EDUCATION FOR RECONCILIATION

A curriculum development project of the CDVEC
Curriculum Development Unit, Dublin

EVALUATION REPORT

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1. **Terms of Reference**

The evaluation of the Education for Reconciliation project was commissioned by CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit and has been undertaken by the School of Education, University of Ulster. The participation and co-operation of teachers and project personnel associated with the project is greatly appreciated.

**Aims and objectives of the evaluation**

The overall aim of the evaluation is to provide some insight into the way in which the pilot schools have incorporated the concept of reconciliation into their teaching as part of the curriculum. Arising from discussions at the Advisory Committee it was agreed that the evaluation would be limited to four specific objectives:

i. to document **project teachers’ interpretations and understandings of the concept of reconciliation**;

ii. to document **the range of contexts that project teachers are using to introduce the concept of reconciliation** to their pupils. This will include reference to concrete examples and the context in which reconciliation is examined (e.g. interpersonal, group, local, national, international or global);

iii. to document what **teaching and learning methods** are used particularly the extent to which teachers have found it possible to introduce more democratic processes as part of classroom practice. The evaluation will draw on teachers’ experience of helpful strategies and possible difficulties in this area;

iv. to document the extent to which it has been possible to **integrate the work of the reconciliation project within the mainstream curriculum provision of schools**. This will include an analysis of where project work is being incorporated within curriculum provision in each school and a review of the level and nature of support it is being afforded by school management structures. Teacher views on strategies for strengthening support will be sought.

Analysis of data collected in relation to each of the above four objectives provided the basis for an interim report in July 2000. However, the evaluation was **formative**, that is the findings of the interim report also formed the basis for further development work with the pilot teachers. In particular, the findings of the interim evaluation
formed the basis of a residential meeting of project teachers in Rooskey in November 2000. This, along with further contact with the pilot teachers in May 2001, provided a further opportunity for feedback from teachers and project personnel on specific issues and these have been incorporated into this final evaluation report. Where appropriate, this report also makes recommendations concerning possible future development of the education for reconciliation project.

Methodology and data collection

The evaluation is based on qualitative evidence that provides an insight into each of the four areas of investigation identified above. The opportunities for data collection were limited. For this reason it was important to identify precisely what sources of data would provide evidence for the final report. Discussions with the Advisory Committee suggested that collection of data from the following sources would be realistic and manageable within the time scale and budget:

- Project documents provided by CDU;
- Documentation related to the project as provided by schools and teachers;
- Teacher responses to questions posed via email, post or telephone;
- Cluster Group meetings on 31 March, 13 April and 17 April 2000.
- School visits to 3 project schools (10 May – 19 June) for:
  - an interview with the project teacher;
  - an interview with Principal or member of senior management;
  - observation of a lesson (by agreement of teacher);
  - small group discussion with pupils involved in the project;
- Information collected from teachers through structured small group discussions as part of a project in-service event (18-20 May 2000);
- Teacher reactions and responses to a draft interim report at a residential in Rooskey, Co. Leitrim (9-10 November 2000);
- Final contact with pilot teachers at a project meeting in Rooskey, Co. Leitrim (May 2001).
2. **Background to the Project**

The Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, established by the European Commission after the cease-fire in Northern Ireland in 1994, aims to promote reconciliation, the development of a peaceful and inclusive society and support social and economic regeneration.

Area Development Management Ltd. and the Combat Poverty Agency (ADM/CPA) have joint responsibility for 14 measures of the Special Support Programme for Peace and Reconciliation relating to projects located mainly in the southern border counties. An additional measure with a focus on promoting cross-border community reconciliation is jointly administered with the Northern Ireland Voluntary Trust.

The work of the ADM/CPA Programme involves promoting reconciliation, social inclusion, cross-border development and the development of the social economy through a wide range of community-based projects. Strategic initiatives have been developed to maximise the impact of this work and encourage mainstreaming and sustainability.

One of these initiatives, *Reconciliation in the Curriculum*, was contracted to CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit with a remit to investigate the possibilities for introducing the theme of reconciliation into the curriculum. This resulted in the report *Education for Reconciliation: A Curriculum Investigation. Report to the ADM/CPA Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, October 1999.*

The current project, Education for Reconciliation, also funded by the ADM/CPA Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, is a further development of that initiative.

Education for Reconciliation is a curriculum development project concerned with the exploration of key ideas and practices for introducing and developing the concept of reconciliation within the curriculum. The project relates to work already underway in the area of citizenship education, namely Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) in the south of Ireland and the pilot programme Social, Civic and Political Education (SCPE) in Northern Ireland. The project involves principally 1st Year/Year 8 pupils within a number of schools in both jurisdictions.
The Education for Reconciliation project had the following phases:

1. **Introductory Phase**: September - December 1999

2. **Cluster Phase**: January - June 2000

3. **Dissemination Phase**: September - December 2000

   A network of sixteen schools was established. Eight of these schools are located within the southern Border counties, four in other parts of the Republic of Ireland and four in Northern Ireland. This network of schools is being supported by:
   
   - a project support worker;
   - three, two-day training sessions and a two-day review meeting;
   - substitution costs for schools and a contribution of £200 towards communication costs;
   - a newsletter;
   - an evaluator.

4. **An Extended Phase**: January - June 2001

   Pending decisions about the future funding and administration of the overall Peace and Reconciliation programme, interim funding permitted the project to operate further meetings involving project teachers.
3. **Rationale for the project**

The Education for Reconciliation Project is located in the context of the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, which has as its overall aim,

> “the reinforcement of progress towards a peaceful and stable society and the promotion of reconciliation.”

In the pursuance of this, its twin objectives are:

> “To promote the inclusion of those who are at the margins of social and economic life.”

> “To exploit the opportunities and address the needs arising from the peace process in order to boost economic growth and advance social and economic regeneration.”

*(Education for Reconciliation: A Curriculum Investigation, CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit, 1999, p7).*

Education for Reconciliation has developed within the context of the longer-term strategies of the ADM/CPA to promote reconciliation and social inclusion and to maximise the impact and sustainability of its programme.

In addition, it can be located in the context of the ROI Department of Education’s White Paper, *Charting our Education Future* (1995), which states:

> “the State must therefore seek to create, promote and support the conditions within which education can realise its potential in society. The democratic character of this society requires education to embrace the diverse traditions, beliefs and values of its people.”

*(Department of Education, 1995, p5).*

Education is seen as having a significant role to play in the peace process in the creation of a new society on the island of Ireland, a society in which co-existence is possible based on respect for a shared humanity and for human rights and responsibilities.
Education for Reconciliation is also considered to have an important role to play in the wider context, as issues of conflict, inequality and differences occur at many levels and in different geographical contexts.

“It is envisaged that Education for Reconciliation will contribute in a meaningful way to many initiatives in the area of curriculum development, particularly those with an emphasis on human rights and citizenship education. Engaging in education for reconciliation will provide an opportunity to develop thinking and practice on a range of issues which have relevance to teachers, students and whole school development.”

(CDVED Curriculum Development Unit, 1999)
4. Project definitions, aims and objectives

Based on the very comprehensive discussion of the complexities and possible interpretations of ‘reconciliation’ presented in the CDVEC/CDU report: *Education for Reconciliation: A Curriculum Investigation*, (September 1999, ps10-13), the following working definition of Education for Reconciliation was proposed:

*Education for Reconciliation is about learning self-respect and respect for other people, especially if they come from other cultural traditions. It is also about understanding how individuals and communities depend upon each other, how co-operation between them can be fostered in practical ways, and how conflict can be resolved.*

The group identified the relevant areas of knowledge, skills and attitudes as follows:

**Knowledge**

- an understanding of our own identities in relation to others;
- similarities and differences between groups in society and how we cope with intolerance of difference; a knowledge of social norms;
- an understanding of conflict;
- an understanding of human rights and responsibilities.

**Skills**

The following were seen as important in managing feelings, respecting equality and resolving conflicts:

- compromise;
- listening;
- bridge-building;
- communication;
- self-observation;
- self-criticism.

