

## **INTEGRATED PRIMARY SCHOOLS AND COMMUNITY RELATIONS IN NORTHERN IRELAND<sup>1</sup>**

Dolores Loughrey, Sonia Kidd, and Jacqueline Carlin  
*University of Ulster, Coleraine*

The practice of community relations in schools in Northern Ireland was investigated in interviews with principals and teachers in controlled integrated primary schools (CI schools which were previously attended and staffed by those from a Protestant background but which have now taken up the option to 'transform' to integrated status and so cater for all children whatever their religious persuasion) and in grant maintained integrated primary schools (GMI schools which were established specifically to facilitate the education of all children together, whatever their religious persuasion). The following topics were investigated in the two types of school in the study reported in this paper: involvement in community relations activities with other schools and within schools; the perceived relationships between a community relations agenda and the traditional educational functions of the school; the effect of the religious background of children on teachers and teaching; and problems of sectarianism and prejudice. The evidence suggests that community relations practices are more substantial and sophisticated in GMI schools than in CI schools.

The vast majority of schools in Northern Ireland can be described as denominational (either Catholic or Protestant). Approximately 97% of parents choose to send their children to such schools. Staffing of schools is also almost always on a denominational basis (Darby & Dunn, 1987; McClenahan, Cairns, Dunn, & Morgan, 1993). Such educational arrangements were not the intention of the committee set up in 1921 to plan the reform of the Northern Ireland education system following the partitioning of Ireland and the setting up of the Northern Ireland state. An early objective of the new state was the institution of a 'national' education system driven by the motive that this might build a 'national identity'. It was the hope of the first minister of education, Lord Londonderry, that a single set of schools which would provide education for all religious traditions could be established, but bitter resentments between nationalists and

<sup>1</sup> The research on which this paper is based forms part of a broader community relations programme funded by the International Fund for Ireland Community Bridges Programme and the NI Community Relations Council, under the European Union's special support programme for peace and reconciliation.

unionists made this aspiration impossible (Milliken & Gallagher, 1998; Morgan, 1992). The Catholic Church, and indeed the Protestant churches, sought to protect the ethos of their schools and, as debate over all aspects of education continued, a dual system of 'controlled' and 'maintained' schools evolved. The controlled schools were largely funded by the state and were attended and staffed by those from a Protestant background. Alternatively, maintained schools were attended and staffed by Catholics. They provided a Catholic education and were owned, administered, and, up until the last decade were partially funded by the Catholic Church (Akenson, 1973; Darby & Dunn, 1987; Farren 1995). These educational arrangements continue to operate in Northern Ireland.

The integrated school movement grew out of a belief held by some parents that if children went to school together, then some of the mutual ignorance and fear about each other's culture might be reduced (Dunn 1991; Graham 1990; Morgan, Dunn, Cairns, & Fraser 1992). In 1974, the 'All Children Together' (ACT) pressure group was established by parents and others interested in education to try to persuade existing schools to change to integrated schools. In support of their campaign, a Bill was passed through parliament allowing existing schools to make such a change. However, despite the apparent support for integrated schools and the legal facility for schools to change to integrated status, none actually took up that option (Moffatt, 1993).

In the wake of such disappointments, the ACT group decided to open a model integrated school to demonstrate the viability of the approach, and in September 1981, Lagan College opened with an enrolment of 27 pupils in a converted scout hall as the first planned integrated post-primary school in the province. It was entirely dependent on private funding. As the campaign and publicity for integrated education gained momentum, the success of Lagan College was followed by Hazelwood College (1985) and by six integrated primary schools which opened between 1985 and 1988. The favourable publicity surrounding the opening of these schools helped to interest major international charitable foundations, such as the Nuffield Foundation, the Rountree Trust, and the Paul Getty Trust. Such interest and large grants and interest-free loans to assist the schools running costs were essential to the survival of the integrated movement (Morgan & Fraser, 1995). During 1989, an umbrella organization, the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), was formed to act as a focal point and facilitator for the integrated movement.

