



PRIDE OF OUR PLACE

2002-2006



FINAL REPORT
 Mary Burke - April 2007



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Project Researcher, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra

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Thank you!



CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

The project was an outstanding success. The children derived great benefit from the visits, from interaction with local people and from raised awareness of our local heritage sites. They made new friends and were exposed to a different environment and culture which can be of great use in developing appreciation of self and others. (Parent, Year Three)

Genesis of the project

The 2002–2006 ‘Pride of our Place’ project emerged from a successful pilot project with the same name which ran from February to July 2000. This initial short project was an experimental exchange between teachers and pupils from four Northern Ireland primary schools and four national schools in the Republic of Ireland. The pupils and teachers involved had opportunities to explore aspects of their local environments in a proactive way and share their learning experiences with their partner school. The cross-border links that were established enriched the mutual understanding of everyone involved, including pupils, teachers, parents, members of local communities and the project organisers. The initiative for this initial project came from the North-South Committee of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science in Dublin and the International Section of the Southern Education Library Board in Northern Ireland.

The eight schools were selected on the basis of the following criteria: an expressed willingness on the part of the school and its board of management to become involved in the project; the inclusion of schools from different traditions; the existence on the staff of a teacher who was interested in adopting the methodologies involved; the geographical spread of schools and ease of location for day exchanges across the border; and the need to limit the number of schools so that schools could be well-supported and the experience gained could be carefully monitored.

The Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh applied for EU Peace Two funding for a second phase of ‘Pride of our Place’ in August 2002 and began recruiting schools in November 2002. In this phase, 12 primary schools (approximately five hundred pupils over the three and a half year period) in the border regions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland explored their local environments in an interactive manner, sharing their place and their learning experiences with their cross-border partner school. It provided an ideal context for children aged 9–12 to explore the themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage in a cross-border setting. The project also enabled the teachers and pupils to explore the local and wider histories of different parts of the Irish border region and their different social, cultural and religious communities.

This project built on the lessons learnt from Phase One and promoted pupil-led and enquiry-based work. It focused on the development of key skills and also on the provision of opportunities for social and play activities for the pupils. It contributed to the enrichment of the professional perspectives of participating teachers by providing experiences of the school system in the other jurisdiction. The project ran for three and a half years (November 2002–May 2006) with progress reports and/or newsletters produced every year, culminating in this final report.



The partners in the project were the Southern Education and Library Board (SELB) in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland and the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) in Armagh (the project manager). The EU Peace Two Programme, through the Special EU Programmes Body, provided Stg£139,941 in funding. The financial assistance covered the cost of residential teacher training workshops and planning meetings, substitute cover, school travel and subsistence, equipment and materials for participating schools, research and evaluation, preparation and publication of reports and newsletters, the final showcase event and the CCBS management charge. Schools were given a once-off allowance of £500 at the outset to purchase equipment and materials needed for the project, and they also received up to £500 per year to cover the cost of transport to partner schools and providing lunches for visiting schools. This funding was critical for schools, as substitute cover and transport costs in particular can be expensive.

Establishment of Steering Committee

A project Steering Committee representative of the partners was established to oversee and co-ordinate its work. The members of the Steering Committee and support personnel were:

- Vivien Kelly, Advisor, Southern Education and Library Board, Armagh
- Colm O Ceallacháin, Department of Education and Science, Dublin
- Maureen Reddick, Advisory Officer, Southern Education and Library Board, Armagh
- Anne Keville, Advisory Officer, Southern Education and Library Board, Armagh
- Andy Pollak, Director, Centre for Cross Border Studies, Armagh
- Mary Burke, Educational Researcher, St Patrick's College, Drumcondra

This committee was committed and dedicated to the fulfilment of the project objectives. This was largely due to a very good working relationship which had been established between three of the key committee members in Phase One of the project, and continued into Phase Two.

The Steering Committee met at least four/five times a year for meetings. The committee organised, facilitated and participated in the training workshops for teachers and also ensured representation at all school exchange visit days – North and South – by its members (with, where possible, a representative from both North and South). The committee reported to the Centre for Cross Border Studies as the project manager and EU accounting officer. In the Republic of Ireland it also reported to the North-South Committee of the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Science, and in Northern Ireland to the Southern Education and Library Board and its Chief Executive Ms. Helen Mc Clenaghan.

Key objectives

The project had, as its primary objectives, the following:

- To engage pupils and teachers of linked cross-border primary schools in focused studies of elements of their local environments and the environments of their linked schools.
- To provide an ideal context for pupils aged 9 – 12 to explore the themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage in a cross-border setting.
- To improve mutual understanding between schools, teachers and pupils in a north-south context and facilitate inter-school networking.



- To facilitate pupils to explore the local and wider histories of different parts of Ireland and of different cultural, social and religious communities.
- To engage pupils in activity-based learning experiences in which they would have opportunities to develop and apply key historical, geographical and other skills.
- To foster the development of pedagogical skills by assisting teachers to identify suitable topics within local studies, and to acquire teaching techniques which would promote activity-based learning.
- To enrich the professional perspectives of participating teachers through providing experiences of the school system in the other jurisdiction.
- To examine the practicalities of pupil and teacher cross-border exchanges at primary level.
- To provide increased opportunities for the use of ICT in the study of history and geography.

This project paid close attention to the pupil as an active learner and provided real opportunities for the pupil's voice to be heard throughout the project. It focussed too on the learning opportunities which the curriculum provided, enabling pupils to explore their sense of place within their own area and in the wider world.

Selection of schools

Twelve schools were selected to participate in the project (six in the North and six in the South). Schools were selected on the basis of the following criteria:

- An expressed willingness on the part of the school and its Board of Management /Board of Governors to become involved in the project.
- The inclusion of schools from different traditions and perspectives on both sides of the border.
- The geographical spread of schools and ease of location for day exchanges across the border.
- The participating schools were selected with the assistance of the Department of Education and Science in the South and the SELB in the North and were paired as follows:

Republic of Ireland	Northern Ireland
Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry, Dundalk, Co. Louth	Kilbroney Integrated Primary School, Rostrevor, Co. Down
Scoil Mhuire, Knockbridge, Dundalk, Co. Louth	St. Michael's Primary School, Clady, Co. Armagh
Scoil Pheadair, Dromiskin, Co. Louth	Derryhale Primary School, Portadown, Co. Armagh
Ballinamoney National School, Bailieboro, Co. Cavan	Laghey Primary School, Killyman, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone
Dún Dealgan National School, Jocelyn Street, Dundalk, Co Louth	Killyman Primary School, Dungannon, Co. Tyrone
Redeemer Boys National School, Dundalk, Co. Louth	St. Malachy's Primary School, Ballymoyer, Co. Armagh



Teacher Training Workshops

The first two-day residential training workshop for teachers was held in the Clounagh Centre, Portadown, in January 2003. The principals of the linked schools and the teachers of the participating classes met to share ideas, plan the project and participate in joint training sessions. On the day before this residential training workshop one of the schools from the South withdrew from the project. With such short notice of the school's withdrawal it was not possible to find a replacement school in time for the first training workshop. It is recommended that in future projects adequate notice be given to the Steering Committee of a school's withdrawal so that arrangements can be put in place to find a replacement school. Attendance at this initial training workshop was critical (for principals and teachers of participating schools) because it focussed on key elements of the project.

In 'Pride of our Place' the residential workshops focussed on:

- Explaining the background and nature of the project to the schools.
- Evaluating and discussing the lessons learnt from Phase One of the project.
- Providing opportunities for the teachers and schools to meet with their partner teachers and schools (most of them had not met before, so this initial residential was very valuable for building links).
- Introducing teachers to the advisors who would support schools.
- Addressing assumptions and prejudices, expectations, hopes and fears in the context of the project.
- Providing in-service training for teachers on approaches to the project.
- Providing opportunities to explore possible areas of study.
- Discussing methodologies, resources and action planning in the context of the project.
- Exploring ICT to support ongoing communication and sharing of planning and materials (including the online learning environment Blackboard).
- Looking at cross-curricular links for integration of themes.
- Planning the practical details of the project e.g. dates, times, travel arrangements etc.

In the initial training workshop opportunities were provided for participants to discuss fears and anxieties with regard to participation in the project and this proved most beneficial for all involved with the project. Over the three and a half years the principals and class teachers from the participating schools met for two more two-day residential workshops in January 2004 (in Monaghan Education Centre) and January 2005 (in Monaghan Education Centre and Armagh's AMMA Centre). These annual residentials provided a crucial opportunity to meet and renew partnerships, to review and reflect, to focus on areas of further work, and to explore key methodologies such as the writing process (Year 2) and visual arts exploration (Year 3). Inbuilt into each training workshop were active learning sessions focussing on the teacher's own sense of place, e.g. sharing an icon from their own place with the group.

The exchanges between the schools usually took place in May and June in each year, with one school spending a day visiting their partner school and the return visit taking place a few weeks later.

Environmental and other activities

In each year, following the annual teachers' workshop, schools developed a wide range of activities linked to their local environment, and there was clear progression during the three and a half years of the project. The exchange visits provided the ideal context for the exploration of the wide variety of activities between the partner schools. Among the work undertaken was:



- **Water studies:** river studies (Derryhale P.S and St. Michael's P.S, Clady); beach study (Scoil Pheadair, Dromiskin and St. Malachy's P.S, Ballymoyer); water treatment and supply (Scoil Mhuire, Knockbridge); pond study (St. Malachy's P.S, Ballymoyer).
- **Heritage:** a local graveyard (Kilbroney Integrated P.S); Roche Castle (Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry); old schools (Scoil Pheadair, Dromiskin and Derryhale P.S); Trew and Moy railway station (Killyman P.S and Laghey P.S); Dundalk railway station (Redeemer B.N.S, Dundalk); Cloughmore Stone (Kilbroney Integrated P.S); the story of Cúchulainn (Scoil Mhuire, Knockbridge and St. Michael's P.S, Clady); the story of Fionn Mac Cumhaill (Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry and Kilbroney Integrated P.S.).
- **Environment:** creation of school gardens (Dún Dealgan N.S and Redeemer B.N.S, Dundalk); local agriculture and a 'mini-beast trail' (St. Malachy's P.S, Ballymoyer); care of the local environment (Derryhale P.S, and Scoil Pheadair, Dromiskin); tree study (Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry); hill study (Dún Dealgan N.S and Ballinamoney N.S); street and local area study (Dún Dealgan N.S and Killyman P.S); local artefacts (Ballinamoney N.S); a local crossroads (Laghey P.S); bog trail (Killyman P.S).
- **Involvement of local community:** storytellers, artists, musicians, flower-arrangers, historians, past-pupils and sports people (all the schools).

See table below for a detailed timetable of the work undertaken between partner schools:

School exchange visits in 2003

School	Project	Partner school	Project	Date of visit from partner school	Date of visit to partner school
Scoil Pheadair, Dromiskin, Co. Louth	History of the school, and three buildings in the locality	Derryhale P.S. Portadown	Old school, new school	15 May	29 May
Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry, Co.Louth	Roche Castle	Kilbroney Integrated P.S. Rostrevor	Legend of Cloughmore Stone	21 May	9 June
Dún Dealgan N.S. Dundalk, Co. Louth	Environment from gate of the school	Killyman P.S. Dungannon	Killyman past and present	15 May	22 May
Ballinamoney N.S. Bailieboro, Co. Cavan	Hill in the locality	Laghey P.S. Killyman, Dungannon	Communication past and present; Laghey Crossroads	3 June	29 May
Redeemer B.N.S. Dundalk, Co. Louth	Dundalk railway station	St. Malachy's P.S. Ballymoyer, Armagh	Our Environment: pond-dipping, making bird boxes, mini-beast study, river study	28 May	21 May

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School	Project	Partner school	Project	Date of visit from partner school	Date of visit to partner school
Scoil Mhuire, Knockbridge, Co. Louth	Local water supply	St. Michael's P.S. Clady Armagh	Local river study	29 May	5 June

School exchange visits in 2004

Scoil Pheadair, Dromiskin, Co. Louth	Seashore study	Derryhale P.S. Portadown	River study based on the river Ballybay, a tributary of the Bann	27 May	20 May
Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry, Co.Louth	Theme of St. Brigid, and shared writing project on theme of Fionn Mc Cumhaill	Kilbroney Integrated P.S. Rostrevor	Theme of St. Bronagh, and shared writing project on theme of Fionn Mc Cumhaill	24 May	4 June
Dún Dealgan N.S. Dundalk, Co. Louth	Garden project	Killyman P.S. Dungannon	Trew and Moy Railway	27 May	20 May
Ballinamoney N.S. Bailieboro, Co. Cavan	Drama based on local history	Laghey P.S. Killyman, Dungannon	Trew and Moy railway	27 May	20 May
Redeemer B.N.S. Dundalk, Co. Louth	Theme of sport in Dundalk area with community activities	St. Malachy's P.S. Ballymoyer, Armagh	Whole community day with the emphasis on local traditions	26 May	18 May
Scoil Mhuire, Knockbridge, Co. Louth	Theme of Cúchulainn, Trail	St. Michael's P.S. Clady, Armagh	Theme of Cúchulainn, Visit to St. Patrick's Trian	19 May	11 May

School exchange visits in 2005

Scoil Pheadair, Dromiskin, Co. Louth	Heritage in the locality, and looking after our local environment	Derryhale P.S. Portadown	Looking after our local environment	12 May	19 May
Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry, Co.Louth	Theme: 'The Big Tree'	Kilbroney Integrated P.S. Rostrevor	Theme of sport	11 May	9 June

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School	Project	Partner school	Project	Date of visit from partner school	Date of visit to partner school
Dún Dealgan N.S. Dundalk, Co. Louth	Shared musical tradition night, Hill walk in Ravensdale	Killyman P.S. Dungannon	Shared musical tradition night, Visit to Peatlands Park	10 May	28 April
Ballinamoney N.S. Bailieboro, Co. Cavan	Our local history – an exhibition of artefacts from the childrens' own homes	Laghey P.S. Killyman, Dungannon	Our school environment	2 June	9 June
Redeemer B.N.S. Dundalk, Co. Louth	The school garden	St. Malachy's P.S. Ballymoyer, Armagh	Beach study at Carlingford	25 May	16 May
Scoil Mhuire, Knockbridge, Co. Louth	Joint art exhibition based on Cúchulainn theme from 2004	St. Michael's P.S. Clady, Armagh	Joint art exhibition based on Cúchulainn theme from 2004	26 May	20 May

In early 2005 the Centre for Cross Border Studies applied to the Special EU Programmes Body for an extension of the project for an extra year (until May 2006) so that participating schools could prepare a showcase event to present their work to a wider audience. The partner schools were allocated a planning day, with substitute cover, to prepare for this end-of-project exhibition. Schools were invited to send a representative sample of pupils to present the highlights of the work of their cross-border partnership. On 11 May 2006 an exhibition of all the work undertaken over the three and a half years of the project took place in the Market Place Theatre, Armagh. The exhibition took many forms: e.g. audio-visual presentations, ICT presentations, drama, song and stories, and demonstrations. The Chief Inspector for Northern Ireland, Ms Marion Matchett and the Deputy Chief Inspector for the Republic of Ireland, Mr Gearóid O Conluain, jointly opened the exhibition.

Ms Matchett wrote in a follow-up letter to the Steering Committee: 'It was a wonderful event, made all the more so by the children's enthusiasm, interest and expertise...Events such as these do not take place without the contribution and commitment of others. Please convey my thanks to all concerned. I am sure you were delighted with the outcome – you have every right to be proud of the project's achievements'. Mr O Conluain wrote: 'Ba maith liom tréaslú le gach duine a ghlac páirt sa tionscnamh seo, 'Pride of our Place'. This project, which took place over a period of three and a half years, was impressive in the manner in which it engaged with its objectives to engage teachers and pupils in focussed studies of elements of their local environments and to improve mutual understanding between schools, teachers and pupils in a North-South context...I was very impressed with the high standard of the presentations and the enthusiasm that pupils and teachers brought to the project. I am confident that projects of this nature play an important role in increasing mutual understanding North and South which will lead to greater harmony and cooperation in the future'.



Research Methodology

The research methodology used by the project researcher involved qualitative methods. The methods used are listed below:

- Teacher questionnaires at the end of Year One and Year Two
- Teachers' reflective diaries: Year Three
- Pupil Questionnaires at the end of Year One and Year Two
- Focus groups at the end of Year Two in a sample of schools with some parents, grandparents and pupils
- Reports and newsletters at the end of each year
- Regular reports and updates from advisory personnel
- Attendance at Steering Committee meetings
- Attendance at residential training workshops for the three years of the project
- Self-reflection questionnaire issued to teachers midway through the project
- Evaluation of key statements of teachers' project expectations at the conclusion of the project
- Samples of work undertaken by schools
- Attendance at a selection of exchange visit days each year
- Visual and photographic material
- Attendance at final year showcase event.

The data for this research comes from the sources listed above but in particular the teacher questionnaires, the self-reflection questionnaires, the reflective diaries and the pupil questionnaires. The co-operation at every level of the research by the schools involved was excellent, and the rich data gathered from this work is as a result of the commitment and interest of all involved. The teacher questionnaires focussed on the practical elements of the project as well as professional development aspects such as use of key methodologies, training, education for mutual understanding and pupil skills development.¹ At the end of Year One, teachers noted that the following areas should be addressed in future training workshops:

- Reflection on project to date
- Revision of good practice
- Opportunity to share experiences and to exchange ideas and practical information
- Discussion with partner school on content for the coming year
- Discussion of ways in which schools could develop further links apart from the project
- Input from advisors to generate ideas, topics and resources
- Opportunities for schools to plan.

All of these elements were addressed in future years' training workshops. Participants were given more time to review, more time to plan, a focussed input on different approaches to themes, and space for individual and group reflection. The Steering Committee constructed a flexible training structure which responded to the teachers' needs, as well as having dedicated input into the professional teaching and learning aspects of the project.

Key data was also gathered from the self-reflection questionnaires issued at the end of Year Two. The Year Three training workshop focussed on self-reflection techniques and what evidence to look for in terms of key statements.² At the end of Year Three, teachers were asked to use a diary format, with some headings as prompts, to write down their thoughts about that year. As the project came to a conclusion in 2006, teachers completed a fulfillment of expectations statement. Reports from members of the Steering Committee on exchange visit days were also beneficial, as were the reports compiled at the end of each year (the schools submitted a sample of work undertaken during the year which also formed part of the annual report).



It was with great interest that I watched the school partnerships journey through the three and a half year period of this project and present their stories through so many media. What became clear was the role of the teacher as the key agent in all aspects of the work – the quality of outcomes in such a project is directly linked to the quality of teaching and learning facilitated by the teacher. What also emerged was the need to pay close attention to what pupils say about the teaching and learning processes. This aspect must be heard and acted upon if real progress is to be made in such projects' teaching and learning experiences.

Also central to the success of this project were a number of key aspects of its structure. These should be borne in mind when constructing a project of this nature in future. Although by no means an exhaustive list, these aspects include:

- Clear vision and understanding of the project objectives
- Financial support
- Role of the teacher
- Leadership of the principal
- Pupil involvement
- Whole staff involvement
- Wider school community involvement
- Role and support of Steering Committee
- Planning and preparation processes
- Professional development for teachers involved, incorporating time for review and reflection, and opportunities to share experiences and to plan
- Communication protocols for all involved.

¹ See Appendices A, B and C

² See Appendix B





CHAPTER TWO

THE BACKGROUND: EDUCATION FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING

In a chapter entitled 'Roots: The Emergence of Education For Mutual Understanding', Norman Richardson posits the view that 'an awareness of the nature of the roots (of EMU) is crucial for those who wish to emphasise the significance of education's contribution to the shaping of a democratic and inclusive society, in Northern Ireland and in the wider world'.³ In this chapter Richardson provides a chronological account of the development of Education for Mutual Understanding from the 1970s to the present time. The 1970s saw the research and experimental phase of EMU, with educationalists such as John Malone and Malcolm Skilbeck making important contributions to the origin and evolution of this initiative.

Malone's work in particular, in establishing and developing the Schools Project in Community Relations, built on the work of the Oxford-based Moral Education Project, which aimed to help the 13-16 age group to adopt a 'considerate style of life'.⁴ Malone developed a local version of this programme, which was piloted under the name 'We live in Northern Ireland'. John Malone argued that schools 'must radically change their whole approach to learning if they are to make a lasting contribution to a more humane society'.⁵ His vision of the role of education in a divided society provides deep learning insights. While Malone warned that schools alone could not change Northern Irish society, he was deeply committed to the role of education in a divided society and also to the concepts of 'education in values' and education for renewal and social reconstruction.⁶

Echoing Malone's work, great attention was paid in 'Pride of our Place' to the development of real and meaningful relationships between the participating schools over a three and a half year period. Principals and teachers came together every January for training and maintained regular contacts throughout the year, with a visit to each other's school in the months of May





and June. Many of these partnerships established joint planning initiatives and shared themes, which grew from their relationships with each other on a personal and a professional basis. There were many fine examples of this shared work: a music project between Killyman P.S and Dún Dealgan N.S.; a shared writing project between Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry and Kilbroney Integrated P.S.; a shared art project between Scoil Mhuire, Knockbridge and St. Michael's P.S. Clady, and many examples of shared projects with environmental themes. This type of shared work gave the project its own unique approach, thus avoiding the cosmetic effect of a 'single once-off performance on the day'. Malone's observation that what is really necessary is 'the creation of an extra dimension of awareness within every teacher's work'⁷ was also a central element of the project's ethos.



