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Shared Education in Northern Ireland: A Qualitative Study of Intergroup Contact

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Shared Education in Northern Ireland:
A Qualitative Study of Intergroup Contact

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Abstract

This thesis explores students' experiences of intergroup contact in two cross-community shared education projects in Northern Ireland. A recent innovation, shared education involves collaboration between separate schools to deliver joint classes and activities. A core aim of this collaboration is to enhance community relations by providing regular opportunities for young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds to meet. This study considers participants' experiences of shared education in the light of this aim, focusing on their interpretations and responses within particular social, historical and biographical contexts.

The study employs contact theory as its theoretical framework and adopts a qualitative approach, in response to calls for research on intergroup contact that is sensitive to participants' perspectives. Analysis of interview and observation data elucidates the contextual influences on pupils' interpretive frameworks and considers how these, along with features of the contact situation, inform their expectations and experiences of shared education. The findings suggest that tendencies towards separation and feelings of anxiety can be reduced when the features of the shared class are conducive to contact – i.e. where the teaching style, class composition and classroom design help to encourage interaction. However, where these features are not sympathetic, few participants report forming acquaintances with pupils from the other group. The analysis also indicates that interaction, where it occurs, tends to focus on group similarities and non-contentious subjects. Rarely do participating students engage with those aspects of difference that are the most divisive in terms of intergroup relations.

In exploring processes of contact via shared education from the perspective of participating pupils, this thesis makes an original contribution to the bodies of literature on intergroup contact, education and community relations. Furthermore, the use of a qualitative approach highlights the complexity of certain taken-for-granted concepts in contact theory, with implications for the design of future studies.

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Abbreviations and acronyms

CCEA	Council for Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment
CCMS	Council for Catholic Maintained Schools
CH	Cultural Heritage
CoPE	Certificate of Personal Effectiveness
CRED	Community Relations, Equality and Diversity
DENI	Department of Education of Northern Ireland.
DfE	Department for Education (England)
ELB	Education and Library Board
EMU	Education for Mutual Understanding
ETI	Education and Training Inspectorate
FSM	Free school meals
GAA	Gaelic Athletic Association
GCSE	General Certificate of Secondary Education
NI	Northern Ireland
NISRA	Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (NI)
SEN	Special educational needs
SEP	Sharing Education Programme

Chapter 1: Introduction

"Just two words state the objection to faith-based schools:
Northern Ireland."[1]

Background and context

The words of the philosopher A.C. Grayling reflect a widespread perception of the relationship between education and conflict in Northern Ireland. Here, critics argue, the practice of educating Catholic and Protestant children in separate denominational schools has contributed to inter-community division by socialising them into "distinctive worlds" (Gallagher, 2005a, p.158) and engendering mutual ignorance (Murray, 1985, Darby *et al.*, 1977). This interpretation is strongly contested by those involved in the provision of faith-based education, who argue that their schools reflect a commitment to reconciliation, the common good, and values such as love, justice and solidarity (CCMS, 2007; Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland, 2001). Characterised by strong arguments and emotions on all sides, this debate remains ongoing; meanwhile, more than 90 per cent of pupils continue to attend schools which are either predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant.

Despite their disagreements, the arguments of each of the parties to this discussion reflect a belief that schools should help to foster integration and social cohesion, particularly in a society like Northern Ireland which remains in transition from conflict to peace. From the same perspective, educationalists, policymakers and concerned others have, over recent decades, implemented a number of educational initiatives to promote reconciliation between Catholic and Protestant pupils. These have experienced mixed fortunes: while curricular programmes have evolved into elements of citizenship education, central funding for contact schemes between Catholic and Protestant schools has recently ended (DENI, 2011; Richardson, 2011a; Gallagher, 2004). Furthermore, while the parent-led integrated sector has weathered the opposition that it faced following the foundation of the first integrated schools in the 1980s (Hansson, O'Connor-Bones and McCord, 2013), only 7 per cent of the region's pupils are educated in formally mixed schools (DENI, 2014a).

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[1] A.C. Grayling (2005); see also Dinwoodie (2013).

As a result, most children in Northern Ireland attend schools which provide them with limited opportunities to meet and learn alongside members of the other ethno-religious group.

