

What works for reconciliation?

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Preface

This is the 19th report from the think tank Democratic Dialogue. DD gratefully acknowledges the financial assistance for this project from the Community Relations Council, which seeks to promote a peaceful, inclusive and fair society based on reconciliation and mutual trust. The views expressed in the publication do not necessarily reflect those of the CRC, on whose behalf Paul Jordan and Frances McClelland have been unfailingly co-operative.

The author wishes to acknowledge the significant contribution of Gráinne Kelly in drawing up the initial research proposal. Owen Hargie, Erin Parish and Maria Power offered helpful advice on the interview schedule. And Alison Keenan of the CRC kindly assisted in identifying the eight organisations sampled.

Special thanks are due to all those organisations for being willing to accommodate the disruptive demands that any research entails. And a particular debt is owed to the 37 individuals who not only agreed to be interviewed but also

gave so generously of their wisdom.

Comments on the publication are very welcome. Our catalogue of publications (available in pdf format) is detailed on our web site.

Anyone wishing to be kept informed of DD projects and events should contact us to be added to our regular e-mailing list. All the necessary details are on p2. »

Executive summary

This report is based on 37 interviews with individuals associated in various capacities with eight diverse, long-standing organisations working for reconciliation in Northern Ireland. Through these interviews, and ancillary documentary research, it has sought to distil transferable ‘good practice’ from which other new, or improving, organisations might benefit.

On the basis of prior work by Democratic Dialogue, a definition of reconciliation is rehearsed. And the key task of organisations working for reconciliation, in challenging stereotypes, is identified.

The first group of elements of good practice distilled focuses on the ethos of such organisations. These include, in short:

- clarity of purpose,
- a holistic, teamwork approach,
- an idealistic and creative culture,
- a long-term commitment to social justice,
- individual and organisational ‘reflexiveness’, and

- interculturalist and cosmopolitan values.

Having identified dialogue as the essential activity of organisations in this arena, the next set of features concerns the conditions most conducive to effective dialogue. These embrace:

- a sense of security for participants,
- responsiveness to targeted individuals and groups,
- recurrent contact in protracted projects,
- a focus on the quality of exchanges, and
- creative use of the arts and electronic media.

Thirdly, the interviews drew out what have been described as ‘ripple effects’—aspects of good practice which allow of a wider social impact. These involve:

- stimulation of wider networks, diffusing innovations,
- new ‘spin-off’ ventures by practitioners, and training in the facilitation of dialogue.

Lastly, the canvas is widened to the broader social fabric. The report teases out two key roles of organisations working for reconciliation in this regard:

- building trust in a mistrustful society, and
- establishing the warp and weft of cross-communal relationships.

And it suggests that funders, the Community Relations Council and government could all do more in brokerage roles—not substituting themselves for organisations with credibility on the ground but acting to enhance their overall effectiveness. In particular, government needs to offer much more targeted support to voluntary organisations specifically and explicitly committed to tackling sectarian division. 🗨️

Introduction

This research project started from two simple assumptions. These were that practitioners in non-governmental organisations working for reconciliation in Northern Ireland tend to have the modesty of self-regard associated with a tolerant disposition and that they have very little time due to their commitment to the work. If true, in combination these would mean—particularly for those with years or even decades of experience—that they would carry around a large reservoir of tacit knowledge about good practice from which many others could benefit.

A straightforward piece of research would then be to interview individuals associated with a range of longstanding organisations in this arena, picking their brains as to the lessons they had learned. What, in their experience, had worked in the cause of reconciliation (and what had not), and why?

The following organisations were selected, with the assistance of the core-funding officer of the Community Relations Council:

- **Ballynafeigh Community Development Association**, the umbrella body for community development in this mixed south Belfast neighbourhood;
- **Co-operation Ireland**, the body promoting people-to-people relationships across the Irish border;
- **the Corrymeela Community**, the pioneer of inter-religious dialogue in Northern Ireland, associated with a north-coast residential centre;
- **Future Ways**, a small group of skilled individuals assisting public agencies to come to terms with diversity among workers and users;
- **Holywell Trust**, a Derry-based centre which has fostered dialogue on politically challenging issues;
- **the Nerve Centre**, again based in Derry, using modern audio-visual technology to tackle cultural diversity with young people;
- **the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education**, advocate for, and supporter of, integrated schools across the region; and

- **WAVE**, a support group for all victims of the ‘troubles’, regardless of the nature of the victim (or the perpetrator).

Thumbnail sketches of these organisations are interspersed through the text. They are not, however, the focus of this report, because it is not an evaluation of their individual performance (a task many others more qualified than this writer have carried out) but an attempt to distil and disseminate more broadly what constitutes good practice.

They were chosen to cover diverse spheres of work, as well as a geographic spread. They could also be located at different points along a spectrum in their focus on reconciliation, as against other valuable goals: from front and centre (like Corrymeela), to more tangential (like the Nerve Centre) to even (as with WAVE) having a problematic relationship with reconciliation itself. And not only was the director of each organisation interviewed but so were a range of others—whether other staff, committee members or individuals otherwise associated (or formerly associated) in some way with its work. The aim was to ensure multiple perspectives were brought to bear, and in all 37 individuals agreed to semi-structured interviews (see appendices).

What was, however, striking was that it almost appeared as if the interviewees had collectively colluded in advance. Despite the diversity of organisational and individual locations, common themes were independently rehearsed again and again. This would therefore suggest that the lessons drawn are highly generalisable.

What was also surprising was the many occasions in which concepts drawn from economics

illuminated the discussions. Those involved in the work of reconciliation are engaged above all, as discussed below, in challenging stereotypes. But one widespread stereotype of such individuals *themselves* would be of the ‘well-meaning and woolly-minded’—as against, presumably, the ‘hard-headed and businesslike’. Yet, again and again, analogies from discussions of what makes for good economic performance proved highly germane to understanding what works in advancing reconciliation.

What was, perhaps, most remarkable, however, about the participants in this research—who gave of their valuable time extensively and with great courtesy—was the extent to which they confirmed the initial hypothesis. The importance of story-telling for reconciliation will also be underscored in this report. Yet the interviewees were, themselves, telling personal stories. Again and again, these were hugely impressive testaments to deep emotional commitment, told with the least self-promotion. Indeed, one interviewee was at pains to stress that the organisations involved should not be represented as elevated ‘experts’.

To link these two points, economists these days talk a lot about the importance of ‘human capital’: the success of firms depends not only on the physical capital invested in machinery and so on but, to an ever-increasing and perhaps greater extent, on the talents, skills and energies of those who work for them. The evidence of this research is that the value of human capital in NGOs working for reconciliation in Northern Ireland—despite very modest investment of money in them—is high indeed. In many ways it is a resource untapped by

government in tackling the ills of this divided society.

The succeeding chapters of this report provide substance as to what constitutes good practice in four senses. First, what are organisations working for reconciliation *about*? Secondly, what exactly do they *do*?—here the focus is on their key role in facilitating dialogue. Thirdly, how do they *multiply* the results, where their work ripples out into the wider society? And, finally, how do they contribute to the larger task of mending Northern Ireland’s damaged social fabric—and what can government and funders do to help them?

It was a great privilege to listen to these stories and Democratic Dialogue is indebted to everyone who told them. Hopefully, this report will do them justice in making their conclusions available to a wider audience. Even though the author has done little to add to them, except framing them in terms of common themes, responsibility for the conclusions rests, of course, with him alone. »



Architects of the future: Windmill Integrated Primary School

Reconciliation

First, three key questions have to be faced. What is reconciliation, and does Northern Ireland really need it? And what would ‘good practice’ in working for reconciliation be seeking to achieve?

In two previous Democratic Dialogue reports, Gráinne Kelly and Brandon Hamber (2005a, 2005b) have utilised international

experience to address a local problem—making the concept of ‘reconciliation’ meaningful on the ground. Surveying the literature on the subject and drawing on expertise from around the world, they developed a definition.

Interviews with practitioners in three Northern Ireland localities detected an uneasiness with the notion of reconciliation, partly

RECONCILIATION

Our working hypothesis is that reconciliation is a necessary process following conflict. However, we believe it is a voluntary act and cannot be imposed. It involves five interwoven and related strands:

- **Developing a shared vision of an interdependent and fair society**
- **Acknowledging and dealing with the past**
- **Building positive relationships**
- **Significant cultural and attitudinal change**
- **Substantial social, economic and political change**

stemming from a concern (for the secular) that it had an inherently theological connotation and partly, more generally, from a sense that it had a nebulous character. Interestingly, however, interviewees felt by and large quite comfortable with the definition developed by Kelly and Hamber (see box), subsequently taken up by the Special European Union Programmes Body to tighten funding criteria for the Peace II programme extension.

The research for this report would bear out the robustness of this definition. The themes addressed in the next two chapters can be referenced back to the five strands. Each of them has a clear resonance in what follows and in some cases, such as in the discussion of ‘relationships’, there is a one-to-one correlation. Notably, the one element whose relevance some of those interviewed by Kelly and Hamber were less sure about—‘substantial social, economic and political change’—emerged unexpectedly and frequently in this research, and is discussed under the heading of ‘social orientation’.

Ironically, some of those reluctant to use the language of reconciliation feel that it does not privilege *sufficiently* social and political change—that it implies that division in society is merely a product of individual prejudice and that this ignores wider social determinants. These are very important connections to make.

Richard Wilkinson (2005) has highlighted how in human and indeed other primate societies characterised by ‘dominance hierarchies’, violence tends to occur between those located down the pecking order and their near neighbours, over which has precedence, while those

at the top—deemed out of reach by their subordinates—tend to escape scot-free. As an explanation of why Northern Ireland’s major division by social class engenders nothing like the reaction caused by the minor differences between working-class Protestants and working-class Catholics, this is hard to better.

In such societies, according to Michael Chance (cited in Wilkinson, 2005: 252), ‘We are primarily concerned with self security ... [and] rank, hierarchy, convention and maintaining good order.’ In contrast to this ‘insecure and fearful’ environment, in more egalitarian societies—again, including some in the animal world—the atmosphere is ‘carefree and creative’ and ‘group members form a network of social relationships and are able to communicate fearlessly and openly with each other’.

These words and phrases—creativity, networks, safe spaces for dialogue—will also recur in the discussion below. And this leads to a key conclusion: not only is fundamental social change an intrinsic feature of reconciliation, but reconciliation has to be at the heart of any progressive politics for Northern Ireland.

The publication of *A Shared Future* (OFMDFM, 2005) by government in 2005, regardless of the limits of the departmental commitments it contained, represented a signal statement. For the first time since partition, the government of Northern Ireland—any government: unionist, direct-rule or power-sharing—affirmed that Northern Ireland was a deeply divided society and that this was politically intolerable. The unionist regime had essentially given Catholics the options only of assimilation, emigration or a ghettoised existence.

Direct rule had replaced this (bourgeois) Protestant-monopoly power by technocracy. And the first power-sharing administration had abolished the Community Relations Commission—on a naïve, job-done, assumption—while the second had failed even to discuss the review of community relations it had itself commissioned—never mind act upon it—before it was suspended.

A Shared Future argues the case for reconciliation mainly on grounds of the socio-economic costs of division. These are real and substantial. But there is an overriding and compelling moral-cum-political case. As the chief executive of the CRC, Duncan Morrow (interviewed for this research in connection with the work of Future Ways), has put it, London and Dublin have been seeking to establish functioning power-sharing arrangements for Northern Ireland in the expectation that ‘a shared future’ would follow, whereas the truth may be the contrary: only when there is wide-scale commitment to a shared future, including among political parties, will stable power-sharing be possible.

A Shared Future has therefore to be a key commitment for government in Northern Ireland—again, any government—for the foreseeable future. But it can only move from the level of the slogan to the street if non-governmental organisations and individual practitioners are given the opportunity to lift it off the page—particularly given the lack of commitment of those regional politicians locked into mutual antagonism, whose sectarian clienteles it threatens to undermine. And innovative work by NGOs and practitioners may

provide important pointers as to what statutory agencies, many of which are struggling with this complex challenge, may contribute to the ‘triennial action plans’ (OFMDFM, 2006) through which the policy will be effected.

And what is the problem to which good practice in reconciliation might be the solution? It may help to take a step back and ask how communal divisions are sustained.

We have, as Amartya Sen (2006: xiii) argues, ‘inescapably plural identities’: male or female, working-class or middle-class, old or young, sporty or otherwise, and so on and so on. It follows that at any one time, in any one situation, we have to reflect on which of our affiliations is important. And so: ‘Central to leading a human life, therefore, are the responsibilities of choice and reasoning. In contrast, violence is promoted by the cultivation of a sense of inevitability about some allegedly unique—often belligerent—identity that we are supposed to have and which apparently makes extensive demands on us (sometimes of a most disagreeable kind). The imposition of an allegedly unique identity is often a crucial component of the “martial art” of fomenting sectarian confrontation.’

It is the process of stereotyping which denies the inherent complexity of every individual’s identity, reducing him or her to a mere cipher for the group, to whom a negative enemy-image can then all too easily be attached. A stereotype is ‘a highly simplified representation of social realities’ and stereotypes create ‘a black and white design’ that leaves no room for

diversity (Bauman, 2002: 115).

And it is in and through ‘degenerate spirals of communication’ (Giddens, 1994: 245) between opposing communal protagonists that tensions are maintained and reproduced. Projecting on to a demonised ‘other’ aspects of ourselves that we cannot face reproduces conflict and violence (Volkan, 1997). On the one hand, one’s ‘own side’ can thus be recruited to the role of passive and blameless victim. On the other, to the ‘other side’ can be attributed all responsibility for each twist in the spiral (Beck, 1997: 83-84). In Northern Ireland this has come to be called the ‘blame game’.

We unavoidably operate with conceptions of the world that are inherently partial and limited. And we fill in the ‘gaps’ with assumptions, estimates and guesses which may or may not relate to any evidence and may or may not cohere with anything else we profess to believe.

But a modesty of self-regard can help prevent us engaging in destructive stereotyping (Ignatieff, 1999: 62): ‘We are likely to be more tolerant toward other identities only if we learn to like our own a little less.’ By the same token, the more we can not only know of others but also the more empathy we can feel with them, the less likely are we to be dependent on stereotyped representations in intercultural encounters.

This point challenges, by the by, much of what has become known in Northern Ireland—to use an awkward neologism—as ‘single-identity work’. This is, ironically, premised on a stereotype itself: that Protestants, as a group, have an identity ‘deficit’ while Catholics, as a group, are ‘confident’ about

theirs. It’s an odd ‘confidence’ that sees working-class Catholic neighbourhoods still predominating at the bottom of the social hierarchy decades after the civil-rights movement.

The politics of ‘multiculturalism’ (Barry, 2001) has emerged in recent decades as an understandable response to the subordination of members of ethnic (including religious) minorities in multi-ethnic states, such as historically Catholics in Northern Ireland (however much sectarian domination was cross-cut by class division). But it has had the unintended effect of hardening communal divisions, including in Britain, where anxiety has mounted since the 2001 riots in northern English mill towns and the 2005 London bombs about the ghettoisation of Muslim communities. Bizarrely, however, the commission established by the government to explore interculturalism and social cohesion has been told discussion of ‘faith schools’ is off-limits—despite the obvious critical lesson from Northern Ireland, of their role in reproducing stereotypes, that Sen (2006) and others have drawn.

