

**North- South  
Student Teacher Exchange Project**

**2002-2007**

**A LONGITUDINAL  
RESEARCH STUDY**



**EU Programme  
for Peace and Reconciliation**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

This report gives an account of a student teacher exchange programme involving 103 student teachers on the island of Ireland between 2002 and 2007. All of the students were pursuing an initial teacher education programme (primary) in one of the five Southern colleges of education or in one of the two Northern colleges of education. The exchange enabled them to carry out a significant part of their assessed teaching practice in host primary schools in the other jurisdiction, i.e. students from the South went to schools in the Belfast area, while students from the North went to Dublin and Limerick.

The exchange was made possible through funding secured by the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh from the EU Peace programmes. The project was managed and implemented by staff at the Centre in conjunction with the Directors of Teaching Practice from the seven participating colleges of education. One impetus for the exchange came from a previous 1999-2000 cross-border exchange between the colleges, but was further strengthened by the incorporation of formal assessment, so that the teaching practice in the other jurisdiction became part of the participating students' final degree performance. Indeed one finding of this study was that participation in this project actually enhanced young teachers' job prospects. The project won the support and admiration of a number of influential stakeholders, e.g. the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), the presidents of the colleges of education, and the Inspectorate in both jurisdictions.

Assessed teaching practice forms a core component of pre-service teachers' formation. It is treated very seriously by both students and staff in the colleges, and by the host schools in which the students carry out their placements. Therefore to undertake this vital strand of professional formation in a jurisdiction outside of the familiar was courageous and involved high stakes for all concerned. There was a rigorous external evaluation of the

exchange programme at every phase of its implementation and development. The findings from these annual evaluations showed that it was extremely successful. A summary of the findings from these evaluations is outlined in this report.

This 2002-2007 longitudinal research study examined the impact of four years of exchanges (there was a gap caused by the requirement to apply for new EU Peace funding in 2005-2006) on the professional practices and personal attitudes of the young participant student teachers. It found that the North-South Student Teacher Exchange programme had been a “great success...in terms of the enduring positive dispositions it has helped to develop among the beneficiaries”. These have included: greater interest in peace and reconciliation issues; greater consciousness of the demands of multicultural classrooms; greater knowledge of the other jurisdiction’s education system and curriculum; the invaluable experience gained from learning from skilled teachers in the other jurisdiction; and a greatly increased sense of personal worth and confidence gained through participation in the exchange.

The results of this study show that not only was the exchange enriching for the young student teachers, but that it also enhanced the education community in the participating colleges. The report also shows that the impact of the exchange has been sustained across the groups of participating students since the completion of the exchange.

The study also sets the exchange project in the broader framework of international cross community exchanges. It concludes that there is a will to establish a further set of exchanges between the colleges on the island. The report also draws the readers’ attention to some insights gained from other cross-border initiatives on potential obstacles to maintaining such exchange programmes over a protracted period.

## **INTRODUCTION**

This report on a student teacher exchange involving 103 students from the seven colleges of education on the island of Ireland between 2002-2007, is presented in six parts. Part 1 outlines the background to and the context of the exchange; Part 2 describes the elements of the exchange; Part 3 outlines the exchange process; Part 4 summarises the findings from the evaluations which formed an integral part of the exchange; Part 5 explores the impact of the exchange, and Part 6 offers some recommendations on the way forward.

## **PART 1**

### **THE BACKGROUND TO THE EXCHANGE**

A watershed event in the history of this island and in the relationship between the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland was the signing on 10 April 1998 of what became known as the Belfast or Good Friday Agreement. This demarche heralded the end of the civil conflict which had convulsed the territory of Northern Ireland for the previous thirty years. The signatories to the Agreement were the prime ministers of both the British and Irish governments and the leaders of most of the Northern Ireland political parties. The main thrust of the Agreement concerned new forms of governance within Northern Ireland, and the constitutional and institutional linkages between Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom on the one hand, and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland on the other.

While prescribing the structural framework for a devolved administration in Northern Ireland, the Agreement looked beyond a system of checks and balances to indicate areas of co-operation between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland which might be socially and economically beneficial to both jurisdictions. One such area was the field of teacher education, and to that end a Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South

(SCoTENS), comprising colleges of education, university education departments and other teacher education providers, was established in 2003. The exchange programme took place under the aegis of SCoTENS, which was the brainchild of a group of senior teacher educators in both jurisdictions. Though not directly involved as a funding agent in the student exchange project, SCoTENS personnel thought highly of it. Commenting on it in 2008 Professor Richard McMinn said as follows:

*The initiative had my warmest support throughout, both as a founding member of SCoTENS and as the Principal of Stranmillis University College at the time. It was exactly the type of project which I felt SCoTENS was established to promote in the context of the student dimension of initial teacher education, at times a somewhat cloistered world, both north and south. The cross-border dimension complemented very well the existing partnership working between the two Northern Ireland university colleges under the banner of DMU (Diversity and Mutual Understanding), funded by the NI Government. The resulting improvement in knowledge and understanding was shared by both participating staff and students'*

In terms of the promotion of mutual understanding between the citizenry of the two jurisdictions on the island, the provision of education and the role of the education services constitute a suitable culture bed. Given the degree to which educational institutions are embedded in the contemporary nation state, the issues of control, management, funding and access are an intrinsic feature of the political and cultural profile of the state, and consequently, these issues can become divisive and contribute to a partisanship which is hostile to an ethos of mutual understanding and tolerance.

A heightened awareness on the part concerned professionals of different modes of provision and differing expectations of the systems might generate a more open appreciation of the values and norms of the societies hosting those systems.

The chilled and indeed hostile relations between the two jurisdictions in Ireland following the Government of Ireland Act 1921 ensured that for a period of over half a century institutional contacts between the two areas was very limited. In Yearbook 5 of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, the Director, Andy Pollak quotes a senior North-South official's characterisation of relations between the two jurisdictions as 'a wasteland of emptiness'. This official disposition of non-engagement and lack of communication percolated to the general public, with the result that apart from a few areas such as sport and the churches, individuals were indifferent to, and largely ignorant of civic developments in the neighbouring jurisdiction.

The suggestion that different experiences encouraged different interests and a consequent diminution of a shared heritage operated in a range of areas, but it is possible that the divergence was particularly promoted in the area of education because that was one of the areas of contention between the Nationalist South and the Unionist North. The divisions had been evident in the Westminster debates on the aborted MacPherson Bill of 1918. The decision by the new Free State government to place Irish language restoration at the heart of the National School system was seen by Unionists as a vindication of the concerns they had been expressing about Home Rule, while the withdrawal of building and maintenance grants from (Catholic) voluntary elementary schools by the unionist administration in the North confirmed nationalist fears about the implications of the partition settlement. Ab initio, the two regimes had adopted a posture of confrontation in relation to educational matters, and consequently it was unlikely that there would be any formal or informal co-operation around this area. That era of chilly indifference was underpinned by the fact that for operational reasons neither jurisdiction recognized the entry requirements for primary teaching of the other jurisdiction.

Although official policy was one of indifference, there were certain areas of exchange and intercourse within the realm of the schooling experience which should be noted, but with the reservation that they touched almost exclusively upon channels of communication between the Roman Catholic school

authorities in both areas. Of the five Roman Catholic dioceses within Northern Ireland three straddle the Border, and consequently the bishops of these (Archbishop in the case of Armagh) were patrons of primary schools funded by the two different Departments of Education. That tenuous structural link was reinforced at a school level where members of Catholic religious teaching orders e.g. Sisters of the Order of Mercy, Irish Christian Brothers, might be transferred from a school in one area to a school in the other area. It is appropriate at this point to observe that the Irish National Teachers Organisation, which provides trade union representation for National Teachers in the South, had a significant membership within Northern Ireland. The fact that most of its Northern membership served in Catholic managerial schools reinforces the reservation noted above, that such associations were not cross-community in the Northern Ireland context.

In the 1990s, although stated official policy had been one of indifference for 70 years, there existed a belief among many educators in the colleges of education that exchange and discourse within the realm of the schooling experience could yield benefits not only to the education community, but to the wider societies through the influence of teachers who play such a vital role in the development of attitudes and values in their impressionable pupils.

### **An Earlier Student Exchange**

In the year 1999-2000 some funding was made available through the Leargas- Central Bureau North-South Schools Programme to facilitate an exchange between 20 student teachers from Belfast Colleges of Education (Stranmillis University College and St. Mary's University College) and 20 student teachers from Dublin Colleges of Education (St. Patrick's College Drumcondra, Marino Institute of Education, Froebel College and Church of Ireland College) going on a teaching practice placement exchange in the other jurisdiction.

An interesting dimension of this exchange was that a further 40 students were linked to it through a 'buddy' role. This role involved assuming responsibility for looking after a visiting student in their home College. These buddies did not travel north or south, but acted in a mentoring or supportive capacity at base, aimed at helping the visiting students to settle in to their new environment. The exchange involved an Orientation Week in the host environment which introduced students to aspects of the host education system. School visits also formed a central feature of this week. This was followed by a week's placement in a school for teaching practice. Generally, students were placed in middle grades where possible, as the view among their lecturing staff was that teaching children in these grades would be less challenging than working with very young children, or children preparing for entry to second level schooling.

This early exchange was organised and introduced with some speed, and as a result, though deemed by students and staff alike to be very worthwhile, it was not without its teething problems. One such problem involved lack of coordination between the colleges, and Mary Immaculate College of Education in Limerick, which had wanted to participate, could not do so as the dates chosen for the exchange visit precluded this. Similarly, St. Mary's University College in Belfast could only participate for one week.

Despite this, the motivation among the colleges for an exchange remained strong, and there was a shared view, especially within the Church of Ireland College of Education in Dublin and Stranmillis University College in Belfast, that the links between the educational institutions and their students should be fostered. The Directors of Teaching Practice (DTPs) from the colleges, who had been the visionaries and implementers of the exchange, pinpointed the need for greater lead-in time, better infra-structural support, and more joint planning to ensure the smooth running and implementation of any future exchanges. This first exchange did not entail any formal assessment of the students' competence. Assessment was to become a very significant

component of the exchange programme between 2002 and 2007 which forms the substance of this study.

This early exchange earned the approval of the Inspectorate of the Departments of Education North and South. Anecdotal information suggests that they were of the view that continued links between the colleges offered the potential to strengthen professional links between members of the education communities in each jurisdiction. They encouraged the addition of formal assessment of the students' classroom performance as an integral part of any future exchange. While at surface level this presents as an easy recommendation to implement, it represented a major change to the nature of the exchange for students, their lecturing staff, and in particular, for their Directors of Teaching Practice. And despite the favourable attitude and occasional public pronouncements from both Departments of Education, there was little substantive evidence of financial or logistical support for the continuity or expansion of the exchange.

## **The Context of this Exchange**

The Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, Andy Pollak was motivated to exploit the goodwill and the heightened sense of purpose that followed in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. He appreciated the role of schools in the promotion of social values, and like John Dewey he viewed schools as accessible and promising avenues in which to advocate democracy, civil society and the encouragement of plurality. He held the view that teachers offered the possibility of instilling in their young pupils traits of tolerance and respect for diversity, while eradicating prejudice and suspicion.

Pollak (2007) regards education as fundamental to any long-term process of peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland, and he sees the consolidation of new, more durable and more mutually beneficial relationships between North and South involving more than policy makers and politicians. He places confidence in younger generations of Irish people to carry forward

the burgeoning networks and collaborations evidenced through many joint initiatives across the worlds of education, business and health.

Prompted by the success of the initial 1999-2000 'pilot' project between the colleges, Pollak pursued the idea of a student exchange based on the best aspects of the earlier model. His tentative enquiries on the feasibility of this met with enthusiasm from the Assistant Chief Inspector in the Department of Education and Science in Dublin who chaired the Inspectorate's North-South cooperation sub-committee. There was also encouragement from a senior inspector in Department of Education in Northern Ireland. Thus in autumn 2002 funding was sought and obtained from the EU Peace Two programme through the Special EU Programmes Body.

The college of education personnel who had been involved in the earlier exchanges, College to College, in the two jurisdictions were very willing to share their knowledge and experience gained through the earlier venture. So it was that a collaborative relationship developed between the Directors of Teaching Practice and the Centre for Cross Border Studies. This collaboration became a bulwark of the programme subsequently, and their disparate areas of expertise complemented each other in ways that contributed to the success and worth of the new exchange, which began organising in October 2002.

It is worth noting that at this early stage of development, the complexities and logistical challenges that the exchange would entail were recognised. For those closely involved in the organisation, planning, dovetailing and synchronising of the teaching practice activities of the seven Colleges of Education, the task was a major one. What is impressive is that the dream was realised, and resulted in a project that has gained the admiration of all the stakeholders. Its success is attributable in large measure to the commitment and the flexibility of those who carried the heavy work, and the enduring responsibility attaching to it, i.e. the Directors of Teaching Practice in the Colleges, the host schools, and the personnel in the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh. They believed in the capacity of the project to help create a more tolerant and harmonious island of Ireland through the young student

teachers who were the project's target group and the envisaged multipliers of its fruits.

## **The Aims and Objectives of the Exchange**

The context and the outline sketch of the history of the exchange help to relate to its aims and the objectives. In setting out these aims and objectives it must be acknowledged that while teachers can play powerful roles in redressing inequities, and strengthening the fabric of democracy, they are not the anointed stewards in this area. There are other powerful agents who play major socialising roles viz, family, peers, media and iconic figures. Thus the aims for both phases of the project are embedded in a context, but appear to be achievable.

The aim for phase 1 (2002-2005) was 'to create cohorts of young teachers, North and South, who have experience in working in primary schools in the other jurisdiction and will thus be able to influence future generations of pupils in prejudice reduction and greater mutual understanding, both vital for peace and reconciliation on the island of Ireland'. Phase 2 of the programme (2006-2008) had the stated aim of 'reinforcing progress towards a peaceful and stable society, and the promotion of reconciliation by a) addressing the legacy of the conflict, b) taking opportunities arising from peace, and c) paving the way to reconciliation'.

Alongside these aims there were specific objectives targeted at 1) the participating students, and 2) the participating lecturers/academic staff.

## **Objectives for Participating Students**

The specific objectives for the student teachers outlined in the programme mission statement were:

- To broaden students' experience of teaching practice by undertaking part of it in the neighbouring jurisdiction on the island of Ireland
- To increase the cultural sensitivity of student teachers by engaging educationally and socially with other students, teachers and pupils in a cross-border, cross-community context on the island of Ireland
- To enable students to experience the education system of the neighbouring jurisdiction
- To enable students to explore similarities and differences in curriculum provision and approaches
- To encourage adaptability, reflexivity, confidence, and personal/professional self-awareness.

### **Objectives for Participating Lecturers**

The specific objectives for the DTPs and other lecturers outlined in the programme mission statement were:

- To provide opportunities for colleges of education on the island of Ireland to affirm and respect cultural differences, and to promote positive attitudes towards diversity
- To develop a model of professional practice in response to cultural diversity, by supporting students who engage in a period of teaching practice in the other jurisdiction
- To develop a deeper sense of community among teacher educators on the island of Ireland that recognises the contributions of different cultural and religious communities
- To increase lecturers' familiarity with the variety of curricular programmes and methodologies, North and South
- To explore and develop strategies and approaches to practice in colleges and universities, North and South, and to contribute to the development of a culture of inter-college collaboration throughout the island.