The integrated movement also benefited from the implementation of the Education Reform Order (1989). The Northern Ireland version of the Reform Act contained measures designed to promote better community relations. To

reflect the particular circumstances in Northern Ireland, new curricular initiatives, Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage, were to be included in the new common curriculum for all schools. Support was promised for integrated schools: 'the Department of Education will facilitate and encourage the development of integrated education where there is parental demand' [Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, 1989]. The Reform Act also made provision for parents of pupils in an existing school to vote to change or transform its status to an integrated school.

The financial implications of such government commitment to the setting up and operation of integrated schools proved to be enormous. By 1995, the Department of Education claimed that over one-third of its total capital budget for new schools and major capital building projects in existing schools was being used to support the integrated sector which provided education for less than 3% of the total school population (DENI, 1996; DENI, 1997). Those championing the cause of integrated education reminded government of their legislative duty to 'facilitate' their efforts to promote integrated education, while schools in the maintained and controlled sectors argued that the expansion of integrated education was hurting them financially. To resolve this dilemma, government made the criteria to be met before a new grant-maintained integrated (GMI) school (established specifically to facilitate the education of all children together) could gain official approval and financial support more rigorous. During 1995, 1996, and 1997, the Department of Education issued a series of official circulars detailing issues relating to recruitment and accommodation (see Fraser & Morgan, 1999). A deterioration in relationships between government and NICIE ensued, as NICIE continued to work to develop and open new integrated schools, while government continued to insist that its new criteria be met before granting financial support.

The 1989 Education Order also made provision for existing controlled or maintained schools to transform to integrated status in what are known as controlled integrated (CI) schools, which were previously attended by those from a Protestant background but which had taken up the option to 'transform' to integrated status and so cater for all children, whatever their religious persuasion. Although no interest had been expressed in this option, which had not been taken up by any school by the mid-1990s, it appeared an attractive alternative to the government in making provision for integrated education. So much so, that by 1997, official statements began to promote it as the preferred choice (DENI, 1997).

Concerns have been expressed about the development of integrated education through transformation. Details of the process, such as what

proportion of cross-community support would be necessary to make a school 'integrated' were questioned. Initially, government guidelines accepted a 1% cross-community enrolment in the first year group after transformation with the prospect of a rise to 5 percent. Figures were subsequently raised to a requirement of 5% cross-community enrolment immediately following transformation, and in 1997 the document *Framework for Transformation* further increased the figure to 10% (DENI, 1997). NICIE (1997) questioned if schools that transform to integrated status could attain the right balance between the two communities and would be able to develop mutual respect for both traditions in a school which had a particular history in one tradition. From the integration 'purists' point of view, transformations were perceived to be a way of saving money, while appearing to support integrated education.

In many respects integrated primary schools are much the same as any others. For example, teachers in integrated schools teach the same legislated curriculum, with its heavy emphasis on literacy and numeracy, as in any other school. While pupils' experience of reading, writing, and number may vary for many reasons, the fact that the school is controlled, maintained, or integrated is unlikely to affect it very much. In other respects, of course, integrated schools are different, and have both formal and informal characteristics that set them apart from schools in the controlled and maintained sectors in a complex variety of ways (see, for example, NICIE, 2001). Furthermore, given differences in buildings, school populations, staffing, the varying length of time the school has operated as an integrated entity, and, perhaps most important of all, the varied locations and catchment areas in which they operate, we might expect to find differences between different types of integrated schools. In the study described in this paper, differences in the state of community relations practice in grant maintained integrated (GMI) primary schools and controlled integrated (CI) primary schools are the focus of attention.

#### METHOD

The study involved semi-structured interviews with the principals and two teachers (one experienced and one less experienced) in 10 of the 28 integrated primary schools listed in the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education's annual report for 1999/2000 (NICIE, 2000). In an effort to ensure as wide a geographical spread as possible, the selection of schools for interviews was based on a range of variables, the most significant of which were management type (GMI or CI), school size, and location. The specific schools chosen were often the only ones available; in cases where a choice existed, it was made randomly. Interviews were conducted in ten schools: three small-sized

(0-99 pupils) schools of which two were CI and one GMI; four medium-sized (100-199 pupils) schools, of which two were CI and two GMI; and three large (200+ pupils) schools, of which one was CI and two were GMI.