It is in this context that a fourth approach, known as 'shared education', has been developed to address division and promote integration through schools. Shared education programmes, which are the subject of this doctoral thesis, work with existing controlled/Protestant, maintained/Catholic, and integrated schools to develop cross-community partnerships which jointly deliver shared classes and activities (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). Pupils at each institution move between the schools to undertake the relevant subject or activity in mixed groups. The aims of this arrangement are threefold: to extend and improve educational opportunities for pupils; to promote financial savings for schools; and to improve community relations by bringing Catholic and Protestant pupils together on a regular basis (Duffy and Gallagher, 2014; Hughes *et al.*, 2012). First introduced in 2007, shared education has largely been delivered to date through independent projects coordinated by statutory and voluntary sector organisations and financed through philanthropic funding. In recent years, however, these programmes have attracted significant attention from policymakers, to the extent that commitments to develop and extend shared education were included in the most recent Programme for Government of the Northern Ireland Executive (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011).

From a community relations perspective, shared education aims to ensure that opportunities for cross-cultural contact are available to pupils attending all types of school, not only those in the integrated sector (Hughes *et al.*, 2012; Knox, 2010). It is hoped that frequent meeting, over a sustained period of time, will permit the development of relationships between young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds and promote more positive perceptions of the other religious group. In this respect, shared education – like school contact programmes and integrated schools before it – is informed by an understanding of intergroup contact theory, which posits that positive contact with a member of another group (usually a stigmatised or negatively stereotyped group) should result in more positive evaluation of the group as a whole (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; Allport, 1958).

Research to date has indicated that shared education can contribute to more favourable views of members of the other religious group, in line with the principles

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of contact theory. Compared with those at schools which are not involved in such programmes, young people who attend participating schools have typically reported more friends from the other religious group, less anxiety when interacting with members of that group, and more positive attitudes towards the other group as a whole (Hughes *et al.*, 2012, 2010). In comparison, however, little is known of the ways that young people perceive and experience these intergroup encounters. There has been limited research, for example, into pupils' expectations of contact through shared education, the kinds of contact that occur during shared classes and activities, and the nature of the relationships that result. Only one study (Hughes, 2014; Hughes *et al.*, 2010) has considered the perspectives of students in any depth; other research into shared education has either focused on the perspectives of teachers (Duffy and Gallagher, 2014, 2012; Knox, 2010; Donnelly and Gallagher, 2008) or has only included pupils as sources of supplementary data (Borooah and Knox, 2012).

This PhD thesis aims to address these gaps by exploring in depth the views and experiences of pupils participating in shared education in two case study school partnerships. The perspectives of these young people are important as they represent the main target group for shared education: it is their attitudes and relationship patterns that the programme seeks to alter to achieve its aim of improving community relations. To ensure that such programmes can contribute effectively to this goal, those involved in their delivery require an understanding of pupils' perceptions and experiences of shared education, as well as the factors that influence their perspectives. These influences may be intrinsic or extrinsic: while intrinsic factors include features of the programme (such as its frequency, location and mode of delivery), extrinsic factors may include pupils' backgrounds and their personal biographies. Both are relevant to informing young people's responses in mixed settings and are thus important to understanding their trajectories through shared education.

Research aims and questions

Reflecting these research concerns, the overarching aim of this thesis is to explore pupils' experiences of participation in a shared education programme against the programme aim of enhancing community relations. The study employs contact theory as the theoretical framework, but draws particularly on the work of Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2005) and Connolly (2000). These authors have exhorted

researchers to pay greater attention to the contextual influences on contact and the "interpretive frameworks and practices" that participants employ during intergroup encounters (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005, p.704).

To guide and structure the project, the study poses three research questions:

1. How do participants in the two shared education partnerships interpret and navigate situations of contact based on their biography, background and previous experience?

2. How do features of the contact situation influence pupils' relationships and responses to others?

3. How do pupils respond to and negotiate matters of difference within shared education?

To answer these questions, the research adopts a constructionist-interpretivist perspective and a comparative case study approach. The selected cases are collaborative partnerships that each comprise one Catholic and one Protestant post-primary school. Both are involved in the Sharing Education Programme (SEP), coordinated by Queen's University. Qualitative methods are employed to collect data: small group interviews with pupils serve as the principal research method, with classroom observations and one-to-one interviews with teachers providing additional data. A qualitative approach is selected because it permits access to participants' accounts of their experiences and the meanings that they impute to these (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005). Qualitative methods are also particularly appropriate to exploring the unfolding course and nature of contact, thus permitting a more thorough understanding of what happens when group members meet and engage with each other, an aspect often overlooked in quantitative analyses.

Contribution to knowledge

In answering the research questions above, this thesis makes an original contribution to the body of knowledge relating to education and community relations and to research on intergroup contact. In the first respect, this thesis constitutes the most extensive in-depth study to date of shared education, which itself represents an innovative approach to addressing division and promoting integration within the

education system. The decision to focus on pupils' experiences, in particular, means that this research contributes new insights to the literature on shared education and, more broadly, to the body of research on education and social cohesion. In addition, the choice of research sites is novel, as neither of the two pairs of schools has participated in research of this nature and depth previously.