A later section will deal with how these objectives were met, but firstly some reference to a very important but implicit rather than explicit objective of the exchange.

## **Wider Societal Objectives**

Implicit in the visioning of the exchange was the aspiration that resulting from it there would be an improved culture of cordiality and understandings amongst the populations North and South, mediated by those who were involved in the exchange. There was a pervasive optimism that the young student teachers would be instrumental in disseminating the good that the exchange would bring. This good would include positive attitudes regarding the citizens of the other jurisdiction; respect for difference; a willingness to end prejudice; an orientation to seek to understand, rather than respond in knee-jerk fashion; and an openness to live harmoniously alongside those with whom one did not always agree. This was a theme that was clearly articulated at many of the Orientation Days, an occasion when the participants from any given year came together for the first time.

In her introductory remarks at the opening session of the annual Orientation Day in Armagh in February 2004, Ms Emer Egan, Assistant Chief Inspector of the Department of Education and Science in Dublin, spoke as follows:

*I am delighted to be present at the opening of a project that holds such potential to forge links that will benefit the education system and its pupils in both jurisdictions. I see teachers as very influential members of their local communities, and a source of hope and vision to many. I know that the experience that you will have through the exchange will enrich not only you personally, but the many, many groups of pupils whom you will go on to teach in the years ahead.*

Also present at that same Orientation Day in 2004 was Ms Marion Barriskell, representing the funding agency, the Special EU Programmes Body. She too,

in her address at the opening, expressed her admiration of the project and referred to how it was addressing the legacy of conflict. She portrayed teaching as a profession with much to contribute:

*I see teaching as a profession of hope; it has the capacity to enrich, to create valuable experiences for many. Through you young, courageous teachers, both North and South have much to benefit. These benefits far outweigh the logistical considerations that the project involves. I am delighted with the fruits of the project to date, and I look forward to learning more of its impact as you spread the results that will come from this exchange.*

On that occasion there were students present from the four provinces of Ireland. At a similar Orientation Day held in Froebel College in Blackrock, Co.Dublin, in January 2005, Ms Egan echoed her remarks of Armagh, and said how she was confident that 'this exciting project' was translating in to reality many of the aspirations of the Good Friday Agreement fostering mutual understandings and improved relationships, North and South.

The students responded well to the challenge set to them by these senior people, and internalised the trust placed in them. They carried a belief that they could be key players in furthering the agenda that the exchange embodied. The outcomes indicate that the trust placed in them was well grounded.

## **The Role of Teaching Practice**

In many ways the central plank of the exchange was the teaching practice component, so it is appropriate to highlight just why this is so, representing as it does a core aspect of a student teacher's initial teacher education. It is difficult to over-estimate the primacy of teaching practice for student teachers.

This corresponds to what in medicine or in any skills based programme would be 'field placement'.

Usually students have no choice over where this field placement is carried out. A teaching practice school becomes the setting of their emerging professional identity and formation. Schools are perceived by students as challenging, overwhelming or supportive, or may be all three. The process of teaching practice can be destructive or affirming, and it is difficult to determine in advance of the process how things will play out. Different students within the same school can have very differing experiences. Student teachers worry deeply about teaching practice, and generate high levels of anxiety throughout the period. This ongoing anxiety is linked to the interactive nature of what occurs in classrooms and schools, and to the unpredictability attaching to how pupils behave, especially when grouped together in confined spaces.

Teaching practice defines for students what it means to be a teacher. It provides information and awareness about their professional competence or lack of competence. As such, it influences their self-esteem, their job satisfaction, and concentrates the mind on the wisdom or otherwise of their choice of career. Very importantly, their teaching grade will be on their record as they pursue employment in their future career and will be a major determinant of their employment possibilities. Teaching practice provides evidence on student teachers' capacity to relate to their pupils, their peers and their superiors. It highlights their competence or lack of competence with pedagogical approaches and mastery of a curriculum which they are charged with enacting. It calls on their ingenuity and skill to create conditions that allow for unimpeded teaching and learning – this in an era when there is strong evidence that classroom difficulty is the number one challenge for the teaching profession.

Teaching practice is challenging when one is familiar with a school and its characteristics, and when surrounded by customary props, but it is an even more daunting experience for young, highly motivated students to carry off

well in an unfamiliar environment. It constitutes a highly emotive and fraught experience for student teachers. The assessment dimension heightens this.

For the Directors of Teaching Practice, the period is always ranked as the busiest and most demanding part of the academic year. Across the jurisdictions the DTPs may use different assessment instruments in their evaluation of their students. Quite a lot of discussion may be required prior to using the instruments, and they may even require alignment so as to incorporate the emphases particular to each college. It is important to dialogue with the students well in advance of the supervised classes so as to reassure them that there is complete understanding between the colleges on all aspects of the teaching practice process. Above all, students must have confidence that their classroom based efforts will be fairly assessed, and that any relevant issues will be understood and dealt with empathically. Even then, their anxieties persist. So the introduction of joint formal assessment within the exchange programme was a significant decision, with far reaching implications.

In this North-South Student Teacher Exchange, there was a lot of gain for the supervisors in their joint discussion of their relative assessment approaches, and the rationale which underpins them. For the students who obtained satisfactory or impressive grades, there was a heightened sense of accomplishment at having performed well in settings beyond the comfort zone of a teaching practice in a familiar environment.

## **PART TWO**

### **THE ELEMENTS OF THE EXCHANGE**

<b>ACTIVITY</b>	<b>TIME OF YEAR</b>
<b>Identification and selection of participating students</b>	<b>Autumn (first term of academic year)</b>
<b>Identification and recruitment of host schools</b>	<b>Autumn (first term of academic year)</b>
<b>Orientation Day (usually in Armagh or Dublin)</b>	<b>January-February</b>
<b>Observation Day in host schools</b>	<b>February</b>
<b>Three weeks teaching practice in other jurisdiction</b>	<b>February-April</b>
<b>Evaluation Day</b>	<b>April-May</b>
<b>Annual external evaluation</b>	<b>Summer</b>

This next section describes the many elements that the exchange programme entailed during a typical year, as summarised in the table above . The project was a complex one, involving as it did two disparate education systems, seven colleges and two differing cultures in a very sensitive and delicate period on the island of Ireland.

#### **Bringing the Exchange to Reality**

In autumn 2002, with funding in place, the Centre for Cross Border Studies sought the cooperation of the Colleges of Education in both jurisdictions to bring the exchange forward. The initial funding was for a three year project (2002-2005), but the enthusiasm generated by the project, and the evidence that it was of worth, and achieving its objectives, led to a request for funding for a fourth year (2007-2007) together with funding to carry out this

longitudinal study in 2007-2008.. Through the unstinting cooperation of the Presidents and the Directors of Teaching Practice in the participating Colleges, a structure and detailed plan were drawn up. It is a remarkable achievement that the project involved **all** the Colleges of Education on the island of Ireland involved in the formation of primary teachers. These included four Dublin based colleges – St. Patrick’s College of Education, Drumcondra; Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines; Froebel College of Education in Blackrock, Co Dublin, and Marino Institute of Education, plus one college of education in Limerick, Mary Immaculate College. The two university colleges from Belfast – Stranmillis and St. Mary’s – made up the consortium of participating colleges. A clause attaching to the funding of Phase Two of the project (2006-2007) precluded Mary Immaculate College from participating, as more rigidly observed EU rules meant that its geographical location away from the border rendered it ineligible to continue as part of the consortium. It was only as a result of protracted negotiations the EU ‘intermediary funding body’ – Cooperation Ireland – that the Centre for Cross Border Studies was able to allow a very few students from counties outside Northern Ireland and the six Southern border counties, to be included on the exchange. The other colleges regretted the omission of Mary Immaculate College, as did the college itself. The stringent and bureaucratic conditions coming from the EU were a little baffling and very frustrating in the context of a project aimed at inclusion and improved relationships on the island as a whole.

There was the evidence on record through the evaluations of the earlier phase of the project that students from the North who had been placed in Limerick schools through Mary Immaculate College were uniformly positive about their experience. Similarly the Limerick students who had gone to the North on their teaching practice placement were among the greatest advocates for a continuation of the exchange in the data gathering that formed part of this follow up study.

## **Recruitment of Students**

The two Northern colleges, in particular already had significant exchange programmes with colleges in mainland Europe and the US. This meant that there was a difference between the colleges in how the students were chosen for the North- South exchange. In the Church of Ireland College in Dublin, for example, students were required to write a submission outlining why they wished to participate in the project, and what they hoped to achieve from it. Their submissions were distributed among a number of college staff for evaluation, and based on the outcome of this process certain students were selected for interview. Thus a combination of written submission and interview determined what students were selected to participate. In this instance, demand for places outstripped supply. This tended to be the pattern of selection in the colleges in the South. In the North there was access to a wider range of exchange programmes, and so recruitment there for the North-South project was based largely on nomination by college staff.

## **Selection of Schools**

The Directors of Teaching Practice at local level found schools in their jurisdiction willing to accept students from the 'other' jurisdiction for the three-week teaching practice period. This was a considerable accomplishment. Teachers are a highly motivated, driven set of professionals. They are accountable to a wide and critical audience that includes pupils, parents, the relevant Department of Education, and the wider community. Often they are reluctant to hand over their classes to novice teachers, as they fear that their pupils may be disadvantaged by the introduction of a 'student'. A classroom teacher develops routines and patterns, and any departure from these often constitutes a threat. So it is often difficult to find schools willing to accommodate student teachers. Experience has shown that there may be some serious catch-up work to be done with a class following a period of hosting a student teacher. There is also the fact that there is a limit to the

number of schools with which a college links, and there can be competition between colleges for identification and selection of teaching practice schools. The challenge of finding schools was greater for the North than for the South, as the numbers of students going North exceeded the numbers of students going South. Typically, 12-20 students went North and 8 students went South in any given year.

Having identified student and host schools, the next step in implementation was the coming together of the students and their Directors of Teaching Practice from their respective colleges for an Orientation Day.

### **Orientation Day**

The venue for the Orientation Day rotated from year to year of the exchange. Its purpose was to allow the participants to meet, to share their expectations and their apprehensions, to clarify any matters of concern, and to become familiar with the ethos and aspirations of the exchange project. It was also an opportunity to meet the personnel from the Centre for Cross Border Studies and to learn of the project in some detail. Budgetary and 'housekeeping' aspects of the project were explained. CCBS and the Directors of Teaching Practice assumed responsibility for the planning and programme for the day. *(see Appendix 3: Orientation Day Information Booklet).*

The Orientation Day was a day of great significance, not just in terms of dissemination of information, but because it constituted the first taste of the project for the student teachers. Their initial encounter with the project had the possibility of either attracting them to it more fully or scaring them. Happily the documentation arising from the Orientation Days indicates that students responded well to the day. Invariably they went away happy, and fired up with enthusiasm for what was to follow when they travelled to the host jurisdiction.

Typically the exchange students came to the Orientation Day accompanied by their Director of Teaching Practice from their parent College. Throughout the day they had the opportunity to meet the other DTPs. This was important, as

these would be the people who would eventually supervise them in their new placement and grade their classroom based work. The day also provided the opportunity to meet with students who had participated in the project in previous years. This was a very popular aspect of the day, as the students could identify and empathise with one another. The former participants told it as it was, or as they had experienced it, and those about to embark on the exchange pursued their own queries and sought clarification on matters that they deemed important.

Another aspect of the day was the opportunity to meet with and hear from a representative of the funding agency, the Special EU Programmes Body, and a representative from the Departments of Education in the host jurisdiction. These 'official' people set the tone for the day, and situated the project in the context of the emerging post-conflict island of Ireland. The day captured the idealism of the project, and transmitted a sense of privilege and of challenge to the students who could become peace-builders and agents of reconciliation and change, influenced by the educational and cultural experience which lay ahead of them.

A number of group sessions were built in to the day to facilitate mingling and networking among the students. During these sessions, there was an opportunity to discuss expectations and apprehensions relating to the exchange. As part of the formative evaluation of the project, a set of questionnaires/protocols had been prepared by an appointed evaluator to elicit information on these aspects. These provided interesting and useful data. The exchange students anticipated benefits from the exchange along two main dimensions, the professional and the personal. The following gives a flavour of what the data conveyed.

### **Students' Professional Expectations**

There was a similarity about the professional expectations from the students in both jurisdictions. They can be summarised as follows:

- To learn about the education system in the host jurisdiction

- To acquire knowledge of the curriculum, and to be able to pinpoint similarities and differences
- To compare pupil competencies and attainments
- To extend their repertoire of pedagogic skills
- To compare classrooms and the availability of resources to support teaching and learning
- To see if all subject areas held equal importance
- To experiment with new teaching methodologies
- To observe the faith dimension within schools.

These findings indicate that the student teachers were motivated to learn, and to develop as professionals through the experience of the exchange. They demonstrated a maturity and a sense of responsibility even at this early stage of the exchange.

### **Students' Personal Expectations**

On the personal dimension the students reflected their openness to what the exchange would bring, and to how they hoped to develop as people. Representative of their responses are the following:

- To overcome my total ignorance of the North, and to soak up as much as I can learn about it
- To observe how Catholic and Protestant cultures coexist
- To let go of my negative stereotyping through mixing with people
- To get a sense of the values and beliefs of the people in the North
- To deepen my understanding of the South
- To become involved in the celebrations around St.Patrick's Day and see how they party in the South
- To widen my circle of friends
- To develop my confidence as a person
- To grow through the experience
- To see if I can adapt and cope

- To learn some lifelong lessons
- To enhance my communication skills.

The above distillation is representative of the students' responses from one year to the next. Information on their apprehensions was also gathered on the Orientation Days. These data were used to set against the data which were gathered following the actual exchange. They allowed for assessment on how the project lived up to expectations and how the students fared with the challenges which they anticipated.

### **Students' Apprehensions**

A striking feature of the apprehensions put forward by the students is that they tended to centre on matters professional. The selected students realised that in going to the host jurisdiction, they were representing not only themselves but also their college, and their own part of the island of Ireland. They wanted to be fine ambassadors for both, while gaining personally from the experience. This is a distillation of their apprehensions:

- The adequacy of time to prepare good lessons
- The availability of resources to support teaching
- The possibility of not being understood by, or not understanding their pupils due to differences in accent
- The lack of familiarity with the texts
- The sensitivities about religion
- The sense that Science was better covered in the North than in the South
- The all important role of formal assessment
- The fear of not fitting in in the host school
- The fear that offence would be taken where none was intended

While apprehensions seem to have abounded, these were countered by a sense among the students that they had something to contribute. As a group they would have track records of high scholastic attainment, and in most cases high levels of competence in areas like music, art, drama and sport. In the experience of the researcher, student teachers at primary level tend to be talented, flexible, and eager to create capacity for others. This group of exchange students reflected this. Their writings prior to the exchange indicated that they wished to give as well as to take, to share their talents, to work cooperatively, to bring fun and novelty into the lives of their pupils, to be worthy representatives of their Colleges.

