Messages to the Future:
Challenges for educational sharing in a culturally diverse Northern Ireland

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In the introduction to his book, "The Disappearance of Childhood" (1982), the late American author Neil Postman penned these words as his very first sentence:

Children are the living messages we send to a time we will not see.

Postman was writing as an observer of what he perceived as the contemporary cultural change that threatened to diminish the concept of childhood that had been developing from the time of the Renaissance, particularly as a result of the influence of television and other communications media. He presented his concerns as a challenge to educators and to parents, but it was in a later book, "The End of Education", that he wrote more specifically about the importance and value of education. Here he attempted to steer away from his anxieties about childhood and suggested that children could still be introduced to a positive valuing of diversity and develop as considerate but critical thinkers and as local and global citizens in an interconnected world. Early in this later book Postman turned out another very quotable statement, that "*at its best, schooling can be about how to make a life, which is quite different from how to make a living*" (Postman, 1995, p.*x*).

The concept of education as a holistic preparation for life in a world that we share with other human beings is one that I suspect appeals to most educators at all levels in the lifelong educational process, despite all the bureaucratic pressures that seem to want to push and pull us into a utilitarian approach that can reduce it all to assessment, statistics and league tables.

Education viewed in this more holistic way is like planting a tree; it is an act of faith in a future we will probably not see ourselves. We pass something on to another generation and, as Neil Postman suggests, they take the messages forward from there.

In our post-conflict society in Northern Ireland we have spoken and written much about the future as we seek to move on from our conflicted past – *A Shared Future*, as our 2005 government policy (OFMDFM, 2005) described it. One unexpected outcome of the present Stormont administration's shift away from that policy document – which I regret because it was an excellent one in my view – is that it actually seems latterly to have encouraged more people to use the "shared future" terminology and the concepts that it represents. The language of "shared *education*" is also now used widely by politicians and seems to have become part of received wisdom since being endorsed as "the way forward" by the First Minister at the DUP party conference in 2011; we now have an independent Advisory Group looking into the options and listening to the views of the public on this matter. The idea of shared education, of course, goes much further back than last year. There have been projects

using that terminology, or the closely related language of school collaboration, over a number of years now, and some local programmes and projects are very well developed. In another form of shared education Northern Ireland also has over sixty integrated schools, in development since the early 1980s, and alongside and back beyond that many examples of inter-school projects which could also be described as an attempt at cross-community educational sharing. It is bound to be well known in an audience of this kind that such initiatives go much further back, to the failed attempt some 90 years ago to establish a unified education system in the form of the 1923 Education Act and, another 90 years further back still, to the establishment of the National Schools system in the 1830s that was also conceived as a means of achieving education together, though again ultimately one that was thwarted by other priorities and ambitions. There is a significant history of such past and present attempts – by no means all a record of complete failure – but there should be an awareness of the obstacles that have brought us to the present time without having achieved this elusive goal.

What exactly do we mean by shared education? If the terminology has become familiar and generally acceptable it may well still prove much harder to find agreement on what it means in practical terms. Is it simply about the sharing of some physical and human resources between continuing separate parallel systems, dictated primarily by economic necessity? Is it to be perceived as a compromise position between the separate systems and the aspiration for full integration – a sort of half-way house on a longer journey? Or is it about the creation of an inclusive and cohesive system – a unified, if not necessarily uniform system – focused on the establishment of peaceful community relations and a reconciled society? Is it intended as a means, through education, towards the creation of good relations in the community, defined by the Equality Commission as:

> "*the growth of relations and structures for Northern Ireland that acknowledge the religious, political and racial context of this society, and that seek to promote respect, equity and trust, and embrace diversity in all its forms*" (2010, p.86)?

The more wary or cynical – taught by years of disappointed wishful thinking – may see it more in terms of that first, rather limited option. Some observers, not least David Cameron, have warned of the danger that the ideal of the shared future may simply become the "shared-out" future – an apportioning of what is available to communities that remain significantly separate within a context of "benign apartheid". Is there also a danger that shared education may, in a similar way, simply turn into "shared-out" education?

