

FOR G R O U

DISSECTING 'ISMS'

Dugald McCullough explores the differences
between oppression, discrimination and
sectarianism

Plus:

Tom Lovett and **Peter McNamee** reflect upon
the Ulster People's College's contribution to anti-
sectarian work in Northern Ireland

Terry Duffy on his summer school visit to the
Peace University in Belgium

Patricia Cullen of Co-operation North outlines
the history of the *Ourselves and Others* cross
border exchange programme.



EDITORIAL

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In this edition of The Journal, Professor Tom Lovett and Peter McNamee relay the history and praxis of the Ulster People's College, reflecting upon and evaluating the college's contribution to anti-sectarian work and the development of mutual understanding and plurality of perspectives in Northern Ireland. The range of major conference themes, specific extra mural courses and the twin track community relations/community development ethos developed and delivered by the People's College underpins a commitment to occupy an important secure neutral venue where the causes and feelings attached to sectarianism can be unpicked whilst the educational process of empowering activists from local communities for change can be pursued.

Social work tutor and community relations trainer Dugald McCullough joins the discussion on the conceptual frameworks informing community relations practice and suggests some significant intervention strategies which will be received as affirmation to many field practitioners. Dugald's astute and informed article dismembers the institutional elements which sustain and grow oppression and discrimination whilst indicating the implications of such systematic power differentiation and control at a personal internalised level.

The parallels and subtle differences between various discriminatory oppressive systems such as sexism, sectarianism, racism and classism are extracted in a clear and readily digestible way. Dugald ultimately suggests a three phase strategy for exchange from disempowered oppression to empowerment and equity including consciousness raising, local community leadership and coalition building with all other anti-oppression and discrimination groups to strategise and campaign for social action and social change. His analysis offers a practical and accessible guide to the conceptual framing of complex social, psychological and historical issues which combined have significant implications for community relations strategy, policy and practice.

In the third article of this edition Peter Doran, originally from Derry, a PhD student at Rutherford College, Canterbury, suggests framing the questions emerging from focused community relations work through a broader world view. The paradigm he systematically unfurls encourages group work focused on the social roots of current global environmental crises. Among the range of perspectives and theoretical concepts offered by Peter's analysis is assertion that conflict is essential to growth and development. Peter espouses a holistic world view embracing simplicity, reflection and action around themes including spirituality, education, politics and culture.

Terry Duffy, Senior Course Lecturer at Magee College's History Department, provides a résumé of his summer school visit to the Peace University in Belgium. Of the many issues raised for conflict mediation workers at the conference, accreditation, professionalism versus voluntarism and terming the participants to conflict as potential 'clients' for conflict workers, poignant questions for the Northern Ireland conflict mediation scene.

Patricia Cullen of Co-operation North outlines the history of the *Ourselves and Others* cross border exchange programme. Subsequent to a thorough evaluation of the organisation's exchange projects, focused community relations work in the form of mutual understanding, political discussion and prejudice awareness skills training workshops are encouraged on the wide range of exchange programme proposals received. The *Ourselves and Others* programme has recruited a facilitators team, an island-wide network of peripatetic group workers and community relations facilitators, who support hundreds of cross border exchanges annually through training and consultancy.

Patricia reports on the tensions, enthusiasm and commitment experienced by exchange groups. She contends that meaningful long-term relationships can result and the exchange process can often release productively channelled energy towards "doing something constructive about the troubles" while fostering good neighbourliness and friendship on the island of Ireland.

Subsequent issues of The Journal will focus on development work within the churches which is beginning to develop. Reports from various conferences, particularly the NCPDR held in Portland, Oregon last June, will provide some interesting copy. Our next issue will also report on the collaborative work initiated between equity agencies in resource sharing and strategy development and will have some reflection from the recent conference of fulltime trainers in Community Relations. We go to press again before Christmas; all items for inclusion should be with the editors by November 5th. As always we are open to receive unsolicited material, be it a letter or article.

Fergus Cumiskey
Rob Fairmichael

The views expressed are those of the contributors and should not necessarily be attributed to the Community Relations Council.

○ A perspective from the Ulster People's College by **Peter McNamee** and **Tom Lovett**

A bridge between community development and community relations?

The Ulster People's College has always based its community relations work upon the necessary platform provided by meaningful community development work. In terms of the contact hypothesis, it has used both the single-identity and cross-community contact models as alternating tactical devices in pursuing its overall aims and objectives, namely, exploring the issues which the two communities share in common, as well as those which force them apart. The foundations for this community education approach were laid, in part, by the College's Cultural and Political Studies Project between 1985 and 1988.

This three-year project, funded by DENI, set out to develop a core community education curriculum aimed at facilitating and contributing to the community relations debate in terms of the socio-economic conditions which the two communities experience 'in common' as well as the issues, beliefs and attitudes which are so often 'divisive'. It was directed at working-class people in their own communities throughout N. Ireland. Then, as now, the Ulster People's College was well aware that there are many groups in the province involved in work of this nature, each with its own working definition of what 'community relations' means.

However, the College feels that community relations is best articulated and undertaken by a process of informed debate founded upon experiential learning; a process facilitated by community education in one of two ways:

(1) Where people from both mainstream political traditions can come together in non-formal groups to discuss what they feel they have in common as 'ordinary' working-class people and, also, once mutual trust and understanding have been established, then move on to discuss what they feel divides them; or,

(2) Where people from one political tradition only meet and discuss issues which they feel define them as a group (again, in a non-formal setting) as a necessary preparatory stage to moving on to meet people from the other tradition in a cross-community setting.

This is a double-edged approach which begins by laying the necessary foundations for effective community relations work (common issues and problems treated by looking at community development), before moving on to sharply focus upon the notion of N. Ireland's divided society (divisive issues and

problems treated by exploring our cultural traditions). The College has consistently applied this approach throughout the ten years of its existence. It is reflected in various aspects of the College's work, including courses, conferences and workshops, and the publication of learning materials.

Short courses

The College's core educational programme adopts an anti-sectarian approach, and takes the form of short courses delivered over ten weekly sessions. They are targeted at four main groups:

- (1) Young people,
- (2) Women,
- (3) Community activists, and,
- (4) Groups involved in community relations work.

The structure of the courses follows a specific educational pattern, insofar as they begin by asking people to look closely at their own community by exploring the economic, social and cultural factors which impinge upon and influence their daily lives. This approach is based upon the idea that a strong sense of 'where we're coming from' is of fundamental importance in confronting the issues which divide us.

The next stage seeks to identify and quantify the common concerns which transcend the sectarian divide. The outcome of this kind of analysis then provides the basis for an exploration of whether there is, or can be, a common culture, or project, which, though fragile and uncertain, can nevertheless evoke a definite commitment from people from both communities.

Common themes and issues which generally arise have to do with unemployment, health, housing, education, redevelopment, and the complex relationship between the institutions of the churches and 'ordinary' people. Necessarily, the importance of women's issues is recognised by the College and, over the years, we have found that an awareness of common struggles is particularly strong amongst women's groups.

Once community identity has been addressed and areas of mutual cultural and social concern firmly established, the participants on the short courses turn directly to exploring community divisions. This is a stage of enquiry which uses learning materials developed by the College to probe division by looking at history, religion, self-identity and politics.