*I can't wait to get started. I am excited now that I know more about the exchange. I hope that I have the chance to do justice to the good work that goes on in our College. I want to express any talent as a teacher that I may have. I look forward to this and to being proud of my heritage and my ideals.*

(Student teacher, Observation Day 2005)

## **Knowledge of the Host Jurisdiction**

The Orientation Day gave an opportunity for honest sharing among the students about their knowledge of what would be their new environment. The initial levels of ignorance were staggering. Initially the students were reluctant to admit this, but as they grew more comfortable with each other, they acknowledged that to their embarrassment they were very uninformed about the education system, the social and political systems, and the issues of the day in the 'other' jurisdiction. They were open to learning, and looked forward to making good, at least in part, this knowledge deficit through the exchange and the insights it could provide.

A booklet containing comprehensive information on the exchange was distributed to the students in the course of the day. The booklet was prepared

by the Centre for Cross Border Studies, and modified as suggestions came up or in response to feedback from each year cohort of participants.

At the end of an Orientation Day an evaluation was carried out to ascertain students' response to the day. The data revealed that they found the day to be most useful and helpful in erasing fears and insecurities that some students may have brought to the table. A striking feature over the years was the level of seriousness which the students attached to the whole initiative. They manifestly wanted to give of their best, and they openly shared their concerns about their future task. Their peers who had been involved in earlier years dispelled many of these niggling worries. The following were typical remarks:

*Having spoken to somebody who completed the programme last year, I was struck by his enthusiasm. His account of his experience helped allay some fears I had, and certainly whetted my appetite for the challenge and the experience ahead.*

(Orientation Day, 2004)

Another student remarked

*I can't wait to go on the Observation Day to meet the teacher and see the class and school I will be working with.*

(Orientation Day, 2005)

As the project evolved, there was frequent discussion among the groups on the value of the Orientation Day. There was a notion that it might be replaced by an Observation Day prior to the exchange in the allocated school in the host jurisdiction. This latter dimension was built in over time to the exchange, and happily the Orientation Day remained. It is this writer's view that it was an excellent and integral feature of the project. It was a vehicle for the dissemination of lots of relevant information; it enabled the exchange students to meet each other and to initiate contact that would be nurtured subsequently; it allowed the Directors of Teaching Practice to assure the

students that they would be supported throughout the exchange; it positioned the Centre for Cross Border Studies right in the centre of the project; it provided a platform for senior officials to celebrate the project, and to proclaim its significance as an all Ireland endeavour, and it set the tone for what was to follow – the seriousness of it and the privilege of it.

Speaking at an Orientation day in Froebel College in Dublin in 2005, Christine Jendoubi, Assistant Secretary of the Department of Education in Northern Ireland, spoke of the potential of the exchange for learning, and for development for students, for schools, and for the education systems in both jurisdictions:

*We in Northern Ireland have a great interest in the Republic or Ireland 1999 curriculum. Our statutory curriculum in the North is very regimented. Our Council for Curricular Education and Assessment (CCEA) and your National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) have engaged in long consultation on this. We have looked at the knowledge base, at what kind of people we want to turn out, and we are moving to a more child centred curriculum. You students going North will have the opportunity to experience the remainder of the statutory curriculum in Northern Ireland. I urge you to learn a lot and to enjoy yourselves. Please do both!*

On the same occasion the Assistant Chief Inspector from the Irish Department of Education and Science told the student teachers that in terms of education policy there was a lot happening. She emphasised that the project was very important in the life path of the beginning teachers, developing mutual understandings, offering well- grounded experiences, and correcting misunderstandings. She went on:

*Teacher Education is front and centre of the education agenda. There is a synergy all round regarding these issues in the EU, at the OECD and in Ireland, North and South. I applaud you all. I want to offer my congratulations to all involved in this very important initiative. The Centre for Cross Border Studies, the institutions, the lecturers, the host schools, and you ( the*

*exchange students) who are up for it. I know that the project is oversubscribed, and I am empathic to the demands of teaching practice as a former student teacher myself. On behalf of the DES, I wish you well. Learn of your own country. Enjoy and benefit!*

It was interesting and symbolic of what the project was striving to achieve to hear the representatives of the education systems from both jurisdictions hitting the same note in this way. They stressed that their problems in education were similar in many ways, but that their progress with their solutions was at different points. The 'optics' of their shared experience mirrored in many ways what cross-jurisdiction collaboration looked like in action.

The next phase of the roll out of the exchange project involved an Observation Day for the exchange students, in the schools in the host jurisdiction, selected for them by the Directors of Teaching Practice. This was introduced in Year Three of the project, in 2005.

### **Observation Day**

The Observation Day was planned to occur a few weeks in advance of the cross-border placement, as following it the student spent large amounts of time back in their home college preparing curriculum materials in support of teaching and learning. Detailed discussion about the workload of the student formed the major focus of this day. Some teachers gave a pen picture of each pupil, and were quite directive and structured with their guidance for the student. Some other teachers were less directive and prepared their student 'to go with the flow'.

It is on an Observation Day that student teachers get their first glimpse of their field placement school in the other jurisdiction, their allocated classroom, their class of pupils, their entry point in to the curricular areas for which they will

have responsibility during their exchange. Equally importantly, it is then that they meet the principal and the staff of their host school.

A key player in influencing a student's school based work experience is the cooperating classroom teacher in the host school. This person plays a vital role in welcoming and blending a student into the work of the classroom, in giving confidence to help a student progress, in finding a balance between allowing the student to find his/her way, while warding off potential problems of a serious nature in matters of discipline, relationships or pedagogy. The dynamic that develops between a student teacher on placement and the resident cooperating classroom teacher is a vital determinant in the perceived success or failure of the teaching practice process.

The student teacher is now in the real world of teaching. S/he may only have a rudimentary set of pedagogic and relationship skills; probably has high levels of anxiety, mingled with insecurity; and is being observed by an experienced teacher and a class of pupils, all of whom are unknown to her/him. The student teacher knows little about the culture of the school, and apprehension may stifle his/her performance. All these anxiety factors are exacerbated by this being a pioneering exercise in teaching practice in a 'foreign' jurisdiction.

The classroom teacher holds the key to easing many of the anxieties that student teachers may harbour in their initial encounter with a school, and a classroom of pupils. There are student teachers who fail to reach their potential on teaching practice placement because they get off to a bad start with their cooperating teacher in their host school. Other students blossom, and have a wholly satisfactory and affirming experience. Some extracts from a sample of students catch their reaction to their Orientation Day.

*Seeing the school panicked me, just because it was an all boys school. The school seemed to be less well resourced than up North. I felt that the school placement would be difficult, and felt out of my depth, but*

*when I got there, I had a great experience, and I strengthened as a teacher’.*

(Student from Northern Ireland)

*The opportunity to observe was an invaluable experience. It helped me see what types of things the children responded well to, and also helped me to get a grip on the different curriculum. I had never taught infant classes before, but the observation day helped me to get up to speed with the different pace of the infant day.*

(Student from Mary Immaculate College, Limerick).

*It was great to meet the class teacher beforehand, as this really put me at ease going North. Also getting to discuss the topics I would be teaching was invaluable for my teaching.*

(Student from Marino Institute of Education, Dublin)

*The day gave me an idea of what topics to teach so I could be prepared when coming on block placement. Seeing the school allowed me to gauge the classes’ abilities and interests. I was more relaxed and was able to get resources from home to take down with me’.*

(Student from Northern Ireland)

*I found the class teacher to be extremely friendly and supportive. She gave advice and support whenever she could, and this was reflective of the overall attitude of St. Joseph’s in Carryduff. The staff were very friendly and interested in us. The children were great as well—very enthusiastic and they appreciated everything that was being done for them.*

(Student from Mary Immaculate College, Limerick)

It is to the credit of the Directors of Teaching Practice from the participating colleges that they chose schools and classrooms in which the students were made welcome, and where every effort was made to integrate them in to the life of the school. The evaluations point up only one negative experience with a placement over the course of the exchange project. And even this, in its own way, proved to be a learning experience for the student concerned, though she would have wished for a different kind of learning experience.

The initial Observation Day that took place before the students went on the actual exchange was followed by another day's observation, or in some cases a few more days, when they embarked on the actual exchange.

Students always wish for more opportunity to observe. They can learn a lot by observing, especially if they have been introduced to what constitutes accurate and skilled observation. However, some experienced teachers are reluctant to give students this opportunity. They may be self-conscious at being observed; they may lack self-confidence, and feel that the young student may have more modern approaches to the teaching of the curriculum. There is a mixed set of motives and beliefs at play when it comes to the evolving relationship between classroom teacher and student teacher on placement.

## **PART 3**

### **THE ACTUAL EXCHANGE**

In the Spring term, between February and April, the students went from their parent colleges to take up their places in their allocated schools for three weeks in the host jurisdiction. Formal assessment of the students was always a feature of the exchange programme. In the first two years, assessment was carried out by staff members from the home college to which the students belonged. During the final two years, the teaching practice was supervised and formally graded by staff from both jurisdictions. This enhanced inter-institutional collaboration, and made for broad ownership of the exchange project among the colleges.

Students made their own way to the schools and in the majority of cases they used public transport to travel there. Alongside the professional dimension of the exchange, which inevitably centred on the school based work, the students were meant to experience some cultural/ recreational pursuits beyond the school. In reality, they returned to their accommodation after their day in school and prepared for the following day's work. The impression must not be given that it was all work and no play, but the major focus for the exchange students was their engagement with the school work and their success and satisfaction in carrying that out satisfactorily. This they certainly did in both jurisdictions. Details of this will be reported later.

The students stayed in campus accommodation in the host college where this was available (Stranmillis was particularly facilitating in this regard). Some students who came from Belfast to Dublin were placed in a guest house, as it was not feasible to arrange campus accommodation for the visitors. This proved to be a popular choice for the group. Students did not travel back to their home jurisdiction during the three- week block placement. Activities of a cultural nature were arranged for the weekends.

## **The Evaluation Day**

When the exchange was completed, there was a post-teaching practice Evaluation Day, which usually took place in late April or early May in one of the Dublin colleges. The purpose of this day was to allow for a debriefing on the experience of the exchange. The Dublin colleges rotated the hosting of this day. The willingness of the colleges to host the various events that were integral to the project is illustrative of the collaboration and networking that the exchange engendered. The exchange students accompanied by their Directors of Teaching Practice attended the day, and an external examiner sat in on the event. During the day there was an opportunity for students to share and reflect on the experience of the exchange, and to review their concerns and expectations as articulated on the Orientation Day.

As in the case of the Orientation Days, the post teaching practice Evaluation Days were structured and orchestrated in a way that allowed for good data-gathering for the organisers of the exchange. The day also allowed the students the opportunity to reunite with their peers from their partner institutions and further develop their links. The evaluation instrument which the students and Directors of Teaching Practice filled out in the course of the day, in conjunction with the focus group sessions, helped to bring the exchange process to a point of formal completion.

Before they had gone on the exchange, the students were involved in anticipating what the experience might be like; now that it had taken place they were in a position to share and reflect on it. Typically the areas which received attention on the Evaluation Days were: 1) professional and personal gains arising from the exchange; 2) the challenges which the exchange presented; 3) the organisation and support that underpinned the exchange; 4) the understandings and insights that developed through the exchange. Students brought their Reflective Journals to the day, and they were very comfortable passing these on to the evaluator as a source of data (see *Appendix 4*).

## Reflective Journals

Before embarking on the exchange, students were encouraged by the organisers of the project to write up a Reflective Journal on a daily basis or at least at very frequent intervals throughout the exchange. The Reflective Journal corresponded to what might be referred to in other contexts as a 'Blog' of their experiences. Blogs are currently used in teacher education programmes as a tool to encourage reflective practice, an aspect of the profession that is held in high esteem among the educational research and teacher education community.

The Reflective Journal was introduced to the students with a set of guidelines to help them to structure their experiences (see *Appendix 4*). The data that they contained were very valuable as they represented 'real time', spontaneous, authentic responses and reactions to the exchange. An entry in one student's journal went as follows (During his exchange, his host school in East Belfast produced the show *Annie*):

*The Annie production was the highlight of teaching practice and although my job on the night was selling ice cream along with the children ( the children were even teaching me pounds and pence),I was appreciated and was thanked by parents and staff. One may think that teaching practice is all about lesson plans, schemes and the dreaded supervisor visit, but that was the last thing on my mind. For the first time I was seen as a real teacher and I had developed greatly in doing so from my experience in Branial.*

*The most difficult part of the exchange was actually leaving the school. Branial Primary taught me more about the profession of teaching than any "Practice of Teaching Textbook" could ever do. My approach to teaching and my style have changed since, from the help of the children and teachers in Branial and from the exchange itself. I would encourage every student to try their best and to go to Belfast with an aim to **learn** as well as **teach**.*

*I am most grateful to the Centre for Cross Border Studies, Stranmillis, and my own Froebel College for the experience, and I wish success to everyone involved.*

This journal entry shows the level of appreciation when a young student from rural Ireland had the opportunity to be part of something professionally developmental and enriching that the project opened up for him. He also recognised the bi-directional dimension of teaching – teachers teach their pupils, but they also learn from them if they are open and receptive to this. The sense of community he witnessed in Braniel – a largely Protestant working class area of East Belfast – through the collaboration of school staff, parents and pupils is an excellent example of what can be accomplished when people work towards the attainment of a shared goal. One hopes that the influence of this positive experience in his formative years as a student teacher will remain with this young man, and that he will replicate it in his ‘Braniels’ of the future.

### **The Administrative Aspects of the Exchange**

The administration of the project was carried out by staff at the Centre for Cross Border Studies in Armagh. The North-South Student Teacher Exchange Project represented a new field of involvement for the Centre, so the personnel there found themselves working with a new range of collaborators, i.e. teacher educators and student teachers. They in turn were operating within the varying parameters of two different education systems and seven different teacher education establishments. The challenge for the Centre of carrying this through must not be underestimated, especially in the first year, where the turn around time between the securing of funding and the actual implementation of the exchange was only a few months.

The bringing to reality of the project in that short time span was attributable to a number of factors. Among these factors was the conviction of those who led

it forward of its intrinsic worth. College presidents lent the project their support, and in turn facilitated the involvement of their Directors of Teaching Practice, their staff and their students. Commenting on the exchange, Professor Peadar Cremin, President of Mary Immaculate College in Limerick said:

*We were delighted to give our full support to the exchange from the outset as it significantly deepened what we had previously been doing by making annual exchanges a reality. Knowing of the commitment of Andy Pollak and the innovative work of the Centre for Cross Border Studies, we felt reassured that the exchanges would be well organised, prepared and delivered, and so it was to be..*

Another characteristic of the infrastructural support was the detailed planning and the meticulous attention to detail that the project received. There was a blueprint in existence from the 1999-2000 exchange. The Centre for Cross Border Studies used this, and adapted it to meet the criteria set by the funding agency, the Special EU Programmes Body. The many cross-border meetings and discussions played a large role in the structure of the project and in its various components. The annual evaluations served to give useful feedback on how it worked and pointed up aspects where modification would improve it. These modifications were implemented.

