

## **A Report to SCoTENS on the ‘Bringing School Communities Together to Promote Education for Diversity’ Project**

**From Dr Ron Smith, Queen’s University Belfast and Professor Keith Sullivan,  
National University of Ireland, Galway**

Dr Ron Smith of the School of Education from Queen’s University Belfast and Professor Keith Sullivan from the School of Education of the National University of Ireland, Galway successfully applied for a SCoTENS grant of £6000 to initiate a North/ South project aimed at ‘bringing school communities together to promote education for diversity’. Ron and Keith share a research interest in the general area of culture, education and divided societies. Ron’s experience has been in Northern Ireland and in relation to the Catholic and Protestant communities. Keith was raised largely in the bilingual/ bicultural context of Québec, Canada and has carried out research in Maori Studies in New Zealand, the postcolonial context of Kiribati in the South Pacific, and in the educational interface between Israelis and Palestinians in the Middle East (see bibliography at the end of this paper). With the official start of a rapprochement between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement, the development of closer economic, political and social relationships, and our growing joint participation in Europe, it seemed timely to explore and celebrate both what we share from our joint heritage and also to better know and understand how we are different. This is the spirit with which SCoTENS was created and, as educationalists, we thought that a good place to start this process off would be in our primary schools, where the future of the two Ireland’s reside.

One of the general lessons that can be taken from the sub-discipline of Comparative Education is that, if we look outwards to how others interpret and respond educationally to the world around them, not only can we develop new understandings about the educational system we are studying, through reflection we can also learn about ourselves. The distance provided by this one-step removed approach also enables us to be more objective about our own experiences, processes and institutions. In setting up the current project, we decided to utilize such a construct as a starting point by going beyond what is normally a dual relationship to create a triangulation. What we did was to bring groups of teachers and principals to Dublin, from Northern Ireland and from the West of Ireland, in order to participate in (to learn about, discuss and critique) a one day seminar and workshop about the Jerusalem-based Traditional Creativity in the Schools Project (TCSP). This presentation was provided by the Director of the project, Dr Simon Lichman and facilitated by Ron and Keith. We feel that this reflective and constructive triangulation (the 3 contexts being Northern Ireland, the Republic of Ireland and Israel/Palestine) proved to be very useful. The vehicle providing a window on the third context - the Traditional Creativity in the Schools Project or TCSP.

The TCSP focuses simultaneously on three problems in the context of the Israel/Palestine situation i.e. cultural pluralism, the transmission of home-culture between generations, and co-existence between neighbouring Arab and Jewish communities. The project is formed around working with twinned classes of Arab and Jewish children over the course of their last three years of primary schooling and in developing an understanding of games, oral traditions, foods and ethnographic processes. The children explore their traditions individually at home with their parents

and grandparents, and then at school they share what they know with their classmates. On regular occasions children and their families from the Jewish and the Arab communities visit each other's schools where they share what they have discovered. As a result of working and playing together, the children learn a lot about their home-culture and that of the children in their partner schools. The basis for appreciating the 'otherness' contained in the differences between generations, religions and ethnicity is created through this process. Rather than talking about interculturalism, the Project quietly creates it in a deep and accessible fashion over the course of the three-year partnership and beyond, as children of different ages from the same families pass in succession through the programme.

The two researchers felt that the TCSP was a useful model of best practice in a difficult and often violent context, where progress was often interrupted or reversed as a result of internecine violence that was occurring. In this and other respects there was much that 'felt' similar in relation to our contexts. In arranging for this event to take place, we weren't suggesting that anybody should adopt the model being presented, but rather that we could use it as a vehicle for reflection and learning to assist the shaping of our own thinking as we developed strategies and programmes appropriate to our own settings. From the theoretical, ideological and methodological points of view, we were concerned to develop an educational project to creatively and positively address the contemporary educational interface between North and South. As researchers and practitioners we realized that we would initially play a leading role in such developments, but wished to move towards a role where all processes and decision-making was shared between researchers, teachers, parents and pupils, with those in the schools gradually taking more control. We also wished to develop a process that was action-based and theoretically linked to the Freirian conceptualizations of problematisation, praxis, critical pedagogy, conscientisation and empowerment. Although this was not as 'clean' a process as many research-supported projects (where a design or hypothesis is developed, put into effect, tested to see if it has been effective and followed with, analysis recommendations and conclusions drawn), our path has been spontaneous, sometimes unpredictable but always creative, inspiring and enjoyable. This, in fact, reflects the reality of the living school, classroom and community of pupils and teachers where you have plans prepared but are aware that you also often have to respond to and deal with the unpredictable. In arriving at our present place, we have gone through several stages as follows:

