Schools as institutions for peace in Northern Ireland: pupils', parents' and teachers' perspectives on the community relations dimension

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Contextualisation

Effective schools research has concentrated on identifying the factors making schools matched for student ability and other intake variables more effective at achieving academic and other goals (White, 1997). Sammons et al. (1995), for example, identified eleven correlates of effectiveness. On the other hand, school improvement work has sought to go beyond a pure effectiveness approach to ascertain how schools improved and assist them in this process (MacBeath, 1999).

However, researchers from both paradigms have called for new perspectives which help schools prepare young people for citizenship in a changing and more democratic world (e.g., Stoll and Fink, 1996; Stoll and Riley, 1998; Clarke et al.,1998). Some have also argued the case for greater use of qualitative methodologies including the use of case study methods (for example, Brown, Duffield and Riddell 1997).

The research reported in this paper attempts to make distinctive and original claims to knowledge by making connections between the School Effectiveness – School Improvement (SESI) paradigms and peace education within a society struggling to emerge from violent ethnopolitical conflict.

Abstract: *The aim of the research reported in this paper is to inform the processes of school improvement for better intercommunal relations in Northern Ireland. Notwithstanding the present peace process, the quality of community relations remains a crucial concern for those interested in long-term stability.*

The research strategy drew on data from nine case study schools and was considered to be part of an interpretist-constructivist paradigm involving an

inductive or grounded theory approach to analysis. The views of pupils, parents and teachers on the contribution of schooling towards improved inter-group relationships were explored in some depth and the wealth of rich data shed light on school practices and key institutional factors implicated in effectiveness and improvement.

Nineteen themes were identified which appeared not to be discrete or self-contained but interact in complex ways creating different patterns at different organisational sites. Furthermore, the patterns spun by these factors appeared to vary in nature through relationship with identities such as geographical location, socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender.

It is argued that this study contributes towards the existing literatures on school effectiveness and improvement and schooling and sectarianism in Northern Ireland. The results suggested that education for community relations in N. Ireland required an alternative concept of school effectiveness to the received model. The emerging organisational picture was more consistent with sensitivity to context models of effectiveness and improvement. The analysis in the final section was designed to offer some broad pointers for school improvement.

Introduction

The popular endorsement of the Good Friday Peace Agreement (Belfast Agreement) was described by Tony Blair as one of the most significant moments in Ireland since partition (Belfast Telegraph, May 1998). People voted in the Northern Ireland referendum for partnership, co-operation and the healing of hurts after 30 years of murder and destruction in what was a sectarian and unjust society (McFaul, 1999). The agreement placed a duty on everyone in Northern Ireland (N. Ireland) to work together to develop and support reconciliation and represented political possibilities of immense significance. The former Secretary of State for N. Ireland (Dr Marjorie Mowlam) remarked that peace building required everybody including those in the statutory, private, community and political sectors to take responsibility for creating a stable and peaceful society that recognised diversity (CRC News, September, 1998).

In December 1998, the Education Minister (John McFall MP) was reported to have said that the education service now had an opportunity and an obligation to respond positively and comprehensively to the aspirations of the N. Ireland community for a better way of living together (DENI press release, 16th December, 1998). On the day that he launched a report on Integrated schools

(see section 1.2), he also announced the establishment of a working group concerned with promoting tolerance in schools. In doing so he indicated that there needed to be a new strategic approach in all schools which met the challenges that a more peaceful and democratic N. Ireland brought (DENI press release, 16th December, 1998).

The above introductory comments suggest that the research reported in this paper is very timely since it aims to inform the processes of school improvement for peace and reconciliation. It attempts to identify the key characteristics of schools having an influence on community relations outcomes by drawing upon the perspectives of those main groups having a stake in the success of schools i.e., teachers, parents and pupils.

Data gathering and analysis were focused around three main questions:

1. What were the characteristics of the schools in terms of what they did to promote learning for improved community relations? Included as sub-themes were the exploration of what participants' believed schools could be doing that they were not already doing and the exploration of teachers' theories about school-based community relations work.

2. What outcomes and impact were schools perceived to have?

3. What helped (promoted, supported) or hindered (impeded) the achievements of schools in this area?

Section 1: Relevant themes from the literature

This section attempts to place the study within broader ecological frameworks and relevant research literatures.

The Northern Ireland conflict

The conflict in N. Ireland (known colloquially as the "troubles") is a complex one, much more so than television coverage would suggest. In its present form the conflict represents a tangle of interrelated questions (Dunn, 1995), which articulates a struggle between divergent forms of nationalist aspiration, ethnicity

and oppression against a background of widespread social and economic deprivation (Lovett, Gillespie and Gunn, 1995). Dunn and Morgan (1998) referred to it as an interethnic dispute while Connelly (1999) made reference to the existence of ethnically defined Protestants and Catholics.

The Northern Ireland school system

Segregation is a feature of almost every aspect of life in N. Ireland. People live, socialise, work and shop in areas where they feel safe (Leitch and Kilpatrick, 1999). Consequently, a distinctive characteristic of the school system in N. Ireland is its segregated nature. The vast majority of children attend schools that can be described as either Protestant (Controlled schools) or Catholic (Maintained schools). As Gallagher (1992) remarked, most schools were characterised by the religious homogeneity of staff and pupils.[1] Nevertheless, there has been a trend towards Integrated Schools[2] although currently only 3 per-cent of the pupil cohort attend schools in this sector (McEwan, 1998).