I want to use this opportunity to explore some of the principles behind shared education and some aspects of the prospects for the future of educational sharing here in Northern Ireland with a few references to relevant research. The marking of 90 years of Stranmillis's role in teacher education is a good moment to do so, not least because the 90th birthday of this institution follows closely on that of the partition of Ireland and almost exactly parallels the 90th anniversary of the passing of that failed 1923 Education Act. Teacher education, which has been our principal task here over those decades, is and will surely remain a key factor in

how we respond to the challenges of sharing education, and the renewed interest in finding better structures for the decades ahead allows us both to reflect on the past and look to the future.

Northern Ireland has often been portrayed as an interface – political, cultural, religious and linguistic. Britishness and Irishness meet here; nationalism and unionism; Protestantism and Catholicism (in both their religious and cultural guises); but also, at a smaller but no less significant scale as we have become increasingly plural in our ethnic mix, we are an interface between the global East and West and the global North and South, between Christianity and other world faiths, between religion and secular society.

For many decades, and not just during the Troubles, our cultural, religious and political interfaces have often become "flashpoints" between communities – places of frustration, antagonism, anger and sometimes just of avoidance. We have our physical reminders of these interfaces, well known through the Troubles but also still very much present with us – the ironically-named "peace walls", the barriers that keep communities apart. We probably know the depressing statistics, that despite the work of some activists to have them removed, there are more of these separation walls now than there were at the time of the paramilitary ceasefires in the 1990s. One of the more recent was actually built within the grounds of an integrated primary school.

The building of walls to keep people apart goes back well beyond the Troubles. In the 1860s a new city cemetery was established in West Belfast, with plans to accommodate both Protestant and Catholic graves. A nine-foot-deep underground wall was built in order to keep the denominations separate even after death! I'm not sure if we should laugh or cry at that horrendous fact! We know of walls of separation in other places too – in Berlin, now happily just a memory; but still a very present and controversial reality between Israel and the Palestinian Territory. In many ways, however, these and the world's other "buffer zones" merely symbolise the reality of the walls and barriers in people's minds – the fear of the other and of otherness in general that too often leads to a desire for physical separation and may well go on to diminish the different other by discrimination or by hate-motivated violence.

We have moved on in many ways, of course, but we still have a long journey ahead; the sometimes expressed view that we no longer need to waste time reflecting on our past divisions is frankly naïve and probably dangerous. In our "post-conflict society" sectarianism has certainly not gone away and racism, by no means an entirely new phenomenon, appears to have flourished. Paul Connolly's various research projects over a number of years (2001; 2002; 2004) on the development of prejudiced attitudes among very young children has warned us against the simplistic view that children are unaware of our adult perceptions of difference, and there is research from other parts of the world that bear out this reality in different contexts. An early years research project in which Stranmillis was a partner a few years ago recorded how a teacher in the Republic had long assumed that the children in her class were unaware of ethnic difference but noted how abusive racist language could "erupt

in a moment of conflict after years of harmony and seemingly deep friendship" (Kenny & McLaughlin, 2004). A study of bigoted attitudes across different European countries conducted in 2007 by Borooah and Mangan at the University of Ulster produced the uncomfortable finding that Northern Ireland's "bigotry level" was the highest in Europe, along with Greece. And it led to the stark headline – not entirely due to press hyperbole – depicting Northern Ireland as "the race-hate capital of the western world" (Belfast Telegraph, 07/02/2007)!

There are undoubtedly many people in our community who have learned to reach out their hands in gestures of peace to former antagonists, or in welcome to new and different neighbours. But such actions are not always received with reciprocity; there are still deep fissures in this society – and we have much to do to find ways together of dealing more constructively with difference. All institutions in society have a role in this process, but it is not surprising that many people continue to look to schools and to education, partly for an explanation of how we have failed in the past, and partly for help in finding new ways forward.