Whereas the approach adopted by the short courses relies upon members from both communities being together throughout their duration, the College has also effectively used the single-identity approach, working separately with groups before bringing them together for residential weekends at the College in order to round off and complete the whole discussion process. We have found that using these two different approaches makes for flexibility and adds a certain depth to the discussions, insofar as the discussion of certain issues can be more thoroughly undertaken when members of one's own community only are present.

To quote Edwin Graham (*in CRC Journal No.2*), "...the participants of such groups have in many cases expressed a greater willingness to discuss issues relevant to community relations than they would if there were people present from the 'other side'." He goes on to raise the question of "the value of such work". The experience of the College underlines the proposition that ongoing contact can allow stronger relationships between both sets of groups to develop organically through time.

The whole educational thrust of the College seeks to be anti-sectarian in its impact, not merely non-sectarian. That is to say, emphasis is squarely placed upon exploring the causes of sectarianism, and not simply the feelings thus evoked. By focusing upon the causes, the College believes that we are better placed to discuss the action steps which are necessary to eradicating these causes. Therefore, the College would regard merely 'respecting' both traditions as being inadequate, and would concentrate, instead, upon the means of assessing the progressive elements within each tradition as well as those in need of redefinition.

Certificated Courses

As a direct outcome of the pioneering work undertaken in the short courses, the College now offers two part-time, one-year extra mural courses certificated by the University of Ulster.

The first course, on Community Relations, seeks to provide the skills and knowledge necessary for effective cross-community work, particularly for those people involved in working in the community with young people, community organisations and with women's groups. The second course, on Community Development (grant-aided by the ESF), seeks to better enable people already involved in local community development to further assist their own communities in the long-term processes of community economic development and social regeneration.

In keeping with the overarching educational ethos of the College, the primary purpose of both extra-mural courses is to fully involve the supporting organisations (in the community) of the participants, firmly fastening it to wider needs of the community, rather than simply presenting certificates to individuals in terms of their personal career prospects.

Conferences, Seminars, Workshops and Publications

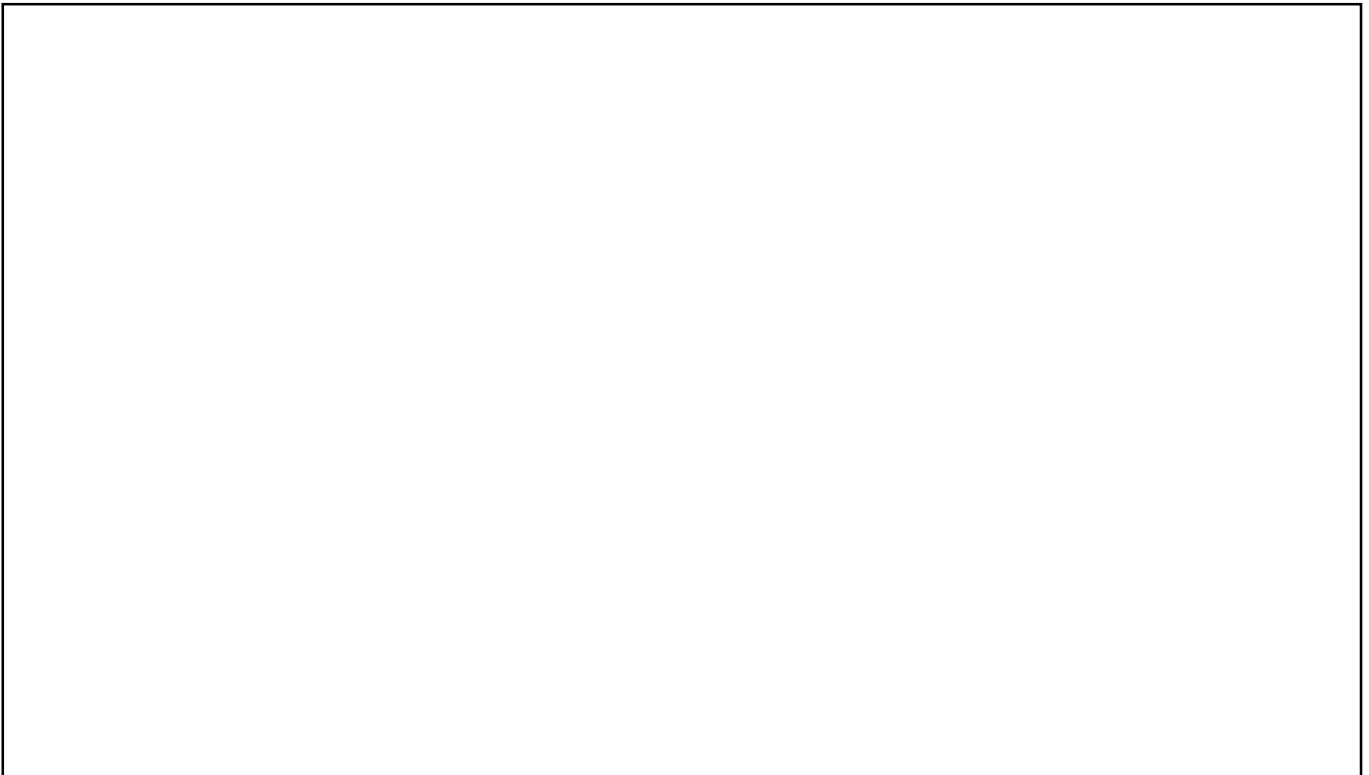
Running alongside the courses, and as part of its tradition, the College regularly arranges occasional seminars, conferences and courses which seek to analyze and discuss issues which affect working-class people and communities from the perspective of 'ordinary' people themselves.

Such conferences have included a major transnational conference on unemployment in 1985, an oral history course in 1986, a seminar on the Ulster Political Research Group's (UPRG) '*Common Sense*' document in 1987, the difficulties confronting Irish language revival in 1989 and later. Additional conferences have, for example, looked at the Anglo-Irish Agreement's effect on working-class people, three years on, and the issue of the churches' involvement in the situation here. The Cultural and Political Studies Project culminated in several publications which look at issues of community and environment, work and unemployment, women in the community, and the two traditions. Details on these are available from the College.

Assessing the Effectiveness of the College's Work

In an attempt to assess and evaluate the effectiveness of the work that the College has been involved in (essentially in terms of 'bridging the sectarian divide') over the past ten years, it is important to reiterate the anti-sectarian thrust of all this work. Therefore, simply bringing people from both communities together is, in itself, not the main purpose of the College's approach: first of all, we have to identify two main strands/leitmotif in this kind of work.

The first strand focuses upon developing the middle ground by identifying those elements of a common agenda not acknowledged by the prevailing stereotypes. Another way of putting this is to say that there is a third way forward, one that lies somewhere between the unionist and nationalist positions. The College perceives a plurality of opinions; some looking to a unity amongst the people, others holding that a resolution of the constitutional question is a necessary precursor to any sustainable resolution of the conflict. Further, the College hopes that such a plurality is defended.



John Hewitt (left) and company in a UPC workshop

The second strand focuses upon promoting social change. If sectarianism is the end-product of social and class conditions, then working to create an anti-sectarian society involves trying to change those elements of our present situation which promote sectarianism. Throughout this process, education to do with social structures and conditions, government policy, people's responses and, perhaps most important of all, clarification of identity, all give people the information upon which options can be articulated and decisions made.