Similar interview schedules were used with principals and teachers. However, principals' interviews focussed to a greater extent on policy and whole-school issues, while teachers' interviews centred on classroom practice.

In view of Murphy's (2001) conclusion that 'most teachers interpret the term community relations to mean public relations', all interviews began with the statement:

The purpose of our discussion is to talk with you about community relations, that is how the different religious backgrounds of the children and adults connected with the school affect you and your work.

Interviews took between 15 minutes and an hour to complete. Generally, principals' interviews took longer, partly because they took place first and a lot of basic information could be gained that did not need to be revisited, and partly because the principal was such a pivotal figure in every school. Topics discussed during interview were: social and religious background; community relations activities within and between schools; community relations and education; sectarianism and prejudice.

All respondents were assured of both individual and collective confidentiality: the names of individuals or of schools would not be identified or be identifiable. Thus, respondents and interviewees are referred to in this report by role rather than by name, and schools are named after the brightest stars in the sky!

## RESULTS

### *Social and Religious Background*

The first few questions in each interview were biographical: length of experience in current role, previous experience whether within the same school or elsewhere, and similar matters. These questions also allowed rapport to be established. While nearly all the teachers were female, the gender balance of principals was more even. Previous experience was very varied. Some interviewees had 20 or more years experience of a particular role in the school (or of more than one role such as from teacher to vice-principal to principal), while others had only a few weeks or months experience. None of this seemed of any great significance except that in a few cases roles had been held for such a short time that the interviewee was not fully informed about school policies or had not been fully inducted into the life of the school.

Most schools claimed either that their pupil intake was mixed in terms of social class background, or that the majority of their children were from relatively disadvantaged homes. In a few schools where the local catchment area appeared to be made up of middle-class or professional homes, this was not necessarily reflected in the composition of the school population. At Canopus GMI school, for example, children were bussed from housing estates around the town, thus providing a mixed enrolment. The social background of children was only occasionally referred to in interviews. The principal of Vega CI school, for example, claimed that country children were less 'worldly-wise' than urban children, and that social and political issues (except at the time of interview foot-and-mouth disease) tended to pass them by. The age of children was regarded as of much greater significance, especially by class teachers. For example, it was often, but not always, claimed that before Year 4 or 5 (when pupils were 8 to 9 years of age) children were quite unconscious of, or at best confused about, religious or cultural identity, and consequently that community relations work was inappropriate.

The religious backgrounds of children and teachers were varied. In GMI schools, strenuous attempts were made to achieve an equal balance of Protestant and Catholic pupils, or at least not too great an imbalance, with varying degrees of success. The fact that parents could decide that their children should be counted as 'others' rather than as Protestant or Catholic caused difficulties in achieving a balance, and on occasion was the cause of some frustration. In most GMI schools, there were also a few children who were 'genuine others', either because the family was of a different ethnic background or of a different religious faith. In GMI schools, staff were generally balanced in terms of religious background, whereas in most CI schools the staff tended to be much more heavily drawn from the Protestant community; often there was only one Catholic teacher. However, this was less true in Vega CI and Procyon CI which had been religiously mixed for many years before integrated status was sought. The proportion of Catholic children in CI schools varied from about 5 to over 80 percent.

*Involvement in Community Relations Activities with Other Schools and in the Wider School Environment*

Principals provided much information about links and connections in response to a question about their involvement in community relations activities. On the whole, teachers were less knowledgeable about this matter except in relation to activities that affected their own class. Most schools had substantial links with other schools and with the community, most commonly through

sporting and musical activities, and by taking part in competitions and quizzes. School teams played football and netball in local leagues, school choirs sang, and orchestras played at concerts and in old people's homes, and throughout the year children participated in a wide range of local events and festivals. These are all valuable activities, but little different from those commonly found in controlled or maintained schools. However, in GMI schools, the specific value to integrated schools of connections within the community had sometimes been thought out in terms of their wider implications:

The community will not value us unless we're of value to it. I'm conscious that it's easy to be caught up in a segregated corner called integrated education which is exclusive and keeps the rest of the world away from us. We're in our corner creating another segregated sector in an already segregated system. I'm very conscious of not becoming a school which does not interact with the wider community. (Principal, Pollux GMI school)

