Council of Europe
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Educational for Mutual Understanding in an International Context

European Teachers' Seminar
Belfast, Northern Ireland, 14-20 November 1994

Report

Council for Cultural Co-operation
In-Service Training Programme for Teachers

Strasbourg 1995

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Only questions related to national defence are excluded from the Council of Europe's work, and the Organisation has activities in the following areas: democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms; media and communication; social and economic affairs; education, culture, heritage and sport; youth; health; environment and regional planning; local democracy; and legal co-operation.

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The **Council for Cultural Co-operation (the CDCC)** is responsible for the Council of Europe's work on **education** and **culture**. Four specialised committees - the Education Committee, the Standing Conference on University Problems, the Culture Committee and the Cultural Heritage Committee - help the CDCC to carry out its tasks under the European Cultural Convention. There is also a close working relationship between the CDCC and the regular conferences of specialised European ministers responsible for education, culture and cultural heritage.

The CDCC's programmes are an integral part of the Council of Europe's work, and, like the programmes in other sectors, they contribute to the Organisation's three over-arching policy objectives for the 1990s:

- the protection, reinforcement and promotion of human rights and fundamental freedoms and pluralist democracy;
- the promotion of an awareness of European identity;
- the search for common responses to the great challenges facing European society.

The CDCC's education programme covers school, higher and adult education, as well as educational research. At present, its main priorities are projects on: the European dimension of secondary education; university co-operation; adult education and social change; modern languages; and the pooling of the results of educational research.

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[1]Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal. Romania, San Marino, Slovak Republik, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey, the United Kingdom.

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COUNCIL FOR CULTURAL CO-OPERATION (CDCC)
In-Service Training Programme for Teachers

European Teachers' Seminar on

Education for Mutual Understanding in an International Context

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Report by

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Introduction

The Council of Europe Conference on "Education for Mutual Understanding in an International Context" took place in Belfast, Northern Ireland, from 14th to 19th November 1994. The aims of the Conference, which were outlined on the first evening by the organisers, Paul Burrows and Dermot George from the Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges, were as follows:

- to investigate good practice in education for mutual understanding (EMU) in Northern Ireland;

- to use the expertise and insights of the Conference participants in this process;

- to discuss a possible agenda for future action.

The following report attempts to review these aims in the context of the lectures, discussions, visits and surrounding documentation of the Conference. It also tries to give some of the background to the development of EMU and how the Conference participants reacted to the experience of what was for most of them their first visit to Northern Ireland.

The Social and Political Context of Education in Northern Ireland

Mr Tom Shaw, Deputy Chief Inspector at the Department of Education, Northern Ireland (DENI), gave the opening address at the Conference, in which he described the social and political context of education in the Province. Northern Ireland is a comparatively small area with a population of about one and a half million people. It is a peripheral region - an outpost of the UK on the edge of Europe. Northern Ireland has a record of high longterm unemployment, with more unemployed Catholics than Protestants. An example of the unemployment trend in recent years can be seen in the ship building industry which has declined from a workforce of 25,000 to about 1,000 people. Other traditional industries in the Province are also in decline or have closed down altogether.

There is a high birth rate in Northern Ireland with a low average income in comparison with the rest of the United Kingdom. There is also a high rate of migration within Northern Ireland itself and between the Province and Britain, and this has been accentuated by the Troubles of the last 25 years. The migration has led to further divisions of the Catholic and Protestant communities, as integrated housing has given way to segregation. However, migration in Northern Ireland is not a new phenomenon but something the Province shares with the island of Ireland as a whole. Perhaps the most outstanding feature of the social and political context of Northern Ireland is the fact that the Province has had a period of civil unrest for the last 25 years. This has affected all areas of life, education included, but now that peace has come, education is on the threshold of playing a very important role (Shaw, 1994).

Dr Tony Gallagher from Queen's University Belfast gave the background of the Government's Community Relations Policy in Northern Ireland and how it related to education. Much of the Government's interest in education lies in its potential to accommodate pluralism while at the same time promoting social cohesion. One aspect of this is the way education can tackle issues of community relations between Catholics and Protestants and in this sense the Government's interest in education is to be understood as part of a wider agenda (Gallagher, 1994).

The Central Community Relations Unit (CCRU) which was established in 1987, states that the Government's community relations policy is based on three objectives:

- ensuring that there is full equality of opportunity and equity of treatment for all members of the Northern Ireland community;

- encouraging mutual understanding and acceptance of cultural diversity;

- promoting cross-community contact. (CCRU, 1991).

We see therefore that EMU is only one of a number of initiatives which have emanated from official Government policy to promote harmony between the two communities in Northern Ireland.

The Origins of EMU

The involvement of educationalists in the effort to contribute to a solution to the problem of civil unrest in Northern Ireland goes back to the early years of the Troubles. In 1976, Malcolm Skilbeck, then Professor of Education at the New University of Ulster at Coleraine, attempted to analyse the problem from a cultural perspective. Culture in Northern Ireland, Skilbeck argued, was militant, highly ideological and sectarian. It was encapsulated and constrained by the need to establish and to fix identities, and to preserve certain positions, advantages and privileges. It was highly visible and dominated by images, symbols and myth-making processes, which prescribed identities and loyalties and shaped beliefs and values. It lacked variety, complexity, diversity and openness. Finally, it was highly reproductive in character and had well developed, visible and powerful mechanisms for renewal and continuation. (Skilbeck, 1976).

Skilbeck's analysis may seem somewhat astringent and not everyone perhaps would agree with him. Nonetheless, he was hopeful about the prospects of improving the cultural environment in Northern Ireland, and saw a crucial role for the schools in this process. There were, he maintained, four possible courses of action a school might adopt. Firstly, it could swim with the tide by identifying basic trends and going with these rather than resisting them. Secondly, it could identify particular elements in the past, and seek to preserve them. Thirdly, it could carry on its work largely ignorant of or indifferent to what was happening in other key sectors of society. Fourthly, it could look forward, trying to anticipate situations in the future, assessing them for their educational significance, and trying to influence them through the various limited means at its disposal. The last of these options Skilbeck termed 'democratic reconstructionism' and this was the role he envisaged for schools in Northern Ireland. (Skilbeck, 1973).

Skilbeck attempted to put his ideas into practice through a curriculum development project aimed at "increasing levels of mutual understanding among young people in Northern Ireland". Teams of teachers from the north of the Province attended regular workshops at the university in Coleraine and, working in conjunction with a central project team, helped to write and test a five year social studies course. The materials were

concentric in design and began with the individual, moved to the family and the community, and then to contrasting forms of family and community life, past and present. In the fourth year, minority groups such as the North American Indians and international conflicts were studied and finally in the fifth year the focus returned to society in Northern Ireland, especially to the conflict there, and an emphasis was put on values clarification and values education. (Sutherland, O'Shea and McCartney 1983).

Perhaps one of the most outstanding Northern Ireland educationalists, who tried to improve community relations through curricular interventions in schools, was John Malone. Between 1970 and 1982, Malone directed three curriculum development projects, each building on the lessons of the previous one - the Community Relations Project (1970-73), the School Curriculum Project (1973-78), and the Schools' Support Service (1978-82).

The first of these, the Community Relations Project, was set up to explore the contribution that action and research in education could make to the political situation in Northern Ireland. In June 1972, after 18 months work, Malone submitted his report on the role schools could play in improving community relations. While actively encouraging contact between Catholic and Protestant schools as an intrinsically valuable activity in itself, Malone nonetheless argued strongly that it was the social rather than the religious divisions between schools which were more significant in inhibiting the development of the educational service in Northern Ireland. In particular, he was critical of the selection procedures which were administered to children at about 11 years and which segregated them into two kinds of schools, grammar and secondary intermediate. He pointed out the contradiction of desiring to improve the quality of education for all children in the Province, while at the same time continuing with what he called a destructive and discredited selection procedure at 11 years. Malone concluded that religious segregation in schooling in Northern Ireland was a by-product of the religious and political divisions in the Province not the main cause of these, and that, while every encouragement should be given to fostering inter-school co-operation, the way ahead was to improve the social and educational context of the schools themselves within their own communities. (Crone and Malone, 1979).