In terms of the focus of the study, this thesis addresses a number of topics that have hitherto received little attention within studies of shared education programmes. These include pupils' understanding of the purpose of shared education and the reasons for their participation; their experiences of attending a school associated with the other community; the features of the shared class which promote or impede interaction; and the ways that participating students address matters of cultural, political and religious difference, which remain sources of contention in the Northern Irish context. The research makes a distinctive contribution to knowledge in these respects, with important implications for the future design of shared education and similar initiatives.

Within the literature on intergroup contact and desegregation, this thesis is also distinctive as one of relatively few studies to employ a qualitative approach. In so doing, it moves away from more traditional approaches to researching contact, which tend to emphasise researchers' conceptual understanding, and focuses instead on the meanings that participants ascribe to their experience. The analysis of this qualitative data highlights the range of influences that inform students' expectations and interpretations of intergroup contact, and reveals the multifaceted and sometimes contradictory nature of these. It thus permits a more nuanced appreciation of the contextual dynamics of contact than is often possible in quantitative studies. As a result, the research raises a number of previously overlooked issues for social psychologists regarding the definition and measurement of key concepts within contact research.

Definition of terms

As a function of the subject matter and the theoretical framework, this study employs certain terms which require definition from the outset. Firstly, while acknowledging the significant overlap of political, cultural and religious identities in Northern Ireland, this research prefers the descriptors 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' to

denote pupils' ethno-religious background. It also favours the terms 'religious group'/ 'ethno-religious group' as non-specific terms to refer to either community. The selection of these terms reflects this study's focus on schools, where separation occurs along religious lines. In addition, employing the terminology of social psychology, from which contact theory originates, this research also uses the terms 'ingroup' and 'outgroup'. The former is used to denote one's own religious group, the latter to refer to the other group.

In discussions of the provision of distinctive forms of education, this thesis refers to 'faith school(s)' and 'separate schools'. The first of these is relevant to the broad debate about faith-based education in the UK and Ireland. It is used to refer to schools which have an explicit religious character and include representatives from the relevant religious tradition(s) on their governing bodies. The term 'separate schools' is primarily used in the Northern Ireland context, where it denotes institutions that are predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant in intake. The thesis also uses the terms 'maintained'/'controlled' and 'Catholic'/ 'Protestant' to refer to the respective schools and the sectors of which they are part. The word 'maintained' is used to indicate schools that are managed by representatives of the Catholic church, while the word 'controlled' refers to schools that are under the direct authority of state education boards. Although the latter are nominally non-denominational, they attract a mostly Protestant intake and appoint representatives from the main Protestant churches to their boards. For this reason, while acknowledging that the term is not universally accepted, this study also refers to these as 'Protestant schools'; similarly, the term 'Catholic schools' is used to refer to those in the maintained sector.

Structure of the thesis

Following this introduction, the thesis begins by situating the study in the context of UK-wide debates about (state-funded) faith schools and social cohesion. The first half of chapter 2 provides an overview of the arguments regarding faith schools' compatibility with social unity and integration. In the second half of the chapter, I briefly explore the nature of this debate in Northern Ireland, before outlining the initiatives that have been implemented within the region's schools to address division and encourage greater mutual understanding. The chapter closes with a more detailed discussion of the development of shared education and the research that has been undertaken to date on its implementation and impact.

As contact theory informs these initiatives and provides the theoretical framework for this study, chapter 3 presents an overview of theory and research in the field of intergroup contact. This chapter also discusses criticism of the theoretical and methodological approaches adopted in this area, including the concerns that contact theory overlooks the social and political context and that contact research is frequently 'idealistic' in its approach. This analysis informs the rationale for this study and the selection of the research design and methods, which are described in chapter 4.

Chapters 5 to 8 present the findings of this study. Chapter 5 sets the context for the subsequent chapters, providing some background information on the two partnerships involved in the research and the towns in which they are located. The chapter goes on to explore the range of influences and experiences that inform the interpretive frameworks that pupils employ during shared education. The first part of chapter 6 examines students' reasons for selecting shared classes and their expectations of contact prior to participation. The second part discusses students' perspectives and responses when attending the other school. Chapter 7 reports pupils' experiences of contact within shared classes and activities, and explores the range of factors that promote or constrain interaction. It also considers the nature of the relationships that pupils develop and addresses other outcomes of participation. Finally, chapter 8 focuses on the ways that difference – in the form of religious, cultural and political diversity, and associated issues of conflict and inequality – is addressed through shared education.