Some schools (always GMI) had, in addition, made links with Irish cultural and sporting activities. In several, gaelic games were played; in others, there were contacts with traditional Irish music and, in one or two, relationships had been established with Irish language, educational, or historical groups or centres. Such links and contacts were unknown in CI schools. In some cases, the idea had just not seemed to occur to anyone; in others, there were worries about parents' views, especially where a substantial minority of parents had voted against transforming to integrated status in the first place. In these schools, there was talk of evolution rather than revolution, of treading warily, or of dipping a toe in the water. In some CI schools, tolerance sometimes seemed rather too generous a description of practice in this area, whereas some GMI schools had clearly made genuine efforts to promote understanding of, and respect for, Irish cultural traditions.

Most schools also had Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) connections with other schools, although in two of the five CI schools such links had been discontinued, since, as the principal said, 'Now we are integrated, there is no longer any point' (Sirius CI school). A variety of links with local controlled, maintained, integrated, and special schools and, on occasion, with schools in the Republic of Ireland were described in interviews. Usually, contact with local linked schools consisted of shared visits to sites of cultural or historical interest and, occasionally, a joint residential trip, plus sometimes written or email correspondence between children or internet links. In some cases, connections had been established and maintained with one school for a number of years, but in others links were more recent or more variable.

Triangular relationships with both a controlled and maintained school were generally found to be difficult and complicated, and many schools avoided them. In some schools, EMU contacts were described as productive and useful, although often the time and effort required by full-time class teachers to organize joint enterprises were onerous and, at times, links appeared to be little more than token. One interviewee expressed doubts about the value of such activities in terms of the extent of meaningful contact between children:

We're involved in EMU formally and I would have to express serious doubts...I would question the benefit of EMU activities where the children go to a particular place in separate buses, then they walk around with their own teacher, and then they sit and have their lunch and go home in their separate buses...I'm very sceptical about that. (Principal, Altair GMI school)

This is a stronger expression than was typical, but similar misgivings were implied by several respondents.

#### *Community Relations Activities within Schools*

In almost all CI and GMI schools, a wide variety of practices concerning community relations were described. In most, assemblies provided a focus for such work, and almost all schools organized events for Christian festivals and other special occasions. Often, assemblies were used as occasions for the reinforcement of ideas related to pastoral care or for general moral teaching, and, on occasion, they were led by visitors, frequently clergymen (but not usually Catholic priests) or leaders of other religious or civic groups. In GMI schools, assemblies were sometimes taken very seriously as occasions for multi-cultural celebrations of difference with activities relating not only to all Protestant and Catholic religious festivals, but also to Chinese new year, Diwali, or Ramadan, or as a focus for 'weeks' such as mixed marriages week, integrated education week, or Christian unity week. In CI schools, such activities were much less common, and assemblies often appeared to be little more than brief and rather traditional weekly events of religious observance. Generally, such lack of attention to community relations matters in assemblies was part of the pattern summarized by respondents in phrases such as 'let sleeping dogs lie', 'not opening a can of worms', and 'it's not an issue here'. On one occasion in a CI school with a slight majority of Catholic children, the notion of celebrating difference was challenged directly:

The trouble with celebrating both traditions is that we have no ways of celebrating Protestantism. Roman Catholic children have the whole of Irish culture to celebrate, music, story, history and art – what have we got?

We haven't got a culture in the same way and all our symbols like the flag and the twelfth have been politicized and corrupted. What have we got to celebrate? (Teacher, Arcturus CI school)

The implication of this view is that the status quo in the school was of some kind of cultural and religious neutrality, which is a very dubious proposition.