Bearing these two strands in mind, how do we assess the effectiveness of the College's work? First of all, we recognise that we need to undertake more work by following up those people who have used the College's resources over the years. We also need to look carefully at our methods of assessment. Empirical tests which look at attitudinal change are notoriously difficult to evaluate and, in addition, they are difficult to pitch in the light of references made to the 'middle ground'. Nevertheless, some of the comments received by the College from people who have completed the courses indicate positive results from any perspective, such as, "I realise now that many of my ideas were silly", or, "The history sessions helped me to understand why we are where we are", or "I'm much clearer who I am".

These elements testify to the usefulness of putting on sessions which look at contentious areas such as history, politics, religion and identity. They are also testimony to the claim that there are quite substantial pockets of educational neglect (perhaps, also, resistance) in N. Ireland; that is to say, areas which simply do not receive adequate attention within the parameters of educational provision currently available, and not only to working-class people. Again, in targeting certain groups only, we hope to widen the overall impact of the courses. Instead of simply 'giving out chances' for individual

personal development, the College hopes to emphasise the importance of collective educational effort.

Education Across the Community, About the Community

Paulo Friere's *Cultural Action for Freedom*, perhaps, more succinctly encapsulates what the College is trying to do in terms of the community education approach: the examination and exploration of people's own communities in all their complexity in order to encourage and embrace options which can improve both a person's and a community's sense of identity, integrity, purpose, security and dignity. The bottom-up emphasis on all these manifestations of popular culture and politics from society's base confers a specifically important function upon the College.

For instance, it's hard to think of many alternative venues where representatives from organisations as diverse as the UPRG (Ulster Political Research Group) through to the IRSP (Irish Republican Socialist Party) can feel able to come for an open exchange of views and a forthright discussion of ideas. This, in turn, brings a complex and hard-to-handle edge to many of the discussions which do take place. In addition, the College offers activists and practitioners in cross-community work an ideal neutral and wholly accessible platform to debate the important and complex issues involved in effective community relations work.

The south Belfast site has recently been extended, to incorporate a conference centre, creche and improved canteen facilities, and extensively modernised to include better residential accommodation, access for disabled people and more spacious reception areas.

Conclusion: Lessons for the Future

In conclusion, it is important to reflect upon why the Ulster People's College was established as a cross-community educational centre in the early 1980s. It arose from a very definite need and within a specific context. The sheer proliferation of community-based initiatives during the early years of the Troubles prompted the belief that community politics could provide an alternative means capable of transcending the sectarian divide in N.Ireland. However, the growing realisation that such a 'transcendence' was largely illusory led the College's founders to set up a cross-community educational centre where all the issues could be discussed and explored.

Without an effective opportunity to explore, precisely, the complexity of issues which divide local communities, it was felt that continuing and on-going antagonisms would prevent the creation of a coherent campaign strategy necessary for fully articulating the pressing needs of working-class communities. Thus, the double-edged approach of the College's educational work is the result of years of experience of working with 'ordinary' people from working-class communities throughout N. Ireland, listening to what they have to say, and enabling them to contribute to the agenda in their own unique way. With the Government's renewed commitment to community relations, we feel that the College is well placed to make an informed contribution to this very important debate.

The College thus provides a major resource, with supporting services for a wide range of organisations and groups concerned to explore community divisions and/or identify common projects in their own particular field of endeavour. It also acts as 'host' to overseas groups from North America, Europe, Africa and the Far East, as well as groups, nearer home, from the Republic of Ireland and Britain. These groups are anxious to learn more about the N. Ireland problem and, as such, the College acts as a convenient base and an educational 'guide'.

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○ By **Dugald McCullough**

Oppression, Discrimination and Sectarianism

As a teacher of the theory and skills of anti-discriminatory practice in social work I have a keen interest in making sense of how discriminatory practices work. Social work, like community relations work, needs theory which makes sense of the phenomenon under consideration in terms which allow for effective intervention. My intention in this article is to clarify some concepts and identify their relationships to each other, in order to better understand that discriminatory system which we call sectarianism. For me, making sense of sectarianism has involved making sense of the personal and social processes through which all discriminatory systems operate, and here I'll be referring to sexism as another example of a discriminatory system.

To start with, I have found it useful to make a clear distinction between what is meant by 'oppression' and 'discrimination', defining that which is discriminatory as "relating to a way of organising relations between groups of humans which serves to keep one group economically and politically disadvantaged as compared with another" and defining as oppressive "any way in which humans as individuals or as groups, are treated with less than complete respect". This enables us to see discrimination as a form of oppression, but more than that, put into some sort of theoretical framework the relationship between individual prejudicial attitudes and the wider social forces.

Discrimination

We are each unique, and human beings come in many shapes, sizes, skin colours, social classes, cultural backgrounds, favourite ice cream flavours, and varieties of spiritual, sexual and political orientations. Each of us can claim many such identifications as we are each members of many groups, and the memberships of these groups overlap and interconnect in countless ways. While the richness of human variety is something to enjoy, it has been on the bases of these differences that discriminatory systems of exploitation of one group by another have been justified in human societies all over the world.

Technically, a discriminatory system is a way of organising relationships between identified groups in society which:

- (a) installs and reinforces false divisions between these groups;
- (b) ascribes positive and negative values to membership of these groups;
- (c) allows access to economic and political power in society dependent upon membership of these groups.

There are other discriminatory systems operating in our society apart from sectarianism and any list would include: sexism, racism, ageism, adultism, anti-semitism, classism,

discrimination against people who have physical differences, discrimination against people with learning difficulties, and more.

Obviously, each discriminatory system has its own unique characteristics and specific content which is directed at a particular social group, but all discriminatory systems share the common elements of - identifying a target group characterised by a particular identity, and, denying economic and political power to members of that group. The experience of discrimination is the experience of being treated as a second class citizen, of having your identification ascribed an inferior status, and having less access to economic and political power.

A discriminatory system operates through laws, customs and practices to exclude members of the target group from economic and political power (thus women experience sexism and black people experience racism, and black women experience both), and I want to go on to say that an oppressive system is something more complex, involving the way in which members of both target and non-target groups are trained to fulfill their roles in an unequal relationship.

Oppression

Oppression operates on two levels. On a personal level, misinformation is internalised, i.e. taken on board as if true by the individual member of the oppressed group, and on a social level, the misinformation about a group who share a common identification is institutionalised in the laws, customs and practices which operate such that this particular section of the population is treated as second class in some way.

Our experience of oppression begins well before any dawning of our awareness of society's inequalities. For each of us it starts in our earliest experiences of not being treated well. Each of us has experience of oppression through the processes which psychologists call conditioning and sociologists call socialisation, those experiences in which misinformation and mistreatment are used to mould each individual's behaviour, perspectives and attitudes to fit the requirements of society.

To be socialised into society and be able to make sense of social life it is necessary to be familiar with the misinformation which society provides about one's own and other people's social group identities. For the oppressive status quo to continuously regenerate itself, each of us needs to be trained to be able to find our place within, and our way through, the jungle of interlocking discriminatory systems. The process of installing this misinformation is experienced as oppressive by the individual on the receiving end, whether that individual's own role (or future role) in any particular discriminatory system is as a member of the target group, or, as a member of the oppressor group. Of course, the misinformation about self and one's own identities (and about others and their identities) can be "positive" or "negative" in society's terms.