One of the most time consuming and sensitive aspects of the project's administration was linked to how monies were dispersed. In accordance with EU regulations every cent had to be accounted for. This sometimes translated in to what appeared like petty housekeeping on the part of the Centre for Cross Border Studies with its practice of receipt gathering and demanding justification of all expenditure by the participants. But the adherence to what might have appeared like an over-officious monitoring of the monies was a necessary and binding aspect of the funding agreement with the SEUPB and its 'intermediary funding body' in the second phase, Cooperation Ireland. It was as annoying for the Centre staff member to carry through as it was for

those whom it impacted. The role that money played in the interplay between the Centre in Armagh and the project's stakeholders was potentially destructive of good, trusting working relationships. As a part resolution to the preoccupation with docketing and ticketing every individual's transactions, the administrator in the Armagh Centre, where possible, pre-booked centrally any element of the project that she could. In this way, potentially embarrassing disputes over money matters were avoided.

The researcher has been struck throughout by how well managed and nurtured this exchange project has been, despite its logistical complexities. Every step of it has been undertaken competently, and with care and commitment. The success of the project is centrally linked to the excellent stewardship and shared responsibility among the key players that characterised the project as a whole.

## **Part 4**

### **ANNUAL EVALUATION FINDINGS**

#### **Assessment of the Exchange**

One of the strengths of the exchange programme was that it was evaluated fevaluator. The annual evaluations provided evidence of gains and of aspects that needed rethinking. The 2005 summative evaluation indicated high levels of satisfaction with the project and the successful attainment of most of its objectives. These are discussed in more detail below. A significant amount of discussion arising from the evaluations and from feedback related to two important aspects of professional practice: 1) the introduction of a pre-exchange Observation Day in the classroom in which the student was due to be placed for the period of the exchange; 2) the introduction of bilateral formal assessment of the Teaching Practice process for the last two years, involving lecturers from both the home and the host college of the participating student.

The introduction of an Observation Day may not appear to be a significant development, but its importance should not be underestimated. The Observation Day was introduced in 2005 and became a cornerstone of the project in subsequent years. In fact, the students recommended that there be two pre-exchange Observation Days, as the value of this initial experience determines their sense of control over what may ensue in the block placement of the exchange. However this was not possible for financial reasons.

The introduction of the grading of teaching practice by staff members from both jurisdictions was a major development. In the first two years (2002-2003 and 2003-2004), before the decision to assess the teaching practice bilaterally, the students would have had a visit from their home college's Director of Teaching Practice or other staff member. This was more in the form of support and was pastoral in orientation. The decision to grade the

process as part of formal assessment in 2004-2005 and 2006-2007 meant that the students were now being evaluated by staff members from both their home and host colleges. Initially, this was anxiety provoking for the students, but as they won the admiration of their host supervisors, they grew in confidence, and felt empowered.

*The Northern supervisor was very encouraging about my work. She was impressed by my autonomy and my creativity, and that meant an awful lot to me.*

(Southern student reporting on her supervision in Belfast)

The decision to have supervisors from both jurisdictions contribute to the grading of a student represented a major shift in emphasis. It involved more staff members than the core group of Directors of Teaching Practice, and greatly increased the level and scope of the cross-border cooperation being undertaken by the participating colleges.

## **Findings from the Evaluations**

A striking feature of the evaluations over the years of the project was the consensus of views among respondents. A summary of their detailed responses on a wide range of categories is set out here.

## **General Outcomes for Students**

Students from both jurisdictions reported a growth in their professional competence, and a new knowledge of the curriculum in the host jurisdiction. As bright, articulate young people they were adroit in evaluating the merits and demerits, as they saw them, of the respective curricula, and of the priorities that seemed to characterise the schools in two jurisdictions. Their skills were developed and extended. Students' reflection on their approaches

led to new levels of analysis of how pupils learn. There was a view that classrooms in the South were not as pressurised as those in the North where the attainment of prescribed targets is a driving force for teachers and pupils alike. Life in classrooms in the South appeared to be more pupil focussed and less task focussed than was the case in the North. Classrooms had a more relaxed atmosphere, and the individual teacher had more discretion with regard to curriculum implementation. An emphasis on task completion in the North seemed to make for few discipline problems, while the apparent absence of preoccupation with targets in the South, and the tendency to use discussion and active teaching methods, opened up the possibility of some discipline problems. The students found it very reinforcing to be able to adapt to the change in classroom dynamics and pedagogic style.

*I was given guides as to what to teach as well as free choice to change. This is very different to Northern Ireland, so I felt more relaxed and was able to get resources from home to take down with me.*

(Student from St Mary's University College placed in a Dublin school)

The excellent range of resources available in the North was the envy of the students from the South. By contrast, the Belfast students were struck by the lack of resources available in the schools in the South. One area of resource provision that evoked comment each year was linked to the proficiency in technological competence of the pupils in the North. Classrooms in the North were much more likely to have computer support than was the case in the South. Pupils in the North carried out their assignments using technology as a tool. This contrasted with patterns of pupil engagement with their assignments in the South.

There was a view shared among students from the South that the pupils in the Belfast schools had higher levels of attainment in core subjects than their Southern peers. But there was a caveat. They wondered if the children in the Belfast schools enjoyed school as much as those in the South, and wondered

if they found the enactment of the curriculum interactive and thematic. One student commented as follows:

*In terms of mathematical and writing ability the children of the North were very advanced. However, they certainly appeared to be a novelty involved in the group work and oral language activities. Hence the group and discovery learning opportunities were thoroughly enjoyed by the Northern classes.*

(Student from Marino Institute of Education placed in a school in Belfast).

On a personal level, the students over the years found the exchange experience to be professionally developmental, but also enjoyable and personally enriching. They left the cloistered and familiar environment of their home College and set on a personal mission that was 'high stakes' at a professional level, and for many, a first break away from their local area and their families. They gained enormously in terms of independence and self-confidence. They had become involved in a serious career related project. They had successfully dealt with its intrinsic challenges and acquitted themselves competently. This was very reaffirming for them and contributed to their self-esteem and their professional growth. The welcome that they received in the host schools and the enabling conditions there helped this process. They could focus on the work in hand, free from any tension that an ambivalent relationship with their hosts could cause. A Southern student wrote of the exchange as follows:

*It was an invaluable experience, culturally and professionally. I made some brilliant new friends for life, and gained a priceless insight into the personality of the people of East Belfast. Seeing a consummate professional (my teacher) in action cannot but benefit my future career. The warmth and welcome afforded us in the host school was unbelievable.*

(Student from Froebel College of Education placed in a Belfast school).

A student from Limerick said:

*Overall the exchange was a very positive and enjoyable experience, although tough work at the same time. I found everyone involved to be very positive and helpful and would recommend the experience to others.*

## **General Outcomes for Colleges**

It is evident that without the full cooperation of the seven colleges of education that the exchange could not have taken place. The college presidents supported the project in word and in deed. Here are two typical comments:

*The whole experience was enriching for not only the students, but for our college as well. It was particularly gratifying to have the work of our students affirmed by our Northern colleagues. It gave us increased confidence in the worth of what it is that we try to do'.*

(Sydney Blain, President of Church of Ireland College of Education, Rathmines)

*Some useful joint staff research activity and scholarly publications were a bonus, which at the beginning, when the focus was understandably on ensuring a quality student experience, had not been anticipated. It is my belief that the exchanges achieved their objectives, and that the students involved will have been influenced by them for their entire teaching careers. In turn through them thousands of children over time will also benefit.*

(Professor Richard McMinn, President, Stranmillis University College)

The colleges' Directors of Teaching Practice became a 'community of learners' as a result of the exchange, sharing their expertise and their insights in the course of many meetings (including several 'overnights'). Now that the project has come to an end, the bond that continues between the Directors is a lasting and vibrant testimony to the strong links that were established among them. The Director of Teaching Practice at St Mary's University College said after the first exchange in 2003:

*Lecturers have had the opportunity to dialogue with other TP organisers and to see other systems of organisation in operation. It has been very beneficial to assess other students using a variety of assessment tools, and the different criteria and emphasis put on various aspects of practice has been enlightening. This allows us the opportunity to reflect on our own practice, assessment, criteria and feedback systems and evaluate these. I think that this has been a very worthwhile project that has been a learning experience for both myself and for the students from St. Mary's. There was much more work entailed in organising than I had imagined there would be. Organising placements was rather pressurised, and convincing cooperating schools that they would benefit from the exchange was difficult at quite a late stage in the year.*

A recurring theme from the Directors of Teaching Practice was the added workload that the exchange entailed. There was a wish to extend the number of students who participated in any one year, but a realisation that this would have increased even further the workload for the colleges. Directors of Teaching Practice enlisted the cooperation of their colleagues, especially with the cross-border task of assessment in the schools. In some instances, colleagues were co-opted to help with the debriefing exercises within their own colleges that followed the exchange, or when hosting an Evaluation Day for the participants. The involvement of staff other than the Directors of Teaching Practice led to broad ownership of the exchange within colleges.

*It was a considerable extra workload as ours was the host college in the South for all Northern students. Budgetary requirements from the Centre for Cross Border Studies were very demanding and not always in line with what I am accustomed to in my own institution. Care of the students participating is of paramount importance and with a small pool of staff it is difficult to do everything.*

(Director of Teaching Practice in a Dublin College).

Two of the Directors collaborated on a joint research paper based on the exchange, and presented this at an international conference on teacher

education in Estonia in 2004 (Margaret Farrar and Pádraig Cannon). The DTPs purposeful conversations inevitably led to refined knowledge about student teachers' initial training. This kind of joint reflection and sharing of practice among teacher educators is advocated among educational researchers. It is usually difficult to bring about in a single jurisdiction, let alone across a border, due to time pressures and logistical difficulties. The project enabled this to happen among the cadre of educators who shepherded the project with professionalism and dedication. It is the view of this researcher that for this alone it has been worthwhile.

## **Summary of Outcomes from the Annual Evaluations**

With regard to the professional outcomes, students reported the following:

### ***Professional***

- Increased knowledge of the education system in the host jurisdiction
- Increased familiarity with the primary school curriculum in the host jurisdiction
- Increased knowledge of pedagogic approaches in the host jurisdiction
- Increased knowledge of priorities between institutions, schools, and jurisdictions
- Increased knowledge of similarities and differences in culture and attitudes across the jurisdictions
- Increased knowledge of the underpinnings of the socio-political factors influencing life in the host jurisdictions
- Increased understandings and empathy regarding issues of political sensitivity across the jurisdictions
- Increased resolve to be agents of reconciliation, peace-building and goodwill in an historic era of change

- Increased motivation to sustain viable links among educators and pupils across the jurisdictions
- Increased commitment to exploit the exchange programme for the benefit of the stakeholders.

### ***Personal***

With regard to the personal outcomes, the following represents typical findings from the participating students:

- A certain coming of age that stems from coping successfully in a new and unfamiliar environment
- A growth of self-confidence that comes from the affirmation and support of significant others, e.g., school principal, college supervisor, new colleagues, new pupil cohorts
- A recognition that the privileged perspectives opened up through the exchange could be shared with many others both in a professional and a personal capacity on return to the home jurisdiction
- A sense that participation in the exchange represented 'value added' that would place them at an advantage in the employment market over their peers who did not participate.

When one sets these findings against the expected outcomes for students embedded in the exchange programme design, there is substantial evidence to show that the programme was remarkably successful in meeting its objectives.

### **Directors of Teaching Practice**

As already stated, the Directors of Teaching Practice were key players in the success of the exchange project. They are all senior people in their respective institutions and as such are in a position to create spheres of influence.

Despite the heavy responsibilities that they carry in their Colleges, they adapted their schedules to accommodate the demands of the project. They mediated the project in their own Colleges; selected the candidates; found school placements for visiting students in the host jurisdiction; liaised with their counterparts in the other colleges; linked with the Centre for Cross Border Studies; supervised and took care of the students while on placement, and kept an overall watching brief on the process.

In the course of their work they exchanged views and information relevant to the core objectives of the project, and advanced the agenda of mutual understandings and respect for diversity. Back in their own colleges they facilitated the dissemination of lessons learned, and experience gained by their students throughout the placement. They were excellent ambassadors for the project, and despite the extra demands associated with its prosecution, they remained positive, and were loyal advocates for the work. Their own knowledge of the education systems on the island of Ireland became well honed, and they moved comfortably between the disparate systems.

They were involved in the project in an era when the rolling agenda of education reform was being implemented. Much of this agenda was linked to curriculum innovation, and to considerable debate on the transition from primary to second level schools. It also was an era of increased awareness of the importance of intercultural sensitivity and provision for 'new comers' into an increasingly multicultural Ireland. The project between the jurisdictions on the island was but one project among many for some of the participating Colleges, especially for Stranmillis University College in Belfast, which has a number of international exchange projects in train. The fact that some DTPs had broad experience in prosecuting comparable projects, and had many exemplars for purposes of comparison, was also a rich dimension of the exchange.

Throughout the lifespan of the project, the Directors of Teaching Practice worked to sharpen and refine the project so as to increase the gains for their students. Improvements which they implemented over the period included:

- The introduction of an Observation Day prior to the annual exchange
- The formulation of a joint role for college staff North and South, in the supervision and grading of the student teachers
- A longer lead-in time before the exchange to allow the students to spend more time in preparation and planning, and extended observation time prior to the commencement of actual teaching duties
- Better and more informed planning on the part of the students
- The encouragement of creative approaches to teaching in the host classrooms
- Greater consideration on the range of classes in which to place the students
- Greater consideration on the range and mix of schools in which to place the students
- An effort to strike a better balance between the work dimension of the exchange and the opportunities to learn more of the social and cultural life of the host jurisdiction.

The data show that these improvements were implemented to the benefit of the exchange. The one area that seemed difficult to influence was linked to the social and cultural aspects of the exchange. The students seemed to be 'all work and no play'. They were totally preoccupied with their schoolwork and spent the out-of-school time preparing for their ongoing work in the host school.

This fits with the characteristics of the participating student groups, who were young committed learners with high attainment needs and good track records of success. They seem to have adopted the view that the overriding priority was to show competence in the host schools, and to do this they needed to immerse themselves in the planning and preparation that this necessitated. Their knowledge of the culture or political issues was filtered incidentally

through their work in the schools. Though this realisation was there from the first year of the exchange, as the evaluation showed, it proved very difficult to break the pattern of hard work and minimal recreation that was to characterise the exchange over its total lifespan.

The above is an account of the project in its total four year lifespan (2002-2007), including a year's gap due to delays in processing a follow-up EU funding application in 2005-2006, leading to the eventual implementation of a fourth annual exchange in 2006-2007. The report now turns to presentation of results on the longitudinal study carried out to gauge impact of the exchange now that the beneficiaries have taken up their careers as teachers in schools across the island of Ireland.

## **PART 5**

### **THE POST EXCHANGE LONGITUDINAL STUDY**

#### **Introduction**

The overall aim of the longitudinal study of the 2002-2007 North-South Student Teacher Exchange programme was to determine if gains that had occurred as the programme unfolded were retained after its completion. The evaluation data presented above have indicated that the exchange programme was highly successful as measured by a number of key indicators. The focus of the 2007-2008 study is on the longer-term impact of the initiative. Exchange programmes such as this are often perceived as highly successful during and in the immediate aftermath of their completion, but with the passage of time, a 'wash out' effect can occur whereby initial gains are lost. This loss seems to occur unless there is a set of enabling conditions to sustain the initial gains. This section of the report concentrates on research that was carried out in 2007-2008 to examine the robustness of the outcomes documented above.

