

**The Practice of Integrated Education
in Northern Ireland:
The Teachers' Perspective**

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Introduction

Since the founding of the first integrated school at Lagan College in Belfast in 1981, the integrated education movement in Northern Ireland has seen the establishment of 46 integrated schools at the primary and post-primary levels. These schools educate a total of about 14,140 students comprised not only from the Catholic and Protestant traditions but from a growing range of religious and cultural backgrounds including those who consider themselves as from a “mixed” background. The enrolment figures provided in the Department of Education’s April 30, 2001 Statistical Press Release indicate that integrated schools are currently educating about 4.2% of the overall student population in Northern Ireland (DENI, April 2001). While growth of the integrated sector has been substantial over the past twenty years, the establishment of new “planned” schools is slowing down a bit with the fastest growth now occurring through the ‘transformation’ of existing (mostly state controlled) schools taking on the integrated mission and management structure. In the context of the significant societal changes currently taking place in NI, the further growth of the integrated education sector remains uncertain. Part of the prognosis undoubtedly rests in the ability of integrated education to provide evidence that it is working. And part of this lies in its ability to gauge whether integrated schools are meeting their mission to facilitate mutual understanding and tolerance while providing quality education for the families of NI.

Inarguably, teachers play a most pivotal role in the achievement of the integrated mission in these schools. The responsibility placed on the integrated school teacher to contribute to the integrated ethos is considerable indeed especially in light of the current emphasis that is being placed on increased academic standards and educational outcomes throughout Northern Ireland. Integrated schools define themselves, first and foremost, as institutions devoted to providing quality education for all students. Toward this end, integrated schools seek to offer a full spectrum of academic coursework that will meet the learning needs of students at all levels of ability, from the special needs student to the high academic achiever pursuing eventual university qualification.

Beyond the expectations and role responsibilities that teachers in all schools are held to, teachers in integrated schools must also abide by the unique provisos promoted within an integrated ethos. They are expected to teach effectively and equitably across the different religious, socio-political and ability groups. As such, these teachers are expected to demonstrate the attitudes of openness and sensitivity associated with child-centered, integrated practice. They are expected to teach across all ability levels in the classroom and work effectively in a team approach with parents. Furthermore, these teachers are expected to model behaviours and provide learning activities that constructively speak to diversity and contribute to an ethos that promotes equity, mutual understanding and respect for all.

Given these expectations and the fact that some observers would go so far as to suggest that the success of integrated education (IE) is fundamentally dependent on the classroom teacher, it would appear useful to examine the practice of IE from that perspective. This research effort then was intended to assess the practice of integrated education from the qualitative standpoint of the classroom teacher. This study did not look to measure students' attitudinal or behavioural changes nor was it intended to assess the educational outcomes of the integrated school system. The intent of this study was simply to gather a focused sense of the integrated school teacher's experience as one way of assessing the efficacy of the integrated education mission in Northern Ireland.

METHODOLOGY

In January 2001, I met with the Senior Research Director of the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) in Belfast to discuss my interest, as Sheelagh Murnaghan Visiting Professor at Queens University, Belfast, in carrying out a study in conjunction with NICIE that would aim to assess the perspective of teachers in relation to the practice of integrated education in NI. The idea behind this study was to have classroom teachers reflect upon what was working (and not working) in terms of the integrated mission of their schools. How are they carrying out their role and practice as teachers in the context of achieving an integrated ethos in their school? What

systemic factors are impacting their ability to contribute to an integrated ethos in their school? And, what promising practices are being employed toward this end?

This focus for this study was taken as a result of an ethnographic case study I had conducted in a single post-primary integrated school during the autumn months of 2000. In that study I noted the significant demands placed on the integrated school teacher. In considering the results of that study, it seemed that further assessment related to the role of the teacher in integrated education would prove of value. To better formulate the design for this study, I met with an established 'working group' of integrated school teachers at the NICIE offices in February 2001. At this meeting, it was decided that these teachers would go back to their respective schools to determine whether senior management would agree to participate in a study that was aimed at gaining the perspective of teachers related to the integrated education mission of their schools.

Characteristic of the open attitude associated with the integrated sector, all of these schools agreed to participate in the proposed study over the course of the next few months. Rather than relying on survey methodology, it was decided that a qualitative study that sought to generate discussion among teachers "in the trenches" would produce a more nuanced and richer picture of what was working and what was not working in integrated education in NI. While naturalistic methods have long been employed in educational research (Borg & Gals, 1989; Denzer & Lincoln, 1994), the use of focus groups has increasingly been gaining credibility as a tool of qualitative research (Morgan, 1997). Over the course of this study, I visited 9 integrated schools, representing about one fifth of the existing integrated schools across Northern Ireland. Of these, three were primary and six were post-primary integrated schools; two were considered 'transforming' integrated schools. In each of these schools, I met with focus groups comprised of teachers across all subject areas, years of experience, gender and, where feasible, religious tradition; in one case, data were collected as a result of individual teacher interviews. An introductory letter and the protocol of categories to be included in the discussion were distributed in advance to

all participants for their consideration before meeting; written responses were also invited. All focus group discussions were taped under the assurance of maintaining anonymity.

In the end, this study generated a substantial volume of qualitative data gathered as a result of focus group discussions with teachers, individual discussions with senior managers, and informal observations made of student and staff interactions in these schools. As a qualitative study, it did not seek to provide quantitative assessments or attempt to make generalizations for the entire domain of integrated education. These limitations notwithstanding, considerable insight was gained regarding what is working and what needs to be worked on in integrated education from the perspective of its key players, teachers.

The findings are presented below as collective summaries of the input that was gathered across all schools arranged according to broad topic areas. To lend additional context, a selection of personal statements that were extracted from the focus group discussions held with teachers has been incorporated into the narrative where relevant. Action recommendations for the integrated education community to consider during the next phase of development are included under most categories. An illustrative listing of the 'promising practices' that are being employed in pursuit of the integrated mission has been included.

FINDINGS

The preponderance of evidence gathered in this study substantiates the efficacy of IE as an enterprise that is succeeding in its efforts to educate students from all religious and ability groups in an ethos that promotes tolerance, interdependence and respect on the part of all of its community members. Considered collectively, these integrated schools appear to be working steadfastly at achieving their mission to provide the families of Northern Ireland with open and inclusive learning environments for their children. Throughout this study, as I visited the participating schools and met with teachers and administrative staff, I was impressed with the climate of affirmation and cooperation that prevailed overall.

It was clear to me that each school in this study represented a unique community with its own personality and defining characteristics; as such, broad generalizations across all integrated schools would make little sense. That being said, some distinctions did seem to emerge by level (i.e., between primary and post-primary schools), by management type (i.e., between planned and transformed integrated schools), by enrolment composition (i.e., the percentage breakdown of the two primary traditions in the school) and by the nature of the catchment area from which the enrolled students were recruited.

The integrated ethos in the planned primary school setting, for example, appeared more openly manifest than in the transforming primary school setting. In the planned primary schools, there seemed to be a more open and proactive approach taken toward integration where signs of promoting inclusion were more evident (from decorations in the hallways to in-class activities to extracurricular events). At the post-primary level, there was a range from strident to subdued in the pluralistic emphasis taken with some schools showing more demonstrable indications of their integrated ethos than others. Similarly, it appeared that the schools with more balanced enrolments between the traditions were more confident, less guarded and took more proactive effort to pronounce an integrated ethos than those schools in which there was a clear-cut minority community among the student population. Those in which the balance between the traditions was uneven appeared the more circumspect in expression of their integrated mission. In terms of the transforming integrated schools, the particular history behind the decision to undergo transformation seemed to be a defining point as did the sociocultural makeup of the given catchment area. When the catchment area from which students were drawn was a rural or widespread region, the schools seemed more comfortable in promoting the integrated ethos. On the other hand it seemed to me that when a school's enrolment is primarily drawn from the localized community, the prevailing demographics and socio-political issues of that community influence the level of open emphasis taken. While a sense of energy and commitment to the integrated ethos was evident in most of the teacher groups I met, in the transforming schools, issues related to the

changeover were still being grappled with and staff cohesion was described as a 'work in progress.'

The considerable data collected over the nine schools in this study have been summarized below according to broad categories that correspond to the primary lines of inquiry entailed in the teacher focus group discussions:

THE EFFICACY OF INTEGRATED EDUCATION.