As Jeff Spinner-Halev (1999: 65) has argued, ‘A multiculturalism that tries to create a society with several distinctive cultures deeply threatens citizenship. In this kind of multicultural society, people are not interested in citizenship; they are not interested in making the state a better place for all; they care little about how public policies affect most people or about their fellow citizens. Even the term “fellow citizen” might strike them as strange. What they have are fellow Jews, or fellow blacks, or fellow Muslims, or fellow Sikhs. Citizens, however, are not their fellows.’

If multiculturalism has been associated with a competitive ‘politics of recognition’, focusing on communal assertion *vis-à-vis* the state—as in Northern Ireland’s endless contest for ‘parity of esteem’—an *intercultural* perspective focuses rather on the relationships between diverse citizens, and so places a premium on dialogue, with a view to reducing communal tensions.

And if the proliferation of identity politics has coincided with the widening of social inequalities (Barry, 2001: 325), underlying an intercultural perspective must be an egalitarian conception of citizenship. Otherwise, self-regard will always take priority over regard for the other and dialogue will never succeed, as one side (the more powerful) will not be listening.

Good practice, then, is likely to be about challenging stereotypes through intercultural dialogue. David Stevens of Corrymeela encapsulated this when he said that ‘good practice is ultimately about giving people some capacity for self-reflection and a capacity to try to enter somebody else’s world’. The interviews excerpted below put rich flesh on the bones of this argument. ❧

Ethos

The first set of themes to emerge from the interviews concerned the ethos of organisations working for reconciliation. And the first issue to emerge in that context was **clarity** of purpose.

As Alan McBride of WAVE put it, ‘you need to have an understanding of what it is you’re trying to do ... Then after that it’s just a matter really of finding what you need in order to support that work that you’re doing.’ And Nichola Lynagh of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education said: ‘There’s something around just what is it that we’re trying to do. What do we want to transform this society from and to?’

Tony Kennedy of Co-operation Ireland agreed, reflecting that ‘maybe the most important thing is to be clear about what you want to achieve because I think that’s where we as a society blew the Peace money. If anybody ever comes to write an honest record of what happened with the European Peace money, you would have to conclude that we as a society

blew most of it on non-peace programmes.’ If anyone came to him for advice on starting up a new group, he would say: ‘They would need to think about what they wanted to achieve by it. What is their aim?’

Often this comes down to a paragraph or two which clearly identifies the aim of the organisation. Terry Doherty of Holywell Trust said that ‘everything we do has an element of “Where does this fit into that mission statement?”’

Katie Hanlon has been director of Ballynafeigh Community Development Association for over two decades. As she recalled, ‘when I took over Ballynafeigh in 1985 first—I still have no job description or anything else, I never wrote one for myself—I inherited the job, which was the constitution with the opening paragraph underlined and the objects. So, actually, I was employed to uphold the constitution. I’ve taken that job very seriously and that’s what I see as my role.’

Clarity of purpose easily lends itself to

clarity of message. Deborah Girvan of NICIE said of her communications effort on behalf of the organisation: ‘Same consistent message you keep repeating and repeating and repeating. And then you hear it being fed back to you, you know you’ve made it!’

These, are, of course, lessons applicable to any organisation. What makes voluntary organisations different, by and large, from (say) businesses—though much comes later on the surprising similarities—is that they are driven by values rather than economic imperatives.

Such values can suffuse an organisation, so that the aim or mission does not become a set of warm words forgotten as soon as drafted. Ms Lynagh applied it to the integrated school as a practical example: ‘I think it’s more important that the school holds at its heart an ethos, a vision, of community relations where they’re really trying to pull every value that’s ethically right—like equity and understanding and relationships—to the top.’ The key then was to ‘make them living, more than just in your corporate plan or in the school development plan’.

Dr Morrow agreed: ‘I hate it because it is clichéd and it’s extremely limited in its value, but the “Equity Diversity Interdependence” language which emerged ... [was because] we had to tell people this wasn’t nationalism and unionism. This was an ethical, value-led project and we were insisting that the national projects be subject to the ethical framework, rather than the other way round.’

The great strength of the slogan is that it does hold together the elements that are often unhelpfully counterpoised—equity and interdependence—in any discussion of diversity in

Northern Ireland. But it is a mouthful and Northern Ireland already appeared to have more acronyms per square kilometre than anywhere else before ‘EDI’ was added to them.

So, if it has become ‘clichéd’, is there something beyond EDI which can encapsulate the values of organisations working for reconciliation? Interculturalism may provide an answer, as discussed below.

A virtue of clearly defining an organisation’s aim is it implies identifying a state of affairs, a goal, which it will work to realise. It is easy for organisations to keep ticking over, doing each day roughly what they did the last. It is even easy to think that one is achieving, by measuring the outputs of the work, such as the number of attendees at a training session.

But what really matters is the outcome(s) that one is trying to achieve. As Mr Kennedy encapsulated it, ‘that’s really the focus of our strategic plan, because somebody described this to me as “oh, is this the survival of Co-operation Ireland?” and we were saying, “absolutely not”’.

Outcomes in terms of reconciliation are clearly much harder to assess than ‘bums on seats’. But Einstein warned against the tendency that what gets counted, counts. As Sandra Peake of WAVE argued, with an eye to funders, ‘we are being driven by targets and whatever, but actually the qualitative value of our work, which is often not measured, is overlooked and probably the least rated, and yet actually it’s most important’.

It is tempting to reduce the evidence funders, and government, seek for monitoring and evaluation to *indicators* which can be readily

measured. As Sanderson (2000: 216) complains, 'concern with understanding, explanation and learning is subordinated in discussions of evaluation in official circles to issues of measurement and accountability'. Indicators may well exclude important aspects which can only be detected by qualitative methods (Sanderson, 2000: 226, 223).

One of the things that makes reconciliation such a challenging task for governments is that, like many contemporary political issues, it is an outcome that no one department is able to 'deliver' on its own. It's the same story with other key concerns like social inclusion or sustaining the ecosystem. They are not just challenges of huge scale but they also represent complex combinations of problems. As already indicated, a broad understanding of reconciliation embraces social, economic and political aspects, as well as the more psychological and emotional.

It is easy to be daunted by this, but another way of looking at it is to say that individuals do not experience such issues broken into convenient departmental boxes either—that's why they often feel driven 'from pillar to post' when they engage public services. Yet voluntary organisations can address these challenges in a more personalised way. And they can sometimes bring together a range of competences which can, under one roof, meet the different aspects of that person's needs. A person attending a victims' group like WAVE, for example, may want advice about problems with handling chronic physical pain but may also be interested in having the support of a befriending

Ballynafeigh Community Development Association

Founded: 1974

Base: Belfast

Purpose: to sustain, support and celebrate mixed communities and neighbourhoods within Ballynafeigh and elsewhere

Director: Katie Hanlon

Web site: www.bcda.net

E-mail: bcda@bcda.net

Signal achievement: establishment of a rich social fabric to sustain Ballynafeigh as a shared neighbourhood, in the face of economic, sectarian and demographic challenges



relationship.

So taking a whole-organisation, **holistic approach** may be key to good practice. Indeed, WAVE sees itself, according to Ms Peake, as 'providing very much a holistic service'.

Conventional organisational hierarchies, where it is assumed knowledge is concentrated at the top and is filtered down as orders to the bottom, may get in the way of this approach. Modern firms have, however, sought to flatten

hierarchies, realising the importance of the intelligence gleaned about their product—how it is made, how it sells—from those dealing directly with the customer.

Eamonn Deane of Holywell Trust pointed out how funders often operated with traditional expectations of line-management which militated against the ethos of working for reconciliation: ‘The only line management that would ever happen here is ... two colleagues sitting chatting together to see how they can support one another. But it’s not line management in the sense that I have seen in other organisations, in that hierarchical sense. If you create a new society, if you are building a peaceful society, then we can’t adopt those old ways of being together.’

NICIE, for example—and this is one of those subtle ways in which the socially progressive and the conciliatory intersect—is determined that tackling controversial issues should be done on a whole-school basis. As Ms Lynagh explained it, ‘it’s an absolute must we have classroom assistants in, and it’s an absolute must that we have the admin staff, people who greet you. So we say it has to be a whole-school approach: we have to have all represented.’ In their latest report as chaplains of Lagan College, Helen Killick and Sr Anne Kilroy insist that integration ‘is an issue that needs to permeate every aspect of school life’.

Derick Wilson of Future Ways described its work with local authorities in similar vein, pointing out that ‘where you get a leisure centre attendant and a cleansing official and a chief executive having a new dialogue about the needs of the town, those are things that don’t

happen just out of equality legislation. They happen out of the good-relations approach.’

Ann Anderson-Porter of Co-operation Ireland echoed this too. Arguing that the organisation’s staff should face the same challenges as those it was funding, she said that ‘we want every single person who works in this organisation—no matter what their job is, from the cleaner to the EU staff—to have gone through the same processes’.

This subtle understanding of the fabric of a successful organisation is not easily captured by funders, however. Anxious to avoid committing themselves to giving core support to organisations to meet their overheads, they tend to support projects instead.

Ms Hanlon decided a robust response was required to the fragmenting effects this was unwittingly having on BCDA:

Projectitis forced people to work for the project and forget the organisation was an organisation—it was a holistic thing. So you had to work in straight lines and people got absolutely focused on these straight lines to deliver their targets, their goals and all the rest of it, and their budget. So even the funder itself only saw the project; it didn’t see the organisation. So I was trying to run an organisation which was more like seven or eight different organisations and the holistic element was going, and so were some of the visions and ideals and all the rest of it. I had to kind of smash that in order to push people to realise that there was a higher body that they were working for.

Effective organisations, however, do not just combine the skills of those who work for them. They achieve a result greater than the sum of their parts through

teamwork. As Ms Girvan described it, ‘it’s only by really working together as a team in here that you can really pull out the key bits which really matter’.

Organisations working for reconciliation are essentially engaged in problem-solving. The problem has no predictable solution, easily arrived at, and there are legitimate differences of perspective as to what the solution is. This is not like making widgets.

Thus, Mr Wilson argued that ‘if the organisational culture is fair, if it is open to the diversity of talents within the membership of its staff, and if it is committed—now we use the language of a shared future—then the “good”, the thoughtful or the learning organisation will use the insights of its traffic wardens, of its cleansing officials, of its leisure centre attendants, of its front-of-house administrative staff, as well as those working in policy and management. The eyes and ears of those organisations are going to be greater if diverse interests and talents of the members of staff of that organisation can be made into some sort of common purpose or common future.’

Eamon McCallion of Community Relations in Schools concurred: ‘You need to reflect in all you do with your team, with other individuals, and to learn from those experiences and to draw on other people’s learning. And I think one of the other models of good practice is to do that wider than your own organisation.’ This allusion to wider networks will be developed in a later chapter.

Discussing how staff at one integrated school had addressed issues to do with integration, Ms Lynagh said that ‘part of it was team-

building. There was a hidden-curriculum agenda which was the team-building—just that they know each other better, be able to work on each other’s strengths.’

BCDA (2005: 21) insists that ‘collaborative action and teamwork are an everyday feature’ of its practice. Philip Whyte described how he and his colleague brought together experiences from their contacts on either side of the sectarian divide in Ballynafeigh and discussed them with the director, Ms Hanlon, ensuring the organisation could take an overview of what was happening in the community: ‘I think it’s a team thing as well—we have a great team in this organisation. That includes where me and Gerry [Tubritt] will always make sure that we meet after key meetings to debrief along with Katie. We’re constantly in this office after a meeting to say “well this happened, this happened, this happened”. So everybody’s on the ball with what’s happening and then where Katie can take us, the next step, [is to] look at the bigger picture and say “well maybe we need to do this but maybe we just need to wait”.’

Ms Hanlon linked teamwork to a sense of common purpose within the organisation, arguing that ‘when we’re all working together we all know that there’s a sort of a common goal that we’re working to’.

There is another, particular, reason why teamwork is so important in organisations working for reconciliation. As Ms Girvan put it crisply, ‘It’s not easy work, community relations.’ The work of Future Ways has never been easy but Dr Morrow reflected that ‘we had a trust in the team and a trust in our mutual ability’.

Co-operation Ireland

Founded: 1979

Base: Belfast and Dublin

Purpose: to promote practical co-operation between the people of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, to facilitate the development of a shared and stable island

Director: Tony Kennedy

Web site: www.cooperationireland.org

E-mail: info@cooperationireland.org

Signal achievement: stimulation of people-to-people networks across the island which have been key to the 'normalisation' of north-south relationships

Des Fegan now works for Co-operation Ireland but his background is in business. He has found that 'the one thing working in this sector, the quality of human resources you have is exceptional and I think we're very fortunate for that. They are very committed people ...' And this **activist idealism** emerges as another feature of good practice. Indeed, in the wider context of the voluntary sector in Northern Ireland, 72 per cent of organisations surveyed by the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action said they believed volunteers were crucial to the running of their organisation (NICVA, 2006).

As Ms Girvan of NICIE put it, 'this is like a vocation to many of us. We feel that we're really doing something, that we're trying to make a difference, that we're succeeding in it.' And Jennifer Gormley, formerly a schoolteacher, now working with young people in the very different atmosphere of the Nerve Centre, said: 'I still like my luxuries, but there's nothing better than getting up in the morning and looking forward to where you're going to be ... and that

would apply to the artists and animators who could well be in Dreamworks doing fantastically financially rewarding things, but they choose to be here.'

Organisations like this, where people get paid for their work rather than working to get paid—and this is not for a moment to suggest that they should be paid less or that their goodwill should be exploited—also attract the energy of volunteers, who may bring additional skills to the organisation. At WAVE, for instance, access to more than 100 volunteers brings a huge 17,000+ contacts with the public in a year (WAVE, 2005). And particularly committed volunteers—some of whom have suffered terrible loss themselves—have joined the board or advisory groups. Co-operation Ireland similarly draws on volunteer effort, including from people with business connections for fundraising.

Voluntary activism has been the spearhead of the movement for integrated schools, and explains why it has succeeded in establishing more than 60 schools in the teeth of adversity in the past quarter century. The 'joined-up' manual co-produced by Corrymeela and NICIE (Potter and Lynagh, 2005: 35) cites Margaret Mead: 'Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed people can change the world. Indeed it is the only thing that ever has.'

Michael Wardlow of NICIE explained the dynamic driving the founders of a new school, a dynamic challenging the fatalism and powerlessness which, arguably, sustains sectarian division in Northern Ireland more than popular commitment to it. He said: 'So there's certain characteristics that determine those type of people and generally they're bloody-minded.'

Generally they are people who really have considered this and really, having heard from us what this means, still are determined to take it on. And generally there around four to six people. So you have a small core of bloody-minded people, in the main people who have a child who they want to go into this system ... And there is this feeling that “if we don’t do it no one else will”, that “if I walk away from this today this will never happen”. From such a small origin, he said, ‘it becomes almost this unstoppable force’.