### **Stage One: cross-border primary school visits**

With the spirit of SCoTENS in mind, we decided to seek the involvement of 4 primary schools from Northern Ireland and 4 from the Republic of Ireland and to arrange a cross-border exchange whereby selected classes within the selected schools would visit parallel classes in their partner's jurisdiction and experience each others' educational, social and community life (this was largely geographically determined in that Ron had developed relationships with schools in the greater Derry area and Keith in the Connemara/ Galway City area). In preparation for the visits, it was intended that teachers and pupils (with input from the researchers) would develop and present a theme that introduced the educational and community activities and concerns of each school. Having carried out a formal and educational exchange, informal activities such as games, a shared meal etc. would be similarly planned for. Although this was well intended, we found that we were thinking 'too big' for such an early stage. We

also found that, financially and logistically, it would be impractical. Due to regulations and personal safety, the original intention of experiencing each other's schools and staying as billets in each other's homes was not possible. From the point of, for - example, bus hire, paid accommodation and sustenance, the costs would have been prohibitive. It also became apparent that before any such exchanges could occur, there were fundamental issues, protocols etc. that needed to be sorted out. Consequently, we modified our original plans. In Northern Ireland, 2 sets of school relationships between twinned Catholic and Protestant primary schools were established (as originally planned). In the South, however, we decided at this formative stage, to focus on developing a strong relationship between just one set of very interesting paired schools - a Catholic Irish speaking national school in a Gaeltacht area and an Educate Together School in an urban setting. Specifically, they were as follows:

**In Northern Ireland** - Two sets of paired schools in an urban (Derry/ Londonderry) and rural (Strabane) setting:

1. Longtower Primary School, Derry (Maintained school - pupils from Catholic background);
2. Fountain Primary School (Controlled school - Protestant background);
  
1. Ardstraw Primary (Controlled school - Protestant background);
2. St Eugene's Primary, Victoria Bridge (Maintained school - pupils from Catholic backgrounds).

**In The Republic of Ireland** - A pair of schools in Galway and Barna:

1. Scoil Shémais Naofa Bearna (Catholic Irish speaking national school).;
2. Galway Educate Together School (multi-denominational and multiethnic city national school).

## **Stage Two: the separate development of understandings**

As we gradually unpicked the issues within our two contexts, both in conversations between ourselves, with the teachers, and with reference to the literature, it became clear that it was 'early days' and that the situations in both precincts were complex and needing of an extensive working through. Furthermore, the different histories made the contemporary issues in the North and South not at all similar. Although more than 10 years have passed since the Good Friday agreement was signed, in Northern Ireland, the religious and cultural divide is still deeply ingrained and is the main intercultural issue. On the other hand, in the Republic, things had developed in an insular fashion and until recently had been almost completely Catholic and monocultural. Society is however changing and, although the Church still governs the schools and controls the ethos, lay people largely run them. What is more, there has been an influx of Eastern Europeans and Africans who have arrived for economic or refugee reasons and there has also been a growing focus on the educational needs of Traveller communities. In other words, it was important to first of all learn about the wider nature of our new contexts before establishing any cultural and educational exchange process. Although this may seem to have been a period of inactivity, this was not the case. It was rather a period of gestation whereby many discussions and

internal processes were occurring. This is similar to the fact that when you build a house, if you want it to last, you need to create adequate foundations before you can erect a structure. Furthermore, such structures are not usually visible.

Despite our sea change, we decided that it would still be useful to bring Dr Lichman from Israel and to utilise the triangulation focus to stimulate debate and discussion between the teachers and principals both North and South. We were supportive of maintaining the positive momentum that was emerging but realized that, with the energetic and creative response of the participants, we the researchers were hanging onto the tail, rather than riding on the back, of this particularly energetic Celtic Tiger.

### **In the intervening period**

Dr Smith and Professor Sullivan carried out preparations with participants from the schools in anticipation of Dr Lichman's visit. Then they went through a further process of reflection and critique as a result of the well-attended presentations they made at the 2007 SCoTENS conference in Malahide. Here, key scholars and interested parties from both Irish contexts discussed and debated issues central to our interests. For example, Ron presented a review of the literatures on school - improvement for community relations education in N. Ireland as well as parental involvement in the design and implementation of diversity curricula within the planned curriculum. It was noted that, despite the ubiquitous use of the rhetoric of partnership in education, research evidence suggested that school practice was still a very long way from a situation where the skills of parents/ carers were considered to be of equal value. Keith then described the work, under the leadership and direction of Dr Simon Lichman, of the Centre for Creativity in Education and Cultural Heritage, Jerusalem (CCECH).