#### **Methodology**

As a first step in the process, the researcher carried out a survey of the relevant educational literature. She then drew up a timeframe for the conduct of the work and subsequently implemented it so as to stay within the stipulated time for completion. At her request, the Centre for Cross Border Studies provided the names and postal addresses of the more than 100 student teachers who had been involved in the exchange over the four years. At an early stage in the research process the researcher wrote to each of the students who had participated in the exchange. This letter was followed up by a telephone conversation with a sample of participants from each year cohort in early 2008. This sample of students who became telephone respondents, and those who went on to become focus group members, was selected on the

basis of their accessibility and their willingness to become involved as research subjects.

There were students whom it was not possible to reach, either because they were either no longer available at the number given, or because their mobile telephones were not answered. From the total sample of 103 students who participated, the researcher made actual contact with 62 of them. Students from all the years of the exchange and from both jurisdictions in every year were represented in her interviews and focus groups.

From the students chosen for telephone conversations, the researcher invited representatives to meet in the form of a focus group. Two focus group meetings were carried out in Dublin, one in Limerick, one in Belfast and one in Cavan.

The focus group participants were asked to introduce the researcher to teaching colleagues of their acquaintance either from within their own school, or from other schools, who did not take part in the exchange, and who would make up a control sample. This they did willingly, and focus group meetings of control students were carried out in Dublin, Belfast and Maynooth. The Maynooth group was formed through personal contact with groups of primary teachers that the researcher had access to through her post-graduate classes at the National University of Ireland, Maynooth. Typically focus groups ranged in size from four to six members.

Another source of data came from a number of conversations that the researcher carried out with a random group of teachers in schools widely dispersed around the South. In the course of her work she has responsibility for visiting schools either to supervise teaching practice, or to facilitate continuing professional development days. This gave her access to large numbers of teachers. As opportunity permitted, the researcher explored some lines of enquiry relevant to the data gathering exercise.

The researcher had prepared a protocol which she used to structure the discussion both during the face-to-face contact with informants and in the focus groups. Contemporaneous notes were made on all occasions and written up immediately afterwards.

The researcher made contact with the Directors of Teaching Practice in the participating colleges. She met with three of them who are still in post, and talked at length with one who is now principal of a large primary school. These meetings took place in Dublin and in Belfast in the period between Easter and summer 2008. These informants were very involved in the exchange right through its duration, and were reliable and interested respondents.

It is worth pointing out that the 2007-2008 study was a post-programme exploration, the period since the exchange programme ended differed: for some it was as long ago as 2003; others had completed it as recently as 2007.. However the sample of informants is representative of all the years that were involved. As already stated, the Directors of Teaching Practice who were interviewed for this phase of the work had been involved with the programme throughout its duration.

## **Findings**

In the interest of clarity the results for student participants and for Directors of Teaching Practice are presented separately. The data from the protocols have been distilled as many of the areas of investigation overlap with each other. The findings for 1) student professional development and 2) student personal development now follow, and are based on the benchmark outcomes that arose in the formative evaluations referred to above.

## **Student Participants Professional Development**

### **1. Knowledge of the education systems and curricula**

The results show that there has been an enduring impact among the participants according to a range of measures relating to their experience in the host jurisdiction. Without doubt they were more articulate and more confident in their discussion about the education systems and primary school curricula North and South, than was the case with their control group peers. The latter group were not at all familiar with the education system or its curriculum in the 'other' jurisdiction. There was a fluency and ease in their discussion of education matters among the exchange students, and a confidence in how they addressed the areas of enquiry. By contrast, their control group peers were much less surefooted, and inclined to be embarrassed at their manifest lack of knowledge of curricula and matters in the neighbouring jurisdiction.

The exchange participants were reflective and critical in their evaluations of the merits and shortcomings of the issues under discussion. The researcher noted that their responses were now influenced by their practice and their job embedded knowledge. They moved easily throughout their responses from their current experiences as qualified classroom practitioners to the exchange period, when as student teachers they were grappling with an unfamiliar curriculum in a different education system. There was a sense that they would relish the opportunity to revisit their placement school and compare and contrast through the prism of their current, and by now more refined learning. They indicated that they would have liked the opportunity to attend lectures in their host college, as this would have further enriched their experience both professionally and personally. The researcher was impressed by the clarity and assuredness in their answering. The memory of the detail of the exchange had not diminished over the time period, nor apparently, had its cumulative impact.

*It was a wonderful experience. I learned about the curriculum pressures; saw the value of directed time; wondered about directed play; marvelled at the use of displays; envied the availability of resources; and developed my own style*

*and approach to the implementation of a curriculum that was different in some*  
(Teacher from the Cavan Focus Group)

*I loved the seemingly relaxed atmosphere in my Dublin school. I enjoyed the freedom to be creative in how you presented material. I have retained this and it works well now in my Derry school. I relate to the pupils in my class more through discussion and allowing them to build up their own knowledge. My sister is a primary school teacher in the South, so we spend a lot of time talking about our respective experiences as teachers. Having seen how it works in the South through the exchange, I find these conversations interesting and evocative of my own time there in a really good situation. The exchange changes you in ways that it is difficult to describe, but I know that I grew through it, and that it has enhanced me as a professional.*

(Teacher from the Belfast Focus Group)

The Northern system was spoken of as being more externally controlled than in the South. Teachers from the Southern sample of respondents rejoiced in the latitude that they enjoyed in curriculum interpretation; in promoting children's construction of their own knowledge, and in being free from the influence of a formal exam process (the '11 Plus') that determined options regarding entry to second level school on completion of primary. The view still persisted that children in the schools in Northern Ireland had higher attainments than their Southern peers.

## **2. Pedagogic Approaches and Priorities**

In terms of impact, respondents admired the positives that both education systems promote and are influenced by these. They recognise that they are working within a given system, which determines to some extent their classroom teaching. In the South, newly qualified teachers (NQTs) undergo a process conducted by the Inspectorate which leads to their being probated as teachers. Understandably they are at pains to reach the required standard for this in the context in which they work. A similar system is not in operation in

the North, but there is a well structured tripartite arrangement involving the colleges, the school principals and the Education and Library Boards which is targeted at the continuing professional development of NQTs. This is one of the fundamental ways in which the systems differ, and classroom teaching is influenced by the different supports.

A significant difference between the jurisdictions which inevitably led to discussion was the practice in Northern Ireland of 'directed' or 'mandated' time at the end of every school day, during which teachers stay on after the pupils have left to prepare their work for the next day. In the South there is no such official policy (although of course there are many teachers who do stay on after school to engage in school related work).

In the North there is also a culture of NQTs becoming involved in collaborative work with their teaching colleagues. This means that their work is heavily influenced by their work colleagues, and by the work related practices in their schools. By contrast, NQTs in the South may not work collaboratively with colleagues, and may in some instances be a little isolated. A recent Department of Education and Science pilot Induction programme targeted at NQTs may reduce this sense of isolation, but not all NQTs are in a geographical area that makes involvement in the programme possible.

In terms of pedagogic style or approaches, the respondents in the focus groups expressed the view that there was more scope for creativity and individual interpretation of the curriculum in the South. The Continuing Professional Development days that formed part and parcel of the implementation of the 1999 Primary School Curriculum (i.e. the revised curriculum) encouraged teachers to mediate the strands of the curriculum in ways that promoted active teaching methodologies and a constructionist approach to learning. In the North, the focus is on attainment of prescribed targets, and teachers there work to ensure mastery among their learners. A teacher in the Limerick focus group commented as follows:

*The approach to children was top- down. You had to cover the material at all costs. It was a race to do so. Above all, reach the target. There was no time to sit down with the children and talk to them and with them. The teachers met, compared, planned, diaries out! The individuality of the teachers is suppressed, with no scope to deviate. It was curriculum focussed versus child focussed. Results in the 11+ exam were very, very important. Contrast this with the holistic, child-centred approach in the Republic of Ireland.*

Respondents in both jurisdictions continued to be aware of the marked differences in the level of resources. These resources included access to and competence in technology. There was recognition that schools in the South trail behind the North in this domain.

*'They had phenomenal resources – presses full of stuff, access to computers, toys etc. I never saw the like of it; all of their resources were used. Our schools are dismal by comparison in this regard'.*

(Teacher from a Dublin Focus Group)

In summary, the data suggest that while teaching styles from one jurisdiction may not have been adopted in the other in overt ways, nonetheless there is a subtle or qualitative influence that comes with exposure to new and different experiences. Respondents spoke of this, and of the difficulty in disentangling what was a post- exchange influence in their current practice and what was not.

One tangible way in which classroom behaviour was influenced centred on the use of displays. The Southern exchange teachers who went North were greatly impressed by the focus on displays that was a feature of schools and classrooms there. This has now been adopted into their practice in their schools. Their current use of displays has been heavily influenced by their time in their Belfast schools, and the guidance on this that they received while on placement there. They now proudly display a variety of work and material in their classrooms. Their approach to this is not random or sporadic, but

orchestrated with care and attention. This is a significant and important legacy as the visual is not only of aesthetic significance, but the display of a pupil's work may be a powerful motivator, and influence a pupil's sense of belonging, and of being valued in school.

While teaching style is evolved by each individual teacher, there is evidence that teachers are heavily influenced by their internalised models of their own former teachers, especially those whom they admired. In the same vein, the exchange students were in the privileged position of seeing some skilled and experienced teachers teach their classes. Inevitably, this experience will have had an influence either conscious or unconscious on their subsequent teaching style.

### **3. Cultural and Political Factors**

It is an interesting fact that participants' baseline knowledge of the culture and the political situation in the host jurisdiction was abysmally low prior to the exchange. With the experience of the exchange came a new awareness and heightened interest in these aspects of life on both sides of the island of Ireland. More preparatory work prior to going to the new environment, and more opportunities to engage with the local community beyond the classroom would have deepened this dimension of the exchange. However the awakening of interest triggered by the exchange continued to develop, and respondents indicated that they maintained an on-going interest in political developments North and South. The control group of respondents showed little or no interest in the evolving political situations North and South, and had no frame of reference for interest in political situations outside of Ireland.

The exchange offered limited opportunities to immerse in cultural activities beyond the school or the host institution. While the take up on cultural pursuits during the exchange may have been disappointing, there was a view among respondents that there were more similarities than differences in cultural life

north and south. This resulted in a lack of motivation or curiosity about attending cultural events or exploring local cultural sites.

Many of the exchange students regretted that there was not more opportunity to explore their new environment, to socialise, and to meet with local residents. They felt slightly isolated and to ward off this, they tended to stay together as a group during out-of-school times. As stated earlier, they were also very task oriented, and felt that to represent their parent colleges well, and to perform satisfactorily in role, they had to engage in lots of preparation time following each day's work in school.

*I would have liked not to feel under such constant pressure. I was preoccupied with the assessment, and less pressure would have given more time to really experience the North. We had to come home every day, and start prep for the following day. Perhaps once a week, we could have had Wednesday off to explore our host city.*

(Student from Dublin Focus Group)

Likewise a teacher in the Belfast Focus Group commented that

*I would have liked to have seen more of Dublin and to have seen more outside of school, but as I was so busy and tired, I never got the time. Participants need to experience more of Dublin as a city.*

#### **4. Role in Promoting Peace and Reconciliation**

The respondents had a sense of the exchange occurring at an historic time on the island of Ireland, a time when leaders both at political and church level were endeavouring to create structures and to build relationships that would contribute to a lasting peace and reconciliation between communities. Teachers as a sector of society tend to recognise their potential to create capacity and to be influential in the lives of many. They bring to their role a strong sense of commitment that is value laden. They seek to establish a

harmonious atmosphere, based on respect and tolerance, in their classrooms. They cater for difference. They are educated today to celebrate diversity. This is central to the current growth of diversity in contemporary classrooms.

As the exchange programme was deeply rooted in a peace and reconciliation context, it came naturally to the participants to 'buy in' to that ethos and aspiration. They were whole hearted in their resolve to use all possible opportunities in their interaction with their pupils, and in their personal networks to promote peace and to seek to reconcile difference.

The participants from Southern Ireland had come to understand the origins of the tensions and the distrust that had played such a large role in triggering and sustaining the 30 years of unrest in Northern Ireland. They reported that they now have a sensitivity to a range of socio-political issues and an empathy that are in contrast to the knee jerk reactions and ill informed positions that predated their exchange programme. The learning and insights that they gained in the course of the exchange have opened up new perspectives on regions of conflict in the world beyond Ireland, but that also have applicability in local cultures experiencing violence and disaffection. They have found that both the local and the global are amenable to analysis as they apply learning from their exchange experience. By contrast, the members of the control groups were hesitant and openly disinterested in issues of conflict. They admitted to missed opportunities to promote orientations of resolution and peace-building, not through lack of goodwill, but more through ignorance.

*I am blissfully ignorant about all of the conflict that I know is going on around the world. I tune out when I hear it mentioned, and I don't know if I would be more up to speed if I had been on an exchange to a part of the world that had a war or something. I didn't follow the Northern 'Troubles'. I was young, and my mind was elsewhere. I suppose I missed out on a whole chunk of history'.*  
(Limerick Focus Group Member)

## **5. Continuing links with host schools**

The data on this were disappointing. The evaluations in the aftermath of the visits to the host jurisdictions suggested that links would be maintained with participating students' host schools, and that in future years their pupils would be encouraged to build connections via shared projects or pen pal activities. This aspiration has not translated into reality. The participants still held very fond and appreciative memories of their time in their schools, but they regretted that, with the passage of time, the links have not been maintained. They suggested that the fact that they are no longer in contact with the schools does not mean that they are forgotten.

## **6. School Principals**

The school principals who were interviewed spoke highly of the students who carried out their teaching practice in their schools. They were impressed by their earnestness and the detail of their preparation. They also liked how they related to the pupils. They found the students open to guidance and at all times cooperative and eager to please. This was true for principals in the North and the South. Principals in the Belfast schools had more experience of hosting student teachers from other cultures. Pupils in the Belfast schools were accustomed to receiving student teachers, and it was striking to see in their schools greetings and displays in a variety of languages. Schools in the South manifestly did not have a tradition of hosting student teachers from other cultures. They were very pleased to have been selected to host the exchange students.

*We were delighted with the students from the South. We welcomed the contact. It was timely in view of the Good Friday Agreement. The students brought a new perspective to our work. They enriched our school. They were very competent and keen to learn.*

( Principal in a Belfast school)

*It was a first time for us to have students from the North. How fitting that we should in this era of new relationships North and South. We admired the earnestness of the students, and their wish to please us and please the pupils. Pity that they did not have more chance to see the city and get a sense of the social scene. There should be more cross border contact, as only then will the barriers of ignorance and prejudice be broken down.*

(Principal in a Dublin school)

## **7. Exploiting the exchange process**

Without exception, all informants had retained their enthusiasm for the exchange. Many indicated how including reference to it on their CV had resulted in their being called to interview for a teaching post ahead of their peers. This information was validated by the control group, of whom the majority had been in the same cohort in the colleges of education as the exchange group of informants. The students on the exchange programme also reported that the exchange often formed much of the basis of their selection interview, and tipped the balance in their securing a post ahead of other applicants. They gained confidence in talking in comparative terms about the education systems, the curricula, the pupils, the different priorities – all learning that was grounded in their field experience in the other Irish jurisdiction.