Between 1973 and 1982, Malone tried to realise this aspiration by working first of all with a group of 18 schools and later extending to 33 schools. The aims were to increase competency, awareness, reflectiveness and analytical self-criticism among the teachers, and the areas in which work concentrated included transition from primary to post-primary schools, systems of pastoral care within the schools, home-school liaison, literacy standards and local studies. (Crone and Malone, 1983).

Right up to his death in 1982, Malone continued to argue for a more equitable education system in Northern Ireland as being the major challenge which faced educationalists: "The argument those who enjoy the privileges of a selective system have to face", he stated, "is not about whether their children will be better off in a non-selective system (indeed many of them might well be better off academically as well as in other respects), it is about the kind of society they want their children to grow up in". (Cathcart, 1990).

Another curriculum development project which prepared the ground for EMU was the Religion in Ireland Project, in which John Greer from the New University of Ulster adapted Skilbeck's reconstructionist strategy to the teaching of religious education. The project had three aims:

- to increase the pupils understanding of Christian traditions in Ireland;

- to encourage a sympathetic appreciation of differing traditions and current trends;

- to develop the ability of pupils to discuss rationally and investigate different forms of religion.

The project ran from 1974-77 and produced eight units of teaching material which were used and evaluated in a number of schools. Teachers from both traditions in Northern Ireland came together regularly to prepare units of material on Prayer, Marriage, the Eucharist, the Bible and Religion and Life. In 1984 these units were published under the title, "Irish Christianity", together with a short guide for teachers which gave a rationale for the reconstructionist approach to religious education.

The Religion in Ireland project advocated an open rather than a closed model of religious education. The closed model implies the transmission of an unquestioned faith in an authoritarian manner, while an open model means using a style of teaching which encourages pupils to explore, appreciate, criticise and discuss religion in such a way that they are able to make up their own minds about its value. Teachers using the open model may have to deal with experiences which they are unfamiliar with and which may even be foreign to their particular way of life. Because of this the teacher will have to learn a new vocabulary in order to understand how other Christians conceptualise and talk about their faith. (Greer and McElhinney, 1984).

Apart from curriculum development projects, a number of individual schools in the Province also promoted initiatives aimed at the improvement of relationships between the two communities. However, the numbers involved remained very small and until the early '80s, EMU was still a minority interest in Northern Ireland. In 1982 things began to change with the establishment of an official committee charged with encouraging all schools and colleges to analyse their whole curriculum and ethos by applying the concept of cross-curricular and mutual understanding (Smith and Robinson, 1992). By the following year this committee had produced a policy for promoting better community relations through education and the term 'Education for Mutual Understanding' came into common usage. The Committee also appointed two full-time field officers (one for primary and the other for post-primary schools), who helped to develop the interest and practical involvement in EMU which was now growing in many schools across the Province. The approach was not the same in all cases but many schools became involved in some educational activity in their local areas, which brought together teachers and pupils from across the sectarian divide to co-operate and get to know each other better (Magowan and Emberson, 1994).

A major step in bringing EMU into prominence in Northern Ireland came with the educational reforms of the 1980s. These reforms took place in the United Kingdom as a whole but in Northern Ireland they included important measures, which were particular to the Province, such as improving understanding and tolerance between the Protestant and Catholic communities. The reforms were enshrined in the Education

Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989 and they included the creation of a common curriculum for all pupils from age 4-16, the promotion of support for integrated education where Catholic and Protestant children could be taught together, open enrolment whereby parents were afforded a greater choice of school, more information for parents on the school's performance and the progress of the pupils, and greater delegation of responsibility to the schools themselves for the delivery of the curriculum, admission of pupils and the management of their own financial affairs, (DENI, 1994a).

The reformed curriculum comprises Religious Education and six areas of study - English, Mathematics, Science and Technology, Environment and Society, Creative and Expressive Studies and Language Studies. In addition to these, a number of cross-curricular themes are included; these are not separate subjects but themes which should be woven into the main subjects of the rest of the curriculum. The cross-curricular themes are Education for Mutual Understanding, Cultural Heritage, Health Education, Information Technology, Economic Awareness and Careers Education (the two last mentioned are for secondary schools only).

The first of these themes, Education for Mutual Understanding, represents the main thrust of the Government's effort to make the Northern Ireland School Curriculum responsive to the need to improve community relations within the Province. We shall now examine in more detail how this is intended to work in practice.

EMU in the Northern Ireland Curriculum

The Northern Ireland Curriculum Council (NICC) has defined EMU essentially in terms of relationships: EMU is about self-respect, and respect for others and the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions. EMU is perceived as an effort to achieve the following four aims:

- pupils should learn to respect and value themselves and others;

- they should appreciate the interdependence of people within society;

- they should understand what is shared as well as what is different in

their own cultural traditions;

- they should appreciate how conflict should be handled in non violent ways.

To achieve these aims three curricular objectives have been identified, covering the areas of interdependence, cultural traditions and understanding conflict. With regard to the first of these objectives, pupils are expected to develop a knowledge and appreciation of interdependence within the family, the local community and the wider world. This implies a study of the structures of the family and its role in society, and entails some knowledge of the different religious and cultural communities within Northern Ireland and the consequences of their integration and segregation. It also involves studying the relationships between Northern Ireland, the rest of Ireland, and the rest of the United Kingdom, and includes knowing something about the impact of environmental change on society and the response of the developed world to the problems of the developing world.

The second curricular objective relates to a knowledge of different cultural traditions and in this context, pupils are expected to appreciate the positive and negative consequences of cultural diversity, drawing examples from the cultural traditions which influence life in Northern Ireland. They are also required to learn about aspects of cultural interaction between the British Isles and the rest of the world and to understand the extent to which international influences are affecting the differing cultural traditions within Northern Ireland.

Understanding conflict is the third curricular objective and in this regard pupils are asked to study conflict in a variety of contexts and to identify constructive and non-violent ways of dealing with it. This means knowing something about the nature of conflict in the individual, the family, the peer group and within and between societies, including the part that stereotypes and prejudice can play. It also involves studying the nature of conflict in Northern Ireland and the different reactions and emotions which result from conflict, such as anger, fear and distress. Finally, it includes an investigation of the role played by a range of agencies in the reduction of conflict at different levels (NICC, 1989).

The Northern Ireland Curriculum Council, in addition to specifying aims and objectives for EMU, has also laid down a curricular strategy for its implementation. EMU is envisaged as not being a subject in any sense, but should be part of every subject. Neither is EMU a threat to the cultural heritage of any particular group; on the contrary it wishes to encourage respect and esteem for all peoples and their traditions. It recognises the reality that the majority of pupils in Northern Ireland have segregated education, and so works within the existing school structures. It is not propaganda in any sense, since this implies the closing of minds and the removal of choice, whereas EMU is about opening minds to the importance of diversity and pluralism. EMU certainly recognises the existence of injustice in society but argues that schools and colleges are places where a start can be made in doing something about this (Magowan and Emberson, 1994).

Guidelines as to how EMU can be implemented in practice have also been published by the Northern Ireland Curriculum Council. Take for example EMU's fundamental concern of having the students learn to respect and value themselves and other people. Opportunities to practice this can arise within a curriculum area like Geography through the study of the local environment, or it could mean two schools getting involved in a joint project in assisting a local voluntary community project. Another example could be to help the students know about and value both their own culture and that of others with different traditions. Opportunities to practise this could arise either within a school or between schools. For example, it might mean involving children in a study of the origins of local place names and surnames, or young people from different schools becoming involved in a joint study of controversial issues. (Magowan and Emberson, 1994).