Community relations policy in Northern Ireland

Growing awareness of the potential negative impact of a segregated school system in N. Ireland led to a number of educational strategies designed to improve intergroup perceptions between Protestants and Catholics. The community relations dimension of education was put on a formal footing through the Education Reform (NI) Order 1989; the N. Ireland version of the National Curriculum in England and Wales. These reforms required that Education for Mutual Understanding (popularly known as EMU) and Cultural Heritage became closely related and statutory cross-curricular themes in the N. Ireland curriculum. In other words, all schools were required to reflect community relations themes within their curricula around four main objectives i.e., respect for self and others, appreciation of the interdependence of people within society, cultural

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[1] Children in N. Ireland are also separated by ability and, particularly at secondary level, by gender. The province retains a selective examination at 11+ and approximately 6% of schools are voluntary grammar schools, some of which are majority Catholic and some of which are majority Protestant.

[2] Integrated schools aim to have a 60-40 ratio of the two traditions.

understanding and appreciation of how conflict could be handled in non-violent ways (NICC, 1990). Schools were expected to develop a whole-school policy and appoint a designated co-ordinator (McEwen, 1999). Schools were also encouraged, but not required, to engage in cross-community contact[3] as part of their EMU programmes.

The intentions or purposes behind EMU policy have been discussed by a number of commentators. Guidance materials produced by the Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA, 1997) described EMU and Cultural Heritage as an expression of the moral responsibility of schools to help promote mutual understanding and respect within N. Ireland society specifically. Smith and Robinson (1996) suggested that the inclusion of EMU into the statutory curriculum carried an explicit expectation that as part of their teaching, teachers would attempt to address issues which were relevant to community division within contemporary Irish society.

The School Effectiveness – School Improvement (SESI) research context

Effective schools research has concentrated on identifying the factors making schools matched for student ability and other intake variables more effective at achieving academic and other goals (White, 1997). Sammons et al. (1995), for example, identified eleven correlates of effectiveness. School Improvement research, on the other hand, has sought to go beyond a pure effectiveness approach to ascertain how schools improved and assist them in this process (MacBeath, 1994).

Several commentators have recently been critical of contemporary SESI paradigms (see for example, White and Barber (eds) 1997; Slee, Weiner and Tomlinson 1998; Thrupp, 1999). One of these criticisms was that measuring school effectiveness had concentrated on a narrow range of cognitive outcomes while ignoring the many other aspects of schooling which were relevant (Goldstein and Myers, 1996). However, this criticism drew a response from SESI

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[3] In 1987, the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI) established the Cross-Community Contact Scheme to encourage voluntary inter-school links. Schools and voluntary groups received funds to bring young people across the community divide together in order to enjoy constructive and collaborative activity which could lead to greater mutual understanding.

researchers. Robertson and Sammons (1996) described it as a stereotype requiring modification given the emphasis in British studies on exploring issues such as self-concept, behaviour, attitudes and attendance (see, Mortimore et al. 1988; Mortimore and MacBeath 1993). Nevertheless, researchers from both paradigms have called for new perspectives which, for example, help support schools to prepare young people for citizenship in a changing and more democratic world (e.g., Stoll and Fink 1996; Stoll and Riley 1998; Clarke et al. 1998). In order to encourage this, some have argued the case for greater use of qualitative methodologies including the use of case study methods (see, for example, Brown, Duffield and Riddell 1997).

Section 2: Aspects of the research

This section describes how knowledge about schools as institutions for promoting peace and reconciliation in N. Ireland was constructed during this study.

Research strategy and sampling

In the main, this study was seen as part of an interpretist-constructivist paradigm involving concern for e.g., natural settings; the perceptions of people and multiple-perspectives; an emphasis on social processes and an inductive attempt to generate analysis (Aggleton, 1997). The focus of this study (and the particular research questions) was considered to locate it as mainly exploratory within the style of case study.

Glaser and Strauss (1967) drew a distinction between statistical sampling and theoretical sampling. The former was concerned with representativeness of a wider population while the latter was more concerned with identifying cases which assisted with the development of concepts and theory through a process of comparative analysis (Armstrong, 1982). The methodological assumptions underpinning the research presented in this paper suggested that theoretical sampling procedures were more appropriate.

Case study schools were chosen following discussion with the WELB Adviser.[4] A number of criteria were included in the framework for selecting cases:

    i) perceived effectiveness with respect to community relations work;

    ii) school sector i.e., both controlled and maintained;

    iii) school level i.e., both primary and secondary;

    iv) schools serving communities having contrasting experiences of political violence e.g., urban (high) and rural (lower);

    v) schools serving communities with contrasting socio-economic circumstances i.e., higher, mixed and lower socio – economic status (SES).

Choosing schools on the basis of perceived effectiveness proved to be a challenging task. My original discussions with the WELB Adviser over the research project were limited to the contact dimension of community relations. As a result, schools were identified on the basis of their commitment to staging contact encounters. Although subsequent discussions led to the adoption of a broader concept of school-based community relations, a decision was made to persevere with this "commitment to contact" indicator; not least because of its transparency and the lack of an obvious alternative.

Nine schools were initially contacted and invited to take part in the project (see Table 1). A study of relative deprivation in N. Ireland published by the Centre for Urban Studies at the University of Manchester 1994 (Robson et al., 1994), suggested that all nine were located in the three most deprived council areas in N. Ireland.

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4 In N. Ireland, LEA's are called Education and Library Boards. Presently, I work in the Western Education and Library Board or WELB. Knowing my professional interests as an educational psychologist practising within the education system, the WELB Adviser for Community Relations approached me for help and advice with issues of improving school effectiveness for better intercommunal relationships. Following further discussions and negotiations, including those with the appropriate Advisers in other ELB's, led to my agreement to commit some time to this study.

	School	Sector	Denomination	Urban - Rural	Socio – Economic Status (SES)	% Free school meals
A	CLOONEY	PRIMARY	RC	URBAN	MIXED	23.75
B	TORRENS AVENUE	PRIMARY	PROTESTANT	URBAN	MIXED	22.00
C	THOMPSON	PRIMARY	PROTESTANT	URBAN	LOW	65.00
D	KNOCKBRACK	PRIMARY	RC	URBAN	LOW	61.72
E	LEARMOUNT	PRIMARY	RC	RURAL	HIGH	16.08
F	LISMORE	PRIMARY	RC	URBAN	LOW	68.00
G	ST THERESA'S	SECONDARY	RC	URBAN	HIGH	5.29
H	ROE	SECONDARY	PROTESTANT	RURAL	LOW	41.3
I	BENBRADAGH	SECONDARY	RC	RURAL	LOW	50.00

Table 1: Summary of schools invited to take part in the study.