Volunteers have played a crucial role at Corrymeela, where they may stay for a year at a time. Dr Stevens pointed out the benefits this may offer the volunteers themselves, as well as the organisation, noting that ‘these people are having the opportunity to work with a huge diversity of groups and as the year goes on some of them would be doing programmes with groups. So people start to see that they have skills that they never thought they had. Particularly working-class kids from Rathcoole or west Belfast whose formal education capacities have been negative—they suddenly discover skills which they can use.’

There will be more to say later on just how critical a role ex-volunteers from Corrymeela have played over the decades. Dr Stevens expressed real concern in this context about a perverse effect, more recently, of the Peace programme in skewing organisations towards bidding for paid staff at the expense of voluntary activism. He warned of ‘a real danger that—to use a good biblical term—the last state will be worse than the first, when the money has worked its way through’.

Channelling that activism and idealism into concrete practices introduces another theme which recurred in the interviews: **creativity**. One of the difficulties conventional hierarchical organisations engender is a tendency towards routine. Indeed, in some areas of the civil service—for example, in north-south co-operation in Ireland—the notion of ‘no surprises’ has been elevated to a positive principle.

One interviewee who had previously worked in a public body in Northern Ireland said: ‘If you did anything wrong you were lambasted. It was a very bureaucratic, very formal, very civil-service sort of thing, and it stymies an awful lot of creativity. That’s another thing: you have to be very creative ...’

BCDA (2005: 25) is committed to ‘developing, testing, and sharing models of creative practice’. Funders might also not find the uncertainty attractive but Ms Hanlon said she would be ‘very loathe to drop the creative approaches because that’s the most challenging part of the work’. And it does bring results: discussions in the NICIE team generated the small-footprint image which won the organisation a public-relations award and which captures very visually the child-centred, future-oriented ethos of the organisation.

The traditional classroom in Northern Ireland would have been associated with didactic rather than interactive teaching methods. Citizenship education, however, is being thought of with the acquisition of more critical skills in mind. Integrated schools have tended to be at the forefront of such developments. And Mr Wardlow argued that ‘there’s all sorts

of creative ways you can do that in a classroom, by role-playing and group work, where you can actually demonstrate when this works well and when it doesn't.

As Dr Stevens had said of volunteering, creative approaches can also be a social leveller. Ms Gormley affirmed that 'it's the only thing I think actually gives the level playing-field to everyone, and there's not much in life that actually can do that, but that's where creativity is unique'. There will be a lot more to say, specifically on the creative arts, in the next chapter.

Inevitably, creativity involves risk-taking, but risk-averse organisations will never challenge the fatalist acceptance of sectarian division. Maureen Hetherington of the Junction, describing her work with Holywell Trust in developing its 'Towards Understanding and Healing' project, had a clear invocation to others. She urged them to 'take the big risks, the huge leaps of faith and the knowledge that you could actually make this happen and that it would be okay, because there's so many times whenever you hear people say "oh I'd love to do that but I know this will happen, I know", and it blocks people from being creative.' Or, as Ms Lynagh of NICIE put it, 'if you're interested in change it's a bumpy ride'.

Creativity is at the heart of innovation. And innovation, as will be evident later, is one of the keys to achieving wider progress.

Clarity of focus, teamwork, voluntarism and creativity will all help to sustain any organisation, in the face of the huge challenge posed by the task of reconciliation. As Northern Ireland's decades of violent

'troubles' recede, what heaves into view is the Labour of Sisyphus which must follow them. This puts **long-termism** at a premium: instant victories can not be expected, but many setbacks can. It takes considerable resilience to withstand them.

Dr Stevens of Corrymeela, which has entered its fifth decade, said: 'The task of reconciliation in this society is a 30- or 40-year task and that raises questions about what a reconciled society would look like, but it's certainly not what we have at the moment!' His former colleague Mary Montague, now at Tides, agreed that 'we have to take very, very seriously the fact that we're not even close to reconciliation and recognise that the journey that we have to make is going to take an awfully long time—and maybe not even [realised] within our generation, because people are carrying so much hurt'.

Ms Peake of WAVE concurred: 'I suppose it's about acknowledging there's no quick fix to it.' Mr Wardlow's advice to anyone wanting to set up a new group working for reconciliation was: 'Think ahead ten to 15 years if you're looking at an organisation.'

But effective organisations do not just engender individuals sufficiently resilient to meet this challenge. They also incrementally accumulate capacities which can be the platform for further progress. Ms Hanlon of BCDA reflected: 'I believe the success of this organisation is longevity, is a lot to do with a body of work built over time. And change: very small incremental steps, layer on layer on layer—working on with individuals, building up a relationship over a long period of time, often from childhood right through to adulthood, right

through to later on.’

Similarly, Lisa Kelly of Tides recalled her experience at Corrymeela: ‘Corrymeela has such a huge benefit because people do build such strong relationships within their experience of Corrymeela, and that’s what’s quite consistent with the organisation, that it has been there for so long, that you have generations of families. That was one of the things I noticed as family worker: you had grandparents and parents and children, and granny had been there during the height of the “troubles” and then the mum had been there and then kids come back.’

But this again raises huge questions about the funding of reconciliation work. This, in economic terms, is a classic ‘public good’. Unlike private goods and services, public goods are non-exclusive and non-rival, so they cannot be bought and sold in competitive markets—the air we breathe, for example. But because they are public goods, in a capitalist society they may be under-supplied because of ‘market failure’: for a firm that pollutes the air, the pollution is a mere ‘externality’ that falls on someone else and so need not concern them. And individuals feel powerless to tackle the problem, which they may with resignation accept. So public intervention, as with clean-air legislation, is needed.

Reconciliation falls into this public-good category. We all would benefit from it but it is not a commodity which can be supplied to the market and individuals face a co-ordination dilemma in securing it. Non-governmental organisations working to resolve that dilemma thus need and deserve—depending, of course,

on how good their practice is—external financial support from government or charitable foundations.

Yet funders are reluctant to operate with anything like the decades-long horizon of reconciliation in Northern Ireland in mind. Dr Stevens said: ‘So this is long-term activity and therefore it needs long-term responses, and one of the difficulties is that the funding structure here is so short-term and the money is starting to diminish.’ This can have perverse effects on the operation of organisations in turn. Shona Borthwick of Tides, again formerly of Corrymeela, said the short-termism of funders meant that ‘you’re always trying to come up with a new initiative instead of just consolidating and developing what you have’.

As suggested in the previous chapter, and hinted at repeatedly above, working for reconciliation cannot be detached from a broader **social orientation**. Once more contradicting the stereotype of the ‘woolly-minded well-meaning’, this research has found again and again steely individuals with a thought-through commitment to the pursuit of a better society—however one defines that.

In the real world, of course, individuals do not bracket off Northern Ireland’s sectarian challenges from other problems they may face in their everyday lives. Organisations that want to engage in reconciliation and stay relevant, therefore, have to make these connections—without spreading their net so widely as to lose their clarity of purpose.

Karin Eyben of Future Ways gave a concrete instance of what this can mean, discussing

the organisation's work with local authorities. She said that 'in Coleraine as an example, we did some workshops with the bin men and they didn't have any toilet facilities. In fact the place where they were located had terrible toilet facilities and no kitchen—basic issues. And it was clear that they were never going to engage in this discussion until their basic humanity had been recognised.'

Her colleague, Mr Wilson, bemoaning the way in which 'the political leadership pretends that different traditions in their different ways own the poverty agenda', said: 'Of course there are spatially concentrated groups where the poverty is also an issue, but can we try to move it away from being the possession of the tradition to being issues of individual citizen poverty that we as a society need to be concerned about?' For him, 'community relations work is now core to the lifeblood of whether we have a new society'.

In Ballynafeigh, the main threat to the mixed nature of the community does not come from sectarian politics or paramilitarism: it comes from the 'invisible hand' of the housing market. The restrictions on how much housing associations can bid for properties and the grants available to private developers have led to many properties being bought by developers and turned into houses in multiple occupation, where the greatest profit lies. That tends to replace a stable population with a transient one, and in the process the balance of the area is becoming more skewed towards the Catholic side.

Recently, Ms Hanlon (2006) has written: 'If Ballynafeigh is left to the mercy of market

forces there is a real and present danger that the social diversity which local residents and Ballynafeigh Community Development Association (BCDA) have fought so hard to protect over the past 31 troubled years will be irrevocably damaged.'

Unavoidably, therefore, BCDA is drawn into policy debates about the regulation of the housing market to promote the public good of a shared community. As Gerry Tubritt of the association said, 'in any given day I'm looking at youth provision, housing, the rights of people on low incomes, the relationship between Catholic residents and Protestant residents, between old and young, and they're all interconnected in my head'.

A convenient stereotype of integrated schools—rehearsed with gusto to this author by the former and current leaders of a major political party in Northern Ireland in conversation some years ago—is that they cater for the middle class and are of no relevance to those living in divided working-class neighbourhoods. Yet NICIE (2006) affirms in its 'statement of principles' that children should be encouraged to identify with 'the oppressed and victims of injustice'.

Sister Kilroy of Lagan College, the first integrated school in Northern Ireland, described its 'justice group', which engages senior pupils. In the group, she said, 'we focus on development issues and also Northern Ireland issues; some of them are coming from a church background, some are atheist; and it's the one area that kids can come together, it's an issue that draws them together—the issue of making the world a better place'.

Errol Lemon, outgoing head of Brownlow College, another school supported by NICIE, said that ‘there’s all sorts of community-based projects that go on from time to time. We’ve an inter-generation project, for instance, with the senior pupils. They go out into the local day centres for the elderly and they make the tea and buns, they bring them in once a year for a big bash—basically, tea and sandwiches—and [they] put on a concert for them.’

Under the heading of ‘equality’, the statement of principles from NICIE (2006) commits schools to ‘be democratic in all relationships between staff, parents and governors and, where possible, make decisions affecting school life on a consensual basis’. Indeed, NICIE claims to have achieved a first in terms of democratic engagement, beyond the establishment of schools councils. Mr Wardlow explained that ‘one of our schools has young people actually on the board of governors as of right. It is the only school in Northern Ireland that we know it happens in, integrated or otherwise, in Dungannon. And those young people do not believe they’re a token.’

Ms Gormley of the Nerve Centre gave an example of the social dimension to this work. Describing the use of an animation resource with primary schoolchildren in the organisation’s cinema, she said: ‘For me that is all about social and personal, P4s. One boy at the back of the cinema when I asked “does anyone know what ‘empathy’ means?” ... says ‘it’s knowing what other people feel’. And I am thinking that’s absolutely wonderful. Do you know what I learned afterwards? The teacher came to me and she said “that wee boy, Stephen, he’s

stated and he never speaks”.’

These could all be seen by some as concerns only for those on the liberal-left side of the political spectrum. Yet Mr Wilson also highlighted the impact of sectarian affiliations on business: ‘If we build a society of narrow associations ... what are we creating? It’s certainly not a high-qualification, high-value based economy where people are at ease with difference.’

Similarly, Mr Deane of Holywell Trust described its imaginative proposal for a shared-city neighbourhood within Derry’s walls. He

Corrymeela Community

Founded: 1965

Base: Belfast and Ballycastle

Purpose: to promote intercommunal dialogue, support victims of violence and injustice, and address issues of faith and ethics

Director: David Stevens

Web site: www.corrymeela.org

E-mail: enquiries@corrymeela.org

Signal achievement: generation of a corps of hundreds of committed and skilled individuals who have animated reconciliation activity during the ‘troubles’ and since



pointed out that ‘we’ve been saying to the statutory agencies and to the decision makers, so long as this city is perceived by itself and by others as being exclusively Nationalist or divided by the river then this city has no future—it has no commercial future’.

One of the ways in which social thinkers have described the world we live in today, where we can no longer take for granted social roles, has been in terms of ‘reflexivity’. As Anthony Giddens (1994: 86) puts it, ‘Decisions have to be taken on the basis of a more or less continuous reflection on the conditions of one’s action.’ Two aspects of ‘reflexivity’—organisational and individual—are germane to this discussion.

Organisationally, it emerges that **self-criticism** is another key to good practice. As Ms Anderson-Porter put it succinctly, ‘we’ll probably learn more from the things that don’t work’. Mr McCallion of CRIS agreed that ‘a lot of the success that takes place is through failure, paradoxically’.

He recognised that ‘it’s a difficult thing to do, to say “you know, I’ve made a mess of this” and put your hands in the air, but I think it’s only through that reflective learning that we grow’. Ms Montague of Tides similarly urged those working in this arena ‘not to be afraid to say, “look group, I’ve made a mistake here” and to take the flak or whatever: “I thought that would have worked; it hasn’t worked”—and actually be prepared just to put your hands up and say “I’ve made a mistake”. I think that’s very, very important.’

Martin Melarkey of the Nerve Centre was

self-critical in a manner typical of the interviewees. He said that ‘we certainly wouldn’t stand here and say the practice has fulfilled our aspirations or what we think the potential is’. But that restless urge to do better fuels continuous improvement.

Ms Kelly of Tides said that time needed to be created for this self-assessment. She warned that ‘often you’re going from one thing to the next’ and so it was impossible ‘just to sit down and have some time to breathe and reflect on it’, to address why ‘this didn’t work—how can we do this better?—so you have that idea of good practice’.

Individually, what is at issue here is a disposition towards **tolerance**. This was often captured by interviewees in terms of a capacity metaphorically to stand outside oneself and monitor one’s own behaviour. Susan McEwan of Corrymeela described it as ‘exploration of the lens through which you look at life and, in a community or a society like ours that has been so divided, looking at that lens by its very nature helps you explore the lens that you [use to] look at the other’.

Ms Eyben of Future Ways spoke of ‘developing a level of self-awareness that is sufficient to realise the normality of how you do things. What is normal actually needs to be abnormal in terms of reconciliation, and *vice versa*.’

But this is not easy, as individual reflexivity inevitably entails a capacity for self-criticism. Ms Lynagh of NICIE said of her group work that ‘it’s normal for me to come back from a session having 20 questions about myself,

going into deep reflection which sometimes tortures—that sense of being open to question and rethink and relook at things’. Ms Hetherington of the Junction agreed that ‘the cost is that you have to either re-examine or think through what your values and belief systems are’.

Yet it is possible. NICIE (2006) is committed, through schooling, to ‘the development of autonomous individuals with the capacity to think, question and research’. And one of the ways reflexivity can be stimulated is through role-playing. Mr Lemon told of how Brownlow College had used role-playing to address controversial issues:

How do you teach the hunger strike, for instance, in a mixed class in year 11? And we have never had a problem with dealing with controversial issues like that, say Bloody Sunday or the hunger strike, in a mixed class, but it does give you the opportunity to take the children out of their comfort zone and challenge them. You could have a situation where you would be doing a role play on the hunger strike and you could have a boy from Mourneview, a very loyalist area, being Bobby Sands, and having obviously done a bit of background reading and so on, but putting the case for the hunger strike. You could have somebody from the Garvaghy Road, from a very nationalist background, being Margaret Thatcher or the British government spokesperson. And that happens and they are quite capable within the safety, if you like, of the classroom, approaching that as an academic exercise and it hasn’t ever been an issue and people are quite happy to do that. The pupils are; the worry is from the staff more than the pupils.

Like others, Dean Lee of NICIE described this process as ‘empathising and putting themselves in another person’s shoes’. That task is made easier by this no-man-is-an-island insight from Mr Wilson of Future Ways: ‘The other is always in us. But we have a society that has promoted this notion that others are *completely* other—they are completely outside us.’