In some ways it is the internalised form of oppression which is more serious. Although oppression is always imposed from outside to begin with, both on individuals and on groups, the great bulk of the damage is done by the effects of the hurtful

experience continuing to operate. Internalised oppression can be succinctly defined as the perpetuation by the people themselves of oppression installed by outside oppressors - it is the way we hurt ourselves and others of our group because we have adopted, unwarily, the negative attitudes towards ourselves and other members of our group.

Internalised oppression is held in place for the individual by the unexpressed effects of mistreatment during socialisation. As the effect of mistreatment on an individual is always anger, grief, fear or a combination of these emotions, these emotions are often triggered when individuals attempt to make sense of oppressive and discriminatory systems such as sexism and sectarianism. The demand for psycho-therapeutic approaches such as Gestalt in the repertoire of community relations trainers skills acknowledges the personal emotional dimension to the oppressive process.

Institutionalised oppression is held in place by physical violence and the threat of physical violence, and, by economic sanction and the threat of economic sanction. All groups experience some forms of institutionalised oppression, but when the institutionalised oppression of any group is organised so that this group is excluded from economic and political power in society, then the institutionalised oppression of this group can be considered a discriminatory system.

Gender Oppression

Let's take gender oppression by way of an example. When the worth of any female is not recognised as something inherent, but is made dependent upon certain behaviours or attributes of that female, then women's oppression is at work, and by the same token, when the worth of any male is not recognised as something inherent, but is made dependent upon certain behaviours and attitudes of that male, then men's oppression is at work.

Women's oppression (or "sexism") has a wide range of forms of expression, both individual and social, and arises from a history of legal ownership by men. This has denied women control over their own bodies, and it is this historical and legal background which permits violence to be perpetuated on women, and maintains women's economic dependence on men. Because men have always run things, women have not

had the same opportunities to express their intelligence and physical strength, and this has been used as an excuse to deny that women have these qualities. Work ascribed to women still carries low status and low economic reward.

“While women represent half the world population, they perform nearly two-thirds of the total number of hours worked, receive only one-tenth of the world income and own less than one per cent of world property.” **United Nations (1980)**

Men’s oppression is a different phenomenon to women’s oppression, with different characteristics and content. Reflect, for example, upon popular ideas in our culture such as “It’ll harden him”, “Big boys don’t cry”, “fight like a man”, and “women and children first” and consider the expectations men learn they must try to meet - the expectation to provide for more than oneself; to take responsibility and provide leadership; to be prepared to fight other men and to behave disrespectfully to women, in order to prove one’s manhood; to kill or be killed for “the greater good” if necessary.

“Men’s oppression is a different phenomenon to women’s oppression...”

Consider also the expectations which hurt because they are so low - boys are told “men are only interested in one thing”; denied opportunities to be involved in child care, men are told they are incompetent to provide it. (The exclusion of fathers from child care is deeply hurtful to both fathers and young people.) So patriarchy hurts men too, and its values are actually anti-male. Any man who attempts to resist conforming with the male role model which patriarchal society demands will be attacked as “not a real man”, i.e. as gay.

It is worth noting that if boys do not internalise this oppressive nonsense and act on the basis of it throughout their lives, the oppression of men cannot be maintained, and neither can the oppression of women. The thing about internalised oppression is that despite one’s common sense, moral values and good intentions, the recordings of misinformation and mistreatment in our memory will continue to have an effect on behaviour and attitudes until faced and dealt with.

So men’s oppression is a different phenomenon to women’s oppression, with different characteristics and content, but most significantly, men are not discriminated against, i.e. denied access to power in society, on account of their gender. Men certainly experience exclusion from positions of power on the basis of a variety of prejudices (which invoke other discriminatory systems): skin colour (racism), cultural background (sectarianism), age (adultism or ageism), but not as men. Racism, sectarianism, adultism and ageism can and must be analyzed as distinct discriminatory systems in their own right.

So whereas both women and men are oppressed, women are also discriminated against, as the system of patriarchy operates

to exclude women from economic and political power on the grounds that they are women. Being both oppressive and discriminatory, women’s oppression gets the term sexism. Men’s experience of being socialised into their gender stereotype is certainly oppressive (and one of the key ways men are oppressed is through the sanctions a man may face if he does not agree to behave disrespectfully towards women) but the oppressive system which operates on men is not a discriminatory system as it does not exclude men from positions of power. Nor do women benefit in any material way from the oppression of men. Whereas men do benefit in a material way from the realities of power which exist behind the sex-role stereotyping in this society, making it easier for men to succeed in almost every area of public life - especially the “traditionally female” professions such as teaching, nursing, welfare work, cooking, dance and so on, where often men head the teaching, management and administration.

Racism

In the same way, the experience of racism is the experience of being treated with less than complete respect because you are Black. I use the term “Black” in its political context to refer to all peoples who are oppressed and discriminated against on the grounds that they have a skin colour other than pink. (This term does not assume that Black people in our society are a homogenous group. The issues and challenges facing Chinese people, people from the Indian sub-continent, Vietnamese people, and people from other minority ethnic groups can be specific to race culture and religion).

Every country where the majority of people have a skin colour other than pink has experienced the oppressive effects of racism. The definition of racism as “Prejudice plus power” needs the crucial extra piece “vested by white people on Black”, because racism is the oppression of Black people by white people. To use the same concept to cover, on one hand, the pandemic oppression of Black people by white people throughout history, and on the other, the resultant effects of this on the way Black people treat white people and other Black people, defines the concept in a way which does not represent reality, and is therefore not as useful as a theoretical tool. For example, to describe tensions between Hindu and Moslem peoples as evidence of racism because the protagonists have a skin colour other than pink, is itself a racist “pinkocentric” perspective, and serves to confuse the concept of racism, for such tensions are well defined by the concept of sectarianism.

With racism, as with all discriminatory systems, both those in the target group and those in the non-target group, experience oppression as individuals, growing up and learning misinformation about, and experiencing mistreatment of, self and others within a racist culture. As with all oppressed groups, internalised oppression will pit Black people against each other.

Sectarianism

All discriminatory systems are sectarian in the broadest sense of the word “sectarian”, in that all discriminatory systems install and maintain divisions between groups of people. Sectarianism as a discriminatory system refers to any situation in which one group oppresses another group on the basis of

their cultural background, heritage or religion. In Northern Ireland, both those raised Catholic and those raised Protestant internalise their experience of oppression but for one group, the institutionalised oppression has historically meant discrimination.

Northern Ireland began as a “Protestant state for a Protestant people”, where access to power has been easier for people raised Protestant as compared with people raised Catholic. Catholics have been, (and to the extent to which there still are laws, customs and practices which exclude people raised Catholic from power and treat people raised Catholic as second class citizens, still are) the target group in the discriminatory system we call sectarianism.

Oppressive sectarian misinformation continues to be internalised by individuals. The oppressive experience of getting the misinformation about what it means to be raised Catholic and what it means to be raised Protestant is a key part of the process of our children being socialised into Northern Irish society. In the same way, adults from other parts of the world who come to live here also learn the misinformation, and how to interpret it, in order to find their way through it, although because their ‘recordings’ of the misinformation are more recent, their common sense and moral values stand more of a chance of refuting the nonsense.