When asked to reflect upon the value as well as the problems associated with integrated education, most teachers expressed strong belief in the ideals of IE and saw an integrated system of education as the best way of building bridges of understanding and tolerance in Northern Ireland's divided society. It was clear in all the discussions I had that the primary focus these teachers maintained was on providing a quality education and that the integrated mission was secondary to the academic goals of the school. This emphasis of integrated schools providing quality education was underscored in an interview discussion I had with the principal of a post-primary school that had achieved significant success in reaching a balanced enrolment due to its fine academic reputation over the past few years:

"The fact that in 6 years our school went from 56 students mostly catholic in high catholic locale to 440 students with almost a balance of 50/50 both traditions proves that if you have a good school, integrated education really can work..... parents first and foremost want their children to go to good schools!"

Although many of the teachers in this study acknowledged not having come initially to teach in an integrated school because of any resolute commitment to the principles of integrated education, almost all of them expressed significant belief in the benefits of the integrated education system at this time. Over their time working in the integrated environment, they had come to see IE as an "incredibly positive influence in young people's development of respectful and socially conscious attitudes and behaviours". This feedback suggests that continued involvement in the integrated school environment facilitates an appreciation for and commitment to the ideals of integrated education on the part of both students and teachers.

In considering how well the principles of integration were working in actual practice at their school, most of the teachers stated confidence in the school's

success in achieving an integrated ethos. Almost all of these teachers saw their respective schools carrying out the IE ideology successfully across gender, religion and ability level. The teachers in the transforming schools, while basically confident, admitted that a more tenuous set of circumstances operating in their schools. In one post-primary transforming school, the teachers were emphatic in their recognition of how far they had come to date despite the many challenges they have faced:

"This is a 'miracle school'... what has been accomplished here (transforming school) represents a miracle when you know the history in this area!"

While a few of the teachers I spoke to in this study mentioned occasionally hearing or seeing a sectarian-based epithet in the school, they all confidently described their students as behaving in tolerant, cooperative and interdependent ways throughout the school.

"The bottom line is that things work here! Fewer conflict situations arise because of the common understanding and expectations that all students have here, they come together here, they eat together, study together, play together and that is the greatest lesson offered. We as teachers then are part of this common expectation that we respect each other because somehow we have gotten to know each other and yes even care about each other no matter what background we are from."

In many of the teacher groups with whom I met, discussion emerged in reference to whether integrated schools can really effect meaningful consequences in terms of their goals to promote tolerance and mutual understanding on the part of students who, at the end of the day, return to their homes and neighbourhoods where old histories of discrimination and division often prevail. While no one suggested any guarantees of enduring change taking place, most of these teachers were confident that their students were "much better off for having the exposure to diversity" (otherwise inaccessible to them) that the integrated setting offers. One teacher stated it this way,

"... we are living in an 'abnormal' society here in NI but what we are here [school name] is a 'normal' school where everyone is accepted!"

Despite their recognition that "out of school" sectarian influences (i.e., from peers, neighbourhood and even family) represent an ongoing challenge

in the lives of these youth beyond school doors, most of these teachers believe that their students are developing genuine and lasting attitudes of tolerance and acceptance of diversity. One teacher summed up his view of the benefits of an integrated school education in this way,

“The students who graduate from here are different people than when they entered, not only are they better prepared academically of course, but they are wiser people, more able to negotiate differences and recognize right from wrong in terms of societal problems”

Across schools, the teachers in this study shared their gut sense that IE was effective in achieving positive change in promoting mutual understanding, respect and interdependence on the part of enrolled students but agreed that most people outside of the IE system are unaware, uninterested or sceptical of the impact that IE renders.

Action recommendation #1: The Department of Education (and relevant policy-making agencies) need to underwrite scientifically sound research that is aimed at comprehensively measuring the psychosocial effects of IE on the part of its graduated students over the longterm. Without such empirical evidence, the outcomes of IE remain anecdotal and piecemeal in nature and unsatisfactory for policy level decision-making.

RESISTANCE TO INTEGRATED EDUCATION.

In considering the future of integrated education in NI, many of these teachers spoke about the resistance posed by certain segments of Northern Ireland society to IE. They noted that the opponents to IE argue that mixing the traditions in schools leads to a loss of cultural identity while single-identity settings help to promote a sense of one’s cultural identity. These teachers also suggested that the respective sociopolitical views of the two primary traditions generate anti-IE sentiment in their own communities; the unionists commonly oppose the IE ideology as favoring nationalist attitudes and the nationalists have argued that, in addition to watering down one’s sense of religious belief and identity, the IE mission of tolerance encourages forgetting the wrongs that have been perpetrated against their community.

Many of the teachers I talked to expressed their strong belief that the other educational sectors (i.e., ‘catholic church maintained’ and ‘state

controlled') are highly resistant to the advancement of IE in Northern Ireland. More than one reference was made to the notion that other sectors will not hire someone who has taught in an integrated school. Resistance from the Church and clergy was also noted as an obstacle to the further growth of IE. Teachers spoke of how some church clergy seek to prohibit parents from sending their children to an integrated school; others recounted how some local clergy have refused to offer chaplain services to children (of their own religion) in the integrated school setting. To underscore the antagonism toward IE that does exist on the part of the maintained schools especially, one teacher group noted with great frustration how their planned post-primary integrated school had been prohibited from participating in a recruitment fair by the local Catholic primary school that was hosting the event.

Additionally, there were many teachers who suggested that part of the roadblock to IE stems from parents in NI who maintain a general bias towards grammar school education.

“Even though more people are getting exposed favourably to IE, it is too bad that, given the choice, many parents would still send their children to a high ability grammar school vs. an all-ability integrated school if they had an option.”

Despite acknowledging the roadblocks that exist, most of these teachers were convinced that IE will continue to grow as a result of the increasing numbers who attend, succeed and 'pass on the good word',

“I have come to feel quite strongly about integrating schools and what my role as a teacher is and what I can do...I feel really good about the fact that this is a mixed school....I think that with more families becoming a part of an integrated environment the more and more IE is going to grow.”

Action Recommendation #2: The Department of Education, in collaboration with the major educational councils/boards in NI would be well advised to sponsor an incentive-based initiative aimed at building bridges of communication and collaboration across the different educational sectors (controlled, maintained, integrated and independent) as part of its efforts to improve education in Northern Ireland. Competition between sectors needs to be formally discouraged and working alliances across and within sectors should be fostered. Cooperative efforts in curricular and instructional development for example would enhance the overall educational enterprise and diminish

the traditional lines of school separation that serve to reinforce societal divisions.

CROSS-COMMUNITY RELATIONS & CULTURAL IDENTITY ISSUES.

The teachers with whom I met consistently agreed that students in their schools get along with each other in cooperative, peaceful ways and that incidents of conflict are rare.

“In 3 years of teaching here I have never come across even one incident where students acted in discriminatory or hostile way toward each other based on religious tradition.”

In general, these teachers felt that a student's tradition was considered of 'no significance' to either students or staff in the integrated school environment. However, in the schools that had a larger imbalance of enrolment between the two primary traditions it seemed that, rather than the goal of impartiality, it was the purposeful norm of 'protective silence' that kept the notion of cultural identity indiscernible. For example, in one of the post-primary integrated schools I visited, this tendency to underplay cultural identity was evidenced in the way it addressed a conflict issue that arose regarding the display of cultural symbols in the school. In the early years of this school's development, a number of parents from the minority community vehemently complained that their children felt offended and threatened when cultural symbols representing the majority tradition were displayed. Rather than persisting in the effort to reach an agreement that might have allowed the constructive acknowledgement of cultural identity (with all of its differential complexities) within the school community, this school felt compelled to implement a ('temporary' but still in place) policy that would prohibit students from displaying or wearing cultural symbols/emoles in the school. Although the school management and parents council attempted to reach an equitable resolution to the matter initially, in the end the prohibition policy was decided upon because it seemed "too contentious" of an issue to manage otherwise. In this case, cultural identity was not addressed as a positive force to be celebrated and shared as part of the learning experience but as a problematic factor that was best neutralized. This issue was addressed in less restrictive

fashion in most of the other integrated colleges I visited, where the display of cultural symbols was not unilaterally prohibited but monitored for “appropriate” student behaviour.