Chapter 9 concludes the thesis with an overview of the main findings of this study and the implications for policy, theory and practice. The thesis closes with some reflection on the limitations of the research and suggestions for future studies relating to shared education and community relations. It is hoped that the discussion in this chapter can inform the future development of programmes and policies that support greater integration within the education system of Northern Ireland.

Chapter 2: Faith schools and social cohesion

In each of the nations of the UK, the involvement of religious organisations in the provision of state-funded education is well established. In England and Wales, the current system of universal state education was achieved in part by extending funding to schools managed by the Anglican, Catholic and non-conformist churches during the nineteenth century, and bringing these into the state system over time (Wright, 2003; Judge, 2001). Similarly, in Scotland, the development of state education involved, from 1872, the transfer of control of schools from the Church of Scotland and most free churches to state school boards, and from 1918, the absorption of Catholic and Episcopal schools into the state system (Flint, 2007; Conroy, 2001). In Northern Ireland, following partition in 1921, proposals for a non-denominational school system were hindered by Catholic authorities' refusal to join Protestant representatives in transferring their schools to the state (Gallagher, 2004; Smith, 2001). State schools thus maintained a Protestant character and a dual system of schooling was instituted, which – with revised funding arrangements – largely continues today (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006; Smith, 2001).

The presence of faith schools within the UK's education systems thus reflects the pragmatism of the architects of state education: as the churches were already managing schools, it was logical that these should provide the basis of the state system. At a more ideological level, however, the role of religious organisations in managing state-funded schools, delivering education, and controlling admissions has generated significant debate. Opponents and supporters of faith-based education trade arguments in two main areas: the extent to which faith schools, which cater primarily for members of a particular faith tradition, contribute to religious and ethnic division; and the compatibility of faith schools with the principles of liberal democratic education, particularly the development of rational autonomy. In the context of this study, it is the arguments in the first area which are of greatest interest. The first half of this chapter provides a summary of these with reference to the constituent countries of the UK.

The second half of this chapter considers how the debate about separate schools has developed in Northern Ireland, where denominational education is the norm for most pupils. Questions about faith schooling are especially apposite in this part of

the UK, which, 16 years after the signing of the Good Friday peace agreement, continues to be profoundly divided along religious and political lines. The discussion in this section considers how commentators have perceived the relationship between schooling and social discord in the region. In response to concerns about social division, in which separate schools have been implicated, a number of practical measures have been introduced to increase mutual understanding and improve community relations through education. The final section of this chapter explores these, concluding with an overview of the most recent initiative, shared education, which provides the focus for the research reported later in this thesis.

The debate concerning faith schools

Arguments regarding faith schooling and social cohesion tend to cluster into three groups. In one group are arguments concerning the very separation of students by faith and the implications of monofaith (and potentially monocultural) schooling for cohesion. A second group of arguments addresses the curriculum and values that are taught within faith schools, and considers the potential consequences of these for social unity. Finally, a third set of arguments explores the claims of parents and communities to educate their children in accordance with their religious and cultural beliefs, focusing particularly on the validity of such claims in a plural society. Each of these is considered in turn in the following sections.

Separation and 'segregation'

In the wider debate about social cohesion, the major criticism levelled at faith schools is that they encourage the separation of pupils by religion – and, therefore, often by ethnicity – and thus do not permit the social mixing necessary for the development of a tolerant and inclusive society. In the UK, this became an issue of significant concern in 2001, following several events which highlighted existing racial and sectarian tensions: disturbances involving young men from white and south Asian (Pakistani and Bangladeshi) backgrounds in the northern English towns of Oldham, Burnley and Bradford; violent protests in north Belfast, where Catholic parents and children were targeted by Protestants as they travelled through a loyalist area to reach the Catholic Holy Cross Primary School; and the attacks of 11th September in New York, which raised concerns about 'radicalisation' within Muslim communities. These events appeared to renew and deepen anxieties in the public sphere about monofaith schooling and its effects (Pyke, 2003; McVeigh,

2001; BBC News, 2001). The independent review of the unrest in Oldham, Burnley and Bradford fuelled these concerns further. Implicating schools in the 'segregation' that was described in these areas, the review team reported that "some existing faith schools appear to be operating discriminatory policies where religious affiliations protect cultural and ethnic divisions" (Home Office, 2001, p.33). Coinciding with the Labour government's announcement of plans to expand faith schooling, this provoked much discussion within the academic community and media about faith schools' impact on social cohesion.