But an interface does not have to be a wall or a barrier; it can also be a bridge – a way across, a way through, a place of meeting, of opportunity and encounter where people can begin to make new relationships and learn how to share. This was symbolised graphically earlier this year at the opening of the Derry/Londonderry "Peace Bridge", which was marked by people crossing from the Waterside to the Cityside and vice-versa, a journey than many people had been extremely reluctant to make in earlier decades. A former barrier can indeed become a place of new meeting and encounter.

Education, too, is an interface – in fact, it is a set of interfaces: between the known and the unknown; between desire for learning and the achievement of understanding; between the world of the child and that of the adult; between the individual and society; between the past and the future; between familiarity and difference; between conflict and encounter; between the closed mind and the open mind … we could add many more. Teachers stand somewhere at that point of interchange, sometimes confidently, sometimes uncomfortably; we are aware of our role in facilitating those transitions that we call education and also well aware that we ourselves are part of the process – we, too, are the subjects of education, not just its agents. Good, bad or indifferent, we recognise our role as teacher and as learner to be indivisible. Sharing in education may depend to some degree on structures and on political will, but it also depends, ultimately most importantly, on the educator.

If we wish to argue that education has been primarily a barrier to sharing in Northern Ireland, there is no shortage of evidence for our case. The historian, Donald Akenson has written (in Bardon, 2009:246f) of the "depressingly ambiguous success" of Ireland's National Schools in the 19th century. Ambiguous because on the one hand National Schools certainly succeeded in enabling many poor people to get a basic education, but "a complete failure" in the intention of mixing Catholic and Protestant children at school. Over a century and a half of

further antagonism and extended separation at many levels leave us still with substantially separate parallel systems whereby still around 90% of pupils attend the school that is perceived to represent "their own community". I've often quoted these statistics and for a paper I was writing a few months ago I thought I'd better check them, counting in what we know about pupils who "cross-over" between systems, attendance at integrated schools and other relevant factors – and that number still holds true – it really does come out at about 90%!

Another fact relating to the 90th anniversary of the establishment of this undenominational college that should not be forgotten is the original intention for it to cater for the training of both Catholic and Protestant teachers; an intention which was realised only for a very short time between 1923 and 1925, at which point the Catholic male students who had already trained in Stranmillis found themselves having to retrain in order to be accepted to teach in Catholic schools (Beale & Phoenix, 1998). Thereafter, and for many years, we became the *de facto* "Protestant training college", and probably remain so in many people's perception despite our actual status, our strong commitment to inclusivity and our much more mixed intake in present times. Those who wish to defend educational separation, whether for religious or political reasons or a mixture of both, will undoubtedly argue that separate schooling, and the resulting "need" for separate teacher training, is a symptom of the conflict and wider separation, rather than a cause of it. I have long believed, however, that symptom and cause have become inextricably intertwined.

Stepping back for just a moment in order to try to understand some of the dynamic in this process, it is worth taking note of the work of the American political scientist Robert Putnam, who has written of the importance of social networks, not in the very recent sense of Facebook, etc., but in the sense of the community interconnectedness that he and others have called "social capital". In his best-known work, "Bowling Alone" (2000), Putnam wrote about how American society has lost many of the benefits of this over the years since the 1960s. Social capital, he argues, is both a private and a public good; it involves mutual obligations – reciprocity. He suggests that social capital has two dimensions – *"bonding"*, which is inward-looking and potentially exclusive, and *"bridging"* which is outward-looking and potentially inclusive. Both are important – bonding holds communities together, but bridging is what prevents that in-group loyalty from becoming out-group antagonism. Putnam cites the civil rights movement and ecumenical religious organisations as examples of bridging social capital, and his message is that people need to reconnect with one another across barriers.