Very early on it was quickly acknowledged that whole school involvement was essential for the work to have a real and meaningful impact. What was equally important was the involvement of the community, and in particular the parents, in the life of the project. There were many fine examples of parent and wider community involvement: the music night hosted by Killyman P.S. and Dún Dealgan N.S. in the Armagh City Hotel; the support of the parents on visits; providing refreshments on partner school visit days; researching topics for the local study; and attendance at exhibition nights hosted by many schools. One of the highlights was in May 2004 in Ballymoyer, South Armagh, when the role of this rural community in the life of its school was made clearly visible by the presence of so many parents and grandparents on the day St Malachy's Primary School hosted its partner school from Dundalk.

In a keynote paper delivered at a 1992 conference entitled 'EMU in Transition', Richardson noted the watershed DENI circular of June 1982, which was sent to every teacher in N.Ireland and which stated that everyone in the educational system 'has a responsibility for helping children to learn to understand and respect each other...and of preparing them to live together in harmony in adult life'.⁸ Richardson also noted that ten years earlier Malone had written that: 'What is required is a wholesale assessment of aims and objectives and relative priorities - not within the schools alone but within the whole education system - in the light of the needs of this community and the children growing up in it'.⁹

Malone's work in the 1970s paved the way for much of the contemporary work in this area. Another project which Richardson highlights in his account of the development of EMU is the Schools Cultural Studies Project (SCSP), which took place from 1974 to 1980.¹⁰ This project was conceived by Malcolm Skilbeck, then at the New University of Ulster, in 1973 and from 1976 onwards was under the direction of Alan Robinson. Based on Skilbeck's reconstructionist approach, it had a graded mixed ability programme of materials for secondary schools. In the SCSP project, emphasis was on discussion and joint work, and in the later years school trails. The Primary School Educational Trails Project in 1977 adopted some of the strategies of the SCSP with the emphasis on joint work, fieldwork and trails.¹¹ 'Pride of our Place' has built on the work on this Trails Project.

The work of the schools in the 'Pride of our Place' project developed organically over three and a half years, with the shared work emerging as a natural consequence of the successful



relationships between the participating schools. It was the quality of relationships which determined the quality of the benefits gained for those involved. The training provided each year by the Steering Committee and the opportunities to come together and talk, discuss and plan were quality dimensions of the project. As the project developed, the quality of engagement grew and the bonds were more visible between the participating schools. In some instances changes of personnel in schools made it difficult for new people participating in the project to start new relationships and engage with schools who had known each other since the project's initiation. There is a strong case to be made for a whole school approach from the beginning of a project like this, so that in the event of an individual teacher leaving the project there is continuity for all the participants.

Leitch and Kilpatrick in *Inside the Gates: Schools and the Troubles* concluded: 'EMU was not therefore simply located in this aspect of the curriculum or another. Nor was it to be found solely in cross-community projects, but was regarded as permeating all aspects of the school and manifested in the quality of relationships, whether these were between pupils and staff or between staff themselves, including ancillary staff'.¹²

The importance of preparation for project visits was crucial in 'Pride of our Place', and this was also a finding in the *Inside the Gates: Schools and the Troubles*. 'The importance of preparation for the project was regarded as vital to the proper and effective development of relationships within a cross-community context... Additionally, cross-community contact was generally viewed as being more effective if it was developmental and progressively built up over the years from primary school right throughout secondary school'.¹³ In 'Pride of our Place' the vision and momentum for this work came from the schools themselves and was one of the great indicators of the successful commitment by participants to the project's ideals. The confidence to undertake this type of work grew as the project developed and each partnership developed their unique relationship. 'Pride of our Place', with its key focus on studying the local environment together with a cross-border partner school, built on the work of the Primary School Educational Trails Project in 1977, emphasising joint fieldwork and trails.

The enriching experience of working with others is perhaps the greatest strength of 'Pride of our Place'. What is important to note is that children need to be familiar with co-operative group work in their own school setting first before becoming involved in such work with another group of children. Social skills for co-operative work need to be taught as well as effective approaches for the facilitation and management of groups. Attention must be paid to preparatory work in schools before they become involved in paired work, co-operative learning, peer-learning and trails. The more children are accustomed to working in groups, the greater are the rewards and enhanced learning experiences for all. Providing children with a language framework to facilitate description, discussion and questioning is key to enhancing all experiences of project work of this nature. Working in the environment and engaging in trail and project work provide ideal opportunities for these skills to be used and developed in a real and meaningful context.

Projects over the years such as the 'Religion in Ireland Project', which was headed by John Greer and colleagues at the New University of Ulster, have focussed on the use of discussion techniques.¹⁴ Other such projects have included the Primary Schools Peace Education initiative, set up by Daniel McQuade – which took on board the lessons of the American Quaker project The Children's Creative Response to Conflict Programme – and the Joint Peace Education Programme. These focussed on self-esteem, relationships with others, the environment, differences and similarities, and the impact of symbols, as elements of EMU work.¹⁵ For example, Leitch and Kilpatrick noted that 'for those schools where the construct of self-esteem was identified as central, there was a general consensus of the role it played in building mutual understanding'.¹⁶ In their study three schools felt that the value of promoting self-



esteem was integral to the development of cultural heritage work. Furthermore it was felt that 'celebrating their culture and language was a major starting point for realising pupils' sense of self-value'.¹⁷

In 'Pride of our Place' all these areas – and in particular relationships, self-esteem and the environment – facilitated work on differences and similarities. Observing the children present their place and listening to them talk about their own locality reinforced the pride all the schools had in their own place. Participants came to appreciate what made each place special and unique and what made each place different. This was echoed in the conclusion of *Inside the Gates: Schools and the Troubles* that 'an essential part of this preparation was ensuring pupils' pride in their own culture and identity before engaging in cross-community contact which demands an appreciation of an alternative culture'.¹⁸ When the children played together, shared playground games and traditions and meals together, opportunities to 'show and tell' about their area naturally arose. These times were rich and rewarding to witness for all involved with the project. The participating children were an inspiration to the adults in their approach to and involvement in this work. The richness of the quotes from the teachers and children alike bear witness to the genuinely committed approach to the project by the participants.

The work of the Centre for the Study of Conflict at the University of Ulster initiated several important research projects in the related fields of segregated schools, integrated schools, school links and EMU.¹⁹ Other key groups in these areas were the Corrymeela Community, the Northern Ireland UNESCO Committee, the United Nations Association and the Council for Education in World Citizenship. In 1978, as part of the Northern Ireland UNESCO Committee Project, Billy Mitchell, a Further Education College principal, enhanced the development of the work of EMU and peace education by encouraging schools to fuse peace education into the curriculum and the whole ethos of the school.²⁰ Mitchell believed that the attitude of the teacher to the students was critical to education for peace. This is also a key finding of 'Pride of our Place', in that the role of the teacher in building relationships with the partner school, the teacher's commitment and approach to the work, the quality of interactions and the leadership provided all greatly influenced the school community. Teachers play the central role in the promotion of EMU by their attitude to this work. Malone, writing in the *The Northern Teacher* in 1973, stated that the 'teacher's role is a vital one'.²¹ In selecting schools for participation in work of this kind, the key players will be the principal and the class teacher. Contacts between schools in projects such as 'Pride of our Place' need to be carefully planned for successful relationships and for promotion of mutual understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage.

In *Inside the Gates: Schools and the Troubles*, Leitch and Kilpatrick make reference to the ethos of the school and the role of respectful relationships:

*Respectful relationships at all levels within the school organisation were viewed as being the most direct expression of the ethos of the school. In most instances this was viewed as having direct benefits for the pupils from the outset, in terms of building self-esteem and setting the groundwork for the growth of tolerance, respect and understanding elsewhere.*²²

Throughout the 1970s the term used for this concept was 'community relations education'. In the 1980s the term 'Education for Mutual Understanding' came into widespread use, and in the 1990s the incorporation of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage into the Northern Ireland statutory curriculum gave the concept greater currency among the public.²³ Richardson describes the concept of mutual understanding as 'a sound and important educational concept' and goes on:



It involves the promotion of clear thought and the relation of knowledge and understanding in society. As such it should be challenging and will often be uncomfortable, inevitably touching on sensitive and controversial issues. In the discussion about how to promote change in a conflicting and disputed society the notion of mutual understanding is clearly in the "hearts and minds" camp.

He continues:

An educational approach which seeks to promote awareness of diversity, human rights and mutual understanding must go beyond the accumulation of knowledge into the process of emotional development, personal growth and social challenge. It could be argued that this is an essential part of good, balanced education.²⁴

The actual term 'Education for Mutual Understanding' was agreed in a formal sense at the first meeting in June 1983 of the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development Committee, which was originally designated as a 'Specialist Steering Group on Community Relations'. According to Alan Robinson, Education for Mutual Understanding features the concepts of 'respect' and 'relationships'. He refers to the key concept of 'mutuality'. 'It is suggested that mutuality is a way individuals and groups relate together respectfully as equals to undertake common educational tasks'. He goes on:

Mutuality can grow if teachers (and others) can create opportunities for pupils to learn more about themselves, to study and talk about issues of concern to them and the community, to learn about others who may be as similar as they are different, and, above all, to achieve together.²⁵

In recent years there have been many projects based on Education for Mutual Understanding. A *Review of the Schools Community Relations Programme* (2002), published by the Northern Ireland Department of Education, makes recommendations on many aspects of this work, including the role of parents in establishing school-community links. This report also recommends 'gradient mechanisms', which enable schools to engage with their community in a planned manner.²⁶ The concept of gradient mechanisms is important in scaffolding participation in projects such as 'Pride of our Place'. The recommendation from the *Review of the Schools Community Relations Programme* that the central commitment of each programme should remain the same – 'to bring children together in genuine, meaningful encounters which reflect the real issues of the community in which they live' – highlights the importance of such genuine and meaningful encounters.²⁷

The New Primary School Curriculum for Northern Ireland (being introduced officially from 2007) will include new 'areas of learning', including Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (KS1&2).²⁸ The new area of Personal Development will take in much of EMU, Cultural Heritage and Health Education. The 1999 Revised Primary Curriculum in the Republic of Ireland, particularly the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, is presented in three strands: Myself, Myself and Others and Myself and the Wider World.²⁹ This SPHE curriculum 'provides particular opportunities to foster the personal development, health and well-being of the individual child, to help him/her to create and maintain supportive relationships and become an active and responsible citizen in society.' The promotion of a broad and varied range of methodologies in the teaching and learning contexts in both curricula enhances the many active learning opportunities for children.



There have been many beneficial learning experiences in the 'Pride of our Place' project and many valuable insights gained as a result. This chapter has tried to show how this cross-border primary schools environmental project has built upon previous work in the development of the area of Education for Mutual Understanding and appreciation of cultural heritage.



- ³ Richardson, N. 'Roots: The Emergence of Education for Mutual Understanding', from a forthcoming publication provisionally entitled *Diversity and Mutual Understanding in Schools in Northern Ireland*
- ⁴ *ibid*
- ⁵ Robinson, A. (1993) 'Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU)', in Caul, L., *A Common Curriculum: the Case of Northern Ireland*, p.10, Belfast: Stranmillis College LRU
- ⁶ Richardson, N. 'Roots: The Emergence of Education for Mutual Understanding'
- ⁷ Richardson, N. 'Roots: The Emergence of Education for Mutual Understanding'
- ⁸ Richardson, N. (1992) *Roots, if not wings! Where did EMU come from?* Keynote paper at conference: [EMU in Transition](#), Newcastle, Co. Down, (citing DENI Circular 21/82: 'The Improvement of Community Relations: The Contribution of Schools')
- ⁹ *ibid* p2
- ¹⁰ Richardson, N. 'Roots: The Emergence of Education for Mutual Understanding'
- ¹¹ *ibid*
- ¹² Leitch, R. and Kilpatrick, R. (1999) *Inside the Gates: Schools and the Troubles*, p 26. Belfast: Save the Children publication
- ¹³ *ibid* p 29 & 30
- ¹⁴ Richardson, N. 'Roots: The Emergence of Education for Mutual Understanding'.
- ¹⁵ *ibid*
- ¹⁶ Leitch, R. and Kilpatrick, R. (1999) *Inside the gates: Schools and the Troubles*, p 25. Belfast: Save the Children publication
- ¹⁷ *ibid* p 25
- ¹⁸ *ibid* p 25
- ¹⁹ Richardson, N. 'Roots: The Emergence of Education for Mutual Understanding'.
- ²⁰ *ibid*
- ²¹ Malone, J. (1973) *Schools and Community Relations*, In *The Northern Teacher*, Vol. 11, No.1 p 19
- ²² Leitch, R. and Kilpatrick, R. (1999) *Inside the Gates: Schools and the Troubles*, p 24. Belfast: Save the Children publication
- ²³ Richardson, N. 'Roots: Introduction', from a forthcoming publication provisionally titled *Diversity and Mutual Understanding in Schools in Northern Ireland*
- ²⁴ *ibid*
- ²⁵ Robinson, A. (1993) 'Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU)', p 8 in Caul, L., *A Common Curriculum: the Case of Northern Ireland*. Belfast: Stranmillis College LRU
- ²⁶ O'Connor, U. Hartop, B. McCully, A. (2002) *A Review of the Schools Community Relations Programme*, p 42 (DENI Consultation Document)
- ²⁷ *ibid* p 42
- ²⁸ Department of Education, Northern Ireland, New Primary School Curriculum (to be launched in September 2007), *Personal Development and Mutual Understanding*, KS1&2
- ²⁹ Department of Education and Science, Republic of Ireland (1999) *Primary School Curriculum, Social, Personal and Health Education*, Government Publications, Dublin



CHAPTER THREE

THE IMPACT OF KEY ELEMENTS

While looking over photos and trying to select some to put on a disc, it occurred to me that the project really gathered momentum as it went along and came to be pupil-led rather than teacher-led, e.g. the clay model of St. Catherine's Church was made by two pupils while the rest of the class worked on forts and monasteries. It was completely their own idea to get the clay and try it out. Similarly the children had drafted out letters and questionnaires before I had a chance to suggest that they do so. (Teacher, Year Three)

Three key elements

At the end of Year One (2002-2003) and Year Two (2003-2004) the principals and teachers were surveyed on many aspects of the project and asked to reflect on a number of its elements in terms of best practice for the project structure and development:

- Getting the children involved
- The two day residential workshop with the overnight stay and time to meet with the partner school
- Financial support
- Communication between schools
- Communication and advice from support personnel
- Researching and planning of topic/theme
- Involving the whole staff of the school
- Getting the school community interested in the project

Principals and teachers felt that all the above elements were important, but especially the following three aspects, in order of importance:

- **Getting the children motivated and involved**
- **Time to meet with the partner school and the two day residential workshop**
- **Financial support**

Getting the children involved

Children looked forward to this day - they talked and talked about it, getting things ready or the visit, and they seemed to have got on very well today. (Teacher, Year Two)

It was easy. They loved the project - subject content, trips, new friendships. (Teacher, Year Two)

While Year One was a learning process for all involved with the project, Year Two brought new insights and new directions. From Year Two on, it was clear from the training workshops that more and more of the ownership of the project was being given to the pupil and that the voice of the pupil was coming through very strongly.



They took responsibility for their own learning which, in turn, gave them a sense of ownership and pride. (Teacher, Year Two)

This first year has just started me thinking about activities and approaches to this project. An individual pupil e-mailing system would free up the limited communication that did take place. Pupils could plan more of the project with their partners to make the process more interesting and relevant. (Teacher, Year Two)

In the questionnaire at the end of Year Two, getting the children involved was rated the most important aspect, with most teachers rating this as either number 1 or 2. While the schools rated this aspect as being really important, it was felt that it was easy to motivate the children, as this type of learning interests them and they have a opportunity to engage, talk and share with other children.



They were very proud of their presentation and enjoyed showing their penfriends everything they had found out. I believe this interaction between children to be very important and feel it benefits both schools. (Teacher, Year Two)

The need to involve pupils more in the 'enquiry aspect' of the project, to take into account the children's views and ideas, and to stress their role as researchers and reporters on their own local area, came across very strongly at the end of Year One. More time for pupils to interact with each other on visits was also cited as being of great importance. Thus at the end of Year One teachers were emphasising key areas for the project to address in Year Two. Learning takes on a whole new meaning when it happens in the company of others. This is evident in the section of this report on the impact of the project on the pupil, where key skills such as decision-making, interpersonal and co-operation skills were identified as coming to the fore as the project developed.

The reflective diaries completed by teachers at the end of Year Three also reflected the importance of the pupil-led enquiry based approach. At the conclusion of the project each teacher was asked to rate on a scale from 1 to 5 whether the project had fulfilled their expectations in involving pupils in their own learning (1 = not at all; 5 = to a very significant extent). It is important to note that eleven out of thirteen responding teachers rated the level of pupil involvement in their own learning at 5 (to a 'very significant extent') and two at 4 (to a 'significant extent'). This shift to pupil ownership was very evident as the project grew and developed, and was a significant factor in the success of 'Pride of our Place'.

Time to meet with partner school and the two-day residential workshop

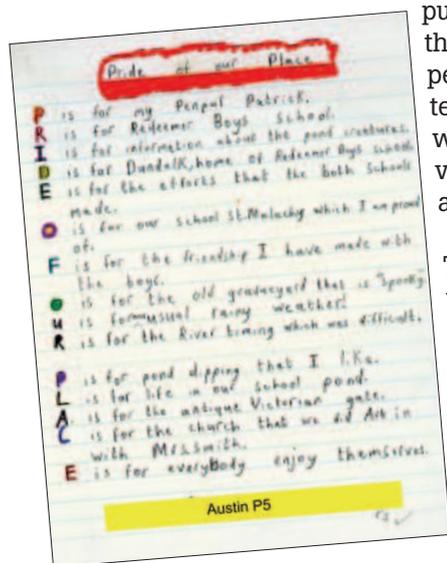
Useful bonding exercise! Very enjoyable for establishing links and friendships. (Teacher, Year Two)

In a midway evaluation of the training (January 2004), all teachers rated the residential workshops as very beneficial. An opportunity to meet all the personnel involved in 'Pride of our Place', as well as meeting the other partner schools, was most valued by teachers and



principals. One teacher commented that this was 'a very live exercise and an opportunity to foster understanding and pride'. What was striking about teachers' comments was the focus on the building and strengthening of relationships. Sharing knowledge, experience and ideas was central to the whole process as well as the time allocated to planning with the partner school.

The whole area of social interaction was most valuable to the process, both from the teachers', pupils' and wider community's point of view. One teacher commented that residentials, where people have the opportunity to meet all the personnel involved, 'gives you a feeling of belonging'. Another teacher commented that they were 'a wonderful opportunity to meet with partner school face to face' and that these training days were very interesting because they gave an 'insight into the activities and achievements of other schools'.



Teachers appreciated the opportunity each year for the affirmation of the work of the schools and also the time provided to celebrate this work. What was also interesting was the developmental aspect of the project for the teachers, which allowed them, through the discussions at the workshops, to decide clearly on what needed to be targeted in their planning for the year ahead.

The two day meeting was invaluable for laying the groundwork and getting a sense of the type of schools involved.

Communication between the children was great. We used video, letters, e-mails, swapped local history books and poems, sent certificates. Children's involvement is the main interest. They sourced local knowledge and involved parents and friends...the display of our drama to the school and to the parents kept interest alive. The visit by support personnel was valuable. There was a good balance, I felt help and encouragement were available and given but I was not under pressure to produce materials and 'perform'. This was something that had concerned me before taking on the project. The financial support enabled the school to purchase materials, source a historian, invite parents for an afternoon and entertain our guests without straining our resources. It was not the major factor in anything undertaken, it just made life easier. The days the children met were wonderful but short, due to distance. Perhaps another meeting, taking in an educational trip, would strengthen bonds even more. (Teacher, Year One)

An excellent two days – we left Monaghan with a very clear understanding of what we wished to achieve. (Teacher, Year Two)

The crucial element for the teachers was the time to meet and plan for the year ahead with their partner school. This time to meet and plan was seen as an essential element of the project, and all schools felt that project structures need to have this element built in right from the start. Five teachers rated this aspect as the most influential aspect in the planning process.

Great for planning etc., but equally important was the strengthening of relationships between teachers. (Teacher, Year Two)

More planning time was advocated in Year One of the project with an emphasis on very focussed planning between the partner schools, so that visits would be effective and beneficial. One comment from a participating teacher, after Year One, clearly supports this view: 'It wasn't focused enough – possibly if we had a skeletal plan: times, dates, people, activities, finance etc'.



The two-day residential workshops emerged as a key element as the project progressed and relationships were established between schools. In the initial stages of a future project this element would need to be carefully scaffolded by the Steering Committee until relationships are established. After the two-day residential workshops much of the work on planning was undertaken by telephone, email and post. In the final year (2006) teachers availed of a joint planning day to prepare for the final exhibition in the Market Place Theatre, Armagh.

