second year pupils focused on the local impact of the Ulster plantation. This was introduced in the 1989/90 school year and involved pupils who had studied 'Peoples of Ireland' the previous year. The unit is a progression from the earlier one in that it is an in-depth look at a more controversial issue as well as showing how different people can react in different ways to events from the past. Again, the programme was taught to the whole year-group with some pupils from each school involved in contact. Contacts included discussion sessions and a residential visit based at the Corrymeela Centre involving field work to plantation sites. As this programme

draws to an end attention will turn to the development of a third unit of study which will be introduced to third-year pupils in the 1990/91 school year.

Current Practice in Strabane Post-primary Schools

The post-primary schools have virtually achieved their aim of introducing units of study in history to the first three year-groups. The subject and the material they have developed encourages pupils to interpret historical evidence about Ireland's past. The relevance of this to EMU is that pupils may develop a deeper understanding of the way different interpretations of history may be used to define contmporary descriptions of relationships between the two communities in Northern Ireland. The programmes are enhanced by opportunities for pupils to meet, thereby sharing to some extent their encounter with historical evidence.

It remains to be seen whether the joint curriculum planning continues to build further up the school in history, or whether other subject areas in the schools will also begin to develop common programmes. There is the obvious danger that, having taken such a strong lead, the history departments are left to carry the onus of EMU development between the schools. This would run contrary to current education reforms which anticipate whole school development of EMU as a cross-curricular theme. We had hoped that the extended life of the project might enable the development of work further up the school, perhaps through another curriculum area, but the timescale prohibited this. It is clear that the development of programmes in post-primary schools will be a more protracted process. This is partly because it takes longer to draw together material which is both appropriately challenging for older pupils and related to the subject of study. Another consideration is the post-primary school environment which is structurally complex with many logistical constraints on opportunities for contact. Nevertheless, through patience and perserverence the history teachers have evolved a process of consultation which has firmly established contact and co-operation between the five schools. Their experience provides an ideal basis for the continued development of EMU in the future.

SUMMARY

WHAT WERE THE HELPFUL INGREDIENTS?

Given the progress which has been made we feel it is important to underline some of the elements which seem to have contributed to a firm base for the future development of EMU within the Strabane schools. The following have been equally important and therefore have no order of priority:

1 Initial Support

It should be remembered that the Strabane schools became involved on a project basis. This meant that initially, at least, an above average level of support was concentrated on the schools. The focus of attention from external agencies may have played a part in encouraging schools to exert extra effort in seeing plans through to fruition (the Hawthorne Effect). However, we still feel that the principles which emerged could be readily adopted and operated by groups of schools with support from Board field officers and the advisory service.

2 Principals' Support

A willingness on the part of school Principals to explore possible contact activities with other schools was a necessary prerequisite to the development work. Principals obviously have a major role in creating a climate in the school where staff are actively encouraged to see that EMU is both legitimate and valued.

3 Consultative Framework

Throughout the project we have been conscious that the involvement of third parties is interventionist. In many circumstances this can be catalytic and is welcomed as a first step in initiating contact. In others it will be experienced as oppressive or manipulative. Our experience suggests that, even where contact is initiated by a third party, it is vital to establish as soon as possible that it is the teachers who control the nature and pace of development. The intention should be to initiate a process of consultation between the schools and suggest possible frameworks in which contacts might take place. Going beyond this can lead to the schools undertaking initiatives which flounder because they are seen to be other peoples' solutions.

4 Coordinator

We had originally assumed that it would be necessary to identify a coordinator for contact in every school. As events turned out a single coordinator operating between each set of schools worked extremely well. This was partly because staffing in the schools allowed for a certain flexibility in the coordinator's teaching load. It is difficult to see how the work of someone coordinating planning meetings between teachers, liaison between schools outside meetings, and the organisation and administration of materials, transport, venues, could take place as successfully when all teachers are tied to classes. The role of the coordinator took on even greater significance once the schools moved to implement the full set of structured links between different year-groups in the schools. It then became crucial that at least one person had a view of the overall plan and the various contact programmes which would implement it.