Putnam was writing primarily about American society, but his model clearly has resonances in many other parts of the world, not least Northern Ireland, and it certainly seems to me to be very relevant to our divisions and to our separate education systems. Others have discussed these processes in terms of *interculturalism*, and although that term has been around for some time in some parts of the world it has now become much more common here, offering an internationally understood context to the work of challenging sectarianism and racism and

setting it in a more proactive context than the concept of multiculturalism. The idea of a multicultural society has been criticised for being merely descriptive or, worse, for implying that it is sufficient to recognise and accept the reality of ethnic difference – in effect permitting in-group bonding to take place without urging on such groups the need for connectivity or bridging. *Inter*culturalism is by its very nature proactive and interactive; it has been highlighted by the excellent human rights-oriented work of the Council of Europe and promoted by academics such as Ted Cantle, Chair of the Institute of Community Cohesion in England. A Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue in 2008 articulated the concept of "Intercultural Competences", an idea that has also been discussed in some detail by Cantle in a recent book (2012). In the words of the Council of Europe this means that schools

> *"are responsible for guiding and supporting young people in acquiring the tools and developing attitudes necessary for life in society in all its aspects or with strategies for acquiring them, and enable them to understand and acquire the values that underpin democratic life, introducing respect for human rights as the foundations for managing diversity and stimulating openness to other cultures"* (CoE, 2008a: p.30 – 4.3.2).

The key areas for developing intercultural competences in education, according to this document, are the teaching of history, languages and religion, though it urges educational institutions to set this in a broadly-based context – within what we would call the ethos of the institution – and it also emphasises that this is a lifelong process that applies no less to informal education, in youth groups, for example, and to higher education, and especially teacher education.

Education may be one of the barriers to a shared future, but it can also be a very important bridge. The approach that I've just outlined can help us to understand something of the process involved and guide us in shaping a rationale around the concern for bridge-building through education in Northern Ireland. It hints at structures that will help us towards the possibility of greater sharing in education. Indeed, it affirms some excellent work that already takes place in education here. It can also offer some insights into the challenges to which we need to respond and I want to use the rest of this talk to reflect specifically on some of them.

The key challenge is, of course, the very existence in our small society of parallel systems of education whereby 90% of children from the two perceived "predominant communities" continue to be educated apart. We have a shared Northern Ireland Curriculum – deliberately described in its first manifestation as a "Common Curriculum" – and the vast majority of what is taught and how it is taught is almost certainly significantly similar, if not identical, in both controlled and Catholic schools. The areas of difference - notably some aspects of religion, languages and sport – are not unimportant, but integrated schools have surely demonstrated that it is perfectly possible to cater for these differences within an inclusive system. I have never hidden my personal preference for an integrated system, but I don't plan to rehearse arguments here with which this audience will be very familiar, and I do recognise the reality that we can't yet achieve that goal. But I will offer a few observations, because I don't believe

that this debate on the future structure of education can stagnate for ever and I do believe that we need to debate the issues openly and honestly; avoidance in such issues is as effective as sweeping dust under a carpet.

Despite opinion poll and research evidence that has regularly shown a majority of people claiming that they support integrated education, and despite some very impressive evidence of excellent work in integrated schools, the integrated sector still only caters for around 6% to 7% of the school-going population. There are various reasons for this limited expansion, some to do with demographics, some relating to the difficulty of establishing new schools when there are already more than enough existing schools to cater for a local population, the cost of new-builds, and so forth. At a different level there are still in some quarters significant fears about "the other community", including the concern that "mixed" or inter-church marriages might result from any form of cross-community educational contact. But undoubtedly a major obstacle is the insistence of the Catholic Church in particular on maintaining its own distinct school system, albeit one almost completely funded by the state.

One of the key reasons given by the Catholic Church and its various educational bodies for taking this position is the belief that Catholic children should be educated within a Catholic ethos, one that is not value-free but synthesises both the sacred and the secular and is committed to faith formation in a three-way relationship between home, Church and school (Catholic Bishops, 2001). Yet at the same time I hear senior Catholic clergy acknowledging that increasing numbers of children attending Catholic schools are from families that do not practise their faith, which rather suggests that Catholic schools are not achieving their goal. School ethos is very important indeed, but to be effective I don't believe that it needs to attempt to be exclusive of a particular faith or philosophy. Indeed, in a still divided and increasingly diverse society perhaps it is far more important that it is a shared and inclusive ethos, recognising the reality and respectful of different ways of life and belief-systems. This is not to propose a value-free, wholly secular education, as the caricature sometimes suggests, and I believe that many of the values that Catholic writers have written eloquently and passionately about can certainly be found in other systems and, more importantly, in shared, inclusive contexts. As we develop models of shared education and new ways of relating schools from existing separate systems, we should not avoid or neglect the exploration of shared ethos. This will certainly not go far enough at the present time for those who defend the need for separate Catholic education, but no one system or school type has a monopoly on values and ethos.