Eamon Baker of Holywell suggested that we all ‘have this capacity to disown the bits of ourselves that we don’t like. So the way I could disown the bit of myself that I don’t like is I disown the perpetrator. Right? So I tell you I’m a victim ...’ Describing how the war memorial in the Diamond in Derry had previously been socially invisible to him, he said: ‘I needed to do a substantial bit of work on myself in terms of the bits of me that I repudiate, the shadowy bits of me, before I could see something that was in our city. And so my speculation is we all need to do that as one way of moving forward.’

It is from others, by the same token, that a more reflexive sense of self is acquired. Mr McCallion described the best thing about being involved with Corrymeela: ‘It gave me the opportunity to look at myself through others’ eyes, if that makes sense.’ And Mr Deane of Holywell said: ‘I think the best practice that I have ever experienced from others and from what is in here have been practices or situations which made me stop and think about an old problem with fresh eyes.’

And if the inherent uncertainty of a reflexive disposition has its costs, it also appears to have larger benefits. At first sight, one of the baffling aspects of the interviews for this project was that age was an irrelevant factor,

even though the participants varied widely from those in their 20s to those in their 60s. Older interviewees were just as sharp, just as enthusiastic and just as idealistic as younger participants. Of course, they were more likely to have grey hair, But Mr Deane's comment may explain why their age had not wearied them—that experience of being continually 'refreshed' through an openness to new ways of thinking about old problems.

A reflexive perspective naturally leads to a questioning of what was earlier described as 'multiculturalism'. For it challenges the idea that individuals can simply be aggregated into 'communities' which are in turn equated with whole 'cultures'. Research by Bloomer and Weinreich (2003) has shown the invalidity of this simplifying perspective in capturing the complexity of individual affiliations in Northern Ireland.

Mr Wilson of Future Ways insisted: 'I have a bigger identity than just that identity that's been given to me. My identity is much more permeable. And that's going to be a major challenge in this society—people having more permeable identities here running through things. Or when you're in a group and a woman from a Protestant background talks about having a Catholic father and so on, and *vice versa*, which happens all the time. You begin to see people say "this identity stuff doesn't quite fit".'

Dr Morrow of the CRC further questioned the practicality of multiculturalism. He argued that while 'the multiculturalist says "let's live and let live"', as an alternative to people being required to assimilate to a dominant culture, 'it

doesn't work either because actually we are having to share the space'.

This leads in turn to a similar-sounding but actually quite different approach to handling cultural diversity: **interculturalism**. Mr Lee of NICIE insisted that 'there's a deliberate use of the term now, interculturalism rather than multiculturalism'.

Mr Wilson put it like this: 'If multiculturalism only builds up cultures to propose, or cultures to sit side by side with other cultures, it doesn't actually help us here. We have to meet as people, we have to meet as equal and different citizens eventually. And we have to create a shared society, which isn't just about those of us who have been here for years: it is also about being open to those who are more recently arrived.'

Ms Peake spoke of the potential of overlapping identities to engender intercommunal bonds. WAVE's approach was 'just accepting people as people from wherever, and the thing that binds it together isn't their religion, their politics. I was going to say [it's] their victimhood, but that's not true: it's their humanity and the victimhood that's been the circumstance of their coming together.'

The focus then moves to dialogue across divided populations, rather than competition between them. And this links to reflexivity, as dialogue can only be entered into in good faith if there is a willingness to embrace the possibility of change upon reflection. As Dr Morrow contended, 'to turn multiculturalism into interculturalism, if we really are going to do that, we have to suspend our presumption that we know'. That requires a social safety-net, as will

later be emphasised in discussion of safe spaces for dialogue.

What does this mean in practice? Mr Craig of Tides gave a hypothetical example:

We know multiculturalism doesn't work because you get ghettoisation inside that. So how do we go for interculturalism? The big conversation is, 'So I'm delighted that you as a Muslim wish to join the police force. No you can't, under the circumstances of the work, pray five times a day, but where the shift pattern allows you we will put a room aside. Welcome, this is our cultural reality and we welcome you to it, but this is where you move to. But what we can accommodate and acknowledge is through a prayer room where the shift pattern allows you to take a short break for prayer.' Happy days. That's interculturalism.

In the new Northern Ireland there is vastly more cultural diversity among the ethnic-minority and migrant populations than among its overwhelming white, Christian (and to an outsider pretty monocultural) majority. Mr Lee of NICIE again pointed to the need for an individualist rather than a group-stereotyped perspective to appreciate this fine grain. He said: 'Even within traditional minority ethnic communities which are perceived as single minority ethnic communities there's still a lot of diversity. My own personal example [is] of the Chinese community, obviously: three main languages, dozens of other dialects spoken within that one community and completely different backgrounds, reasons for coming to Northern Ireland, cultural practices, countries of origin. So the diversity really is huge from that perspective.'

An interculturalist approach seems essential to confront this developing reality. John Peto described one of the Nerve Centre's goals thus: 'To try and broaden this notion of diversity and try and get the idea that diversity in Northern Ireland should be the same as diversity anywhere else. It's not just about Prods and Catholics basically.'

How, for example, can the still essentially Protestant/Catholic denominational organisation of the schooling system cope, without increasingly forcing square pegs into round holes? Mr Lee asserted: 'I think the goal posts should be widened in terms of integration, integrated schools being seen as the ideal place for ethnic minorities, because it fits into the ethos of acceptance of diversity, no matter what kind of diversity is there. It's not just acceptance of it but it's a willingness to address what makes us different, which can be applied not just with Protestants and Catholics but also with other cultural and religious differences as well.'

Even before the wave of immigration associated with EU enlargement to the east, the CRC had effectively buried the language so current at the time of its establishment in 1990—the talk of 'two traditions'. There are many more cultural manifestations in Northern Ireland than two—indeed, there is an infinite number—and hermetically sealed 'traditions' keep pointing the region back to its divided past, rather than to a shared future.

The Department of Education, however, is finding it difficult to come to terms with this. Mr Wardlow of NICIE explained:

Future Ways

Founded: 1994

Base: University of Ulster, Coleraine and Cookstown

Purpose: to find practical and human ways people can live, learn and work together equitably with their differences in a society emerging from conflict

Director: Derick Wilson

Web site: NA

E-mail: da.wilson@ulster.ac.uk

Signal achievement: challenging the notion that community relations is the sole responsibility of those with least power, through long-term work with social institutions like the PSNI, probation, councils and churches

We've been arguing in the integrated sector with the department recently that integrated schools are defined at law as schools likely to be attended by equal numbers of Protestants and Catholics, so we are not allowed to count 'others' in the balance; now, some integrated schools have 'others', if you like, of over 20 per cent. We've been meeting the department and trying to get them to address this ... They are still saying 'well, you are Protestants/Catholics together, that's what you are there for' and we're going 'hold on, that's not the new Northern Ireland and if we are answering questions about ten years ago and we are not addressing the future we are actually building schools that are not fit for purpose'. Now there seems to me singularly a lack of understanding of that, and certainly our discussion with, say, folk from the Islamic tradition or coming from a Chinese background in terms of race is that they really don't want their own schools—certainly the Muslim community don't: they are happy to be in an integrated environment. And where that works it works well but that is not recognised by the department at the minute.

This intercultural approach, finally in this chapter—and pointing towards the substantive issues discussed in the next—is associated with a **cosmopolitan** insight.

The Celtic Tiger economic phenomenon has been largely a product of the managed integration of the republic into the global economy since the 1960s. A low-performing economy has moved to being a high-performer, and this is not only through attracting high-performance enterprises in sectors like computing. There has also been a diffusion effect on indigenous firms, whose game has been raised as a result (O'Malley, 2005). Had the republic instead persisted with the idea, pursued relentlessly between the 30s and the 50s, of developing domestic enterprises behind tariff barriers, a certain level of mediocrity would otherwise have been continually sought and achieved, and the possibility of developing globally competitive firms would have been a pipedream. In the sense of becoming able to benchmark performance against higher global standards, this story is one of 'reflexivity' too.

Similarly, what emerged from these interviews was not just that some of the NGOs were winning international contracts for work in the Balkans or the middle east, important as that is as an indicator of the quality of their work. What was striking was the insight that only *through* a broader, internationalist perspective could the 'local' be adequately addressed and understood.

Mr Wardlow of NICIE put it this way: 'I think the big thing is integrated schools know that they need the international links because there's

lots of other good practice in the world, whether that's in America, for example—where there would be a lot of issues around desegregation—and our schools would have links in say Israel/Palestine, South Africa, the places where you would think of where conflict happens.'

Corrymeela's volunteer system, referred to above, brings such international connections. Dr Stevens said in a matter-of-fact way: 'We recruit about 14 long-term volunteers every year, some from Northern Ireland and others from abroad. We would have people from former Yugoslavia at present, El Salvador, the States.' Mr McCallion, formerly a Corrymeela volunteer himself, said of his experience: 'And in some ways that challenged me as well, because it made me more open to realise, well, actually we do need a wider context and a more international context to help us focus and to look at this.'

Tides' international work, including in the Balkans, allows lessons to be brought home. As Ms Montague explained, 'if you look at the work that we've done here and the work that we've done internationally, I think it's taking the learning from both, so giving people a sense that "okay, this is only one little tiny part of a very big world that we're in", and helping people. Because when you're focusing and you're storytelling and you're doing all that, you're getting people to look at themselves an awful lot, but you have to put that into perspective, into the context of today's world, so that they get a sense that there's more in life and not just their little local problems, without being arrogant. That was the other mistake, that we can get so

tied up with looking at our own situation that we miss the fact that it's not just all about us: there's a big world out there.'

Asked, for example, what students at Brownlow College would be doing during Integrated Education Week, Mr Lemon responded: 'You're looking at all sorts, maybe conflict around the world. Increasingly we're trying to get away from too much navel-gazing on the Northern Ireland situation and the fact we have 30 pupils at the moment who are non-English speaking, that's something that's happened in the last two years. That gives an opportunity to look at different cultures. We're talking about Brazilian, Polish, Lithuanian, Portuguese, Chinese at the moment. And it's to look at their cultures, look at a little bit of the history and the conflicts there.'

Mr Wardlow said: 'Certainly Lagan would have a huge number of international links. I guess they can do that because of the economies of scale, but I am always amazed that Lagan continue to push this and push the fact that they are an international school.' The school, famously, pioneered use of the International Baccalaureate in Northern Ireland as an alternative to the much more narrow British 'A-level' system—an idea whose time may now be coming with the development, post-devolution, of a 'Welsh Bac' and a broader Northern Ireland secondary curriculum.

And the international connections of the integrated sector mean it is still ahead of the educational game. Mr Wardlow again: 'The fact that now under citizenship we can look at the global dimension and again under the RE syllabus where other faiths and other traditions

can be taught, particularly at post-primary level, that's allowing teachers who have that creativity to bring the other faiths and other traditions in and bring people in from the outside to say "well this is what it means for me as a Hindu in Diwali, for example"; "here's what Ramadan means for me as a Muslim". So they're actually bringing real faces that are non-white into the [classrooms], and when schools are doing this the children go away challenged by it, and teachers too.'

Sr Kilroy of Lagan said: 'I love that aspect of things, bringing in people from all over the world.' And she added: 'We need to see people of different colour, different creed, different level.' She gave an example of how it could contribute to that modesty of self-regard so essential to a reflexive disposition, describing the impact of a visit by a group of youngsters from Kenya on Lagan pupils:

I tell you they were absolutely bowled over when the Kenyan girl was telling them about what her school day was like. Four am to get up to go for the water. She'd only to walk one kilometre but she could have had to walk up to five. Five am to seven am prep, study. Eight am to five pm class. Break at half ten but nothing to eat. Lunch at one. Sport from five to six and then those who were boarders studied until 10 pm, the others go home, do the cooking, the cleaning and then study. And they pay for it. I mean that one thing was enough: they [the Lagan pupils] were literally goggling. And they [the Kenyans] were saying, "but we're the lucky ones: most of the people can't afford to pay for education". So that was worth seeing—our kids' faces.

Equally, Northern Ireland can go to the world

to gain this opportunity, as Ms Peake of WAVE put it, to 'listen to others'. She described taking a group to the US in 1998, where they met victims from Rwanda and Bosnia: "They found that not only had they lost but in some cases they didn't have water, they didn't have a home. Their whole structures had totally gone ... and what people were saying was that it actually made them realise that in some ways they had had a very horrific experience and a bereavement, but all their things had not been taken from them. And sometimes that's about taking stock and recognising that in Northern Ireland you can become very insular."

BCDA (2005: 28) emphasises 'achieving our outward-looking vision by fostering national and international links'. And some of that world is attracted to Ballynafeigh. Ms Hanlon gave an example of how the meaning of the area as a mixed community, and BCDA's role in knitting it together, was changing: "There is a Zimbabwean church use here on a Sunday as a place of worship ... They have volunteered too in the after-school club and sent their children to the crèche. It's from those small things, and then all of a sudden you can build a project or a joint piece of work because you can involve people more directly. We obviously service a lot of the ethnic minorities in the advice centre and the rest, but for me the test will be when we can have a Polish Residents and a Zimbabwean Cultural Society, but it has to be from them."

The intellectual curiosity towards the 'other' associated with a reflexive disposition is a natural stimulant of new conversations. And it is to what makes for successive dialogue that we now turn. ❧

Dialogue

The previous chapter was about the approaches successful reconciliation groups bring to their work. This one is about the single largest aspect of it—the facilitation of dialogue. As indicated above, this is potentially the most powerful solvent of stereotypes, but not necessarily so. Stereotypes can be confirmed in some encounters, as Northern Ireland’s hitherto endless rounds of fruitless political ‘negotiations’ have demonstrated—with the participants emerging to give their phalanxed press conferences, all explaining why it’s been the fault of somebody else.

By contrast, the conversations in which Future Ways was involved (as was Mediation Northern Ireland) with the police were very productive. These began prior to, but provided impetus for, the process of radical reform consequent upon the Patten review arising from the Belfast agreement. Mr Morrow noted of the senior police participants that ‘all said that the opportunity to begin to have these conversations was really significant’.

So what is it about dialogue that gives it this potential, and what are the conditions to realise it?

One intriguing answer to the first question came from Ms Montague of Tides. She analysed why out of ten cross-community groups with which she had been involved at the time only one had survived unscathed the tensions which exploded in the mid-1990s over the annual Somme commemoration parade by the Orange Order at Drumcree in Co Armagh. She reflected:

I had a number of groups working together and they were working on common issues, and that was fine. And then we had the first Drumcree and just as that happened it blew those partnerships apart. So, although you had people that were meeting and discussing things, issues around housing, issues around health—common issues, social issues—as soon as Drumcree happened those relationships disappeared and out of the ten groups that I had working together, only one group remained in inter-community dialogue, and

that was a group called the Over the Wall Gang. And it was a group from Cupar Street [in Belfast] on the Catholic side and from Ashmore on the Protestant side, on the Shankill side. And I looked at that and I thought, “well, why did they stay together and the others didn’t stay together?”. And on reflection what I found was that with the Over the Wall Gang there was a piece of work that I had done which I hadn’t done with any of the other groups, and that was that I had got them to story-tell, shared storytelling. So they actually got saying openly to one another, ‘Here’s how we’ve been affected by the conflict; here’s why we’re afraid and what we’re afraid of.’ And that was very interesting because that group then could come together, they had a more open relationship. They could each honestly say how Drumcree made them feel and how they viewed it.