Financial support

All teachers felt that the funding was crucial to the project, especially for transport costs, substitute cover, cost of meals and educational resources. Many teachers commented on the expense of hiring buses for the exchange visits, especially where the distance between schools is considerable. They noted that distance should be factored into the allocation of the budget: a sliding scale should operate in this instance, as transport costs will vary from school to school. Some schools used the funding provided at the outset of the project (Stg£500) for the purchase of materials of their choice e.g. a digital camera, a camcorder, art materials, computer consumables etc. Many schools involved in this project developed local studies materials which would be used for many years after the conclusion of this project, thus bringing learning gains to the whole school. Schools also availed of the opportunity to fund guest speakers on various topics. Some teachers noted that the funding level was insufficient and that more funding should have been made available to the schools. It is important from the outset of a project like this that rules governing the budget are clearly outlined annually and that an update on the expenditure of each school is provided at the end of each year.

Many of the lunches for the visiting schools were provided in the schools and local community centres, with many instances of parents and the wider community helping with refreshments/lunches on the day of the exchange visit. In future project work of this nature it is recommended that lunches should be provided on the school site rather than away from the school grounds. This provides an ideal opportunity for children to mix on an informal basis with other pupils and teachers from the school.

While the following three elements were not considered as important as the three outlined above, they were nonetheless essential elements to the success of the project:

- **Communication between schools**
- **Advice and assistance from support personnel**
- **Research and planning of the topic/theme**

Communication between schools

Schools used a variety of means of communication e.g. email, video, letter, video and Blackboard (an on-line learning environment), which the project team facilitated. Teachers were trained in the use of Blackboard at the training workshops in Year One and Year Two, but there were technical problems in Year One in that some schools found it difficult to access Blackboard. However in Year Two a competition to develop a logo for the project had the use of Blackboard as its focus, and this meant more schools used the medium. In Year Three Blackboard was not used as often as in the previous year. This again had a lot to do with access by schools, but was also due to the fact that relationships between partner schools had now become firmly established, so that Blackboard as a means of communication was not as



essential as it had been in the initial stages. The use of Blackboard by participating teachers was minimal.

IT problems: in sending and receiving e-mails to and from partner school due to inadequate (non-existent) internet access and problems in sending entries for logo competition. (Teacher, Year Two)

It was clear that immediately after the training workshops there was good activity, but unless there is a focussed reason for logging on, teachers will use alternative routes for communication e.g. post, telephone, and e-mail.

At the training session in the AMMA Centre in Armagh in Year Three (January 2005), many partnerships made great use of ICT for their presentations. The high point for the use of ICT was in May 2006 at the final exhibition in Armagh of all the work undertaken over the project's life span. The multi-media presentations and the use of ICT at the various stands were most impressive. Much progress had been made over the three and a half years in this area, particularly for those schools which had not used ICT prior to their participation in 'Pride of our Place'.

At the close of the project teachers were asked to rate on a scale of 1 –5 (with 5 = to a 'very significant extent') how their expectations had been fulfilled in terms of the enhancement of their own use of ICT. From the thirteen responses received, two teachers rated this aspect to a 'very significant extent', seven to a 'significant extent', three to a 'moderate extent' and one returned no score. In terms of the enhanced use of ICT by pupils, the teachers rated this aspect as to a 'very significant extent' (five), to a significant extent' (five), to a 'moderate extent' (one), to 'some slight extent' (one) and one returned no score. This rating by teachers signified the development in ICT skills, by both teachers and pupils, over the project life span.

Where communication between children via post or email is encouraged, it is essential that a protocol for this type of communication be established by each school partnership. In the initial training for a project of this nature the principles underlying such a protocol should be addressed and guidelines given by the Steering Committee on what constitutes best practice in this area. Ethical use of communication media is essential and training should also be given to the pupils on how to communicate throughout the various media.

Despite the important learning to be gained from on-line communication, face-to-face contact is the preferred mode of contact in cross-border projects such as these. The role of on-line communication should be clearly delineated at the start of the process. Many teachers commented that they were gaining confidence in the use of Blackboard as the project progressed, but more support is needed if they are to be fully confident in the use of an on-line tool such as Blackboard.

Advice and assistance from support personnel

The comments from teachers in this area were that this service was practical, supportive, and always available. Participants felt that it was good to know that they could call on the advisory personnel if help or support were needed. Support personnel undertook approximately two visits to participating schools each year. The training workshops were invaluable for dealing with practical issues and planning issues. As a result follow up was not of the utmost importance, as schools had already established very good links, particularly after the first year.

Taking time to clearly state the project's objectives at the outset was crucial in order to allow all areas to be explained thoroughly, questions to be answered and resources to be identified.



One very helpful resource was the handbook distributed on the first day, which contained lists of helpful resources for working in the local environment, including maps, historical sources, and publications on best practice for working on castles, graveyards and other historical buildings (which were prepared by SELB personnel). From this beginning, schools increasingly took ownership of the project and this was very evident at the final year's workshop in Armagh in January 2005, at which the linked schools made presentations on what they had accomplished in the 2004 exchange visits. This was one of the most rewarding moments of the whole project for those involved, as the progression in the development of professional relationships between the school partnerships was clearly evident.

Research and planning of the topic/theme

Respondents noted how important it was to plan thoroughly: the cross-curricular aspect was mentioned as a key element. At the end of Year Two, five respondents rated researching and planning the theme between 3 and 5 on a scale of importance (rating 1-2 = 'very important'). Teachers felt that it was necessary to research and plan a topic which would be of benefit to the school and which would also fulfill the curriculum requirements.

As last year, there was a big effort to put together a cross curricular project which can be used in later years. (Teacher, Year Two)

All the teachers stated that they could access resources through a wide variety of channels. Many used libraries, museums, local historians, teachers' centres, DoE Water Service, the Heritage in Schools Scheme, Road Safety campaigns etc.,

In summary, the key elements which contributed to the success of 'Pride of our Place' were: pupil involvement, including time for the pupils to meet, eat and play together, and time for the teachers to meet and plan. Financial support was also critical, particularly for substitute cover, transport costs, meals, and purchase of materials. Effective communication between the partner schools involved in the project was a key element which underpinned all the work.





CHAPTER FOUR

EDUCATION FOR MUTUAL UNDERSTANDING AND APPRECIATION OF CULTURAL HERITAGE

I liked making friends and participating in the races. I also liked the trails. Actually I liked everything the best. It was a landmark in my life. (Pupil).

It would help children because they have different backgrounds than us. I would love to see people and children talking and playing together. (Pupil).

This chapter will explore two key objectives of 'Pride of our Place': to provide a context for pupils aged 9-12 to explore the themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage in a cross-border setting, and to facilitate pupils to explore the local and wider histories of different parts of the border region and of different social, cultural, and religious communities.

It will explore the responses of teachers to the work of the project in this area over its three and a half year timespan. The data for this chapter comes from the teacher questionnaires distributed at the end of Year One and Year Two, and the reflective diaries of Year Three, and also from the pupil questionnaires at the end of Year One and Year Two. The self-reflection questionnaires at the end of Year Two and at the close of the project also provide some data. The chapter will look at four distinct aspects of the project's work:

- **Children's understanding of their own sense of place**
- **Children's understanding of their partner school's sense of place**
- **Enhancement of mutual understanding through participation in the project**
- **How mutual understanding could be improved further as a result of a project such as 'Pride of our Place'**

Children's understanding of their own sense of place

This was one of the many positive benefits of this project. It was very obvious that the children developed and displayed a great pride in their own place. One pupil accorded the preparation for the exchange visit the highest accolade by stating: 'I felt it was for the President because everything had to be in the right place'. Another said: 'Both learning about and sharing a place is very valuable'. It was in this presentation of their place to others that the experience of learning about their own place shone through the most: 'Because you show people that you are proud of the place that you live in' (Pupil). Pupils spoke with pride as they explained and narrated their stories: 'In so many ways—they got to love their area and feel proud of it' (Teacher, Year Two). Each school had its own unique story to tell about their place.

In showing their own place to others, pupils became conscious of that place: 'They are more aware and conscious of their own place and its history and culture' (Teacher, Year Two). All the teachers commented that the children had an increased sense of place as a result of the project. They felt that they had a better understanding of the past, how their parents and grandparents had lived, and a better knowledge of the local history and folklore through research and fieldwork, thus creating a sense of pride in their locality. The teachers felt that



the children were now very proud of where they lived: of the rich history and folklore, the local rivers, the local town, and local sites and buildings.

I honestly don't think they would have given a second thought to a water treatment plant before this. Now they are keen to explain to people how it works and they are proud of the fact that their little parish contains the plant which supplies the town of Dundalk with clean water. (Teacher, Year One)

They knew nothing of the water treatment plant or the original reservoir coming from the Cooley mountains. Standing on top of the treatment plant was an education in itself – quite apart from the project – history, geography, farming and estate houses all lying before them. (Teacher, Year One)



Children now have a real understanding of the contribution the local river makes to the River Bann and Northern Ireland. (Teacher, Year Two)

The children have amassed a vast amount of knowledge and expertise on their local seashore, the marine life and the folklore connected with the seashore. So I think the children have a great appreciation and connection with our local seashores. (Teacher, Year Two)

Teachers also felt that children no longer took their area 'for granted' and saw their school and the area surrounding it as part of the history of the town or region.

The pupils were very surprised at the joy others got from a place they take for granted. (Teacher, Year Two)

The project also enabled children to become aware of the local history present in their environment and of the central role that people from their community play in its development.

The project made me focus on the local area. We now have a local study in history and geography to add to the Key Stage 2 Curriculum. (Teacher, Year One)

The project led to the discovery on their own doorstep of history – alive and kicking and with real people. (Teacher, Year Two)

One interesting aspect commented on by many teachers was the fact that in developing a sense of their own place pupils were also becoming aware not only of the contribution of others to the locality, but also of the contribution that they themselves can make to their own place.

What was once a ruin beside the school grounds to the children is a key to the past for them now. Now they see their area as a place that people, their ancestors, have had an impact on... They recognize that they too can have a positive impact on their area through environmental awareness and community involvement. (Teacher, Year One)



Knowing about their own place also involved the children becoming more aware that their families were a real part of that place, and led to a greater sense of belonging to the locality. 'They realised that their families are part of their place; 'they communicated with more locals' (Teacher, Year Two). Developing a sense of place involved looking at many aspects of place: 'looking at their townlands and finding out why they are named; identifying areas of interest (historical and otherwise) in their parish' (Teacher, Year Two). They also found out about their school: 'due to an in-depth study of the history of the school pupils have a deeper understanding of the story of our school' (Teacher, Year One).

The preparation for the exchange visits also gave a special meaning to the presentation of place, as pupils were now talking about the place they called their own in the company of another school, who were learning about it for the first time.

Better knowledge of local sport and people who made huge contributions to same...also pupils seeing and appreciating the exchange school being excited and impressed by the school's talent and preparation. (Teacher, Year Two)

In the final year, self-reflection questionnaire teachers (from the thirteen respondents) found that the project had enhanced their own pupils' understanding of their sense of place to a 'very significant extent' (ten) and to a 'significant extent' (three). It is also worth noting that the teachers found that the project had enhanced the whole school's understanding of its own place: to a 'very significant extent' (three), to a 'significant extent' (seven), to a 'moderate extent' (two) and to 'some slight extent' (one).

Interestingly, the teachers noted also that the parents' (of the participating class) understanding of their own place had been enhanced to a 'very significant extent' (two), to a 'significant extent' (five), to a 'moderate extent' (four) and to 'some slight extent' (two). In future cross-border projects of this nature, it should be an essential and integral element of the project that parents and grandparents play a greater role. In the schools where parents and grandparents were involved, it was clear that project participation took on an extra community dimension which proved to be beneficial and positive.

Children's understanding of their partner school's sense of place

By first of all studying their own place, the children became aware of the importance of place and community to others. This was an important aspect of the project because it is by firstly exploring their own sense of place that children can then come to appreciate what gives another area its distinct character and sense of place. This would also be in line with best geographical practice that the starting point for all such local studies should be the pupils' own place before becoming involved in the study of another place.



Their enjoyment of the partner school's presentation on the history of their school increased their awareness of each place and community having developed in a similar way. (Teacher, Year One).



The importance of learning in the company of others is clearly an important outcome of the work of this project.

Their partner school is much smaller than our own and I think they've learned that bigger does not mean better. The children from Clady showed how proud they were of their place and conveyed this well. Our children talked a lot about their school and the river when they came back. (Teacher, Year One)



Many teachers referred to this aspect when talking about and writing about the project.

The project connects the places – it's great to see their playground done up... It's been great for us. (Teacher, Year Three)

At the end of Year Two, all the teachers agreed that the pupils had an increased understanding of their partner school's sense of place. 'We learned that other places have a lovely local environment' (Pupil). In the final self-reflection questionnaire, thirteen teachers found that the project had enhanced their pupils' understanding of another place to a 'very significant extent' (seven), to a 'significant extent' (four) and to a 'moderate extent' (two).

The teachers commented that through seeing how the other school presented their project, completing the trail, looking at the poster displays and listening to children talking about their work in an informal setting, they had gained an understanding of, and taken an interest in, their partner school's history.

Very impressed by history of local farming community and customs, local musicians; also the storytellers and local characters left a lasting impression. (Teacher, Year Two)

They also commented that they had an increased awareness of similarities and differences and that they all shared a past.

The following quotations really highlight this increased sense of awareness:

I liked learning about our local history, visiting different places, taking photographs, drawing pictures, making brochures and making new friends with our partner school. (Pupil)

Our partner's school is very different but the core of the community is very similar. (Teacher, Year Two)

I learned that other places are different in ways and similar in ways to ours. (Pupil)

In the following quotations from the end of year questionnaires, two teachers who were involved in a school partnership referred to the increased understanding their pupils had gained of their partner's place.





They now seem to understand that the children in Dundalk are like themselves, support the same teams, play-station games etc., They got a great sense of pride from the other children during the presentation. (Teacher, Year One)

They see that the school in Dungannon is a very similar community to ours, despite differences in the setting, culture, history and type of school. (Teacher, Year One)

Enhancement of mutual understanding

Mutual understanding was enhanced in many ways though 'Pride of our Place', and was evident in every aspect of the work undertaken by teachers and pupils. It was not an add-on to project work but rather a dimension which naturally flowed from the relationships established between the participating schools, teachers and pupils.

Children were more confident; made more discoveries that the 'others' were children like themselves, with the same hobbies, names, supporting the same teams, same games, food, etc., (Teacher, Year Two)

Mutual understanding was evident in the personal interactions:

By spending time with each other, they begin to realize that they are all essentially the same at heart; they have similar desires and aspirations. (Teacher, Year Two).

It was also there in the presentations on exchange visit days; in the care taken with the preparations for the visit days; in the activities provided, in the greetings and the games.

You made new friends and got to see what they do different from us at school. We do most things the same as they do but it was fun to see what they do different. (Pupil)

Where the relationships displayed commitment and respect to the ethos of the project, the engagement was natural and genuine.

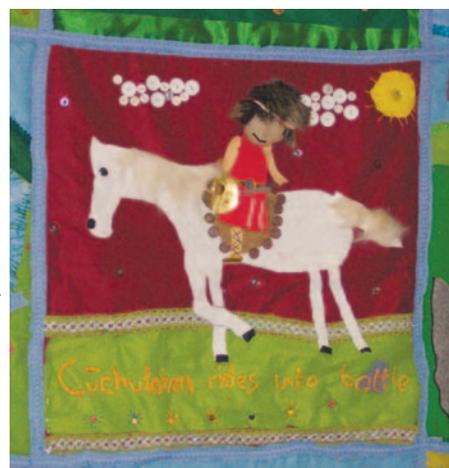
There did not seem to be any great differences among the children. They accepted the other children as they met them, North/South differences didn't arise and only the accents provided great scope for discussion. (Teacher, Year Two)

Many teachers referred to the issue of having time as being central to the development of relationships and building bonds. Pupils noted in their comments that projects such as 'Pride of our Place' are good for understanding and making connections with other people. The use of the words 'understanding' and 'connections' by pupils and their understanding of difference is best exemplified in the following quotes:

You think only of differences – you don't think of things that are the same. (Pupil)

They understand their differences but more especially they understand how similar they are. (Teacher, Year Two)

We get to make connections... some people never knew that Dún Dealgan and Ard Mhacha are





connected. I didn't know that Cúchulainn travelled to Armagh. (Pupil)

There are key underpinning principles upon which mutual understanding thrives and these are the building and maintaining of relationships, respect, leadership, trust, communication and co-operation.

Kindness shown by both school communities was appreciated by all the children and showed that sharing brings joy and understanding. (Teacher, Year One)



Mutual understanding has been enhanced through structure and processes: sharing common interests with pen pals; presenting work to visiting schools and having their project presented to us. The project sets the positive objective and goal to be achieved and gets everyone moving towards the same goal. (Teacher, Year Two)

The teachers referred to the value of the practical nature of the project and the various activities which were organized for the exchange visit days. These activities really provided ideal opportunities for the pupils to communicate and work together.

The practical exercises both schools organized helped the children to communicate with each other in a friendly way which I suppose is 'mutual understanding' for children. (Teacher, Year Two)

Really excited but I was a bit worried about them in case they didn't talk. (Pupil)

Mostly the way the children were so friendly. I thought they wouldn't talk to us but I was happy the way they talked to us. If you didn't have that the thing would be unsuccessful. (Pupil)

The teachers commented that mutual understanding was in the sharing of the experience of:

- Cross-border
- Rural-urban
- Co-operation
- Social interaction
- Group work
- Partner links
- Meeting the pupils
- Conversing with others
- Learning about others from different areas
- Finding out they have shared interests e.g. soccer teams
- Enjoying the same activities
- Having the same outlook on life and most importantly a sense of fun permeating the visits.

The project on Cúchulainn between Knockbridge and Clady was a wonderful example of how children from different parts of the border region can investigate a topic that is common to other communities and thus unites them. At the same time the children can appreciate the different cultural and social contexts that make their partner school unique. (Advisor)

Mutual understanding has been enhanced through raising awareness of a common



heritage and how different areas can have close associations. (Teacher, Year Two)

It was very evident from the teacher feedback sessions and questionnaire responses that pupils loved the whole concept of showing off their place to others. This social aspect of learning was key



to the whole project. It emerged very strongly from Year One that engaging the pupils in groups, with varied and challenging activities and where communication and activity were central to the work, proved to be a most successful experience. There are valuable lessons to be learned here for all teaching and learning experiences: pupils must be afforded the opportunities to direct their own learning and to work collaboratively and co-operatively. Real and meaningful learning will then take place. These teaching and learning experiences are critical to the successful development of all the key skills for pupils. Schools need to ask pupils about teaching and learning experiences, listen to what they are saying and act upon what they say.

Children are children no matter where they come from, no matter how different their accents are. (Teacher, Year One)

No barriers between children, they take each other at face value - a lesson to us all. (Teacher, Year One)

I think this was summed up by a boy in fifth class. He met a lady from the North of Ireland on the train to Dublin and chatted to her. She was from Dungannon and he discussed the project with her. The children feel a real connection with the people they met. (Teacher, Year One)

The pupils' learning about respect and co-operation is supported by the richness of the following quotes:

Tradition and barriers do not really exist among children, I have discovered. The children respected each other and this was enhanced by the way they could see the staff getting along together. Perhaps we don't give credit to the children for their intuition at times. (Teacher, Year One)

Pupils realize that they may live in a different place and go to a different size school but we are essentially the same - same interests, likes and dislikes - and that one school may have something that the other doesn't. (Teacher, Year One)

We discovered that the other school was no different to ourselves. (Teacher, Year One)

The organisation of play activities by the schools during exchange visits provided many opportunities for the pupils to get to know each other in an informal and friendly way. In future work of this kind, this social aspect should be a key aspect of the process. Some of the schools prepared for this play aspect by teaching pupils traditional games from the locality to share with the visiting school.

Children play no matter who they are or where they are. These children just got on with it,



*talking, comparing notes, playing football and so on.
(Teacher, Year One)*

*You made new friends, got to see what they do
different from us at school. We do most things the
same as they do, but it was fun to see what they do
different. (Pupil)*



In the self-reflection questionnaire at the end of the project, teachers were asked to rate on a scale of 1 (not at all) to 5 (to a very significant extent) if 'Pride of our Place' had fulfilled their expectations when it came to changing their attitudes to the North or South for the better. From thirteen responses teachers rated their attitudinal change as to a 'very significant extent' (five), to a 'significant extent' (five), to a 'moderate extent' (one), 'not at all' (one) and one returned no score.

With regard to the project changing pupils' attitudes towards the North or South for the better, six teachers rated this to a 'very significant extent', three to a 'significant extent' and four to a 'moderate extent'. It is clear from these findings that even in a small-scale project such as 'Pride of our Place' real and meaningful learning about people and places on the other side of the border took place. The potential of small projects like 'Pride of our Place' to bring about attitudinal change should not be undervalued.