Despite the seeming tendency to underplay cultural identity, it is important to point out that a number of the integrated schools I visited were engaged in purposeful and proactive efforts (that is, beyond the public relations level) to acknowledge the cultural traditions of their students in the context of celebrating the pluralism of the school community. For example, in one of the (planned) integrated colleges where enrolment is relatively imbalanced with students from one tradition, a school-wide ‘getting to know you’ program was instituted two years ago as a means of increasing cross-community sharing. In this activity, a number of students are selected each day to wear nametags and be ready to introduce themselves and their backgrounds to their classmates and teachers throughout the day. As a result of this initiative, all students’ backgrounds are comfortably recognized and the school community has come to welcome all of its members openly by the end of the term. And, in a transforming post-primary school, teachers told me of a recent effort that had begun in their school that was aimed at bridging cultural differences on the part of the teaching staff. In an effort to construct bridges through open dialogue, a group of teachers started meeting on a regular basis to discuss cross-community relations among staff in the school. The impetus for what was described with a smile as a “work in process” was the notion that “teachers can’t promote cross-community relations among students without practicing the same among themselves.” In my estimation, this activity, with its inherent risks and challenges, underscores the unique opportunity for building rapprochement between the two traditions that is provided by the safe environment of the integrated school.

Overall, the primary schools seemed more confident in openly affirming the cultural heritage and traditions of both communities than did the post-primary schools. However, the level to which the different cultural traditions were openly fêted seemed to be, as far as the three primary schools I visited, a function of the school’s management structure and catchment area. Interestingly enough, all three of the primary schools in this study had a

relatively large enrolment imbalance between the two primary traditions, suggesting that enrolment imbalance did not alone account for the differences in community relations emphasis seen at the primary level.

The transforming primary school was less engaged in affirming students' cultural heritage than were the two planned integrated primary schools in this study; the teachers in this school for the most part deemed cultural identity as an unimportant focus of their work with students. At the same time, the primary school that drew its population from an adjacent "flashpoint" catchment area was a bit less strident in its overt cross-community initiatives than was the primary school which drew its students from a wider area. Where all of the primary schools I visited had established practices in place that provided students with approved in-school preparation for religious sacraments, only one of these schools appeared to take specific efforts to capitalize on these events as an opportunity to educate and inform students across both traditions about what these types of religious rituals comparatively mean. Sponsoring visits to and by different clergy across religious communities was part of this school's commitment to promoting community relations. In this innovative school, teachers and managers proudly pointed out activities and displays in the classrooms, meeting rooms and hallways that were specifically intended to foster cross-community sharing and offer all students a comfortable sense of having their cultural tradition positively acknowledged within the school community.

Action Recommendation # 3: Enhanced effort needs to be taken by individual integrated schools, if not the entire integrated sector, to implement school policies and practices that confidently promote cross-community relations and respect for cultural identity within the context of the integrated ethos. To accomplish this, the respective boards of governors and parent councils must commit to instituting a whole-school approach.

PARENT INVOLVEMENT

When teachers were asked to discuss the level and nature of parent involvement in their schools, some interesting accounts were shared. In most of the schools I visited, the teachers indicated that parents were not as actively involved in the school (especially compared to the beginning years) as might

be generally presumed. Similarly, many of these teachers feel that a large number of the parents in their school are not necessarily committed to the IE ideology and that they send their children to an integrated school for non-ideological reasons. (e.g., “an integrated school is better than a secondary school,” “the 11+ is not required for enrolment,” etc.). Efforts made by the school to increase parent involvement were not always successful and it was not clear to these teachers whether this was simply a ‘sign of the times’ and the ‘busy lifestyle’ of people or whether there were deeper implications to the apparent ‘lack of interest’ shown by too many parents. In a transforming primary school where there was a noted lack of commitment on the part of the parent community, teachers seemed chagrined to accept the fact that,

“The socioeconomics of the catchment area the school draws from affects the level of involvement and investment parents have in their children’s education...not much can be done other than to understand this dynamic and try to work creatively around that natural tendency.”

It was quite clear that these teachers saw communications between the school and parents as critical. In a number of schools, the teachers indicated a need for increased parent involvement. At other schools, this seemed to be less of a concern. Overall, the teachers in this study agreed that lack of commitment to the integrated ethos on the part of parents was disadvantageous to the school’s ability to effectively achieve its integrated mission. They felt more needed to be done to foster parental commitment to the ideals of IE so as to better insure an overall team approach between school and home.

Action Recommendation #4: Integrated schools need to undertake expanded effort to re-engage the parent community. This would include increased efforts toward improving communications, team-building and collaboration with parents as stakeholders in the school community. It is essential that the emphasis be placed on expanding the number and range of parents participating in the school enterprise and that the ideological commitment to the fundamental principles and practices of integrated education serve as a guiding force.

PEDAGOGY

Given the mission of IE to promote tolerance and mutual understanding among all members of the school community, I was curious in this investigation to assess how that mission was being played out in practical terms in the schools. Specifically, I wanted to examine how issues relevant to living in NI society such as conflict, diversity, prejudice, inclusion and sectarianism were being addressed within the classroom. As part of this, teachers were asked how instruction was being delivered in the integrated classroom; specifically, what pedagogical methods and strategies were being employed to facilitate the integrated ethos.

A number of teachers in different schools indicated that they were using discussion activities, debate strategies and group methods as a means of promoting interdependence, equity and skill in the negotiation of differences in their classrooms (see promising practices). For the most part however these teachers were using these methods as a result of their own design and choice rather than by school policy or practice recommendations.

“All integrated school teachers should have training in relevant teaching methods that support building a cooperative classroom ethos such as circle time techniques; group work; discussion and debate methods and cooperative versus competitive methods.”

Although there were a few illustrations at the primary school level where such pedagogical approaches are being employed as part of a whole-school approach (e.g., implementing the “investment in excellence” program for teachers and students; instituting school school-wide teacher training in and implementation of “circle-time” methods, etc.), the majority of the schools in this study had no systemic initiatives in place.

Through the focus group discussions, it became evident that in many schools there is a tendency for teachers to steer clear of the issues, sensitivities and positions that underpin conflict, cultural identity and the sectarian divide in the larger NI society. Rather than promoting the expression and sharing of perspectives among and between members of the school community, a good number of these teachers were cautious about openly addressing matters of diversity in the classroom. The distinction between those who did proactively address these issues and those who avoided them

was most apparent in relation to how balanced the school's enrolment was in terms of the relative percentages of students from each tradition in attendance. Additionally, the individual attitude and style of the teacher had much to do with determining whether an "integration pedagogy" was undertaken in the classroom. For many of these teachers, concerns about the potential for offending or putting the minority at a disadvantage were formidable enough to restrict their involvement in this vein. Leadership at the senior management level and the availability of collaborative support at the department level also appeared to be important factors influencing teachers' pedagogical behaviour in this area.

In a number of schools, the teachers indicated that, rather than addressing these issues directly, they simply attempt to maintain a climate of acceptance, tolerance and respect in their classes as the way to best contribute to the integrated ethos. Many acknowledged that they only discussed these issues directly when the occasion or "need arose" such as on the infrequent occasion when a student might make a prejudicial remark in reference to some cultural symbol. These teachers said that they try to use these occasions as teaching opportunities while making it clear that these behaviours are unacceptable.

While there were indeed illustrations of how these issues were being incorporated into classroom learning (largely through curriculum infusion in subjects such as English, History, RE and PSE), overall it appeared that the proactive treatment of diversity issues in the classroom was not necessarily being supported on a systemic basis. In a number of these schools, it appeared that there is an avoidance of openly addressing the sensitive issues that continue to divide society in Northern Ireland in the hopes of not broaching dissension in the classroom. On the other hand, the teachers and schools that have taken a proactive stance in addressing these issues in the classroom were quite convinced that learning activity that supports the integrated ethos of the school can be successfully imparted while remaining mindful of minority group sensitivities. These teachers have seen that through relevant instruction and dialogue in the classroom, students can build the necessary tools to

problem-solve, negotiate differences and make responsible choices not only in their integrated school setting but also in society at large.