**Attitudes**

Challenging one’s own attitudes and valuing difference were seen as key ways to promote open minds and the acceptance and appreciation of diversity. Areas identified related to attitudes were openness; interdependence; stereotyping; acceptance.
Cluster Group Aims and Objectives

The initial approach taken by the project involved a group discussion and identification of areas of interest. The group divided into three Cluster Groups based on these chosen areas, which were:

Cross-border communication and exchange

The aim of this cluster group was to promote understanding and respect through identifying similarities and differences among the 1st year/year 8 students within the schools in the project. This would be achieved by:

- getting to know one another;
- learning from one another;
- planning further activities.

An issue-based approach to Education for Reconciliation

The aim of this cluster group was to identify a strategy through which the issue of sectarianism might be addressed in the classroom. Specific objectives were:

- to create a safe environment in which to raise the issue of sectarianism by first building friendships between the groups through the use of student profiles and photographs;
- to explore students’ experiences of being treated differently because of religion, race, colour, gender, language or urban/rural prejudices;
- to use these experiences do develop suitable case studies, which may be used in the classroom.

Classroom methodology and conflict resolution

The aim of this cluster group was to research and develop conflict resolution models for use both within and outside the classroom. Specific objectives were:

- to raise awareness and understanding of conflict among the students;
- to encourage students to question their own attitudes and values in relation to conflict;
- to develop an awareness of the need to resolve conflicts and bring about reconciliation.
5. **Findings from the Evaluation**

The project was evaluated under four thematic headings:

I Definitions and understanding of education for reconciliation  
II Reconciliation contexts  
III Teaching and learning methods  
IV Embedding the project within the mainstream

The issues arising in each of these areas are discussed below:

**I Definitions and understandings of Education for Reconciliation**

After some consideration of the concept of reconciliation, the following working definition of Education for Reconciliation was proposed in the CDVEC/CDU report to the ADM/CPA Programme for Peace and Reconciliation:

> *Education for Reconciliation is about learning self-respect and respect for other people, especially if they come from other cultural traditions. It is also about understanding how individuals and communities depend upon each other, how cooperation between them can be fostered in practical ways, and how conflict can be resolved.*

*(Education for Reconciliation: A Curriculum Investigation, CDVEC/CDU. September 1999.)*

In discussions with participant teachers both on an individual basis and in the cluster groups about their definitions, the terms ‘Reconciliation’ and ‘Education for Reconciliation’ were frequently interchanged. However there were commonalities in their definitions. The majority of teachers saw ‘Education for Reconciliation’ or ‘Reconciliation’ as being concerned with not just understanding diversity, but also accepting and celebrating difference.

There were some differences in terms of emphasis or nuances between the three Cluster Groups. For a few people, especially those in the Cluster Group dealing with *Conflict Resolution*, the definition was more closely tied to conflict resolution, to raising awareness of conflicts in society and exploring methodologies for resolving these. However, incorporated within this definition was the promotion of an understanding of the sources of conflict, which in essence is also a recognition of the need to deal with differences.
The Cluster Group dealing with *Sectarianism* had a sharper focus on Northern Ireland and also regarded conflict resolution skills as important. It was suggested that ‘self-questioning’ was part of the process. The question was raised as to whether people recognised any sense of personal responsibility in relation to sectarianism even indirectly. In the eyes of one pupil, a reluctance to challenge sectarianism was tantamount to supporting or at least to allowing it to happen. Initially in this group it was considered that ‘Reconciliation’ had too many religious and middle-class overtones, but as the debate progressed this view changed. It became something very practical and in the words of one teacher, “irrevocably linked to education” and of such importance that it should be part of mainstream educational concerns. One participant stated that Northern Ireland needed a healing process and Education for Reconciliation was perceived to have an important part to play.

In addition to understanding, accepting and valuing difference, this group also gave attention to “valuing the experience of pupils” and this was reflected in their work in developing case histories for stimulating debate in the classroom.

The Cluster Group dealing with *Conflict Resolution* saw this thematic approach as a route to reconciliation. This was expressed in one of their objectives “to recognise the need to resolve conflicts and bring about reconciliation.” There was a greater emphasis on co-operation within this group, as this was perceived as an essential element in resolving conflicts. ‘Flexibility’ was defined as an ability to empathise with different perspectives and was seen as a prerequisite for compromise, essential in conflict resolution. The question of how to encourage ‘flexibility’ was raised. This group focused on the development of methodologies that would help to develop conflict resolution skills.

The Cluster Group concentrating on *Communication and Exchange* placed a slightly stronger emphasis on the appreciation of similarity. The programme was seen as broadening horizons, exploring and challenging misconceptions. The development of ‘empathy’ with different perspectives was also referred to and the need to build up trust, which allows people to move from previously fixed positions in response to new information and experiences. Several people also considered that it had a personal, social and emotional dimension and it was therefore suggested by a member of the project team that it could be considered the ‘social’ component of Civic, Social and Political Education (Republic of Ireland) and Social, Civic and Political Education (Northern Ireland).
**Link with CSPE/SCPE and Human Rights**
Many individuals within the Cluster Groups referred to the link between Education for Reconciliation and the work being undertaken in CSPE/SCPE on human rights and the *UN Declaration of Human Rights* or the *UN Convention on the Rights of the Child*. The programme was seen as requiring and fostering democratic processes, which affected classroom practice and had far reaching implications for whole school development and ethos.

**Ethos**
Education for Reconciliation is linked inextricably to ethos, both at classroom level and in the broader school context. One Principal interviewed felt that Education for Reconciliation should be integrated into every area and reinforced by being included as a cross-curricular theme as well as in the form of a specific module with specified curriculum time. In his view Education for Reconciliation was essential in creating a climate that facilitated ‘integration’, not only in terms of North-South relationships, but also in terms of local community relations. There was, in his view, a necessity for Education for Reconciliation even if the peace process was successful, as there was always a danger of ‘forgetting’ or ‘slipping back’ if people failed to remember the past.

Another Principal saw Education for Reconciliation as a way of promoting an understanding firstly of “who, where and why we are the way we are” and then offering an opportunity to move on to develop an understanding of those groups with which we wish to be reconciled.

**Repairing relationships**
The suggestion was made that other colleagues might interpret ‘reconciliation’ as the mending of relationships that had been fractured and therefore not see the relevance of such a programme for their school if they considered that no relationships had broken down. However, the perspective of the teacher involved in the project was that there were many ‘fractures’ in the local community that needed to be addressed.

**An emphasis on ‘process’**
Many of those involved frequently emphasised that reconciliation was a process. As one teacher put it:

“It is a process whereby persons, people, communities engage with each other in active listening to each others stories and come to value that story in all it’s diversity and complexity. It
also involves the attitudes, skills and commitment necessary to resolve conflicts, build support, interdependence and cooperation.”

One teacher reflected that if she were to repeat the exercise she would allow more time. She felt that the process had been rushed through in the enthusiasm to get an end product (case studies). All groups considered that the exchange of profiles, letter writing and generally getting to know the other students was an important part of the process of looking at similarities and difference and generated much enthusiasm and interest among not just the students involved, but in some cases among other students and staff. It would appear that the relationship building aspect of the process is a crucial factor in the success to date of this project.

Revisiting the concept of Education for Reconciliation

A residential meeting in Rooskey, Co. Roscommon (9-11 Nov. 2000) offered the opportunity to revisit the concept of Education for Reconciliation in light of teachers’ own experiences in implementing the project. The Interim Evaluation Report had raised a number of critical questions and one of these concerned the extent to which there was a common or shared understanding of the concept of education for reconciliation amongst the teachers involved in the project.

To what extent has the work, especially in the cluster groups, maintained a clear focus on the concept of reconciliation as well as on underpinning or supporting concepts such as relationship building, appreciating difference, conflict resolution?

(Interim Evaluation Report, July 2000)

The implication was that the concept of ‘reconciliation’ has distinctive characteristics, whilst ‘education for reconciliation’ involves a broader range of concepts that may support reconciliation processes.

At the residential the project personnel facilitated further discussion of this issue and project teachers readily engaged with the task. Outcomes included statements further clarifying participants’ understanding of the concept of reconciliation and the creation of a list of distinguishing features of reconciliation.