Selected schools were contacted by letter and invited to take part. During December 1998, follow-up visits were made to each school by the WELB Adviser and myself in order to clarify any queries or concerns and to confirm participation. Given the very sensitive nature of the subject matter, particular approval was sought regarding the questioning of students.

Methods of investigation

The main method used involved the focus group interview. As a discussion-based interview which produced qualitative data (Morgan, 1997), this was consistent with the chosen research style. The interview technique might best be described as semi-structured (see also Robson, 1993). In other words, it was neither fully structured (predetermined set of questions and responses recorded on a standardised schedule) nor completely informal. An interview guide specifying a small number of open-ended questions was prepared in advance.

In the primary school sector all permanent members of staff were invited to take part in focus group discussions held in directed time after school. Since the task of interviewing students about community relations required to be set within a more concrete context, I arranged to meet year 7[5] students who had taken part in cross-community projects with their schools. Parents of year 6-7 pupils who had taken part in cross-community events were generally invited to attend school during the evening. These events were planned with social processes in mind.

Focus group sessions at the secondary level were held with Heads of Year, particularly those whose subjects were identified as important carriers of EMU (e.g., English, History, Geography and RE) as well as key staff such as the EMU Co-ordinator. Key Stage 3 pupils were identified by the Principals on the basis of their potential capacity to comment on their experience and involvement with cross-community events at school. Likewise, invitations were forwarded to the parents or guardians of these same students.

As seen from Table 2, research contact was made with a total of 343 individuals across all schools, of which 87 were members of staff, 228 were pupils and 28 parents. Research in each of the schools produced over 6 hours of tape-recorded interview and group discussion on the themes of the study. School visits were completed over a five-month period between February and July 1999.

Data analysis

The procedure used to analyse data followed the five steps described by Vaughn et al. (1996) i.e., identify the big ideas, identify units of information,

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[5] In N. Ireland, year 7 is the final year of primary schooling.

categorise units, negotiate categories and finally identify themes and link to theory. This procedure was described by Vaughn et al. as an adaptation of the Constant Comparative Method (Glaser and Strauss, 1967) and Naturalistic enquiry (Lincoln and Guba, 1985).

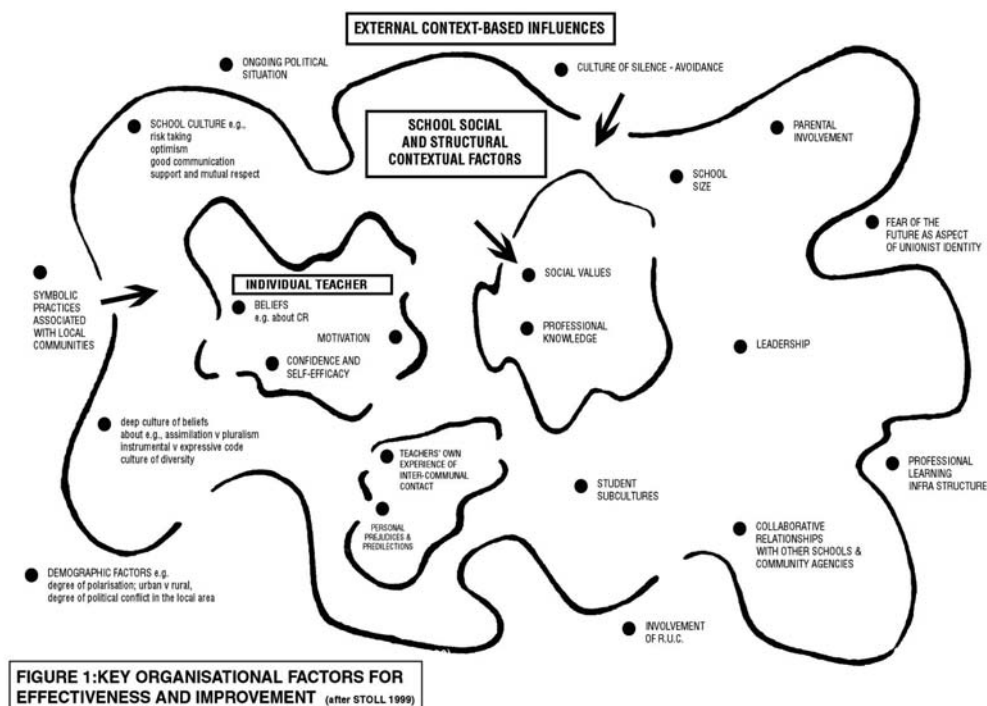|	School	Teachers	Pupils	Parents
A	CLOONEY	8	61	2
B	TORRENS AVENUE	18	58	7
C	THOMPSON	6	18	4
D	KNOCKBRACK	9	15	4
E	LEARMOUNT	9	22	2
F	LISMORE	10	11	1
G	ST THERESA'S	7	7	2
H	ROE	7	14	5
I	BENBRADAGH	13	22	1
	TOTAL	87	228	28

Table 2: A summary of respondents across case study schools

Section 3: Issues

Key results including commentary are presented in this section. Section 3.1 concentrates on the performance level (see Knoff, 1995) by describing some teacher practice. By way of comparison, the perspectives of students and

parents on this practice are then positioned alongside. Section 3.2 identifies key institutional factors influencing effectiveness and improvement. However, due to the limitations of space, it was not possible to include all nineteen identified themes in this discussion.