According to a number of the teachers with whom I spoke, some of the reticence to discuss conflict and diversity issues up-front through planned curriculum and instruction stems from the lack of formal training or preparation they feel they have in this area. A number of these teachers acknowledged having had no exposure to diversity, conflict management or integrated education principles as part of pre-service or professional development training.

"We could use ideas on how to contribute to the integrated ethos through our teaching methods, especially by subject area; for example, I heard of another teacher in an integrated school talk of how he wove debate on relevant issues (for example, class discussion examining the arguments for having equal representation of a society's cultural groups in its police force in English class that engendered different perspectives, public-speaking, formulation and articulation of a position, negotiation, and problem-solving, etc) as a learning goal into his English instruction and I've tried to borrow some of that but could use more ideas and tested methods."

In considering curricular resources that they use or need to support the integrated mission, a number of teachers indicated that they have had to rely on securing or making their own instructional resource materials when looking to infuse learning activity relevant to the integrated mission into their subject matter. One teacher suggested,

"Curricular resources developed by subject area related to the integrated ethos would be helpful.....as of now, I rely on my own creativity but am concerned as to level of accuracy and whether it is appropriate," and went on to ask, "can something be produced toward this end by NICIE?" "We could use more curricular resources that are aimed at supporting the integrated ethos...the PSE resources that have been developed by our teachers here and shared across some schools are an example of what could be made available for other subjects."

Despite the many obstacles that exist, one integrated primary school I visited served as a brilliant illustration of what can be done in this area. This school has been successful in undertaking a school-wide initiative to proactively celebrate issues of diversity and tolerance including a whole-school

conflict mediation program, an ongoing in-house staff development program that emphasized teacher competencies specifically related to the integrated ethos, whole school participation in a curriculum-based program called “Achieving Your Potential through Education” program for both students and teachers... and all carried out in the midst of a vibrant and affirming building aesthetic!

Action Recommendation #5: Schools of teacher education, regional ELB’s, subject area professional associations and teacher specialists in the field need to engage in curriculum and pedagogical development aimed at promoting tolerance and mutual understanding through classroom instruction. In addition to enriching the curriculum for the sake of enhanced learning on the part of students, this type of an initiative would be aimed at equipping teachers (with relevant curricular activities, resources, methods) to constructively address pluralism in their classrooms. This would include development of both content and process capabilities; that is, not only what is taught but how instruction can be best delivered to foster an integrated ethos. For example, methods and resources that would better equip teachers to constructively address diversity issues through the use of discussion-oriented, cooperative learning and group methodologies could be developed. Similarly, activities involving critical thinking, debate, conflict resolution, tolerance-building, and problem-solving could be incorporated into most subjects and learning themes. A wide range of these types of curricular materials and methods have been developed worldwide and could be tailored to meet the needs of the NI classroom.

ALL-ABILITY EDUCATION

The “all-ability” mission of IE emerged as a common topic of discussion in many of the teacher focus groups that took place in this study. As one teacher posited, *“Meeting the all-ability mission is actually more of a challenge than meeting the integration of traditions mission.”* Teachers across a number of schools posited that policies and practices related to carrying out the all-ability mission have not been thoroughly worked out yet in integrated schools. Many indicated that trying to provide effective educational services for students across all ability levels has resulted in maintaining a “balancing act” between doing what’s best for students from an educational standpoint versus what’s expected from an (integrated) ideological perspective. One area in which this was most apparent was in meeting the needs of students with special learning needs. For example, many of these teachers stated they

would support establishing a special needs unit in the school in order to more effectively educate students with special learning needs and further assure quality instruction for all ability levels. However, there was a sense from these teachers that, at the board of governors level, strategies that separate out students in any way would be seen as going against the principles of IE. This dilemma was highlighted by one teacher who posited,

“The school needs to establish a special needs unit that would more appropriately address the needs of the special needs children because we are not equipped to respond to all these differentiated learning needs in one classroom situation...we need more than just a special education coordinator in the school (who is not necessarily a trained specialist in special education), as of now we send students out to special resource room which is moving in that direction anyway...the school has difficulty with the seeming contradiction to the integrated ethos that this would mean we were not providing an all-ability learning environment in the school this needs to be addressed and resolved at the policy level in IE ...”

The challenge involved in effectively providing quality education to the full spectrum of student ability levels has necessitated that multiple approaches and strategies be taken by integrated schools. Some schools have instituted both enrichment and special needs resource services in order to better meet the learning needs of students at both ends of the spectrum. A number of integrated schools have instituted instructional and class placement policies such as “banding” as a means of addressing special learning needs within the IE ideology. One principal clarified how his post-primary school addressed student placement within the all-ability mission,

“While we do consider ourselves an ‘all-ability’ school, there is ‘banding’ that takes place here in most ‘academic subject areas’ as means of better addressing learning needs/capabilities at each level; in some subjects however such as drama, art etc our classes are mixed ability in one class which students find very stimulating for the sharing of competencies that goes on here. I think of an example of one of our students who would be considered on lower end of academic ability but excelled in art and was able to impress all her (higher ability) classmates with her competence in this area thereby diminishing any sense of advantage/disadvantage and promoting respect for differences.”

The need for curricular materials designed for teaching in mixed ability classes, specifically for differentiated instruction, was also noted, “We could

use a supply of texts and curricular materials that could be appropriately used by teachers to draw upon to meet the individual ability levels we teach in our classes.” As of now, teachers find themselves having to establish differentiated instruction methodology on their own, although some indicated more support in this area is now being given through staff development activities.

In addition to the issues related to meeting the learning needs of special needs students, the concern regarding being able to sustain high-ability student enrolment and provide full A-level education at the integrated colleges is also a significant, if not pivotal issue, for some schools. The dilemma that some integrated colleges are facing in their effort to retain an all-ability enrolment revolves around the following: in order to attract and keep high-ability students, a full range of classes at that level needs to be provided; in order to provide these classes, teaching resources need to be allocated accordingly (which sometimes becomes cost-ineffective); if appropriate instruction and developmental opportunities are not offered for the bright students, attrition to grammar schools becomes an option which in turn lowers enrolment at the high-ability level and potentially generates a student profile that mimics a secondary school.

Schools at the primary level try to maintain an “all-ability” classroom placement policy by making random class assignments for students. In order to maintain the integrated ethos of all-ability schooling at this level, classes in a year group might sometimes be reshuffled if one is found to have an imbalance of too many special needs or academically gifted students compared to others. It was clear however in each of the primary schools I visited that the teachers were quite concerned about the challenges involved in teaching across all abilities in one classroom and felt that, even with the support of class aides, the burden on the classroom teacher was significant.

Action Recommendation #6: The IE sector needs to pursue thoughtful solutions to the resource-related, operational and ideological concerns that have begun to emerge in the area of providing all-ability education. Policy decisions and associated resource allocations need to be made at this point in the development of IE if integrated schools are to be effective in achieving an “all-ability” mission. As part of this, integrated schools must realistically determine the level and nature of teaching resource support that is needed to address the growing numbers of special learners enrolled. Increased efforts need to be taken to ensure

appropriate instruction and opportunity to high-achieving students in integrated colleges as well. While remaining sensitive to the integrated mission, IE schools need to establish systems and procedures that are in line with 'best educational practice' and allocate resources accordingly.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT/PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

The need for staff development targeted towards teaching in an integrated school emerged as significant in these teacher discussions. When asked what staff development activities helped to equip them to contribute to the integrated ethos, these teachers mostly mentioned generic opportunities that are made available to them. They noted that new teachers go through an orientation when they start work in an integrated school at which the school explains the expectations related to teaching in the integrated environment (among other important agenda items). In some schools, new faculty are provided with a staff handbook containing information that speaks to the principles of integrated education. Each year, there are typically two "Baker" staff development days scheduled (usually at the beginning of the year) which cover topics such as child protection, discipline and the like; sometimes topics specific to the integrated ethos are included. At this time, new teachers will meet with the school's Integration Coordinator (or designee) to discuss the policies, expectations, resources and activities related to achievement of the integrated mission of the school.

While the regional Education and Library Boards (ELB) offers ongoing staff development sessions to teachers (from all educational sectors) throughout the year, these teachers did not think that the ELB's offered much that was particular to the issues relevant in integrated education. In reviewing the directory of professional development training sessions offered by one of the regional ELB's, I came to the conclusion that there was little available related to the areas of diversity, conflict and all-ability education that would specifically address the needs of the integrated school teacher. Special education offerings on the other hand were more commonly given by ELB staff development programs.