### **Stage Three: Honing our thinking in order to progress**

#### **The Meeting in Dublin:**

A one-day workshop took place on Monday 14 April, 2008 in Dublin. The Dublin City Council Arts Officer kindly arranged for us to use a seminar room in Dublin's Art Space, the LAB. Dublin City Council also provided us with morning and afternoon teas. This workshop brought together participants from the 6 schools in a location at a similar distance from the two National settings.

#### **Participants:**

##### **I. Researcher and Guest Speaker**

Dr Simon Lichman, Director - Centre for Creativity in Education and Cultural Heritage, Jerusalem, Israel

##### **ii. Irish Coordinators**

- From Northern Ireland: Dr Ron Smith, Lecturer in Education, Queen's University Belfast and June Neill, General Secondary Adviser, Western Education and Library Board (WELB)

- From the Republic of Ireland: Professor Keith Sullivan, School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway.

iii. School Participants

- From the 6 schools (3 sets of paired schools), 4 principals and 7 teachers attended.

**The Order of events:**

1. 10:30 am until 11:00 am Introduction of purposes and participants

2. 11:00 am until 1:00 pm – Workshop with Simon

A full overview of the Traditional Creativity in the Schools Project (TCSP) and how it worked in the Israeli context was provided by Simon; followed by a question and answer session.

3. 1:00 pm until 2:00 pm – Lunch

4. 2:00 pm until 3:00 pm – Workshops

The question we asked participants to consider was: “How can we best utilize the Traditional Creativity in the Schools Project to develop intercultural understandings in our Schools?” The aim of this session was to work together in small groups and then, in the large group, to come up with a plan of action. Simon, June, Ron and Keith acted as facilitators for both processes.

5. 3:00 pm until 4:00 pm – Draft plans of action were developed to take back to each of our two contexts

**The Seminar Day and the Outcomes:**

Dr Lichman’s presentation was excellent and the engagement and discussions brought interesting comments, challenges, and refinement of thinking. The major themes and observations that occurred were as follows:

1. It became apparent that although sharing an Island and a history, the two major groupings from the North and the South were as far apart as if they had been at either end of a large continent. For the two paired schools from Northern Ireland, there was an excitement at being presented with a project that was from the Middle East, and although in ways exotic and culturally different, the major concerns were very similar. What the Traditional Creativity in the Schools had accomplished was seen as inspiring and a useful model, however, it became even more clear that groundwork in the home schools needed to be done. Furthermore, in the context of the North, the issue of the conflict in N. Ireland stood high above all other concerns.

ii. The group from the Republic of Ireland became very inspired and it became apparent to them, and in relation to the Galway Educate Together School in particular, that although they wished to have a cultural exchange with their

partner Gaeltacht school, they wished first of all to pursue an internal development process of getting to know who they were culturally. Keith Sullivan has been working with them on this. An evening seminar and/or teacher development day is planned for the coming school year. In the context of the South, the ethnic cultural mix has long been essentially solidly Irish Catholic with a small minority Protestant population and a marginalized Traveller community. However, in recent years, with the emergence of a strong Celtic Tiger economy and the need of people to fill the positions that this created, there was an influx of immigrants from Eastern Europe and of refugees from various African nations (this may, of course, change now!). Since its inception, the Educate Together School movement has been marginalized by the powers that be, and is in principle very concerned to understand about and honour the rights the large number of ethnic minority children in its school and also to educate the Irish children about interculturalism. From the point of view of where to go from here, ideas that have been germinating will be addressed when we next meet so that we can continue to move forward. It is hoped both to develop useful educational approaches to address the issue of interculturalism and to develop a model that could be used in other schools in the process.

The meeting in Dublin provided the participants with a stimulating triangulation of the Arab/ Israeli interface, the Catholic/ Protestant Northern Ireland interface/ and the Catholic Gaeltacht monoculture context/ multi-denominational, multicultural Educate Together context. This coming together had been preceded by some thinking about the issue of cultural religious divides and the notions of monoculturalism, multiethnicity and interculturalism. The day was a fascinating experiment in its own right, but also provided us with a sense that, as in other areas of life, both the simplicity and complexities of situations need to be fully addressed before progress to the next stages can be contemplated. We had been faced with a similar complexity in our earlier stages and had to consider the issues and negotiate resolutions in order to reach the next stage. Tensions have been high, and sometimes stressful, but this has provided a creative force and the impetus to utilize what we had learned in order to make sense of our current situation so as to be able to build bridges of understanding.