From my own experience, I recognise that as an Irishman I carry some internalised Irish oppression which tells me that in some undefined way I am not really as good as an English person, and at the same time, as someone raised Protestant in Northern Ireland, I also have internalised Protestant oppression, which tells me I am not “really” Irish, and in some undefined way am “superior” to raised Catholic Irish people. Personally, I didn’t ask for any of this, it sort of came with the territory, and it has been deeply confusing, and very painful. What is important to note, however, is that if in my behaviour or attitudes I act on the basis of my internalised Protestant oppression, raised Catholic people will experience it as sectarianism.

As when considering any discriminatory system, it is necessary to be clear that other oppressions are operating along with sectarianism which, unless identified, can confuse our understanding. In Northern Ireland, as in all capitalist countries, working class people of any background/cultural heritage are subject to classism, the exclusion from economic and political

power of the working class. Considerable confusion is generated by the interplay between classism and sectarianism in Northern Ireland.

Implications of this analysis

Much more needs to be said here, but I can give a brief point in the direction this analysis might lead. As the key characteristic of oppressive systems is lack of respect, the antidote to them is the provision of respect.

“Each of us is only responsible for our own part of it...”

Against internalised oppression the ethical principle of respect operationalises as pride. Real pride conveys a confident sense of delight on one’s own being, it is the ability to accept oneself and assert oneself without putting anyone down, or putting anyone on a pedestal. When an individual takes real pride in every aspect of themselves, this runs counter to the misinformation which may have told them that they were better than or worse than some other people in some way. The result of this inner confrontation will usually be the expression of previously unexpressed emotion which the individual has been carrying, hence the need for the creation of appropriate environments for this work to be done. Critically, this is “within-group” work. CR trainers could be influential in setting up and leading “Catholic pride” or “Catholic liberation” groups, and “Protestant pride” or “Protestant liberation” groups. (There are models in the women’s, black and gay movements).

Against institutionalised oppression, the ethical principle of respect operationalises as social action to change sectarian laws, customs and practices. CR trainers cannot be “value free” (can anyone?) and may choose to see their role in terms of assisting groups to move effectively against their oppression. To do so, such groups will need:

- (a) accurate information about their condition - how they got to be and how they currently are oppressed (consciousness raising);
- (b) to devise their own policies and strategies for change with leadership from within their own groups;
- (c) to make allies with other oppressed groups.

In summary, I would say that as individuals, Catholic or Protestant, we are not individually responsible for the existence of institutionalised sectarianism, each of us is only responsible for our own part of it. One’s responsibility is firstly to oneself, to decide not to act on the basis of, and eventually to get rid of, the sectarianism which has been internalised, and second, to contribute intelligently to campaigns to change laws, customs and practices which treat Catholics (and all people) as second class.

Dugald McCullough teaches social work at the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education; he is also a member of the CRC Trainers’ Network.

○ By Peter Doran

The Environment - a generative theme for the study and practice of peace

In this article I want to suggest that activists working in the area of community relations might usefully consider group reflection on the social roots of the current environmental crisis¹ as a generative or thought provoking method for the study and promotion of the conditions for a just and co-operative society. An invitation to informed reflection on the social origins of our environmental problems can stimulate critical thinking about important concepts like power, domination, and culture, and foster a renewed appreciation of such human qualities as compassion and conviviality.²

In the course of the past twenty years our appreciation of the destructive environmental impact of many human activities has grown exponentially. Last year's "Earth Summit" (*United Nations Conference on Environment and Development*) in Rio de Janeiro underlined the transformation of our understanding of the environment as a set of marginal and disparate issues into one which recognises it as the global context. The environment is recognised today as the fragile and dynamic life-support system against which all our economic, political and social actions must be weighed and reassessed.

Special challenges lie in store for our Western culture characterised by political and economic practices which have come to dominate by virtue of their associated technological power to disseminate particular ideas and values. In the words of Thomas Berry:

"Our secular, rational, industrial society, with its amazing scientific insight and technological skills, has established the first radically anthropocentric (human/self centred) society and has thereby broken the primary law of the universe, the law of the integrity of the universe, the law that every component member of the universe should be integral with every other member of the universe." (Berry 1988: 202)

For those of us who live in the Western milieu the environment must become a green tinted mirror for self-critical reflection on deeply embedded assumptions, behaviours, and expectations which touch not only our relations with nature but our relations with one another. On the journey we can discover implications for our roles as consumers (How shall we simplify our lifestyles if our claims on the world's resources are to become both just and sustainable?); as citizens (Is the political role of the citizen to be limited to occasional voting? Won't the new environmental age of global citizenry and local action demand more active participation, responsibility and creative input?); and as human beings (How much longer can we treat ourselves as a privileged elite among the community of species who inhabit the earth, entitled to treat others as mere means to satisfy our material and aesthetic needs?).

Violence and Creation

As Heraclitus noted, "conflict is the father of all things." Nature is turmoil, the story of life is replete with struggle and conflict as it has advanced towards ever more complex expression. Humanity has emerged in the latter chapters of this story and imposed its own violence on the natural world. What sets human violence apart is its essential ambivalence. The violence of the natural world has been essentially creative in the long perspective of the great scheme of things.

Human power, however, has sought to take control of nature's processes, initially through agriculture and irrigation and latterly through science and technology at the service of economic and state driven models of development³ designed in the image of Western notions of progress and modernity. A conquest of nature has helped define the project of modern civilization alongside the subjection of distant peoples, cultures and territories.

The enclosure of the global commons - and its peoples - is the leit-motif of our history, the foundation of the global and economic system of nation-states. The people of Ireland are well acquainted with the consequences of this history. Such are the powers that human institutions have taken upon themselves that human agency can now determine the future of nature itself. A failure in human creativity in the face of our environmental crisis - a crisis of knowledge, power, culture and relationships between humans, between humans and nature, and between humans and the sacred - will be an absolute failure.

Thomas Berry has called for a "creative resolution of antagonism" as a response to our crises. The anthropologist A.L. Kroeber advocated that the ideal situation for any individual was not "bovine placidity" but "the highest state of tension that the organism can bear creatively". The question is not one of conflict or peace but how one can deal creatively with the enormous tensions now apparent in the many dimensions of human/nature relations.

The Peace of the Earth

"The foundation for a positive peace is peace with the earth."

Berry and Mische have outlined a number of foundations for a new understanding of this dynamic - The Peace of the Earth:

(a) Peace is indivisible

The earth constitutes a single community composed of all its geological, biological and human components. No part of the earth in its essential functioning can be the exclusive possession or concern of any nation.

(b) Peace is Not a Fixed Condition but Process

The creative response - "a creative resolution of antagonism" - is not a clearly seen or predetermined pattern of action but a humble groping toward an ever more complete expression of the numinous mystery revealed in the process. This uncertain path implies acceptance of some disquiet, an incompleteness; also the excitement of discovery, transformation and advance toward new levels of integration. Such an understanding of peace also implies an acceptance of some experience of insecurity.