Examples of curricular activities calculated to promote EMU are the exploration within the classroom of contemporary controversial issues, and the exchange of materials especially those reflecting cultural differences, using various forms of communication systems, with a possibility of visits to common ground and to each others schools. Schools are also encouraged to undertake joint work together extending ultimately to international contacts and including the exploration of controversial social and political issues, both local and general (NICC, 1989).

The Cross-Community Contact Scheme

Another powerful stimulus to encourage schools from the two communities to give opportunities to their pupils to work and play together came with the introduction of the Cross-Community Contact Scheme in 1987. The scheme, which is managed by DENI, has produced a significant increase in joint programmes between segregated schools and also among youth clubs. By the end of 1990 almost one-third of all schools in Northern Ireland had used the scheme to establish some form of regular contact with other schools and to involve pupils in a range of linked activities. (DENI, 1990).

Considerable flexibility is given to the schools in the choice of the activities undertaken and in the way they are implemented. DENI issues a number of broad guidelines:

- each project should result in cross-community contact which has defined objectives and which requires a genuinely collaborative effort to achieve its aims;

- the programmes should be ongoing and systematic;

- the activities should involve making new contacts or should develop existing contacts;

- there should be an equitable Catholic and Protestant ratio among the participants;

- the participants should be under 25 years;

- each programme should involve the same group of participants throughout. (DENI, 1994b).

In 1990 an evaluation report of the DENI Inspectorate found that most of the joint activities inspected in the Cross-Community Contact Scheme were of high quality and that the pupils were deriving educational and social benefits from participating. In particular the evaluation found that:

- the schools had embarked on the programmes on a voluntary basis and

had invested a great deal of time and effort into making them successful;

- some schools had drawn up policy statements on EMU and these were appropriate and realistic. The absence of such policy statements in other cases meant that the schools were uncertain about the place of EMU in the overall curriculum and this could be an impediment to progress;

- programmes were most successful when they were firmly based on the school curriculum and met wider educational objectives;

- the best programmes provided a variety of social, recreational and curricular experiences, all of which included the aim that the pupils should enjoy one another's company;

- co-operative work between schools produced higher quality than schools working on their own;

- time spent in planning was very important to the success of the programmes;

- the quality of relationships between the principals and the teachers in the schools was an essential element in the success of the programmes;

- the most successful work emerged where there had been sustained contact between the teachers involved;

- in the majority of schools, the teachers accepted a shared responsibility for all the pupils taking part in the activities, and the pupils related freely and confidently to all the teachers involved;

- outside agencies made a valuable contribution to the activities;

- residential experiences for the pupils, where they were part of systematic contact, made a highly significant contribution to improving relationships;

- the great majority of the programmes were well resourced.

In conclusion, the findings of the survey revealed an encouraging picture of the range and quality of cross-community contacts in schools in Northern Ireland. The Inspectorate were particularly impressed by the firm belief of the teachers in the benefits of the joint activities and the way in which the pupils showed obvious enjoyment and enthusiasm for working together. The report noted that its findings were "encouraging for the future, not only of contact work but also in the broader context of improving relationships in Northern Ireland" (DENI, 1990).

EMU and the European Context

The European background of EMU was given by a DENI inspector, Vivian McIver, who reminded the Conference participants that EMU is the fourth 'R' in the curriculum - it stands for relationships in education. EMU tries to develop good working relationships among young people across the religious divide in Northern Ireland, within the island of Ireland as a whole, within the British Isles, and across the English channel to continental Europe and the wider world. In other words EMU looks to Europe and beyond for its full development. McIver made this point graphically:

> *The new Europe is, whatever its faults, something of an inspiration to us here, and secondly, it is something which our young people, Catholic and Protestant, North and South, share. To take the second point first, when you live in a divided society like ours in Northern Ireland, indeed in a divided island, it is of course important to examine those divisions together. But perhaps in the first instance it is arguably more important to remind our young people of what they have in common and what they share. In the last decade of the twentieth century, one of the major things they share is common citizenship of the new Europe - for they are all young Europeans now! That doesn't mean that we are using Europe (or as I said earlier running away to Europe) to avoid discussing our divisions. Far from it, for in fact we find that our young people, Catholic and Protestant, North and South, sometimes find it easier to discuss their differences in the context of Europe than by confronting those divisions at home, in either part of Ireland.* (McIver, 1994).

From this point of view, to be a young European does not mean that a person is in any way less Irish or less British but in the new collaborative Europe of the future, young men and women can be whatever they feel

themselves to be and yet know that they also share a European identity. This provides opportunities to work together on European projects, to co-operate with one another to get the projects done, and to relax together and so get to know one another. In this relaxed but purposeful atmosphere, young men and women from different traditions can discuss their 'Irishness' or their 'Britishness" but in a much less threatening and in a more trusting way (McIver, 1994).

A good example of EMU in the European context can be taken from the work of one of Northern Ireland's five local education authorities or Education and Library Boards - the North Eastern Education and Library Board (NEELB). An officer of the Board, Mr Gilly Irwin, gave the background to this work to the Conference participants. In March 1989, DENI convened a working party which examined the steps which should be taken to prepare for the creation of a single market within the European Community. This working party concluded that there would need to be:

- a much higher profile for the European dimension in the curriculum;

- a much greater proficiency in European languages, to facilitate mobility in employment;

- a much greater mobility of teachers and pupils within Europe;

- a matching of appropriate employment skills with employment opportunities within Europe.

In response to these developments, the NEELB drew up a policy and strategy for promoting European awareness in its schools, colleges and youth service. Appropriate learning materials were adapted and links were forged with educational institutions in Spain, France, Germany, Denmark, Scotland, Romania and the Republic of Ireland (NEELB, 1992).

In March 1994 a special agreement was drawn up between the NEELB and the Strasbourg Académie to promote greater contact and co-operation in education between the two regions. This connection was significant because people in Strasbourg like people in Northern Ireland can have a dual nationality. As part of the agreement, thirty schools are now twinned

between Strasbourg and Northern Ireland and the activities undertaken by the students are built into a record of achievement. It is also planned to have a number of trainee teachers from Strasbourg visit the NEELB in Spring 1995 (Irwin, 1994).

The Conference participants also had the opportunity of hearing about the EMU activities of the South-Eastern Education and Library Board through a lecture from one of the Board officers, Mr Ernie Brown (Brown, 1994).

Another example of EMU in the European context is the European Studies Project - a description of which was given at the Conference by the project co-ordinator, Ms Anne Fay. This project has the following aims:

- to increase mutual understanding, awareness and tolerance through the study of contemporary Europe;

- to broaden the students' knowledge and understanding of their own place and of their own relationship to others in the Europe of today;

- to develop the students' appreciation of the contribution of their own region to European culture and identity, as well as an interest in and an understanding of that of their neighbours;

- to develop knowledge, skills and competencies, which will lead to better communication, and an awareness of what we share and what we can contribute and receive from being European together.

The project was founded in 1986 and at present over 300 schools and colleges are participating. Financial support for central administration is provided jointly by the Departments of Education in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, and varying degrees of assistance for schools is supplied by regional and national education authorities in Belgium, Denmark, England, France, Germany and Spain. Schools in Austria, Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Finland also participate.

Participating students are grouped in multi-lateral clusters and normally each cluster has one school from the Republic of Ireland and one from Northern Ireland. The students are encouraged to develop the skills

necessary to use technology as an effective tool of communication and also the ability to understand and communicate in at least one non-native language so that they are prepared as adults to take advantage of the opportunities arising from being part of contemporary Europe.

The schools communicate through surface and electronic mail, fax, telephone, teacher contacts, and residentials, video and audio tape messages and video conferencing. The project activities include the following:

- Initial exchange of personal profiles. Individuals and groups construct profiles and prepare information about their schools and their localities. This information, which may be supplemented by audio and video tapes, is sent by surface or electronic mail to linked institutions.

- Exchange of student information with a regional, national or European focus.

- Reports or reactions sent by electronic mail.

- Sending of display materials.