### **Follow up to the Day:**

Ongoing relationships between local schools were arranged and this has been maintained through local-based activities, inter-school visits and ICT contact, such as through the use of Skype. General support and developmental assistance is also provided to participant schools by the coordinators from Queens University, Belfast, the Western Education and Library Board and the National University of Ireland, Galway.

### **Summary and Conclusion**

We applied to SCoTENS under the title of ‘Bringing School Communities Together to Promote Diversity for Diversity’. In terms of the Subject of Project, we developed 5 that were both aspirational and which served as an organizational umbrella. We will indicate under each heading what we have accomplished to date:

- 1. To involve one pair of schools in each jurisdiction that had a history of involvement in intercultural and /or multicultural education and, where particularly in the Northern Irish context, cross-community contact was viewed as one important location for making a contribution to such work.**

Our original intention had been to have several schools from each jurisdiction take part in a cross-border interchange with a visit and return-visit. From a safety and cost point of view, at this point such an interchange was not possible. Consequently, we modified our intentions to focus on an interchange between two schools in Northern Ireland and two schools in the Republic of Ireland and for there to be a North-South dialogue and general exchange created with the focus and 'opening-up' point being the meeting which occurred in Dublin on April 14<sup>th</sup>, 2008 - Dr Lichman's presentation.

- 2. To engage Dr Simon Lichman to facilitate residential cross-border professional development with teachers from the paired schools mentioned above and according to the methodologies of the Centre for Creativity in Educational and Cultural Heritage.**

With the support from SCoTENS, we were able to arrange a full day's seminar-cum-workshop in Dublin (supported by Dublin City Council who provided us with a venue and morning and afternoon teas). The Group from Northern Ireland had travelled down from Derry/Londonderry and County Tyrone and the other group from Galway. Eight people travelled from the North (6 teachers from 4 schools, the Secondary Adviser [with responsibility for community relations] from the Western Education Library Board, and Dr Smith. From Galway, 5 teachers from 2 schools (including the 2 principals) attended and Professor Sullivan. A full lunch was also arranged and allowed conversations to develop in an informal context. The presentation from Dr Lichman was informative, stimulating and provided the basis for intensive, reflective and relevant questioning. It also allowed, through looking at another interface (Arab-Jewish), the dealing with similar issues as found in the Northern context to emerge. Because of this "other-perspective" context, it was non-threatening. It allowed us to look at what was happening 'over-there' and provided an ease in starting up non-threatening conversations. This also allowed a 'getting to know each other' (which had started on the journeys to Dublin) and 'getting to trust each other' atmosphere to develop. This provided the foundation for the more difficult local issues to start to be addressed.

This process underlined how very different the 2 contexts were. But, interestingly, not only this, how different the contexts were within each jurisdiction (see also Appendix 1).

- 3. To encourage the school-attached professional personnel connected with the paired schools to attend residential professional development sessions.**

This was proposed as a way that Ron and Keith could support professional development in terms of cultural interfaces and in relation to multiculturalism. What in fact happened, in the context of the two Galway schools, was that they decided that, contrary to our intention of having the two schools coming together

and having a cultural interchange, it was felt (particularly in relation to the Educate Together school) that it was much more important to carry out an in-school process in order to understand this from their own point of view, rather than having an interface having not created this crucial and fundamental understanding of their own school. Similarly in Northern Ireland, a different trajectory was being developed.

Rather than the two university researchers taking charge and running the project they had in mind, the power of the interchange in Dublin between the North and South participants and Dr Lichman, was such that they had jumped a few steps ahead of what was anticipated and were 'empowered' to take more control at an earlier stage. Although this could have been seen as loss of control by the university researchers, in Freirian terms, it was the kicking in of conscientisation and those who needed to take control in the long run doing it earlier than planned. This was a good result.

**4. To have one project up and running in each jurisdiction by the end of 2008 incorporating an action-research network of practitioners and researchers.**

As a result of the conference, the two settings, North and South, have chosen to take responsibility for their own development overall and to work with the 2 coordinators in so-doing. Appendix 1 provides a summary of follow-up activities both North and South.

**5. To have completed a proposal for securing long-term funding.**

Appendix 2 provides an overview of our proposal for funding.