This theme that productive dialogue can take the form of **storytelling** in small but diverse groups recurred repeatedly in the interviews. It’s a natural human proclivity, an obvious conversation-starter. Just to ask someone ‘what do you do?’ or ‘where are you from?’ is an invitation to begin a story about their unique life history. As Sarah Lawrence of Studio One, the Nerve Centre’s Belfast offshoot, explained, ‘if we bring any youth groups together or any group of young people, a lot of the stuff we would do is to do with identity anyway because it’s about what they’re interested in, what they’re about, who they are—stories. If they’re making a film or an animation the stories are going to come from them, so that’s to do with their identities.’

Mr Deane of Holywell Trust described in very uncomplicated terms its Towards

Understanding and Healing project:

This is a dead simple process. Basically it is telling your story, but telling it in a way where you’re just telling your story without trying to score points politically or otherwise—just saying this is what happened to me and my family. And the other people in the room, the small group, their contract is basically to listen to the story ... You don’t have to pass any commentary but when it comes your turn you tell your story, that’s all. No mystery and no psychotherapy and no psychobabble, just straightforward. It might arise that people begin to put themselves in the other person’s shoes; it might not if they’re not making that choice. Just let’s see. But what we will do is ensure safety, insofar as is possible. We will not try to impose any time limit on the person telling their story. We will not try to impose any structure which says ‘you can’t say this’ or ‘you can’t say that.’ You tell your story, your voice, you find it, tell me.

His colleague Mr Doherty agreed: ‘I think it’s respectful to the people that you’re working with and you don’t have to be smart, you don’t have to be able to write a book, you don’t have to do any of those things. You can come along and participate and just do what you normally do—speak to people, listen to people. So you talk about listening, hearing, speaking and those types of things.’

Mr Baker, also of Holywell, developed the metaphor that, if walls can have ears, ears can also have walls: ‘Storytelling is central to it and that storytelling is about me being able to see with wider eyes or hear with ears that haven’t got walls in them.’ In that context, he said, ‘in an *apartheid* society or a parallel-lives society,

storytelling becomes a bridge'. Ms Hetherington, also involved in this project, spoke of how 'you just see the transformation when people felt that they have been heard—the way that their bodies were changing, how receptive and responsive they would be to understand, that respect for listening, and then that becomes the positive and counter-dialogue'.

Mr McCallion of CRIS teased out this critical element of reciprocity: 'I think one of the other key ingredients about providing a forum where people can tell their story, where people can feel valued and heard, is when they genuinely believe that the people here are interested in their story and that it's not to make snowballs to fire back at them. It's about genuine listening. It's about a desire to understand. It's about a desire to move on. It's about a desire for the listener to have their opportunity to be heard as well. So it's about that mutuality within the relationship.'

Absorbing an individual's unique story, having recognised human dignity on equal terms, makes it hard to see in him or her only a mask of collective identity. As Ms Montague put it, 'it's very easy to have an enemy when you can't see the enemy's face. So, once there's some kind of direct interaction and people meet one another on a face-to-face basis, the dynamics change. And it's not as easy to hate, because the faceless monster on the other side of that wall has got my blue eyes or brown eyes, has a name, has a family—they are a person. They're not a cardboard cut-out that you can hurt or hate.'

In the work by Wilkinson (2005) referred to in the introduction, the alternative to societies based on 'dominance hierarchies' is represented

Holywell Trust

Founded: 1988

Base: Derry

Purpose: to work at individual and community level for healing, dialogue, co-operation and civic transformation, in Derry and the north-west

Director: Eamonn Deane

Web site: www.holywelltrust.com

E-mail: eamonderry@aol.com

Signal achievement: creation of a network of figures at community level in Derry instrumental in reducing tensions in the city



by those—and he points to concrete examples in the human and animal world—based on co-operative relationships. Here, instead of competition, sometimes violent, over places in the social hierarchy, the symbol of co-operation is the gift. Chimpanzees can spend apparently

inexplicable amounts of time grooming each other, yet the point of this reciprocal indulgence is a reassurance of the lack of mutual threat. Open and honest (as against guarded and defensive) dialogue is the human equivalent of searching the hair on each other's hands for fleas.

And yet in a divided society, where any cross-community conversations are normally severely restricted to the 'polite', these experiences can be all too rare. WAVE members have participated in the discussions, sponsored by the Healing Through Remembering project, about dealing with Northern Ireland's 'troubled' past. Ms Peake said of such discussions: 'For some people that might be the first time they've had them.' Unpublished research for the organisation by Gareth Higgins found 'the constant surprise of such diverse people sharing so intimately in a larger group the stories of their lives, when such sharing would not be possible outside the context of WAVE due to the social boundaries in this society'.

The rest of this chapter focuses more on answering the second question above—identifying the conditions for successful dialogue. Overwhelming in the interviews was the theme of **safety**. Creating safe spaces for dialogue—a notion which has also been recurrent in the Council of Europe's work on intercultural dialogue, with which the author has been associated—is critical. As Ms McEwan of Corrymeela put it, 'I think safety is huge: creating a very safe environment is possibly the first thing.'

Dr Stevens saw this as a key lesson from

Corrymeela's extensive experience: 'I think that some of the things that are potentially transferable are: how do you create a safe space for people to work in? how do you create a situation where people feel confident to tell their stories, listen to other people? ... Obviously we have a residential centre; not everybody wants or needs a residential centre. But the issue of how you create a space where people feel that they have some security, where they can reach out, is one of the issues that we have hit upon.'

This was confirmed by Mr McCallion, who reflected that 'lots of people say this about Corrymeela, but it is a place where I've heard so many stories that I never would have had a chance to hear if I wasn't there. So many people have felt the trust and the security that the place provided, where people could tell their stories, where people could say things and take chances that they normally wouldn't take because they felt supported in that context. And certainly I heard many, many stories and many of impacts on individuals that impacted on me long-term. And I certainly don't feel I would have heard them if it wasn't in that setting or it wasn't part of Corrymeela.'

WAVE too has found this to be true, as Ms Peake described it: 'WAVE's ethos, I think, has contributed to the fact it has that open, inclusive atmosphere so that people feel comfortable—not that we make an issue out of where people come from: the thing is that their grief and trauma is what brings them. Now, quite clearly in the background, that has been caused, generally, by one side or the other. But that's a secondary issue to the trauma that they've suffered and the support is offered without

reference to the cause of it.’

Safety for conversations depends on individuals being treated equally, not just impartially—which is why the social orientation described earlier is so important. As Dr Morrow stressed of Future Ways’ engagement with police officers before the Patten review, ‘The whole process, first of all, [meant] taking them out of the normal hierarchal situation, second of all legitimising a set of conversations which had never happened before there—really acknowledging some of the difficulties of being police officers, Catholic police officers being able to talk about for the first time really what it was all about and the compromises they made.’

Similarly, Mr Baker of Holywell said of the Towards Healing and Understanding project that it placed ‘at its core business the importance of creating safe places for stories to be told’. This was partly a matter of using a venue that would be seen as safe by all participants.

His colleague Mr Doherty described how Holywell was able to attract Protestants to the city side of Derry, from which many felt alienated: ‘We also make this a safe place for people to be honest with each other in a caring way but nevertheless honest—and I suppose if you’re dishonest you’re not at all caring. So, there have been many, many really, really in-depth conversations here between and with Protestants, Catholics and others about how to co-exist ...’

Gary McFadden of Lagan College spoke of how even a bus could provide such a space, describing a tour for teachers around the north Belfast ‘peace walls’, which many had not seen. He said that ‘even taking them into that context actually opened up conversations amongst

themselves—talking about their own backgrounds and the influence of paramilitarism on their own particular society’.

But safety is also about the rules of engagement, and these are best debated and written down before a group gets into serious discussion. As Mr Baker described it, ‘you would rarely be working with a group unless there’s a contract that espouses values and principles around listening or confidentiality’.

For example, Ms McEwan said that ‘one of the things we would always say when we’re drawing up our contract ... is that if you’re going to ask a question of somebody, that person has the right to ask you why you’re asking it’.

One such rule might seem perverse, but it makes sense in terms of participants in any profound dialogue feeling a sense of control over it. Mr Baker said that ‘you’re also saying to people “but you don’t *have* to tell your story”’. Things had ‘to happen at the pace of the person’ and ‘it was inappropriate to push people, to badger people’.

Ms Montague stressed in this context the importance of skilled facilitation. (Indeed, co-facilitation is ideal for such discussions, as it allows one facilitator to act as a foil for the other.) She said that ‘it’s no good saying to people “have a hard conversation” unless there are people in the room to support them in it, that have the skills to facilitate that’.

Mr McCallion of CRIS agreed. He said that ‘for me the key ingredient for allowing this to happen is the facilitator being the enabler and actually the process belonging to the participants that are involved, and that’s very, very key

to me. I have been in many a process where that hasn't been the case and they've been the least rewarding processes for me, where the structure hasn't allowed for the process to be driven and belong to the participants.'

This isn't just a democratic sentiment. It is also a condition for reflexivity: passive individuals are very unlikely to reflect on their attitudes and behaviour in an active way. As Mr Doherty said, 'you have got to be respected and if you

feel trapped it's just not fair'.

This may seem a small point but it illuminates why it has proved so difficult to get unionists and nationalists to agree on the widely canvassed constitutional solution for Northern Ireland—devolution plus north-south co-operation—since the old regime collapsed in 1969-72. Unionists have sought to shoehorn nationalists into majoritarian arrangements for devolution, hankering back to pre-'troubles' times, while nationalists have tried to inveigle unionists into accepting north-south arrangements with a forward dynamic towards a unitary Irish state. As a response in each case to the double-minority Irish problem (Catholics a minority in the north, Protestants on the island), it is perfectly rational—and it is guaranteed not to work because it is about 'trapping' the other into a dialogue that is only allowed to have an outcome favourable to the self.

If offering a safe space is tied up with those who enter it feeling 'owners' of it, then **responsiveness** becomes a prerequisite of those working to promote dialogue. Public agencies tend to be driven by direction and targets from above, whereas the best voluntary organisations are stimulated to improve their performance by being sensitive to the concerns raised by their users.

Ms Peake agreed that WAVE did differ in that regard from a statutory organisation. She said that 'some people, maybe, have taken that step and have found that avenue has in some ways been shut down, because the statutory person dealing with them is quite uncomfortable with what they're hearing and they get that message

The Nerve Centre

Founded: 1990

Base: Derry, with Belfast offshoot

Purpose: to act as a focus point for youth culture in Derry, including the exploration of cultural diversity through creative use of technology

Director: Martin Melarkey

Web site: www.nerve-centre.org.uk

E-mail: s.mcneilly@nerve-centre.org.uk

Signal achievement: production of a stream of innovative audio-visual materials challenging stereotyped images and symbols



that there's an area really they shouldn't progress to'. By contrast, 'I suppose in terms of coming here, it's about knowing that there is a mechanism for remembering and having some acknowledgment, which is quite important. People will use those words and sometimes what do they mean: "acknowledgement", "recognition"? And yet they are things that people strive for, because they feel that those haven't happened or those haven't taken place.'

WAVE (2005) describes itself as 'a user-led organisation' and Rev David Clements, a voluntary board member, pointed out how WAVE had always referred to its 'members', not 'clients'. He explained: 'We're set up as a limited company and all of that. But, going back to the early days, "member" basically meant anybody who had any involvement with WAVE and—I didn't coin it, it was before my time—my assumption is it had to do with a sense of empowerment and of ownership. And that you came to WAVE to be involved with others, to give and to get help, rather than to come and get something done to you as a client. Part of the healing wasn't just what was done to you and the services that were offered—it was your own processes involved in making a journey yourself.'

Ms McEwan said of her work for Corrymeela across sectarian interfaces, that 'the overarching idea of the project is that we don't parachute in and say, "I have an agenda, this is what I want to do, I know how to sort out your interface, therefore, come and do my work". But, rather, a lot of it is about listening and responding and reacting to needs that are already being articulated by the communities.'

And Ms Lynagh of NICIE gave a similar

account: 'So when I work with a school I get a small group internally from different layers of responsibility together and work with them to develop the training that they need, rather than me saying "this is what you need" and delivering it without any internal ownership.' NICIE had run a conference for parents of children at integrated schools, she said, to find out from them why they had chosen the integrated option—their aspirations, their hopes, etcetera—and parents were also trained to become school governors.

Stereotypes can be thought of, given their potency and invisibility, as unexploded devices. Asked what he thought represented the biggest barrier to reconciliation, Rev Clements said: 'The biggest barrier probably, in my view, is our history and people's present perception of it and the versions of it and the propaganda that comes from it that makes people think that the other guys have got horns of some kind. And a related issue to that is the increasing segregation which then allows those perceptions to be reinforced.'

And so inevitably the careful dismantling of those dangerous devices in a safe context, **de-stereotyping**, is at the essence of effective intercultural dialogue. And good practice here requires a developed skill in disposal.

Ms Montague described the discussions about modern Irish history which she has led—and found to be remarkably popular—in these terms: 'So you're trying to open up some and just throw in a little bit of doubt that their history is really as black and white as what groups here seem to feel it is. It's not as black and

white, and it's all shared history, that's the reality. There's no part in the history of this island that isn't shared.'

Ms Peake told of how the experience of diverse victims coming together at WAVE could challenge myths they might have had. She gave the story of a man whose son had been killed by loyalist paramilitaries and how he had believed that he would never win justice for him as there was, he believed, only justice for the Protestant community.

And he came and he started to engage with others and what he found was that they were affected in exactly the same way, and the reality was that they weren't getting justice either. And he said that something which is very important to him about WAVE was the fact that that myth that he had lived with, which he said was a myth to him—he thought it was a fact, but when he started to think about it he said, 'no, actually, it was something that had been perpetuated time and time and time again for me and reinforced, which in the end would have built my bitterness and my sense of injustice'—there was something about the fact that he came here and he was able to meet others who also had lost children and to see that their pain and their grief were no different, and the reality was the system and processes which also affected them.

Mr Melarkey gave an example from the Nerve Centre's work in Derry with young people, using animation to address historical themes: 'What we went out and did was try to get young people from the opposite traditions to look at the main events that we were dealing with as symbols—a group of Catholic kids in

Fermanagh to do the 12th July, a group of Catholic kids from Creggan to do the Somme. We got a group of Protestant kids from Ballymena to do 1798. We switched and did it a bit like that, so it was really about them having to research the other community's history.'

Ms Lawrence from Studio One gave a further instance of work with final-year primary children from schools across the divide in Belfast:

So basically they were studying myths in school and they wanted to do something around that, so we used Cúchulainn because it's obviously a shared myth. But we thought: how are we going to do this so that it's more interesting, more modern? And we thought about who writes history: what is the truth? And we did a 'Let's Talk to Cuailnge'. So they had different sides: there was Medb's side and then there was Cúchulainn's side and it was about people debating what the truth was. It was really interesting, because then at the end we asked them, 'Do you think that everything you see on the news is the truth? What do you think about history: do you think that's the truth?' And there were lots of things brought up. For P7 it was actually quite a complex of issues that we were starting to bring up with them, and a lot of primary teachers would be very hesitant about bringing up the whole Protestant/Catholic thing. But it was the way of bringing up these issues where people felt safe to actually discuss them. And it was fun and they did animation based on it—it was like a news report.