While assemblies and other whole-school events were often discussed, arrangements for the religious education of Catholic children were always of concern. Each school had developed ways of handling such matters which varied in detail, but in nearly all cases Protestant and Catholic children were taught together in class, and Catholic children were then withdrawn at particular times to prepare for the sacraments (Religious education was taught entirely separately in only one CI school). In some cases, such withdrawals or similar arrangements were consciously made in ways that fitted with normal school routines:

All the children split at two o'clock to go to specialist classes, so the fact that some are going for preparation for sacraments doesn't raise any eyebrows. (Principal, Deneb GMI school)

Such arrangements did not cause any apparent difficulties in any school, and it was variously claimed that children did not notice, or saw it as routine, or never questioned it, or that it was discussed openly if it was raised. In most schools, children of other ethnic groups or faiths joined in with religious education classes, with the rare exception of Jehovah's Witnesses who were excluded from all religious activities by parental request.

The organization of First Communion itself was handled in different ways, largely depending on local circumstances. In some schools, very good relations existed with priests and maintained schools in the area, and children were fully integrated and welcomed into existing arrangements. In CI schools, a *modus vivendi* had often been worked out over many years ('It's part of the fabric' as a Vega teacher put it), and in some GMI schools positive relationships had also been developed. In a few GMI schools, however, clergy were less obliging and children from the school were accommodated in church procedures somewhat grudgingly; in one or two other areas, local maintained schools apparently resented the fact that integrated schools were taking 'their' children and did not willingly co-operate.

First Communion and its associated activities required a lot of principals' and teachers' time and effort, and the process as a whole should not be regarded as insignificant. There was much evidence of willing tolerance by schools of children's religious needs, but active respect was less common. While principals and teachers often attended religious services, Protestant children were enabled

in only some schools to attend the First Communion of their classmates as members of a participating school choir or just to observe the service (in most cases parental permission was sought for such forms of attendance). Similarly, in some GMI schools, First Communion was celebrated as a momentous occasion during school assemblies or at a specially organized party. In other schools, mainly CI, there was no apparent acknowledgement of First Communion at all:

Nothing happens about it here. The other children don't know anything about it, they don't even know that something's happening that Saturday and then the (Catholic) children come in all excited about it but it's over, it's stopped. (Teacher, Arcturus CI school)

The principal in the same CI school commented, 'It may be mentioned in assembly but it's not a big thing. It's just mentioned'. In two CI schools, the teacher mainly responsible for the preparation of Catholic children for the sacraments felt that such relative neglect was regrettable. In one case, the teacher's suggestion to other staff that First Communion could be explained to all children and that some small celebration within the school might be appropriate had been 'talked down' on the grounds that 'the Catholic children would feel uncomfortable at being singled out' (Teacher, Sirius CI school). In another CI school, the idea that photographs of children in their First Communion outfits could be put up in the area used for religious education had been rejected although 'pictures of football teams are displayed all over the place even though not everyone's interested in football' (Teacher, Arcturus CI school).

Finally, it may be worth noting that in respect to community relations work within school or in external contexts, there was no evidence that integrated status had made any substantial difference to CI schools, nor did any such schools claim that it had. In several cases, being integrated simply made the fact that the school was religiously mixed and had been for years more explicit and upfront, without any obvious effect on practice. In one or two other schools, a slightly cynical view would be that becoming integrated was a pre-emptive strike against the possibility of a GMI school opening in the area and, thus, potentially taking pupils away from the school. Again, however, transformation had had minimal implications for the ways things had always been done. Further, it was clear that some teaching staff, as well as parents, had not supported the move to integrated status, with the result that changes in practice were unlikely, at least in the short term.

*The Community Relations Agenda and the Traditional Educational Functions of the School*

At one extreme, the view was expressed that the community relations agenda was actually as important, or even more important, than the school's more traditional educational functions.

Interviewer: Are you saying then that integration is just as important as the curriculum?

Principal: Far more so, far more... Integration is our reason to exist... everything we do is geared to this ethos of integration... When people say to me I'm only here to teach I say go and work in another school. (Principal, Altair GMI school)

At the other extreme there were no doubts either. In all CI schools, respondents consistently and forcefully stated their aspiration to provide a good primary education in ways little different from that provided in any controlled or maintained school, and that their integrated status was of marginal importance:

We get children from a wide catchment area because of our academic achievements, and especially because of our 11+ results. That's what parents are interested in. Many of them have no strong religious affiliations; it's the quality of teaching and the 11+ passes that count. (Principal, Sirius CI school)

It was in the GMI schools, apart from the one or two that had nailed their colours firmly to the mast of community relations, that the tension between education and integration was most keenly felt. Principals and staff in such schools sometimes made comments which were very similar in tone and content to that of the Principal at Sirius.