### **Concluding Remarks**

To date, the process that we have been involved in has been action-based and has been driven by responding to the needs of the various groups that we are assisting to develop programmes to address their intercultural needs. The process is a slow one, but we are clear that going through considered processes that put down deep roots, and can be adapted to a variety of settings, is appropriate for what we are attempting to achieve.

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## **APPENDIX 1: TWO RESPONSES TO THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY**

### **I. THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY IN DUBLIN: A NORTHERN PERSPECTIVE**

Bridget Devine (Principal St. Eugene's Primary School, Strabane) with Sinead Johnston (St. Eugene's Teacher) and David Stinson (Principal Ardstraw Primary School)

#### **Contextualisation**

Both of us (BD & DS) came to our present schools as Principals in post. David has now been in Ardstraw for 25 years and Bridget has been in St Eugene's for 13 years. We teach in small rural schools located in extremely staunch Loyalist and Republican-Nationalist areas respectively involving high multiple social deprivation. Ardstraw is situated in an almost exclusively Protestant area. The only Catholic children who ever attended was an English family that moved to the area. In the past, one parent seeking to enrol their child in Ardstraw asked if the school was involved in cross-community work. On finding out that it was, the parent declined to enrol their child! St'Eugene's is situated in Victoria Bridge in an area of mixed housing and prior to BD's time, several Protestant children attended the school.

We had been involved in the School's Community Relations Programme (SCRCP) for approximately twenty years. Approximately six or seven years ago, due to the combined pressures of curriculum demands and our roles as teaching Principals, our Community Relations partnership lapsed, and, although there was informal contact between our schools, planned community relations contact work ceased. However, in response to the Review of the Schools Community Relations Programme and its recommendations, in 2004 the WELB Advisory Teacher for the SCRCP held a joint meeting with ourselves at which we agreed to revive the partnership and try to incorporate into our programmes some of the recommendations contained in the SCRCP report. Consequently, I believe that our involvement in the *The Bringing School Communities Together Project* was due to the already very strong, vibrant, effective partnership between our two schools which included, and also extended, well beyond our formal contact as part of SCRCP.

#### **The Bringing School Communities Together Project**

Since no formal meetings had taken place prior to the Dublin visit, as far as we were concerned, the project formally began when we joined representatives from four other schools (2 RoI and 2 NI) at a Dublin venue in order to take part in a one-day workshop led and facilitated by Simon Lichman. The staff at St. Eugene's discussed who should attend the Dublin meeting and BD persuaded SJ - a young member of staff - that participation provided an unique opportunity to enhance her CPD. SJ was initially reluctant to agree since she didn't really know DS very well and was also not entirely sure what the proposed project entailed. She was also not aware that teachers from schools in the Irish Republic would be attending.

DS travelled by car to the meeting whilst the remainder of the N. Ireland contingent JN, BMcL (WELB); Ron Smith (QUB), BD, Sinead, AS (Long Tower Primary School), SD and NG (Fountain Primary School) travelled together by plane. Everyone involved had been sent several articles outlining projects that had been undertaken by Simon Lichman working with Jewish and Arab schoolchildren and their families. I think DS and JN were already fairly well informed about many issues related to the Arab-Israeli conflict, but the remainder of the group had a very sketchy background knowledge.

Sinead was very nervous and apprehensive when she was asked at the workshop to talk to the whole group about the cross-community work the two schools were involved in. I think that she would have preferred to have been informed of this beforehand and been able to prepare something that could have been given to all of the participants. On the other hand, in his role as Principal, and through other work involving speaking to large groups, DS had a lot of experience and consequently did not find this experience stressful. I remember DS commenting that the examples Simon provided concerning the parts of the programme where the Jewish and Arab children involved their parents and grandparents in homework activities - to find out about traditional foods, games, family stories and traditional songs - might not transfer to the N.I situation since the two main traditions here shared a lot in common with respect to these areas. During the afternoon session, ongoing relationships between the local schools were arranged which is being maintained on an on-going basis through: ICT contact (the use of Broadband Skype); local-based activities and inter-school visits; support and development help provided by QUB and the NUIG partners. I also remember making a mental note of the following issues that arose for me at the time with respect to the meeting as well as further involvement with the Bringing School Communities Together Project:

- The difference between the N.I. and RoI education systems and the great lack of knowledge we displayed of the working of each other's system;
- The multicultural context of the Educate Together Schools being so different to ours and how each Educate Together school in the RoI operated so differently, no uniformity. It was difficult to build up a picture;
- The commitment required;
- The restricted funding.