When describing the influences acting on a school's internal capacity for change, Stoll (1999) used an amoeba-like shape to represent in visual form the dynamic and adaptive nature of schools. Her representation was adapted for use here (see, Figure1). The spaces in this model indicate that the influences at each level interact and may not act in isolation.

EXTERNAL CONTEXT-BASED INFLUENCES

ONGOING POLITICAL SITUATION

CULTURE OF SILENCE - AVOIDANCE

SCHOOL CULTURE e.g., risk taking optimism good communication support and mutual respect

SCHOOL SOCIAL AND STRUCTURAL CONTEXTUAL FACTORS

PARENTAL INVOLVEMENT

SCHOOL SIZE

FEAR OF THE FUTURE AS ASPECT OF UNIONIST IDENTITY

SYMBOLIC PRACTICES ASSOCIATED WITH LOCAL COMMUNITIES

INDIVIDUAL TEACHER

BELIEFS e.g. about CR

SOCIAL VALUES

MOTIVATION

PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE

LEADERSHIP

CONFIDENCE AND SELF-EFFICACY

deep culture of beliefs about e.g., assimilation v pluralism instrumental v expressive code culture of diversity

TEACHERS' OWN EXPERIENCE OF INTER-COMMUNAL CONTACT

STUDENT SUBCULTURES

PROFESSIONAL LEARNING INFRA STRUCTURE

PERSONAL PREJUDICES & PREDILECTIONS

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS WITH OTHER SCHOOLS & COMMUNITY AGENCIES

DEMOGRAPHIC FACTORS e.g. degree of polarisation; urban v rural, degree of political conflict in the local area

INVOLVEMENT OF R.U.C.

FIGURE 1: KEY ORGANISATIONAL FACTORS FOR EFFECTIVENESS AND IMPROVEMENT (after STOLL 1999)

Teachers and themes

A summary of the data collected from Torrens school is included here because it illustrated features of practice shared to some extent by all the case study schools (see Table 3). Given the declared purposes behind EMU work, an extraordinary feature of this information was the widespread absence of

classroom pedagogy which enabled students to discuss and reflect upon issues directly related to the N. Ireland conflict and its religious or political ramifications; at least during the statutory years of schooling. Instead, teachers appeared to interpret the task as one of personality development and the resolution of interpersonal conflict. As such, the study provided evidence to support Cairn's (1996) speculation that peace education focused too much on interpersonal as opposed to inter-group conflict. Indeed, it suggested that this personal -social development (PSD) view was so common that it appeared to represent part of the taken for granted knowledge within schools.

Most teachers in this study did not spontaneously refer to classroom-based activities when required to articulate their understanding of community relations. Across all case study schools, in total only half a dozen topics were identified as providing obvious or natural links with the contemporary situation. While the making of links was influenced by mediating factors related to teachers and the school context, the interviews nevertheless were notable for the way in which they revealed an unwillingness or inability amongst teachers to make such connections.

From Table 3 it can be seen that Torrens teachers' believed they were doing community relations when helping children, for example, to identify with a very functional view of society where life was good so long as everyone played their part, to understand the interdependence of people in the process of making bread or understand the process of recycled rubbish. At Key Stage 1, Lismore teachers included children helping each other tie shoelaces as part of their EMU programme to develop interdependence.

Evidence such as the above failed to support Smith and Robinson's (1996) conclusions that schools in N. Ireland were strong on intercultural learning; understood here as practices which enabled students to critically explore their own and counter-religionists' culture (the other side). On the contrary, it suggested that the planned curriculum (at least in case study schools) was to a large extent devoid of such opportunities. Perversely, more common was the appropriation of 60's-70's English style multicultural practice (designed to deal with relationships between minority ethnic cultures and their host communities in inner-city areas; Rolston 1998) as well as taking a broader European dimension. For example, teachers from Torrens at Key Stage 2 used stories to help students explore Chinese and Indian cultures.

	Fostering Respect for Self and Others and Building Relationships	**Understanding Conflict**	**Interdependence**	**Cultural Understanding**
Nursery	Through class rules Through daily routines Talking about behaviour and treatment of each other	Quarrels within the classroom	Playing with each other	Looking at different stories and story time
Key Stage 1	Through the topics of ourselves and family in science Through class rules Through RE topics such as the Good Samaritan and friendships Issue of bullying through stories and the Kidscape materials	World War 2, war stopping on Christmas day and making friends with the enemy Quarrels in the playground Lying, conflict developing between two people; using stories when conflict develops between individuals in the classroom RE topics about telling the truth and respect for other peoples' property	How different occupations within the community all fit together to make life better for everyone Making bread (farmer-millar-baker-shop-mum) Topic of recycled rubbish (bin-cleaners – caretakers – binmen-recycled) visit to local shopping centre	Reading scheme stories on different ethnic groups e.g., Chinese, Indian. Through RE, Confirmation and Mass; the Good Samaritan; Jesus the healer/teacher
Key Stage 2	Through school rules (safety, staying on school grounds, getting lost on school trips) Use of Kidscape materials Using drama and role play about handling a social situation Bullying Series of talks relevant to discipline in schools; discipline talk relevant to school	Use of Kidscape Appreciation of another persons' point of view when an argument arises Use of Kidscape materials on bullying Using topics for debating and supporting two points of views	Use of creative dance in PE Use of classroom procedures The Victorians and the Industrial Revolution	Through RE Through drama Geography: Europe History: the famine Music from a variety of countries Literature from around the world i.e., legends, fairytales in Ireland.

Table 3: Teachers and themes: Torrens school

When cultural heritage objectives within the N. Ireland context were tackled, teachers appeared to use a range of strategies to avoid controversial situations or discussions. All the case study primaries made use of the packaged heritage industry (e.g. visits to Folk Parks), where distant historical events such as the Famine in Ireland were presented in such a way that any potential political sting in the tail was removed (see also Rolston, 1998).