(c) Human decisions are Central to the Peace of the Earth

Human knowledge is not separate above nature. The development of human knowledge and capacities for reflection and the creation of cultural practices means that the earth itself has acquired a field of consciousness. With this development humans inherit a responsibility for self critical and creative

responses to crises - moments for learning and transformation. The responsibility also implies an urgent need to rediscover the quality of humility in our relations with nature.

(d) Respect for the Diversity of Life Forms and Human Cultures

From the beginnings of evolution earth processes have involved increasing complexification and differentiation, including the development of multiple modes of expression in human existence and culture. Today scholars and ecological movements study the knowledges and practices of the world's aboriginal peoples who have struggled to preserve the integrity of their local eco-systems and cultures in the face of great opposition and violence. In Ireland there are projects committed to the re-evaluation of celtic culture and lifestyles, and the accompanying ecological wisdom.⁴

(e) Communion and Interdependence

Physicists call it magnetism or attraction. Biologists call it bonding. Teilhard de Chardin, the Christian palaeontologist, called it love. Reflecting on the magnificent communion and interdependence of all the dimensions of the universe - from the movement of the planets around their sun to the micro phenomena of electrons and neutrons around a nucleus in the simplest of cells - Mische has commented: "The community of which we speak is a communion of geological, biological and human components and not only of human parts. But it also involves humans in community with each other. Education for

peace, then, involves educating for responsible life in community."

(f) Creativity and Conflict Resolution

The Peace of the Earth is not passive but dynamic and creative. The goal of peace education cannot be understood exclusively in terms of the elimination of conflict. Conflict seems inevitable and probably even essential to growth and development. A more appropriate goal is the development of capacities in our communities to resolve conflict creatively.

(g) Peace from Below

Decision making regarding the fate of the earth is largely in the hands of the industrialized nations where a lack of leadership and insight in environmental politics has been evident. The real hope for a Peace of the Earth may lie largely with social movements and religious networks where people are sometimes more able to transcend sovereignties and narrow nationalisms and ideologies to act out of a deeper consciousness of the earth, its integrity, wholeness and our relationship with it.

For Mische the multiple dimensions of environmental crises represent symptoms of a state of non-peace with nature. The origins of that non-peace are to be found in our cultural, economic, social and political practices which also give rise to more familiar conflicts between peoples, communities and their institutions. Our understanding of peace is enriched and extended when we incorporate care for the earth into our reflection and action.

Recognising the origins of environmental degradation in social factors, Mische has argued that the first step in making peace with our planetary home may be to work on the conflict in the human psyche. In the modern period people in the advanced industrialised countries have witnessed a rupture in human/nature relations, an experience of separation lived as an illusion of exaggerated independence from their life sustaining network of relationships which constitute the biosphere:

"There has been an increasing objectification of the earth, a paradigm of the earth or nature as other and apart from self and the human."

Tied to this experience of separation is the human drive for dominion over nature and elevation of reason. The earth has come to be understood as not only other but also something to be exploited, controlled and subdued in the interests of science, material accumulation and security. Associated with this experience of separation and domination are the history of colonialism, the oppression and extermination of tribal cultures, and the global practices of patriarchy. These are just some of the important themes raised by a serious reflection on the social origins of our environmental crises and appropriate responses.

Reflection on the environment and our relations with it invites us to read the world anew, to read the circumstances of our country, our community and our personal life-styles, with a critical eye cast over deeply embedded assumptions about power, life style, justice and relationships. It demands above all the recovery of our ability to listen to a new voice which sings of the integrity of creation:

“Reading the world, inscribing and being profoundly inscribed by it, has more to do with deep attunement or hearing, and involves a kind of obedience to life’s deepest resonances (Fr. obeir, to obey: L. ob audere, to hear from).” (Smith: 1992: 2 58).

Notes

¹ The environmental crises are numerous, including ozone layer depletion, global warming, species extermination, deforestation, unsustainable development, industrial pollution etc. For the purposes of this article I wish to stress the point that the many dimensions of the environmental crises have their roots in our dominant social and industrial paradigm, a common context and worldview. Reflection on the origins and possible responses to the environmental crises is, therefore, essentially a political exercise which must address questions of power, culture and systems of knowledge and perception.

² Critical reflection on environmental themes can be facilitated through participation in group activities including discussion and role play. A very good example is The Forest game, available from the One World Centre, in Belfast.

³ Development strategies promoted by the political and economic elites in Northern Ireland are, for the most part, reflections of traditional commercial driven concerns. Sustainable, ecological and aesthetic alternatives are available e.g. urban village development as opposed to centralisation of facilities in large cities, urban farms on public lands using organic and permaculture techniques, development of public transport, LETS schemes which promote an exchange of skills outside the formal economy etc.

⁴ An excellent example is An Charraig community located on an island off the West coast of Ireland, founded by Father Dara Molloy. Embracing a simple life style the members of the community combine reflection and action around themes including spirituality, ecology, education, politics and culture.

Reading

Berry, Thomas, *The Dream of the Earth* (1988).

Mische, Patricia *The Earth as Peace Teacher* (1990).

Smith, David, *Modernism, Hyperliteracy and the Colonization of the Word* (1992)

○ By Terence Duffy

The European mediation scene: thoughts from the 1993 University of Peace workshop

In July I had the privilege of attending the annual international mediation conference organised by the University of Peace which is based in Namur in southern Belgium. The work of this innovative university is centred on the management of conflict. Its four-fold commitment to cooperation, nonviolence, negotiation and mediation are characterised by its concern with finding practical avenues to test theory. The University was founded in 1960 by the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dominique Pire, and since then it has developed as a place for research and training with an objective no less ambitious than ‘contributing to a more peaceful society’.

Integral to this process is that ‘everyone momentarily should set personal opinions to one side’ in an attempt to ‘understand and value (even without actually sharing) another’s outlook’ (*University of Peace: Orientations*, Namur, 1993). In this way, dialogue involves the respect of the other’s views even if circumstances bring them to be enemies. Increasingly this challenge of conflict resolution has allowed participants to view conflict in a more positive perspective and this is reflected in the work at Namur. The resolution or management of conflict is a critical task for mediators. These important aims were firmly expressed in the recent July workshop.

1993 workshop: mediation & the management of conflict

The Mediation workshop met against a climate of growing political conflict in Europe and it is significant that among the delegates were mediation practitioners from various parts of

the former Yugoslavia. Equally, the problems of Northern Ireland (which was regarded as a European problems of great longevity) featured on several occasions in the sessions. Conflicts further afield were also discussed and there was a special emphasis on the political and economic crisis facing various parts of Africa. Senegal, Congo, Chad and Algeria were represented among the African delegates. The workshop was opened by a thematic address from Jean-Francois Six, President of the French National Centre for Mediation. Regional studies were provided by Jean Demunck on mediation in Europe and Jim Smith on recent experience among mediation groups in the United Kingdom.

In the remaining sessions interventions were given by the fifty or so experts present whose combined experience ranged over many parts of the world. A number of important themes

emerged in the course of the workshop as being critical for the continued development of mediation in Europe and further afield. The common denominator of this exploration of current theory and practice was the need to find ways of managing (and if possible) of resolving conflict. It was useful to have such a frank exchange of current ideas.