Feedback from teachers at the Rooskey residential suggest that reconciliation is about:
• **building relationships** through personal development and change; improved communication; learning through dialogue; compromise; appreciating interdependence; accepting difference;

• **acknowledging past hurts** through an understanding of who was affected and why;

• an awareness of the **law** and its role in terms of **justice**;

• a challenge in terms of **personal values** and the relevance of values based on a framework of **human rights and responsibilities**;

• a **healing process** in that it was felt that Education for Reconciliation was more than conflict resolution, but may also involve concepts such as ‘expressions of regret’ and ‘forgiveness’.

There was considerable consensus within the group on the relevance of these characteristics. However, two areas prompted considerable debate and diversity of opinion. One concerned whether condemnation of past acts is either appropriate or helpful to the process of reconciliation (other terms used included the concepts of ‘retribution’, ‘restorative justice’ and ‘compensation for victims’). The other controversy concerned the extent to which an expression of regret (‘apology’, ‘saying sorry’, for what and to whom?) is a necessary component of the reconciliation process. This later issue was debated in terms of interpersonal relationships, but also at the level of relationships between different groups within society and in terms of historical events between peoples and nations.

A meeting of the project teachers in May 2001 provided further evidence that serious consideration had been given to the development of a deeper understanding of the concept of reconciliation. It was clear that the project teachers saw some merit in further refining the working definition of education for reconciliation to include the significance attached to ‘empathy’, ‘acknowledgement of past hurts’ and ‘the healing dimension’ of the reconciliation process.

A very practical outcome from the project has been the schemes of work and lesson plans generated by project teachers in the three cluster groups. The project staff has also demonstrated a commitment to contribute towards a more enduring legacy from the project by documenting aspects of project development and making the lessons learnt available through guideline documents for wider dissemination within the system.
Conclusions concerning conceptual development

The interim evaluation suggested that the concept of education for reconciliation was being understood interpreted and two main ways. Firstly, in a broad, generic sense representing a set of underlying concepts and processes that may contribute to the improvement of relations between individuals and groups. Secondly, in a very specific sense that highlights the distinctive characteristics of the process or act of reconciliation.

The final evaluation highlights the significant progress that has been made by the project in this area, characterised by a high level of engagement with complex issues on the part of project teachers and the positive steps taken by project staff to provide stimulus materials and opportunities to explore conceptual understandings of the term reconciliation. A significant outcome from the meetings facilitated by project staff has been a deeper and more sophisticated understanding of the process of reconciliation. This included a willingness to engage with potentially controversial aspects of reconciliation, for example, the extent to which expression of remorse or regret is an essential feature of the process and what form this should take. It also included reflection on the extent to which values, custom and tradition within different societies determines what form the reconciliation process might take, for example, by contrasting the very public approach taken by establishing a truth and reconciliation commission in South Africa and the more subdued and private approach adopted by older generations who experienced the civil war in Ireland.

Given the quality of project work in this area, it would be extremely helpful if its insights could be made more widely available. In concrete terms this could take the form of a set of learning resources that explore characteristics of the reconciliation process and drawing on examples identified in the course of this project. Such materials could provide the basis for learning resources offered as part of Junior Cycle Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) in the Republic of Ireland and Citizenship education to be introduced to the curriculum at Key Stage 3 in Northern Ireland from September 2003.
II    Education for Reconciliation Contexts

One of the objectives of the evaluation was to document the range of contexts used by project teachers to introduce the concept of reconciliation to their students.

‘Context’ can be viewed in a number of ways:

- *curricular context for Education for Reconciliation;*
- *the thematic focus for Education for Reconciliation;*
- *the level at which Education for Reconciliation is addressed.*

**Curricular context**

Education for Reconciliation was specifically set in the context of the statutory Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) programme in the South and the parallel pilot programme, Social, Civic and Political Education (SCPE), in Northern Ireland. All participants felt it sat well within this area, where it had a natural connection with topics such as ‘human rights,’ ‘pluralism’ and ‘community’.

Other possible subject areas mentioned in the course of discussions included Personal and Social Education (PSE) / Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE). Also mentioned was Religious Education (RE), but it was noted that in many schools students came from a variety of religious traditions and not all attended RE classes. However, one Principal regarded Education for Reconciliation through RE as appropriate if it was to be extended into senior cycle level, as this would tie in with social issues studied by this age group.

Other areas mentioned were English and History. However, one teacher saw tensions arising in History. He suggested that the concept of reconciliation might be seen as inappropriate in the context of atrocities such as the Holocaust. In such cases the concept of co-existence, or a coming-to-terms with the atrocity and moving on, was more appropriate and realistic. Reconciliation in such circumstances might be seen as disloyalty to the dead.

At times the boundaries were not very distinct between Education for Reconciliation and CSPE/SCPE. In some cases Education for Reconciliation was linked into topics on human rights and community as part of CSPE/SCPE. However, in other cases Education for Reconciliation was described as being more distinctive by being focused on ‘developing interpersonal relationships’ in a helpful way.
One teacher also noted that a greater emphasis on discussion was a distinguishing feature of her Education for Reconciliation classes.

Education for Reconciliation was further described as making CSPE ‘more concrete’. An example given was in relation to teaching about human rights through games and role-plays. This approach, it was said, had merit and was fun, but in some ways made human rights seem a vague, distant concept and rather aspirational. In contrast, when human rights were dealt with in the context of the Education for Reconciliation project, by looking at ‘difference’ in the local community, it became a ‘live’ issue, more relevant and accessible to students.

Others saw Education for Reconciliation as filling a gap in CSPE/SCPE, especially those who had a stronger focus on North-South relationships. For example, it was felt that there was a lack of material for teachers who wanted to work on sectarianism and that the project, in developing a methodology and case studies for dealing with this issue, was fulfilling a very important function.

Education for Reconciliation was considered by all to be of great importance in the context of whole school ethos. It was also perceived as difficult to implement since it intrinsically involved democratic methods and structures, which were likely to run counter to prevailing practices and hierarchical structures.

The location of Education for Reconciliation solely within CSPE/SCPE was insufficient in the opinion of one Principal, who saw it as extremely important in relation to whole school ethos. He maintained that it needed the involvement of all staff in order to provide this educational experience at the wider level. However there was dissension about the effectiveness of such a cross-curricular approach in the light of evaluations of the cross-curricular theme, Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) in Northern Ireland. Furthermore, there has been no culture of cross-curricular themes in the Republic of Ireland.
**Thematic approach**

Following much discussion at the start of the project, teachers identified three areas of interest or themes through which Education for Reconciliation might be made accessible to pupils. Three cluster groups were formed, each working around the following themes.

- Cross-border communication and exchange
- An issue-based approach to Education for Reconciliation
- Classroom methodology and conflict resolution.

**Cross-border communication and exchange**

The cluster group working on cross-border communication and exchange consisted of six schools, one of which joined the project at a later date. The aim of this group was to promote understanding and respect - through identifying similarities and differences - among the 1st year/year 8 students from the schools involved in the project. Objectives were set in terms of:

- getting to know one another;
- learning from one another;
- planning further activities.

The emphasis in this group was on exploring the similarities and differences between students in the different schools as revealed through an exchange of student profiles, letters and videos. Two of the schools completed their exchange programme with a meeting of the two groups in the Ulster American Folk Park, where they took part in a programme of planned activities. The students had established a good rapport with each other before the meeting and this resulted in a very successful day.

Other schools in the group did not manage to get to the contact stage. Student profiles were exchanged; these were passed around initially between three schools but this expanded to include a fourth school at a later date. With a larger number of schools involved it became difficult to manage the process. However, in spite of these difficulties, pupils derived a number of benefits from the project, these are discussed in Chapter 6, ‘Impact of Education for Reconciliation.’

Two of the schools were successful in achieving the stated aims and objectives of this cluster group. For the others, while they did not complete the exchange as they had hoped, it was generally considered a very useful experience with considerable learning around the issue of
difference. It is difficult to assess the level of understanding and respect engendered towards other groups as a result of the project. Attendance at some classes and conversations with teachers and students suggest that considerable learning and understanding has taken place, although hard-line attitudes among some students were still in evidence in relation to groups such as travellers and refugees. Teachers emphasised that the project was a learning curve for all involved and was inevitably a slow process.