When DS and BD returned to school, they talked to their respective colleagues about the Dublin meeting and the possibility of receiving SCRP funding from the WELB for a joint project. Both staff groups agreed that active and meaningful parental involvement was an extremely important, yet neglected, aspect of SCRP's and consequently should be the main focus of the project. In order to encourage maximum parental participation, DS and BD agreed that the project should have a strong element of fun and that the community relations element would be an integral, although understated part. It was agreed that the two of us would speak about a possible joint venture involving parents, grandparents and children to those attending our respective school Christmas concerts. As it happens, due to a family illness, BD was unable to address the Ardstraw parents, so DS spoke to both groups.

## **Charlie and the Chocolate Factory**

It was at one of these meetings that the idea of staging a drama involving mothers, fathers, children and grandparents received strong endorsement. A production of Charlie and the Chocolate factory was agreed. Initially, in response to parental input, an action plan was drawn-up. A conscious decision was made to hold the initial meeting and rehearsals for a joint production of the production in the Young Farmer's Club (YFC), a relatively neutral venue in Ardstraw. We also felt that, in order to get the project up and going, a member of staff from either school should be present at every meeting or rehearsal in order to show that, although ownership of the project belonged to the parents, staff members were actively supportive.

The first meeting saw parents gravitating towards other people they knew from their own school, whilst the teachers deliberately approached parents from the other school. However, by third meeting, cross - community friendships were beginning to form, which continued to develop throughout the project. Whilst early meetings took place in the YFC, the hall turned out to be extremely cold, dreary and confined. Consequently, the parents suggested using both school premises instead - no need for a "neutral" space.

The drama became an established and important event in the community. Some of the women who were working on costumes, props etc arranged informal meetings to work in each other's houses. Indeed, for some women, rehearsals became their only social outlet. The intergenerational aspect involving young people and parents working together was an extremely impressive aspect to witness. We believe the profile of both communities was raised by the performance of the production in a professional theatre and subsequent excellent reviews of the show in the local press. Furthermore, whether in a performing role or backstage making props and scenery, we witnessed the self-confidence and esteem of a number of participants grow. At whatever level of involvement, the children appeared extremely proud of their parents. There were also some unplanned outcomes such as renewed contact between family members who had drifted apart a few years earlier, parents becoming aware of unknown skills and talents that their now grown -up children possessed, and parents of pre - school children, as a consequence of their involvement, changing their mind and deciding to send their child to a local school rather than schools outside the community.

## **Sustainability**

A local drama group has now been formed involving all those parents and others who were associated with Charlie and the Chocolate Factory. They have indicated that they would like to work on a similar project next year - with the parents taking ownership and the schools acting less as leaders but still providing support. The support and advice provided by the WELB's Advisor for Community Relations (June Neill), and the Assistant Advisory teacher for Community Relations (Brigeeen Mc Laughlin), is tremendously valued and greatly enhances the sustainability of this project.

## **Response 2 from John Farrow - Principal of the Galway Educate Together School**

### **Aim of the Project and Reason for Participation:**

To create an understanding of diversity in contemporary Ireland for school children. As Galway City's only multi-denominational school it was a project that interested us greatly as it harmonized well with our ethos and its aims were very similar to many of the aims of the school's Religious and Ethical Education Programme. The Principal, John Farrell, and two class teachers, Sinead Carroll and Sara Falvey attended.

### **Reflection on the workshop:**

The morning session consisted of a workshop presented by the director of Traditional Creativity in the Schools Project, Dr Simon Lichman. This presentation was very engaging and showed to great effect the remarkable work being done by Dr. Lichman and the TCSP. The presentation drew a great response from the participants in the workshop and there were plenty of opportunities for questions and discussion.

One of the main ideas to emerge through the discussions was the vital importance of the children understanding their own cultural backgrounds in some depth before engaging with other cultures. Examination of our own lives and a willingness to share this with others were important aspects of the project. Children develop a sense of pride in their own cultures and through interaction with children from different cultures would find similarities and differences between themselves. Family participation was a prerequisite and a vital element for the success of the project.

### **Looking at the project in a GETNS context**

GETNS is a school that has developed and changed greatly in only a few years. The school has gone from being a school where the vast majority of the pupils and their families were from Ireland to a school that now has families and children from 41 different countries. It has also developed from having 1 part time language teacher to support the children with additional English language needs to having 2 full-time language teachers.

This rapid development requires us to take the time necessary to recognise the different cultural backgrounds of the children attending GETNS and to see how best to help children share their own cultures with each other.