Contrary to intentions, teachers in some of case study schools appeared to use the cross -curricular themes in an ethnocentric way to celebrate the communities they served and thus contribute towards homogeneity and exclusion. One Catholic secondary teacher, for example, suggested that she decided to use the novel "To Kill a Mocking Bird" with her class because "it dealt with the struggle of a minority, just like you know how the British Empire tried to subordinate our own culture."

The pupils' voice

When given the opportunity, young people in this study were not afraid or unable to discuss issues surrounding peace education in N. Ireland that many teachers seemed unwilling or unable to tackle. Their views and opinions about school-based work seemed to vary in relation to factors such as location of the school in a more or less troubled area as well as socio-economic status, religion, age and gender. The eleven year-old children from more politicised areas of the city were most motivated to discuss divisive issues whereas some male rural Protestants were extremely negative, fatalistic and exhibited more sectarian exchanges in discussion than any others:

> If we were taught something about it we would understand, nobody tells us about it so we don't understand.... right and the agreement (Belfast Agreement) and stuff; its the children's future you know and we should have a right or get the choice whether or not to hear about peace or the agreement or whatever....we should get the decisions to….its our future and we should get to decide
>
> (Thompson student)

The parents' voice

The parents (mainly mothers) in this study shared the characteristic of never having been invited to air their views about community relations policy. Contrary to expectation, there was good support for work such as prejudice reduction, discussion of controversial issues and the exploration of issues about ethnicity. This view was more prevalent amongst the urban parents of all socio-economic circumstances.

Section 4: Key factors in Organisational Effectiveness: individual teacher level

Individual teacher level

Six interacting themes at the individual teacher level were identified of which the first three will be discussed here: beliefs about community relations practice; teachers own prejudicial perceptions; confidence and efficacy including personal experience of inter-group contact; motivation; social values and professional knowledge.

Theme 1: *Beliefs about community relations practice*

Despite the fact that contact schemes were non-statutory, many teachers in the case study schools believed that community relations and contact were synonymous. They held onto this belief with such tenacity that it appeared to be an implicit theory underpinning practice. As predicted by Gallagher (1995b), the community relations as "contact" view tended to limit teachers' curriculum and other perspectives on the task.

A personal-interpersonal or PSD view of community relations assumed that the development of personal identity (self-esteem) and interpersonal relationships (e.g. teacher-pupils; pupil-pupil), via the classroom and school ethos, had a direct influence on peace and reconciliation in the wider community. This represented the general approach. The specific approach occurred when, for example, "teachers helped to reconcile differences between children if they had a fall out in the playground" (Clooney teacher).

Theme 2: *Teachers own prejudicial perceptions*

The difficult issue of communicating stereotyped and prejudicial perceptions was raised by all the groups. These discussions very often focused on the teaching of history which, since educational reform, had a common and agreed syllabus including an attainment target specifically designed to encourage the exploration of alternative perspectives. Whilst agreeing that this curriculum specification within policy texts existed in theory, one teacher from St Theresa's suggested that "you could still treat issues in a biased way by either evading other points of view or saying things like I'm convinced the other side were wrong; this definitely goes on and so it comes down to the individual teacher's own political and social views". A Learmount teacher agreed, "you could still put a different slant on things, you could, for example, look at the Famine in Ireland in a particular way if you wanted to." Two departmental heads insisted that their own colleagues fell over themselves to be objective, but conceded that this was not the case in all schools. There was good support for the idea that curriculum interpretation was down to the individual teacher since "they were all a product of the environment" and that it was very easy to pass on preconceived social-political ideas which children were quick to pick up on.

Theme 3: *Confidence and efficacy*

In discussion, teachers cited fears, lack of confidence and lack of ability about aspects of community relations work; especially over inertia to tackle the difficult highly emotive and charged work involved in exploring the course, impact and potential for joint resolution to conflict in N. Ireland. These mostly involved insecurities over assumed negative parental reaction to any such work as well as lack of confidence about dealing with potential conflictive situations around sectarianism. They also cited insecurities and concerns about, for example, their own lack of knowledge of the "other" side, influencing children with their own values or "breaking ranks with colleagues and experiencing adverse responses from one's own community when an alternative was offered" (Benbraddagh Principal). Evidence from some Catholic EMU co-ordinators suggested that Protestant schools had more difficulties with this type of work because of greater fear and defensiveness within the broader Protestant community at this time.

Many teachers believed that the solution to some of these issues was a massive investment of time and resources in a programme of professional development.

138

School and structural level

At the level of the school's social and structural learning context, six themes were identified: school cultures; student subcultures; leadership; parental involvement; collaborative relationships with other schools and voluntary agencies and school size (three themes are discussed here).

Theme 1: *School culture*

Stoll (1999a) cited Schein's (1985) view of school culture as the deeper level of "basic assumptions and beliefs" that operated unconsciously to define an organisation's "view of itself and its environment". It acted as a screen or lens through which the world was viewed (Stoll, 1999a). This study demonstrated that respondents were able to identify a number of cultural norms and dimensions associated with outcomes including: professional understandings about the task and "the ideal pupil"; social and political values of staff; sense of collaboration and community and a social environment for students which promoted moral reasoning and pro-social (interpersonal) behaviours.