Within this debate, opponents of faith schooling claim that the separate education of pupils along religious lines compromises the development of social unity. Williams (1998), summarising the arguments of critics of faith schools, notes that objections commonly address two dimensions: the civic/social and the educational. In the first case, opponents of faith schools suggest that, because young people will be expected as adults to live and work alongside those from different religious and cultural backgrounds, it makes sense that they should be educated together. In the second case, critics argue that faith schooling denies young people the opportunity to meet others from a range of cultural backgrounds and thus to learn respect and tolerance for difference. Unless pupils have such opportunities at school, opponents argue, there is a risk of social segregation and, consequently, of avoidance, ignorance and fear (British Humanist Association, 2013; Accord Coalition, 2012; Home Office, 2001). Moreover, where religious or ethnic tensions are prevalent in wider society, faith schools may be viewed as sustaining, if not legitimising, existing divisions. Qualitative research for Glasgow City Council found, for example, that local residents commonly viewed the existence of parallel state and Catholic school sectors as a symbol of the continued presence of sectarianism in Scottish society (NFO Social Research, 2003).

These criticisms of faith schools meet three main responses, which a) challenge the claim that faith schools are divisive; b) question the assumption that fully integrated schooling is more conducive to cohesion; or c) point to other, more significant causes of ethnic and religious division. Those who challenge claims of divisiveness refer to the role of the curriculum in promoting cohesion and to the positive and inclusive values taught in faith schools (see the section below). Supporters also refute the suggestion that faith schools constitute monocultural, monofaith enclaves. Grace (2012, p.502) argues, for example, that "[t]he modern conception of a faith-

based school has moved from a ghetto model (providing schooling only for members of the faith) to a community model (providing for members of the faith and also for others [subject to places available] who wish to have access to its services)".

Implicit in these arguments is the suggestion that faith schools, being increasingly inclusive, *can* provide opportunities for students to mix with those of other faith backgrounds. However, this is circumscribed by the popularity of the school: where schools have more applicants than available places, they may employ religious criteria to select pupils and thus prevent those from other backgrounds from obtaining a place (West, Barham and Hind, 2011; Pring, 2005). Proponents also point to the ethnic diversity within faith schools and the consequent opportunities for intercultural exchange (Morris, McDaid and Potter, 2011); however, statistics relating to faith schools in England suggest that particular ethnic groups (black African and black Caribbean) are over-represented and others (Indian, Pakistani and Bangladeshi) are under-represented (Allen and West, 2011). While faith school advocates make important points in challenging the monocultural image of their schools, these arguments often overlook the limits on diversity that can result from the use of religious criteria in schools' admissions processes.

The second response adopts a different standpoint from the first and questions the assumption that the presence of pupils from different ethnic and religious backgrounds in the same school necessarily leads to greater cohesion. In this regard, Conroy (2001) argues that there is little evidence to show that common schools are more successful than faith schools at reducing division. Similarly, Short (2003) questions whether the factors that facilitate positive interaction between pupils from different ethnic or religious backgrounds – such as equal status and co-operation, rather than competition – can be adequately implemented within the common school. Furthermore, Hemming (2011) suggests that co-presence alone is insufficient to promote integration; rather, he argues that this depends on the nature of the interaction that takes place in the school. Overall, the thrust of these arguments is, if not to claim that faith schools are particularly successful at promoting cohesion, then to query the belief that common schools are any more effective.

The third argument deployed in defence of faith schools is that they are not the principal cause of social division and, as a result, the dismantling of faith-based education will not constitute a panacea for existing tensions. In both Scotland and Northern Ireland, this argument has been deployed in response to criticism that the existence of a separate Catholic sector perpetuates sectarianism. In the Scottish context, Flint (2012, p.508) points to a more widespread "'othering' of the Irish-origin and Catholic population that cannot be attributed to the presence of Catholic schools". In Northern Ireland, similarly, Catholic authorities have highlighted inequality and social injustice as causes of division, and dismissed claims about the contribution of separate schooling (Gallagher, 2005a). Commentators have also argued that faith schools do not create segregated environments so much as reflect existing segregation, which may have arisen from inequalities in employment and housing or from fears of racism or sectarianism (Halstead and McLaughlin, 2005). In sum, this line of argument depicts separate schooling as merely a symptom of disunity, with greater cohesion only possible once more entrenched social problems are addressed.

Curriculum, norms and values

Beyond the critique that faith schools prevent pupils from learning about diversity through encounter, these schools have also received criticism for the content of their teaching. As this section discusses, opponents argue that faith schools compromise social cohesion because a) they fail to teach a curriculum that engenders understanding of, and respect for, other faiths and cultures, and/or b) because they promote norms and values that are at odds with those which modern liberal democracies should endorse. In response, supporters of faith schooling offer counter-arguments to demonstrate that faith schools' teaching is compatible with social cohesion. A minority also defend faith schools on the basis of pluralism, questioning the legitimacy of enforcing 'liberal values' or a common, secular curriculum in schools.