5 Planning Days

The announcement in Department of Education, Circular 1988/2 of extra teacher cover for schools involved in inter school contact was timely. The Circular indicated that schools would be allowed **at least** 10 extra days to bring in substitute staff. The most obvious use of this is to bring in extra staff when events involving pupil contact are taking place, either to lower the teacher/pupil ratio on educational visits or to cover classes when a particular teacher is out of school with pupils. It soon became clear, however, that the opportunity for teachers from the different schools to meet and plan for a sustained period was a vital element. These extra cover days therefore allowed for full-day meetings between teachers where a substantial part of planning the year's activities could be accomplished in two full-day sessions. More recently the primary schools have expressed some concern that, with four year-groups involved in links, each school will have used up 8 of its 10 extra cover days for planning before extra cover for activities involving pupil contact is taken into account. To date the schools have been able to respond by internal reorganisation where the Principal or other member of staff covers classes, but once again this only operates successfully where the staffing allocation allows flexibility or where the Principal does not have a class full-time.

6 Cross Community Contact Scheme

Department of Education Circular 1987/47 announced the Cross Community Contact Scheme which *"..offers financial assistance to schools, youth and community groups for the development of programmes which bring together young people from the two communities in the Province in ongoing, constructive and collaborative studies and activities which lead to greater mutual trust, understanding and respect."* (Northern Ireland Information Service, 14 September 1989). This gave all schools the opportunity of applying for extra financial assistance to cover materials, transport, entrance charges and other costs associated with educational visits and residential courses. Whilst there was some initial concern about the way in which support from the Scheme would complement support from the Education and Library Board, there is little doubt that it made a major contribu-

tion to the development of links between schools in Strabane. Most specifically it enabled schools to submit a joint application for extra resources to cover contact activities. As a result they received block sums of money which were administered through a joint bank account opened by the schools. The teachers were therefore in a more powerful position directly to requisition materials and pay bills associated with the contact activities. This system of block allocation allowed the Scheme to operate with the minimum of bureaucracy and teachers found it helpful and relatively simple to operate. Suggestions and recommendations at the end of the report devote more attention to the Cross Community Contact Schemewhere some minor points are made on administration, and some questions are posed concerning its future in relation to EMU.

7 Communication with Parents

Parental support for the sort of approach the schools were developing was perhaps the biggest unknown quantity. Whilst the schools recognised the importance of communicating with parents there was natural concern, particularly in the early days, that parents should not become alarmed that some radical form of social engineering was being set in place. The primary concern for teachers was therefore to focus on the educational value of joint activities planned for pupils. Each time pupils came together parents were informed about the nature of the activity and that their child would come into contact with pupils from the other schools. It has been noticeable over the past three years how the schools have gradually nurtured confidence in the programme. The parental survey in the primary schools indicates that parents have grown more familiar with the language of EMU, have some understanding of its aims and are fully aware that the schools are operating a comprehensive programme of contacts.

WHAT ARE THE RESIDUAL CONCERNS?

A number of issues remain and it is expected that these will be explored as the schools develop their programmes further:

1 Policy Development

Given the progress made we would see it as regrettable if the schools were not offered further support in moving toward formal policy statements. Some Principals have indicated a willingness to develop this aspect and there is little doubt that the accumulated experience of these schools has much to offer in terms of understanding how the process of policy development in EMU takes place. An intrinsic value is that a focus on the development of policy would involve governors and staff in more detailed discussion about fundamental aims. This may enable those involved to confront some of the ambiguity currently associated with the language of EMU and what it seeks to achieve.