Towards an agenda for mediation in Europe

An important theme which was identified at an early stage in the conference was that participants were finding that mediation was increasingly being exploited by people falling foul of the law and by clients vis a vis social workers and other government agencies. Now there is nothing intrinsically wrong with mediation being used as a means of plea-bargaining - indeed it is inevitable that mediation would be used by client-groups in this way. However there are obvious perils in the abuse of mediation by client-groups.

A second major set of issues concerned the matter of finding agreed standards for effective mediation practice. There was widespread agreement that if mediation is worthwhile then it must be professionally conducted and it must therefore be effective. Related to standards, were questions about the independence of mediators and their relationship to government and other agencies. Questions were raised about how far accepting government money might mean abandoning independence or being associated with the state. These issues clearly have pertinence to a society like Northern Ireland and to the situation facing the Community Relations Council. Opinions were also aired about safeguarding the neutrality of mediators in politically estranged societies like the former Yugoslavia. In the general European context it was clear that government money secured programme activity but often also meant the sacrifice of autonomy for community mediation groups.

Some of the workshop discussions focused on the influence of Quaker scholars and practitioners on the development of mediation. While this 'Quaker tradition' was recognised for its historic contribution to mediation, questions were raised as to whether there was not a need for new paradigms in mediation. It was also recognised that there were several new, dynamic Quaker programmes such as the emphasis on prejudice reduction shown by the Quaker Peace Education programme (QPEP) in Northern Ireland. However the shift in Europe seemed to be away from the characteristic Quaker 'quiet work for peace' towards a variety of different kinds of professional approaches.

An important question which raised many hackles at the workshop was the issue of accreditation. Many of the delegates at the workshop (as elsewhere) felt that once you begin to make mediation somehow 'academic' you begin to alienate people, and you begin a process of excluding some of the best mediators who happen to have the fewest academic qualifications. However, mediation is at a cross-roads now as to where it's going regarding academic and practical experience. It was good that the debate on this subject was so frank.

Another critical issue which cropped up time and time again was that of evaluation. On the whole, it was felt that this should take the form of peer-appraisal among mediators so that those

at the 'coal-face' of mediation can share their ideas and experiences. It cannot but be meritorious to have constructive criticism and encouragement from one's colleagues so that one can make mistakes 'off the field' where they can be least harmful to the conflict participants.

The question of training and mediation featured extensively in the discussions, as it does at practically every gathering of the professional mediators. This writer doubts if there will ever be an overall standard-setting mechanism for mediation. Hours of training and hours of experience are (of course) very important but we are still a very long way away from agreeing any kind of formal regulatory mechanism on practice. This was also the consensus-view at Namur.

Conclusion: mediation and cross-cultural sharing

It was apparent from the interventions offered by the delegates (who came from diverse backgrounds and from a wide range of countries) that the application of these ideas differed much across geographical regions. For instance, delegate Mamadou Ly from Senegal (outlining the development of mediation in the African context) showed how African society was rich with proverbs in support of mediation. Thus in Senegal there was a saying 'if you fight you are animals' - bolstering the norm of advocating a peaceful settlement of disputes.

From the tribal war of the 1960s in Zaire came the idea of tribes 'burying a dead dog' so that the conflict between the two tribes 'could be seen as dead forever'. Thus a tradition of harmony and proverbs helped safeguard peace so that in the African context local mediation might start with a village elder telling a joke in order to lighten the atmosphere and allow discussion to follow about the dispute. However far apart Europe might be from Africa, the contributions from that region were greatly appreciated for their resonance further afield.

It was likewise felt that the interventions on family mediation highlighted the multi-disciplinary nature of so much of mediation practice. It was felt that many ideas from family mediation could be applied beyond purely domestic settings. Thus it will be apparent from the above that we still have a long way to go in defining the terrain and the practicalities of mediation activity.

Mediation is still at a very embryonic stage in its evolution but workshops such as those organised by the University of Peace do much to advance the field. The University is to be congratulated for providing an important forum which facilitates the sharing of experience not only across Europe but across international frontiers. The result was a lively and productive opportunity not only for discussing old ideas afresh but also for testing many new ones.

○ By **Patricia Cullen**, Co-ordinator, 'Ourselves and Others' programme

Ourselves and Others

Community relations activists are generally aware of Co-operation North which focuses its energies on addressing relations between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. A great deal of valuable experience has been gained. In this article I plan to outline a recent initiative built on that experience which marks a major step forward for the organisation.

I am coordinating the 'Ourselves and Others' programme which was designed to provide a network of trained facilitators to assist local leaders of cross-border exchanges. Since it was launched in Belfast in 1991 the network has grown to 37 whose specific task is to enhance the quality of exchanges through their skilled intervention.

I had considerable experience as a facilitator before taking up my position as co-ordinator which has given me a real understanding of the demands, difficulties and potential of the work on the ground.

But my connections with Co-operation North go back further; I took part in a British/Irish Adult Education Conference in Warrenpoint in the eighties followed by a Peace Studies Exchange which I helped organise. I experienced at first hand the value of cross-border contact and saw for myself the positive effect it had on my own community.

Co-operation North has been successfully bringing people together in cross-border exchange programmes since 1985. The organisation encourages people in Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to work together to build respect for each other's traditions and to achieve greater practical co-operation. We envisage a long term, large scale, professionally managed effort to help achieve a more peaceful future, acknowledging that how people think and behave in the Republic has direct bearing on relationships within Northern Ireland.

Cross border exchange links involve thousands of people every year with the ultimate aim of a growth in understanding and tolerance and a genuine welcome for diversity among participants.

The right conditions are necessary for these aims to be realised. 'A Model of Managed Co-operation', by Joyce O'Connor and Helen Ruddle of the Policy Research Centre, Limerick, gives guidelines for these favourable conditions based on their extensive evaluation of the exchange programme.

Their research underlined Co-operation North's considerable success in establishing friendships and creating new social networks between exchange groups. However, something more

was needed to bring about significant change in attitudes; a true encounter which moves beyond the culture of politeness towards an honest meeting of hearts and minds.

'Ourselves and Others' was a response to the research recommendations. Facilitators are now available to each group involved in cross-border links to assist exchange leaders address the prejudice reduction element which many felt unsure about. Previously, sensitive topics were sometimes avoided because of understandable fears and occasionally discussion was actively discouraged. Other leaders had dealt with such issues but needed extra ideas, resources and support.

The facilitator and group leaders design a programme taking account of the group's needs and special themes they want to explore. Workshops are conducted before, during and after the exchange and leaders are encouraged to be fully involved. An exploration of identity and values takes the contact out of the purely social domain.

Pre-exchange workshops are invaluable, providing an opportunity for groups to focus on expectations and what they hope to achieve and helps dispel their fears. Ground rules are set and the facilitator gets to know the participants and assess their needs.

The pre-exchange intervention is even more valuable when the Northern Ireland group has a cross community composition which we actively encourage. Workshops help participants to 'gel' as a new group before meeting their counterparts across the border.

The new appointment of a cross-community worker will help develop this important aspect of the work. One of the outcomes I have noticed is that Northern Irish participants often realise that they have more in common with each other than with their Southern counterparts.

At the next stage, Northern and Southern groups meet for the first time. The host facilitator helps them get to know each other, explore differences and discover similarities while common misconceptions and stereotypes are identified and challenged. There's a 'buzz' and excitement about the contact phase when two distinct groups become a single group for the duration of the visit. Exchanges are reciprocal so each group experiences both hosting and visiting.