The curriculum-focused and exam driven nature of the whole system was seen by most respondents as extremely detrimental to effective outcomes. The 11 plus selection procedure in particular was singled out as incompatible with broader aims.[6] With tongue in cheek, one Learmount teacher explained that "there was plenty of time to concentrate on other things like EMU - after the 11 plus exam" and "during year 6 and 7 community relations work was really just incidental" (Torrens teacher). Not unusually, this factor was bound up in complex and situation specific inter-relationships with others. Thompson school, for example, attempted to maintain a balance between cognitive and social goals and this was based on the interpretation by staff of students' needs living in an area of high social deprivation. Interestingly, and unlike the situation with respect to the two mixed SES schools, this more balanced approach was reflected in the cross-

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[6] McEwen (1999) suggested that Catholics viewed Grammar schools as representing an engine of social mobility while for Protestants it appeared to be an important component of their self-worth as a community. However, its existence raised questions about social justice in the extent to which it was socially divisive and illustrated the way in which the system as a whole responded to the diversity of its students. The system is presently under review.

community contact aims held by the school. On the other hand, neighbouring Knockbrack was emerging from special measures and staff now had their sights firmly focused on the perceived need to improve 11 plus selection results and their place in the local league tables. With this educational vision, there was no thought given to replacing the vacant EMU co-ordinator post, reviewing the EMU curriculum or investing in relevant teacher development.

Working in surroundings where it was safe to take risks and maintain an optimistic attitude in the face of terrible atrocities were identified as important for effectiveness. The EMU co-ordinator at St Theresa's believed strongly that the focus in her school on "community" and" collaboration" helped to encourage these characteristics including the process of developing a whole-school approach to community relations (see also Watkins, 1999a). Nevertheless, she conceded realistically that it might be easier to maintain these conditions within an all-girls grammar school than in less privileged contexts.

Theme 2: *Student subcultures*

As reported by respondents, student subcultures operated in a number of ways to influence school practice. Salmon (1998) cited Cohen (1997) as having suggested that the school playground constituted an arena of significant interaction between young people where the world of the adult community and its institutional regimes carried little weight. Nothing illustrated more the power of the hidden curriculum to forge new identities than the following anecdote from one Torrens mother who had recently arrived in N. Ireland from England. Less than six weeks at his new school and her son was coming home asking what a "Fenian" was (slang word for Catholic) and what the difference between a "good Catholic" and a "bad Catholic" was. She explained how, "the very fact that they're at school they start to ask these questions because I never discuss it at home or they wouldn't hear it around this area; you know, it's very hard to keep them out of it when everyone else is throwing them in". An interesting dimension to this data was the way they illuminated the capacity of students to act as "critical reality definers" (Risborough, 1985; Woods, 1990) by attempting to shape the nature and form of teacher practice. Roe school provided a lot of rich data relevant to this in addition to highlighting the importance of taking account of the unique social contexts and discursive practices surrounding each school. The Roe Principal explained "the Protestant population from Roe have lived in a siege mentality for centuries and they feel threatened, to look at the other sides

point of view would be like an act of treachery and a betrayal of loyalism". The EMU co-ordinator continued "Yeah, they make you feel you're a traitor and it's terrible pressure; now, not all of them because the ones that do I don't think I've make one ounce of difference to them and I've tried, believe me I've tried".

There was a gender effect to this "alienated against" (AA) pupil subculture. Furthermore, this reporting of different student reactions was consistent with the view that there was a range of working class responses to schooling (see Brown, 1987) and several ideological positions available to contemporary loyalism in N. Ireland (see McCauley, 1998). These results were also consistent with a reciprocal, negotiated view of schooling.

Theme 3: *Leadership*

"The attitude of the Principal and senior management you know, if they're willing then it's possible but, if they're not it's impossible" remarked the EMU co-ordinator from St Theresa's. The Lismore teachers agreed "if you don't get encouragement from your boss at the top you may as well forget about it because you're banging your head against a brick wall." Respondents provided much rich data confirming the importance they attached to leadership and management at Board of Governor, senior management and co-ordinator levels (see also Stoll and Smith 1997; Smith 1998).

External context based

Seven themes were identified of which three will be described in greater detail: educational reform; the culture of silence or avoidance; school conflict over symbols valued within the neighbourhood; the demographic and social-economic status and circumstances of the neighbourhood or broader community; broader political climate; the culture of fear perceived to exist within sections of the Protestant community and police involvement with peace and reconciliation.

Theme 1: *Educational reform*

Concerns about the negative impact on provision as a result of educational reform provided a great deal of rich data. This comment from one of the focus group participants received much support from colleagues:

> God, the insecurity of teachers at the moment is detrimental to everything we do, its the insecurity that whatever I'm doing its never enough and no matter how experienced you are, how good you are and no matter what field you're in, there is this feeling that you are not doing enough in your academic subject role.
>
> (focus group participant)

As expressed by primary and second level teachers, open-enrolment combined with formula-funding, league tables of school performance allied to selective education created intense competition between schools. This emphasis on competition and selective provision provided little incentive for schools to promote inclusive practices including education for diversity. Furthermore, it appeared to have influenced negatively the psychological climate within institutions creating states of mind antithetical to risk taking and working differently (see also Smith, 1998; Watkins 1999a and 1999b).

Theme 2: *The culture of silence and avoidance*

The following story was told by a Protestant student about his visit to a Catholic school during the Christian festival of Lent:

> Before we went we were warned very much not to say anything about black marks on the heads of teachers or pupils; anyway, there was this Library lady who had one on her head, I couldn't stop for looking and I asked my mum and gran because I didn't know about it and they said it had something to do with St Patrick.
>
> (Protestant student)

Then there was the staff in another school who referred to the difficulties of doing more cutting-edge work because "we hide behind a lot of political correctness in N. Ireland and not wanting to cause offence". These examples were selected from a range of cross-focus-group data which illustrated what Gallagher (1998) referred to as "the all pervasive culture of silence that discouraged open discussion on the causes and consequences of division in our society" (Gallagher, 1998, p.19). By not mentioning controversial issues, related to conflict value-laden issues such as politics and religion, people in everyday interaction appeared to concentrate on interpersonal or non-group related issues (Gallagher, 1998).

Theme 3: *Cultural practices valued within local communities*

Data from low SES schools in particular provided rich information concerning struggles between pupils and teachers over displays by the former of symbols representing broader political and religious allegiances; things like badges, hats, scarves and tee-shirts. Students across schools provided a number of examples describing symbolic challenges to adult authority (the politics of symbolism) and attempts by teachers to counter these expressions of identity. The educational consequences appeared to lie in the antagonism and alienation it engendered (cf. Willis, 1977; McLaren, 1986).