An issue-based approach to Education for Reconciliation

The six schools in this cluster group, four from the South and two from the North, chose the issue of sectarianism as their theme. The aim of the group was to identify a strategy through which the issue of sectarianism might be addressed in the classroom. Specific objectives were:

- to create a safe environment in which to raise the issue of sectarianism by first of all building friendships between the groups through the use of student profiles and photographs;
- to explore students’ experiences of being treated differently because of religion, race, colour, gender, language or urban/rural prejudices;
- to use these experiences to develop suitable case studies which may be used in the classroom.

The use of student profiles and photographs proved very successful in generating interest and enthusiasm among the classes involved, and in some cases the interest spread to other classes and staff in the schools. The exploration of difference was used as a lead in to looking at the issue of sectarianism. Considerable progress has been made in the development of case studies.

The teachers involved in this cluster group felt that very useful and very demanding work had been carried out. They admitted to anxieties about the theme, but discovered that they were in fact more nervous about dealing with the issue than the students. Reflection on the work completed drew comments about the value of what had been done, but also highlighted the need to broaden the focus and include issues suggested by the students themselves. The methodology developed was considered applicable to other controversial issues. The telling/hearing of personal stories was a very important part of the process; this lead to a valuing of and respect for the individual or group which was at the heart of Education for Reconciliation.
Classroom methodology and conflict resolution

Four schools opted to take this approach. The aim of the group was to research and develop conflict resolution models for use both within and outside the classroom. Specific objectives were:

- to raise awareness and understanding of conflict among the students;
- to encourage students to question their own attitudes and values in relation to conflict;
- to develop an awareness of the need to resolve conflicts and bring about reconciliation.

The emphasis in this cluster group was on developing skills required for conflict resolution, and ultimately reconciliation, through group work. The methodologies employed encouraged the development of a co-operative and democratic ethos in the classroom, with everybody being listened to with respect and therefore able to express their opinions without fear of ridicule. Through the use of an exercise called ‘New Planet,’ students explored and debated issues such as rights, responsibilities and needs. A number of conflict situations were also explored.

The teachers in this cluster group felt that progress had been made, that students were beginning to understand the need to listen, communicate, co-operate and to think problems through. Some teachers commented on the positive way in which students responded to working in a more democratic way. They valued the opportunities to have their opinions heard and there was an increased sense of involvement and a greater responsibility for activities in the classroom.
The level at which Education for Reconciliation is being addressed

The evaluation sought insight into the level at which Education for Reconciliation was being addressed through project and classroom activities. In this respect, the evaluation inquired as to whether the contexts within which the concept of reconciliation was being explored by pupils fell within the following levels:

- reconciliation at personal and interpersonal level;
- reconciliation between groups within communities at local level;
- reconciliation with an emphasis on north-south relations in Ireland;
- reference to east-west relations between Britain and Ireland;
- reconciliation with references of an international or global nature past or present, e.g., post-war reconciliation in Europe, Bosnia, Rwanda, South Africa and Aboriginal issues in Australia.

There were a variety of views on the efficacy of approaching Education for Reconciliation from a personal or local perspective or whether it was easier and more productive to start from the global or general and work back to the personal.

In the Communication and Exchange cluster group the emphasis was on exploring similarities and difference at the personal and school level first and then moving out to local community, the national (North/South) and global issues. Encouraging respect, acceptance and celebration of difference was seen as an essential part of a communication process, which would hopefully lead to reconciliation. Some of the group did touch on all levels.

While there was excitement among the students at the prospect of a cross-border exchange, one teacher stressed that the process of communication was more important than the issues raised. School community and local community were seen as important and relevant to the students.

For one teacher it had appeared initially that the focus was on North/South issues and on actual contact. When it became apparent that contact might not be possible, it was necessary to refocus to make the project accessible, interesting and relevant to the students. Local issues, such as Travellers and refugees were discussed. This was in accord with the emphasis on community and human rights in CSPE. It was felt that there was a need to appreciate and understand one’s own community first and then consider cross-border relations.
There was agreement among those in the Conflict Resolution cluster group that it was easier to work from the global to the local or personal. As the students were 1st years /Year 8s, this approach gave them an opportunity to get to know each other and the teacher a little better before moving on to more personal matters. It was also felt that at the global level students were more objective and understanding and found it easier to come to an agreement about the concepts of general rights and a peaceful solution of conflict. Issues dealt with included:

- animal welfare;
- rights of individuals e.g. through the ‘Giant Steps’ game;
- conflict between students/teachers and students/parents;
- travellers;
- refugees;
- environmental issues;
- economic differences: Third World / First World;
- an imaginary classroom conflict.

Only one member of the group addressed issues related to the conflict in Northern Ireland. It was not an issue for some students. There was also a concern about specifically raising what could be very contentious issues in the classroom; one view was that it might be better to concentrate on developing general conflict resolution skills that could be applied to any conflict situation.

Several members of the cluster group dealing with Sectarianism responded that they had dealt with the issue at all levels. There was a significant, but not exclusive, focus on Northern Ireland. In the case of one Southern school, the students started by looking at sectarianism at the national level and then at the local and personal levels. Another Southern teacher, who would normally have favoured approaching the theme from a global perspective, found that the use of a case study enabled a start at the personal level.

The main strategy adopted in this group was the production of stories written by the students; teachers were very impressed by the quality and depth of these. An important aspect of this methodology was the valuing of students’ own experiences. It was intended to adapt these for use as case studies and to pilot them within CSPE and SCPE. The teachers were reviewing the stories to see how they could be developed. One suggestion was that they could be used to raise issues related to the denial of human rights. Some of the Southern teachers saw the Northern stories as being a very valuable tool for increasing understanding of experience of the conflict in Northern Ireland.
In addition to dealing with sectarianism, issues concerning Travellers, refugees and the vandalisation of Jewish and Jehovah Witness’ graves were also included.

Issues identified by pupils as important were:

- bullying;
- being treated differently because of:
  - economic status
  - family background/circumstances
  - urban/rural background
  - appearance
  - disability
- level of knowledge/understanding of Northern Ireland conflict;
- lack of political awareness;
- understanding of own community/locality.

The personal dimension was stressed by a number of teachers as they felt there was a need to make sectarianism everyone’s responsibility.

The residential at Rooskey in provided an opportunity to reflect on the contexts (or examples of reconciliation) that project teachers might use to help pupils explore the concept of reconciliation through practical examples. The Interim Evaluation Report posed the question:

*To what extent should there be reference to reconciliation through specific examples at interpersonal, local, North-South, Ireland and Britain, and international levels?*

(Interim Evaluation Report, July 2000)

Although North-South issues were addressed by some, especially the group dealing with sectarianism, there was a greater focus on the personal and local levels. It was considered important to address issues relevant to the students. One of the discussion groups at the final evaluation session felt there should be a progression from the personal to the family and outwards to local and eventually global perspectives.

There was some discussion about *private* and *public* dimensions of reconciliation. The example was given of politicians working amicably together privately, but maintaining a hostile or confrontational attitude in public. A danger was foreseen in staying in the ‘comfort zone’ unless there was a specific requirement to address the more difficult areas. The point was also made that the age of the students involved in
the project was a limiting factor in terms of what it was possible to address.

There was some consensus that the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement had provided a new framework within which the conflict in Northern Ireland could be addressed. This framework identified three sets of relationships as being important, that is community relations within Northern Ireland; North-South relations in Ireland; and East-West relations between Britain and Ireland. The argument was put that any programme of Education for Reconciliation should include reference to these three sets of relationships as well as reference to interpersonal and more international examples of reconciliation.

Subsequent discussion gave rise to the following points:

- The Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement changed the focus from internal only to a three-way set of relationships. It stressed that one set of relationships could not be isolated.

- It was suggested that the interpersonal level was easier to deal with at classroom level than the intergroup, North/South and Britain/Ireland (East/West) dimensions.

- There was some debate as to whether equal emphasis should be given to examining North/South relations and East/West relations.

- Initially the East-West dimension (relations between Britain and Ireland) was not seen as immediately relevant or important and it was regarded as rather inaccessible.

- The importance of North/South relations to Nationalists was readily acknowledged, but there was also increased awareness of the difficulties that may arise if relationships are dealt with only in a North-South context, since this denies the strong emotional and historic links of Unionists to Britain.