We operate in an atmosphere of competitiveness. That is why our main concentration in the school is competing with and surpassing the educational standards being achieved by everyone else in the locality. Otherwise the school goes down and there is no integrated school. (Principal, Deneb GMI school)

Similarly, at times, staff in GMI schools felt that the difficult choices and judgments they had to make were not appreciated, the same Principal asserting:

So every new initiative which is not educational is regarded by me as an extra chore ... Integrated Schools Week is a typical example. We've organized very successful Integrated Schools Weeks for ten years now. I don't think that one additional pupil has joined the school as a result of Integrated Schools Week, nor has anyone had a deeper commitment to integration. It hasn't affected the school in any way. So it's a typical chore

in my mind invented because it looks good on the front of the *Belfast Telegraph* for one day. (Principal, Deneb GMI school)

However, in GMI schools, including this one, such remarks were rarely the whole story. In Deneb school, for example, not only did the practice described by interviewees contradict a literal interpretation of the Principal's rather jaundiced opinions, but the school was one in which the EMU policy was the most thoughtful, thorough, and closely linked to classroom practice that was seen. Nevertheless, this tension between competing pressures seemed to be a fact of life for many Principals of GMI schools.

*The Effect of the Religious Background of Children on Teachers and Teaching*

Teachers always asserted that they treated children equally, regardless of religious background. Some teachers claimed not to be aware of children's religious backgrounds at all and seemed somewhat puzzled by the idea that it could affect their work in any way, while others stated, sometimes quite forcefully, that it was simply irrelevant.

I don't care whether children are Protestant or Catholic, it makes no difference to me. I try to teach every child to the best of my ability, to achieve his or her potential. I don't teach children differently because they are from a different religion... I always try to think if this was my child what would I want for him. (Teacher, Procyon CI school)

Children don't have these hang-ups about religion, and teachers ought to avoid creating something that isn't there. I don't think children should be labelled or identified by background. True integration is where it's irrelevant. (Principal, Rigel CI school)

A substantial number of principals and teachers expressed such views, but they were much more common in CI schools. In GMI schools, principals and teachers were a little more aware of the possibility of moving beyond the kind of passive tolerance implicit in these quotations, although an alternative view was most clearly articulated by a CI school principal:

Teachers say we just teach our Maths and English, Science, History, we just teach our subjects, even RE as a subject. And I'm saying no, you don't teach subjects, you teach children. And therefore if you're relating to a child and his inner being you can't do that, you can't divorce the subject from the child... If they're refusing to recognize the traditions that are there and saying we have no difficulty in teaching Protestant and Catholic children because we don't mention anything about the differences... then I think you're missing a bit of the child... what are you teaching Maths to? (Principal, Arcturus CI school)

However, principals and teachers provided rather few examples of differences in classroom practice. The most common were taking care with terminology and language (church/chapel, Lord's Prayer/Our Father) and explaining to children why some made the sign of the cross and others did not. One or two teachers of older children felt that it was important to bear in mind when teaching topics such as Guy Fawkes that history tends to be written by the winners of conflicts (in Britain often Protestants). Other teachers thought that the implications of some novels, such as those by Joan Lingard, were worth specifically pointing out to children.

Of some relevance may be the fact that a GMI school principal asserted that since all teachers bring to their work intellectual and cultural 'baggage', she tried to ensure that children were taught by teachers from different traditions on their long journey through the school. Another principal said that she reminded teachers of the need to be conscious of religious balance when children were given tasks in groups, just as they would routinely be in relation to gender.

Most teachers in all schools felt that it was inappropriate to raise community relations issues with children deliberately and consciously. Indeed, in some CI schools it was felt that any discussion of such issues at all was a mistake.