Another argument that is frequently made in relation to separate faith schools, including Catholic schools, is one of human rights and parental choice. In support of this recourse is usually made to statements such as Article 2 of Protocol No. 1 of the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which provides that:

> "*No person shall be denied the right to education …* ***the State shall respect the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religions and philosophical convictions***".

This is a complex and often very emotive debate and deserves much fuller treatment, but I think that the traditional interpretation of this statement by some religious or secular groups has often missed the point. Surely this is primarily about protecting the rights of parents and children to their own culture and religion, particularly in circumstances where states have denied such rights to some or even all groups or have even sought to force them to adhere to an alternative belief system. To go beyond this and assume a right to separate religious schools is, I suspect, a step well beyond what was originally intended.

If shared education, even at a fairly tentative level, can help us to move into a less separate place and build the kind of trust that can ultimately reassure people that their identity would not be lost within a more unified system, then this would surely be a significant benefit. Some of the shared education experiments have, indeed, been based on the valuable learning that the integrated sector has shared with the other sectors – notably the PIEE Project based in the North Eastern Board which stemmed from the Integrat***ing*** Education project established by the NI Council for Integrated Education. (PIEE stands for the Primary Integrating / Enriching Education project.) Another excellent product of the integrated schools movement which has significantly contributed to the education system in general is NICIE's ABC book (2008) – an outline of what an *Anti-Bias Curriculum* can look like in practice. It could be seen as a handbook for any attempt to extend educational sharing and inclusivity and it deserves to be read and disseminated widely.

Although the major focus of any discussion on educational sharing in Northern Ireland is bound to be on the relationships between the larger communities here, the increased presence of other ethnic groups must also be addressed in any discussion of this kind. All school types have experienced this to a greater or lesser extent but the evidence suggests that the quality of response has been extremely variable. The focus of such response has often been on the language needs of newcomer children, and while this is very important, it seems to me that this may have been to the neglect of their cultural needs. Research that I carried out about nine years ago (Richardson, 2003) suggested a significant deficit in teachers' awareness of the needs and concerns of ethnic and religious minority families; teachers seemed in many cases simply not to know how to respond to requests regarding dress or diet or religious festivals, for instance. These issues were clearly not part of many teachers' knowledge, experience and training at that time. New structures and processes have been put in place since that work was carried out, but in a much more recent research project (Mawhinney et al, 2010) our research team discovered evidence of many similar deficiencies in teacher awareness and understanding, including at very senior levels. This, I am sure, in part continues to reflect the absence of issues around cultural and religious diversity from the school curriculum and teacher education during the period when many currently serving teachers were in that process. Things have improved within teacher education here in terms of intercultural awareness, though I don't know how uniformly that is the case; there is still a need for continuing professional development in these areas – though the opportunities for it seem to be diminishing as Education and Library Board personnel continue to be reduced.

Another dimension of this that I believe would help would be the recruitment of teachers from ethnic and religious minority communities, though there is little evidence of this at the present time. The teaching profession would benefit from this greater diversity within its membership, and children from minority backgrounds would also have valuable role models.