In most cases, beginning teachers in integrated schools receive additional professional development support in-house where they are

supervised/supported through a process that promotes early professional development by offering them the opportunity, under supervision, to identify professional development areas they want to pursue. It does not appear however that this is geared to specifically focus on the profile of knowledge, attitudes and skills required to work effectively in the integrated school environment but rather serves as general in-service support. Some teachers alluded to having an annual staff development professional review whereby they present their own plan for staff development for the next year and are evaluated subsequently on their attainment of these own goals. It was not clear however whether these reviews were geared in any meaningful way to achievement of the school's integrated mission.

Despite these staff development opportunities, the teachers I spoke with consistently articulated across schools the need for training and professional development support in areas such as cultural diversity, human relations, conflict resolution and mediation skills, behaviour management, special education and all-ability teaching strategies; the areas directly related to their ability to contribute to the integrated mission of their schools.

For example, the vast majority of these teachers acknowledged having limited, if any, training in how to address conflict or diversity in the classroom. One teacher acknowledged,

"There is really little staff development that relates specifically to helping us understand how to deal effectively with differences that can arise in an integrated setting; so we have learned to count on each other (other teachers on staff) for ideas and problem-solving."

Another reinforced this notion by stating, *"When controversy based on sectarianism arises, I use common sense to deal with it."* The question remains however as to whether all teachers can be counted on for such common sense to prevail without guidance in these sensitive areas.

Similarly, many noted a lack of training in how to incorporate discussion related to 'integration' into course subject matter which, as one teacher said, *"makes it difficult for the individual teacher to figure out how much, what, when, in which ways such discussion is considered appropriate."* (Note: It is important to mention here that not all of these teachers see such infusion as pertinent to their instruction.) At the same time, some teachers felt that staff

development in this area was unnecessary, *“You either got in here or you don’t (pointing to heart and head); you cannot really train a teacher to believe in the principles of integration; otherwise I think we have pretty good staff development training available to us here.”* The prevailing sentiment however was that more should be done to better equip teachers to teach in the integrated sector, *“Besides the induction of new teachers where the IE principles are introduced, there is too little effort given to providing teachers with knowledge and skills related to diversity and tolerance, the whole integration area. Teachers need ongoing staff development in this area.”* When teachers in a transforming school were asked about staff development needs, they agreed that some staff development focus on integration would be helpful *“especially with the increasing diversity and the wide range of reactions to the principles and practices of integration we experience as a transforming school.”*

One teacher who acknowledged her own single-identity socialization recognized the need to know more about the particular beliefs of the “other tradition”:

“We could use some training to learn about the different religions in this school so we could effectively discuss and deal with the questions that come up. I never want to offend anyone, so sometimes I say nothing rather than say something wrong or insensitive; for example, when our catholic students are called out to prepare for first communion, I don’t know how to answer the other students questions about what they are learning/doing.”

When asked if there was any ongoing conversation among teachers in staff meetings or such about the issues, concerns, strategies, resources that are relevant to teaching in the integrated setting, a few indicated, *“there is nothing formal done really but within subject area there are informal discussions among teachers aimed at sharing concerns and solving problems.”*

Across all levels of experience and school setting, the teachers I spoke with clearly indicated a need for staff development and professional development support in the area of all-ability instruction and special educational needs. Other than a few newly credentialed teachers, most of the

teacher groups I spoke with acknowledged having no training at the pre-service in special education and/or in principles and methods for all-ability instruction, in the classroom. Some teachers noted that there are opportunities in staff development now available (both in-service and outside offerings) in the areas of special education and all-ability education but more support in this area needed especially in light of the legal requirements now informing this area. One primary school teacher who serves as the Special Educational Needs (SEN) Coordinator for her school emphasized how the senior management of her school supported her pursuit of professional development training in this critical area by giving her release time during the day to participate in staff development activities including attending ELB offerings, Cluster Group meetings (for SEN teachers in area) and the annual N.A.S.E.N. conference in Belfast.

Action Recommendation #7: The IE sector needs to strengthen efforts to address teacher staff development needs in the areas such as proactive treatment of diversity issues in the classroom, classroom behaviour management in the all-ability classroom, community relations and conflict management. Additionally, training in effective pedagogical approaches to teaching students across ability, gender and sociocultural differences in the classroom (e.g., cooperative learning strategies, discussion and group techniques) should be offered. Because teachers come from their own respective traditions and typically have been educated and trained in single-identity schools themselves, they have had little exposure to or training in these areas. With this in mind, a comprehensive staff development program should focus on achieving competence on three levels: personal awareness, knowledge and skills. If integrated schools are to be successful in maintaining the integrated ethos over time, teachers need to be considered a most essential ingredient and, as such, supporting the notion of "teachers as learners" through an ongoing, well-designed professional development program can further ensure that success. Towards this end, a concerted initiative should be undertaken by NICIE, in collaboration with regional ELB's, Schools of Education and selected community relations specialists, to design staff development curricula and delivery systems specifically aimed at equipping teachers to effectively contribute to the integrated school ethos.

PRE-SERVICE TEACHER EDUCATION

The teachers in this study overwhelmingly pointed to the need to strengthen preparation of future teachers in the competencies required for

effective practice in the integrated sector (Note: Many of these teachers made a point to suggest that this preparation is needed for all teachers in NI). Having received virtually no training in these areas in their pre-service education, these teachers admitted to being ill-equipped from the 'get go'.

“(given current training deficits)... there is no reason to expect that a new IE teacher would be better able to address issues of sectarianism or conflict than any one else.”

Throughout the focus group discussions, teachers posited that the competencies related to diversity, all-ability and special education, and conflict management should be central offerings in teacher education programs and built into pre-service lessons and materials that teachers would later be able to employ in their work:

“There was no mention of integrated education when I was trained as a teacher a few years ago; although we were able to choose an integrated school as one of our 8 week teaching practice blocks, we had no special prep for what to expect or how IE would differ from standard schools. We all come from different backgrounds, so understanding the principles of integration would be useful for all teachers in NI.”

“In teacher education courses there was no specific training received in all-ability education and/or special (needs) education which, given our mission and student population, puts us in difficult position to know how to be most effective.”

“I think the one year PGCE program is not enough time to learn all that's needed to teach effectively especially because much of that is spent out in the field. I remember in my first teaching just feeling swamped because I felt inadequately prepared. In areas like special education, you need specific training on what to expect, how to understand the learning problem and what methods work best but we had almost none of that”

“I think it's ironic that in a society divided by politics and religious tradition, there is nothing about this division and its implications ever mentioned when you are in training to be a teacher who will work in this society; I would think it should be standard no matter what type of school you were going to teach in.”

Action Recommendation #8: Given its unique perspective, the Integrated Education sector is in an instrumental position to provide consultative input to Northern Ireland's Schools of Education and ELB's related to areas of competence that should be incorporated into teacher education

and professional development curricula. For this to occur, a centralized, targeted effort (perhaps through the work of a task force formed by NICIE or the Department of Education) needs to be initiated that would open lines of communication and feedback related to the professional preparation of (integrated school) teachers in the competency areas of special education, all-ability education, diversity, conflict management and community relations.

SCHOOL POLICY & PROCEDURES

When asked how school policy and procedures impacted their efficacy as teachers in an integrated school, most of these teachers saw school policies as supporting their role. In most cases, these teachers felt that there was opportunity for input in the development and implementation of school policy and procedure, especially at the building level. Most affirmed that an open-door policy on the part of senior management was in place in their school. Most acknowledged the open communication that took place on a daily basis, frequently as part of morning staff briefings where feedback related to policy and procedure could be aired. A few schools noted that teacher council representation on the governing board was also afforded but admitted that there is usually limited time designated, other than at the departmental level, to discuss school-wide issues across the faculty in order to develop a consensus that could then be brought to the policy level of the board of governors. As such, many of these teachers suggested there was a lack of the practitioner's voice at the policy-making level.