Not at all. School should be a haven from all the troubles. I wouldn't discuss such things with the children. (Teacher, Vega CI school)

Issues like that are rarely raised or discussed. There's just too much else to do. (Teacher, Sirius CI school)

Many teachers also thought that before the age of eight or nine, children were too egocentric to make open discussion of such subjects worthwhile. However, in GMI and rarely in some CI schools, teachers were willing to discuss issues as and when they arose in the course of classroom work, especially in 'circle time'. The most common topics for discussion centred on personal relations, such as bullying or difficulties in family relationships, and the most frequent 'external' subject was foot-and-mouth disease, a matter of great concern in some localities. But teachers also described a wide range of community relations issues which they had discussed, especially with Y6 or Y7 children, arising from current news, such as proposals by the Royal Ulster Constabulary to widen recruitment to include Catholics, the Shankill and Omagh bombings, the nature and purpose of political parties, the implications of Ash Wednesday for Catholics, and similarities between recent events in Jerusalem and the Northern Ireland conflict. Only rarely was a real event in the immediate locality of the school ('My granny was burnt out of her house') mentioned as a matter which needed discussion. Perhaps surprisingly, only one teacher mentioned the footballer Neil

Lennon who had been subjected to sectarian abuse in an international match, a case which was prominent in the local news at the time of the interviews.

*Problems of Sectarianism and Prejudice*

Those interviewed unanimously denied that problems of sectarianism or prejudice affected their work, whether in the classroom or playground. Squabbles and conflicts arose, as in any school, but there was never a sectarian edge as far as any were aware. The following responses are typical:

There are no problems of those kinds here at all. We're just a happy wee school. (Principal, Sirius CI school)

No, nothing like that. In Y7 we get the odd playground fight but they're not sectarian. I've been here six years and no, never ever. (Teacher, Canopus GMI school)

Most schools reported no overt local sectarian community conflict, and thus no source of potential difficulties. In the two schools where there were such local problems, the school had not been affected, at least not in any direct way. One principal explained that both parents and children held different sets of values for inside and outside school:

They have two sets of values. The inside ones are wonderful, but they're not brave enough to stand up to sectarianism outside. I understand that; I expect that; they can't be at risk because they come to an integrated school. So yes, they are involved in stone throwing and painting red, white and blue. Not in school, but there are thugs in the community who would break their legs if they objected. (Principal, Altair GMI school)

This type of response, it should be stressed, was unusual. Almost always, interviewees were simply unable to think of any issues or problems at all, or at most some very minor incident that happened years ago.

To probe this a little further, two specific issues were raised: the selling of poppies at the time of Remembrance Day and the wearing of Celtic or Rangers football shirts. In relation to both, practice varied but in no school was either matter seen as problematic. A few schools banned poppies, others actively sold them to children, others tolerated them. In several schools, the question of why some people wore poppies, while others did not, was discussed with the children. In Canopus GMI school, a parent had raised the issue, claiming that it was inequitable to sell poppies but not lilies for the IRA at Easter, but this was an isolated case. In relation to football shirts, again practice varied. In some schools, the issue hardly arose since children wore uniforms; in others, children were formally or informally discouraged ('I told him it was a very nice scarf, but it might be better to wear it at home'). In others, it was claimed that children wore

all sorts of shirts, and a Manchester United shirt was as likely to cause a problem as a Celtic or Rangers one. In one or two cases, problems had arisen only when children wore their shirts on EMU and similar trips outside the school. For example,

The principal up at (maintained school) said a lot of boys up there wear Celtic shirts so she said that she was going to ban them. We were going to visit them so I said if you're going to ban them I'll ban them too. (Principal, Vega CI school)

#### CONCLUSION: THE PRACTICE OF COMMUNITY RELATIONS

The integrated schools in this study varied in the extent to which community relations work was a high priority. At one extreme, individuals in a few GMI schools were of the view that the integrated nature of the school was of fundamental significance, that it was at least as important as its more narrowly educational function, and perhaps even more so. However, interviewees in most GMI and all CI schools stressed educational achievement to a much greater extent, but in qualitatively different ways. GMI schools seemed to see themselves as trying to balance, on the one hand, the requirement to be a good school in terms of academic achievement, and on the other, to be distinctive and different because of the implications of integrated status (many implied that this was much easier said than done). However, CI schools generally viewed educational excellence as their *raison d'être*, and integration, if not quite an optional extra, tended to be seen as merely a bonus.