In these debates, concerns about the curriculum of faith schools largely relate to the delivery of potentially contentious subjects, such as religious education (RE) and citizenship. These concerns address both the content of the curriculum and the dominant pedagogies. In respect of citizenship education in England and Wales, King (2010), though herself supportive of faith schools, acknowledges that there are areas of the national curriculum – particularly regarding "'socially accepted' laws

and practices" relating to same-sex relationships and abortion (p.284) – which may conflict with the religious teachings endorsed by the school. If schools decide in such cases to prioritise religious tenets, the resolution may undermine the purpose of a common curriculum. With regard to RE, the exemption of most faith schools in England and Wales from requirements to teach according to the locally-agreed RE syllabus has raised further concerns about the role of these schools in addressing religious diversity (Berkeley, 2008). Even where common RE curricula are in place, such as in Northern Ireland, it is argued that the delivery of the curriculum continues to reflect the particular religious and cultural perspectives of schools and teachers (Richardson, 2013, 2010). According to critics, it is through these curriculum choices and teaching approaches that separate schools – often in subtle ways – prevent the development of shared and mutual understanding among pupils.

The mores and values that faith schools impart to students have also been a source of unease among those with reservations about faith-based education. Dwyer and Parutis (2012, p.2), reviewing literature on geographies of education, observe that, while schools in general are defined as "institutional spaces within which...young people encounter the socio-spatial transmission of normative values", faith schools have been depicted as "alternative spaces where dominant narratives are challenged, negotiated or reworked". Resulting concerns have particularly addressed faith schools' potential challenge to secular liberal norms of gender equality and tolerance of diversity in sexual orientation (Doward, 2012; Mason, 2003). Discussion in this area makes notable reference to Muslim schools, which have been positioned in public discourse as threatening principles of equality and national values, howsoever defined (Hurst, 2014; Tinker, 2009; Hewer, 2001). In all arguments of this type, however, the criticism is at heart the same: that the values promoted by faith schools may conflict with the public norms of liberal democratic societies, thus compromising the contribution of these schools to social cohesion.

Among defenders of faith schooling, the principal response to such criticism is to argue that, other than in a tiny minority of cases, their curricula and values *are* compatible with cohesion (Morris, 2012; Williams, 1998). Furthermore, they suggest that faith schools' presence within the government-regulated state system helps to ensure that this is the case (Brighouse, 2005). In England, supporters have cited the reports of school inspections that found Catholic and Anglican schools to be more effective than non-faith schools at promoting community cohesion (Morris, McDaid

and Potter, 2011; Jesson, 2009). Proponents also insist that the faith-based values encouraged in such schools are supportive of social unity, reflecting concerns with equality, justice, compassion and love (Grace, 2012; King, 2010). In turn, these arguments have generated a counter-response, rooted in empirical studies that suggest that teaching alone – that is, with no supplementary direct contact – may be insufficient to develop an understanding of cultural difference. For example, in an ethnographic study of a faith school in the north of England, Hemming (2011) highlights the divergence between pupils' knowledge of 'socially acceptable' discourses (anti-racist, pro-equality) and their behaviour towards others. Similarly, Hughes (2011) observes stereotyping and sectarianism among pupils at a Protestant school in Northern Ireland, despite the school's avowed commitment to promoting 'Christian values', including equality and respect.

While the first response to criticisms about faith schools' curricula and values is to deny their incompatibility with cohesion, the second response questions the legitimacy of the criticism itself. Specifically, it queries the implication that state schools should inculcate a particular set of norms and values among young people. Halstead and McLaughlin (2005) suggest that to do so would conflict with principles of pluralism in liberal democracies. They argue that, while it is acceptable for schools to encourage adherence to certain unifying values (such as civic respect) in the public domain, it is illegitimate for them to enforce cohesion through the imposition of unifying values (for example, the acceptance of homosexuality) in the private domain. Morris (2012) defends curricular freedom in faith schools with a similar appeal to pluralism. He suggests that any attempt to centralise and standardise the content of RE would erode "strong pluralism" within education – where "definite, differing, conflicting and often incompatible positions are allowed" (p.518) – and argues in support of curricular diversity from this perspective. In both cases, these authors move beyond simple engagement with arguments about 'divisiveness' to query the legitimacy in liberal democracies of promoting cohesion via the prescription of particular norms and values.