Ms Hetherington identified yet another instance from work in Derry schools, which showed the virtue of patience in disposing of dangerous stereotypes. She said that 'one group

in one of the schools was quite difficult and throughout the whole six weeks [of the programme], Protestants to them were just the scum of the earth—they were the devil incarnate. They never met them, but there was just this whole stereotypical notion coming out. At the end of it one of the facilitators [asked], “well what if you met one, what would you do?” Anyway, she turned round and she said, “well you’ve been working with one for six weeks, because I’m a Protestant”. And it was so lovely because they all ... said, “oh, we’ve really offended you”, and she said, “no, you haven’t, it’s not a problem but can you judge me now, how do you see me now?”. So she turned it into a bigger workshop and it was just amazing.’

Stereotypes, however, are not easily dismantled in one go. So, while contact across sectarian and other ethnic divides is necessary, it is not a sufficient condition for successful dialogue. It needs to be **recurrent**.

Interviewees were united on this point. Mr Peto of the Nerve Centre did not see much value in ‘a one-day event for the group and then tomorrow they’ll probably forget all about it and move on’. Mr Lemon of Brownlow College said that ‘going for a day away with the neighbouring Catholic school is fine but it’s a one-off and very often there’s no follow-up or come back, whereas here that’s how life is lived on a daily basis’.

Ms Anderson-Porter of Co-operation Ireland similarly said that ‘a one-off football tournament may cause a life-changing impact on some person but it just as likely won’t—there

would have to be a number of contacts, it has to be managed and it has to be a progressional route’. Mr Kennedy said CI thus recognised ‘the reinforcing nature of several contacts rather than just doing a one-off thing’. An unpublished analysis by Catherine Lynch of CI of the Civic-Link programme with school students found that ‘the *number of exchanges* in which students participated was found to be the strongest predictor of their reporting decreased levels of social distance’.

Ms Borthwick of Tides recalled how when she was doing residentials with young people at Corrymeela, these would be preceded by perhaps eight sessions with the participants. It was evident from the evaluations, she said, what a difference that repeated engagement made. And Mr McCallion of CRIS said: ‘In terms of facilitation and practice, you just can’t bring people together and expect them to tell their stories in their first meeting.’

Studio One has worked with young women from two suburban estates, one in the west and one in the east of Belfast, and Ms Lawrence said: ‘It’s all very well and good going in and doing a brilliant programme for four days or eight sessions or whatever.’ But the relationships had to be fostered, especially when one transposed that from the individual to the organisational level. ‘So, for example, with the likes of Poleglass and Tullycarnet youth centres, it’s about supporting them to continue on with other young people and doing similar programmes, because at the end of the day obviously young people are going to grow up and do whatever, but it’s about actually those organisations that you’re working with—supporting

them to be able to continue as well is really important.’

Earlier, Dr Stevens was quoted as saying reconciliation was a process measured in decades, and certainly successful projects are measured not in weeks or months, but years. Projects to facilitate dialogue, that is, will need to be **protracted**.

As Mr Whyte of BCDA emphasised, ‘it’s time, no doubt it’s time, just building that trust bit by bit by bit’. Citing examples from his work, he said he’d ‘been involved with flags and the bonfire issues for a long time now—four, five, six years—and I just built that trust up in time’. Trust is a category to which the next chapter returns.

Ms Montague of Tides put a similar timescale on a successful piece of work. She said that ‘there has to be a commitment from the group to stay in a programme—some form of programme around activities etcetera—for at least three years, if not more’.

Conversely, Ms Anderson-Porter of CI said that ‘all of the research that we have done is saying a one-year programme isn’t long enough, particularly if we’re going to work with those least reconciled groups, or, as we like to think about them, the hard-to-reach groups—the groups that haven’t had a chance to meet or to have their views challenged and to maybe challenge other people’s views as well’.

And Ms Girvan of NICIE said that ‘for a community-relations projects to work it has to be a sustained project over time’. She also took up Ms Lawrence’s point of how the timescale inevitably lengthens once an institutional

perspective is taken. Integrated education was ‘one of the only community-relations projects which brings together whole institutions, where it’s working from the children’s level, to the parents meeting at the front gate, to the teachers being integrated, to the governors being integrated—and that to me is getting people talking in dialogue, meeting, respecting’.

These two points about the nature of successful dialogue—the need for it to be repeated and extended—underscore a point in the first chapter: organisations working in this arena must be resilient to face the long haul. Yet the timescale of meaningful projects comes up against the much more short-term horizons of other organisations, for example in education, whose co-operation may be needed.

Marianne McGill of CI stressed that ‘time is needed and a process is needed where, whatever the interaction is, it’s more frequent even than two exchanges, which is all we can deliver in a year. And some kind of long-term trust [is] built up before you can actually get to where you need to get, which is the open debate about these issues. And in what sectors is that possible and how practical is it?’ Being serious about *A Shared Future* must include public authorities thinking in similarly long-term ways.

The ‘contact hypothesis’ for promoting reconciliation is over half a century old (Allport, 1954). But recent work by a large team of social psychologists—analysing previous data as well as conducting their own research—has vindicated the value of inter-sectarian contact in Northern Ireland (Hewstone *et al*, 2005).

They found that the conditions for success were ‘lower anxiety’—those safe spaces for dialogue—and the possibility for increased ‘perspective-taking’: reflexivity again. It was also important that individuals’ communal affiliations were recognised—to avoid the scenario where a positive experience of, say, a Catholic could still be dismissed by a sectarian Protestant on the ground that ‘Sean’s not like them other Fenians’, with the stereotype remaining intact. Again and again, these aspects of the **quality** of dialogue, and not just its quantity, came up in the interviews for this project as a critical concern.

Another analogy from the economic arena may help clarify this. If a company is producing widgets, its concern will simply be to produce widgets as quickly and as cheaply as possible; here the incentive is for companies to engage in a competitive ‘race to the bottom’ on prices (and so wages). In an economy beyond mass production, however, catering for individual tastes among demanding consumers, price may no longer be the main source of competition and the most successful firms may be those which can offer new products of higher standard, tailored to diverse demands, even at relatively high cost. In this context, the winners are those that can ‘move up the value chain’ in terms of the quality of their output.

Mr Kennedy described how CI had changed towards this more qualitative, user-responsive focus: ‘Our ideology would have shifted in the last ten years from being a first-contact organisation to being an organisation that says, “it’s okay, yes, contact is good, but we need to then move on to the stage where we start talking

about the things that we’re not comfortable with”’. In the context of better cross-border transport links and increased north-south economic activity, an unpublished CI paper concludes: ‘While “contact” was breaking new ground in the past, there is a current desire among many groups and individuals to amplify this opportunity and enter into a process that is much more challenging.’

Mr Kennedy gave as an example a local-authority programme called Pride of Place, saying that ‘for a while we did it with councils and it fell a bit into the twinning trap of “let’s everybody go and get pissed together and say how friendly we are”’. So we tore this up three or four years ago, and then set up a group of chief executives from the associations north and south, who then work out what priorities they want us to deal with. So we are working to their agenda but we’re keeping their focus on the north-south agenda, and Pride of Place is about people working in their communities and doing what they can to make their communities better.’

Ms Lynagh of NICIE said that mere contact ‘doesn’t shift anything—I could sit with you for hours and I wouldn’t have any greater understanding of your values, your beliefs, or I wouldn’t have any greater respect’. Previously, people were being urged: ‘Just bring people together—doesn’t matter what you do—especially within the school sector. It was just bring young people together, get them on trips, that’s enough.’ But, she said, it was now recognised that this was ‘just not enough’.

The interviewees had various ways of describing the reconciliation equivalent of

‘moving up the value chain’. Ms Lynagh spoke of ‘that sense of how you move that perspective further down the gradient’. Mr Craig of Tides talked of the ‘need to understand that there is a continuum, because in the daily reality of running an organisation you get caught into what I would call the mundane or the ordinary’. And Mr Baker described effective group work as ‘like the Heineken ad: it refreshes parts that other beers don’t reach’.

But if the way to better practice is to move from quantity to quality, this returns us to the question: what if the evaluators of this work are only interested in counting? Ms Lynagh said that ‘we’re probably reticent to say we want relationships to be improved, because that sounds very hard to measure and it’s nebulous ... but I think we also need to charge ourselves with saying, “well, what are we trying to do on a bigger scale?”. And actually it’s not about 60 people going through a particular programme that we know is good quality: it is that whole transformational thing.’ Ms Peake said that what WAVE achieved was ‘not about the numbers we put through here: it’s about the difference you’ve made to someone, or the difference you’ve facilitated them to make’.

Dialogue is conducted through the medium of language. But it is also about ‘body language’ and it takes place today in a rich environment of sounds and images in the arena of popular culture. And the arts comprise a sphere where new images and sounds are constantly being created (‘art’ has the same root as ‘artificial’ or ‘artisanal’). Taken with the earlier emphasis on creativity in

organisations working for reconciliation, it is unsurprising that the **arts and electronic media** figured in the interviews as a key domain of activity.

One of the advantages of this is that it can provide avenues for those who feel less articulate than others, as a result of implicit understandings of social hierarchy, to contribute to a process of dialogue that is otherwise purely verbal-rational. Another, very simply, was highlighted by Mr Fegan of Co-operation Ireland: ‘I mean it’s fun, for God’s sake! It can be fun to do this and let’s not make peace and reconciliation a chore. It should be a celebration. And I would say that’s why the arts is a wonderful vehicle to try and promote peace and reconciliation.’

Ms Hanlon explained why BCDA had developed a partnership with a theatre company, Partisan Productions: ‘Well there’s so many different techniques across the world where people have used the arts to challenge and to address issues in their society and in Northern Ireland this has been confined to the arts arena. And, again in Northern Ireland we compartmentalise things, so the arts can do the creative approaches and the community development [domain] does the community development. And I don’t think that’s right: community development can, an area like this can, inform the arts and the arts can inform the way we do things.’

Ms McEwan of Corrymeela gave a simple example of how she utilises the arts with groups engaged in dialogue. She said that ‘we’ve also then built in the ability to have either an artist or a poet work with us and they capture

the process. So, for example, if we were having this conversation, the artist would be sitting in the corner and although they wouldn't have picked everything that was said, through their art they would pick the mood or hold the mood of the conversation. And then at the end of the evening that gets reflected back to the group.'

The media are, however, more pervasive than the arts in contemporary culture. And here the Nerve Centre and Studio One have pioneered the use of modern media as, literally, media of dialogue.

Ms Arthurs from Studio One explained one combination of exercises to stimulate reflexivity and challenge stereotypes among young people. Participants are given photographs of people they don't know and are asked to generate identity profiles of them and to act out these roles. Then they are asked to interview each other and find out about each other's identities and to question these. Then, returning to the photos, they could be asked 'why did you think such and such about someone?' For example, did they draw a particular conclusion from body-piercing, or certain facial expressions, to compile that profile?

Mr Melarkey contrasted the experience of young people in the Nerve Centre with their exposure to didactic communalist murals—'Stalinist', he called them—on the streets outside. 'And it is thinking really about how you can give people some other potentiality, some other possibilities, and for us obviously our biggest one is the creative one—that young people can come in here, and they will still be exposed to a lot of that stuff, but maybe through digital photography and through this



eclectic mix of media you can really be irreverent about anything or do anything and bring a sense of humour to bear on all this stuff, and bring the sensibility of young people and idealism of young people to bear on this kind of culture.'

The Nerve Centre has developed a wealth of electronic-media educational resources, allied to workshops, addressing images from this street culture from its interactive CD about the two 1916s—the Battle of the Somme and the Easter Rising—to its animated film about the tale of Cúchulainn. And now, said Mr Melarkey: 'We're trying to use mobile phones and iPod technology. So really it's about that business—

we've always seized the technology because we feel that that does go beyond barriers, it gets us away from geography, from behind "peace walls" and you know the distribution platform for this stuff is so exciting.'

This spirit of innovation is one of the themes to be developed in the next chapter. It builds on the demonstration (Hewstone *et al*, 2005) of the 'ripple effect' of integrated education through indirect friendships: simply having friends who have friends on the other side of the sectarian divide, it turns out, tends to undermine stereotypes. So it addresses the question as to how all this valuable small-scale activity can ripple out into the wider society and undermine the hard sectarian pillars into which Northern Ireland has been divided. 🗨

Ripple effects

The interviews with those in the integrated-schools sector confirmed the ‘ripple effect’ thesis. Mr Lee of NICIE said that ‘one of the things about integrated schools which maybe define integrated schools a bit more than others is this understanding and willingness to see themselves as part of that local community—and not just a dormant part but a really active part of that local community. And if we’re getting the message through to those 61 integrated schools that that’s what they need to be focusing on if they’re not already doing so, then again the potential is for 61 localised areas to be really energised by the contribution of that school in that area.’

And he said: ‘Even by its very existence, and by the very determination by parents in that area to want a different option for their children, now we see the ripple effect of that being other schools in the area taking on board the need to look at interculturalism, the need to work with each other, the need to work with

local communities.’ In its statement of principles NICIE (2006) is committed to ‘seek to secure and sustain deep parental participation in the life and work of the school, and in particular in its government’.

Yet the forces of competition can undermine this, militating against good practice in particular being more widely shared and disseminated. Each integrated school is, after all, competing with other local schools for pupils—and so will naturally tend to guard its success stories. Mr Wardlow said: ‘We have some brilliant examples but they stay within very local confines. We’re hopeless at sharing.’

This raises a wider dilemma which this chapter seeks to address: how can the various ‘private’ initiatives described above make an impact in the public, even political, arena, which is greater than the sum of their parts—particularly when the organisations involved are themselves competing with others for public support?

Again, it may be helpful to glean the lessons available from the much-studied world of economic organisations. Competition plays an essential role in a market economy, in which a variety of enterprises struggle against the threat of market failure in an atmosphere of ‘disciplined pluralism’. But well-functioning markets rely on ‘intermediate institutions’ if each enterprise is not simply to take a selfish, go-it-alone approach at the expense of the public interest (Kay, 2003).

For example, universities can stimulate links between themselves and individual firms, and between firms themselves, which encourage better sharing of research and development. They thus encourage networks to develop, so that small enterprises can be part of larger agglomerations, and economies of scale can result. Silicon Valley in California, stimulated by proximity to universities like Stanford, is the renowned example.

If the same NGOs working for reconciliation were to be funded year after year and others excluded from the ‘market’, those organisations would be likely to become complacent and keep doing what they had always done. But if they just compete in isolation, the outcomes may be less than ideal—so an institution needs to protect the wider good, for example by stimulating **networks** between them. And this is exactly what the CRC has done in recent years with the regular meetings it has convened of practitioners, bringing together representatives of those in receipt of core or EU funding to discuss—including with each other—common concerns. These have been well-attended and lively sessions.