The need for more clarified articulation of policy and procedures at the building level was commonly noted in these discussions. For example, when I asked these teachers to describe "school policy" that would govern how to deal with sectarian prejudice in the classroom, most were not clear on their school's policy other than the general understanding that teachers are expected to deal with all such situations with respect and equity in the classroom when they arise. In general, these teachers felt that better articulated policy and procedural guidance would be useful in areas such as addressing conflict and diversity issues. While some felt that these sensitive and complex areas cannot be appropriately addressed through policy

directives, others felt there should be some behavioural standard or protocol of procedures to guide teachers in these circumstances.

“There is no school policy or guidelines regarding how teachers should deal with incidence of conflict and prejudice in the classroom; when it does infrequently happen, the individual teacher uses his/her best judgment as to deal with the issue; I use humour to address these situations; some teachers might refer the concern after the fact to the year head for guidance; but not everyone is as comfortable or competent in knowing what to do.”

Similarly, the need was noted in some of the post-primary schools for developing appropriate policy (i.e., befitting the integrated ethos of the school) that would help govern the contentious issue of the display of cultural symbols by students in school.

“Some integrated schools have experienced particular difficulty in determining a fair and balanced policy regarding the display of cultural emblems/symbols; no matter how difficult it is, such policies need to be established with the input of everyone recognizing the integrated mission of the school.”

Action Recommendation #9: Integrated schools need to better determine and articulate school policies and procedures related to the appropriate treatment of diversity and conflict issues in the school. This could be undertaken as part of a whole-school approach toward collective problem-solving and team-building. Out of these efforts might come a policy guidebook or manual for teachers that would specifically address school expectations related to the treatment of diversity, conflict and sectarian issues in the classroom. Although not intended to be definitive or constraining in practice, such guidelines would offer confidence and direction to teachers related to sensitive areas and provide common ground. In the same vein, integrated schools need to be encouraged to confidently determine policy and procedures that reflect the IE ideology rather than be governed by individual concerns.

TEACHER WORKLOAD EXPECTATIONS

It was clear to me throughout this study that integrated school teachers go ‘above and beyond’ standard job responsibilities in carrying out their complex roles, as was noted by one teacher who had previous experience in a non-integrated school:

“Because of the complexity entailed in carrying out the integrated mission, we are held to expectations that go beyond standard job responsibilities in other schools...the more you do the more you’re

expected to do...at other non-integrated schools there seems to be greater management control within department structure at least...we're working on this now here in our department."

These teachers are notably laden with designated responsibilities beyond classroom teaching. These added expectations appear to contribute to elevated stress levels on the part of many teaching faculty. Beyond the stress normally associated with classroom teaching, these teachers experience the added stress of teaching to a pluralistic student population wherein sociocultural and ability differences present additional layers of challenge. For example, a number of teachers from the post-primary level mentioned that, in addition to having to provide differentiated instruction across the ability levels in their classes, they are finding the behaviour management issues that arise in all-ability classes increasingly strenuous.

By and large, these teachers felt there was not enough time allowed in their day for taking care of all their professional duties.

"We need to have more time specified in our week to take care of the work we have to do, especially for us to do justice to the mixed ability population let alone address issues of diversity."

There was general concern expressed across schools in this study that time allowances for teachers needed to be better protected by school management. For example, in being expected to "cover" classes for absent teachers, these faculty find that their scheduled free periods are frequently reassigned to cover absent teachers which causes further stress on their schedule.

"We are called upon to cover classes of others absent and this puts additional pressure on our days...we have limited time protected for preparation of our lessons because of the expectations the school places on us to chip in to make things work."

It was impressive to see how, despite such expectations, these teachers remain dedicated to doing what is asked of them as their way of contributing to the integrating ethos. In my estimation, the success that is currently being achieved in integrated schools is in large measure

predicated on the individual devotion of its teachers. Wisdom would suggest, however, that continuous stress is cumulative and can lead to resentment. The concern would be that the felt stress levels and expressed concerns regarding workload could, if not constructively addressed at this stage, lead to problems such as loss of morale and the attrition of good faculty to other systems.

“There are extraordinary expectations placed on teachers’ time and effort in integrated schools because of our child-centered, all-ability, integrated ethos the expectation is that we are here to meet all needs. I think this might be the biggest burden on the teacher in integrated schools, not having protected time and limits on job expectations.”

Active Recommendation #10: The governing boards and senior management of integrated schools need to consider ways in which the role definition of teachers, in terms of time and task, can be more appropriately clarified and systemically implemented. In the end, school leadership needs to establish responsive policy and procedural guidelines that will better ensure the appropriate deployment of teacher time and function by building in new protections and budgeting for additional staff resources to limit extraneous burdens on any given teacher. Systemic approaches toward this end should be pursued.

HUMAN RESOURCES

While fairly satisfied with the equipment resources available to them, most of these teachers identified the need for additional human resources to support them in carrying out the integrated education mission. For example, many indicated a need for additional classroom assistants to help with the demands of mixed ability classrooms including *“some of the behavioural problems we come across with the special learning needs students.”* One primary school teacher noted,

“We need more classroom assistants to help carry out the differentiated ability curriculum in the integrated school classroom; at the primary level we have about 30 students in a classroom, if there are a few special needs students, this is a tremendous requirement of time and energy and more support needed to cover all students needs.”

When asked to consider the issue of resources, most of the teachers in this study suggested that additional support staff should be hired, including

permanent substitute teachers and part-time helpers who could be assigned some of their extraneous tasks in order to free them up to more effectively carry out their role. Referring specifically to the pressures entailed in an all-ability environment, one teacher noted,

“We could use a special needs unit with trained specialists designated by time, role and function to address the special needs area. Part time support by a teacher with other classroom duties is not adequate.”

Action Recommendation #11: The governing boards and senior management of integrated schools should work to correct some of the undue burdens that appear to have befallen the classroom teacher. Toward this end, schools need to make appropriate allocations to hire additional teaching staff support including (permanent) substitute teachers as a means of better securing ft teachers’ “free” periods and classroom assistants as a means of supporting the increasing number of special needs students in the integrated school classroom.

INTERCOMMUNICATION AND STAFF RELATIONS

When asked what type of dialogue occurs across the entire faculty related to IE or general concerns, a majority of the teacher groups I spoke with indicated that, other than within subject area, there is really no regular full forum within the school for such discussions among the teachers. Other than on a department level, it appears there is limited effort to gather the consensus of teachers’ concerns, needs or suggestions on a regular basis.

For the most part, the teacher groups I met with seemed fairly cohesive in terms of staff relations. In fact, the level of mutual respect and cooperation between staff members I saw in some schools was quite impressive. Transforming schools experience unique challenges in terms of promoting intercommunications and staff relations, as was noted by one teacher who is in a transforming post-primary school,

“We are a transforming school and that’s a bit different from the other integrated schools in that members of the staff come from all different perspectives, not all made the choice to teach in an integrated school but found themselves in a school that was transforming ...so a big concern is staff relations and how we cope with these differences where some are diametrically opposed to others culturally. We won’t be successful in achieving an integrated ethos of mutual understanding if we don’t work together...so we’ve

set up a small working group of teachers who come together to address this issue of staff cohesion/perspective.”

Teachers in a good many of these schools indicated that there were good working relations and communications between teaching staff and senior management. *“Communications with senior management are good here; there’s a ‘can do’ attitude in the school that prevails thanks to the principal’s approach.”* In at least one school I visited however, concerns were raised in relation to the senior management not being in tune with the concerns of the faculty, *“There’s only limited communication through senior management and the teachers here don’t feel the administration understands their concerns. At the same time there’s little done by teachers to formally communicate concerns and needs with management ...but now the teachers council is making attempts in this area.”*

While most everyone agreed in principle that the spirit and intent are there, the need for enhanced intercommunication and collaboration between the primary and post-primary levels was acknowledged.

“We (the IE sector) need to do more to support the transition of our primary integrated school students into the integrated colleges and encourage more cross-communication between the two levels if we are to really build meaningful bridges of respect and tolerance for these young people especially when there is a primary and post-primary integrated school in same catchment area.”

Overall, these teachers thought that intercommunication and networking across schools was not adequate within the integrated sector.

“There needs to be more pulling together of ideas within the integrated school system here in NI...to a large extent individual integrated schools work in isolation.”

While noting annual IE conference days and NICIE-sponsored initiatives as being an available means to promote cross-school collaboration, there was a clearcut call for increased effort in this area.