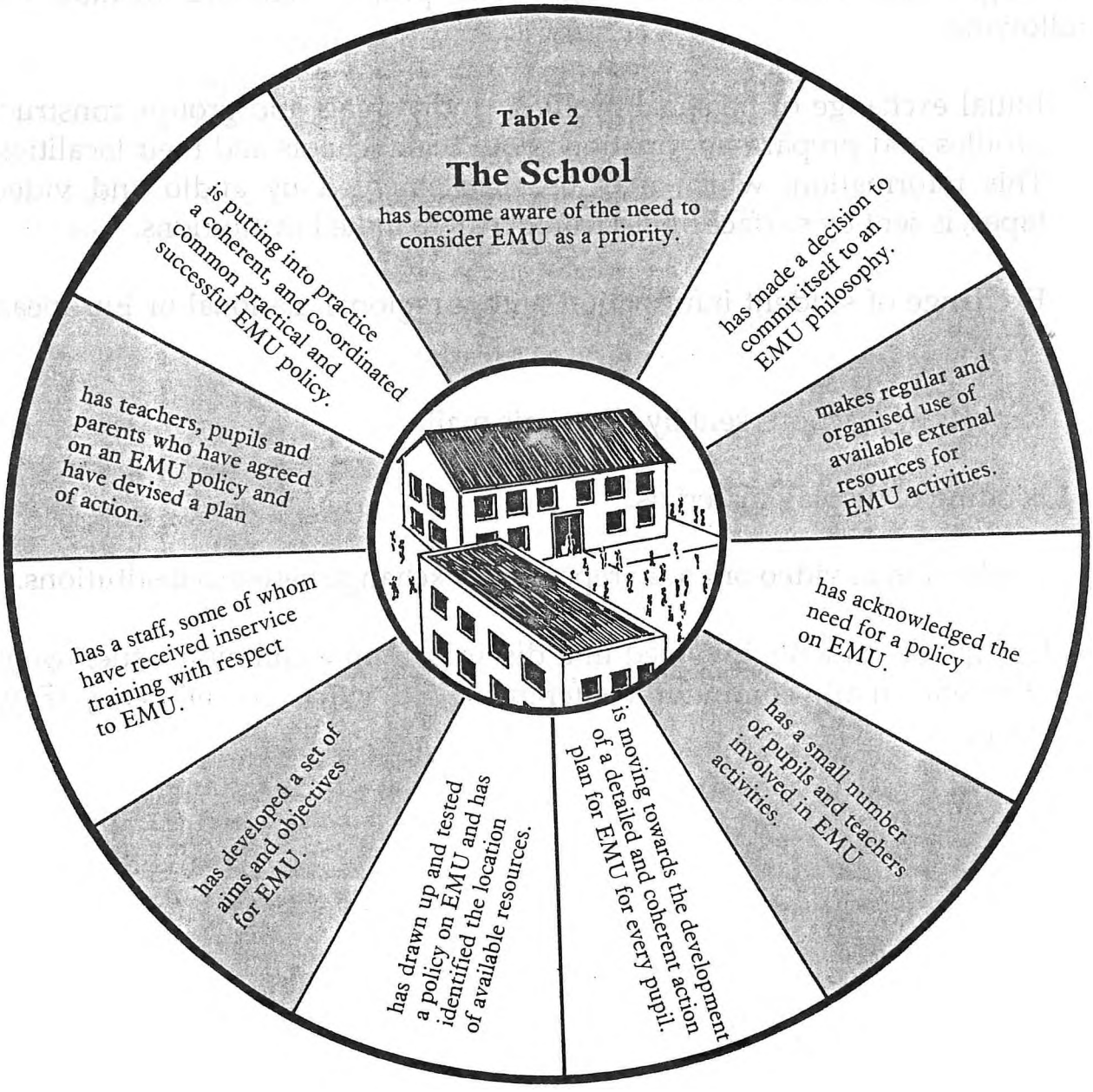
- Production of video or audio reports for exchange between institutions.

- Groups of students involved in a discussion on a common issue, using electronic mail, computer conferencing or video conferencing (Fay, 1994).

The EMU School

In 1988 the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development (NICED) summarised the activities of the ideal EMU school in the following diagram:

The EMU School



Source: NICED (1988) *Education for Mutual Understanding: A Guide*, Belfast.

The Conference participants had the opportunity of visiting eight schools and seeing for themselves how EMU was put into practice (Appendix 2). While recognising that no single school could be expected to embody all the dimensions of the above diagram, the participants nonetheless were impressed by the commitment of the teachers and the interest shown by the students. A typical examle of the kind of activity witnessed was a first encounter between senior students (aged 16-17 years) from a Catholic and Protestant school in North Belfast. The area in question had a history of political turmoil but the schools had nonetheless tried to maintain an atmosphere of normality for their students.

The meeting between the students took place in the library of one of the schools. The setting was informal and relaxed and the teacher in charge of the proceedings showed considerable skill in organising the students into small discussion groups, which were lively and articulate. One of the discussion themes for instance was to imagine what the European Union might look like in the year 2010. This elicited suggestions such as a common police and defence force, the disappearance of national borders, a common curriculum in the schools, greater mobility of people and enhanced prospects of employment - all of which are very germane to the situation in Northern Ireland.

The Conference participants also had the opportunity of joining in discussion groups with students drawn from four different schools (Appendix 2). The participants were very taken by the confident and articulate manner in which the students expressed their opinions and by their determination to create their own future. Some typical comments were as follows:

"We like it in Northern Ireland; it is a good place to group up in".

"I blame the parents who tell their children not to talk to other people".

"I get angry when I have to explain why I talk to Catholics".

"You should have organised this seminar for our parents".

The Environmental Dimension

Within the last two decades environmental education has become a growth point in educational development and an accepted part of the curriculum in many countries. Furthermore, since environmental problems do not recognise national frontiers, the study of the environment is perceived as a powerful means of promoting co-operation across physical and cultural boundaries. This consideration is of importance in Northern Ireland, where there is an increasing recognition of the potential of environmental education to promote the aims of EMU. This can be seen in particular in the work of a network of twenty-eight schools, Catholic and Protestant, North and South, which for the last seven years have been co-operating together in the field of environmental education. The network is entitled European Action for the Environment (EAE) and has the following aims:

- to promote environmental awareness;
- to encourage initiative, creativity, self-confidence, involvement and other dynamic qualities in the context of a critical environmental consciousness;
- to promote greater understanding between teachers and students from different cultural backgrounds within the island of Ireland;
- to encourage pupils to learn about the shared and the diverse aspects of their environment;
- to foster open and tolerant relationships between administrators, teachers and pupils involved in the network.

The schools in EAE are involved in groups of four for purposes of exchange visits, and each group comprises a Catholic and Protestant school from Northern Ireland and two schools from the Irish Republic. During the year two exchanges, each involving at least two nights away on either side of the Border are organised and the teachers meet at the beginning of each school year to plan the project work and the details of transport and accommodation. An annual exhibition of project work is also organised and a network bulletin, 'Environmental News', is published.

An evaluation report on EAE published in May 1994 noted that many of the school principals involved were supportive of the cross-Border and cross-community dimension of the activities undertaken. The teachers for their part reported that the response of the pupils was very enthusiastic and that they enjoyed both the social and environmental aspects of the project. Firm friendships were established and these were followed up by letter, phone and meetings during holidays. Initially some pupils were somewhat nervous at the prospect of travelling across the Border but this soon changed to enthusiasm after the first school exchange.

Improvements in attitudes to each other were also observed in students. A high degree of understanding and tolerance was evident from the evaluation studies and reports carried out after the exchanges in the schools. In general, the teachers reported that the pupils were more comfortable with each other and that the project had a cohesive effect resulting in good relations and friendships. This applied to schools in their own area as well as to schools across the Border. One school in Northern Ireland reported that there was very positive evidence of pupils across the religious divide sharing visits to their own homes and that the contacts established between the schools in the area were still continuing. (O'Brien 1994).