How cross-border projects can further improve mutual understanding

What emerged strongly here was the use of words such as 'joint', 'links', 'contacts,' 'connections' 'communication' and 'shared experiences'. Teachers commented that continuing the exchanges, increasing the number of visits to schools, facilitating ongoing reviews, increasing funding to facilitate exchanges and providing time to reflect with partner schools could further enhance mutual understanding.

*Possibly look into their history further, more to do with time as opposed to place.
(Teacher, Year Two)*

*By crossing religious and political divides at every opportunity - adults create these
problems. (Teacher, Year One)*

Many teachers spoke about the many ways that cross-border co-operation could be enhanced and how links could be maintained after a project such as 'Pride of our Place' comes to a conclusion. It is important that structures are put in place which provide opportunities for schools to maintain and build on links into the future so that the learning gains and experiences of this project will not be lost.

*The very fact that the children are crossing the border to meet each other promotes mutual
understanding. Perhaps if we as teachers encouraged blossoming friendships more by
talking, displaying pictures, letters, e-mails and debates, it might help. (Teacher, Year One)*

It would be great if there could be ongoing links maintained between North and South in



*terms of pen-pals, email, writing, teachers' e-mail and video conferencing.
(Teacher, Year Two)*

When the pupils were asked midway through the project to offer suggestions for future work in this area, their suggestions were illuminating. They referred to key areas such as learning about the life and culture of people they have never met, working together, learning about their hobbies and understanding their life and culture.

I do think projects like this one help to promote understanding of other people because you get to know about the people you are working with. You also have your partner as another friend to you and you work as a part of a team. (Pupil)

Because it helps us to understand their life and they get to understand our life. (Pupil)

Because instead of hearing about it, we saw it! It was hard though because we had to go up and introduce ourselves to complete strangers. It was great fun and I would love to do it again. (Pupil)

I think it was a good idea because we learn about different people with different cultures. (Pupil)

In this project the opportunities to work together, to play together and to be part of a team were very valuable and beneficial. These are the aspects that pupils derived enjoyment from and most of the learning came through this co-operative aspect of the project.

*I think it does help as we can learn a lot from each other.
It helps to understand different lifestyles. (Pupil)*

... because there was group work. (Pupil)

... because we get to know other children and what their hobbies are. (Pupil)

Definitely, because without it we wouldn't know anything about them. (Pupil)

The real life learning experience which was an integral part of this project is what proved to



be its most beneficial and valuable element. While the trails and other project related activities were the foci of the preparation, it was the learning about other people and other places that really mattered on the day. It is interesting to note some of the suggestions by pupils on how education for mutual understanding could be enhanced as a result of projects like 'Pride of our Place':

You really get to see for yourself what others are like. (Pupil)

Find out more about them. Do not fight about religion. (Pupil)

If we try to bring our religions together and have a service. (Pupil)

The pupils suggested that more time should be given to this type of work, with a larger number of schools involved in the partnerships. This would be a natural extension of the type of work undertaken in 'Pride of our Place', and would help to disseminate its valuable teaching and learning experiences.

It should continue because other people will have a chance to connect with people like we did and have links with other schools. (Pupil)

You could link up four or more schools and then there would be more variety. (Pupil)

Your school could be teamed up with a school that is another religion. Then you could see that people of different religions are the same as each other. (Pupil)

Teachers commented on the positive and developmental learning gained by children who experienced the project for a second year. This highlights the fact that 'once-off' meetings have little benefit. The real gains are to be made through long-term contacts between schools. In this long-term context, stronger links and contacts are made, relationships established, trust developed and opportunities arise naturally for joint and shared work.

[There was] further reassurance that pupils from the North are 'friendly' and 'good craic'; breaking down of barriers and fears regarding the unknown. Children are now familiar with the process of travelling north to visit our partner school and having the children from the exchange school visit us. (Teacher, Year Two)

We looked forward to meeting again. We sent photos, and the children built up good rapport long before meeting in May. (Teacher, Year Two)

Children who had been in the project the previous year had a greater awareness of the project and had a good understanding of what to expect on exchange visits. Many of these schools were small and encouraged whole school involvement, so the children in the broader school context were aware of its participation in the project.

The children left the school feel sad at missing next year. There was talk of asking their new school could they come back for the day...4th class have introduced themselves and are all set to go. (Teacher, Year Two)

I felt I had missed out on something as I only got involved at Stage 2. (Teacher, Year Two)



*I noticed my pupils interacting with other children and the adults like old friends.
(Teacher, Year Two)*

*Children felt they were almost meeting 'family' again on the second visit.
(Teacher, Year Two)*

In summary, education for mutual understanding and the development of an appreciation of the heritage of the school's locality and their partner school's locality was a key objective of this project. It was most evident in the work of the schools after the initial year, and into the final phases of the project, when relationships had been established and developed. It was most apparent in the shared theme work and joint work undertaken by the schools. The key elements necessary for the development of education for mutual understanding and an appreciation of cultural heritage were:

- Commitment
- Communication
- Co-operation
- Trust
- Respect
- Leadership
- An understanding of the processes involved when working with pupils on a cross-border project of this nature
- Effective support to fulfil the project's objectives

Pupils need to know how to operate in groups and need to be taught the social skills of group work so that maximum benefit can be gained. These skills involve:

- Turn-taking
- Listening
- Responding
- Co-operating
- Working as a team

Many of the schools had well-devised trails prepared for the visit of their partner schools. Trails are an ideal opportunity for these group skills to be used and developed. In future work in this area, preparing the ground for group work should be a key feature of the planning phase and should form part of the in-service training for the participating teachers.



CHAPTER FIVE

IMPACT ON THE TEACHER

What we (staff, Board of Governors, local community and most importantly pupils in both schools) got out of this project was phenomenal. The finished product (although never technically completed or quite finished) was and is something that stands out in my mind. I walk through my school with pride. (Teacher, Year Three)

I, too am very proud of our place, school and pupils. (Teacher, Year Two)

The children's enjoyment of the project and the knowledge that they gained from the whole experience was significant. I overheard one 5th class pupil discussing the possibility of repeating 5th in order to get another turn at the project. (Teacher, Year One)

The project led to more interaction between children and teachers, a more relaxed atmosphere, increased interest from tutors and project leaders, more enthusiasm from all concerned, including parents and the Board of Governors. (Teacher Year Two)

In this section, based on the project impact on the teacher, the following project areas will be explored:

- **Fears, expectations and disappointments**
- **Teachers' professional development**
- **Teachers' use of active and investigatory methodologies**
- **Teachers' personal development**

Fears, expectations and disappointments

In the first year 'fears and expectations' were discussed on the first day of the residential training workshop. Midway through the project teachers were asked to comment on their feelings on fears they may have had in relation to taking part in it.

No fears! We have an excellent working relationship with our partner school and his school so I am looking forward to Stage 2. (Teacher, Year Two)

My fears were for the workload involved and fitting it in with all the other subject areas as I teach in a multi-class situation. Target reached with plenty of planning. (Teacher, Year One)

Less fear factor this year due to the success of last year. Stronger relationships and bonds make communications easier. I'm now very open and confident. This year we knew what was expected from us as teachers. (Teacher, Year Two)



I suppose I feel much more relaxed. Having established a relationship with our partner school and teacher, there's really nothing to fear and my expectations are now based on experience. (Teacher, Year Two)

Fears were unfounded; great parental support. (Teacher, Year Two)

At the start of the project the fears expressed were in terms of the amount of time required, not knowing what lay ahead, taking on too much, the impact on other areas of the curriculum and the expectations of parents and pupils. Midway through the project teachers commented that the fears they may have had in the beginning were unfounded. They also spoke of the great support from partners and parents and a feeling of confidence and being more relaxed. Practical issues were then of more concern such as the problem of lack of time for exchange visits. There was also an expression of concern over the finance and budgeting for the project, particularly in terms of cost of transport for visits. On completion of the project there was a sense of relief that it had been worthwhile and that none of the fears had really materialized.

At the end of Year One all the schools felt there were no disappointments with the project except some minor ones in relation to technical problems with 'Blackboard' and lack of time to get everything done.

I wasn't disappointed. I just felt under pressure because of the time element, and when the children really got going I felt there was a lot more we could do. (Teacher, Year One)

Similarly there were few disappointments at the end of Year Two. Some teachers highlighted the need for more funding as a small number of schools had overspent on their budget on their first year, which caused them concern.

We actually spent quite a lot from our own school budget. (Teacher, Year Two)

One teacher commented on the lack of time for the exchange visit. This was an issue particularly with regard to the small number of schools which had to travel a long distance and pack a lot into a very short day. In future project work this time/distance element should be factored in to the project structure. This also has implications for the project budget, particularly if a project runs over a number of years and if there are small rural schools participating.

Better links could have been established between pupils in both schools (and their teachers) if proper internet access had been available in schools – I would recommend this be checked, and support given where necessary. (Teacher, Year One)

IT problems: sending and receiving e-mails from/to partner school due to inadequate (non-existent) internet access and problems in sending entries for the logo competition. (Teacher, Year Two)

Our computers are unreliable so the IT aspect was not as developed as I planned. (Teacher, Year Two)

A lot of work in a short time (my fault). I didn't realize how much could be covered by the topic until I had started. The project grew and grew as I progressed! (Teacher, Year Two)

Meeting financial obligations. Completing full visit in limited time. (Teacher, Year Two)



Already overloaded school work left little time for communication between children before meeting. (Teacher, Year Two)

However overall the teachers stated that there were hardly any aspects of the project which they found difficult, except some minor ones.

[There was] great communication with the partner school's teacher and her children, the parents and all those involved. (Teacher, Year One)

Good forward planning led to smooth implementation. (Teacher, Year One)

Teachers' professional development

Teachers commented that 'Pride of our Place' had been a very positive professional learning experience. Areas where they benefited most were:

- Inter-school exchanges, meeting and exchanging views with teachers from across the border; experiencing another type of an approach to education
- Developing more creative approaches to teaching and learning and getting interesting ideas and tips for teaching when visiting the partner school
- Enhanced organizational skills and improved use of ICT.

Learning about the education system in another jurisdiction was a very important aspect for the participating teachers, as was building relationships in the cross-border context. Teachers also spoke about developing an appreciation of their own local area and about becoming more self reflective about their teaching.

At the end of Year Two, teachers engaged in a self-reflection exercise on the project's objectives. This evaluation involved ranking the project objectives on a scale of 2 – 10 (where 2 = very little and 10 = a great deal), in terms of the fulfilment of these objectives. At the Year Three training workshop, a session was held on self-reflection, whereby the teachers engaged in a process of outlining key indicators of what constituted evidence of the fulfilment of each project objective.³⁰ This exercise was a most beneficial one and was a clear progression from Year Two. The annual residential training workshops were really beneficial, and over the three and a half years of the project it became apparent how the teachers had grown in their relationships with each other, as well as in their confidence.

This was particularly evident at the Year Three workshop in the AMMA Centre in Armagh. Each school partnership was invited to present a report to the other partner schools, using whatever medium they wished, on the previous exchange visit. The manner in which each partnership undertook their presentations was a real tribute to the strength of the bonds which had developed over the years, and also a powerful demonstration of the professional approach they had taken to the partnership and the pupil-centred approach of the project. Each presentation brought with it a unique style and approach and cumulatively they were an immense learning experience for everyone.

All agreed that presentations like these would not have happened in the first year and probably not in the second year of the project. This sharing of experience between the schools also demonstrated the range and variety of projects that were undertaken in Year Two, and the creative and imaginative development of the nature of the projects. The third year was the critical time for this sharing and creative development to happen. This was due to a growth in professional and personal confidence and trust by all involved with the work of the project.



In the final self-reflection, completed by teachers at the end of the project, thirteen teachers who responded to the questionnaire rated the enrichment of their own professional experiences as to a 'very significant extent' (ten), with the remaining three rating their experiences as to a 'significant extent'. It is clear from this that 'Pride of our Place' provided the participating teachers with many opportunities for the enrichment of their own professional development.

I worked harder, was better motivated to produce a higher standard of resources and encouraged more outside support and input. (Teacher, Year One)

It made me more self critical of the way I teach. (Teacher, Year Two)

It gave us a holistic approach to learning and finding out. We were able to merge numerous subjects and the whole project was so much more meaningful. (Teacher, Year Two)

It further enhanced my understanding of the approach and methodology suggested in the revised curriculum. (Teacher, Year Two)

I felt I have developed a deeper appreciation of my area and therefore have more confidence in my teaching of local history. (Teacher, Year Two)

Use of active and investigatory methodologies

At the end of both Year One and Year Two teachers were asked to list the methodologies that they had used over that two-year period. The grid below lists the variety of methodologies and approaches employed. However while the first two years were important, it was in Year Three that many of the partnerships engaged in joint or shared work, employing a diverse range of methodologies. The final exhibition in Year Four was a fine display of the range of methodologies employed over the period of the project.

Methodologies	2003	2004
Trails	13	10
Use of maps	14	15
Use of photographs	16	15
Use of documents	10	8
Use of ICT	16	15
Site visits	16	15
Oral evidence	14	14
Story	11	13
Use of drama	3	4
Interviews	6	10
Surveys/questionnaires	6	6
Habitat studies	7	7
Audio and video recording	2	2
Poetry/song	2	2
Visit by specialist	1	2
Compilation of scrapbook	2	
Construction	1	1
Mind-maps		2



Site visits, the use of ICT and the use of maps and photographs were the most effective methodologies used in this project and many of the schools constructed short trails for use on site visits. These trails were very beneficial for group and co-operative work and proved a rich environment for enhancing mutual understanding as children engaged openly in talk, discussion and learning together in a 'fun' and enjoyable experience. Local knowledge in visual, oral and documentary form was also very important and many schools invited local historians and craftspeople into the school.



I believe I put in an extra effort to research the topic, find resources and produce better quality information sheets. Pupils were given more time than usual to investigate the topic. I took more time to talk with them and prompt their learning resources.
(Teacher, Year Two)

The constructivist approach to learning was very enjoyable. I benefited from seeing the value of learning outside the classroom and different ways of learning (e.g. multimedia).
(Teacher, Year Two)

The teachers saw lots of possibilities for integrating the project throughout the curricular areas and commented that many of these areas were developed further over the three years. Many of the themes or topics were displayed for the visit of the partner school and pupils also gave presentations on the exchange visit days.

Teachers' personal development

Teachers benefited on a personal level by the new links and social interactions with partner schools.



It was great to meet and discuss with other teachers – the cross-border element of the project was a good one. (Teacher, Year One).

Teachers also spoke about the bonds which had been established between the linked schools:

I now feel there's a genuine bond between the partner schools. (Teacher, Year One).

The project also provided opportunities for the teachers to involve other staff within their own schools. There was a sense of great satisfaction, too, that the project had been brought to a successful completion. Some teachers referred to the building of their own self-esteem as a result of working on the project. Motivating and affirming the teachers in their work was a central role for the project advisory personnel.

I felt I was doing something worthwhile which boosts self-esteem (even for teachers!). (Teacher, Year Two)

Key words which emerged from the data generated over the three and a half years of the project, were 'welcome', 'support', 'friendships', 'bonds', 'rapport', 'involvement', and 'contacts'. Teachers also spoke about how this project provided an opportunity for community involvement.

It got me out of the classroom and I met new people (and children) and I also learned about water treatment! It also made me realize that time can be made for projects. (Teacher, Year One)

I have enjoyed this and it was a way of introducing myself to our place and getting to know about the local area and people and history. (Teacher, Year One)

I feel we have developed a better rapport with pupils. (Teacher, Year One)

Children are the same everywhere. We were welcomed with open arms. Great contribution by leaders of the project. Support from parents and governors has increased. (Teacher, Year One)

Summary

There are key areas which are particularly important for teachers in the development of a project such as 'Pride of our Place':

- Planning and preparation on the part of each school are essential requisites for the success of exchange visits.
- Pupil leadership and ownership of the project is critical.
- The model of professional development and training should link in with the learning areas of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding and The World Around Us in the Northern Ireland Curriculum, and the Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum and the Social, Environmental and Scientific Education curriculum in the Republic of Ireland, as well as human rights based courses.
- Particular attention should be paid to the facilitation of teachers' professional development in areas such as group work, co-operative play and other related areas.
- The residential workshops for participating teachers proved to be very beneficial for the building of relationships.



- Whole school involvement is particularly important especially if a teacher falls ill or leaves the school continuity is maintained.
- Finding ways of involving the community should be explored and addressed in initial training.
- A model for the involvement of parents needs to be addressed in the initial training workshops.
- Access to an active steering committee is necessary at all times during the life of the project.
- Also important is the briefing of the school community by the steering committee, particularly the governing bodies and the parent body
- Leadership of the principal is critical to the success of the project. It is not sufficient to just attend training days – rather, a finger on the pulse of the project in each school needs to be maintained throughout the life of the project. Accepting an invitation to participate in a project of this nature brings with it certain responsibilities, which must be honored.
- Attention needs to be paid to group work within the school, and the principles underpinning co-operation and collaboration. This aspect is absolutely essential for projects such as 'Pride of our Place' to fulfill their objectives effectively.
- Financial support is critical for the whole period of the project.
- Effective and on-going communication between partner schools is central to the success of the project
- Time to plan, time to meet, time to play together and time to eat together are vital aspects of this whole process.

Key message

Respectful relationships, at all levels, were integral to the success of the project.

³⁰ See Appendix B



CHAPTER 6

IMPACT ON THE PUPIL

I learned that you have to look deeper than the person's accent or where they are from. If you really want to know them you have to look in their heart. (Pupil)

We have learned everyone is as important as you. (Pupil)

A huge part of the work was that the children used a variety of ways to make new friendships. (Teacher, Year Three)

I liked meeting new people and finding out what their lives are like compared to ours. (Pupil)

This chapter will look at the following aspects of the project from the point of view of its impact on the pupil:

- **Motivating aspects for the pupils**
- **Aspects about the project which disappointed the pupils**
- **Improvement in the quality of the pupils' learning experiences**
- **Provision of opportunities for skills development for the pupils**
- **Other areas that were enhanced by project participation**

All the teachers said that their pupils really enjoyed participating in this project and mixed together so easily that it was quite obvious that they were enjoying themselves. The practical nature of the project was very appealing to them, and overall it was a very positive learning experience. The pupils felt special as they were representing their school in the project and they really enjoyed visiting the partner school and meeting other children.

They look forward to letters and photographs, and the visit itself builds excitement even more. (Teacher, Year Two)

The children really enjoyed meeting their pen pals. They enjoyed their visits to our partner school and found their earlier apprehensions, fears and negative attitudes to be unfounded. (Teacher, Year Two)

However the time for meeting, completing trails or site work, and having time for games or eating together was often at a minimum, and children were disappointed that the visits were so short. For future work in this area it is important that schools factor the distance element into the planning of the visit to the partner school. When children plan and prepare for such a visit, it is important that they have the time and opportunity to fulfill all the planned elements, e.g. meeting and greeting; trail/site work; other planned educational activities; eating lunch together; playing games; and saying goodbye at the close of the day. Much work goes into the planning of this day, so travel time to the host school needs to be carefully planned so as to ensure maximum benefits for all involved.

The children thoroughly enjoyed themselves but were just starting to renew their relationships when they had to go home. (Teacher, Year Two)

The pupils had their own views on the time constraints:



They only wrote once and I wish I could have got more contact with them.

We didn't really get to spend time talking to the school face-to-face about the project.

I was dismayed when we didn't have enough time to play outside.

The thing that disappointed me about the project was that we only did things with them three times. I would have liked to meet another few times.

I was disappointed that we didn't get more time to play and talk to them.

Motivating aspects for the pupils

The teachers noted that the aspects which appealed most to the children were:

- Meeting new friends, visiting and communicating with the other schools and planning for the visits;
- Showing off their own school and its environs; preparing the trails and games for the visit;
- The games and fun element of the day and the opportunity to eat together;
- Researching and presenting their work, using the digital camera, doing power-point presentations, making video and audio tapes, and the practical nature of the work;
- Involvement of the wider community;
- Getting the project completed.

What the teachers said

Meeting their pen pals – they were very excited about this aspect of the project. (Teacher, Year Two)

The fun element of any project will always be more appealing to children than the educational aspects!

- a) Planning and choosing topic for research*
- b) Communicating with partners, especially via 'snail mail'*
- c) Participating in joint essay project*
- d) Bus trips to historical areas*
- e) Meeting partners*
- f) Compiling video diary. (Teacher, Year Two)*

They loved to see the garden change. They brought their own art work and pieces to decorate it. (Teacher, Year Two)

E-mailing the other children before meeting; visiting their friends' school and hosting the return visit; the visit of a past pupil of the old school telling them about school life in the past. (Teacher, Year One)

Having a choice and a say in what they did. Realizing that their own families were part of local history. (Teacher, Year Two)

Allowing the children to come up with a plan, letting them develop it and letting them take responsibility for various aspects of it. Ensuring their involvement in all stages of the project. (Teacher, Year Two)



Feeling ownership of the garden was a great motivation. Sharing it with others was great fun. (Teacher, Year Two)

Sharing their place with other children. (Teacher, Year One)

The fact that they were representing their school and that they wanted to show their partner school where they lived and their pride in it. (Teacher, Year One)

What the pupils said

My favourite moment and probably the most exciting moment was when they first arrived.