- Examples of reconciliation at international level were discussed. These included the process of post-war reconciliation in Europe and between Japan and Western countries; the extent to which reconciliation might be possible following atrocities such as the Holocaust, ‘ethnic cleansing’ in the former Yugoslavia and genocides in Rwanda; statements of remorse by political leaders for former acts against indigenous populations in places such as the United States, Australia and New Zealand.
Conclusions concerning contexts for development

Curricular Context

In terms of the curricular context for Education for Reconciliation there was considerable support for the view that the programme requires dedicated space within the curriculum and that the natural place for this would be within Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) in the Republic of Ireland and the emerging programme for Citizenship education in Northern Ireland.

Education for Reconciliation was also regarded as having a number of distinctive features and strengths. These included:

- a clear focus on learning about relationships at a range of levels;
- an opportunity for teachers in both jurisdictions to include a specific focus on issues related to the conflict in Northern Ireland;
- a strong emphasis on communication skills and on debate that gave students a greater sense of being listened to and having their opinions valued;
- a commitment to teacher development and support.

A Thematic Approach

Teachers identified three themes through which Education for Reconciliation might be made accessible to pupils. Three cluster groups were formed around the themes:

- **Cross-border communication and exchange** with a focus on respecting difference.
- **An issue-based approach** which developed a strategy for exploring and challenging sectarianism, using students’ stories.
- **Classroom methodology and conflict resolution** that emphasised a co-operative, democratic, problem-solving approach.

The three cluster groups developed their own specific approaches and made good progress in relation to their aims and objectives. The value of the cluster groups has been to provide concrete ways of taking the project forward into classroom practice and considerable progress has been made in developing lesson plans and learning experiences. There remains a challenge as to the extent to which the work of the cluster groups can be drawn together in a more integrated way and the extent to which the learning resources can be developed for broader dissemination within the system.
The evaluation played a formative role in suggesting that the concept of reconciliation might be explored at the following levels:

- reconciliation at personal and interpersonal level;
- reconciliation between groups within communities at local level;
- reconciliation with an emphasis on north-south relations in Ireland;
- reference to east-west relations between Britain and Ireland;
- reconciliation with references of an international or global nature past or present, e.g., post-war reconciliation in Europe, South Africa and Aboriginal issues in Australia.

Considerable engagement with this issue took place as part of residential in-service work facilitated by the project team. There was some acknowledgement of the need to consider what emphasis should be placed on each of these levels.

Examples of reconciliation at personal and interpersonal levels were considered to be readily accessible and most groups had worked on examples of relations between groups at local community level.

It was felt that Education for Reconciliation provides a unique opportunity to develop a module common to both jurisdictions that addresses the three sets of relationships identified in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement, although this presents challenges in terms of addressing more contentious issues and the perceived relevance of each of the three sets of relationships (community relations within Northern Ireland; North-South relations; and relations between Britain and Ireland).

Examples of reconciliation at international or global level were perceived to be valuable by illustrating that the concept of reconciliation is not unique to any one society or culture; by introducing examples that might involve less ‘emotional attachment’; and by providing a clear focus on the question of reconciliation between peoples and nations.
III  Teaching and learning methods

At the start of the project teachers were encouraged to keep a journal reflecting on the progress of the project, and the learning experiences. Not everyone did so for a number of reasons. In some cases people had joined the project late, for others the process was found to be too time-consuming and ideally something that needed to be done immediately after the class, which proved difficult. Some teachers commented that they normally kept notes on what had or had not worked, but they did not keep a more formal journal. Six participants wrote journals on a regular basis. Extracts from some of these were made available for the purposes of the evaluation process. In addition a process for reflection was undertaken as part of the cluster group meetings. This involved responding to questions regarding learning related to knowledge, skills and attitudes/feelings as follows:

To review knowledge

1. Provide a brief description of the lesson and its content.
2. In relation to the content of the lesson, can you write down something that developed your understanding of reconciliation?
3. How might you relate what you learned today with some other subject that you are teaching? Give one or two examples.
4. What questions did today’s lesson raise for you?

To review skills and actions

1. Write down a few words to remind you of what you covered during the lesson.
2. Write down the different activities that you used, e.g. discussion, group work, filling in work sheet, listening, etc.
3. What kind of activity challenged you most? Why?
4. How can you see yourself using these skills in situations at school, at home, in the community or within the project? Give one or two examples.

To review feelings and attitudes

1. Write down a few words to remind you of what you covered during the lesson.
2. How do you feel about today’s lesson? Use words such as those below to describe how any of the lesson made you feel: confused, angry, bored, tired, energetic, enthusiastic, frustrated, satisfied, positive, negative or add your own words.
3. What was important for you at a personal level?
4. Give an example of how your attitudes have been challenged by today’s lesson.

These sources, plus development work as part of the cluster groups and meetings at Rooskey, have provided insight into the sort of teaching strategies and methodologies that proved most helpful to teachers. Indeed, the working methods of the project itself were regarded highly by participants as an example of effective professional development. The format of cluster group meetings and the wider network were considered very supportive and affirmative. Teachers felt valued.

It is suggested that feedback and lessons learned provide the basis for more detailed practice guidance on methodological issues appropriate to Education for Reconciliation. In general terms the teacher evaluations confirmed the importance of active and participatory learning methods to successful learning in this area of the curriculum.

Within each of the cluster groups various methodologies were employed, many of which were common to all three groups. Some of the activities that worked well included:

- ‘New Planet’: a game requiring students to draw up rights and laws and deal with human needs in the event of finding themselves on a new planet;
- ‘Giant Steps’: a human rights game exploring the degree to which individuals from a variety of different backgrounds have their human rights fulfilled or denied;
- ‘Moving debate’/’4-Corners’: an interactive debating methodology, which allows people to change their positions in response to the on-going discussion and new information;
- some students kept diaries or journals in which they described what happened in the class, what they had learned, what they felt and in some cases they were asked to give reasons for supporting or opposing a particular opinion or issue;
- group work involving an activity, a debate or a discussion;
- paired work;
- brainstorming;
- ‘icebreakers’, such as ‘Chinese Whispers’ – used to illustrate the effects of rumour and misinformation;
- case studies, both those in exemplar CSPE material and derived from stories written by students themselves in the group looking at sectarianism;
- games such as a human rights card game;
- practical activities such as developing a Bill of Rights;
- role play/drama and use of art;
- students taking responsibility for preparation of the classroom;
- in one school sixth-form pupils were mentors and co-facilitators.

A major focus throughout all the groups was the exploration, appreciation and acceptance of difference at all levels, such as background, ethnicity, religion, opinions. The work was strongly underpinned by human rights principles.

**Some concerns raised**

Some teachers experienced difficulties in getting students to work in groups and take part in discussions. This was in part attributed to students being unfamiliar with the methodology but it was also attributed to a lack of listening skills.

Increased noise levels caused anxiety in some cases, again attributed to a lack of listening ability on the part of students, who, in spite of ground rules, were inclined to talk over each other.

For some teachers “letting go” of authority and switching to a more facilitative role was difficult, although all saw the value in this approach.

The change to more open discussion in the classroom caused some anxieties about questions being raised to which the answers might not be known, although this served to highlight how the methodology implies a changing role for the teacher towards facilitating learning rather than being the point of reference for all knowledge.

A concern was expressed about adapting the new methodologies for use with mixed ability groups.

In some cases the actual physical set up of the classroom was seen as unconducive to interactive methodologies. At times classes were brought to other rooms, e.g. the library, or a sports hall.

Lack of time was the problem most often mentioned. The interactive teaching/learning techniques being used were widely appreciated by teachers and students alike. However, these are more time-consuming than a ‘traditional’ class both in terms of preparation and delivery, especially when project work is involved. The length of most class periods was considered too short, led to fragmented delivery and made continuity difficult.
Controversial Issues

Following the presentation of the interim evaluation at a meeting in Rooskey there was considerable debate with regard to the discussion of controversial issues in the classroom.

Some fears were expressed about unduly influencing students by ‘leading’ the discussions or voicing an opinion. The question of how one best conducts such discussions without being directive was posed. It may be helpful to refer to the ‘philosophical enquiry’ approach developed by Matthew Lipman (1980).