One of the main points of agreement between all participants in the workshop was the need for each school community to identify ways of examining "Who we are" in their own schools. It was the view of the participants that while creating connections between schools both in a local and a North/South context was something the schools would like to pursue, it was more important for schools to begin with exploring their own cultures first.

At GETNS we have decided to begin sharing our cultures with each other by hosting an "International Day" before the end of the school year. We will seek to have as many representatives as possible from the differing cultures in the school. They will

be able to share with each other through music, dance storytelling and food. We will also invite guests from Bearna school as a way of introducing ourselves to them.

## **APPENDIX 2: PROPOSAL TO SECURE LONG -TERM FUNDING**

*NcompasS* is an initiative designed to promote understanding, respect and reconciliation between young people in Northern Ireland and the border region of Ireland. It supports young people, and those who work with them, through activities such as: thematic projects; training courses in managing educational exchanges; student teacher/youth worker placements and dissemination of good practice. The aim of *NcompasS* is to develop partnerships in the formal and non -formal education sectors which will contribute to peace and reconciliation in Ireland and Northern Ireland between people and organizations from differing cultural traditions. The project is administered by a cross - border partnership which includes the British Council in Northern Ireland, the Youth Council in Northern Ireland and Léargas (based in Dublin).

Following their seminar at the 2007 SCoTENS Annual Conference, and, as a consequence of contacts made with the Project Coordinator of Léargas (Eva Creely), Professor Keith Sullivan and Ron Smith were invited to become specialist partners in a Schools' Programme led by *NcompasS* and seeking EU funding under Peace 3. Our role is to deliver intergenerational -based programmes for school Communities (see below).

### **The NcompasS Schools' Programme**

This programme involves a partnership of key practitioners, educators, trainers and providers from the statutory, private and voluntary sectors collaborating on a series of projects a regional basis designed to have far reaching impact on statutory provision for the training, development and support of teachers in the front line of division and diversity. The programme aims to address the legacy of the conflict and challenges arising from the fast changing demographics of migration, sectarianism and inequality in communities throughout the region. It will endeavour - through strategic alliances and partnerships - to share best and good practice and build on cross - border and cross community links. The programme has three interrelated strands:

#### **1. The Cluster Strand**

This is the main area of activity where clusters of school communities (including teachers, principals, parents, classroom assistants and outreach workers) will engage in a process to develop and embed suitable strategies for dealing with issues of difference. Training and good practice will be developed in regional clusters, with support services provided locally and regionally.

#### **2. The Leadership in Education Strand**

The focus of this capacity building strand is on a programme of cooperation between the institutions that share responsibility for developing leaders and teacher education. The key objectives of this strand will be:

- To develop modules of training and support jointly;
- To offer interventions and support to the cluster strand;
- To develop joint policy approaches which reflect the learning outcomes of the cluster strand.

### 3. Research and Dissemination Strand.

An initial baseline study of knowledge and skills (as directed by the intended outcomes) will be undertaken. Throughout the lifetime of the programme (4 years) a dedicated resource will be in place to closely monitor progress and impact of the activities. The research function will disseminate learning from the cluster strand and from other external sources, and will act as a conduit for the monitoring of best practice and policy formulation. It will maintain a constant dialogue between the cluster strand and the leadership in education strand.

All three strands are designed to be interrelated, informing each other and ultimately working towards the production of an evidence - based model of cross border, cross community provision of initial teacher education, support and continuing professional development designed to address the emerging needs of educators in the post conflict, multicultural Ireland, North and South.

#### INTENDED OUTCOMES

| Stakeholder                    | Intended Outcome   |
|--------------------------------|--|
| Policy Makers                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increased understanding of what is needed to build capacity and overcome racist and sectarian challenges;</li> <li>○ Increased understanding of problems facing formal education systems in terms of racism and sectarianism;</li> <li>○ Increased understanding of how different models of collaboration can help meet the challenges of racism and sectarianism;</li> <li>○ Increased number of leaders for change in the system;</li> <li>○ Increased opportunities to meet existing policy objectives regarding sectarianism and racism.</li> <li>○ Increased opportunities to meet policy objectives regarding collaboration between schools and the communities they serve</li> </ul> |
| Teacher Education and Agencies | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Greater awareness and understanding of issues for educationalists in meeting sectarian and racist challenges;</li> <li>○ Increased cross-border and cross-sectoral links</li> <li>○ Increased capacity to work in partnership with other educational stakeholders</li> <li>○ Increased likelihood of delivering appropriate services</li> </ul>   |
| Headteachers                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Greater understanding of the challenges facing different levels within formal education in terms of sectarianism and racism</li> <li>○ Increased opportunity to direct services</li> <li>○ Greater access to cross-border and cross-community support networks</li> <li>○ Greater ability to engage and implement programmes and strategies that</li> </ul>   |