Meeting them...I mostly liked meeting them. I didn't know what my pen friends looked like, so it was a nice surprise meeting them. I loved their accents.

The best moment in the whole project for me was when we went swimming in Newry with our partner school.

Dinner, because you could just sit down and talk with your friend.

I liked seeing what they played and what work they did.

Most insightful were the comments by the pupils on the learning opportunities:

Instead of hearing about it [the project], we saw it! It was hard though because we had to go up and introduce ourselves to complete strangers. It was great fun and I would love to do it again.

I think it was a good idea because we learn about different people with different cultures.

I learned that other places are different in ways and similar in ways to ours.





Disappointing aspects

There were few aspects which disappointed the children except where they did not get enough time to talk or play or eat together. The group work approach is valuable as it facilitates more than just one-to-one meetings, and thus pupils are not anxious about having to take full responsibility for initiating a conversation. It is essential that the social skills are taught through working in pairs and in groups and that children are afforded opportunities to practice (e.g. through role-plays) meeting and greeting new friends, asking questions, initiating, maintaining and sustaining conversations. This should be an integral part of all curriculum work: children develop an understanding of what the responsibilities are when engaged in activities and projects of this nature.

These are valuable life skills which enhance self-esteem and boost confidence. In the words of one pupil at the end of Year One:

I think they should make it more interactive, because when I went up to our partner school I did not sit with people [from that school]. I sat with my friends. I did not know anything about them, so I did not make friends. Also we sent profiles with pictures and our names but no one knew who I was.

We can learn from the above comment for future project work. For all children, there is an expectation that a project such as 'Pride of our Place' will provide an opportunity for them to meet and interact with others. Within the project structure every effort must be made to facilitate this expectation. Getting feedback from the children after the events is essential so that lessons can be learnt and built upon for the following year. One of the strengths of 'Pride of our Place' was that the project ran for three and a half years and afforded schools the opportunity to learn from each year and review and plan for the following year. Here are some more pupils' views:

I enjoyed the visit to the other school because I think the people felt more comfortable in their own school and they talked to you more.

Really excited, but I was a bit worried about them in case they didn't talk.

Last year it was a bit scary going into other schools but this year it's different –easier this year we knew each other's names.

I felt very excited to know that we could show off our school and chapel but a part of me felt very worried that it would rain. It was also a lot of responsibility on me.

I felt there was a lot of pressure on my shoulders. However I also felt very excited.

Enhancement of children's learning experiences

All the teachers stated that the quality of the children's learning experiences had benefited as a result of participation in the project. In the final self-reflection questionnaire, completed by teachers at the end of the project, nine of the thirteen teachers who responded to the survey rated the improvement in the quality of the pupils' learning experiences as to 'very significant extent', with the remaining four rating this aspect to a 'significant extent'. Some of these areas of experience were:



- **Respecting difference**
- **Taking responsibility**
- **Active learning through studying the local environment**

Firstly, they have developed an extraordinary interest in history – national and international; secondly, they have developed a great pride in their locality. (Teacher, Year Two)

The children took a greater interest in their environment and local history. (Teacher, Year Two)

The local study was a wonderful experience. The area chosen is a short street, steeped in history. The work was very practical so it suited the whole class. Bringing history alive made the course in class more relevant – the street we studied spans many centuries. Geography was also covered. It was on an historical walk of Dundalk after the project was over that the real benefit emerged. The class displayed knowledge of the area that was amazing and were open to new information in a very positive way. (Teacher, Year Two)

Children today learn far too much from textbooks. For us there were no textbooks as such – the children had to go out, observe, record, research, appreciate, do, make, communicate. The project provided the context – this made it all more meaningful. (Teacher, Year One)

I had prepared my project on 'River Studies' really well and the pupils got more out of it. The field trip was invaluable and must now be an essential part of future river studies. (Teacher, Year One)

Other quality experiences noted by the teachers were:

- Visiting another school, learning about another school, and making new friends.

I felt they were more confident this year because they were not the first group from the school to be involved. (Teacher, Year Two)

New ideas and situations were put before the children. The core issue of the project, interaction with the partner school, brought new experiences of meeting and working with strangers. The strangers were only such for a few minutes. (Teacher, Year One)

As the second group doing the project they weren't ground breakers, they were well treated by the first group. (Teacher, Year Two)

- Communication skills, e.g. interacting with children from the partner school; presenting 'Our Place'; sharing their experiences and having the confidence to do so.

A willingness to plan for themselves – the drama work was entirely written by themselves. (Teacher, Year Two)

I tried to make the focus much more pupil-oriented. They had ownership





and made suggestions about format. They had more choice and say. They were continuously enthusiastic and keen to link with the other school. (Teacher, Year Two)

Active involvement means better learning experiences. (Teacher, Year Two)

I feel they improved in decision-making. Having to share experiences with new adults and children was a great confidence booster. They wanted their work to be of good quality. (Teacher, Year Two)



- Sense of their own place, knowledge of their own area

They produced their own newspaper—a week in the life of their area complete with sports reviews, a problem page, music charts and wildlife. (Teacher, Year Two)

- Social skills, presentation skills, group work and practical skills
They used a multimedia approach to obtaining the information required – books, Internet, guest speakers, seashore visits and so on. (Teacher, Year Two)

Their presentation of the project involved the careful preparation and delivery of speeches on the seashore theme. (Teacher, Year Two)

On many levels they had to develop their social skills: meeting new friends and asking questions. Most of all they learned that they could rightly be proud of their own place. (Teacher, Year One)

Children were engaged in a variety of learning techniques, e.g. written evidence in roll books, oral evidence, map evidence – this strengthened the whole learning process. This can only benefit their attitude towards learning in the future years. (Teacher, Year One)

They became more independent researchers. They enjoyed being involved in the decision-making and organization. (Teacher, Year One)

Provision of opportunities for skills development

In the survey of teachers midway through the project, the following skills were listed and teachers were asked to comment on how these were developed throughout the life of the project. The skills development areas were:

- Interpersonal
- Decision-making
- Co-operation



- Making choices
- Communication
- Presentation

Interpersonal

Some of the areas noted under the heading of skills development by the teachers in the interpersonal area were:

- Making new friends
- Talking together
- Meeting children for the first time
- Mixing with new friends in a different setting than normal
- Being responsible for making children feel welcome
- Group work
- Responsibility for others
- Discussing and planning together
- Communication via e-mail and letter writing
- Social interaction
- Initiating and sustaining conversations
- Developing personal relationships

Many of the areas highlighted by the teachers are curriculum objectives and the project provided the context for these skills to be developed in a meaningful and relevant way. Many teachers commented on how this aspect of the project proved beneficial in that curriculum requirements could be fulfilled through the project without adding to the class timetable. Many examples of cross-curricular work undertaken are highlighted throughout this report, e.g. the visual arts project on Cúchulainn, the garden projects, the seashore studies, the writing project on Fionn Mc Cumhaill, the local studies projects.



What the teachers said

Links with other school involved, group work on drama, interviews with their families and talks with the local historian. (Teacher, Year Two)

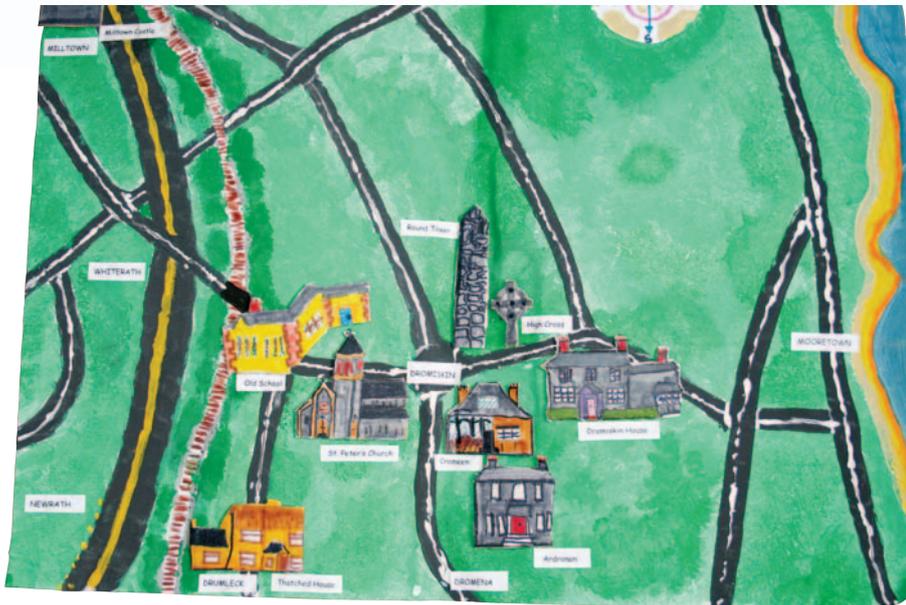
Chatting and making friends during the two visits; working together to complete set activities; playing interactive collaborative games. (Teacher, Year Two)

Children worked in groups and had to agree on procedures. (Teacher, Year Two)

They had to make an effort to mingle and get to know children they would not normally meet. (Teacher, Year Two)

What the pupils said

That you can make friends easily with people you don't know.



I have learned that they do things differently but they are really the same as us.

That people from the North and South are no different.

There were a lot of differences between each school, like getting dinner in school and doing a lot more tests than we do.

Their names, ages, different interests and different accents...their different school ways and rules.

I learned how other people were taught, lived and enjoyed themselves.

[I learned that] lots of our grandfathers worked on railways.

Don't underestimate people you've never met!

Decision-making

In this area teachers found that the following areas were enhanced:

- What to include in the project
- What questions to ask
- What information to include or exclude from the project
- What form of presentation to make for the visiting school
- What activities to undertake on the day
- What entertainment to provide on the day
- What lunch menu to provide on the day
- What games to play
- What to write about to the pupils in the partner school

They decided what to include in project resources and activities. (Teacher, Year Two)

Working together and making decisions together gives responsibility. (Teacher, Year Two)



They decided on what aspects of Cúchulainn to develop, to build a ring fort, and the materials to use. (Teacher, Year Two)

In Ballymoyer the pupils had to decide where best to look for mini-beasts and how to assemble bird boxes. They had to decide what to include in their essays about a railway journey. (Teacher, Year One)

Co-operation

Teachers found that the following skills were enhanced in the development area of co-operation:

- Working in groups within their own class and with their partner school
- Making choices together
- Collecting samples of flora/fauna
- Doing the trail together
- Playing games together
- Working on specific tasks with each group's co-operation
- Having fun together
- Sharing information together
- Offering advice to each other and to teachers, and accepting advice
- Sharing equipment





Working in groups and greeting new friends is necessary for a successful project. (Teacher, Year Two)

They worked on the class newspaper, in research groups, on presentation speeches and on presenting the project. (Teacher, Year Two)

They had to co-operate to actually complete the project as well as co-operating with their partner school. (Teacher, Year Two)

Co-operation in the practical elements of work was required as was a new level of co-operation in behaviour outside the classroom. (Teacher, Year One)

Making choices

Working on the project facilitated skills development in the area of making choices, such as:

- Choosing what to do during the project and when to move on to a new activity
- Choosing ways of presenting information
- Choosing what aspects of the school grounds they would show their partner school on the trail
- Choosing the scripts for power-point presentation
- Choosing ways to greet/entertain visiting school, how to behave

They chose the line of study – this was helpful as I was an outsider and couldn't dictate the line of study as I didn't know the area. (Teacher, Year Two)

They choose between suggestions for activities made by themselves and did it very democratically. (Teacher, Year Two)

The project once again was very successful because of pupil involvement throughout – choosing themes; planning activities, choosing food for the break (in the supermarket!); writing scripts for power-point presentations; communicating with pupils from the partner school by letter before and after visits and liaising with pupils from the partner school during the visit; planning drama and allocating the parts for pupils from the partner school – all demonstrating 'pride in our place'. (Teacher, Year Three)

Communication

This was one of the key areas of skills development in the 'Pride of our Place' project and teachers highlighted the following areas as examples of communication:

- Talking to new friends
- How to use questions
- Using multi-media to research and communicate ideas e.g. video, audio, letters, digital photography, e-mails before visits, conferencing
- Group communication
- Communication with teachers
- Oral communication through work and play

Types of communication in this project included peer communication; peer to adult communication; on-line communication; power point presentations and Publisher handouts. (Teacher, Year Two)



*Letters to each other and pupil profiles; wall displays on the work covered.
(Teacher, Year Two)*

Playing games and chatting to assigned pen pals during visits; participating in assignments and activities with partners. (Teacher, Year Two)

Communicating via e-mail and snail mail with partner school. (Teacher, Year Two)

You get to meet other schools and you get to meet more people than you would meet before; learn about their school, classes, subjects; history you might do differently; having fun, doing something different. We sent letters, the last time we sent videos. Yes, we are really proud of our places. (Teacher, Year Three)

Presentation

An integral part of the host school's reception of the partner school was the presentation of findings on the local area to the visitors. As the project progressed the development in this area was very apparent, and the use of ICT as a means of presentation and display was very evident. Pride taken in the preparation of the presentations was very apparent. Some of the elements in this area were:

- Preparing for and presenting their school and community to other children and to the visiting adults
- Wall displays
- Variety of presentations from oral to visual to written
- Skills development in written presentations and in grouping and categorizing information
- Power point presentations

Some schools displayed their work in the local community centre and museums and many of the presentations were on view for all the parents of the school.





Children had to think about their method of presentation to make it interesting and aesthetic to others. (Teacher, Year Two)

The project was on display for two weeks so their presentation was very important. (Teacher, Year Two)

Great experience gained in presentation of information, knowledge and expertise to a very varied audience: parents, school classes, our partner school, ESB environmental award judges, 'Pride of our Place' co-ordinators and organizers. (Teacher, Year Two)

They became proud of their project and so wanted it presented in the best possible way. They had to learn to summarise and speak in public. (Teacher, Year Two)

Presentation of work in stories, poems, and art and crafts in the exhibition. (Teacher, Year Two)

They took responsibility for their own learning which, in turn, gave them a sense of ownership and pride. They were very proud of their presentation and enjoyed showing their pen friends everything they had found out. I believe this interaction between children to be very important and feel it benefits both schools. (Teacher, Year Three)

Other areas that were enhanced

Teachers observed that the project gave the children more time to observe, investigate and question in the preparation of their work, and offered lots of opportunities for talking, planning, writing and drawing activities. New links were created with schools and support staff from the Southern Education and Library Board in Northern Ireland and the Department of Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland. The project developed a real sense of pride in the local areas where the schools were situated – many of them relatively isolated rural areas.

It broke down pre-conceived fears and notions about travelling North, and about Northern children and people. (Teacher, Year Two)

[There was] collaboration and co-operation in undertaking the presentation of a large project to a variety of audiences. (Teacher, Year Two)

The project generated goodwill and co-operation between pupils, staff, parents and local community. (Teacher, Year One)

A great all-round learning and social experience. (Teacher, Year One)

Children saw the value of planning ahead and gained great satisfaction in seeing their plans in action and giving enjoyment to others. (Teacher, Year One)

In summary, the opportunities for pupils to develop key social skills were most evident in the work of this project. Immense gains were made where pupils were afforded the opportunities to direct their own learning and to employ key skills. The pupil's voice was illuminating and insightful and provided clear direction on what is beneficial, constructive and productive to pupils in the teaching and learning contexts. In future projects such as 'Pride of our Place', particular attention should be paid to:



- Working together and the principles involved in co-operating and teamwork.
- The social process of learning must be emphasised, as this element has shone through in the life of this project and has been a key factor in its success.
- Skills development takes on a whole new meaning when it is developed in the company of others.
- Many of the skills used in 'Pride of our Place' are key life skills, e.g. communication, co-operation, making choices.
- Pupils highlighted again and again interpersonal skills as being most important, e.g. meeting and greeting, making new friends, initiating and sustaining conversations, building relationships.
- Pupils must be given real and meaningful opportunities to practice these skills, and projects such as 'Pride of our Place' are ideal structures for this to happen.
- The context of this project also provided an ideal base for the building of confidence and the enhancement of self-esteem for the pupils involved.

Finally, presenting their place to others was a proud moment in pupils' lives and they realised what their community meant to them. It also provided them and others (parents, governors, the local community) with an opportunity to look at what was similar and different about their community in comparison to other communities. In this way pride of place and a sharing of that pride was truly evident in the participating school communities.



CHAPTER 7

IMPACT ON THE COMMUNITY

I think it is a very important project – apart from the children interacting, they are learning about different traditions. It is putting an end to the myth that we're different – we just have different traditions.

(Parent, Year Two)

I think 'Pride of our Place' was a very worthwhile project. It gives an opportunity to meet with other children of the same age but from different areas and with different outlooks and to get to know one another. Before the children introduce the other school to their area they have to find out about where they live and the traditions and customs and folklore of their own place. This gives them a better understanding of where they live and they can identify more with their local area. The children enjoyed this project and gained a lot as well as having fun.

(Parent, Year One)

It's very satisfying to see locals being excited by such a project.

(Teacher, Year Two)

In some of the schools the sense of community involvement was very evident, with many of the parents helping out on visit days and taking an active part in many aspects of the project work in the school. In Year Two one of the Northern schools devoted the exchange visit day to whole community involvement and invited the community into the school. It was indeed an enriching experience to meet with parents and grandparents on that day and share stories of their area in times past. The grandparents talked about the changes they had seen over the years e.g. changes in farming, local history, school in the past and games that they played.

The parents committee provided sandwiches and drinks. One parent was especially helpful as she is a florist by profession. She helped out with flowerbeds, bought suitable climbers for the shed wall and gave sound advice. Another parent loaned a wheelbarrow. Others helped out on the day of the partner visit with tea and sandwiches. (Teacher, Year Two)

However, as one principal commented, it is difficult to involve the wider community given the fact that visits take place during the school day when most parents are working.

With the majority of both parents working these days, involving a wider community was difficult. (Teacher, Year Two)

We just did not get time to involve them fully. (Teacher, Year One)





The parents weren't involved. But in future I would get them involved, e.g. by talking to the children about aspects of life around their area. (Teacher, Year One)

It is a challenge for future projects like this to find a model whereby parents are facilitated in getting involved. In the final year self-reflection questionnaire, teachers (from the thirteen respondents) found that the project had involved the parents in a real and meaningful way to a 'very significant extent' (two), to a 'significant extent' (five), to a 'moderate extent' (two) and to 'some slight extent' (four). Many of the participating schools in 'Pride of our Place' held exhibitions of the work undertaken and also produced newsletters to keep the parents informed of the various events. One partnership held a music night for the parents of both schools in the Armagh City Hotel in November 2004, which was a most enjoyable night and was attended by large group of parents from both sides of the border. It brought the two school communities together: parents, governors, teachers and children. Two months earlier the pupils had met with a music facilitator, who facilitated the music for the two groups and organised a joint rehearsal. The schools concentrated on looking for the similarities through music and it was a most successful venture. This partnership established and built strong links right from the start and this was most evident throughout the life of the project. The relationships between the two schools went from strength to strength.

There were other examples of community involvement over the three and a half year period: for example, the creation of a school garden; the gathering of artefacts from the community for a school display on the day of the exchange visit; and the interviewing of people from the community for a local studies project.

Parents helped with clearing and planting the garden. They were delighted with the garden and came to meet the children and teachers from Dungannon. (Teacher, Year Two)

Parents helped out on the school visit, with tea and sandwiches. Others had more defined roles, organizing projects on the day of the visit, e.g. flower arranging and craft work. (Teacher, Year Two)

The level of involvement of parents varied, but all schools noted that parents were supportive of the project in different ways. They helped out in the making of bird boxes, providing refreshments and transport, helped with local research of the topic and with the preparation of the project and the exchange visit. Teachers stated that parents felt this project was a very good, worthwhile experience and very positive.

Parents were supportive and enthusiastic – they came along on our seashore visit (in numbers) and also enjoyed the children's presentation of our seashore project. They were supportive of the 'Pride of our Place' North-South ideals! (Teacher, Year Two)

A valuable exercise that will last them for a lifetime and hopefully will instil some pride and interest in their community which they can pass on to the next generation. (Parent, Year Three)

Parents also commented on the project in terms of the benefits it brought to children's skills development, self-esteem and teamwork.