EAE has had a ripple effect well beyond the confines of the schools. It was not unusual during the North/South school exchange visits to find parents, prominent members of the community and politicians at various levels becoming involved. In this context, the network demonstrated the potential of the environment to unite rather than to separate people. This thought was expressed by President Mary Robinson when she opened the annual EAE exhibition at the ENFO Centre in Dublin on 10 April 1992:

> *The project is about schools in both parts of the island of Ireland working together. Close collaboration, such as that which has taken place here, helps to focus young minds in the direction of the things which they share rather than of those which divide them. This places it at the heart of efforts to promote the European dimension in education in two member jurisdictions of the European Community.* (Curriculum Development Unit, 1992).

EMU and Integrated Education

We have already seen that integrated education is one of the principal ways in which the Education Reform Order of 1989 promotes good community relations. During the Conference, the participants had the opportunity to discuss this aspect of EMU and to visit Lagan College, Northern Ireland's first integrated school in modern times.

The movement towards integrated education in Northern Ireland is not a new one. As early as 1812, Nicholas Grimshaw built a large two-storey building near Greencastle for both Protestants and Catholics, and Religious Education was taught daily. (McGaffin, 1990). In 1831 the British Government introduced universal primary education into Ireland, North and South, and children from all denominations were admitted to the new national schools. By the end of the century, however, opposition from Church interests, Catholic and Protestant, had made the system denominational in practice. The situation was summarised by one commentator as follows:

> *By a strange paradox, the Roman Catholic Church which at first had largely supported the 'mixed' or 'integrated' principle, had by the end of the 19th Century become largely opposed to it. On the other hand, the Presbyterian Church, the Church of Ireland, and the Methodist Church, which initially had opposed the 'national' system, decided to support it - but only when the 'mixed' principle had been effectively defeated in practice.* (McNeilly, 1973).

In 1923 the Government of Northern Ireland attempted to provide an integrated system of education at primary level. The first Minister for Education, Lord Londonderry, proposed that religious education was forbidden in school hours and teachers were to be appointed without reference to their religious denomination. It was hoped by this that the Churches would be willing to transfer their schools to the new local authorities which were being set up. Such hopes, however, were confounded because in a rare spirit of ecumenism all the Churches opposed the plan and separate schools for Catholics and Protestants have remained the norm in Northern Ireland right down to the present day (Chadwick, 1994).

One of the principal reasons why segregated schooling is so firmly established in Northern Ireland is because it is seen by the main political and religious groups as a means of securing their respective identities. Catholics see ownership and control over their schools as a powerful means of protecting minority traditions and identity within a Protestant hegemony. Protestants on the other hand see themselves as a potentially threatened minority in the event of a possible reunification of Ireland and want their identity preserved through control of their schools. As one observer commented: "Nowhere else does one find the lethal mixture of a large minority with a well founded and deeply felt sense of grievance, and a narrow majority with justifiable anxieties about what the future may hold" (Whyte, 1990).

Within the last two decades a fresh movement towards integrated education in Northern Ireland has begun. In 1979 an association called 'All Children Together' (ACT) was established with the following aim:

> *The advancement of integrated education, where desired, in Northern Ireland and for the benefit of the children in Northern Ireland, in the provision for them of a system of integrated education, where desired, as an addition and alternative to the existing system of Catholic maintained schools and de facto Protestant controlled schools.* (Chadwick, 1994).

At the annual general meeting of ACT in March 1981, a group of parents, faced with the prospect of their children leaving segregated primary schools and transferring to segregated secondary schools, persuaded the ACT trustees to try to open a school the following September on integrated lines. Thus it came about that Lagan College, the first integrated school in Northern Ireland in recent times, came into being. (Chadwick, 1994).

The growth of integrated schooling in Northern Ireland is still a tender plant with less than 12 schools in all and less than 1% of the total school population. On the surface it appears that only a small number of parents are prepared to support the idea, yet the integrated schools have managed to attract national and international interest and support far in excess of their size or representativeness. (McEwen, 1990). The schools are also attractive to parents because they provide an alternative educational

experience in their ethos and organisation. This is particularly so in the post-primary schools, which are comprehensive in organisation and unselective in intake, and the classes, in addition, are usually organised along mixed ability lines. These educational policies are in contrast with most of the other schools in Northern Ireland which are still overwhelmingly selective in their intake. (McEwen, 1990).

EMU and Teacher Training

Teacher Training in Northern Ireland is provided principally by the Education Departments of Queens University and the University of Ulster, and also by Stranmillis and St Mary's Colleges of Education. The two colleges cater for separate religious denominations - St Mary's for Catholics and Stranmillis largely for Protestants - but nonetheless over the years have forged strong co-operative links. Several subject departments in both colleges hold joint classes, organise inter-collegiate teaching and work together on shared field courses. Good relations also flourish in the joint boards of studies and boards of examiners which plan and assess the common B.Ed courses and examinations taken in both colleges.

In 1988 the two colleges established a Colleges Liaison Group with the purpose of co-ordinating their joint EMU work. The first task of this body was to draw up a list of joint college objectives in EMU. These objectives are as follows:

- to learn about other cultures, both local and international, and the importance of treating with respect other races, nationalities, religions and lifestyles;

- to acquire an awareness of the multi-cultural heritage of the society of the island of Ireland, and its historical roots and European background;

- to appreciate the interdependence of all the people in the community;

- to value the richness of our shared environment and recognise its potential as an appropriate basis for cross-curricular and cross-community study;

- to confront controversial issues and to examine assumptions, attitudes and perceptions, with a view to breaking down barriers of ignorance and prejudice;

- to examine psychological and sociological aspects of education for mutual understanding;

- to engage in a critical study of the development of the Northern Ireland educational system and how religious and cultural divisions have given it distinctive features, and to explore cross-cultural perspectives on children, their education, the curriculum and the role of the teacher;

- to enable students from both colleges to share experiences in interactive learning situations, which are systematic and genuinely collaborative;

- to identify and discuss introductory and extended EMU programmes and to participate in studies of EMU activities in host schools during the students' teaching experience;

- to enable the students to experience types of schools with which they would be unfamiliar (Magowan and Emberson, 1994).

An example of EMU in a university education department can be taken from the work of Roger Austin from the University of Ulster in Coleraine. Some Northern Ireland student teachers were linked with a group of 18 year old students in Denmark. Both groups agreed to exchange information by fax on the theme 'Living, Loving and Dying in Europe'- an examination of the customs and traditions related to birth, marriage and death which had evolved during the last 50 years. The EMU element in the project was explored in the mixed composition of the two groups and more importantly through a cross-community analysis of Catholic and Protestant customs in Northern Ireland itself.

It soon became clear to all the participants in the project that although there were real differences between religious and social customs, there were also some striking similarities. The Northern Ireland students discovered first of all that differences in the traditions and customs between the Catholic and Protestant communities were less marked now than they were 50 years

ago, and the students were able to suggest possible reasons for this such as greater mobility, increased interaction between different groups and less influence from the churches. The second thing the students noticed was that the similarities between the two communities were not present in other European countries. In other words the students were appreciating what it is that makes the people living in Northern Ireland different from other societies in Europe.

Another example from Austin's work is taken from an exchange through computer conferencing between groups of sixth form students in Northern Ireland and Germany and teachers in training from the University of Ulster. Two of the Northern Ireland participants observed that identity and loyalty were sometimes expressed in sport but that easy generalisations were misplaced:

> *We are both Protestants and we grew up in a community which looked towards Britain and the Queen for its national identity. We have both grown up with the Troubles and it has forced us to take sides. Our country we believe is a place to live in, not a place to die for. If there was no violence, we believe that both Protestants and Catholics could see Ireland as their country. People on both sides of the Border can support an all-Ireland rugby team for example. However, the question of nationalism raises its head during football matches. Protestants generally support Northern Ireland and Catholics the Republic. I, however, as a Protestant would support the Republic, but it is only because I like football players. The team name does not matter.*

The problem of identity often rises to the surface in Northern Ireland and can manifest itself in many ways. Some of the students in the project formed cross-community groups and were able to find a sense of identity within Northern Ireland itself. The following excerpt is taken from the report of two students who had worked together across the community divide:

> *Coming from different religious backgrounds, one Protestant, one Catholic, we both feel a Northern Irish identity. This identity is grounded in a fair and equal society in which both sections of the community play an equal role. From my Protestant perspective the linkage of Northern Ireland to Britain is of less importance than the fear of a United Ireland. As a Northern Irish Catholic, I feel*

emotionally drawn to the idea of a United Ireland, as my Irishness is very important to me. However, in practical terms, the economic and social implications of an all-Ireland state are off-putting.