All spoke appreciatively of the project and held the view that it was as timely now as it had been in the immediate wake of the Good Friday Agreement. This latter view was stressed. A majority expressed the view that with collaborations developing between stakeholders at a variety of levels in society North and South, joint education initiatives constituted a powerful means to foster the consolidation of the early signs of peace and mutual understandings now emerging between communities.

## **Student Participants' Personal Development**

There was an important dimension to the exchange process that may not be amenable to measurement or overt observation. This is the area of personal development that occurred for each participant. It is a delicate and private area in that it explores the growth of an individual in a number of variables. These include insights, evolving perspectives, self-esteem, self-reliance, the clarification and inculcation of values and personal identity. It was remarkable how, in the data gathering, respondents were eager to report how the exchange experience had altered them as persons. For many, they had for the first time lived away from the comfort zone of their habitual environs; had taken more responsibility than ever before for the management of their own lives; had won the approval of a new set of senior professionals; had performed to their own high standards, and had achieved something of worth which could be shared and augmented in their home environment.

The exchange seemed to contribute to their sense of personal worth, especially for those who found it to be demanding and exacting. Their confidence grew, and there emerged a growing belief in themselves as reliable and self-sufficient individuals. This maturing process, occurring away from the support of their habitual props, was one of the most lasting and strongest impacts of the exchange experience. The respondents seemed especially grateful to the exchange for causing this to happen in that there had been a lasting and transferable effect. Situations that might hitherto have appeared to be daunting are now tackled with courage and optimism. The negotiation of the demands associated with the exchange seem to have laid a foundation for the successful negotiation of subsequent challenges.

In summary, there has been an enduring and positive personal impact for the participants who took part in the exchange.

The research subjects who formed the control groups differed from the exchange subjects in a number of ways. They were not at all familiar with the curriculum of the other jurisdiction. They were unable to name the teacher

education institutions in the other jurisdiction. They acknowledged a disinterest in the political situation or in the economic or cultural life of the other part of the island of Ireland. Very few had ever visited the other jurisdiction, though without exception they had all been 'abroad', and all carried passports. These findings substantiate the gains reported above for the exchange teachers.

## **Impact for the Directors of Teaching Practice**

Interviews with the Directors of Teaching Practice as part of the data gathering for this post- project impact study indicate that they continue to remain enthusiastic about the exchange. They saw the fruit of the professional and personal development that occurred among their students through the project. They recognised the multiplier effect that this could bring for many cohorts of pupils across the land. Through the sharing of their experiences and inspired by their own personal idealism, they understood in a special sense the need for mutual understandings, for awareness of justice issues, for peace building and harmony across communities. They understood the corrosive effects of prejudice, and how young teachers in interaction with their impressionable pupils could help to mould attitudes that would be respectful, conciliatory and just.

The exchange project gave the Directors of Teaching Practice a privileged opportunity to contribute to a big agenda that went far beyond the nuts and bolts of placing students in new school settings. The data suggest that their engagement with the project in the midst of their busy lives was motivated by higher and idealistic aspirations. They were doing more than showcasing their colleges and the schools in their jurisdictions. The view was expressed that if the project were not to be re-introduced, then they would explore other alternatives to bring about comparable exchange opportunities for their current students.

The project brought gains to them too. They collaborated on academic journal writing, and made joint presentations at international conferences. There is a strong bond between them and their partner colleges, both in their own and in the other jurisdiction, that continues today. Their links are predicated on shared purpose, shared expertise, shared concerns, and friendship. The project certainly helped to consolidate this network among the seven colleges of education on the island. The vibrancy and sincerity of the links testifies to the lasting impact of the exchange.

*I have definitely been influenced by the exchange. I have a greater appreciation of what is good in our system. I am more reflective, more open and more aware of how teachers can help to break down prejudice. I would have liked the cultural events to have been more of a success. We made a special effort to show something of worth and beauty in the city of Dublin, while the students were here. We went to an exhibition in the National Gallery, and organised dinner in the Commons in Trinity College for them. In my view the exchange represents good value for money. Its impact is lasting and positive for me.*

(Director of Teaching Practice in the South)

*I enjoyed my involvement in the exchange. I see it as making a contribution in North- South relations. There is still a lot of healing to be done. It was interesting to hear the President, Mary Mc Aleese mention the centrality of the role of teachers in helping to solve the inherited problems of modern Ireland. Links are essential if the relationship is to become seamless between us. Twenty years ago, it would have been impossible to dream of the links. The recent years have been transformational. The essentials are tolerance, mutual understanding and respect. If you do not come and see it as it is, then it is all perception. The fast changing times make this project more relevant than ever. Both North and South have seen considerable migration, so let us get to know each other.*

(Director of Teaching Practice in the North)

## **Discussion**

The data are unequivocal. The North South Student Teacher Exchange programme has been a great success, not only while it was rolled out over the four years, but in terms of the enduring positive dispositions it has helped to develop among the beneficiaries. The central aims of the project have been maintained, and the wash out effects relate only to the decline in the contacts that were so live immediately after the exchange visits. The attitudes to issues of peace and reconciliation have been maintained and applied to other regions of conflict beyond Northern Ireland. Interest that was awakened in cross-cultural matters has extended beyond the local and the national to the international. The pre-project apathy about conflict and failed policies across cultures no longer prevails.

The beneficiaries are more informed, more aware, and more analytical in their discourse on global issues. The majority of teachers live in monocultural worlds, but are increasingly teaching in multicultural classrooms. The experience of straddling two cultures on the island of Ireland through the exchange has widened their horizons. There is an increased sense of identity as global citizens rather than homogeneous inhabitants of a small island, insulated from developments beyond its shores.

Added to an evolved interest in political situations, there are the new challenges posed for many teachers of working sensitively and competently with pupils from a variety of cultures, as the demographics in Irish classrooms have changed dramatically in recent years. The formative experience of the exchange has had ramifications that were not envisaged in its original design. The learning that occurred then has had ample scope to consolidate through the daily practice of many beneficiaries.

## **What contributed to the success?**

It is interesting to speculate on why the programme was so successful. There are a number of factors that may be posited to explain this. Firstly there was the timing of the project, occurring as it did in the wake of the Good Friday Agreement. The added momentum stemming from a belief in North-South cooperation as one of the integral strands of that peace-building agreement lent energy and purpose to the exchange. The atmosphere on both sides of the island of Ireland at that time was one of hope and optimism. Stakeholders were 'ripe' for involvement in an initiative that would help to actualise the aspirations and the ideals of the peace process.

Secondly, teacher education as a field of study in the third level sector is often something of a 'Cinderella' area. Yet most thinking people recognise that the fabric of a society is in part dependent on the quality of its teachers and its schools. The exchange set out expressly to develop its students and the staff members in their colleges in ways that would contribute to a more hospitable and more tolerant island of Ireland. It was thus both opportune and visionary of the Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies to put forward this project for consideration in the period following the Good Friday Agreement. The project offered the potential to have ramifications far beyond the immediacy of the exchange, and to touch the lives of many more adults and children than those who were actively engaged in it. As one school principal said of the project: 'A thousand projects will bloom as a result of this'.

A third factor contributing to the success of the project was the calibre of the persons who were involved. Teachers and teacher educators constitute a group of people who bring to their work high levels of vocational commitment. Teaching is perceived as 'a caring profession', and as such it welcomes the opportunity to contribute in a way that enhances the lives of others. Student teachers as a group are self-selecting in that they choose teaching because they 'want to make a difference'.

At all points, the exchange data testify to the goodwill and commitment of the key players: the Directors of Teaching Practice in the seven colleges, the host schools in the two jurisdictions, the college Presidents, and the wonderful student teachers who were excellent ambassadors and promising peace-builders. These people now constitute a critical mass of influential people who will do justice to the fruits of the exchange through their interaction with others. One Director of Teaching Practice spoke of the project as follows:

*This has been a very worthwhile project. It brought students together not only North-South, but also North-North and South-South...an international experience in their own country! An unforeseen bonus was that the Directors of Teaching Practice in all seven colleges on the island began meeting to research and exchange good practice. It has been one of the most fruitful collaborations that I have been involved in.*

A fourth factor that contributed to the success was the behind-the-scenes support from the administrative staff at the Centre for Cross Border Studies. There was an amount of logistical and financial detail that required time and expertise. This was provided with grace and efficiency. With each year of the exchange the system became more streamlined, and it seemed like every eventuality was anticipated and addressed through a viable solution.

A fifth factor contributing to the overall success was the supportive network in which the project was nested and the ethos that developed around it. Mention has already been made of the support for project within the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS). All the contributing stakeholders had very good working relationships with one another, and were able to enlist the cooperation of their colleagues in the colleges, and of the principals and teachers in the schools to which they customarily sent their own students on teaching practice placement. The key players came to know and trust each other in the course of the exchange, and a mutual respect and collegiality evolved among them. The Directors of Teaching Practice knew that they had the backing of their college Presidents; the participating students knew that they had the support and guidance of

their lecturers and their hosts in their new environments. All of these knew of the commitment and interest of the Centre for Cross Border Studies.

This coalition of interested parties working with a shared vision and this common purpose was a real strength of the project. Added to this there was the ongoing interest in the parent colleges when the students resumed their studies there. Here there was the opportunity and the responsibility to disseminate the learning and the insights, to reflect, to debrief, and to act as mentors for future exchange students. The project had a life beyond the actual duration of the exchange period, and that served to consolidate the emerging perceptions and resolve to extend the project.

A sixth factor contributing to the success was the detailed preplanning that went in to the project. The stakeholders had set a series of project milestones (i.e. selection of students, finding of placement schools, the Orientation Day, the Observation Day, the actual three-week exchange, the Evaluation Day) that were carefully orchestrated and set within a timeframe. The formulation of these necessitated multiple meetings, and sustained, time-consuming verbal and written communication outside of the meetings. As the project unfolded, these milestones were reached within the stipulated time. The milestones may not all have had high visibility, woven as they were into the programme design, but they each constituted an integral part of the exchange. Their attainment was affirming for all involved. Morale throughout did not dip, and it is a tribute to all concerned that they committed to the endeavour with energy and enthusiasm, year on year, over the four-year period.

In summary, the six factors selected by the researcher as instrumental in the overall success of the exchange programme are

1. The timing of the exchange programme
2. The intrinsic worth of the exchange
3. The calibre of the people involved in the exchange across all levels
4. The levels of support that permeated the project – administrative, financial and emotional

5. The coalition of stakeholders working towards a shared set of outcomes
6. The detailed planning that predated and went into the programme which allowed sufficient flexibility to modify and respond in the light of incoming evidence.

## **What does the research literature say about programme success factors?**

It is interesting to compare the factors above with what research-based findings point up as necessary elements for programme sustainability (Marek & Mancini, 2004). The data cited below come from a body of research that has been synthesised from over a 100 community -based programmes. It proved difficult to locate much literature specifically on education field placements, but there is a rich literature on community intervention programmes, mostly in the area of early childhood. With this caveat in mind, it is important nonetheless to locate this report on a cross-border educational exchange in a broader context of comparative data. The data on the community programmes shed light on the elements that protect programmes from losing their impact after initial funding ceases. These factors are first described, and then set against the evidence based knowledge accumulated from the 2002-2007 North-South Student Teacher Exchange programme.

### **Research-based factors for sustainability**

- **Leadership competence:** This refers the ability to develop clear goals and a vision for the future of the programme (Shediach-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998,) while also maintaining a balance between short and long term needs (LaFond, 1995; Shediach-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998,) and planning for sustainability (Goodman & Steckler, 1987, 1988; Holder & Moore, 2000).

- **Effective collaboration:** This has been found to be an essential element in supporting the long-term effects of programmes. Many researchers ( Bamberger & Cheena, 1990; LaFond, 1995; Glaser, 1981; Goodman & Steckler, 1987, 1988; Moskalewicz & Swiatkiewicz, 2000; Shediak-Rizkallah & Bone, 1998) have found that the 'climate of collaboration' contributes to a programme's continuation, and this is especially so where the collaboration occurs among the key people in the collaborating organisations/ communities.
- **Understanding the Community:** Community awareness and involvement in project development and implementation are important elements in the sustainability of a project. Active participation by relevant community members strengthens the likelihood of sustaining long-term gains, and minimising the threat of wash out effects (Bossert, 1990).
- **Demonstrating Programme Results:** Demonstrating the effectiveness of a programme and marketing its successes are powerful dimensions if seeking to institutionalise or mainstream a programme (Bamberger & Cheema, 1990; Bracht, N et al., 1995). There is also need for continuous monitoring and evaluation not only to inform possible adaptation within the programme, but to highlight the gains, and use this evidence as leverage for future commitment and funding (Holder & Moore, 2000).
- **Strategic Funding:** Inadequate funding detracts from a programme's sustainability (Altman, D.G. et al, 1991), but support from local resources enhances sustainability and community ownership of the process. Holder & Moore (2000) emphasise the importance of accessing local resources for enhanced sustainability after external funding ceases. Bossert (1990) stresses that planning for future funding needs to be built in to the early planning of a programme, and continuously developed

through the lifespan of a project, lest initial gains be lost through lack of ongoing support. LaFond (1995) supports the idea of longer initial periods of funding to allow for sustainability to be nurtured.

- **Staff Involvement:** It is important to a programme's sustainability that there be adequate staffing to run the programme in all its facets. Glaser (1981) stresses the importance of involving staff in decision making relevant to the programme, while Bossert (1990) discusses the need for staff to be committed to programme goals.
- **Programme Responsivity:** This refers to a programme's ability to adapt to contextual changes, and to have the requisite flexibility to respond to changing circumstances or new emphases/requirements (Holder & Moore 2000), Lefebvre (1990).

An examination of the variables that come from this large corpus of research shows that the North-South Student Teacher Exchange programme met all of the criteria outlined above. This helps to understand why it is that the programme has sustained its impact in the post implementation period. The insights gained from this are important as they reinforce the good practice on which the programme was based. They also help to unpick why other initiatives may flounder and form a useful 'checklist' for any future programmes. The programme was characterised by 1) **competent leadership**, both at planning and execution levels; 2) **effective collaboration** at all stages; 3) **community understanding** as evidenced by the sensitive orchestration of the programme, and the choice of school placements for the participating beneficiaries; 4) **result demonstration**, both through the formative and summative evaluations which were built in to the programme design, and through the many opportunities for the project's planners, Directors of Teaching Practice and participating students to reflect and debrief; 5) **strategic funding** through the EU Peace Two programme (obtained through the good offices of the Director of the Centre for Cross Border Studies); 6) **staff involvement** as evidenced by the broad-based

ownership of the programme in both Irish jurisdictions; and 7) **programme responsivity**, shown through the additions and modifications as the programme evolved, based on suggestions from respected sources for the improvement of the programme, and for a wider involvement of key others.