Another key area – right at the heart of my own concerns – relates to the role of religion in schools and in particular to the teaching of Religious Education. I believe this to be extremely important not least because it can play a central role within many of the issues that we are discussing this evening. It's a role that has been acknowledged increasingly in recent years by international bodies such as the Council of Europe – bodies which for many years almost certainly did their best to steer clear of any discussion of the place of religion in schools. The 2008 Council of Europe White Paper on Intercultural Dialogue that I quoted earlier (CoE, 2008a) afforded this issue a significant place in the process of developing intercultural competences through education. A recommendation that same year agreed and adopted by the Council's Committee of Ministers (CoE, 2008b) encouraged member states to "*pursue initiatives in the field of intercultural education relating to the diversity of religions and non-religious convictions in order to promote tolerance and the development of a culture of 'living together'*". The Council has also produced support materials for teachers including a text book that I use widely in my own teaching (Keast, 2007). And yet there is little doubt that many teachers are very uncertain about the place of RE, especially in relation to dealing with issues around Catholics and Protestants and the possibility of shared learning. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is one area of the curriculum that has not been given much time when it comes to deciding what can be done together. Religion has often been perceived as the ultimate no-go area in educational discussion, and the history of education probably reinforces these fears. Even in the integrated schools, where there has often been some very good work on developing inclusive ways of teaching RE, the need to accommodate different religious expectations within the school has led some teachers and others to a belief born of frustration that religion creates too many problems, especially when – against all the instincts of integrated education – it is decided that such teaching has to be done separately. It's not surprising that many people seem to wish that religion could be taken out of the educational equation altogether, but that, I believe would only leave a vacuum. Evidence from the United States or France, where – for quite different reasons – RE is not part of the school curriculum, indicates that religious topics have been recognised as too important to omit and so have been dealt with through other curriculum areas such as History, Social Studies or Ethics.

Confusion over the purposes of RE still impacts on this discussion. When I speak of Religious Education I make a very clear distinction between education and instruction. The latter is in my view the responsibility of the Churches and other faith communities, not of the publicly funded schools. I know that this goes strongly against the traditional denominational and catechetical approach in the Catholic maintained sector, and it also challenges the traditional non-denominational but "essentially Christian" expectations of many in the Protestant community too. But I believe that shared Religious Education, taught on the basis of

professional principles and practice, in which pupils learn both about and from familiar and unfamiliar religious traditions in an open-ended, inclusive and mutual context is important and an essential part of the educational task as we deal with our divisions and our diversity. This requires the development of what we might call "faith literacy" – a background knowledge about Christianity and other faiths, coupled with an appropriate vocabulary and a capacity for sharing and discussing religious ideas openly and inclusively. When children and young people can do this in a shared rather than an exclusive context it is far more meaningful and can help to dispel stereotypes and develop respect. Where religion continues to be taught only within a mono-cultural context, the opportunity for learning from that kind of encounter is lost.

By no means unrelated to this is the requirement that teachers wishing to teach in Catholic primary schools must have a Church-accredited RE Certificate. This effectively excludes teachers who are not Catholic from working in such schools, and for me this raises serious issues of professional equality – and it is yet another significant barrier to the possibility of more inclusive and shared practice.

Our "essentially Christian" Religious Education Core Syllabus in Northern Ireland (Department of Education, 2007), devised by representatives of the larger Christian denominations without reference to members of other faith communities, contributes little to the possibility of intercultural learning, and it is time that government had the courage to insist on a broader base and more inclusive programmes of study. I don't wish to see the Churches excluded from this process, but rather to be engaged in partnership with others, as they are in other parts of the UK and many other countries. My own recent research suggests that teachers in all school sectors are much more open to an RE that takes diversity seriously than we may previously have thought. It would indeed be a sign of maturity within shared education settings of various kinds if inclusive religious education were to become a regular feature of their work. And just maybe it would also persuade those who still wish to keep religious learning separate that there is nothing to fear from the sharing of religious education.