This project helped greatly in developing self-esteem and was greatly enjoyed. (Parent, Year Three)



I think he benefited greatly from this. He worked on his project as part of a team. Also he has more local knowledge which he shared with us at home and as we are not natives of this area we learnt more also. (Parent, Year Three)

I think the project was beneficial for all involved. It enabled interaction between children from different backgrounds, which is essential to the development of social skills. It also enabled a comparison between a rural and urban school and enabled the children to mix outside their own community. (Parent, Year One)

I am pleased that he was given the opportunity to be involved in 'Pride of our Place' project. I would encourage him to be understanding of others and proud of his community. This project seems to have successfully shown him that other children, although educated in a different place, are still very similar in most ways to himself and to his class. (Parent, Year Three)

I think 'Pride of our Place' is a very worthwhile project. Our school, being a country school, was involved with a town school. This made the children aware of the differences in country life and town life. It made each respect the other's way of life. Over the past three years my child was involved in this project and she really enjoyed it. She took part in lots of activities and enjoyed the visits to the partner school. She met lots of new people and discovered what their lifestyles were. I feel it gave the children a chance to be aware of and develop a pride in their own environment. (Parent, Year Three)

The involvement of former pupils in giving interviews and providing old photos was also cited as important, as was the involvement of other people who worked in the community. Those who were involved found it interesting, informative and very enjoyable. The level of community involvement varied, but in general increased as the project developed. Some of the people involved were local historians, local business people, local newspaper reporters, local storytellers and musicians, local sports club personnel, retired teachers, extended family members, neighbours and friends.

Great value for the whole school, getting experience of different attitudes and different life experiences, and two different education systems – seeing how things work in different jurisdictions. (Chairperson, Board of Governors)

Involvement of the whole staff

In the smaller, rural schools whole school involvement was very much an integral part of the project, although this element was harder to achieve in the larger schools.

All the staff were involved, everyone had ownership of the project. (Teacher)

In our school (a large urban school) it is very difficult to get all the staff involved. (Principal, Year Two)

However, as the project progressed this aspect grew even in the larger schools. In one such school a staff member with skills in film animation facilitated the pupils to create a short animation of the death of Cúchulainn.

All the teachers got involved in the drama 'The Secret Garden'. The local involvement was huge this year, with newspapers, the museum, visitors, outreach groups, a local artist and even politicians. (Teacher, Year Two)



Such whole school involvement is crucial to the long-term benefits to be gained from a project like this one. International research shows that this is true of any project undertaken in a school. When all the staff are involved in a project, from the ancillary staff to the teaching staff, then the gains are immense. In fact, in future projects of this kind the whole staff should be briefed at the outset and their involvement should form part of the contract. Many of the schools in this project were small rural schools and whole school involvement was an integral part of what they did, with obvious benefits.

In future project work of this kind it would be highly recommended that a member of the steering committee would visit all schools and meet with all the staff, representatives from the parents group, and the Board of Management/Board of Governors to outline what is involved in a project of this nature. A representative from the Board of Governors/Board of Management or the parent body of the participating schools should also attend the initial training workshop. The commitment of the principal is the driving force behind any such project in the school, and if he or she is not committed and wholehearted, then the project will not succeed. The principal is also the key to linking in with the community and involving them in a real and meaningful way in projects such as 'Pride of our Place'.

In a letter to the Steering Committee at the conclusion of the project, one principal wrote:

It has been a thoroughly worthwhile and enjoyable experience and a multi-dimensional success. The project has touched children, teachers, and parents and indeed reached into the broader community to forge memories and bonds, which hopefully will last for a long time. Firstly, and perhaps most importantly, our students have benefited enormously from the experience. Their input into the project has involved a whole range of skills and cross-curricular activities...The unfolding of the project saw children collaborate together and work as part of a team in making decisions and problem-solving.

It involved them thinking creatively and developed skills in gathering, harnessing and processing facts and information. It has also inculcated an awareness and appreciation of their cultural and historical heritage, which they can, hopefully, pass on to future generations...They have also been exposed to different cultures and traditions, which has very positive implications in the development of their knowledge and understanding of cultural differences.

Teachers, too, benefited from their involvement in Pride of our Place. It has allowed them employ fresh and innovative approaches... They have also met and interacted positively with fellow professionals from across the border. Exposure to differing systems of education can but augment the professional development of teachers involved. The feedback from parents has been extremely positive... A consistent refrain is that they, through their direct involvement, have learned more about their parish and heritage – to hear such comments is heartening indeed...The interviews conducted by the pupils established a very positive interaction with the broader community...In addition we now have an exhibition in the school covering many of our heritage sites and places of interest...As Principal I have been proud of our school's involvement in the Pride of our Place cross-border project. It has been truly educational and beneficial to all involved.

In summary, the involvement of parents and the wider community is essential to the success of projects such as 'Pride of our Place'. Involving parents from the initial phase is very important, as well as keeping parents briefed on the development of the project. Participation by the wider community brings great benefits for all involved.



CHAPTER 8

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The main sections of this report were designed to afford the participants in 'Pride of our Place' the space to voice their views and experiences on the project over its three and a half years duration. It is through the voices of the children, the teachers and members of the school communities involved in the project that the effects of this co-operative and collaborative project are clearly articulated.

It is especially important that the children themselves have contributed to this report. It is a key objective of Phase 2 of 'Pride of our Place' that this project would be, as far as possible, pupil-led and enquiry based. This key objective became more and more central to the whole life of the project as it developed. It is also worth noting that the three and a half year life span of this project, in contrast to the six-month life span of Phase 1, ensured that parent and community involvement became an important element and was developed in most of the school communities. The project was a clear success and the learning from it was immense. Furthermore out of 'Pride of our Place' clear guidelines are emerging in relation to cross-border projects in primary education, and in relation to teaching and learning contexts in general.

OUTCOMES

A new model

The project succeeded in promoting and establishing strong cross-border links between schools, pupils and teachers, and the schools fulfilled their commitments from the start of the project to its closure. Networks and partnerships were created between twelve primary schools (with approximately five hundred pupils aged 9-12 participating over the three and a half year period) in the border regions of the two jurisdictions.

Many of the schools involved have committed themselves to maintaining these links, irrespective of inclusion in other projects of this nature. Indeed, one school partnership has already initiated links for collaborative work in the current year. It is a clear indication of the project's success that at its conclusion many schools will maintain their links.

Sound working relationships have been established between the advisory personnel in both jurisdictions and also with the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh. The project provided an ideal context for children to explore the themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage awareness in a cross-border context. This exploration of EMU and Cultural Heritage is best illustrated in the model described below

As a result of the work on this project, a **new model has emerged**, which may be useful in future project work of this nature (in cross-border, cross-community and all other inter-school partnerships), which has at its centre the following key elements for building relationships:

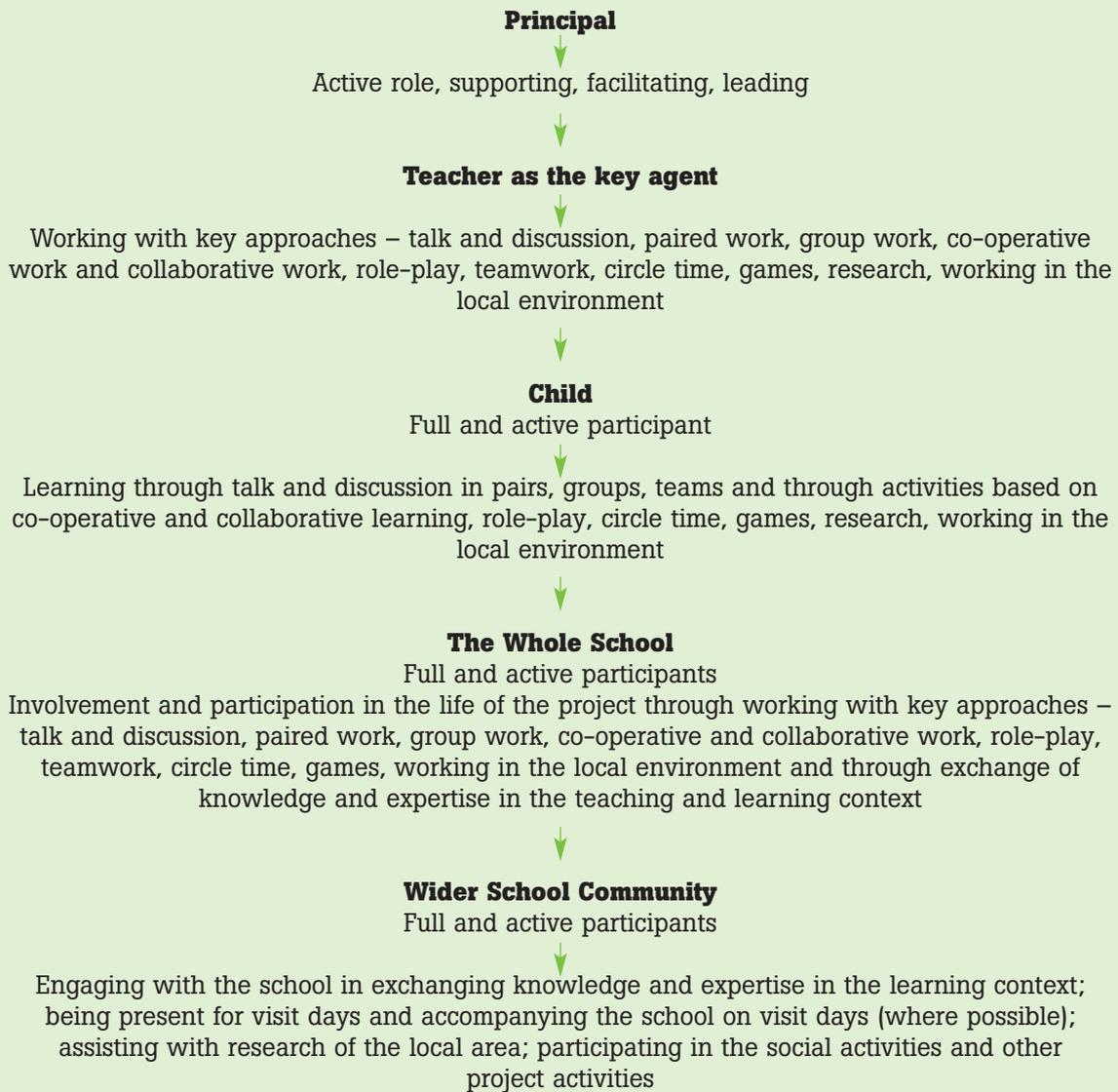
- ✓ Contact
- ✓ Communication
- ✓ Consensus – a shared vision and understanding
- ✓ Commitment



- ✓ Co-operation
- ✓ Challenge
- ✓ Contribution
- ✓ Connections
- ✓ Confidence
- ✓ Continuity

A New Model

The key elements named above need to be present at each of the levels listed below. Where these elements are an integral part of a project structure then success is probable.





As a result of the rich information obtained from teacher and pupils in written and oral formats, observation visits and training workshops, it is possible to determine five global, over-arching factors which contribute to constructive policies and practices regarding cross-border exchanges between schools at primary level. These factors are **vision, leadership, role of the teacher, pupil-centred practice and the school in the wider school community.**

Vision

It is evident from this research that the schools involved in 'Pride of our Place' were committed to the objectives of the project and many of the schools had a clear vision for their work. Each participating school had its own ethos, identity and style of approach to the project. The responsiveness of the pupils, teachers and school communities was a direct result of the quality of the partnerships established by the schools. Schools were keen throughout the project to build on and develop the project to the best of their ability and the progression throughout the project was most evident. While all schools demonstrated commitment and enthusiasm to all the project objectives, the twelve participating schools displayed a variable profile across the range of effective project practice indicators. Some schools were more highly developed than others in some of the dimensions: e.g. pupil-led and enquiry-based project work, community involvement, leadership of the principal, relationship building, use of ICT, team approaches.

Leadership

The role of the principal is critical to the success or otherwise of any project. The commitment and enthusiasm of the principal and his or her support and guidance for the participating teachers was inextricably linked to the quality of the teacher and pupil engagement in the project. The attendance of the principal at the training workshops was crucial as was the support of the principal in all the other aspects of the project. Of most importance was the role of the principal in hosting school visits and in leading the modelling of the key skills for all involved.

In 'Pride of our Place' all the principals, with the exception of three, were teaching principals. Taking on a project of this nature was a great undertaking, which displayed the commitment and interest of the teaching principals involved. This was not a project of passive involvement – every word, action and gesture by its leaders was significant in a project of this nature. Pupils' attitudes and behaviour are most affected by the attitude of the significant adults in their lives, and no more so than by the principal and staff of their own school. There were some fine examples of this modelling in action throughout the life of the project. Where a principal did not engage fully with the project the relationship with the partner school was affected and the impact of participation was less evident.

Principals expressed openly and supportively their commitment and obvious pride in their school through their involvement in this project. They clearly felt that it was an honour to be asked to participate in a project of this nature and that they were making a significant contribution to the whole peace process. Principals also felt that this project provided an opportunity for all pupils to engage in activities which were non-academic and involved key social skills and other dimensions of school life. Many teachers and parents referred to the leadership of the principal as being crucial to the ongoing participation and progression of the project. Support from the principal in terms of advice and time to engage in project activities was very important.

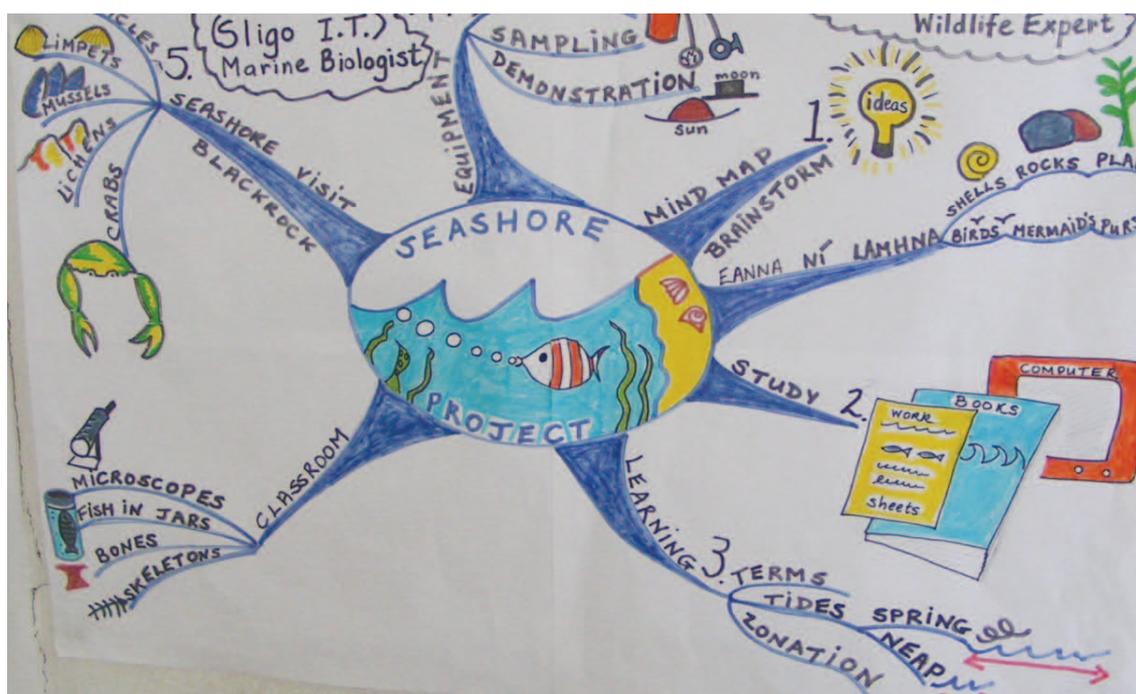


Role of the Teacher

The role of the class teacher was central and crucial to the success of the partnerships between schools. It was the relationship between the two participating class teachers in the linked schools which held the key to the project's success. Motivation of pupils and preparation for visits ultimately was the teacher's responsibility. Key aspects such as communication, commitment, co-operation and contribution depended on the enthusiasm and dedication of the teachers to the objectives of the project.

Teachers used a wide and diverse range of methodologies and approaches in the project work, and as the project developed it became increasingly evident that teachers were embracing new ideas and challenges in a most positive and constructive manner. Using a wide and diverse range of active and investigatory approaches and methodologies with the pupils, teachers built progressively on learning opportunities which presented themselves throughout the life of the project. The importance of the role of the teacher in a project of this nature cannot be underestimated. Richardson noted in his 2002 article 'Schools as Bridges: Education for Living with Diversity' that in cross-community schools work 'central to the potential for future development is the teacher'.³¹

Opportunities for formal and informal contact for the sharing of professional knowledge and expertise between teachers North and South were provided in particular on the two-day residential training workshops in Portadown in January 2003, in Monaghan in January 2004, and in Armagh and Monaghan in January 2005. These training days facilitated review, shared planning, opportunities to explore new approaches and, in particular, the building and strengthening of relationships among the partnerships. The workshops were most productive and beneficial in the exploration of new approaches and methodologies, and teachers were afforded the opportunity to discuss and talk about the practicalities of the various approaches. Such residential programmes (especially in a cross-border context) encourage review and planning and promote positive social and working relationships.





As the project developed over the three and a half year period, the partnerships began to work closely together on themes common to both jurisdictions and all communities, while at the same time appreciating the different cultural and social contexts that made each partner school unique. There were many fine examples of shared themes: the writing project on Fionn Mac Cumhaill with Scoil Phádraig, Kilcurry and Kilbroney Integrated P.S; the art project based on the life of Cúchulainn with Scoil Mhuire, Knockbridge and St. Michael's P.S Clady; the music project with Killyman P.S. and Dún Dealgan N.S; the environmental awareness projects with Derryhale P.S, and Scoil Pheadair, Dromiskin; the local community project with Ballymoyer P.S and Redeemer B.N.S. Dundalk, and the local studies projects with Laghey P.S and Ballinamoney N.S. Best practice emerged in the shared work of many of the studies undertaken e.g. the visual construction of Cúchulainn's life story through a marvellous patchwork tapestry; the music and concert presentation, the Fionn Mac Cumhaill stories, the designing and implementing of environmental trails, fieldwork in the historical environment and the seashore studies.

The impact on teachers' own professional development in visiting another school, broadening their knowledge, deepening their understanding and having access to other educational practices and methodologies, was a very positive and beneficial experience. One of the real strengths in this project was the quality of preparation and the quality of work in the local environment. The amount of learning was directly linked to this quality of preparation. Opportunities to use and develop ICT skills were facilitated and enhanced through the teaching and learning activities but also through the use of ICT for communication. In the initial stages the performance aspect sometimes took over on the exchange visit days, but as the project progressed and schools actively engaged the other school in drama, trails, and other activities, the engagement was much more beneficial and effective. Active methodologies should be the cornerstone of pedagogical practice in a project of this nature. The role of the teacher in a project such as 'Pride of our Place' is absolutely critical to its success.



The school and the wider school community

Defining school ethos is difficult and involves an understanding of all the aspects of what characterises a school and its community, but respectful relationships are at the heart of the ethos of a school. In *Inside the Gates: Schools and the Troubles*, respectful relationships were viewed as being a direct expression of the ethos of a school.

*Respectful relationships at all levels within the school organisation was viewed as being the most direct expression of the ethos of the school. In most instances this was viewed as having direct benefits for the pupils from the outset, in terms of building self-esteem and setting the groundwork for the growth of tolerance, respect and understanding elsewhere.*³²

Many models have been developed in relation to the processes of building self-esteem and mutual respect in relationships through education. In his 2002 article on 'Schools as Bridges' Richardson notes:

*It is widely agreed that affirmation is an essential basis for such processes and that they must also involve the development of skills in communication and co-operation... Perhaps the most important element of such work is its emphasis on emotional development.*³³

Writing as long ago as 1973, Malone talked about the quality of trust and how schools can foster or encourage trust.³⁴ In 'Pride of our Place' trust was an important quality for the success of the various school partnerships and also for the project group in general, as they came to know each other and work with each other throughout the life of the project. This project provided the context for teachers, pupils and wider community to learn about communities across the border in a real and meaningful way. Perceptions were challenged and changed as a result of the cross-border work and very strong bonds were forged in relationships among most of the partnerships. The developmental nature of the project was important as the three and a half year time span highlighted many aspects which would not have been easily identified if this project had run for a shorter period. Where relationships were firmly established from day one, these relationships developed and grew and their quality was sustained and enhanced as time moved on.

The Boards of Governors and Boards of Management of all the schools supported the schools in their work over the three and a half years. Whole school staffs became more involved as the project developed, with some fine examples of whole staff involvement by its conclusion. Wider community involvement, in particular parent and grandparent involvement, also developed as the project progressed. Communities on both sides of the border displayed a real sense of pride in their place through 'Pride of our Place'.

Pupil-centred practice

The pupils' voice was central to the work of this project. The aspects highlighted by the children clearly show that really listening to what the children have to say about teaching and learning is the best guide for any project to make an impact. In 'Pride of our Place' pupils were introduced to the world outside the classroom in a real and meaningful way and the children were also provided with opportunities to share their locality with others. Play was central to the success of pupil relationships, and children expressed an overwhelming desire for more social interaction in each year of the project. Sharing lunch and engaging in playground games with children from the partner school was one of the highlights of the exchange visits.



Opportunities were provided for the children to develop key skills in the areas of communication, interpersonal skills, decision-making, empathy, presentation and problem-solving. One teacher noted: 'Children took charge of the actual project, decided what to do, and how to look after their guests'. Opportunities to develop key historical, geographical and scientific skills using evidence, observation, investigation, questioning, designing and experimentation were also provided through the various project activities.