The evidence from interviews suggests some major differences between CI and GMI schools. In the former, although some community relations work was undertaken, especially in terms of EMU relationships with other schools, there was little or nothing to distinguish any of their practice from that of any controlled or maintained school. Indeed, at times there was a degree of ignorance and even hostility towards community relations issues that was rather unexpected. In GMI schools, practice was much more varied. There were at least one or two, and sometimes more, adult participants associated with all GMI schools who had sophisticated ideas about integrated education, who thought that involvement in an integrated school was distinctive and momentous, and who energetically pursued the implications of a community relations agenda in their work in, and for, the school. Not everyone involved in every school had kept up, and in some cases, practice seemed to lag behind rhetoric, but in all cases there was a palpable sense of difference in CI schools.

In relation to the practice of community relations, then, Fraser and Morgan's (1999) claim rings true:

Some of the integrated schools are involved in specific curriculum initiatives...but such activities reflect the decisions of individual principals and their colleagues rather than a distinct feature of the integrated schools....

Such issues raise again the wider question of the distinctiveness of integrated schools and whether this should go beyond their mixed enrolment and staffing. (p.35)

## REFERENCES

- Akenson, D.H. (1973). *Education and enmity: The control of schooling in Northern Ireland 1920-1950*. Newton Abbott: David & Charles.
- Darby, J., & Dunn, S. (1987). Segregated schools: The research evidence. In R.D. Osborne, R.J. Cormack, & R.L. Millar (Eds.), *Education and policy in Northern Ireland* (pp.85-97). Belfast: Policy Research Institute.
- DENI (Department of Education for Northern Ireland). (1996). *Strategic plan for education – 1996-2000*. Bangor, Co Down: Author.
- DENI (Department of Education for Northern Ireland). (1997). *Framework for transformation*. Bangor, County Down: Author.
- Dunn, S. (1991). *Facets of the conflict in Northern Ireland*. London: Macmillian.
- Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order. (1989). Belfast: Her Majesty's Stationery Office.
- Farren, S. (1995). *The politics of Irish education 1920-65*. Belfast: Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University of Belfast.
- Fraser, G. & Morgan, V. (1999). *In the frame. Integrated education in Northern Ireland: The implications of expansion*. Coleraine: University of Ulster.
- Graham, C.F. (1990). *An integrated school: A principal's perspective*. Unpublished MA dissertation, Faculty of Education, University of Ulster.
- McClenahan, C., Cairns, E., Dunn, S., & Morgan, V. (1993). Planned integrated and desegregated schools in Northern Ireland. *Irish Journal of Education*, 27, 50-59.
- Milliken, J., & Gallagher, T. (1998). Three Rs: Religion, ritual and rivalry. *Educational Management and Administration*, 26, 443-456.
- Moffatt, C. (1993). *Education together for a change: Integrated education and community relations in Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Fortnight Educational Trust.

- Morgan, V., Dunn, S., Cairns, E. & Fraser, G. (1992). *Breaking the mould: The roles of parents and teachers in the integrated schools in Northern Ireland*. Coleraine: Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster.
- Morgan, V. (1992). Views from outside: Other professionals' views of the religiously integrated schools in Northern Ireland. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 14, 169-177.
- Morgan, V., & Fraser, G. (1995). Integrated schools, religious education and the church in Northern Ireland. *Aspects of Education*, 52, 30-39.
- Morgan, V., & Fraser, G. (1999). When does good news become bad news? Relationships between government and the integrated schools in Northern Ireland. *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 47, 364-377.
- Murphy, E. (2001). Community relations: An overview of this area in relation to schools/integrated schools. Unpublished paper. Belfast: Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education.
- NICIE (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education). (1997). *Development in integrated education*. Belfast: Author.
- NICIE (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education). (2000). *Developments in integrated education (incorporating Annual Report 1999/2000)*. Belfast: Author.
- NICIE (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education). (2001) A background to the development of integrated education in Northern Ireland. Belfast: Author.