Parental rights and the protection of minorities

The third set of arguments regarding faith schooling focuses on the rights of parents and communities to educate their children within a particular faith. Although the arguments concerning rights are more indirectly related to social cohesion, they are relevant inasmuch as these rights provide a legal basis for the separation of children

by faith. The significant parental right in this regard is "the right of parents to ensure such education and teaching in conformity with their own religious and philosophical convictions", which is enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights (Article 2, first protocol) and, in the UK, in the 1998 Human Rights Act (Article 2, first protocol). This legislation is often interpreted by advocates of faith-based education as supporting the existence of faith schools on the grounds that they permit parents to make a genuine choice from a range of options (Morris, 2012; Grace, 2012).

Those opposing faith schools challenge both the legitimacy of parents' rights and the interpretation that these support the establishment of separate faith schools. It is argued, for example, that parents' rights in this regard may conflict with young people's rights under the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) to freedom of expression, which includes the "freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds" (Article 13.1) (Mason, 2003). This may be particularly true in the absence of a requirement for certain categories of school (e.g. voluntary aided schools and 'free schools' in England) to teach about a range of religious traditions (Mason, 2003). Furthermore, both Mason and Parker-Jenkins (2005) argue that the faith criteria operating in many schools conflict with young people's rights not to experience "discrimination or punishment on the basis of the status, activities, expressed opinions or beliefs of the child's parents, legal guardians, or family members" (UNCRC, Article 2.2). With relevance for arguments about social cohesion, these perspectives suggest that the rights of parents may conflict with the rights of (their own) children to experience a diversity of worldviews and the rights of (other people's) children to escape unfair and unequal treatment.

Critics of faith schools also contest the interpretation that separate schools are required for the enactment of parents' rights to educate their children in line with their religious convictions. Mason (2003) proposes an alternative reading of the same legislation as supporting what she terms "diversity within unity" – that is, "a common core in a common school that respects many beliefs and offers facilities and opportunities for observance and teaching in conformity with them" (2003, p.121). She refers to the position of Amnesty International, which suggests that the relevant clause in the UK Human Rights Act should be interpreted, above all, as safeguarding young people's freedom from state indoctrination. Assuming this is secure, Amnesty argues that the "article guarantees people the right to access to existing educational institutions; it does not require the government to establish or

fund a particular type of education" (Amnesty International, 2000, cited by Mason, 2003, p.121). For these authors, parental rights in respect of education do not necessitate the provision of faith schools. Their interpretation leaves room for other considerations, including social cohesion, to inform states' approaches to fulfilling their rights obligations.

With respect to the protection of minority groups, faith schools have been defended on the basis that they provide education in an environment in which a child's religious identity is respected and encouraged (Tinker, 2009; Burtonwood, 2003; Valins, 2003). In more hostile circumstances, moreover, faith school advocates have argued that these schools safeguard the religious identities of minority groups which might otherwise face prejudice or assimilation within common schools (Shah, 2012; Flint, 2007; Miller, 2001). While the legitimacy of prioritising individuals' religious identities in this way is contested (O'Sullivan, O'Flynn and Russell, 2007; Marples, 2005), so too are the implications of this position for cohesion. From a stance of opposition to faith schools, critics such as Berkeley (2008) – while perhaps sympathetic to the underlying concerns – regard this position as problematic for reasons already identified: that, in justifying young people's education in separate schools, it prevents them from mixing with those who are different from themselves. Instead, Berkeley – like Mason (2003) – advocates a pluralistic approach, according to which all religious (and other) identities should be valued and encouraged within the common school.

An alternative perspective, however, considers separate schooling on these grounds to contribute positively to cohesion, as it prevents the social withdrawal of minority communities who might otherwise feel that their identities are under threat (Wright, 2003). According to this argument, the supportive environment of a faith school helps young people to develop strong and positive identities, enabling them "to take their place in wider society from a position of strength and confidence" (Hewer, 2001, p.525). Indeed, Halstead and McLaughlin (2005) argue that this sense of confidence among young people from minority faith backgrounds, together with the respect and tolerance that they develop as a result of receiving such respect themselves, may be at least as important as a common school education in fostering cohesion.

This survey of arguments regarding faith schools and social cohesion is intended to highlight both the complex nature of the debate and the lack of a clear resolution. While opponents of faith schools offer compelling arguments, the similarly strong defence of these schools by their supporters, allied with their continued popularity among parents, means that there is unlikely to be any serious challenge to the existence of such schools within the jurisdictions of the UK in the near future. While this may disappoint those who believe that faith schools are socially divisive, it also raises a further challenge: how to ensure that schools can promote mutual understanding and positive relations *within* the faith-based framework. In Northern Ireland, with its experience of violent conflict along religious lines, this is a question that has exercised policymakers and educationalists for several decades. The following section considers issues relating to faith schooling in this part of the UK.