The Department of Education have acknowledged that school governors are centrally concerned with the process of policy development. In 1989 the Minister responsible for Education, Dr Brian Mawhinney wrote inviting each school's Board of Governors to nominate a governor to promote EMU. This was followed up by a seminar and reception for the nominated governors, hosted by the Minister, to explain Government thinking on the introduction of EMU to the common curriculum in Northern Ireland. Part of Dr Mawhinney's address at the reception pointed to the development of policy, *"I trust that governors will continue to take an active interest in the promotion of EMU in their schools, that they will seek to establish a written statement of policy with regard to EMU and to publicise this among parents."* (Northern Ireland Information Service, 25 June 1990). School governors also have a statutory responsibility *"to describe what steps have been taken by the Board of Governors to develop or strengthen the school's links with the community and, in particular, to promote the attainment of the objectives of the educational theme called Education for Mutual Understanding;"* under Article 125(2)(h) of the Education Reforem (Northern Ireland) Order 1989.

2 Similarity or Difference?

The recent emergence of EMU has taken place in a socio-political climate where it is accepted that there are two distinct ethno-religious communities in Northern Ireland. The notion that education has a role to play in fostering better understanding and respect between these two communities has gained a certain respectability. This has led to a pragmatic view that, as part of EMU, greater contact between children whom the education system has traditionally segregated may lead to more tolerant relations between future generations of the two ethno-religious groups. This popular, though somewhat simplistic, philosophical basis for EMU conceals a plethora of thorny issues which become more apparent when practitioners attempt to implement contact activities.

Our experience is that many people find it incredibly difficult to articulate how the process of Education for Mutual Understanding operates. It often comes across as a metaphorical phrase representing an aspiration that people develop more harmonious ways of living together. This reluctance to impose a tight definition on EMU is seen by some to be its strength, allowing the theme to embrace, within the curriculum, a range of issues pertinent to human relationships. A broad interpretation of EMU allows teachers to address a wide range of issues, from inter-personal conflict, to social deprivation, race relations, gender, poverty, human rights, international relations amongst others. Others feel that the primary thrust should be inter community relations in Northern Ireland, and perhaps suspect that too wide a definition of EMU does nothing to encourage practitioners to deal with issues closest to home.

Whichever view is taken there is the suggestion that, despite EMU having a central place in the school curriculum, it is still largely uncharted territory, relatively untheorised and conceptually vulnerable. There is certainly a need for more educational debate around key theoretical questions which have direct practical implications for those attempting to implement EMU policies in the classroom. For example, a number of people (Gallagher, 1988; Foster, 1988; O'Callaghan, 1990) have queried how programmes designed to bring about inter-personal contact can expect to affect intergroup attitudes since the relationship between these is neither apparent nor simple. Exploration of this important issue remains largely confined to social psychologists and needs to be opened out in an educational context.

We suggest that the relationship between similarity and difference is equally complex and needs deeper exploration by those developing policies on EMU, so that their programmes have a clearer direction. The official line from government seems to lean heavily on the view that programmes should emphasise similarity between children yet encourage them to appreciate the richness of cultural diversity. An example is a statement from the Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with responsibility for Education, Dr Brian Mawhinney, *"Those children, from controlled and maintained schools, who have worked together will have learned even more clearly that the differences between our schools is not as significant as some would have them think. Learning that there are many things in our culture that we share is a positive step towards greater mutual understanding and respect."* (Northern Ireland Information Service, 21 March 1988). A distinction between 'diversity' and 'difference' is implied but not explicit. Our experience suggests that teachers too feel more comfortable emphasising similarity and playing down difference. In the climate of Northern Ireland, where so often difference does indeed mean division, it is easy to see how it is less contentious to concentrate on similarity. However, over-emphasis of this denies that the concepts of 'similarity' and 'difference' are intimately bound as two sides of the same coin which cannot be handled separately.

Our hope is that those involved with EMU will continue to wrestle with the issue of similarity and difference, despite the elusive and somewhat theoretical tenor of the language. Whatever kind of EMU programme is provided it will, even by default, communicate some message to children about the relationship between the two main religious and cultural traditions in Northern Ireland. That message may emphasise similarity between the cultures, thereby encouraging the notion of a common culture. It may emphasise differences, thereby encouraging the notion of separate development. Or it may consciously attempt to communicate a more complex picture which denies neither, and encourages some form of cultural pluralism.