The majority of teachers favoured an emphasis on building trust within the group before introducing discussion of more contentious issues. They stressed the importance of the work being underpinned by human rights and responsibilities.

The techniques for handling debates on sensitive topics were considered an integral part of the reconciliation process. Teacher training was therefore seen as a crucial issue if this work was to be taken forward and disseminated in schools.

Specific concerns were expressed about needing to find time for “debriefing” in the wake of discussions of very sensitive issues. It was felt that some students were possibly revisiting personal or family traumas and that “specific counselling skills were needed to feel one was dealing adequately with outcomes.”

Democratic processes

A number of teachers felt that their own practice had become more democratic through their involvement in the project.

The democratic ethos considered to be required by and resulting from Education for Reconciliation has implications for the inclusion and involvement of students in school life and structures.

Responses from many of the teachers suggest that there has been an increased level of co-operation and bonding within the classes involved. This was attributed to a greater engagement of students in discussion and debate with each other, a greater awareness of listening to the views of others and, according to one teacher, an “awareness of
those who are different and could be left out.” This created a “more open and democratic classroom,” where students were “more likely to ask questions about what they are interested in.”

Some of the perceived benefits included better communication and listening, a greater willingness on the part of the students to take responsibility in the classroom due to their level of interest and involvement and an improved ability to think problems through.

Several teachers referred to the development of good teacher-student relationships. In the view of one teacher, that relationship was better with the Education for Reconciliation group because they were “learning together rather than me telling them. We are on an exciting journey of discovery, learning about ourselves and others, our attitudes and how the world works.”

Trust was seen as an important ingredient in improving classroom relationships. According to one teacher the students responded to this and the classroom relationships improved, becoming “more democratic, more fun...and the class is much more united.”

It was clear from responses and discussions that several teachers were aware of changes in their own practice as a result of the project. One teacher stated, “It has affected me as a practitioner re how I approach teaching and learning for all classes at all levels”. Another teachers commented, “I’m more inclined to listen and let pupils have their say”. It appears that the experience has influenced many of the participating teachers’ practice in other classes also. However, it was also stated that there were classes with which one could not use this more democratic approach because they would “get out of control”.

Drawing up a classroom contract was identified as an example of a democratic process. Exploring the rights of all in the school community and drawing up a Bill of Rights was considered by some to essentially provide democratic ground rules. Some of the effects of the project noted by teachers were:

- a greater awareness and tolerance of the ideas of others;
- “a greater sense of responsibility for each other;....awareness of those who...are different and could be left out;”
- a class that was more united and more concerned about bullying;
- that students were more likely to ask questions;
- better behaviour and better listening;
- the emergence of a ‘community spirit’ within the class group.
IV Embedding the Project within the Mainstream

The evaluation sought some clarification in relation to the question,

*How will Education for Reconciliation be integrated into the curriculum in the future and what will be required to strengthen support for this work?*

(Interim Evaluation Report, July 2000)

**Location in the curriculum**

From the start Education for Reconciliation was specifically located within CSPE in the South and its Northern counterpart, SCPE. This was seen as providing a natural home for it both in terms of subject matter and in terms of the existing structure of the two parallel programmes and the links that had already been established between them at curriculum council level and at the level of practitioners. All involved felt that this location was suitable and the point was made that it was advantageous to locate it within an identifiable area, as otherwise it was unlikely to survive. This would ensure that it became part of every student’s experience and thus increased the chances of it impacting on the ethos of the whole school community.

The theme of reconciliation could form an essential part of the CSPE/SCPE as it has the capacity to provide a concrete focus on relationships between peoples and groups.

It was considered possible to slot it into all levels within CSPE, from the individual and local to the national and global. In SCPE it was seen as tying in with the concepts of Pluralism and Human Rights. Opportunities existed within both programmes for an action project on Education for Reconciliation.

In the view of one of the Principals, Education for Reconciliation was too important to be confined to one subject area. His preference was for cross-curricular delivery in order to get the widest possible commitment and support. In his opinion, as with many other participants, Education for Reconciliation had a major contribution to make in relation to whole school ethos and development. However the consensus was that there were acknowledged shortcomings in adopting a purely cross-curricular approach. The preferred option was for a discrete module or unit of work within CSPE/SCPE, with links to other relevant subject areas.
Curriculum Time

Lack of time was the most frequent complaint. This included time for preparation, for delivery and for debriefing. Short class periods made continuity difficult and were not conducive to the use of the interactive methodologies, which were an essential aspect of the project. Various arrangements were suggested, including:

- allocating blocks of time
- full-day workshops
- allocating consecutive periods, e.g. the Education for Reconciliation class to run before or after another class taught by the same teacher and which would complement it, for example, English or RE.

The inadequate time allowance was seen as a discouragement to teachers given that this project and CSPE/SCPE were considered very labour-intensive, due to the nature of the methodology and the project work involved.

Assessment

According to one teacher “the main difficulty will be in overcoming the climate of negativity that exists towards non-academic and non-traditional subject areas, including CSPE/SCPE and Education for Reconciliation”. Although there were some who regarded examinations undesirable in this area, there was a widespread recognition of the problem of status associated with non-examination subjects. The consensus was that it would be necessary to assess/accredit Education for Reconciliation in some way.

It was suggested that the skills component could be assessed cross-curricularly, for example, communication skills. However, it is not clear how the level of attainment or progress could be attributed to any particular subject. This may not be important in terms of the end product, but may be so in terms of assessing the impact of Education for Reconciliation.

It was considered that co-operative skills could be assessed through action projects. A qualitative assessment of this was envisaged rather than a mark. It was stated that at present CSPE action projects were just marked as written documents. There was no assessment of skills such as co-operation. Some suggestions were:
include a section on Education for Reconciliation to each unit in CSPE/SCPE and assess it in this context;
identify Education for Reconciliation through key concepts which can be examined;
include Education for Reconciliation in the action projects;
encourage students to evaluate each session, for example through the use of structured questions such as: what I did; what I learned; as a result of this learning I--;
one teacher intended to include the conflict resolution model developed by the cluster group on the end of term examination. The test would be set as a number of dilemmas;
it was suggested that the examination boards should co-operate in assessing or accrediting students, North and South.

**Teacher Accreditation**

It was stated that teacher accreditation was a vital component in supporting the development and continuation of Education for Reconciliation. This would give it credibility and standing and would encourage more teachers to become involved.

One suggestion was that Education for Reconciliation could be an action research project, with teachers publishing and actively disseminating their findings. This could form part of a professional development course, which could be accredited. Another possible avenue for accreditation mentioned was the Accreditation of Prior Learning in Northern Ireland.

Opportunities appear to exist in several third level colleges within an existing Higher Diploma course in CSPE and in other developing Masters and diploma courses.

**Other Support Required**

Alongside decisions about where Education for Reconciliation might fit structurally within the curriculum are issues about other forms of institutional support that will be required. Suggestions included:

**Political support** on a cross party basis had been important to the development of civic, social and political education and to emerging initiatives in citizenship education. Further commitment at policy level would need to be secured by encouraging a greater sense of ownership by Departments of Education, both North and South.
Internal support from senior management was also considered crucial and school Principals were seen to have a key role in creating a signalling the importance attached to the project. Special in-service training for principals was proposed. The hope was expressed by a number of Principals that the programme could be offered to all first year CSPE/SCPE classes and continued on into the second and subsequent years.

Collegial support would be important in terms of the acceptance of Education for Reconciliation as part of mainstream curriculum provision and it was therefore essential to disseminate information to colleagues. The Newsletter was seen as very useful in this respect, but it was also felt that a more proactive approach would be needed, perhaps involving briefings or workshop sessions for other staff. Some of the Principals interviewed were prepared to promote the project from at least one other colleague, instigating a type of ‘buddy’ system, or mini-cluster group within a school.

Educational partners such as Board of Governors, Management Committees and education advisory services were identified as key groups to be informed about project development. In one school parents had been kept informed and their support requested and obtained. The role of teacher unions was mentioned in relation to their reaction to possible changes relating to the curriculum. It was suggested in the interim report that the project might be presented to unions in terms of its benefits to teachers. The teachers involved considered that it improved relationships in the classroom, students became more motivated to participate and take responsibility and this had the potential to improve discipline, reduce stress for the teachers.