The principles underlying the project work described above are worth noting. Firstly, the students needed to clarify their own understanding of the historical, cultural and political situation in Northern Ireland. This process of clarification took place in a context of trust built up by active learning sessions. Secondly, the project had a clearly defined educational objective, such as replying to questions about the situation in Northern Ireland sent by students from outside the Province. Thirdly, the project also had a definable end product, like a wall display or an electronic mail reply. Finally, the project was linked with other training objectives in the student teachers' course, such as an introduction to the European dimension or the development of skills in information technology (Austin, 1994).

EMU and Vocational Training

Although the conference concentrated largely on the activities of educational institutions, one of the conference papers broached the topic of EMU and vocational training (Trant and McSkeane, 1994). This was done by giving a case study of a vocational preparation initiative entitled the 'Wider Horizons Programme of the International Fund for Ireland'.

Wider Horizons aims to enhance the training and employment opportunities of young people aged 16-28 years by sending groups abroad for periods of about two months - mainly to the US, Canada and the countries of the European Union - to places where they can obtain relevant training and work experience. Every group, which comprises about 15 to 20 people, has to contain two dimensions - it must have both Catholics and Protestants from Northern Ireland, and also participants from the Irish Republic. To ensure that each project group functions as a unit requires considerable preparation and leadership well in advance of the actual overseas experience. The Programme covers a wide spectrum of people, from managers of businesses to young people with poor qualifications and poor prospects of employment and seeks to make an impact on their lives by sending them into a situation very different from the one they are used

to, and so hopefully enhance their employability and deepen their understanding of each other. Thus, the Programme can be said to have a two-fold aim: to promote mutual understanding and reconciliation through vocational preparation and professional development.

During the seven years of its existence Wider Horizons has gained valuable insights into the process of reconciliation. Reconciliation is a complex process which is difficult to measure but a study of the research literature on reconciliation seems to indicate that there are five broad conditions necessary for successful work in this field: (i) maintaining an intergroup as well as an interpersonal focus in the contact situation; (ii) ensuring that there is equality of status among all the participants; (iii) recognising differences as well as similarities: (iv) co-operating together in the pursuit of superordinate goals; (v) creating a safe and suitable environment.

The intergroup approach is based on the premise that if attitudes are to change then contact must take place in a situation where the interaction that occurs is between the different conflicting groups rather than between individuals as individuals. According to this view changes in interpersonal relations are often an effect rather than a cause of a more general change in intergroup relations.

Equality of status means that participants in a successful reconciliation project must pursue equal goals and in the process be given social and institutional support. The application of this to Wider Horizons is to ensure that in all projects the proportions of cross-community and cross-Border participation are equitable. The Programme's official policy on this is unambiguous: participation should be one third Northern Protestant, one third Northern Catholic and one third from the South.

Recognition of differences as well as similarities is another condition for genuine reconciliation. This is sometimes described as avoiding the 'culture of politeness', which has been described in one research report in the following terms:

> *When groups first meet in the contact situation, their behaviour initially is likely to be polite and superficial. Each side strives to establish safe patterns of interaction and, to do so, seeks out similarities or common needs. This pattern is reinforced by the*

> *prevailing social value to be polite at all costs. While this approach of smoothing over differences may mean that an atmosphere of bonhomie prevails, however, if the contact continues in this mode it means that no controversial information is shared and unchallenged myths may be perpetuated* (Ruddle and O'Connor, 1992).

In order to overcome the culture of politeness and to create genuine intergroup contact, it is necessary that people acknowledge that differences do divide them and that these differences should be discussed and explored in a positive manner. This implies confronting what another researcher called the 'denial syndrome' - the frequently observed convention that politics and religion are to be avoided as topics of conversation in "mixed company" (Cairns, 1987).

Co-operating in the pursuit of superordinate goals is also important for reconciliation - the project group should learn to co-operate together in the pursuit of goals which the members could not have achieved on their own. This is especially the situation in Wider Horizons, where the superordinate goal in question is for the entire group to have a successful training and work experience overseas. This is the Programme's central attraction, the factor that induces people of different backgrounds and traditions to overcome their mutual suspicions and antipathies and allow themselves to be bonded into a new unity. Within this unity, however, it is important to recognise the distinctive contribution that each of the constituent subgroups makes to the common endeavour. Otherwise, there is a risk of hostility reasserting itself, as the subgroups feel their own identity to be threatened.

Creating a safe and suitable environment is the final condition for reconciliation. Taking part in the process of reconciliation can be a risky exercise, where people feel vulnerable and exposed. It is imperative therefore that reconciliation happens within a context of safety and trust, where the participants know they will be respected and treated in a responsible and non-judgmental fashion. At a practical level this means that procedures and ground-rules are thoroughly worked out and clearly understood by all, and that a common code of acceptable conduct is agreed.

The previous paragraphs have outlined five conditions which according to the Wider Horizons philosophy should underpin any effort directed

towards reconciliation. The question, however, remains, how consciously or explicitly should reconciliation inputs be made into a particular project? The leaders of at least one Wider Horizons project grasped this nettle. Three community training workshops from Carrickfergus, Lurgan and Athlone, which sent a Wider Horizons group to Denmark, placed reconciliation at the top of their agenda. The pre-departure programme, which took place over three weekends, and the final evaluation residential, were designed specifically to explore sectarian prejudice and to break down religious stereotypes.

The theme of inter-denominational reconciliation underpinned the entire project. The first weekend, for example, opened with trust-building exercises which allowed the participants to overcome their sense of strangeness and to speak freely and openly. During these first meetings the young people examined their self-concept and took part in games and exercises which helped to enhance it. Thus, by the time they met for the second weekend, they had become accustomed at least to the vocabulary associated with discussing feelings.

It was during the second weekend that the topic of sectarian conflict was addressed directly. First, in small groups and later in a large group, the young people spoke about what it was that had brought them together and what it felt like to be a Protestant or a Catholic. One myth which emerged was the assumption on the part of the young Protestants that the Republican paramilitaries were universally supported South of the Border - which the young Southerners indignantly rejected.

The most explicit work was done with the help of flags. All the national and some of the county flags were brought into the session and all the participants were allowed to handle each flag, remembering the significance it might have for other members of the group. Some participants had never before touched a flag representing a tradition other than their own. Later, flags were designed to represent the Carrickfergus/ Lurgan/Athlone group, which would soon travel to Denmark under one banner (Trant and McSkeane, 1994).

EMU and the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum

Part of the Conference took place in the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum and during this session the participants learnt about the valuable contribution which the museum is making to EMU. The museum has been involved in EMU from the beginning, as is clear from its mission statement:

> *The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum acquires and conserves collections of artefacts and information, for the purpose of illustrating the way of life, past and present, and the traditions of the people of Northern Ireland, and disseminates knowledge of such a way of life and traditions. This mission fulfils important social and educational roles, especially in the context of community relations in Northern Ireland. In doing so, it is a major visitor facility contributing to Northern Ireland's economy, leisure and tourism sectors* (Gailey, 1994).

In the 1970s, the museum experimented with EMU before the term had even come into being, both in cross-community contact and in subject content. From the late 1980s onwards, the museum became more overtly involved in EMU activities because of the need to do something about Northern Ireland's community problems at a local level, and also because of the opportunity that arose in the reform of the national curriculum. The essence of the museum's approach is to inculcate respect for diversity of traditions, which can only be learnt through a realistic knowledge of these traditions.