|                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
|                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ seek to challenge sectarianism and racism</li> <li>○ Increased professional development opportunities</li> </ul>   |
| Teachers          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increased ability to discuss and deal with contentious issues in the classroom;</li> <li>○ Wider variety of techniques to rely upon to challenge sectarian and racist attitudes and behaviour;</li> <li>○ Increased number of colleagues in support networks;</li> <li>○ Increased understanding of what causes racism and sectarianism</li> <li>○ Increased awareness of other sectors and organisations</li> <li>○ Increased professional development opportunities</li> </ul> |
| Pupils            | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increased awareness of racist and sectarian attitudes and behaviour</li> <li>○ Better understanding what produces racism and sectarianism</li> <li>○ Increased ability to discuss contentious issues in a respectful and secure manner</li> <li>○ Better relationships with people from other backgrounds</li> <li>○ Better life chances and broader horizons</li> <li>○</li> </ul>  |
| Community Leaders | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Increased involvement with schools</li> <li>○ Increased sense of inclusion in planning</li> <li>○ Increased capacity to engage with statutory services</li> <li>○ Changing perception of schools' function in communities</li> <li>○</li> </ul>  |
| Wider Community   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Better relationships at a local level with the school recognised as a resource for positive change in the community</li> </ul>   |

## **OUR PROPOSAL: BRINGING SCHOOL COMMUNITIES TOGETHER TO ADDRESS DIVERSITY**

### **Aims & Objectives**

As specialist partners in the proposed **NcompasS Schools' Programme**, our aim is to build and coordinate communities of practice within education North-South that encourages mutually sustaining collaborative relationships between schools, families and communities - in the pursuit of tackling discrimination based on linguistic, socio-economic and cultural difference. Our objectives include:

1. To embed a commitment to tackling discrimination based on linguistic, socio-economic and cultural difference through a menu of research-based *school - home - community* strategies;
  - 1.1 Cross-generational involvement in diversity education modelled on the principles and aspirations of the Traditional Creativity in the School - Community Project or (TCSP) based at The Centre For Creativity in Education and Cultural Heritage (CCECH) in Israel - *but adapted to the Irish contexts*;

- 1.2 Improving School - Community Connections with Families of culturally and linguistically diverse learners using a school self-evaluation and improvement process devised by Dr Caroline Linse at the School of Education, Queen's University of Belfast.
2. To provide professional development and consultancy to clusters of school communities;
  3. To establish and develop an action-research network to provide on-going support to the work of the schools;
  4. To develop and disseminate materials to support development planning within school communities;
  5. To build and maintain a comprehensive presence on a project website to provide access to information, materials, support and to support e-mail discussion;
  6. To publish and disseminate good educational practice.

#### ELABORATION ON 1.2 above

Devised by Dr Caroline Linse at the School of Education, Queen's University of Belfast, the self-evaluation and improvement process is a process of collective review that guides staff along a structure allowing for a progressively detailed examination of the school or department. It is a means of examining and improving school practices and levels of responsiveness to families whose home language is not English. The process typically:

- Is a systematic process, not simply reflection;
- Its short-term goal is to obtain valid information about a school's condition, functions, purposes and products;
- It leads to action on an aspect of the school's organization or curriculum;
- It is a group process that involves participants in a collegial process
- It is a process owned by the school or sub-system;
- Its purpose is school improvement/development and its aspiration is to progress towards the problem-solving or relatively autonomous school.

Collective review has to do with ensuring that the collective whole exceeds the sum of the parts. That is, it is an approach to organizational improvement that places learning at the heart of matters; that eschews instrumental, controlling and bureaucratic change management strategies having narrow foci on performance and efficiency (Clarke et al., 1998). As Brighouse and Woods (1999) suggested, it provides schools with an opportunity to increase the common wealth of their curiosity, an extension of knowledge through the sharing of other people's ideas. However, turning information into knowledge necessarily engages the organization's current state of knowledge and the quality of its learning processes as an organization. The development of information systems needs to be paralleled by the development of learning systems, which utilise data (Watkins, 1997). Consequently, like Watkins,

MacBeath (1998) and other school improvers, experience suggests that ‘schools need friends’ to develop the approach.