Dissemination was regarded as important. The Newsletter has played an important role to date. It was felt appropriate that students themselves should have a greater input into this, in terms of contributions and perhaps involvement in its production if this was feasible. Some teachers had publicised the project through articles in local newspapers and radio interviews. The involvement of the students themselves in such promotions would also be useful in helping to raise awareness and engender support at community level.

Training and professional development for teachers was identified as a crucial and on-going requirement. It was felt important that the cluster groups should continue to provide a core group of committed people. Questions were asked about how best to utilise the developing expertise of those who have come through the process to date and it
was suggested that project teachers might become mentors to new participants in the cluster groups and contribute to future plans for in-service work.

Concerns were raised about the tendency to provide relatively short-term support for new curriculum initiatives. There was a concern both North and South that there should be on-going support for programmes that have importance for the personal development of students.

The collaborative, supportive approach adopted through the cluster groups and the larger network has been at the core of this project. All participants greatly valued the experience and many felt profoundly affected by it in terms of personal and professional development. The essence of the experience appears to have been the inclusive, democratic, mutually respectful dialogue and ethos created which allowed, not just good working relationships to be established, but also genuine friendship. This was evident in the cluster groups and in the larger network and was commented on by those not normally part of the group. Participants gave great credit to the CDU project team for the skilful facilitation of the process and it was hoped that they would continue to be involved in supporting Education for Reconciliation.

It could be argued that this is evidence of some small degree of mainstreaming starting to occur. To sustain and build on this will require on-going training, adequate resourcing and support from all the educational partners as outlined above. Collegial support and strategic links could help to build capacity, which could provide the critical mass to influence both policy and practice.
6. Impact of the Project on Teachers and Students

Teacher Perceptions

The Education for Reconciliation project was appreciated by teachers for the way it had valued them as practitioners and for the level of support given through the cluster groups and the wider network. It had provided opportunities to exchange ideas and develop expertise both conceptually and in terms of practice.

While it was acknowledged by several teachers that they had already become familiar with interactive teaching and learning methodologies through CSPE/SCPE, others emphasised that Education for Reconciliation had developed and improved their skills in this regard. It had encouraged them to increase their use of such methodologies both within their Education for Reconciliation class and in other classes. Some teachers reported that it had made them more aware of the impact of different teaching styles on the classroom ethos and atmosphere. Some referred to feeling “professionally empowered”, with increased skills, knowledge and the confidence to address controversial issues.

Many reported that their experience with the project had resulted in changes in their practice. In addition to being more focused on interactive teaching and learning methodologies, they also felt that they were consciously trying to adopt a more facilitative teaching style. In the words of one teacher it “reaffirmed the value of this over talk and chalk.” The comment was made that facilitation skills are not taught in teacher training.

Several teachers referred to the project having the effect of promoting a more democratic ethos in the classroom, where students took more responsibility and teaching became an enjoyable experience with less need to be preoccupied with discipline. A few of teachers reported that their attitude to discipline had changed. This was described in one case as being “more effective and more in line with conflict resolution principles engaged in the project.”

Several teachers felt the project had a very significant effect on them personally and professionally. Some felt that they had become more reflective. For some their listening skills had improved, for others it had given them the confidence to change their teaching style and to address difficult issues. Others felt they had developed conceptually.
Response of Students to Education for Reconciliation

Teachers reported that student responses to Education for Reconciliation were very enthusiastic and positive. Those involved in cross-border contact were anxious to continue the contact either by e-mail, video-conferencing or further meetings. This was corroborated in interviews with groups of students.

The exchange of photographs, profiles and letters, in which the majority of students were involved, generated much interest and enthusiasm. The use of students’ own stories made the experience real and personal and appears to have been a significant factor in engaging students with the project.

Student participation in terms of agreeing ‘learning contracts’ and having an input into the choice of activities was somewhat varied. Less than half the participants indicated that students drew up classroom ground rules. There were some reports of students taking more responsibility in the classroom for setting up the room, selecting working groups, and to a very limited extent having some input into choice of learning strategy. A number of teachers felt that more student participation was desirable, but implementing this was hampered by time constraints. However the process was considered a learning curve and it was hoped that levels of participation would be increased.

Several teachers commented on the need to include issues that were relevant and of concern to the students. In one case it was reported that interest had flagged after some time. It seems this could possibly be attributed to students feeling that Northern Ireland issues, such as sectarianism, were not a major issue for them. However, they were still anxious to develop the links with the other school. Other issues raised, which were considered important by students included:

- bullying;
- homework;
- being treated differently because of economic status/family background/circumstances;
- location (urban/rural);
- appearance;
- ability/disability;
- understanding of own community/locality – refugees/ Travellers
- homelessness.
**Perceived benefits of the project to students**

Some of the perceived benefits to students were identified as:

- increased maturity;
- broadening horizons;
- a sense of empowerment for young people;
- valuing the experience of young people;
- challenging attitudes in relation to:
  - respect for and acceptance of diversity;
  - sectarianism and racism;
  - complexity of issues;
  - compromise and flexibility and willingness to compromise;
- developing a knowledge of local, national and global issues;
- developing skills of:
  - conflict resolution and negotiation;
  - debate and discussion;
  - listening;
  - communication;
  - co-operation;
  - compromise;
  - decision-making;
  - critical thinking;
  - reflection.

More generally it was felt that the project had a considerable impact on relationships within the classroom and had helped students to adapt to the post primary environment. Some teachers reported a sense of having a special relationship with the class involved. It was suggested that the active learning methodology increased the level of trust and responsibility, which in turn improved relationships.

In some instances the class involved was perceived to perform better as a team than other first year classes of equal ability. Student evaluations were quoted as indicating a greater knowledge and experience of teamwork and co-operation. It was also stated that the project resulted in teacher and students getting to know each other better ‘as people’.

**What was good about the project?**

All students interviewed expressed enthusiasm for the active learning methodologies adopted and wanted this approach to be used in other
subjects. It was seen as a fun way to learn and unlike anything else they had done. Some of the good points mentioned included:

- “having a say”
- “not so much pressure”
- “have to think for yourself”
- “there can be many different opinions not like in other classes”
- “just one right answer and you have to get this or you are wrong.”
- “more opportunity in this class to express your opinion”
- “gets everyone working together”

All liked the discussion element and this was seen as happening in this project to a greater extent than in any other subject. One group made the distinction that in other subjects whatever discussion took place was “with the teacher, not with each other.”

For one school the main difficulty was the fact that it had not been possible to complete their exchange process. These students expressed considerable frustration and disappointment.

There was an anxiety about raising sensitive issues in case the other group would be offended. Some commented that face-to-face meetings would be better as they might be able to see how the others felt.

It was apparent that the enthusiasm of a group largely depended on the degree of relevance and interest that an issue held for them. Several teachers had commented on the importance of including students’ own issues.

Students who had completed a cross-border exchange process felt that they had a greater understanding and knowledge of life in Northern Ireland. One student commented that he didn’t know that things in Northern Ireland were “so serious.” As a result of this some commented that they would take a greater interest in news bulletins. They had been surprised at some of the pre-conceptions their exchange group had held about them.

A common perception of Education for Reconciliation was that it was about “making peace” and was mainly concerned with North/South issues. However other issues that were also raised. During one classroom observation, although most students seemed to accept the view that all people were entitled to the same human rights, there were those who still expressed strong anti-Traveller and anti-refugee opinions.
Students who had dealt with the concept of reconciliation in the context of conflict resolution felt they had learned useful skills. They referred to the need to discuss, negotiate and compromise in order to resolve problems in a way that did not damage relationships. Their experience of trying to solve a school problem by simple majority decision had resulted in friends falling out with each other.

**What students would like to happen as a result of the project**

Virtually all students want the project to continue. Where contact with other schools was involved, they were very anxious to develop this and most preferred to meet face to face.

The methodology used was uniformly popular. Students all wanted it continued and extended to other classes. Other views expressed by students included:

- some students stated that they would like to have a School Council
- students thought it was important to have ‘the right teacher’
- some wanted to use e-mail, video-conferencing as well as letters.