The emphasis in the museum's work on EMU is on the primary schools and lower classes at secondary level. The approach is as follows:

Day Visits

- about 11,000 pupils per year;
- small group activity (6-8 pupils);
- co-operative activities;
- museum programmes tailored to the schools' project needs.

The museum staff work primarily with teachers so that they are in a position to deliver programmes to their own pupils.

Residential Courses

- About 8,000 courses are held per year and 75% of these for children. In these courses, young people learn to work and live together. There are back-up materials for teachers and worksheets for pupils. Activities include crafts, drama, music and art workshops.

There is access to the use of the museums artefacts and replicas and these are used, not just looked at. There are also opportunities for natural history in the museum park.

The museum is greatly influenced by the philosophy of the early folk and open air museums in Europe, especially the Danish High Schools. The museum director, in adopting the motto of these pioneering institutions, 'Know Thyself' has added his own interpretation: "How can you know yourself without knowing your neighbour? Our neighbours are given to us as gifts: we can't choose them" (Gailey, 1994).

Besides the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum, the Conference participants heard about the EMU-related activities of the Ulster American Folk Park from its director Mr John Gilmour (Gilmour, 1994). They also had the opportunity to learn about the work of other institutions which support EMU, such as the Navan Fort Interpretative Centre and the Armagh Planetarium. A lecture on how modern learning technology can be placed at the service of EMU was given at the Conference by Mr Derek Kinnen, director of the Northern Ireland Centre for Learning Resources (Kinnen, 1994).

The International Dimension

International perspectives on EMU were given by Mr Norman Richardson of Queen's University, who talked about the application of EMU in Sri Lanka (Richardson, 1994a), and Mr David Farrell, who reported on the EMU potential of the Japanese Studies Project (Farrell, 1994). However, the main international context of the Conference was supplied by the

participants themselves, who representing as they did over twenty different nations, were able to supply a rich international background to the programme. They were very perceptive in their comments on the various conference activities; they listened to lectures, held discussions with experts, visited schools, talked to teachers and students, and reflected among themselves in small groups and in various informal sessions.

The experience of presenting the EMU picture to a group of sympathetic but critical observers from outside was not without its effect on the people from Northern Ireland who participated in the Conference. As Norman Richardson, observed: "We were able to borrow the eyes of our visitors to see ourselves as others see us - a healthy and salutary process" (Richardson, 1994). The same point was made by another Northern Ireland participant who found it "especially enlightening to be able to focus on the conflict of the past 25 years through the eyes of strangers" (Mitchell, 1994). Thus the Conference enabled the Northern Ireland participants to broaden their perspectives, to think things out fresh and re-clarify the rationale for EMU by encouraging them to relate their thinking and practice to a broader society.

This search for a broader perspective is particularly important in Northern Ireland because of its relatively isolated position. As Richardson pointed out, there is a danger for people in Northern Ireland to look inward only:

> *We need to recognise the broader reality, we must learn to extract certain universal principles from our own experience, we need an EMU which can transcend national barriers, because at its heart the concept of EMU (whatever it may be called locally) is about learning to live with differences in a spirit of mutual respect - Catholic/Protestant, traveller/settled, imigrant/native, east/west, and rich world/poor world* (Richardson, 1994).

Most of the Conference participants were visiting Northern Ireland for the first time and many expressed agreeable surprise at what they saw and heard. They had been conditioned by adverse media coverage of the Troubles to expect a scene of devastation and even horror. They were relieved to find that the reality was different, and greatly encouraged to discover that the people of Northern Ireland were doing their best to get on

with every-day, normal living. They were particularly impressed by the schools they visited, as is evident from the following quotation from a report written by a conference participant from France:

> *We found well-equipped and well-disciplined schools which have done their utmost to remain safe havens for the children in the midst of the troubled world. We met dedicated and enthusiastic teachers, happy to work in their schools. The pupils, at least those we had the opportunity to speak with, were happy, very articulate and had a clear view of what they wanted to do. Schools have a wide range of activities organised to bring the children of both communities together. These can vary from mere social evenings and sports activities to more important projects. I was much impressed by videos made by a group of pupils from a Catholic school and a Protestant one. One of these videos dealt with the difficulty young people from Belfast have to face when they decide to go and live in London. In it among other things, a young Protestant explained how he ended up living in a squat with Catholic friends because he felt he had more in common with them than with the young Londoners* (Delie, 1994).

The participants were particularly impressed by the young people they met and by their obvious determination not to be bound by the ideas and traditions of their elders. A participant from Barcelona noted how the young people in Belfast play the same computer games, watch the same movies and hear the same music as young people in Dublin, Berlin, Paris or San Francisco. Shared cultural experience, he felt, will have a strong bearing on strengthening the opportunity for peace in Northern Ireland. The new generation will not look at the world in the same way as their parents, as they move into a future where the terms 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' may take on an entirely different meaning (Font, 1995).

Several participants reported that they found a spirit of tolerance and a tendency to co-operate among the young people they met. The following comment from a participant from Portugal is typical:

> *The wish to overcome the ethnic and religious divide was noticeable among the boys and girls, and as far as I could see the youth in Northern Ireland is really the key to change. The impression is still very vivid with me that most people, the young in particular, are aware that deep changes are taking place, not only in their immediate surroundings but also in a broader context, and that they*

are preparing themselves for this change. This is the core of the message I have got which I'll try to pass on. (Guilherme, 1994).

Some participants made use of the Conference to enter into networking arrangements with each other and with teachers and pupils in schools in Northern Ireland. In this context, a participant from Switzerland had this to say:

> *While visiting Little Flowers Girls School, I collected a sample of essays on the students' view of the present situation in Northern Ireland, of which I made copies to be pinned on the wall in several of my own classes for reading and further discussion. One class decided to work in groups and send back letters expressing their opinions on life here, together with their season's greetings. Another class worked on a European Studies questionnaire and prepared a commentary... I also forwarded a teachers request for pen-pals within my own school and to friends teaching in other schools.* (Hunziker, 1994).

For many participants the conference was an occasion to reflect on conditions in their own countries and on the problems of diversity of cultures, which were emerging there. As a participant from Finland observed:

> *In our community, we have not had many cultural differences but the situation is changing in Finland. After the seminar it is obvious to me that there are ways in which we can support people from other cultures to become full members of our society and to feel equal. I can now tell about the models used in Northern Ireland to my colleagues and teacher trainees* (Koskela, 1994).

Another participant noted that although the situation in his own country, France, was different from that of Northern Ireland, the Conference had nonetheless reinforced his conviction of the necessity of putting even more emphasis on the teaching of tolerance, self respect and respect for one another at all levels of the curriculum. (Delie, 1994).

Finally for most participants, the important lesson of the Conference was how to apply EMU back home in their own situation. This was aptly summed up by a participant from Cyprus:

> *I think that mutual understanding must begin from school especially from teachers. We must find time to exchange ideas with each other about the human behaviour and also find ways to promote respect and understanding between people who have different religions or cultures. In this year, dialogue is the main target of the school year. I believe that dialogue must begin first of all with us. All the teachers must use dialogue during their lessons* (Antoniou, 1994).

Concluding Remarks

The context of EMU in Northern Ireland was given on the very first morning of the Conference. We were told how from humble beginnings EMU became part of the Government's official policy and was incorporated into the Education Reform Order of 1989 as an essential dimension in the curriculum. We also learnt that the official adoption of EMU reflected the wider programme of political and social reform that began to be implemented in Northern Ireland from 1969 onwards in areas like housing, employment and voting rights. This is important because it places EMU very firmly in the context of a political, social and economic agenda.