3 Time

The most precious commodity for teachers continues to be time. Not only time to consider the sort of philosophical issues mentioned above, but time to meet with colleagues in other schools, time to develop programmes and time to implement the work with pupils. There is concern that if staffing allocations to schools are such that all teachers are tied to a full day of class teaching then much of the planning and discussion required for EMU will fall further down the list of priorities. The unique aspect of EMU is that the contact encouraged between schools inevitably means that schools are encouraged to generate whole new sets of institutional relationships and it is difficult to see how this can be done without flexibility in teaching timetables.

A related concern is that joint work on a class-to-class basis means that teachers are often working with exceptionally large groups of pupils. Given the kind of small group activity which EMU programmes often include this provides a further working difficulty for teachers. Access to extra teacher cover can alleviate this to some extent, although this invariably means involving a teacher who has not had the benefit of participating in the planning process. In exceptional cases other solutions have been found (for example, the work in Limavady schools reported in Chapter 2), but there is little doubt that current teacher/pupil ratios in schools impede the type of small group work approriate to EMU.

4 Logistics and Cost of Full Blown Contacts

The Strabane primary schools have speculated how readily schools can sustain comprehensive sets of links between all year groups as part of their approach to EMU. Their experience suggests that for links to be meaningful they need to take place on a fairly regular basis. Yet as more links are built up the tasks of administration and arranging contact become more complex whilst the flexibility for teacher cover decreases. If they are to represent anything other than fragmented experiences for pupils, programmes between single classes in all four upper primary years would appear to approach saturation point . Yet, if the programmes are educationally sound and achieving benefits in EMU terms, clearly they should be available for all classes. This will cause problems for larger schools which have more than one class in each year group, since the logistics would then be even more complex. It also causes dilemmas where symmetry of classes between controlled and maintained schools in an area does not exist.

Even if symmetry between controlled and maintained schools were not a problem there is some concern amongst teachers that full sets of linkages operating

between schools throughout the province would be financially unsustainable because of the extra teacher cover involved and the costs incurred by the educational visits and transport commonly associated with contact activities. Some teachers are concerned about the overall financial cost to the education system, and a few use financial arguments to support the view that teachers are being asked, unrealistically, to compensate for institutional segregation when they would prefer to see their role as one exclusively about teaching and learning. Issues concerned with funding are discussed in more detail later in Chapter 7.

5 Demography

A number of teachers involved in the project have questioned the logic of choosing an area which has a majority/minority demography which is 59% Catholic (Eversley and Herr, 1986). This issue was referred to in the previous report (Dunn and Smith, 1989). Lack of symmetry between Protestant and Catholic populations in the area is relevant and, at times, the controlled schools have felt under more pressure to participate in the links. Sometimes this was misinterpreted by those in the Catholic schools as the controlled schools being lukewarm to contact, but it has been noticeable how, during the course of the project, a greater appreciation of each other's circumstances and concerns has grown. The very lack of numerical symmetry within the population may actually have helped sensitise people to anxieties which the demography invokes. Our feeling remains that similar majority/minority issues would have arisen in any area for it is very rare in Northern Ireland to find a community which has a symmetrical demography. Even in such a situation we would be forced to question whether this should in fact be considered 'ideal' in community relations terms, since the very notion of symmetry implies some form of distinct and separate development with mirror institutions reinforcing the existence of two communities in the one locality.

The notion of 'community' itself is problematic and it became clear that we could not think of Strabane as a single community in simple geographical terms. Children in the area clearly recognised they live in 'Strabane', but it was clear even to the youngest children that they do not live in a single community. Perhaps an opportunity was missed to make this sort of issue the focus for a curriculum-based programme between the schools. The initial thinking behind fostering links between schools in the same town was belief that the experience of contact may help children perceive themselves to be part of the same community. We have no evidence of any advances in this area, and this underlines the limitations to what schools, being only one of many social institutions, can hope to achieve as agents of social change.