Section 5: Further analysis and thoughts for change

This study contributes, I would argue, to the existing literatures on SESI and schooling, identity and community relations in N. Ireland. The factors associated with effectiveness in the case study schools appeared not to be discrete or self-contained but interact in complex ways creating different patterns at different organisational sites. Furthermore, the patterns spun by these factors varied in nature through articulation with key identities such as geographical location, socio-economic status, ethnicity and gender. This suggested that education for community relations in N. Ireland required an alternative conception of school effectiveness to the "received" model (see Lauder, Jamison and Wikeley, 1998).

The organisational picture revealed in this study related more to the sensitivity to context models of school effectiveness such as the contextual model (CM) described by Lauder et al. (1998). This had considerable policy import since it suggested schools in different contexts had different capacities, potentials and limits to change. The uniqueness of schools as organisations set in their own social contexts rendered problematic any notions of recipes for success.

Improving School Effectiveness for an inclusive democratic society

Notwithstanding the above, on the basis of the results of this study, it was thought feasible and desirable to attempt some form of analysis to inform improvement processes. In this respect, Knoff's (1995) whole-system perspective on organisational change was found to be a useful model for helping
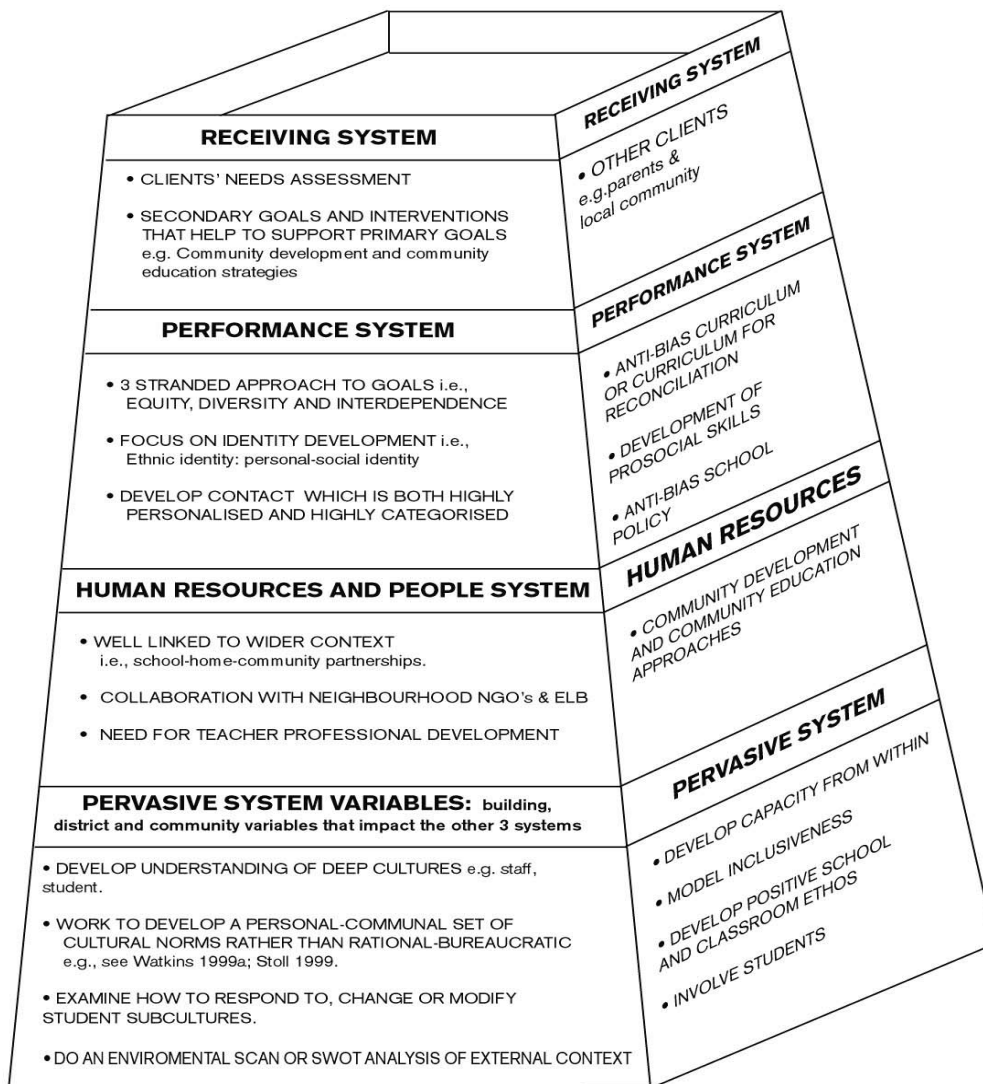
RECEIVING SYSTEM

- CLIENTS' NEEDS ASSESSMENT

- SECONDARY GOALS AND INTERVENTIONS THAT HELP TO SUPPORT PRIMARY GOALS e.g. Community development and community education strategies

PERFORMANCE SYSTEM

- 3 STRANDED APPROACH TO GOALS i.e., EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE

- FOCUS ON IDENTITY DEVELOPMENT i.e., Ethnic identity: personal-social identity

- DEVELOP CONTACT WHICH IS BOTH HIGHLY PERSONALISED AND HIGHLY CATEGORISED

HUMAN RESOURCES AND PEOPLE SYSTEM

- WELL LINKED TO WIDER CONTEXT i.e., school-home-community partnerships.

- COLLABORATION WITH NEIGHBOURHOOD NGO's & ELB

- NEED FOR TEACHER PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

PERVASIVE SYSTEM VARIABLES: building, district and community variables that impact the other 3 systems

- DEVELOP UNDERSTANDING OF DEEP CULTURES e.g. staff, student.