It would appear from this limited study that Education for Reconciliation has had a positive impact on relationships in the classroom. Reflection on the views of both teachers and students suggest that the factors that seemed to contribute include:

- the inclusive and respectful nature of debate and discussion, which allowed a diversity of opinions to be expressed, heard and valued;
- working co-operatively appeared to gel the groups into a team;
- a real sense of engagement on the part of the students both with each other with the teacher involved in the project;
- increased levels of trust and shared responsibilities;
- a focus on trying to understand other points of view and on looking at how groups treat each other (stereotypes, prejudice and human rights issues). This encourages the development of empathy, essential to the cultivation of a caring society and crucial to any healing process.
7. Conclusions and Recommendations

The Education for Reconciliation project has provided a unique opportunity to concentrate on learning processes, resources and methodologies that enable young people to develop a deeper understanding of the concept of reconciliation.

Strengths of the project

Three of the main strengths of the project were:

i. The first project report, *Education for Reconciliation: A Curriculum Investigation*, provided a very strong foundation and initial exploration of the concept of reconciliation and this was carried through into the subsequent project.

ii. The collaborative, empowering model of teacher professional development was regarded highly by the teachers. Teachers’ experience of being valued and supported contributed greatly to the development of excellent working relationships and a high level of engagement on the part of teachers. This approach resonates very appropriately with the emphasis on relationship building, which is intrinsic to Education for Reconciliation.

iii. The project staff demonstrated a high level of commitment to take account of questions raised by the interim evaluation and feedback from teachers. This meant that the project was genuinely responsive to needs as they emerged.

Main conclusions

The initial evaluation raised a number of critical questions related to the project’s development. Project staff and teachers responded positively to these questions and this resulted in significant development in the following areas:

i. Definitions and understandings of the concepts

The initial evaluation raised a question about the extent to which the work, especially in the cluster groups, had maintained a clear focus on the concept of reconciliation as well as on underpinning or supporting concepts (such as relationship building, appreciating difference, conflict resolution). The suggestion was that the concept of education for reconciliation was being understood and interpreted in two main
ways. Firstly, in a broad, generic sense for a set of underlying concepts and processes that may contribute to the improvement of relations between different groups. Secondly, in a very specific sense that highlights the distinctive characteristics of the process or act of reconciliation.

The final evaluation has revealed the significant progress made by the project in this area, characterised by a high level of engagement with the issues on the part of project teachers and the positive steps taken by the project staff to provide stimulus materials and opportunities to explore conceptual understandings of the term reconciliation. Helpful teacher guidance and learning materials are a likely outcome of this process and these may illustrate how the concept of reconciliation has a number of distinctive characteristics that involve:

- **building relationships** through personal development and change; improved communication; learning through dialogue; compromise; appreciating interdependence; accepting difference;

- **acknowledging past hurts** through an understanding of who was affected and why;

- an awareness of the **law** and its role in terms of **justice**;

- a challenge in terms of **personal values** and the relevance of values based on a framework of **human rights and responsibilities**;

- a **healing process** in that it was felt that Education for Reconciliation was more than conflict resolution, but may also involve concepts such as ‘expressions of regret’ and ‘forgiveness’.

Other important points raised by the project include:

- the extent to which reconciliation is a process with **an emotional dimension** and not just a ‘cognitive act’;

- the development of ‘**empathy**’ is an important part of the process;

- although it is important to acknowledge past hurts, it may also be unhelpful to dwell too much on the past and ‘apportion blame’;

- conscious attempts need to be made to represent minority opinions.
ii. Contexts for learning about reconciliation

The project cluster groups were organised around three main themes were extremely helpful in providing a focus for the development of the project. The evaluation also played a formative part in suggesting that some consideration be given to the emphasis paced on student exploration of reconciliation at the following levels:

- reconciliation at interpersonal level;
- reconciliation between groups within communities at local level;
- reconciliation with an emphasis on north-south relations in Ireland;
- reference to east-west relations between Britain and Ireland;
- reconciliation with references of an international or global nature past or present, e.g., post-war reconciliation in Europe, South Africa and Aboriginal issues in Australia.

Considerable engagement with this issue took place as part of residential in-service work facilitated by the project team and this included reflection on the implications of the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement for educational work related to various sets of relationships within the islands of Ireland and Britain. There was some agreement that the Education for Reconciliation project may have a distinctive role to play in developing learning resources related to these three sets of relations.

iii. Democratic learning processes

The evaluation collected reported evidence from teachers concerning positive developments in the area of teaching and learning methods as part of the project. These included reports that more active and participatory learning methods were being incorporated into the pedagogy within the classrooms of individual teachers.

Teachers reported some evidence that such methods have positive effects on relationships within the classroom, on discipline and on the quality of learning. Reported characteristics of such practice included establishment of ‘learning contracts’ with pupils, greater opportunity for pupils to define learning content and the teacher acting more as a facilitator. It is not clear what the impact of more democratic practice within individual classrooms may have on pupil expectations of other classes or the wider school environment and this may represent an area for more detailed study.
iv. Developing the project within the mainstream curriculum

The evaluation raised questions about the extent to which Education for Reconciliation might be integrated into the formal curriculum and what steps might be required to strengthen support for this work within the school environment.

In terms of Education for Reconciliation’s place within the mainstream curriculum there was considerable consensus from teachers that the work sits naturally within the curriculum framework for Civic, Social and Political Education in the Republic of Ireland and pilot work for the emerging Citizenship curriculum in Northern Ireland. Possibilities for a cross-curricular approach were acknowledged, but the majority of teachers felt that the work requires dedicated time and space within the curriculum. The necessity of a whole school environment that is supportive and consistent with the values reflected by Education for Reconciliation was considered to be extremely important.

The project identified areas for future action (pp. 32-36) to increase the likelihood that Education for Reconciliation is incorporated into the mainstream curriculum. These include actions at the level of political support and policy decisions within the education systems; the development of internal support structures within schools; and incorporating innovations from the project into general practice.

Recommendations

Based on the findings from the evaluation the following recommendations are made:

i. Significant learning related to the concept of reconciliation has emerged from this curriculum development project. The quality of engagement has been at a high level and the quality of learning has been sophisticated in a complex and sensitive area. It is strongly recommended that the project be given the opportunity to draw together what has been learnt to date, so that the project leaves a tangible legacy for broader dissemination within the system.

ii. The project should develop a learning resource on Education for Reconciliation for broader dissemination within the two education systems. This should draw together the key characteristics of the concept that have emerged through the project. The resource might provide learning materials to explore reconciliation at a range of levels including personal, interpersonal, inter-group, international and global examples. Such a resource would also provide an

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opportunity to provide a specific focus on community relations within Northern Ireland; North-South relations within the island of Ireland; and relations between Britain and Ireland. The methodology involving ‘personal stories’ proved particularly effective in this respect.

iii. The project is well placed to develop advisory and guidance materials in the following areas:

- Cross-border communication and exchange;
- Characteristics of a Democratic Classroom;
- Addressing Sensitive or Controversial Issues.

Where possible the guidance material should be illustrated by practical examples drawn from the experiences of the project.

iv. Consideration should be given to the extent to which the work of the project might be incorporated within the formal curriculum. The most obvious way forward in this respect is inclusion of a ‘module’, ‘unit of learning’ or set of learning resources on reconciliation within the curriculum framework for Civic, Social and Political Education (CSPE) in the Republic of Ireland and Citizenship education in Northern Ireland. The project has developed this work at Junior Cycle and Key Stage 3, but consideration should also be given to opportunities at Senior Cycle in the Republic of Ireland and Key Stage 4 in Northern Ireland.

v. The project should consider how the development of a formal strategy that might lead to the work being incorporated within mainstream provision. This should include a strategy for developing broader sets of relations with a range of institutions so that ownership of the work is developed in partnership with appropriate education and curriculum authorities.

vi. The importance of teacher professional development should be at the heart of future developments and this will mean negotiating adequate and appropriate resources and support to take the initiative forward.
References


The Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (1998) Developing The Northern Ireland Curriculum to meet the needs of young people, society and the economy in the 21st Century Advice to the Northern Ireland Minister of Education on the nature and scope of the review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. CCEA, Belfast.