Presentation of work to the partner school and to the wider audience of local community people and visiting advisors from both sides of the border was a source of great pride to all schools. Pupils expressed an overwhelming desire to act socially, to mix, play, and work as teams and in groups, and most learning took place where pupils took responsibility for their own learning. Involving children and young people in the development of the curriculum and the selection of activities in facilitating learning is important in future work in this area. Time and time again the pupils themselves reiterated the social aspect of the project as being a key factor in their excitement and enthusiasm for it. Key work in the areas of language, talk and discussion and related skills must be an integral part of future such projects. This type of work must also be an integral part of initial training for schools participating in a project of this nature.

RECOMMENDATIONS

General aspects

- The **vital role of schools** in the promotion of education for mutual understanding on a cross-border and cross-community basis needs to be affirmed.
- Where schools are involved in contact programmes with another school, **selection criteria** for participation should be carefully prepared. Criteria for school selection should be drawn up by the project steering committee and schools should be invited to apply for inclusion in the project based on expression of interest. Preference should be given to schools which have developed processes whereby links with community have been established and where co-operative work forms an integral part of their curriculum. Schools should be asked to articulate their aims in getting involved in cross-border or cross-community projects such as 'Pride of our Place'.
- Schools need to have **time for developing a vision for the future** and working on what it is that is of value to them and their school communities. Lederach suggests that in working for reconciliation in divided societies, we need to think in terms of generations. We need to have a vision of what we are trying to achieve in order to build towards and reach that vision.³⁵ Lederach states that

*Thinking about the future involves articulating distant but nonetheless desirable structural, systemic, and relationship goals: for instance, sustainable development, self-sufficiency, equitable social structures that meet basic human needs, and respectful, interdependent relationships.*³⁶

He further states:

*If we do not know where we are going it is difficult to get there.*³⁷

Projects such as 'Pride of our Place' should be promoted with a view to providing a context for the exploration of important themes of education for living with diversity.



- **Training** for schools involved in projects like these need to focus on the exploration of key qualities such as tolerance, trust, respect, understanding of others and introducing pupils to educational experiences which extend their horizons.
- Training for schools should explore the whole area of **relationships**: building self-esteem, building relationships, maintaining relationships, managing conflict in relationships.
- Skills of **communication**, listening and empathy need to be promoted as key skills in this area of work.
- **Co-operative work** is central to the life of a project such as 'Pride of our Place'; co-operative and group work skills should form part of the initial training for teachers participating in a project of this nature.
- **Role of language** is crucial to co-operative work e.g. dialogue, discussion, story-telling and other related language skills. It is important that these areas are incorporated into the initial teacher training programme for a project of this nature.
- The opportunity to share, discuss and reflect was a very valuable aspect of the project, and this **reflective element** of the project structure had a profound impact on teachers and schools. Time to reflect is critical to the life of any project and to do this reflection in the company of others is professional dialogue and practice at its very best. The teachers and schools took more ownership of the professional development sessions at the training workshops as the project grew and developed. This is a very valuable finding of the work, and one that developed over the three and a half year period of the project.
- **Involvement of parents and local community** should be a key objective of any project of this nature, and strategies on how to encourage and enable such involvement should be catered for in the initial training workshop.
- **Shared and joint work** is better for relationship building and communication.
- The **developmental nature** of the project was important as the three and a half year lifespan highlighted both strengths and weaknesses. Where relationships were built and sustained the quality of the experience was maintained and grew year by year. Where circumstances changed, valuable connections were lost between schools. The lesson is that there is a need to build in a whole school approach from the initial stages of the project.
- In Initial Teacher Education the exploration of the transferability of **key skills** – particularly in the area of the appreciation and accommodation of diversity – from the classroom to the wider arena of inter-school, regional and island-based projects, should be facilitated in teacher education programmes.
- Consideration should be given to the development of an **award-bearing course** (at diploma level) for participating teachers in projects such as 'Pride of our Place'.
- A co-ordinated programme should be drawn up between all the relevant institutions, North and South, to **further develop this cross-border, community relations work with primary schools.**



Practical aspects

- Once-off contact is of little use. **Contact must be sustained** over a period of time with progression in the activities undertaken built into the programme.
- **Adequate funding** for these projects is critical, particularly in terms of the cost of substitute cover, transport, the preparation of materials and other related project activities.
- **Time to plan** with the partner school is an important element, and the provision of substitute cover for teachers to undertake this element is a necessary part of any programme of cross-border co-operation, particularly at primary level.
- Consideration should be given to building in a **whole school role** into future such projects.
- The **issue of distance** between partner schools should be a consideration in the selection of participating schools, particularly with the involvement of primary school children. In 'Pride of our Place', distance between schools was an issue for some of the participating schools.
- **Lunches** are best catered for in the school, rather than leaving the school campus, other than to a local community centre.
- **Timing of visits** on exchange days is critical, as schools have given careful thought to timetables, lunch breaks and activities on those days. For participating schools it is important that arrival and departure times are adhered to so that the preparation which goes into exchange days is afforded the respect it deserves – both for the teachers and children who have prepared the day's events.
- **Guidelines for communication** between participating schools should be clearly stated at the first training workshop. These guidelines should involve pupil – pupil communication as well as teacher – teacher and school – school communication. A protocol should be established at the initial training workshop which governs all project communication.
- Some schools really **involved the parents** and it was clear that the project had a wider and stronger impact in these schools. Where parents engaged in the project in a real and meaningful way – by participation in visit days, research and preparation of the trails, in the welcoming and hospitality during the visits – the benefits were great. As the project developed and practice in parent involvement was shared with the project group as a whole, other schools embraced it. This was very evident after the presentations in the Year 3 workshop, where practice in many areas was shared and discussed. This aspect – sharing and dissemination of good practice among the participants for more effective teaching and learning – is a key finding of the project.
- The role of **advisory personnel** is key to providing support and guidance to schools and also in designing and devising a training programme for the schools involved (the role of the Southern Education and Library Board advisors was key here). However this role should be one of empowerment of teachers and schools, enabling the teachers from the linked schools to develop and lead the project. It is important that this role be clarified from the outset so that expectations of the roles of the participating schools are clear.



- Another important area for consideration on school visits is the **health and safety** aspect. While local schools will be aware of potential hazards in their area, these hazards may not be apparent to visitors. Thus when planning activities for children it is important that the code of practice for working (and playing) safely in the environment is adhered to, and that a risk assessment for all activities is carried out before embarking on local studies work.
- The presence of representatives of the **Centre for Cross Border Studies** and the two **Departments of Education** at the various training workshops, visit days and exhibition day gave credence and importance to the project and was an important affirmation of the participating schools' work.
- **Training workshops** for participating principals and teachers are vital for sustaining enthusiasm and re-energising the process. The sharing of experience and expertise on these days is an opportunity to reflect and take time to plan for the next stage. It is important for the work of the project that both the principal and the participating teacher attend these days. Invitations should also be extended to a representative of the wider school community, and in particular a parents' representative, to attend one of these workshops.
- Meetings of the **Steering Committee** should be regular and on-going. Communication should be maintained through email, on-line environment, telephone or face-to-face meetings.
- **Communication with schools by the Steering Committee** in the interval before and after exchange visits should be regular and should involve the on-line environment, newsletters, short reports, email and telephone contact. In 'Pride of our Place' contact was ongoing through many media to brief schools on project events. Competitions for a project logo and the production of newsletters, a calendar and short reports were some of the activities undertaken by the Steering Committee. Local newspapers were also invited to the exchange visit days by some of the schools.
- Opportunities within the curriculum should be explored **without adding extra work** for schools and teachers.
- **Use of ICT** is an essential element of any project of this nature. However having a clear purpose as to the use of ICT is very important. If a blend of communication media is to be used then it is essential that a focus for the use of ICT be established at the initial training workshop. In 'Pride of our Place', training was given at two of the training workshops on the use of Blackboard. Where a specific focus was given for the Blackboard environment (for example, the design of a project logo), then it tended to be used more frequently. (See also the latest report of the Dissolving Boundaries project on engaging schools in collaborative curricular projects using ICT³⁸).

Final note

The enthusiasm, motivation to make a difference, and positive and constructive outlook of the schools involved in 'Pride of our Place' made for a project where the learning was great and the lessons for future cross-border work in primary schools are invaluable. In drawing this report to a close it is important to ask the critical question: 'Where to from here?'



It is recommended that a structure be put in place which would facilitate the ongoing work of schools involved in cross-border or similar work, particularly in the area of the understanding, appreciation and accommodation of diversity. There is much work still to be done and there are many more schools interested in initiating such co-operative work with other schools. The Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh is strategically placed to undertake the creation of such a structure and to facilitate the ongoing development of cross-border projects at primary level.

In crossing borders we are expanding horizons and looking to futures in which our children will live, therefore we need to be continually exploring and asking how we can do things better. The schools which participated in this project made immense contributions to this research. It would be a fitting acknowledgement of their motivation, time, effort and experience if, at the conclusion of 'Pride of our Place', there was a structure created for future work in this area.

³¹ Richardson, N. (2002) *Schools As Bridges, Education for Living with Diversity*, Paper delivered at Ninth Annual International Conference on Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child, p 8

³² Leitch, R. and Kilpatrick, R. (1999) *Inside the Gates: Schools and the Troubles*, p 24., Belfast: Save the Children publication

³³ Richardson, N. (2002) *Schools As Bridges, Education for Living with Diversity*, Paper delivered at Ninth Annual International Conference on Education, Spirituality and the Whole Child, p 5

³⁴ Malone, J. (1973) *Schools and Community Relations*, in *The Northern Teacher*, Vol.11, No. 1 p 25

³⁵ Lederach, J.P. (1997) *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies*, Chapter 6, p 76 & 77, Washington, D.C. United States Institute of Peace Press, (Quoting Elise Boulding, (1991), 'The Challenges of Imaging Peace in Wartime', *Futures* 23, No.5, 528)

³⁶ *ibid* p 77

³⁷ *ibid*, p 77

³⁸ Austin R., Mallon M. (University of Ulster) and Rickard, A. Metcalfe, N. and Quirke-Bolt. N. (NUI Maynooth) (2006), *Dissolving Boundaries*



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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Teacher Questionnaire for Year Two (May-June 2004)

1. Now that you have taken part in Stage 2 of this project, what gives you particular satisfaction?
2. Last year we talked about 'fears and expectations'. How do you feel now, at this stage of the project, in relation to fears you may have had in relation to taking part in this project?
3. Were there aspects of the project that you were disappointed with in Stage 2?
4. Were there aspects of the project that you found difficult to achieve?
5. Thoughts on best practice at Stage 2

Planning

What were the most important aspects in the planning process at Stage 2?

Consider the following points in your response but feel free to include any additional points...

- Time to meet and plan with partner school
 - Researching and planning the topic
 - Two day in-service with overnight stay
 - Communication and advice from support personnel
 - Involvement of the whole staff
 - Involvement of the local community
 - Getting the children motivated and involved
 - Financial support
6. The child's voice in Stage 2:
 - (a) Did the children enjoy participating in the project?
 - (b) What aspects of the project appealed most to the children?
 - (c) What were the motivating aspects of this project for the children?
 - (d) Did the quality of the children's learning experiences improve as a result of the project this year? In what way did their experiences improve?



- (e) In what way did the project offer the children opportunities for skill development in Stage 2? Consider the following areas and give examples where possible.
- Interpersonal
 - Decision-making
 - Co-operation
 - Making choices
 - Communication
 - Presentation
- (f) Were there other areas that you feel were enhanced by participation in the project in Stage 2?
- (g) In what way do you think the children have an increased understanding of their own sense of place this time?
- (h) Do you think that they have an increased understanding of their partner school's sense of place?
- (i) In what way do you think mutual understanding has been enhanced in Stage 2 of this project?
- (j) In what way could this project improve mutual understanding further for the final Stage of the project?
- (k) Did this project in Stage 2 enhance the learning experiences of children with special needs? If so, give examples...
- (l) Could you access resources quite easily this year?
Could this aspect be improved?
- (m) For children who took part in the project last year do you think the experience was deepened this year?

7. The Teacher's Voice

- (a) Which of the following methodologies did you use in the development of the project in Stage 2? Please tick
- Trails
 - Use of maps
 - Use of photographs
 - Use of documents
 - Use of ICT
 - Site Visits
 - Oral evidence



- Story
- Use of drama
- Interviews
- Surveys/Questionnaires
- Habitat studies
- Other

Which of the above did you find most effective in this project?

- (b) Was it possible to integrate this project into other curriculum areas? If so, give examples.
- (c) On a professional level did you feel this project benefited you this year?
- (d) On a personal level, have you gained from the experience this year?

8. The Parent's Voice

- (a) Were the parents involved in the project? What did they think of this project?
- (b) Were members of the wider school community involved in this project?
- (c) What were the views of the local community on the project?
- (d) What did you think of the advisory/support service in Stage 2?
- (e) For the final stage of the project what would you suggest?
- (f) Have you any other thoughts/ideas/suggestions?

Thank you so much for taking the time to fill out the questionnaire. Your views are extremely valuable and will be given due consideration.



Appendix B

Year Three Teacher Training Workshop (January 2005)
Self Reflection based on project objectives

Characteristics of Good Practice	Questions you might ask as part of your self-evaluation	What evidence might you look for to answer these questions?
Pupils are involved in all aspects of the project	Is the project pupil led? Have pupils been involved in the planning and organisation of the project? How? What specific aspects of the project are the pupils involved in?	List of activities involving the pupils Decisions made by pupils Suggestions made by pupils
The project is firmly rooted in the curriculum	How is the project tied into the curriculum? Which areas are being addressed? Does involvement in the project contribute to a better understanding of certain areas of the curriculum? Is there awareness of the different curricular requirements in each jurisdiction?	Areas being covered by each activity Pupil work Teacher comment Pupil comment
The project is focused on developing understanding of local culture/environment	What aspects of local culture and/or environment in both areas are being looked at? Any common ground? What local sources are being used? Does the project concentrate more on culture or environment? How do we define 'local'?	Written/pictorial evidence of local resources used Mapwork Pupil work on local studies Fieldwork
The project involves a range of cross-curricular activities	What types of activities are pupils involved in? What curricular areas do they cover? Are pupils aware of the different areas?	List of activities and cross curricular components Overview for pupils/outline planning Feedback on activities Displays



Characteristics of Good Practice	Questions you might ask as part of your self-evaluation	What evidence might you look for to answer these questions?
	<p>How have they been integrated? Is the cross curricular dimension enhancing the project outcomes and/or pupils' learning?</p>	
<p>The project provides opportunities for pupils to explore and appreciate cultural, social and religious diversity</p>	<p>Has there been any attempt to look at themes from different perspectives? Is there ongoing development of mutual understanding? What opportunities are available to the pupils to explore diversity in:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Culture • Society • Religion 	<p>List of activities Pupil comment Teacher comment Artwork Displays Discussions/interviews with pupils/parents/teacher/local community</p>
<p>Pupils have opportunities to develop the skill of:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Managing information • Thinking, problem solving & decision making • Being creative • Working with others • Self management/taking responsibility for own learning 	<p>What do we understand these skills to mean?</p> <p>Which skills are key to the success of the project? What opportunities do pupils have to develop these skills? Are pupils aware of skills development?</p>	<p>Pupil comments/interviews/discussion Pupil work</p> <p>Project write-ups Displays Photographs</p>
<p>The pupils are engaged in active learning strategies</p>	<p>Is there a variety of active learning strategies used? What are they? Is the project enquiry led? How do you know that pupils are engaged in active learning?</p>	<p>Teacher observation Pupil feedback Pupil work and displays</p>



Characteristics of Good Practice	Questions you might ask as part of your self-evaluation	What evidence might you look for to answer these questions?
<p>ICT is used in a variety of ways in the project</p>	<p>In what ways is ICT being used during the project? Is it used for communication and if so, who is using it? Is it used for sharing of planning, ideas, and materials? How is it used to enhance project work?</p>	<p>Displays Electronic records PP presentations e-mail communications</p>
<p>Communication between partner schools is strong</p>	<p>What type(s) of communication has taken place? Is it frequent? Is it ongoing – before, during and after the visits? What are the main purposes of this communication? Is regular communication important to the success of the project?</p>	<p>e-mails, letters, etc</p>
<p>The whole school is involved in the life of the project</p>	<p>What do we mean by the ‘whole school’? In what ways is the whole school involved? What level of awareness of the project exists within the school? How is this maintained? How inclusive is the project? Have others in the school benefited from the project? How? How has expertise within the school been used/shared?</p>	<p>Details of who was involved and how Numbers of teaching staff directly involved/indirectly involved Number of ancillary staff involved Project discussed at whole school level/focus at assembly SEN pupils included? Minutes of BoG meetings/visits by BoG members</p>
<p>Parents are supportive of, and involved in, the project</p>	<p>What level of awareness of the project exists among parents? Have parents been involved in the project? How? How many? How does the</p>	<p>Details of communications with parents regarding the project Numbers of parents involved and details of how Feedback from contributors</p>



Characteristics of Good Practice	Questions you might ask as part of your self-evaluation	What evidence might you look for to answer these questions?
	<p>support and involvement of parents contribute to the success of the project? Is parental support and involvement important to the project?</p>	
<p>The local community is involved in a variety of ways</p>	<p>What do we understand by the 'local community'? How have members of the local community contributed? How has this contributed to the success of the project? How important is community involvement? Is community involvement ongoing?</p>	<p>Details of communication with local community regarding the project Numbers of local people involved and details of involvement Feedback from contributors</p>
<p>The project enhances teachers' own professional development</p>	<p>How can participation in a project such as Pride of Our Place enhance the professional development of teachers? What can teachers gain from the project in terms of knowledge, understanding, skills, experience, perspective etc? What aspects of the project provided opportunities for teachers to develop professionally?</p>	<p>Professional development log Details of INSET</p>



Appendix C

Pupil Questionnaire for Year Two (May-June 2004)

We would like to hear what your thoughts and opinions are on this project. When you are answering a question write down what your own opinions are on the question. What you say is really important so please answer each question as best you can. You can write as much as you like.

Name:

1. When you heard about this project what did you think?
2. How did you prepare for the project?
3. What were the things you liked most about this project?
4. Was there anything that disappointed you about the project?
5. Did you learn anything new about your own place?
6. Did you learn anything new about your partner's local area?
7. What have you learned about other places from this project?
8. What have you learned about other people from this project?
9. How did you feel about the other school coming to visit your school?
10. What was the best moment of the whole project for you?
11. Do you think that projects like this one help to promote understanding of other people?
12. Have you got ideas on how we could promote understanding further?
13. For pupils who took part last year and are taking part again this year, have you learned anything new this year?

Thank you for taking the time to fill in this questionnaire. Your comments will be carefully considered.



Appendix D

EVALUATION OF 'PRIDE OF OUR PLACE'

January 2007

Dr. Mark Morgan, Head of Education, St. Patrick's College Dublin

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The project Pride of our Place involved pupils and students from 12 primary schools in the border regions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. The schools engaged in focussed studies of their local environments and shared learning experiences with their partner school. This project built on the lessons learned from Phase 1 of a similar project.

This external evaluation of the project was based on site visits, an examination of the questionnaires completed by participants and conversations with the researcher and support personnel. The evaluation warrants a number of conclusions. Firstly, very effective networks and partnerships were built between the schools, teachers and pupils, as well as with the support personnel. Secondly, best practice in cross-border co-operation between primary schools was identified and implemented in the project. Thirdly, there was a major impact on teachers' professional development in broadening their knowledge, deepening their understanding and having access to other educational practices and methodologies. Fourthly, teachers were using a wide range of innovative methodologies in the teaching of local studies, and the children had been introduced to the world outside their classroom in a real and meaningful way. This resulted in a better understanding of their local environment and the contribution of people from diverse backgrounds to that environment. Fifthly, parents were supportive in a real and meaningful way, not only in the exploration of their own locality but in that of their partner school's locality.

The evaluation sought and found a number of key factors that underpinned the success of the project. These included the careful planning by schools; the involvement of children in the activities and the wise and skilful expertise of the support personnel.

The international literature was examined with a view to examining the success of similar projects. We concluded that while some projects contained some of the components of the Pride of our Place, none featured all of them so successfully. It can therefore be regarded as a truly innovative project that was built from the community base and yet contained all the elements that have been shown to be successful in the international context.

It is unfortunate that for the moment a similar, follow-up project is not planned. However should this be the case in the future we recommend that the Pride in our Place should be a model for such activities. This kind of activity is especially worthy of support and the Irish border region is an especially appropriate place for such an enterprise. There is ample evidence from a variety of sources that the kind of contact which the project involved is a key factor in increasing knowledge about other groups in addressing stereotyped beliefs.

EVALUATION METHODOLOGY

This report is based on a mix of qualitative and quantitative research, taking into account the aims of the project and the particular context in which the research was carried out. Specifically the following activities were involved:

- An examination of all of the documents relating to the proposed activities, progress reports and accounts of final outcomes and achievements;
- Site visits to the most relevant activities including open days, cross-border visits and in-service programmes;
- Interviews with key personnel including the researcher and school principals.



Since detailed information was obtained by the project researcher (Mary Burke) and since this included important evaluation information directly relevant not only to the progress of the project but also to its outcomes, features of this work are also incorporated into this external evaluation. Her research included teacher questionnaires, reflective diaries, student questionnaires, focus group interviews, attendance at steering committee meetings, and self-evaluation ratings by teachers in addition to the above.