As Tom Shaw pointed out, official thinking about education in Northern Ireland has to be interpreted in the light of the Government's three priorities - economic regeneration, targeting social needs and combating violence. All this places EMU in the context of what is sometimes described as social engineering in education. The term 'social engineering' is slightly pejorative and some educationalists have reservations about it. It risks placing an unduly heavy burden on schools by raising expectations which cannot be fully realised. It also risks distorting the aims and functions of education by subjugating them to extrinisic factors, be these political or social. Nonetheless, social engineering through education is a reality and is indeed often linked with idealistic if not to say noble aspirations. If one were to seek a good example of this, one need look no further than the Council of Europe's programme on Human Rights in which education is seen as a vital and dynamic part (Stobart, 1994).

EMU then is a kind of social engineering through education, and it is important to add that the term is used here in a neutral and non-pejorative sense. EMU is part of a reform package which aims at doing something about civil unrest and violence in Northern Ireland. As such, EMU is a

laudable aspiration and no right-minded person could possibly disagree with its general thrust. There are, however, two things which should be borne in mind, two conditions which should underpin any exercise in social engineering through education. Firstly, it should always be a genuine form of education and secondly its success or failure must be judged in the context of the wider, political, social and economic agenda in which it is situated. Let us examine these two conditions in relation to EMU.

EMU should always be truly educational and always resist the temptation to become propaganda even in a good cause. In this context it is interesting to compare EMU with other educational modes of social engineering which are being tried today, such as Environmental Education, Health Education and Consumer Education, to name but three. EMU has a marked resemblance to the first of these, Environmental Education, in that both arise from the need to do something about a serious crisis in society and both embrace almost every aspect of the curriculum - they are in fact perceived to be almost as wide as education itself. We could call them efforts in educational renewal, an attempt at finding new dynamic methods of actively involving people in the educational process.

We can look at EMU then as a way of renewing education, releasing new energies and idealism, refocussing aims and opportunities, reallocating resources and rekindling interests. Even if the broad political aspirations of EMU are never fully realised, nonetheless much good will have been achieved, provided the teachers are allowed to use EMU activities in pursuit of true educational goals, such as fostering the intellectual, moral, physical, spiritual, social and economic development of the individual human person.

The second thing to be noted about EMU is that its success in bringing about better relations between the opposing communities in Northern Ireland will have to be judged in the broader context of the political, social and economic reforms that are being implemented. If for instance there are serious injustices in society in areas like employment, political power, or institutional intolerance, there is little point in asking schools to make good the deficit. Having said that, however, we cannot but be impressed by the pioneering role played by the schools at a time both of great civil unrest and of unparalleled change in the curriculum and organisation of schools in

the Province.

During the Conference we saw that EMU can take place in a variety of situations, both inside and outside the formal curriculum. One thing, however, seems to stand out: a successful EMU experience must always have a focus - whatever the nature of the activity, it must always make educational sense to the participants. This experience must never be artifical or forced but always natural and intrinsically worthwhile. The focus most talked about during the Conference was the European idea. EMU was often presented as either part of European studies or some aspect of preparation for citizenship in the new Europe. There seems to be no doubt that the European idea presents a powerful theme for EMU, especially when we relate it to the aspiration of European unity and the fundamental reason for the existence of the European Union. We are reminded of the dream of the founders of European Union in the immediate aftermath of World War II, that there should never again be conflict in Europe. This is certainly an appropriate focus for EMU in the aftermath of the ceasefires in Northern Ireland.

There are other ways of focussing EMU and we heard of some of these during the Conference - for instance the shared concern over the problems of the environment and the fact that this can link not only young people from both traditions in Northern Ireland but also from the North and South. Another example is the concern everywhere in the island of Ireland over the problem of youth unemployment and the opportunity that this presents of exploring new initiatives in vocational preparation and training which are cross-community and cross-Border. Perhaps one of the most important lessons to emerge from such initiatives is the realisation of the need to shift the narrow ground on which some people in Northern Ireland take up their stance. This can be achieved by offering them experiences which widen their horizons, physically and mentally, especially through the opportunity of spending meaningful periods overseas in mixed groups of Catholics and Protestants, North and South. This is a very exciting development. It provides a new space in people's lives, a neutral venue, where young people can build a positive relationship with each other.

We were greatly impressed during the Conference by the young people we met either during the school visits or in the discussion groups. These were

articulate and confident young people, determined to shape their own futures and mix socially across the religious divide. We wondered, however, if this was the complete picture and whether there were not other young people less articulate and more entrenched in the opinions of their particular communities - young people, perhaps, for whom EMU meant less and whom we did not have the opportunity of meeting. We also heard how EMU could be practised in all kinds of situations out of school, museums, interpretative centres, and even a planetarium. This is as it should be and we presume that EMU is not just for young people but also and perhaps especially for adults, including political, religious, administrative and business leaders.

Last but not least, it is important to comment on the teachers who are putting EMU into practice. The celebrated Scottish philosopher Alasdair MacIntyre once remarked that teachers are the forlorn hope of the culture of Western modernity - they are engaged in an enterprise on whose success we have to depend but which in fact is bound to fail (MacIntyre, 1981). This is a strange paradox, which contains a disturbing amount of truth. Society constantly undervalues the teachers' role but when a crisis breaks it is the teachers who are called upon to enter the fray at a desperate hour.

Over the past twenty five years, many teachers in Northern Ireland have played courageous roles in helping their students to grow up in very difficult circumstances. We have seen how the idea of education for mutual understanding began with the efforts of these teachers to do something, no matter how small, to promote better relationships between the two communities. EMU has now received official recognition and even within the last three years has become a compulsory feature on the school curriculum. Now that peace has arrived, the opportunities and scope for EMU are greater than ever before. The Council of Europe Conference showed that there are many hopeful signs that EMU is having an impact on the new and peaceful Northern Ireland that is coming into being.

Anton Trant
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APPENDIX 1

Conference Participants

Ms Irene Antoniou	Cyprus
Mr Terry Ashton	Scotland
Mr Albert Baeckens	Belgium
Ms Markéta Cerná	Czech Republic
Mr Bernard Délié	France
Mrs Maria Lisete Dias	Portugal
Mrs Orietta Fantechi	Italy
Ms Fatima Flores	Portugal
Mr Jordi Font	Spain (Catalonia)
Mr Andrew Garbera	England
Mrs Nada Gjukic	Croatia
Mr Jens-Peter Groth	Germany
Ms Maria Guilherme	Portugal
Mrs Maria Hadjipavlou-Trigeorgis	Cyprus
Mr Arild Hem	Norway
Mrs Myriam Heyvaert	Belgium
Mrs Evelyne Hunziker	Switzerland
Ms Tonia Kastelanides	England
Mr Hannu Koskela	Finland
Mrs Beate Lobis	Austria
Mrs Ulrike Mehrhardt	Germany
Mr Jean Mikolajek	France
Miss Patricia Mitchell	Northern Ireland
Mr Domingos Neves	Portugal
Mr Tom O'Connor	Northern Ireland
Mrs Guri Raaen	Norway
Mr Michal Skapa	Czech Republic
Mr Albertus Smit	Belgium
Ms Eleonora Tomkova	Slovak Republic
Ms Astrid Uhner	Sweden
Mr Fery Van Lierop	Netherlands
Mr Francesc Vidal-Pla	Spain (Catalonia)
Mr Jost Von Weymarn	Germany
Mrs Miek Vrints	Belgium

In Attendance

Mr Paul Burrows (Conference Organiser)	Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges
Mr Dermot George (Conference Organiser)	Central Bureau for Educational Visits and Exchanges
Mr Norman Richardson (Assistant Organiser)	Queen's University, Belfast
Dr Anton Trant Rapporteur	CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit Dublin

Appendix 2

Schools Visited by Conference Participants

St Louise's Comprehensive
Glengormley High School
Grosvenor Grammar School
Little Flower Secondary School
Our Lady and St Patrick's, Knock
Ashfield Girls' School
Model Boys' Secondary School
Lagan College

Schools which provided students for discussion groups during Conference

Bangor Girls' High School
Sullivan Upper School, Hollywood
St Columbanus High School, Bangor
Lagan College, Belfast