“NICIE or some other overarching organization should serve as a communication conduit for teachers in IE schools across schools and within subject areas when areas of concern/inquiry arise for which the individual classroom teacher or school may be unable to investigate sources”

Action Recommendation #12: Senior management should institute fixed opportunities for school-wide communication and collaborative decision-

making/problem-solving (beyond daily briefing sessions) on behalf of all staff within their schools. Additionally, increased efforts should be taken, perhaps spearheaded by NICIE, to promote articulation across schools within the IE sector. Similarly, efforts should be taken to increase cooperative communication and interdependence between and across all sectors; initially, the professional subject-area teacher associations might serve as constructive vehicles in this regard. Toward this end, technological applications such as the use of listservs and chat-rooms to promote professional discourse and sharing could be pursued.

PASTORAL CARE SUPPORT

Integrated schools explicitly promote pastoral care as being an important aspect of the integrated ethos. That being said, pastoral care services appear to be variably addressed across schools and typically subsumed into the role of the classroom teacher. In integrated schools, form teachers and year heads are the staff who are chiefly responsible for providing pastoral care support to the students they teach. Feedback gathered in this study indicated that this arrangement further challenges teachers' time and training capabilities. One teacher plaintively spoke on behalf of her colleagues by noting that,

"...pastoral care is added into all the other job responsibilities so time is limited and has to be figured out when student counselling needs arise.... oftentimes it is the classroom instruction that is hindered because it is hard to say 'wait' to an upset child."

As a means of fostering pastoral care services and activities across the whole school community, integrated schools will frequently designate one classroom teacher to take on the (additional) role of Pastoral Care Coordinator with responsibilities to work with faculty and the EMU, PSE or Integration Coordinator in an effort to promote the emotional health and development of all students within the school community. Where feasible, these positions are filled by staff who have counselling courses in their background.

Many of these schools consider the PSE curriculum as the chief forum through which to address student development issues in the school and, in this vein, have formed faculty committees to design effective and proactive curricula to meet student psychosocial needs across all school year levels. Many of the teachers I spoke with however were not convinced that PSE classes are adequately meeting the needs of students for support on personal

and emotional matters. In discussing this area, teachers commonly indicated that trained counselling/pc services should be available in the school because their students had a lot more problems than they could appropriately handle on their own.

“EMU and PSE only offer limited opportunities for counselling but it’s better than nothing; what is needed is someone who is on staff to take care of these personal and emotional concerns with students and be able to help teachers figure out how to address those they can help and refer those they cannot.”

Some of the school managers I met with were quick to point out that auxiliary pastoral care support is available in their schools. In some schools, there are child welfare staff workers who work on abuse problems in the school and, in at least one school I visited, it was noted that the vice principal had counselling training and therefore was able to specially assist in these matters. Another school noted there was a social worker in the area for consultation on problem cases that might arise.

Northern Ireland is one of the only states in the region that does not mandate formal school counselling services in its schools. Given the challenges stemming from the diversity of the integrated school student population alone, it would seem critical for integrated schools to institute specially designated pastoral care services (i.e., full-time, trained staff counsellors) as part of carrying out their child-centred mission.

Action Recommendation #13: The IE sector needs to commit itself to enhancing pastoral care service provision within its schools. Students need to be provided with accessible and competent pastoral care support to help them negotiate emotional and social concerns, not the least of which can include the conflict, anger, prejudice, depression, victimization and identity issues stemming from living in a divided society. As part of this, at least one professionally trained staff member (a credential in counselling would be necessary) should be designated with the overall responsibility of coordinating essential support mechanisms within the school community (e.g., providing individual counselling support; developing a peer helper program; coordinating conflict resolution training; running groups to address problematic behaviours such as bullying, aggression, prejudice, etc.; conducting bereavement and loss counselling; conducting in-house training to staff teachers on the guidelines for ongoing referral in selected areas of concern such as the signs of suicide risk, symptoms of an eating disorder, etc.). This Pastoral Care Coordinator or school counsellor

would address both responsive and proactive areas of concern and, as such, provide a developmental safety net for students in the school community. To be effective in carrying out this role, the pastoral care counsellor would need to be free from teaching responsibilities and dedicate full-time to these responsibilities. For IÉ to take action in this area would serve as a model of critical and forward thinking innovation in NI where this omission in the other school sectors is similarly problematic.

FACILITIES

Given the grass-roots start up that is entailed in establishing new integrated schools, a number of these schools had no choice (fiscally) but to set themselves up in building facilities that were available to them at reasonable cost but, in the end, were inadequate. For a number of integrated schools, using an old and rundown building facility (such as in a converted psychiatric hospital) and/or scheduling classes in detached mobile units serves as an obstacle to achieving an integrated ethos. Many teachers in the affected schools felt that the dreary ambience, cramped quarters and general state of disrepair of their school building sent the wrong message to the students as well as to the outside community. Having students move in and about mobile or makeshift classrooms throughout their day was seen as incompatible with promoting a cooperative and peaceful school environment. On the whole however, the schools I visited appeared in relatively good shape and well accommodated; furthermore, some that were newly constructed or renovated buildings seemed custom made to support an open, caring and cooperative school community.

Most of the teachers in these schools were satisfied with the level of equipment support they had access to in their teaching and, other than in a few cases, most were satisfied with the amount of curricular material support available to them in the integrated setting. One teacher surmised, *“We are lucky to be well resourced...this is a problem for us with other schools who mistakenly see integrated schools as having more than they do.... in the end we do have good equipment which helps us with our teaching.”* At the same time, it was acknowledged in at least one school that the monies used for these types of expenditures came from the school’s ‘development funds’ which supported the beginning years of the school operation but terminate after the

initial development years. In some schools, it was noted that outside funds had to be recruited or donated in order to afford purchase of school equipment such as computers and learning labs.

Action Recommendation #14: The IE sector needs to continue its lobbying efforts with the Department of Education to secure appropriate monies for constructing new or properly rehabilitating old building facilities in which its schools are housed. For an increase in student enrolment to be effectively achieved in the IE sector (reportedly, waiting lists are already in place), additional adequate space and building facilities need to be secured. Increased effort should be devoted to exploring sector-wide funding and facility development initiatives toward this end.

EXTERNAL SUPPORT

A common sentiment expressed by teachers in this study related to the need to have some centralized unit of support beyond the individual school level that would serve to coordinate and underwrite important initiatives that were generic across the IE sector. Such an entity would also serve in lobbying, spokesperson and advocacy roles on behalf of integrated schools in NI.

“We sometimes feel alone without a strong network to represent us or to whom we can bring concerns for problem-solving; the catholic maintained school system has the CCMS which serves as a good model because it is proactive and responsive in meeting needs of teachers in the catholic schools.”

These teachers were quite adamant about the need for developing facilitative connections and networking between integrated schools. A number of these teachers voiced strong opinions regarding the need to have a mechanism through which their professional concerns as teachers could be addressed. Some felt that the IE sector was given short-shrift compared to the other sectors and therefore enhanced lobbying and public relations should be carried out on global level.

“We are not treated as equal partners in the educational system here in NI; the schools in the surrounding community do not support us because integrated education in many ways is seen in competitive ways by the other educational sectors; the local maintained primary schools prohibit us from going there as other post-primary schools might do recruit for enrolment; because of this we need more PR or opportunity to educate, encourage and engage those publics regarding the true picture of IE not only at a local level but at a higher level which would

require efforts from others such as NICIE or the DE; as teachers in an individual integrated school it is difficult to contend with this.”

Some teachers mentioned that they would like to have opportunities arranged for team-building for teachers across subject areas in integrated schools. They saw this as necessitating centralized coordination.

“There needs to be funding for integrated initiatives throughout the system to be institutionalised to enable us to do the things we know we should be doing but either do not have the staff or the time or resources to accomplish...there needs to be some centralized system that oversees and coordinates the implementation of the types of initiatives we sometimes now can only do on temporary basis; I know NICIE does not have the funding or the mandate to play this role for integrated schools but this type of institutional support is really needed.”