While government still seems to be struggling with its proposed replacement for the Shared Future policy, educational community relations policy has moved on, and in March 2011 the CRED policy – *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education* – was published. While there are many good things in that policy, not least a continuing commitment to this area as a significant dimension of what education is about, many teachers and activists in the community relations sector remain unhappy about some of its approaches. There has been particular concern about the intention to move away from what it describes as "the dependency on external organisations" that has been a long-time feature of this work. The desire "*to embed this work firmly within educational settings by providing a strong skills base for educators and the required teaching resources*" (Department of Education, 2011, para. 5.7) is a perfectly appropriate one, but schools alone will certainly struggle to achieve this without additional support. The high quality organisations that continue to work in this field – some of them from long before government took a serious interest in such work – have the skills,

resources and wisdom to support schools in this task without making the mistake of doing it for them. I know this because I have had the privilege of working with these skilled professionals over many years, and they regularly support us here in our own Diversity and Mutual Understanding programme with St. Mary's University College. I don't believe that at this stage in the process we can afford to lose from the system the valuable contributions of organisations like Community Relations in Schools, Corrymeela, Northern Ireland Children's Enterprise, the YMCA, Speedwell and several others, and I know that this view is shared by staff within the schools where they work. Some of my own students have just returned from short placements with these organisations and they too have gained insights into this area of work that many of them have not gained from their regular placements.

Many of the challenges to shared education inevitably come back to where we are right now – to teacher education. The Council of Europe White Paper has emphasised the significant role of institutions like this one:

> *"Teacher-training curricula need to teach educational strategies and working methods to prepare teachers to manage the new situations arising from diversity, discrimination, racism, xenophobia, sexism and marginalisation and to resolve conflicts peacefully, as well as to foster a global approach to institutional life on the basis of democracy and human rights"* (CoE, 2008a, p.32 – 4.3.5).

In many areas of our work here in Stranmillis we enjoy good working relationships with our colleagues in St. Mary's, which we often and appropriately call "our sister college". And yet while there is a degree of sharing we remain separate institutions and that very separateness limits the potential for developing greater sharing in education. Our joint Diversity and Mutual Understanding programme has many excellent dimensions but is missed by too many students who, for one reason or another, will not travel the short physical or perhaps the longer mental distance between the two institutions. We could do so much more of this to much greater effect if we were able to find some way of being a *shared* institution – and I use that term deliberately, because there may be different ways of doing just that. I don't want to be simplistic about this, and I am aware of the many pitfalls in such a proposal. But it's my personal hope that in our local teacher education system we may in the future be able to model more effectively the educational sharing that we desire for our schools.

We have spent many years where the educational focus has been on bonding; it is now surely time for an emphasis on bridging. Bridge-building in education is clearly about much more than just getting pupils together in the same place. It must be interactive; there needs to be a process of interpersonal and inter-community encounter. In attempting to move forward to new levels of educational sharing we may well have to settle in the interim for something less than our ideal solution. But we can't afford to go back to those very separate parallel worlds in which we once too comfortably lived; that is the very antithesis of a shared future.

We have some very good schools in Northern Ireland, throughout the sectors, and shared education is certainly not about abandoning these for the sake of some higher, purer good. But it is about finding ways of making them even more effective as places of sharing, of new

learning, of creating structures and developing processes that can support a society that is more confident in its identity and its diversity.

For me these concepts are right at the heart of education itself. When UNESCO reported in 1996 on the findings of their "Task Force on Education for the 21st Century", they wrote of *The Four Pillars of Education*:

Learning to Know
Learning to Do
Learning to Live Together
Learning to Be (UNESCO, 1996).

Learning to live together can ultimately only be achieved by encounter, by being together, by finding new ways of sharing. We owe it to the children who will be the future that we will not see to make sure as best we possibly can that we don't simply pass on our mistakes, our defensive prejudices, our missed opportunities; that we make every effort to build the shared future that we still only struggle towards. And even the very process of moving towards that goal must be done together.

Denis Lawrence has also summed up what is, for me, the essence of education:

> ***"Education is not just about learning cognitive skills. It is also about helping children to learn about themselves, …"*** (bonding)
>
> ***"… to be able to live peaceably with themselves and with others …"*** (bridging)
>
> ***"… and to help them to develop into competent, mature, self-motivated adults."***
> (Lawrence, 1996:xii)

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