Interestingly, Mr Fegan of CI is from a business background. And the feedback he received from funded projects in the arts took him down the networks route. When groups were invited to a conference in Armagh to suggest to the intermediate funding bodies what would really enhance cross-border cooperation and reconciliation, ‘a lot of stuff coming out was networking, just people knowing what other people are doing, if they can provide that. This sounds pretty basic stuff but this is new to us, because the whole Peace programme has been about IFBs asking organisations to deliver projects, when what they really want is just to provide a structure which is linking up all their activities—that perhaps even without money they are going to engage with each other on a more regular, on a more pragmatic basis.’

He said: ‘Certainly what we’re looking at now is the support of both formal and, I suppose even as important, informal networks.’ A big help here will be the electronic database resource developed by the Centre for Cross-Border Studies, www.borderireland.com.

Ms Killick of Lagan College spoke of the value of the links between the school—in a leafy east-Belfast suburb—and the Cornerstore Community at the Springfield Road interface in west Belfast. This meant that ‘you have the opportunity to go out of school with the students, and with the staff as well, into areas of Belfast they might never have been in before. I think those links then become very important, because the communities that are working on the ground in some of the places where the division is much more evident can provide us with real learning experiences.’

Ms Gormley described a network of six schools in Derry with which the Nerve Centre was going to be working for three years. This was a 'great opportunity', she said, to 'consolidate some of the work that we've been doing with people of like mind who are buzzing, who want to get on with developing the work'. Mr Peto referred to the partnership developed between the Nerve Centre, whose main skills were on the technical side, and the Institute for Conflict Research in Belfast, which provided much of the text to which the visuals and sounds were added.

Ms Lynagh described how NICIE had stimulated a partnership between two integrated schools, which had blossomed despite their being a long way apart: 'So these two schools, they've just flown with this partnership. They were foisted upon each other to a certain extent: I rang two different schools, they said "yes", I said "okay, let's get together", and it's just worked really well. And you can hear them learning, their conversations ... like "well, how do you do your timetabling?", and that's what we need more of.'

And Mr McCallion explained how CRIS had become part of a network with others working with children and young people—NICIE, the YMCA and, potentially, Corrymeela—for the purposes of the organisational self-criticism referred to earlier. He said that 'we have four reflective learning days a year where we critique what we have done and why we have done it and we learn from each other'.

NICIE sees itself ideally as the hub of a network of autonomous schools—and we know that autonomy for individual organisations is

necessary for them to be creative. Mr Wardlow said:

Now, what tends to happen is schools tend to grow and move away from NICIE for all sorts of reasons—it's a bit like cutting the umbilical cord and away they go. We tend then to come in if we've got a programme to offer or there's a particular issue of concern. What we would love is

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

Founded: 1987

Base: Belfast

Purpose: to co-ordinate efforts to develop integrated education and to assist parent groups in opening new integrated schools

Director: Michael Wardlow

Web site: www.nicie.org

E-mail: ehassard@nicie.org.uk

Signal achievement: sponsorship of and support for more than 60 integrated schools across Northern Ireland, pioneering interculturalism in education



that we build up a network of the schools themselves, because this is the only way this is going to work. And NICIE, a metaphor for it might be that we're like a heart pumping out, and we're maybe saying to Brownlow 'do you know Lagan are doing that?'. We're finding ourselves being a conduit, we're actually telling schools 'did you know so and so?'. So it's a bit like a wheel and we're the hub and we're sending wee spokes out.

Ms Hanlon described how BCDA had facilitated the emergence over a decade of a fine-grained network of associations in the community, whose capillaries reached individual streets. This meant, she said, that 'we can actually call together any grouping in this society we choose—any incident that happens, I know we can go directly to the source'. Independent research (Murtagh and Carmichael, 2005: 34-5) has highlighted 'the construction of networks and informal governance arrangements' by BCDA in addressing issues ranging from hate crimes to housing and planning.

Mr Whyte explained his work for BCDA in terms of joining up these strands on the ground. Over and above troubleshooting, he said, 'it could be creating networks where people can come together and work together as a whole because what we've found is there's a lot of residents' associations, there's a lot of active groups within the area, [but] there's no structure for them to communicate together. So part of it will be trying to allow the opportunity for communication through various means.'

For example, there were tensions in the area, as in any urban neighbourhood, between generations. One of his tasks would be 'to create a network with young people so they have a

collective voice as well as residents, because now we've got all these young people who want to make things change but we've residents who don't talk to each other. So it's about bringing them all together now too.'

Mr Deane of Holywell outlined how a particularly striking network of significant figures across the city had been established which had helped to stop the 'degenerate spirals of communication' referred to in the introduction—in terms remarkably similar to an account of the peace-keeping role of cross-communal civic associations in Indian cities (Varshney, 2002). In this case the network had arisen from a formative trip to Israel, organised by Holywell, in the mid-90s. He said:

That was one of several experiences which would allow you to very clearly understand, when things are bad between the two communities, the importance of a personal relationship on the other side. You have to phone and say 'Here's the shit that we're getting, here's what people believe is happening, how do you see it happening and what can we do about it?', absolutely knowing—absolutely, in your profoundest level of being, knowing—that that's sectarian stuff you are being fed. Like the Prods who were going to burn down the cathedral or whatever it is, that this is not true, and that there's a way in which you can connect to another human being and you can say 'this demolishes rumours'—so that the fears and the fantasies, the worst devils, can be dealt with.

His colleague Mr Doherty was in no doubt that, while it hadn't been the reason why such networks had been established, their very existence had helped allow of a resolution of the parades controversy in Derry. There was, he said 'an

easier openness in Derry as a result'.

In today's world, of course, networks don't have to be face-to-face. Ms Montague of Tides explained how the idea of mobile-phone networks had emerged as a means to help suppress tensions between the pockmarked neighbourhoods of north Belfast: 'I did a lot of work in the Limestone between Tiger's Bay and Parkside. We had very well formed relationships there but it was a different scenario. Because there had been a level of very severe violence at that interface, it took a while before people would come together as two groups. But what had happened before the two full groups came together, I had community activists coming together. And in fact the idea of the mobile phones originated from those people.' It was subsequently disseminated by the Community Development Centre in the area, and supported by the CRC.

Inevitably, the Nerve Centre is at the forefront of developing an electronic network to promote interculturalism. The Diversity Online resource will allow the centre not only to make existing materials more widely available but also for these to be updated frequently, offering training on issues such as intolerance and hate crime. Mr Peto captured the relationship between innovation and network dissemination, describing how through 'the animated series, through the symbols [CD], the Ulster Weans A-Z comes to our mind, you can see we've constantly evolved and adapted. You get to one solution, you do the animation and then it's about looking at the conflict so then we move into more direct symbols—1916, Easter, Somme, direct conflict—so we're no longer

coming at it from a tangent, we're hitting it head-on and then with that there's some issues about the format. CD-rom, it's complicated, too academic. So we move on to a DVD, so it's just literally watching telly. You don't have to interact, whatever else. Then we realised with a DVD still you actually have to physically put something in somebody's hand, so we move on to delivering stuff online.'

What would be seen as another key feature of Silicon Glen and similar agglomerations has also provided a significant 'ripple effect' in the work of organisations committed to reconciliation.

Individuals working in university departments or particular firms incubate an idea of their own in such secure environments, and this becomes the basis of a new and sustainable enterprise. It was remarkable how often in these interviews individuals spoke of having had a stint with Corrymeela, even just as a volunteer, before spreading their wings elsewhere.

Dr Stevens described Corrymeela as offering an 'apprenticeship', which over 300 long-term volunteers had experienced since its establishment. 'So in this sense you learn about good practice from seeing other people do things. So how you teach is a very interesting question in that regard. I think actually it is better seeing somebody else do.'

And, interestingly, he used Californian language to describe how this learning had spawned new organisations, like Tides. It was 'a pattern of **spin-offs**', he said.

Mr Deane spoke of an identical diffusion from the Derry base of Holywell. He said that

‘people come along and say, “look, I’m thinking about doing something here, what do you think?” and we help them to create their project. We would help them to go after the funding and sometimes we would give them space in here to start it off ... So we would have projects like that that were spawned in here by people and then take an independent wing and go on their own.’

Dr Stevens’ discussion of ‘apprenticeship’ relates to the other obvious way of creating ripples: **training**. And, as Mr Craig of Tides Training encapsulated it, training is ‘primarily about how to facilitate people to have tough conversations while we do not agree’. He stressed that ‘there’s a point at which you have to agree some initial standards’, as there were ‘real skills involved in this and yet anybody—the guy in the street crossing the road there—could put the coat on and say “CR trainer”’.

Mr Craig is of the view that the CRC needs to engage in ‘kitemarking’ in this regard. Others, reflecting on the failure of the Community Relations Training and Learning Consortium, felt the CRC should take on a more active training function itself.

The ripples can begin within individual organisations themselves. Ms Peake of WAVE spoke of how ‘people like Alan [McBride] and others that are on the staff team represent a very strong mentorship system in terms of what can be achieved’. And Mr Lemon described a system of training in peer mediation for selected young pupils at Brownlow: ‘I have very strong evidence that that really sticks

with them right into year twelve even. Because by that stage, or even before that stage, they can articulate very clearly what skills they’ve learnt through peer mediation and they really do value it.’

This could have its lighter side: ‘They’ll say, “There was a row in our house on Saturday night but I got it sorted out because I applied mediation! I put my Mum in that room and my Da in that room. Did a Kissinger!” It’s quite funny.’

The next stage is to generate formal training programmes and/or resources to spread the word. NICIE and Corrymeela have produced an extremely impressive training manual (Potter and Lynagh, 2005), which is already, according to Mr Wardlow, in international demand. The manual demonstrates in an eye-catching manner how schools—all schools, not just those in the integrated sector—can and should set about addressing issues of interculturalism.

Notably, the manual stresses the importance of a ‘whole school’ approach, of establishing a development group across the school staff hierarchy, and of engendering ‘safe spaces’ for dialogue in which genuine ‘reflection’ can take place. It rehearses, then, many of the themes which have recurred throughout this report, while offering much practical advice and suggesting many concrete exercises. While oriented towards the educational community, it is therefore of wider interest still.

A decade ago, NICIE pioneered an early-years ‘anti-bias curriculum’, which has latterly been tweaked and re-issued. Subsequent research by Paul Connolly highlighted the significance of this, demonstrating as it did how children in

Northern Ireland begin to recognise the sectarian connotations of symbols as young as three years of age (Connolly and Healy, 2003). Mr Wardlow said that ‘the interesting thing is the uptake of the training in the anti-bias curriculum is extremely impressive in schools that aren’t integrated’.

And, finally, there is the training which reaches way beyond its source. Here, Future Ways has played a valuable role in its work with public agencies. For example, Mr Wilson explained how some years ago he and Dr Morrow had engaged those responsible for social work training: ‘These were the trainers of social workers across Northern Ireland. And when they had sessions with Duncan and I on politics and scanning the environment here, that was the first time they had done it. Now it was liberating once they did it but they didn’t know how to do it.’

Dr Stevens of Corrymeela made the remark that ‘voluntary organisations are often more flexible than the statutory bodies and they can pioneer. But unless this sort of thing is mainstream—and not just mainstream as a sort of tick-box, lip-service exercise—then voluntary bodies will always remain on the margin’. Mr Wilson had one answer to this conundrum, suggesting that a system of ‘shadowing’ for public servants might allow a transfer of knowledge and practice across the voluntary-statutory divide. ❧

Social fabric

The alternative to a divided society is one strong in social capital—more particularly, one strong in ‘bridging’ social capital that establishes networks across communal lines, rather than narrowly intracomunal, ‘bonding’ capital.

Ms Hanlon of BCDA said that ‘the whole idea of a place like this is you can have your own identity, you can have your own beliefs, but you can still work together on the common good, which to me in that jargon is bridging capital. And that is what this society needs, not bonding capital.’

Social capital can perhaps more simply be understood as the ‘social fabric’ (Halpern, 2005). It is at one level easily torn but very difficult to repair, yet at another it is strongly interwoven and can withstand much day-to-day stress. Weaving that social fabric in Northern Ireland, and repairing its holes, is the task of reconciliation for the decades ahead.

Mr Tubritt of BCDA described what this means in Ballynaveigh:

I suppose I’m looking to build a community, and I use that word in the broadest sense, which is as inclusive as is possible but where difference isn’t hidden or swept under the carpet and, where there is conflict, it’s acted out in a way ... that doesn’t tear down the social fabric around it. And a lot of my role is helping groups through the process of conflict but trying to at least minimise the damage to the social fabric around that conflict, and that isn’t the same as trying to push people into consensus—that’s not what I’m talking about. I think it’s very healthy for people to disagree but as long as that disagreement isn’t apocalyptic, which is often what happens in Northern Ireland. Because we have a disagreement about a march at the bridge, it becomes an apocalyptic thing where everything about Northern Ireland is focused on that bridge.

Another common theme in these discussions was **trust**, a key ingredient—along with social networks and widely-accepted norms—of social capital. Several interviewees said that trust was the foundation of their credibility with those with whom they worked. Speaking

of how residents in Ballynafeigh viewed BCDA, Ms Hanlon said that ‘a lot of the things can be brought down to the simplest level, that people trust you, that people know they are not going to be shocked by what you do, and that people know you are going to act on their behalf, even if they accept that you are kind of different. Then that trust is something you can do all sorts of things with.’

Ms Kelly of Corrymeela said the organisation’s accumulated trust went before it: if ‘you go and you meet a group and you say, “hi, I’m Lisa from Corrymeela”, there’s automatically a cup of tea on the table, the door’s open a wee bit more for you and you’re accepted slightly more sometimes ... It’s been there for so long and lots of people know about it and the stories are all quite positive.’

Ms Montague of Tides explained how this trust allowed her to address political issues in a challenging way in discussion groups. Having established her reputation in mediation and work with prisoners, she said that ‘that gives you a level of credibility to allow you to say the things that are hard for them to hear. Because they know that you’re not doing it out of a sense of sectarianism or trying to trick them, they trust you.’

Ms Hetherington told a similar story about the value of personal, as well as organisational, credibility. She said that ‘if people know you by reputation, that you’re trustworthy, you can do things that you couldn’t otherwise do. And you can open doors that wouldn’t otherwise open.’ She added that ‘the other thing too is that when you do develop that sense of trust, then a curiosity gets people to go way beyond the

realms of other conversations’.

A big positive about social capital is that it tends to strengthen with use, whereas physical capital—money, for example—is expended when it is deployed. Trusting behaviour tends to be reciprocated, particularly in more egalitarian societies, and the reciprocation itself reinforces the initial trusting gesture. The handshake is a simple embodiment of this.

Dr Morrow contributed an insight into why the work by Future Ways with the police had been so effective. His explanation was that ‘fear generates fear and trust generates trust’ in what he called a ‘multiplier effect’. What had happened with the police was that ‘the ones who wanted this [change] started to pile in on the back of trust, believing we would back them, and all of a sudden you got a virtuous circle of people articulating what the issue was’.

But here’s the catch. As so often in this report, the need for a long-term perspective arose here too. Mr Whyte spoke of ‘investing a lot of time and effort into making sure that trust is there’. The implication is clear. If organisations working for reconciliation are to be able to build, or rebuild, the social fabric, they need to have the long-term support to allow such a painstaking process to take place.