Since much of the report is based on the teacher questionnaires, it is appropriate to mention the main focus of this instrument. The following were the main questions examined:

- (i) What were the main sources of satisfaction from participation in the project?
- (ii) How do you feel with regard to your fears in taking part in the project?
- (iii) Were there any aspects of the project with which you were disappointed?
- (iv) Were some aims of the project difficult to achieve?
- (v) What are your thoughts on best practice for the future of the project?
- (vi) What features of the 'child's voice' were most significant?
- (vii) What methodologies did teachers use and what professional benefits did they derive from it?
- (viii) What did parents think of the project?
- (ix) What aspects of planning need attention for the future?
- (x) Any further suggestions.

Context, Aims and Objectives

Context

The focus of the work described here, arises from the successful co-operative pilot project, 'Pride Of Our Place' Phase 1, which took place from February to July in 2000. This project was an experimental exchange project between teachers and pupils from a number of Northern Ireland primary schools and national schools in the Republic of Ireland. The pupils and teachers involved had opportunities to explore aspects of their local environments in a proactive way and to share their learning experiences with their partner school. The strong and successful cross-border links that were established enriched the mutual understanding of everyone involved, including pupils, teachers, parents, members of local communities and the project organisers

An important feature of the context of the 2002–2006 programme is the understanding and appreciation of diversity which is a core theme of the primary school curriculum, North and South. Great emphasis is placed on the importance of diversity and on the appreciation of the contribution to communities of peoples from a range of social, cultural, religious, ethnic and economic perspectives. 'Pride Of Our Place' in both its phases was a vehicle for the realisation of such goals and was also designed to develop models of good practice in the implementation of these curricular aims, North and South.

In Phase 2 of the project pupils and students from 12 primary schools, (24 teachers and roughly 500 primary school children) in the border regions of Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland engaged in focussed studies of their local environments and shared learning experiences with their partner school. This project built on the lessons learnt from Phase 1. It provided a context for children aged 9 – 12 to explore the themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage Awareness in a cross-border setting.



The project was also aimed at enabling the teachers and pupils to explore the local and wider histories of different parts of the Irish border region and their different social, cultural and religious communities. In the design of the project, close attention was paid to the child as active learner and to providing opportunities for the child's voice to be heard.

This project was initially scheduled to run for three years (extended to four years). The partners in the project were the Southern Education and Library Board in Northern Ireland, the Department of Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland and the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh. The EU Peace Two Programme, through the Special EU Programmes Body, funded the project. A steering committee representative of the partners was established to define and co-ordinate the work of the project. The members were representative of the partners involved in the study.

The project had, as its primary **objectives**, the following:

- To engage pupils and teachers of linked cross-border primary schools in focussed studies of elements of their local environments and the environments of their linked schools;
- To provide an ideal context for pupils aged 9 – 12 to explore the themes of education for mutual understanding and cultural heritage in a cross-border setting;
- To improve mutual understanding between schools, teachers and pupils in a North-South context and facilitate inter-school networking;
- To facilitate pupils to explore the local and wider histories of different parts of Ireland and of different cultural, social and religious communities;
- To engage pupils in activity-based learning experiences in which they will have opportunities to develop and apply important historical, geographical and other skills;
- To foster the development of pedagogical skills by assisting teachers to identify suitable topics within local studies, and to acquire teaching techniques which will promote activity-based learning;
- To enrich the professional perspectives of participating teachers through providing experiences of the school system in the other jurisdiction;
- To examine the practicalities of pupil and teacher exchange at primary level;
- To provide increased opportunities for the use of ICT in the study of history and geography.

Project work in the schools

Below we summarise some of the main activities involved in 'Pride of our Place'; this cannot be comprehensive as the project changes from school to school and from year to year. However the following activities seemed to me to be central:

- Exploration of a significant feature of the local environment from an historical and geographical background. Sites explored included a castle, streetscape, hill, railway station, water tower, school and buildings past and present. Habitat studies were also undertaken, e.g. a river, a stream, a mini-beast study, as well as practical environmental-based projects



such as making bird-boxes. Myths and legends associated with sites were also explored and developed.

- Using local sources for project work including oral evidence, maps, photographs, video, model-making, artefacts, buildings/ruins, documentary evidence.
- Developing key historical and geographical skills, e.g. investigation, observation, questioning, using evidence, developing empathy, evaluating. Developing key interpersonal skills, e.g. communication, co-operation, presentation, respecting difference, critical thinking, making choices, decision-making, sharing information, discussion, debate, social interaction, making and sustaining relationships, accepting responsibility, offering and accepting advice.
- Making and completing trails and worksheets.
- Developing cross-curricular links through art, music, poetry, drama, written work, library work, ICT, stories, model-making, video.

Impact of the project on key outcomes 1: Sense of Place and Impact on Children

Below we will consider the impact of the project on three central outcomes. The first is concerned with mutual understanding, sense of place and cultural heritage, since this is central to the project. The second is concerned with impact on children and the third with effects on teachers.

Sense of Place and Cultural Heritage

The following are key questions relating to the issue of the extent to which the objectives are achieved under this heading: To what extent has the project enhanced the children's understanding of their own sense of place? To what extent has it increased their understanding of their partner school's sense of place? Has there been an increase in mutual understanding through participation in the project?

The evidence on these points comes mainly from the teacher questionnaires and the reflective diaries of Year Three as well as the children's questionnaires. There was strong evidence that the children developed and displayed a great pride in their own place as a result of participation in the project. In particular the presentation of their place to others was a critical factor in this. Many of them spoke with a deep pride as they explained and narrated their stories of place. It was also evident that each school had their own unique story to tell about their place, and in demonstrating their sense of place to others they became conscious of their own place. The teachers felt that the children had a better understanding of the past, how their parents/grandparents lived, and a better knowledge of the history/folklore through research and fieldwork, thus creating a sense of pride in their locality

Evidence on the enhancement of mutual understanding comes from the questionnaire that was completed at the close of the project. Teachers were asked to rate the extent to which the project fulfilled their expectations on changing their own attitudes to the South or North for the better. The majority of the teachers rated the changes of attitude as positive to a very significant extent, with only a small number rating the change below this. With regard to changing pupils' attitudes towards the South or North for the better, the majority of teachers rated this as happening to a very significant extent, to a significant extent or to a moderate extent. It is clear that even with a relatively small-scale intervention like the present one, there were real and meaningful changes in attitude.



We conclude that education for mutual understanding and the development of an appreciation of cultural heritage of the school's own locality and that of their partner school's locality was a major positive outcome of this project. This was especially apparent in the shared theme work and joint work undertaken by many of the schools. The project also showed that a number of factors were especially important in the development of education for mutual understanding and an appreciation of cultural heritage. Particularly important was an understanding of the processes involved when working with pupils on a project of this nature and the need for effective support to fulfil its objectives. It is of particular interest that many of the schools had well-devised trails as a feature of the visit day for their partner schools. These trails provided an ideal opportunity for skills to be used and developed.

Impact on Children

With regard to the impact of the project on children and their learning, the following are especially relevant: (i) Enhancing children's interest and motivation, and (ii) Improvement in the quality of the pupils' learning experiences as well as provision of opportunities for skills development for the pupils.

As regards enhancing children's interests and motivation, the teachers took the view that meeting with pupils from their partner school was one of the aspects that appealed most to them. There were a number of aspects of this meeting that were crucial. Firstly, meeting new friends and planning the visit were important factors. Secondly, the opportunity to show off their own school and its environs ('Pride of our place') was a major factor, as were the games and fun element of the day and the opportunity to eat together. Another important contributor was the work involved in researching and presenting their work, using the digital camera, power-point presentations, making video and audio tapes, and the overall practical nature of the work.

We conclude that the opportunities for pupils to develop key social skills were very evident in the work of this project. Immense gains were made because pupils were afforded the opportunities to direct their own learning and to employ key skills. The children's input into the project provided clear direction on what was beneficial, constructive and productive to pupils. Above all the following features were especially worthwhile:

- Working together in a way that required co-operating and teamwork;
- The social process of learning was central and this element has been foremost in this project and a key factor in its success;
- Skills development took on a whole new meaning when it was developed in the company of others and in a cross-border context;
- Attention should be drawn to the fact that the main skills used throughout the project development are key life skills, e.g. communication, decision-making, co-operation, making choices and presentation.
- The children drew attention several times to the interpersonal skills as being of utmost importance e.g. meeting and greeting, making new friends, initiating and sustaining conversations, building relationships.
- The project gave children real and meaningful opportunities to practice these skills and the context proved to be ideal for this



- The context of this project also provided an ideal base for the building of confidence and enhancing self-esteem for the pupils involved.
- Presenting their place to others was a proud moment in their lives, and they realised what their community meant to themselves as well providing others with an opportunity to look at what was similar and different about their community in comparison to other communities.

Impact of the project 2: Teachers and Schools

Teachers' Own Development

There was overwhelming consensus among teachers that the experience of involvement in 'Pride of Our Place' was a very positive professional learning experience. Among the most important areas were the inter-school exchange, and meeting with teachers from across the border and exchanging views and experiencing another type/approach to education.

Developing more creative approaches to teaching and getting some interesting ideas and tips for teaching when visiting the other schools were major factors. Teachers also spoke about the development of an appreciation of their own area and spoke of becoming more self reflective about their teaching. At the end of Year Two teachers engaged in a self-reflection on the project objectives. This evaluation involved ranking the project objectives in terms of the fulfilment of these, and the results showed strong belief that major progress had been made towards the achievement of objectives.

The professional development and training days were perceived by teachers to be really beneficial, and over the three and a half year period it was very apparent that the teachers had grown in their relationships with each other, as well as in their confidence. The sharing of experiences between schools also demonstrated the range and variety of projects that were undertaken in Year Two, and the creative and imaginative development of the nature of the projects.

In the final self-reflection, completed by teachers at the conclusion of the project, 10 teachers out of 13 who responded to the survey rated the enrichment of their own professional experiences at the very highest level. Furthermore the remaining two teachers rated their experiences at just below this. Thus it is apparent that this project provided the teachers with many opportunities for the enrichment of their own professional development experiences.

Effects on Teachers: Use of active and investigatory methodologies

At the end of Year One and Two teachers were asked to list the methodologies that they used over that two-year period. While the first two years were important, it was in Year Three of the project that many of the partnerships engaged in joint or shared work, employing a diverse range of methodologies. Site visits were among the most effective methodology used and many of the schools constructed short trails for use on site visits. These trails were very beneficial for group and co-operative work and proved a rich environment for enhancing mutual understanding as children engaged openly in talk and discussion, and learning together became a fun and enjoyable experience. Local knowledge in oral and documentary form was also very important and many schools invited local historians and craftspeople into the school.



The use of maps, photographs and documents were among the key approaches employed by the teachers.

Factors contributing to Teachers' Development

In the course of the project a number of key areas emerged, which were extremely important in contributing to teachers' development. The first was that the model of professional development and training linked in with the teachers' own needs, incorporating time to reflect, discuss and plan their work. Secondly, it was important that particular attention was given to providing dedicated inputs in specific curricular approaches and methodologies. Thirdly, the residential component of this project proved to be very beneficial for the building of relationships. Fourthly, whole school involvement was particularly significant, particularly if an individual teacher left the school and where continuity needed to be maintained with regard to relationships. Finally, the leadership of the principal was critical to the success of the project. This involved not only attending training days but also keeping in close touch with the project as it pertained to each school

Key Features in Success of the Project

While we can say with some conviction that the project was a major success in terms of its objectives and in terms of the effects on schools and children and communities, an important question is around the major factors that contributed to this success. This is extremely important to enable lessons to be learned from what has been achieved. We consider the most important success factors to be the following:

Getting Children Involved

In the questionnaires getting children involved was rated the most important aspect. Significantly they also felt that was not very difficult to achieve since it was easy to motivate the children. This in turn was due to the fact that they had an opportunity to engage with other children and exchange ideas with them.

The need to involve children in the 'enquiry aspect' of the project, to take into account the children's views and ideas, and to stress their role as researchers and reporters on their own local area, came across very strongly in the evaluations that were completed at the end the first year. In the teachers' view, learning takes on a whole new meaning when it happens in the company of peers. The teachers were also insistent on the importance on the key skills that resulted from this involvement and learning, including decision-making, interpersonal and co-operation.

The reflective diaries completed by teachers at the end of Year Three also reflected the importance of the pupil-led enquiry based approach. The move to pupil ownership was very evident as the project grew and developed. This aspect of the project was a significant factor in the success of 'Pride of our Place'.

Time to meet with partner schools and in-service programme

In the evaluations of training days, all teachers rated the training as very beneficial in the context of the opportunity to meet all the personnel involved in 'Pride of our Place' as well as meeting the other partner schools. It was particularly interesting that many teachers commented on sharing knowledge, experience and ideas with regard to planning with the



partner school. The whole area of social interaction was most valuable to the process from the teachers, pupils and wider community point of view. This is particularly interesting since teachers rarely have the opportunity to work with other schools or get an insight into the organisation of work outside their own situation. The lesson learned here could be especially important in the development of new programmes if small schools begin to work with each other in clustering arrangements.

The meeting with colleagues also allowed an opportunity for the affirmation of their work as professionals and indeed an opportunity to celebrate that work. This is of great significance for teachers since there are very few opportunities for teachers to be fully aware of the success of their work. Following the training sessions, much of the work on planning was undertaken by telephone, email and post. In the final year teachers availed of a joint planning day to plan for the final exhibition day. This raises the matter of communication between the schools in other ways, which is examined below.

Communication between schools

Schools used a variety of means of communication e.g. email, video, letter, video, and through an on-line learning environment, Blackboard, which was facilitated by the project team. Teachers were trained in the use of this facility at the in-service training days. However there were technical problems in Year One whereby some schools found it difficult to access Blackboard. Despite the efforts to introduce the system at various times throughout the project, the take-up was somewhat disappointing. On the other hand the rating by teachers at the close of the project signifies major improvement in their ICT skills over the project life span. In their evaluations some teachers commented that they were gaining confidence in the use of this tool, but during the project there was hardly enough support for them to become fully confident in the use of Blackboard as an on-line communication tool.

Communication and advice from support personnel

In the evaluations a number of teachers commented that the support service to the project was practical, supportive, and always available. Teachers said that it was good to know that the service was there if needed.

In the opinion of this evaluator, the support service made a major contribution to the success of the project. This was done in a low profile, 'behind the scenes' way but was planned with great efficiency and on a cross-border basis. In particular the support service was responsible for the training days which involved dealing with practical issues. Because the people involved gave the time and effort to state the objectives at the commencement of this project, all aspects were explained thoroughly, questions were answered and resources were identified.

The Southern Education and Library Board prepared a very helpful resource handbook distributed on the first day, which contained lists of helpful resources for helping with work in the local environment, including maps, historical sources, publications on best practice for working on castles, graveyards and other historical buildings. It is a major tribute to the support service that schools took ownership of the project. This was particularly evident at the final day's training in January 2005, where all the partnerships presented to the rest of the schools on what they had done in the summer visits of 2004. With each year that passed in the project the schools involved moved progressively forward on a professional and personal partnership level – this is the best endorsement of the support service.



Planning and Preparation

The general point we are making here is not new: we have stressed repeatedly that a major factor contributing to the success of this project was that the steering group, the support personnel and the schools spent huge efforts in planning the activities and in preparing for the events that were central to the project. Without these efforts, the project could not have achieved what it did .

It is interesting that this feature was mentioned several times in the evaluations. The teachers noted how important it was to plan thoroughly – the cross-curricular aspect was mentioned as being important. Teachers thought that it was important to research and plan a topic which would be of benefit to the school and which would also fulfill the curriculum requirements. Planning was especially important with regard to resources to which they gained access through a variety of sources.

Pride of Our Place in the international context

It is appropriate to look at best practice in the international context to see how the present project fits in with others that have broadly the same objectives. There are several examples of such programmes, especially from the US. Here we give attention to the following, with a particular focus on the extent to which they have similar aims and methodology to 'Pride of our Place.'

One approach that has received considerable attention is **empowering students** as a component of multicultural education. The basic objective of this movement is give students an opportunity to learn about the experiences (positive and negative) of all ethnic and minority groups, and in this way to raise the esteem of such groups, reduce prejudice and also improve the achievement of such groups. Part of the rationale is that this approach will also help majority children to become more tolerant and that all groups will develop multiple perspectives on curricula.

One of the most fervent advocates of empowering students is Nieto (2005). She argues that multiculturalism should be part of every student's education. This includes all students becoming bilingual and studying different cultural perspectives. She takes what would be called in Ireland a whole-school view and suggests that multicultural education should be seen everywhere including in classrooms, lunchrooms and assemblies. A key feature is that students should be trained to be more conscious of culture, especially to be more aware of the historical, political and social factors that shape their own views of culture and ethnicity.

A slightly different approach has been taken by people who argue for **culturally relevant teaching**. The argument has been made that some ethnic groups behave in a way that make some educational tasks more difficult than others. For example, it has been found that Asian-American students prefer visual learning than do their European-American peers (Litton 1999), while there is also some evidence that African-American students may perform better in tests that require presentations rather than written examinations. The evaluations of this approach suggest that, at least in some circumstances, building such features into the curriculum makes teaching more effective for these groups (Diaz et al, 2006).

Another idea in the international literature that has received considerable attention, despite being a relatively simple idea, is the **funds of knowledge approach**. This approach suggests



that teachers should, if possible, visit students' households and build social relationships with their students' families to learn more about their cultural and ethnic backgrounds so that they can incorporate this knowledge into their teaching (Moll & Gonzales, 2004). One example of this approach indicates that when teachers understand the kind of language that their students encounter outside the school, their teaching of English and reading is improved.

Issues-centred education is an important feature of multi-cultural education. In this approach students are taught to systematically examine issues that involve equity and social justice. They not only clarify their own values but also examine alternatives and the consequences of taking a particular stance on an issue.

Positive contact with others from different cultural backgrounds remains one of the most promising approaches to improving ethnic attitudes. However it should be stressed that contact is not a guarantee of a reduction in inter-group bias. The strong evidence is that contact has to occur in certain circumstances in which the individual group members get to know each other as *individuals* rather than as members of a group. Thus contact works best when students talk with each other about personal matters, including their ambitions, successes, failures, and plans for the future. What is particularly important is that students should share personal information about each other. This has the effect of children from different backgrounds realising that despite those different backgrounds they have very similar hopes and feelings. This sharing of personal information can help to break-down inter-group barriers (Santrock 2007).

Perspective taking is rather similar to some of the ideas discussed above. In this kind of intervention, children learn to see others perspectives and this can improve inter-group relations. In one version of this approach, children first learn about two different cultural groups. They then interact with each in accordance with the (somewhat inappropriate) behaviours that they have learned about. The consequence is that they experience feelings of anxiety, which results in a cultural shock that is akin to being in a cultural setting with people who behave in a way which is different from what one is used to. The basic idea is to get children to 'step into the shoes' of students who are culturally different from themselves and feel what it is like not to be treated as an equal. Some evaluations of this approach are quite promising (Cushner 2006).

The **school and community as a team** project stresses the importance of the school community in developing inter-group attitudes (Comer 2006). There are a number of aspects of this approach that are especially significant. Firstly the school management develop a comprehensive school plan. Secondly a school support team is established. Thirdly a parents' programme is developed. Some of the evaluations of this approach have shown dramatic results not only in terms of attitude change but also in school achievement. This is the case even when no socio-economic change had taken place in the neighbourhood.

A number of other lesser known projects are worth mentioning briefly. The **anti-bias curriculum** devised by Derman Sparks (1989) created a programme to reduce biases in children's thinking about other groups. The **Teaching Tolerance Project** (Heller & Hawkins, 1994) is somewhat similar to the perspective taking project describe above.

International Projects and Pride of Our Place

What is striking about these various projects is that while they have all started with ideas that are quite similar to the present project, they all eventually do something that is similar to Pride



of our Place, but none have taken on all of the components of this Irish project. For example, perspective taking is a feature of 'Pride in our Place', as is contact with other groups, as is the idea of the school and community as a team. What is truly remarkable is that all these components have been put into practice in a single, cross border project – not only this, but it has been accomplished in a thorough and professional way.

Conclusion

The 'Pride of Our Place' project made a major contribution to education for understanding between communities. The ideas underpinning the project were soundly thought through and based on the most advanced ideas on effective ways of enhancing inter-group relationships. Equally significantly, the project was managed with great skill and professionalism by all concerned and especially by the support team.

From a teaching point of view, the project was a great success. It contributed greatly to teachers' professional development and especially their involvement in new methodologies. But above all the greatest success of the project was the way it engaged and sustained the interests of pupils throughout. To have been present on the occasions when pupils talked about their own locality and history, and to see the welcome given the partner school, was a privilege for this evaluator.

Finally, as noted above, the project was in line with best practice as this emerges in the international literature. To summarise similar work, it is clear that while other projects featured some of the elements of 'Pride of Our Place', no other work has brought the various elements together in such a suitable educational experience.

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