### **Cross-Cultural Field Placements**

The next part of the discussion of results focuses on some of the research literature dealing with cross-cultural field placements, and situates the current exchange project within that framework. In a comprehensive study of learning outcomes for 109 student teachers from the United States who carried out placements in culturally different environments, Mahon & Stachowski (1993-1994) asked the participants to reflect upon, identify and record 'new learnings' that they judged to be very important arising from the placements.

The respondents grouped their 'learnings' within the categories of classroom teaching strategies, curriculum, fact acquisition, human interrelationships, self-discoveries, global issues, aesthetic knowledge/appreciation, and miscellaneous. They further identified the main source for each learning from a listing of 17 possibilities that were clustered into five major groups: community people, school professionals, school pupils, physical things, and listening/reading /reflecting. Of particular interest for the North-South Student Teacher exchange project is that that sample of US student teachers found 'community people' to be a significant source of learning for them.

One of the few weaknesses that emerged from the North-South data was the limited opportunity that participants had to mingle with people from the local community. As the project evaluations showed, the exchange students were very task focussed. Their primary motivation was to acquit themselves competently in the classrooms of their new environment. They socialised little and met with very few people beyond their schools. They may have missed the opportunity to develop their understandings of how the host community lived, what they thought and what they valued. This kind of learning is vital for educators seeking to serve the community. It should be pointed that the

exchange time was limited, and did not offer sufficient time to develop out-of-school relationships.

The work of Stachowski & Mahon (1998) suggests a set of requirements that could be incorporated in to the design of any student teacher field placement aimed at promoting cultural learning and preparation for diversity, while developing a bond between school and community. Suggested examples include becoming involved either individually or in groups in some form of service learning (community work/volunteering); identifying, visiting, and describing community libraries, museums, historical displays, places and events that reveal something of the community's history, evolution and culture; carrying out structured interviews with some community members eg parents, to ascertain their views on education and on what children should learn for the future as global citizens.

The US Department of State has a number of programmes aimed at increasing mutual understanding between the US and people of other countries. In broad terms these programmes aim: 1) to increase knowledge and understanding of international issues and foreign societies; 2) to expand the paradigm of partnership between the US and foreign institutions and individuals, and 3) to inform foreign policy.

In evaluating their many exchange programmes, the evaluations gather information on the following: 1) to what extent is there continued communication between the exchanging participants/institutions; 2) to what extent do the programmes further the education, training and skills of the key audiences, and 3) to what extent do the programmes promote an understanding and appreciation of the US and /or host country? Data from 5, 272 combined participants in exchange programmes in 2001 concluded that exchanges

- Promote a better understanding of foreign relations
- Are life-changing experiences

- Promote international friendship and peace
- Demonstrate that across countries there is a shared interest in the development and stability of other nations
- Lead to a change in professional activities that is rewarding
- Enhance the opportunities for promotion and job satisfaction
- Evince more democratic ideas about workplace leadership.

These findings, based on a large sample of exchange programme beneficiaries, resonate with many of the self-reports from the North-South exchange participants who formed the sample for this research. Thus there is persuasive evidence coming both from the international data and the local data that exchange programmes produce very positive outcomes that have lasting impact.

Writing about exchange programmes for educators, in 2008, Rapoport wrote as follows:

*Direct interactions and contacts with different cultures, political or educational systems and representatives of these cultures: a) improve teaching about the visited places; b) engender educators' responsibilities for passing on the experience, for opening windows to the world for others; and c) encourage them to engage in more cross-cultural encounters'.*

Rapoport expressed the view that exchange visits help participants to appreciate what it is like to be an 'outsider'. The lived experiences become, in retrospect, milestones in the development of a consciousness of multiple realities. The recognition of multiple realities leads to a realisation that multiple realities exist in a community, in a country, but also globally.

This insight is part of the hidden enrichment of exchange programmes. It constitutes very significant learning. It may represent the beginnings of intercultural competence. Intercultural competence involves knowledge, motivation, and skills that enable individuals to interact effectively and appropriately with members of different cultures (Wiseman, 2000). Byram et al (2001) include attitudes as a component of intercultural competence, arguing that the foundation of intercultural competence is in the attitudes of intercultural speakers and mediators. The changing demographics of classrooms on the island of Ireland make intercultural competence a very relevant attribute for the teachers who work there in interaction with multicultural classes.

## **PART 6**

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

This report highlights the worth and the success of the 2002-2007 North-South Student Teacher Exchange Programme. There is reason to be optimistic that on foot of the exchange the beneficiaries will be more competent and more sensitive in working with diverse populations in the challenging cultural environments which are now more often found within their own jurisdictions. Despite the intrinsic complexities of the exchange, it was prosecuted in a way that ensured its smooth and harmonious implementation, and that facilitated many gains.

It is inevitable that at the end of such a successful project interested parties will wonder – where to from here? They will ask questions like: Is it worth replicating in the near future? Is there the appetite to reassemble the key players? Is there any guarantee that further funding could be secured in a harsher financial climate? Is this the best way to achieve outcomes like those reported throughout the exchange? Will the gains be sustained further down the road?

Question like these exercise the mind, and there is a point in pondering them in the immediate aftermath of a project like this, when either the file on it has to be closed, or else there needs to be a reactivation while lessons learned are still fresh. The respondents for this report expressed the view that an exchange programme is as relevant today as when the exchange was at full strength. While there may be a fund of goodwill among influential personnel like the Directors of Teaching Practice and staff members in host colleges and schools for a resumption of the exchange, it is worth bearing in mind the findings of the 2005 North South Exchange Consortium report on school, teacher and youth exchanges, cited by Andy Pollak in his article on 'Cooperative Projects: the Education Sector' in *Crossing the Border: New Relationships between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland* (Coakley & O Dowd, 2007).

The findings point up a number of operational difficulties that confront any joint education initiatives between North and South. They include the following:

- The very complex ways, and unclear funding routes, by which programmes and projects are financed;
- The limits to core funding for sustaining organisations involved in cross-border work;
- The terms stipulated by the two main funding agencies – i.e. The EU Peace programmes and the International Fund for Ireland – which can result in most Southern counties being deemed ineligible to participate;
- The perception in some sections of the Protestant or Unionist community that peace-building efforts only serve to dilute the notion of the 'border';
- The uneven distribution of projects and programmes among groups, with the result that some participate in many, while the majority are not involved in any;
- The inadequacy of institutional involvement in cross-border activities;
- The need for coherent government policies governing cross-border collaboration so as to ensure a more transparent and effective system.

Apart from the helpful if slightly disheartening reality check that can be taken from this set of findings, this report points up the following as relevant in any future plans aimed at creating a new phase of North-South educational exchanges.

1) In any future phase of the exchange, it would be helpful if a less bureaucratic approach to the dispersal of monies could be introduced. Some of the practice that it was necessary to adopt in the past phases often seemed

over-rigorous, and sometimes proved to be frustrating and annoying for all who had to work within the parameters set by the funding agency.

2) There should be less preoccupation with trying to make the exchange a culturally rich experience for the groups. If this happens it is a bonus, but the overriding concern for the students is an enhancement of their professional skills through the experience of teaching practice in a culturally different environment. This is what concerns them most throughout the exchange period. They should be supported as much as is possible to achieve this. 'Forcing' cultural experiences upon them, or seeking to involve them against their wishes, is a waste of time and money. The students are in a best position to make choices about how they spend their time in the host jurisdiction.

3) The outcomes from this series of exchanges should be disseminated, with the Departments of Education in both jurisdictions a particular target. Dissemination of outcomes in this way could help to supplement the multiplier impact that is so central to the essence of international exchanges. Every opportunity should be exploited to disseminate the findings at conferences, seminars, workshops, parent-teacher meetings, school displays, poster sessions, and through websites and publications. The outcomes are too important and too relevant in our newly intercultural society to be ignored. The intrinsic worth of the project warrants a sharing and promotion of its outcomes in a wide variety of fora.

Finally, special congratulations and thanks must be extended to all who contributed to the success of this highly worthwhile endeavour. It was very labour-intensive for those involved. The number of beneficiaries may have been disproportionate relative to the volume of work that the exchange necessitated. But the yield should not be quantified in terms of participating student teacher numbers alone. The reach of the exchange went well beyond the numbers directly involved. It verified its capacity to develop mutual understandings, cross-cultural respect, and the nurturing of norms of justice across the contested frontier that is the Irish border.

The energy, efficiency and motivation were there to bring to fruition the fine idealism that inspired the initiative. The conditions on both sides of the island were enabling and welcoming. The generosity of spirit evidenced by the contributors helped to sustain the project and to ensure its momentum. There is every reason to be proud of work well done, and to be optimistic that the peace agenda has a competent and dedicated cadre of advocates as a result of this highly innovative project.

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# APPENDIX 1

## North-South Student Teacher Exchange Project

### STUDENT CONTRACT

An EU Peace Two grant administered by the Centre for Cross Border Studies

#### PART ONE

Student: \_\_\_\_\_ Year in College: 1 2 3 4  
(circle as appropriate)  
(Beneficiary)  
College: \_\_\_\_\_ Student ID no.: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
E-mail (1): \_\_\_\_\_ Email (2): \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Telephone: \_\_\_\_\_ Mobile: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

For the purpose of completing the North-South Student Teacher Exchange Project (2007) from: 10/03/2007 to 30/03/2007 which is a total of **3 weeks**

in [Ireland/Northern Ireland](#)

It is agreed that –

- the grant shall be a contribution towards the costs of the planned exchange period
- the Beneficiary will receive 70% of their grant in advance and the balance at the end of the exchange on production of a full set of original receipts
- written confirmation of the exchange project will be available to the Beneficiary prior to departure
- the Beneficiary will participate for the full duration of the exchange project (including the St Patrick's Day cultural event), and will accept that she/he will be assessed in a placement school in the other jurisdiction on the island of Ireland as part of her/his overall teaching practice assessment
- the grant will not be used to cover costs already supported
- modifications to the planned exchange project shall be agreed to in writing
- an evaluation questionnaire will be completed after the 17 January 2007 Orientation Day; an evaluation sheet will be completed at the end of the project; and the Beneficiary will attend an Evaluation Day on 25 April 2007
- the arrangement of sufficient insurance protection shall be the responsibility of the host college when the student is involved in school or college business
- the Beneficiary accepts the project arrangements as outlined in the project information booklet
- this agreement is governed by the laws of the United Kingdom and Ireland.

It is also agreed that –

- the Beneficiary may be required to reimburse the total grant received or part of it if the Beneficiary fails to meet the obligations of the exchange project
- the Beneficiary may be required to reimburse the total grant received or part of it in the case of the termination of this agreement and
- the Centre for Cross Border Studies may demand the reimbursement of any grant paid or due if the Beneficiary fails to complete the project.

I, \_\_\_\_\_, agree to the above conditions and declare that the following statement is true

**I am eligible to receive a grant.**

*Next of kin details*

Name: \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to student: \_\_\_\_\_

**Address:**

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

**PART TWO** (to be completed on receipt of project grant)

I have received a grant of £        / €        (complete as appropriate) to cover costs as outlined in the project information booklet.

Signature of Student :	_____	Date:	_____
Signature of CCBS representative	_____	Date:	_____
Name of CCBS representative	_____	Designation	_____

**Please return to: Mairéad Hughes, Centre for Cross Border Studies,  
39 Abbey Street, Armagh BT61 7EB, Northern Ireland**

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **Contract for Participating Institutions**

The Centre for Cross Border Studies (hereinafter called the “CCBS”) at 39 Abbey Street, Armagh BT61 7EB has entered into an agreement on behalf of the Special EU Programmes Body to administer financial aid from the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation in Northern Ireland and the Border Region of Ireland 2000-2004 (hereinafter called the “EU Programme”) to promote cross-border co-operation between schools and encourage mobility for pupils and teachers.

On behalf of the EU Programme the CCBS will provide support in the form of financial assistance to the following (hereinafter called the “recipients”)

Stranmillis University College, Belfast  
St Mary’s University College, Belfast  
Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin  
St Mary’s College, Marino, Dublin  
St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra, Dublin  
Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

for the purpose of funding

The Student Teacher Exchange Project: a North-South action-research study (hereinafter called the “North-South project”)

Financial assistance will cover the costs of meals, accommodation, transport to placement schools and other sundries to the 24 students taking part in the North-South project. This will be paid to Stranmillis University College, Belfast and Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin (except for the cost of five Northern students staying in a Dublin guest house, which will be paid directly by the CCBS). The CCBS will also cover the costs of travel and subsistence for steering group members, plus materials, administration, evaluation activities and any additional insurance premiums for the North-South project. The CCBS will provide a small grant to each participating student to cover travel, subsistence and cultural activities.

The CCBS will make all the arrangements needed to prepare, organise, monitor and evaluate the North-South project as outlined in the proposal document and will accordingly enter into an agreement with the recipients. Eligible costs are based on the budgetary projections given in the proposal document.

### **8. Project conditions**

The recipients declare that they

1. will use the financial assistance to cover the costs of the North-South project which were detailed in the proposal document and agreed between the Special EU Programmes Body and the CCBS, or in subsequent amendments agreed with the CCBS
2. will inform the CCBS if undertakings entered into as part of the North-South project should fail to take place or take place in a modified form from that set out in the proposal document
3. will submit their colleges' students evaluation reports of the North-South project (backed up where appropriate with documentary evidence) to the CCBS as the CCBS requires
4. will acknowledge in any document (including letterheads) produced or any conferences/events organised relating to the North-South project the financial assistance given to the recipient by the CCBS of behalf of the EU Programme
5. will recognise that the CCBS will accept no liability for any loss or damage that is not due to serious and intentional misconduct on the part of the CCBS or its staff
6. will ensure that, if required, current insurance arrangements will be extended to include the activities of the North-South project, on the understanding that any additional premiums will be reimbursed by the CCBS
7. will advise each participating student that it is his/her responsibility to insure for personal effects and belongings as well as travel
8. will ensure that each participating student is advised to obtain an E111 medical form for the North-South project.

**Signed on behalf of the Centre for Cross Border Studies**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Print name  
\_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_ Date  
\_\_\_\_\_

**Signed on behalf of the recipient (by the legal head of the institution)**

Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Print name  
\_\_\_\_\_

Position \_\_\_\_\_ Date

Cheques to be made payable to

—

## **APPENDIX 3**

**The Centre for Cross Border Studies**

**NORTH-SOUTH STUDENT TEACHER EXCHANGE  
PROJECT**



**ORIENTATION DAY**

**INFORMATION BOOKLET**

**Thursday 27 January 2005**

**PROJECT OUTLINE**

**The 2005-2006 North-South Student Exchange Project will involve 28 students from seven colleges of education: Stranmillis University College, Belfast; St Mary's University College, Belfast; St Patrick's College, Drumcondra; Church of Ireland College of Education, Dublin; Coláiste Mhuire Marino, Dublin; Froebel College of Education, Dublin, and Mary Immaculate College, Limerick.**

This project is funded by the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation and managed by the Centre for Cross Border Studies (CCBS) in Armagh, in partnership with the participating colleges. The project is run by a steering group drawn from the CCBS and the colleges of education. It will build on the experience of the first two years of the exchange project in 2003 and 2004.