The structured approach which has been developed will obviously have its limitations for other groups of schools. We have already mentioned a saturation point which schools will inevitably reach and the problems of matching classes where there is lack of symmetry between schools. The notion of linking with a partner school in the same area is obviously limited for those schools which are isolated by geography or by the fact that they are located in highly segregated areas. Other solutions will need to be found in these cases, perhaps an emphasis on residential work where children live and work together over a number of days. However, the project has demonstrated that, even in a highly imbalanced majority/minority situation, it has been possible for schools to institutionalise a system of contacts which provides the framework for children to explore together issues about the nature of the community in which they live.

EMU AND DIFFERENCES IN PRIMARY AND POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

There are a number of distinctive differences between primary and post-primary schools which are likely to affect the way contact as part of EMU is implemented in the respective institutions. The three mentioned below are related to each other.

Firstly, teaching in primary schools is more clearly orientated to cross-curricular approaches. Primary teachers are well used to developing a theme which draws together diverse knowledge and skills. This lends itself well to the nature of EMU which concerns itself with process and relationships. The situation in post-primary schools is more likely to regard knowledge of a particular subject discipline as the central objective and the relationship between subject disciplines secondary. There has been a movement away from this notion, but most teachers in post-primary schools still feel themselves considerably constrained to gear work towards examinations. It remains to be seen whether reforms in assessment which are criterion-referenced, based on levels of achievement, rather than norm-referenced, will encourage more multi-disciplinary approaches in teaching. In Strabane, the work in history has drawn attention to questions about the overlap between history and activity, more accurately described as community relations.

Secondly, because teachers in post-primary schools generally perceive themselves to be subject specialists, they are less likely to embark on more holistic themes appropriate to EMU. Concentrating on the contribution of an individual subject discipline may be no bad thing, but it can give rise to the situation where pupils receive a fragmented and disjointed experience of EMU through history, EMU through English, EMU through music and so on. For pupils the implications of EMU through these different disciplines may never be drawn together. Therefore, the involvement in EMU of a wide range of teachers from various disciplinary backgrounds is to be encouraged, but it does suggest that post-primary

schools face a more complex task in putting together programmes which provide a coherent experience for pupils. There is a danger that, whilst individual teachers may be making individual contributions to EMU through their own subjects, the school has no overall plan which identifies what EMU is trying to achieve. For EMU to function in a genuinely cross-curricular way we would see it as vital that post-primary schools delegate particular individuals the responsibility of identifying what programmes operate throughout the school and how these relate together to give a whole-school EMU scheme. Post-primary schools, being generally larger and more structurally complex, face a challenging task which will require focused leadership, discussion and cooperation between departments, and whole-school in-service development.

Thirdly, a clear difference between primary and post-primary schools concerns their internal organisation and this too will have a bearing, particularly on how contact with other schools is operated as part of the EMU experience. In primary schools children usually have a single teacher who works with them for the whole day on all aspects of the curriculum. Classes have a stability which gives teachers the flexibility to decide when and where learning activities take place. If the primary school teacher decides to carry out joint work with a class from another school it is relatively straightforward to organise and carry out with least disruption to the rest of the school. Post-primary schools, on the other hand, are much more bound by a highly-structured timetable where class periods are short. The organisation of contact with other schools is therefore more disruptive to these schools. Invariably other teachers are affected by missing periods with pupils who are out of school, or are asked to cover classes for the teachers who accompany them. This disruption of routines can be the cause of discontent in some schools.

We have no illusions about the complex and highly idiosyncratic nature of most post-primary school timetables. Even so we would still encourage schools which are serious about facilitating pupil contact with a neighbouring school, to look again at the way their timetables are organised. The possibility of completely synchronising the timetables of neighbouring schools is remote, but there may be opportunities for those responsible for timetabling to come up with imaginative solutions which allow schools to synchronise block sections of the timetable for one or two afternoons in particular subjects. Such synchronisation has already proved possible for work experience schemes and day courses operated through local Technical Colleges. This would greatly facilitate opportunities for contact through educational fieldwork or work in each others' school.