Other teachers noted the problems faced by individual schools in trying to achieve balanced enrolments through organizing recruitment activities on their own in resistant locales. To help in this area, they called for some centralized support to bolster efforts in recruitment and public relations,

“We could use some help in the area of recruiting students to meet the required formula breakdown of c/p enrolment which should be 40/40/20 in a catchment area that is primarily comprised of one community; with all we do to make IE work this effort of recruiting is major difficulty, the catholic church in this area actually speaks out against sending children to integrated schools and won't open their doors to us to recruit at the primary level for our post-primary school. Can NICIE help here?”

Although frustrated by the notion, most of these teachers understood the current limitations of NICIE in not being funded or otherwise empowered to carry out these roles.

CONCLUSIONS

This study was initiated to assess the efficacy of integrated education in Northern Ireland from the perspective of its teachers. This study sought to gather the salient input of teaching practitioners in the field through focus group discussions, interviews and observation. Nine separate integrated schools, representing about 20% of the schools in this sector including a range of planned and transforming, primary and post-primary schools, took part in this research effort. By opening discussion related to the practice and professional needs of teachers in relation to contributing to the integrated

ethos of their schools, a picture of what is working and what needs to work better in terms of achieving the integrated mission of these schools was framed. It is important to note that because this study solely sought input from the teachers (with some input also garnered from senior managers), these findings need to be considered from this vantage point. In qualitative research such as this, much of what is reported comes through the subjective eye of the researcher and, as such, needs to be considered in this light. As such, the conclusions drawn from this study need to be considered suggestive rather than definitive. Likewise, the recommendations derived from it should be considered in the context of the qualitative design of this research project. That being said, there is much in these findings that can be considered relevant to the integrated education system at large; not to mention for relevance to the entire educational system of Northern Ireland.

In summary terms, the overall feedback from the teachers and managers in this study indicates that integrated schools in NI have been successful in fostering learning environments in which individuals, students and staff, from different backgrounds come to accept and interact cooperatively with each other in a safe and reliable community. The findings serve to confirm that an integrated ethos that promotes respect for others and tolerance of diversity prevails in these schools. While the success of the integrated ethos was apparent in the school setting, information to affirm that behaviours of tolerance and mutual understanding continued beyond the school setting was anecdotal and projective in nature, limited by the study design. It is significant to note that the teacher groups with whom I spoke almost universally affirmed their schools as supportive and tolerant learning environments. Indeed, much of what is working best seems to stem from the general atmosphere of support and encouragement that is provided students in the school. These teachers made it clear that the commitment to fostering self-esteem and respect on the part of all students in the school forms an integral fibre of their daily practice. Clearly, this study did much to highlight the strengths of integrated education and furthermore opened rich ground for building further growth and modeling for education in a divided society.

Much of what was uncovered in this study highlighted areas of concern that need to be addressed if IE is to fully achieve its mission and further develop as its own legitimate force within Northern Ireland's educational system. Of primary consideration would be the need for enhanced staff development on the part of teachers in the areas of interculturalism, conflict resolution, all-ability and special needs education in addition to relevant training in cooperative pedagogy methods. Re-engaging the ideological commitment of the parent community, pursuing whole-school approaches to planning, problem-solving and implementation and establishing a centralized body empowered to represent and coordinate efforts to address common needs across integrated schools would also be salient goals.

As in its initial twenty years of growth, the next phase of development for integrated education in Northern Ireland presents significant opportunity and challenge. There is much to capitalize on and the hope would be that prior success builds further success. At the same time, thoughtful and purposeful consideration of those areas that have been presented here as potential markers for improvement would be well taken up as part of formulating a framework for successfully situating integrated education within the mainstream of Northern Ireland educational practice in the 21st century.

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A SAMPLER OF PROMISING PRACTICES IN INTEGRATED SCHOOLS

- “We offer empathy training for our teachers and expect compulsory use of ‘circle time’ in classes.”
- “We have enthusiastic celebrations of cultural events in school both British and Irish.”
- “We have established shared church visits to promote sense of cross-community understanding.”

- “This year, we began something new to further provide staff development in significant areas: In the beginning of the year, we had a full-day based on Integration as part of strengthening our in-service program. As part of this, each department devised a unit of work into each PSE scheme to start off each year on positive note with regard to the integrated ideology.”
- “We developed an “Integration Action Plan’ group that meets monthly to take on contentious areas for problem-solving, e.g., policy on display of emblems and flags.”
- “All new teachers are provided induction with our EMU coordinator in August before the school year begins.”
- “We make careful and challenging selection of the history texts and literature we will use in our courses to assure equal and accurate treatment for both traditions.”
- “As part of an initiative to provide all entering students with a grounding in the school integrated ethos this, all of our year 8 students participate in Corrymeela’s residential program on peace & reconciliation.”
- “The best strategy that our teachers here would agree they use in relation to promoting the integrated ethos is that whenever a situation comes up that could be considered contentious, we use that situation as an immediate opportunity to help the students better understand it for implications of respect, mutual understanding and cooperation”
- “Last year we started a working group of 6 teachers who were looking to determine a curriculum in PSE across all years; we brought this back to staff to discuss and finalize the curriculum”
- “We have instituted a school-wide course we call ‘XYZCollege Studies’ for all new students coming in year 8 which although not only intended to deal with integration and diversity issues it does try to get all the

students to understand and commit to the ideals we follow here.... it is really very effective in that our students no matter what tradition they are from, really are loyal to our ethos ”

- “It is expected practice for our teachers here to use ‘circle time’ in class to promote discussions, sharing, cooperation and mutual understanding. Teachers are trained in this technique because we see this as a method that helps to promote the school ethos.”
- “We do some fundraising for special initiatives we want to undertake here; because our efforts, such as peer mediation, are infused into the curriculum and are not one-time add-ons it is more attractive to potential funders.”
- “We have established a ‘Citizen of the Month’ recognition initiative in this school that is based on teacher’s nomination of a student in class who exemplifies the qualities that promote/reflect the integrated ethos such as cooperation, respect and social responsibility. This student has picture taken and poster made with brief description of reasons for the recognition and this is posted on decorated bulletin board display in front of main entry; the children feel proud, the ideals of the school are reinforced.”
- “We have a daily exercise we do in year 8 in this school to help the students and staff get to know and understand each child/other in the context of their own individual backgrounds (this proactive effort undercuts/sabotages the common NI preoccupation of trying to figure out what tradition individuals come from) ... at the morning meeting each day, four students are nominated to be highlighted that day for sort of a “getting to know me” activity that follows them through the day where the objective is for these students to share info about themselves with others openly, proudly and comfortably.”
- “We have a school-wide Peer Mediation Program for all year 7 students. We train them in conflict resolution and peer mediation over the

course of seven weeks at the end we have 16-18 trained peer mediators ready to apply to conflicts for students year 5 up; all staff are trained in these techniques as well; initially we borrowed a program used in the USA but over the past couple of years we have added our own aspects. It really takes a commitment on the part of the principal to see that it will become institutionalised; everyone on staff really needs to want to work; we have received feedback from the post-primary schools our students go to that they can tell the difference with our students, you can tell they have have conflict resolution training/understanding, they stand out in their ability to approach differences effectively with others.”

- “All the staff go through an ‘investment in excellence’ professional development process where we are encouraged to work on our own self esteem and attitudes; based on notion that we can’t be effective in helping foster positive self esteem on the part of our students if we haven’t looked at ourselves; because senior management has seen this as so important there is appropriate allocation of time for us to undertake this effort.”
- “We have made purposeful effort in this school to foster mutual understanding between and among the different traditions.... we have actively engaged the local council of churches to support us in the effort to communicate across traditions and share the heritage of the different religions”
- “We have staff meetings that are devoted to increasing the sense of cohesion and team-building in this school as well as honouring individual rights within the community...we do exercises that foster this as an open process this is something that our principal has made happen.”
- “We are exploring ways to infuse diversity and conflict issues into the curriculum as a learning activity that still allows us to follow and achieve our curricular goals. In English 10 for example, a ‘cooperative learning’ project was instituted with selected writings of Joan Lingard that dealt with a protestant girl and a catholic boy in Belfast during the troubles. Students

needed to work in small cross-community, cross-gender groupings and reflect upon, deliberate, debate and draw consensus on contentious issues from the novel. In addition to the regular goals of reading comprehension, writing and public speaking, these students grappled with the difficult issues of conflict and religious differences and really enjoyed it!”