The participating student teachers will spend three weeks – from Saturday 26 February to Friday 18 March 2005 – at colleges of education and in school placements in the other jurisdiction. The Southern students will all be accommodated at Stranmillis University College in south Belfast. The Northern students will be accommodated at Marino Institute of Education in Dublin, with evening meals being arranged by St Patrick's College, Drumcondra. All travel and accommodation costs of participating students will be covered.

Students will begin teaching on Tuesday 1 March and will be assessed during the course of their placement both by their own institution and by the host institution as part of their overall teaching practice assessment.

A new element of this exchange in Year Three will be an observation day for students in their placement school in advance of the exchange – for Northern students, this will be on Friday 28 January and for Southern students, Thursday 10 February. This will give students an opportunity to get to know their placement school and its teachers, observe its teaching and learning methods and prepare teaching materials in advance of their placement. This will be funded by CCBS and further information will be available on 27 January.

**As part of this exchange students will participate in a cultural event, also funded by CCBS, on 17 March – in the North this will be a visit to the Corrymeela Reconciliation Centre and the Giants Causeway in north Antrim and in the South a visit to the Newgrange monument and the site of the Battle of the Boyne in Co Meath.**

**There will be a Year Three evaluation day for all participating students at St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin on Wednesday 27 April 2005.**

## **PROGRAMME FOR 27 JANUARY**

The Orientation Day will take place in Froebel College of Education, Blackrock, Co Dublin. The programme will be as follows:

- 11.00 am Registration/refreshments (plus completion of introductory questionnaire)
- 11.30 Official opening and welcome
- 11.50 Froebel students outline the Southern education system
- 12.00 Stranmillis and St Mary's students outline the Northern education system
- 12.10 Students involved in previous exchange speak about their experience
- 12.30 Four break-out groups (with a mix from North and South and from the different colleges): a "getting to know you" session
- 1.15 Presentation on the ethos of Froebel
- 1.30 Lunch
- 2.30 Logistics and question and answer session (plus completion of Orientation Day evaluation and student contract)
- 3.30 Close

## **PROJECT AIMS**

### ***FOR PARTICIPATING STUDENTS***

1. To broaden students' experience of teaching practice by undertaking part of it in the neighbouring jurisdiction on the island of Ireland.
2. To increase students' cultural sensitivity by engaging educationally and socially with other students, teachers and pupils in a cross-border, cross-community context on the island of Ireland.
3. To enable students to experience the education system of the neighbouring jurisdiction.
4. To enable students to explore similarities and differences in curriculum provision and approaches in a cross-border, cross-community context.
5. To encourage adaptability, reflexivity, confidence and an increase in

personal and professional self-awareness in students through engagement with culturally diverse groups.

### **FOR PARTICIPATING LECTURERS**

1. To provide opportunities for colleges of education on the island of Ireland to affirm and respect cultural difference and to promote positive attitudes towards cultural diversity.
2. To develop a model of professional practice in response to cultural diversity by supporting students who engage in a period of teaching practice in the other jurisdiction.
3. To develop a deeper sense of community among educators on the island of Ireland which recognises the contributions of different cultural and religious communities.
4. To become more familiar with a variety of curriculum programmes and methodologies, North and South.
5. To explore and develop strategies and approaches currently in practice in colleges of education and universities, North and South, and to contribute to the development of an inter-college culture of collaboration on the island.

### **CONTRACT**

All participating students will be asked to sign a contract agreeing that:

1. They accept that the teaching practice element of the North-South Student Teacher Exchange Project will be assessed as part of their home college's overall teaching practice assessment.
2. They are covered by the host college's insurance only when they are involved in school or college business.
3. They will complete an evaluation form after the 27 January Orientation Day and at the completion of the exchange, and will attend an evaluation day on 27 April 2004.
4. Having read this information sheet, they accept the arrangements for the North-South Student Teacher Exchange Project as outlined.

Students will be asked to sign an addendum to this contract when receiving their allowance (*see Practical and Financial Information*).

### **STUDENTS' RESPONSIBILITIES**

In addition to signing this contract, participating students will be expected:

- ❑ To engage wholeheartedly and with enthusiasm in all aspects of the project.
- ❑ To be sensitive and understanding in the project's cross border, cross community setting.
- ❑ To be respectful of the ethos, mission statement, policies and procedures of their placement school.
- ❑ To co-operate fully with the principal/staff of the school and project personnel.
- ❑ To behave professionally at all times, being punctual and attentive.
- ❑ To prepare thoroughly for teaching practice, teach with commitment and reflect critically on one's teaching.
- ❑ To practise a range of teaching skills and methodologies in a creative, innovative manner.
- ❑ To be open to advice and suggestions for improvement.
- ❑ To reflect critically on the entire project experience and record and share these reflections.
- ❑ To adopt an enquiring frame of mind throughout.
- ❑ To enjoy the cross community, cultural, educational and social programme.

## **ASSESSMENT**

Students on teaching practice during the North-South Student Teacher Exchange Project will be assessed by both the host college in the other jurisdiction and their home college. There will be a minimum of two supervisory visits to the placement school and the instrument of assessment normally used by the home college will be used.

The host college and the home college will make one visit each. Students will not normally be visited on the first day of their practice. **Supervision will take into consideration the complexities, pressures and preparation required of students in a different jurisdiction.** Host colleges will return completed assessment forms to the home colleges on or before the last day of the placement.

Participating students are required to prepare fully three units of work/lessons per day in accordance with the requirements of the home college and giving due recognition to the curriculum requirements of the placement school. Both written preparation and classroom performance will be assessed. Supervisory visits will be made by teams from the

home and host institutions. Marks/grades awarded will be collated in the normal way in the home college and will contribute to the participating students overall year result as appropriate.

Students will have been informed by the Director of Teaching Practice of their home college which years they will be teaching during their placement.

## **PRACTICAL AND FINANCIAL INFORMATION**

### *TRAVEL AND TRANSPORT*

All students should arrive at their host college on Saturday 26 February. They will be collected, as a group, from the train station by their host college and will be taken out for a meal by the host Students' Union on Saturday evening. The Centre for Cross Border Studies will purchase train tickets and distribute these to participating students, along with advice on which train(s) they should take.

Students travelling to Belfast will be expected to use CityBus where available and convenient to travel between colleges and placement schools; where this is not possible taxis will be organised and the relevant students informed. Most students in Dublin will be placed within walking distance of their school while others will be within a five mile bus radius.

### *ACCOMMODATION AND MEALS*

All the Southern students will be accommodated in Stranmillis University College's halls of residence. Breakfast and evening meals will be taken in the college. Stranmillis is around a mile and a half from the city centre and half a mile from the university area, where there are pubs, restaurants, cinemas and other attractions.

All the Northern students will be accommodated on a bed and breakfast basis in Marino Institute of Education in Dublin. Marino is only a fifteen minute bus trip from the shops, cinemas, museums and cultural attractions in the heart of Dublin. Evening meals will be arranged by St Patrick's College, Drumcondra (a short walk from Marino).

Stranmillis and Marino will provide students with a packed lunch from Monday – Friday and they will receive a lunch allowance from CCBS to cover weekends.

### *PAYMENTS*

Funding for the exchange will be available in two ways. The Centre for Cross Border Studies will purchase and supply:

1. One return rail ticket per student for Dublin/Belfast, Limerick/Belfast or Belfast/Dublin. Any trip home during the exchange will be at the student's own expense.
2. Bed and breakfast accommodation and an evening meal in host colleges.
3. A packed lunch from host colleges, Monday – Friday.
4. One weekly Dublin or Belfast bus pass per student for each week of the exchange.
5. Taxis to schools where relevant.
6. One phone card per student for the duration of the exchange.
7. One photocopier card per student for use in their host college.

CCBS will provide each participating student with money for the following:

8. An allowance to buy teaching materials (£60.00/€85.00).
9. An allowance to buy lunch at weekends (£4.50/€6.50).

All payments made directly to students will be on a 70%/30% basis, ie they will receive 70% of their allowance at the outset of the project and the balance at the end of the project on production of a full set of receipts. **Strict EU-funding guidelines mean that it is essential that students ask for and keep original receipts for all project expenditure (no matter how small the amount) – otherwise the Centre for Cross Border Studies cannot reimburse them.** This also applies if a student has sufficient funding for the exchange in the 70% advance received.

#### *OTHER INFORMATION*

Marino Institute of Education facilities:

- The library is open Monday-Thursday 10am–9.30pm, Friday 10am–5pm, Saturday 10am–1pm and is closed on Sundays.
- The computer suite is open Monday-Friday 9am–10pm and Saturday and Sunday 9am-9pm.
- Exchange students will have full access to library and computing facilities.

Stranmillis University College facilities:

- The library is open Monday-Thursday 9am-9pm, Friday 9am-4.30pm and is closed on Saturday and Sunday.
- The computer suite is open Monday-Thursday 8am-9pm and Friday 8am-4.15pm.
- Exchange students will have access to borrowing and computer facilities.

The Centre for Cross Border Studies will provide money through Stranmillis University College and St Patrick's College to allow their Students' Unions to take participating students out for a meal on the evening of their arrival.

The costs to students of travelling to the Orientation Day, the Observation Day and the Evaluation Day will be covered by the project.

Students should have an E111 form for the duration of the exchange – this enables them to receive urgent medical treatment if required.

Participating students are covered by their host college's insurance only when they are involved in school or college business. Any additional insurance arrangements are at the students own expense.

## DIRECTORS OF TEACHING PRACTICE/LECTURERS

Institution	Contact	Telephone	Email
Stranmillis	Sonia Kidd	(028) 9038 4371	s.kidd@stran.ac.uk
St Mary's	Claire Connolly	(028) 9032 7678	c.connolly@stmarys-belfast.ac.uk
CICE	Margaret Farrar	(01) 4970033	mfarrar@cice.ie
St Patrick's	Catherine Furlong	(01) 8842292	catherine.furlong@spd.dcu.ie
St Patrick's	John White	(01) 8842297	john.white@spd.dcu.ie
Marino	Paraig Cannon	(01) 8057700	<a href="mailto:poc@mie.ie">poc@mie.ie</a>
Froebel	Brian Tubbert	(01) 2112021	btubbert@froebel.ie
Mary Immaculate	Fiona McSorley	(061) 204308	fiona.mcsorley@mic.ul.ie

## EVALUATION PROCEDURES

This is an innovative cross-border exchange project and both the Centre for Cross Border Studies and the project funders, the EU Peace Two Programme, are interested in learning how it helps to overcome barriers, reduce prejudice and lead to increasing co-operation between colleges of education and their students on the island of Ireland.

Students will be asked to participate in two evaluation procedures as part of their overall participation in the project. They will be asked to fill out two simple questionnaires (no names will be used) during the 27 January Orientation Day and another one at the conclusion of the project. In addition there will be an Evaluation Day for students and lecturers in Dublin on 27 April.

Participants will also be asked if they would like to compile a short weekly 'reflective journal' on their experiences of the exchange project, which will provide both a personal and professional view of how problems are solved, barriers overcome and preconceptions changed during the three weeks of the exchange. This reflective journal will be entirely voluntary and will not form part of the formal evaluation of the project. It is a way of helping participants to think about their participation in the project, and to assist the steering group to recommend improvements for its running in the future.

#### **FURTHER INFORMATION FROM:**

**Mairéad Hughes, Project Manager**  
**Centre for Cross Border Studies, 39 Abbey Street, Armagh BT61 7EB**

**Tel. (028) 3751 1550**  
**(048 from Republic of Ireland)**

**Fax (028) 3751 1721**  
**(048 from Republic of Ireland)**

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**APPENDIX 4**

*Centre for Cross Border Studies*

**North-South Student Teacher Exchange  
Project**

**MY REFLECTIVE JOURNAL**



**Name**

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**College:**

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Dear Participating Student

In line with modern thinking on the professional development of teachers, it is recommended that you keep a **reflective journal** that will document your experiences during the exchange programme. This journal will help you to focus your thoughts and may influence your practice, either in the course of the exchange or beyond. The journal will be your personal property and is confidential to you. In the last two years some students chose to share their journals with me in my role as project evaluator. Following my reading of them, the journals were returned in a sealed envelope to the students. There is no obligation to share your journal, but the keeping of it is nonetheless advocated. Inclusions in your journal are of your own choice, but it may help to structure your writing if you give consideration to some of the areas suggested here:

### School related issues

- What are my initial impressions of the school in which I find myself carrying out my teaching practice?
- How does this school compare with my previous experiences in my home jurisdiction?
- How do pupil standards of attainment compare?
- Is there evidence of parental support here?
- What are the main issues for my colleagues here? Are they similar or different to the issues of concern with which I am familiar in my home base?

### Professional development issues

- In what way are my **skills, attitudes, and values** impacted by my experiences on this teaching practice? Would similar outcomes have occurred had I not been working in this host culture?
- What have I learned that I wish to take and apply in my usual setting, following this teaching practice?
- Could what I am learning be learned in my home setting, or is it occurring because I am exposed to a different environment, and a different way of doing things?
- Is my relationship with my classroom teacher one that is professionally enriching? Are there ways in which it could be enhanced? Can I contribute to the mutual enrichment of our time together on this project?
- Am I relating to my pupils in a way that is beneficial to them on a wide variety of measures? Could I do better? What are the features of my relationships within this school that I need to address?

### **System issues**

- As an educator, how do I evaluate the official provision that I am experiencing?
- Are there curricular issues that are appealing, or that are unattractive?
- Are there work practices that satisfy or frustrate me, or that are different from what I have experienced in my own environment?
- Are there differences in the level of discipline in the school, as compared with schools in my own jurisdiction?
- Is there a difference in the approach to the creation of a healthy teaching and learning environment?

### **Cultural issues**

- What are the cultural aspects of my new environment that stand out for me?
- What new insights have I gained about my host jurisdiction?
- Will I be able to introduce some new cultural aspects to my work and personal life after this exchange has finished? How?
- Is there a mutual respect for the culture that I represent, and the culture that is opening up for me?
- Are we closer in many ways than I had envisaged, or are we worlds apart?

### **The joys to date of the exchange**

- What for me are the positive aspects of my time here, so far?
- How does what is happening on a day-to-day basis match what I had anticipated before I left to come on this exchange?

### **The frustrations of the exchange**

- What are the frustrating or disappointing aspects that I am encountering? Have I any control over them? Am I dealing with them in a mature and reasonable fashion?
- Did I anticipate that it would be like this?
- Am I more frustrated than I might be, were I carrying out my teaching practice in my home environment?

### **Environmental issues**

- In general terms, what is my reaction to my new setting?
- If circumstances permitted, would I consider taking up a post here when qualified as a primary teacher? Why/why not?
- Am I pleased with my living conditions here during the exchange?

## **General issues**

- How am I responding to the exchange?
- Is it professionally, personally and culturally worthwhile?
- Are there suggestions that I wish to make to the organisers that will make this a better exchange project for future cohorts of exchange students?

**Remember that the journal is your personal account of your exchange experience. Deal with it how you wish, but try to make an entry in your journal at intervals during your time on the exchange – if possible at least one every week of your stay. However you are the best judge of how often or how seldom you choose to write. Use the journal to clarify your thoughts, and to keep as a possible archive. The sections outlined are a mere prompt. Come up with categories of your own if you think them more interesting or relevant.**

*Good luck! Maeve Martin – project evaluator*