Before the second cross-border meeting, facilitators communicate to avoid duplication. Ideally, this follow-up joint exchange workshop allows for a deeper encounter now that understanding and trust have grown and there can be a very special atmosphere.

There is no set format for workshops and each event is designed separately drawing from several models of intervention; we recognised that no single model can fit every situation. Our workshops are unique in dealing with transient groups out of their usual circumstances and are designed to ensure that ownership of the project remains with the groups themselves.

The post-exchange workshop is the final stage in the process. Groups are again visited on their home ground and have a chance to reflect on their experience and whether original expectations were realised. They evaluate the overall exchange and unresolved issues are raised and dealt with. Possible follow-up activities are explored including ways of nurturing new friendships and developing an ongoing relationship between the groups.

'Ourselves and Others' was a courageous initiative for Co-operation North with all its cost, personnel and administrative implications. Early response has been favourable and even the most reluctant leaders being gradually won over to the new approach. Exchange organisers give enormous valuable voluntary commitment and usually have more than enough to handle organising travel, home hosting, social activities and fundraising. They are generally appreciative of the facilitator's extra support.

However, there are difficulties introducing a complex process into established practice and a few leaders are sceptical. They've run workshops for years where youngsters shared social and cultural activities and simply didn't see a need for extra input, particularly something seeming so potentially risky as "prejudice reduction". Fortunately, most reservations disappear once fieldworkers and leaders meet and the benefits of co-operating become clear. We're looking at our terminology to find more attractive ways of presenting the programme so that fear about such intervention is minimised.

Participants may not always value discussion, especially when it competes with more obvious pleasures like sightseeing,

shopping or sports. Finding room in a packed programme for workshops can be quite a problem. As well, trying to get the right atmosphere for serious work can be difficult if the group has just tumbled out of a coach 'high' on sightseeing, are yawning after a long day's physical activity, or itching to get ready for a disco!

Through our leaders training events and guidelines we are highlighting the importance of sensitive programming so that workshops are located in the most favourable position within the overall exchange.

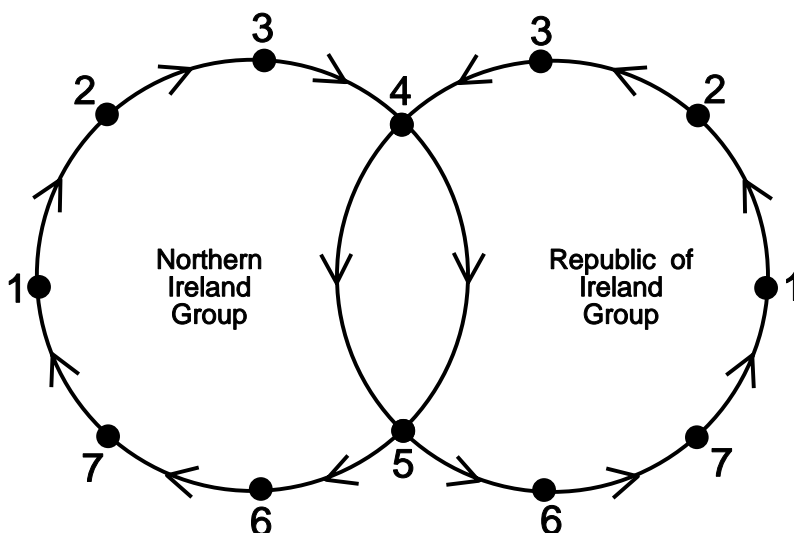
Facilitators adopt an informal, fun approach using ice-breakers and games to relax groups. School bells, fixed desks, draughty halls, overcrowded rooms, people "dropping in to see what's happening" are just some of the impediments to achieving the right atmosphere so necessary for group work. These difficulties are avoidable when organisers understand the need for a suitable environment for workshops. We are now achieving these optimum conditions by improved liaison with leaders.

Late notice of exchange dates was a serious problem which has largely been overcome. Previously, Co-operation North had successfully encouraged groups to be autonomous in planning and managing their exchanges. Because "O & O" facilitators need time, we've introduced earlier closing dates for applications. There's a direct correlation between adequate preparation, successful workshops and a quality exchange.

Occasionally, exchange participants are not highly motivated and there have been a few instances of disruptive behaviour, refusal to participate or belittling of the process. Our facilitators need much skill to inspire enthusiasm out of apathy and participation from resistance. I've seen bored and disgruntled city teenagers change to an animated and enthusiastic group over the course of an exchange.

We're discovering that smaller groups, extra facilitators and alternative mediums of expression (art, drama, music etc) are

"Ourselves & Others" exchange process



Ourselves/Others: Intervention Stages

1. Co-ordinator assigns facilitator to group
2. Facilitator/Leaders contact
3. Pre-exchange workshop
4. 1st joint exchange workshop
5. 2nd joint exchange workshop
6. Post-exchange workshop
7. Evaluation/Feedback to co-ordinator

important. Nonetheless, we have a clear task to develop our collective expertise and improve resources to meet special needs. Some leaders are asking for more straightforward discussion with less emphasis on fun exercises which, while important in some scenarios, can be distractions in others,

Exchange groups are tremendously varied. Facilitators might, for example, work with third-level students, young people in detention, adult literacy groups, lone-parents or elderly people crossing the border for the first time. Because workshops are connected to what's sometimes perceived as a grant-aided 'holiday', we meet people who wouldn't normally contemplate anything as serious as "prejudice reduction". This is an important advantage for the organisation to capitalise on. We are definitely not "preaching to the converted"!

A Co-operation North exchange offers an exciting opportunity for adventure to young people at a crucial time in their lives. Nor should the value of visits by community groups to their cross border neighbours be underestimated with all their potential for increasing good relations on the island. I've seen for myself that they can be an important first step through which the desire to "do something about the troubles" can be channelled productively.

"*Ourselves & Others*" work is very challenging and not for the faint-hearted. We attempt to address the deepest and most divisive issues which go to the very roots of society; facilitators need to be flexible, resourceful and creative. More of Co-operation North resources are being directed towards marginalised and disadvantaged groups and there are increasing demands for facilitators to conduct seminars, training events,

residential camps and community sessions apart from regular exchanges.

Practical and moral support is needed especially as facilitators are geographically isolated from colleagues. This is an important aspect of my role as Co-ordinator and twice yearly seminars give further support. We're also encouraging informal area meetings where they can share experience and build a sense of comradeship.

In Co-operation North we are justifiably proud of our facilitator network and achievements so far, we're mindful, however, of the shortcomings and gaps in this new service and are working hard ironing out difficulties and making improvements. As with all voluntary agencies, we're short of personnel and finance to do all that we might like to do.

It's important that '*Ourselves & Others*' performance on the ground is monitored closely, and we accomplish this by continual evaluation, supervision and consultation, with commitment to ongoing training and research.

Our task is to strive for the highest professional standards, improve groups skills and find ever more effective methods of facilitating the prejudice reduction process.

'*Ourselves and Others*' network of skilled facilitators is unique in these islands in the spread and scope of our work and has potential to be a powerful resource for good. It's part of our strength that we have a willingness to learn from and co-operate with other community relations agencies. Indeed, we very much need the support and goodwill of our colleagues in the field and welcome opportunities for further co-operation.