- WORK TO DEVELOP A PERSONAL-COMMUNAL SET OF CULTURAL NORMS RATHER THAN RATIONAL-BUREAUCRATIC e.g., see Watkins 1999a; Stoll 1999.

- EXAMINE HOW TO RESPOND TO, CHANGE OR MODIFY STUDENT SUBCULTURES.

- DO AN ENVIROMENTAL SCAN OR SWOT ANALYSIS OF EXTERNAL CONTEXT

RECEIVING SYSTEM

- OTHER CLIENTS e.g.parents & local community

PERFORMANCE SYSTEM

- ANTI-BIAS CURRICULUM OR CURRICULUM FOR RECONCILIATION

- DEVELOPMENT OF PROSOCIAL SKILLS

- ANTI-BIAS SCHOOL POLICY

HUMAN RESOURCES

- COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND COMMUNITY EDUCATION APPROACHES

PERVASIVE SYSTEM

- DEVELOP CAPACITY FROM WITHIN

- MODEL INCLUSIVENESS

- DEVELOP POSITIVE SCHOOL AND CLASSROOM ETHOS

- INVOLVE STUDENTS

FIGURE 2: AN INSTITUTIONAL MAP TO IMPROVE EFFECTIVENESS OF SCHOOL-BASED COMMUNITY RELATIONS after KNOFF 1995.

make such an analysis more explicit. Knoff viewed the school as consisting of four operating and overlapping systems (see Figure 2).

System 1: *The clients and their needs: the receiving system*

Knoff (1995) believed it was essential to make sure the real needs, goals and desires of our primary clients (students) were integrated and reflected in organisational change processes. It was clear from the student responses in this study that they had a great deal to offer the development of school provision designed to meet their needs (see also Leitch and Kilpatrick, 1999).

The upper primary school aged students in the case study schools showed a capacity to think in very sophisticated ways and were prepared to discuss controversial issues. Yet, as one Torrens student remarked, "there's not enough systems for children's' voices to be heard by adults, to say what we feel".

System 2: *The performance system: organisational and strategic planning*

The following issues were identified by Knoff as part of the system which helped the organisation obtain its student-focused goals i.e., tasks, programmes (activities), mission, goals and aims. In relation to pedagogy, the results of this study were interesting for the way in which they demonstrated a gulf of some proportions between the world of the classroom and the world of academic and research psychologists in N. Ireland; small though the latter were (Cairns,1999). As demonstrated, teacher practice was influenced by implicit theories which emphasised personalised strategies such as the organisation of contact and development of personal-interpersonal skills. On the other hand, for some time, psychologists in N. Ireland have rejected personalised views about prejudice and violence and have attempted instead to apply a social psychology of the group; in particular Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel and Turner, 1986). This theory draws attention to the important disjuncture or discontinuity between personal identity aspects of self-concept (personal identity) and social identity aspects of the self. As Turner (1999) explained, in situations where social identity becomes salient, a change in the level and context of the self occurred whereby people categorise themselves as a group member in contrast to other

groups; this is a change from the "I" to the "We".[7] Under such circumstances, what predicted prejudice was not personality, but the specific beliefs, stereotypes and biases about ingroups and outgroups that people held (Turner, 1999).

This has implications for organisational change. School provision for personal-social education needs to take a more multi-dimensional view of identity. For example, unless school-based practice designed to help future citizens build an inclusive democratic society attempts to disrupt or challenge the sectarian attitudes and beliefs that children already hold, then it will be impotent. From his review of the literature on children and racial prejudice, Connelly (1999) suggested that "anti-bias" work involving the presentation of "counter-biases"[8] was essential from the pre-school stage onwards. As can be seen from Figure 2, I referred to this as a Curriculum for Reconciliation; envisaged as critical pedagogy that didn't avoid controversial issues and allowed students to engage critically and reflectively with their own background and that of the other main ethnic and cultural group (see also May 1999).[9] The SPD approach takes its place in this analysis as an indirect but necessary way of preventing further prejudicial beliefs from developing.

System 3: *Human resource and pervasive system variables*

The limitations of space allow for no more than a passing mention of some essential improvement issues associated with these two organisational systems. The respondents in this study drew attention to the significance of teacher and student subcultures for effectiveness and improvement. As Fullan (1988) remarked, attempts to improve a school which did not take account of culture

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[7] Northern Ireland people who spend some time living in another country might identify with this process.

[8] Connolly (1999), drawing upon the research of Doyle and Aboud (1995), suggested that counter-biases could take two forms i.e., positive portrayals of the outgroup (stressing their similarities and valuing their differences) and negative portrayals of the ingroup.

9 Ira Shor (1992) remarked that a curriculum that avoided questioning school and society was not as is commonly supposed politically neutral … "social education that tries to be neutral supports the dominant ideology in society, it cuts off the students' development as critical thinkers about the world" (Shor, 1992, p.12).

and underlying organisational conditions might be doomed to failure or tinkering. Furthermore, respondents reported better student and teacher outcomes when schools operated in a communally and collaborative fashion; that is, when they adopted a personal-communal model of schooling (see also Rosenholtz, 1991; Watkins, 1999a).

The need for teacher professional development and school-home-community partnerships were highlighted by this study. As mentioned, some interesting and stark differences of perspective were revealed when teacher and parent views were compared. Consequently, by silencing the voice of parents, the case study schools appeared to have deprived themselves of a powerful source of support for school improvement.

As suggested above, this study contributed to the existing literature on SESI and schooling, identity and community relations in N. Ireland. With regard to the latter, the case studies threw some strong empirical light on how the cross-curricular themes shaped-up in the classroom (cf. Gallagher 1995). The factors mediating Government policy at the level of the institution were explored in some depth. The results suggested that schools were still more akin to "cultures of partisanship" than "cultures of diversity" despite over a decade of official support for community relations work.

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