The other side of trust is the **relationships** it binds between citizens.

Reflecting on what had worked in his experience with young people at WAVE, Mr McBride said relationships were key: ‘It’s not just the relationship with the young person, it’s the relationship with the young person’s parents and, yeah, the relationship is key. So when I

WAVE

Founded: 1991

Base: Belfast (and outreach centres)

Purpose: to offer care and support to anyone bereaved or traumatised through the violence, irrespective of religious, cultural or political belief

Director: Sandra Peake

Web site: www.wavebelfast.co.uk

E-mail: admin@wave.belfast.co.uk

Signal achievement: supporting victims, on a cross-community basis, with a reach and sensitivity no statutory agency could match

think about the projects that have worked well and the young people that I think I have probably made a difference with, a lot of it has been to do with the extent of the relationship and some young people have benefited more than others from that.'

WAVE (2005) cites academic evidence in support of this from a psychologist, Maura Burns. Writing of the value of befriending for victims, she argues: 'Building up social relationships ... can redeem the relationship with the community which is frequently damaged or fractured by the traumatic event.'

In their joint chaplains' report at Lagan College, Ms Killick and Sr Kilroy affirm: 'Relationships are, at the end of the day, the object and means of integration for students and staff alike.' The peer-mediation training at Brownlow referred to earlier is one example of relationship-building, which Mr Lemon described as 'integration in practice, because if we're talking about, at a very basic level, the peaceful resolving of disputes, for 11 year-olds, some of those concepts are fairly abstract, but what they do

understand is bullying and being unhappy in terms of relationships'.

In an unpublished paper, Dr Stevens argues that the founder of Corrymeela, Ray Davey, developed 'a language around relationships and reconciliation'. His vision 'expressed a commitment to encounter, interaction and positive relationships between all sorts and conditions of people'. Dr Stevens notes how this language has entered *A Shared Future*, which affirms that 'relationships matter and are central' and that 'moving from relationships based on mistrust and defence to relationships rooted in mutual recognition and trust is the essence of reconciliation'.

A simple demonstration of the importance of relationships was given by Mr Deane of Holywell Trust. Just being photographed with another member of the cross-community network Holywell has stimulated—'doing ordinary things together'—perhaps in a hall or a bar with sectarian connotations in which one is perceived to be out of place, could chip away at stereotypes: 'it does send a message where people say "maybe they're not all like that"'.

Mr Tubritt of BCDA explained how pre-existing relationships had constrained tensions in a mixed residents' group, following an argument at a meeting over the issue of Protestant-communalist parades:

What happened was at the next meeting—which I didn't even think was going to happen—everybody turned up, it was a lovely summer's evening. There was fairly frank discussion and they said, 'let's talk about a way of managing this situation, of managing the march, of managing the relationships'. And what happened was that yes, there

were Catholics and Protestants who had strongly-held views on a number of things and issues to do with the march, yet the higher value was that they were neighbours in that street—and that they agreed that, however they did this, they would try to respect the views of the other, whatever that may be.

For him, ‘the key factor, the brake on it becoming apocalyptic was the recognition by those people that they lived in this community, and that this community was a little bit more than just a group of Catholics and a group of Protestants living together. They were actually neighbours.’

Indeed, more positively, he said: ‘You get a flag, a Union Jack going up near the Catholic church, the people who are most concerned about that are actually some Protestants who then go “that shouldn’t be happening”. And the police will very quickly go “that’s not on”’. He added that ‘you do get a fairly sizeable element of one side of the community looking after the other, and self-censuring in the expressions of political culture and things like that’.

Mr Wilson of Future Ways echoed, in the institutional arena, what Mr Tubritt said of community:

I suppose our whole work ... was building a relational model of reconciliation, which then fits into organisations and structural things. In a relationship where people acknowledge one another and do not threaten one another, they still have different views, they still disagree. But in a relationship where people acknowledge one another the threat is either less or absent. You can still disagree, you can still fundamentally disagree, but in a relationship where you don’t have *any*

relationship, if you like—where it’s just a contested, conflictual one all the time, where the relationship doesn’t exist—nothing is mediated. I suppose that’s my point. If you are in good relationships they mediate different views, they keep you together. If you are just in a conflictual relationship without any sentiment for one another, which our politicians are in—I mean, they don’t really get anywhere.

Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 established a statutory framework where designated public authorities were required to have ‘due regard’ for equal opportunities along nine axes and ‘regard’ for ‘good relations’ between religious and ethnic groups. There was considerable tension during the debates leading to the legislation, with some egalitarians expressing concern that the ‘good relations’ provision might lead to a soft-peddling on equality, which they felt was the key to addressing intercommunal tensions.

But Mr Wilson argued it was misguided to counterpose the two: ‘You can’t build good relations on top of nothing: you have to build it on an equality platform. But legislation itself will not bring us into new relationships. Legislation will protect people who are vulnerable, but legislation of itself won’t give us the relational experience, by which we learn to acknowledge one another’s different opinions but get into a relationship with one another.’

Moreover, he argued, ‘if you look at organisational change literature, not around equality and good relations but just around how do you build imaginative organisations, they have had to address the relational dimensions of their life. And when you look at those organisations

that have been imaginative and creative and generative, they tend to be organisations that have a relational culture, on top of whatever minimum is required legally.’

Ms Lynagh of NICIE also suggested that even the notion of ‘good relations’ was too static to capture the fact that ‘if we’re about anything we should be about relationships’. She said that ‘relations is just like your second cousins or something like that. You don’t need to do anything with them or know them too well; you just send them a card at Christmas and that’s it. But relationships ... are where you have a connection with somebody.’

Building this social fabric is a much larger task than any one organisation can perform. Indeed, grossing up the earlier point about holistic approaches to the societal level, one of the keys is ensuring that the whole of the work of all of the organisations committed to reconciliation is greater than the sum of their parts. And that has important implications for agencies—funders, government, the CRC and political leaders—which can play a positive, brokering role in this regard. Yet there were some criticisms, and self-criticisms, in this regard, suggesting on the contrary that good work was not being adequately supported or was even being undermined.

Mr Craig of Tides claimed that some Peace funding had reinforced communalism. He said: ‘Part of the Peace money, if you want to put it that way, has funded sectarian division, because we now have community centres, if you like, that represent sectional groups: they don’t represent communities in the broadest sense. So

we’ve lost the idea of interdependent community. We now have independent, self-seeking, self-concerned neighbourhoods.’

A less insidious, but no less important, concern has been the volume of work required of organisations in receipt of funding to account for their expenditure of it. This can not only represent a distraction of resources but, ironically, can be at the expense of assessment of real outcomes—easily lost sight of in a blizzard of spreadsheets and bean-counting.

Making clear this was a personal view only, Mr Fegan of CI said that ‘the demands for accountability and transparency can very often suffocate the outcomes that a project can deliver’. And Ms Eyben of Future Ways argued that the CRC should seek to model a ‘different way of being a funder that’s actually about the quality of relationships rather than the money, or as well as the money’.

Mr Fegan also took the view—against the backdrop of the big reduction in EU support anticipated for Peace III—that funding should be used to lever co-operation between organisations. He said: ‘I don’t think a single organisation should be able to apply for a project. I think it should be a collaboration; if we are going to deliver projects they should be collaborative.’ Ms Eyben felt that the funding remit of the CRC had not sufficiently allowed staff with good administrative backgrounds to develop their practitioner base and experience.

Government, too, was seen as having responsibilities to address. Despite the existence of *A Shared Future*, Ms Girvan of NICIE said that ‘another job to do, I think, is just to persuade government to recognise the value of

community relations [activity], and that's a hard old battle.'

Extraordinarily, it became evident during the research for this project that one of the organisations involved was facing an imminent cash crisis, another had recently undergone such an ordeal and a third had only been saved by a big private gesture. Yet, as Nick Acheson (2006) points out, generic public-expenditure support for voluntary associations in Northern Ireland has increased substantially—on the implicit, but unevidenced, assumption that associationalism itself breeds social trust—while inter-communal divisions have significantly deepened.

The clear implication is that there must be a much more targeted investment by government in non-governmental organisations specifically and explicitly committed to tackling those divisions head-on, over and above EU programmes.

But perhaps the greatest frustration revealed in the interviews for this project was with the Northern Ireland political system. This was not coming from a group of political *naifs*, minded to rehearse tabloid attacks on politicians as 'only in it for what they can get'. Rather, these were very politically engaged and knowledgeable individuals. And they were capable of discriminating judgments, rather than tarring all politicians with the same brush: Ms Girvan, for example, highlighted and welcomed in her interview what was then a recent statement by the South Belfast SDLP MP, Alasdair MacDonnell, in favour of integrated education.

Mr Baker of Holywell criticised the repetitive televised political exchanges, noting that 'we say [of] our politicians, "talking heads", or

Let's Talk—let's repeat the routine'. Mr Tubritt was saddened by the associated remoteness, disappointed that 'in various guises I've been working in the community sector in south Belfast now for 13 years, and I've yet to feel that anything I've said to a politician has been understood, valued'.

Ms Montague of Tides complained that 'there isn't sound leadership towards a shared future. I feel that it's very difficult to ask communities to make a move to dialogue over issues that are diverse, that are dividing them—for example, the interfaces, there is an expectation that the communities at the interfaces will do something that at a higher level political leaders should turn [to].'

Ms Peake intimated that WAVE continued to receive some 600 referrals per year, a figure that showed no signs of decline. Indeed, some political developments caused it to rise:



Projecting alternatives—the two 1916s at the Nerve Centre

‘Interestingly we can see, if you look at referrals, positive and what’s perceived as negative political development, or lack of development, will bring people forward. Even the recall of the assembly quite recently caused a surge in referrals ...’

The absence of political reconciliation since the agreement, she said, was ‘part of what people are battling with now, the disillusionment of what that all meant’. In the most recent report on its work by WAVE (2005), Ms Peake writes: ‘Anger, disbelief and feelings of isolation are perpetuated due to the political stalemate.’

Ms Girvan suggested that ‘what’s wrong with the politics up here’ is that ‘trust has totally broken down, and if you don’t build trust from the bottom up how are you going to have a better society in the future? I often say if they had gone to integrated schools in the first place, some of the politicians, maybe we wouldn’t actually have been in this situation we are now. When I hear them up in that assembly, they can’t even select a [committee] chairperson, I just [*sighs*] I just can’t comprehend ...’

And Mr Wilson of Future Ways said that ‘if we’re talking about building a civil society where the public space is that sort of space where people engage, or where people bounce off one another—where, if you like, the hard edges are softened a little—that’s only possible in a public space that is relational and that’s not what this society has ... [Political figures] don’t have a sentiment for one another, so they don’t even see the importance of public space. They just have a conflictual space where they bounce off one another as arrogant adversaries.’ 🐼

Conclusion

The interviewees' negative portrait of the Northern Ireland political system reinforces evidence from DD's earlier work on reconciliation. This found the same frustration among practitioners in case-study localities *vis-à-vis* the politics of the local council chamber (Kelly and Hamber, 2005b).

But there was much in this research to indicate that the apparent intractability of Northern Ireland politics is not so evident as at first glance. Indeed, it explains, at least in part, a number of unanswered questions.

Why has the parades controversy been essentially settled in Derry, but not yet in Belfast? How does it come that the police service, of all the major institutions engendered by the Belfast agreement, is the one that is intact and thriving? How can integrated schools prove to be such oases of mutuality amidst sustained sectarian polarisation? And how can a neighbourhood in south Belfast be far more mixed than any in the north of the city, without being criss-crossed with 'peace walls'?

Precisely because of the modesty of the participants in this research, they would not make great claims in this regard. But their stories indicate how invisible networks and intense dialogues have helped make these very real achievements happen. Good practice, in other words, has had very tangible outcomes, including in ways the political process has yet to realise.

What is lacking is the official and political support these hugely worthy and selfless endeavours, on any objective assessment, clearly merit. As this report has indicated, we know 'what works'. So why is government support so modest—particularly given the obvious savings in policing and other arenas of public expenditure that such investment can bring?

The answer appears to be that government itself is unclear in its collective mind as to whether it is merely accommodating, and so 'managing', intercommunal division in Northern Ireland or whether it is seriously committed to engendering 'a shared future'.

But it is increasingly hard to see, in today's globalising context, how maintaining two pillarised 'communities' in Northern Ireland, hermetically sealed from each other and from the wider world, is politically (or morally) sustainable.

Indeed, the very mistrust and intolerance which Northern Ireland's political system has embodied appears to have been one of the spurs driving those committed individuals interviewed for this study. And it is not hard to detect, in the emphases of their often very moving testimonies, the outlines of a different political culture in the making, more attuned to our reflexive and intercultural times. ❧

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Appendix a: interviewees

The list below identifies the interviewees. In bold are the directors of each organisation, followed by others who were interviewed in that context, including subsequent or different organisational affiliations.

Katie Hanlon **Ballynafeigh Community Development Association**

Gerry Tubritt BCDA

Philip Whyte BCDA

Tony Kennedy **Co-operation Ireland**

Marianne McGill CI

Ann Anderson-Porter CI

Des Fegan CI

David Stevens **Corrymeela Community**

Susan McEwan Corrymeela

Colin Craig Tides Training

Shona Borthwick Tides

Lisa Kelly Tides

Mary Montague Tides

Eamonn McCallion Community Relations in Schools

Derick Wilson **Future Ways**

Karin Eyben Future Ways

Duncan Morrow

CRC

Eamonn Deane

Terry Doherty

Eamon Baker

Maureen Hetherington

Holywell Trust

Holywell

Holywell

The Junction

Martin Melarkey

John Peto

Jennifer Gormley

Sarah Lawrence

Ingrid Arthurs

The Nerve Centre

Nerve Centre

Nerve Centre

Studio One

Studio One

Michael Wardlow

Dean Lee

Nichola Lynagh

Deborah Girvan

Gary McFadden

Sister Anne Kilroy

Helen Killick

Errol Lemon

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education

NICIE

NICIE

NICIE

Lagan College

Lagan

Lagan

Brownlow College

Sandra Peake

Alan McBride

Rev David Clements

WAVE

WAVE

WAVE

Appendix b: topic guide

1. What would you say represented the biggest barrier, or barriers, to reconciliation that you have experienced through your work?
2. How does your organisation attempt to overcome that barrier / those barriers?
3. What do you consider the term 'good practice' to mean in relation to what you are trying to achieve?
4. What in particular have you found has been a successful project or practice?
5. What factor(s) do you think, specifically, made the difference in that regard?
6. Were there any particular conditions enabling this success which would have to be present in order to achieve similar results in another context?
7. Are there any other projects or practices that stand out in this way?
8. And why did it / they work, do you think?
9. Again, were there any particular conditions on which this outcome depended?
10. Can you think of an example of work in which you have been involved where the outcome has surprised you—for better or worse—in terms of your expectations?

11. And why do you think this was the case?
12. Are there any episodes in which you gleaned a new, perhaps unexpected, insight from your work?
13. Conversely, are there any where you felt you learnt a negative lesson?
14. Are there any other aspects of good practice that you have learned from organisations other than your own, or just happened to observe?
15. Finally, if you were advising someone setting up an organisation working for reconciliation, how would you suggest from your experience they avoid reinventing the wheel or making unnecessary mistakes?