Separate schooling in Northern Ireland

Questions about faith schooling remain particularly pertinent in Northern Ireland, given the extent of denominationalism in the education system and the history of (often violent) division in the region. In broad debates about faith-based education, Northern Ireland has often been cast – rarely with evidence to substantiate the assertion – as a worst-case example of the division and conflict that can be engendered by separate schooling (see Smyth, 2010, and Grayling, 2005 for examples). Within Northern Ireland itself, the question of whether denominational education has contributed to existing divisions has also been much discussed, although with little resulting agreement (Gallagher, 2005a, 2004). The nature of these arguments is briefly considered below. Greater consensus has been achieved regarding the role of the education system in promoting greater cohesion in Northern Ireland, and the subsequent discussion will outline the responses of policymakers and educators in this respect.

The education system in Northern Ireland

The denominationalism that characterises education in Northern Ireland had been a feature of Irish education prior to partition in 1921 and survived the aspirations of the first government of Northern Ireland to create a single, unified system (Gallagher, 2005a). Following partition, legislative arrangements to bring schools under state control were not well received by authorities representing either of the religious groups: while the Catholic Church refused to transfer its schools, the

Protestant churches only did so in the 1930s, after securing a number of concessions that guaranteed the Protestant character of these schools (Gallagher, 2004; Smith, 2001). Although Catholic schools have not been formally brought into the state system, changes to financing arrangements in 1947 and 1968 increased the amount of funding that these schools received from the state (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006; Smith, 2001). Parity of funding with Protestant schools was achieved in the 1990s as a measure to improve the educational outcomes of Catholic pupils relative to their Protestant counterparts. In exchange for increases in finance, the Catholic Church accepted greater involvement of the state in the management of its schools, via local representatives (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006; Gallagher, 2004).

Today, the majority of Protestant schools are within the 'controlled' sector, receiving full funding from the state via one of five local Education and Library Boards (ELBs).[2] Day-to-day management of these schools is the responsibility of a Board of Governors comprising parents, ELB representatives, teachers, and representatives of the Protestant churches ('transferors') (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006). Most Catholic schools, by comparison, are within what is termed the 'maintained' sector, for which funding and management arrangements are slightly different: while the ELBs meet the ongoing running costs of maintained schools, the Department of Education provides a direct grant to fund capital expenditure (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006). Like controlled schools, maintained schools are managed by a Board of Governors, although these feature greater representation from church authorities than their controlled counterparts. The governing bodies of Catholic schools are overseen by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), which also has responsibility for school planning, employing teaching staff, and representing the sector to the Department of Education and the ELBs (Byrne and Donnelly, 2006). There is also a smaller voluntary sector comprising only grammar schools, more than half of which are under Catholic management, and a very small (but growing) Irish medium sector (DENI, 2014b). Between them, the denominational sectors educate more than 92 per cent of pupils, approximately half of whom attend schools where at least 95 per cent of students share the same ethno-religious background (Connolly, Purvis and O'Grady, 2013; Torney, 2012).

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[2] The Minister of Education has recently announced that the five Education and Library Boards are to be merged into a single board by April 2015 (DENI, 2014c).

Debates about separate schooling in Northern Ireland

Separate education in Northern Ireland has been controversial in the context of the social division that the region has experienced, particularly during the period of violent conflict between the late 1960s and the signing of the Good Friday peace agreement in 1998. The conflict in Northern Ireland has been described variously as 'ethno-religious', 'ethno-national', and 'politico-religious', these terms indicating the interrelation of religious, cultural and political factors in forming and sustaining the divisions which continue to exist in the region (for use of these terms, see Bonney, 2013; O'Dowd and McCall, 2008; Fox, 2002). Broadly, the main cleavage has been between Catholics and Protestants, who have constituted the two main communities and associated political, religious and cultural traditions in Northern Ireland since its creation. Respectively, they now account for 45 per cent and 48 per cent of the population (NISRA, 2014).[3] Catholics have traditionally claimed Irish identity and heritage and sought the reunification of Ireland, while Protestants – who largely trace their heritage to the English and Scottish settlers who arrived in Ireland during the seventeenth century – have tended to claim a British identity and wish to retain the union with Great Britain.

Against this background, the school system in Northern Ireland has attracted particular attention because its separation into two main sectors – controlled (Protestant) and maintained (Catholic) – reflects the major fracture within Northern Irish society as a whole. In this regard, educationalists and commentators have, since the early days of the conflict, questioned whether separate schools might contribute to divisions between members of the two religious groups (Gallagher, 2011; Dunn and Morgan, 1999). The arguments advanced on either side of this question echo those proposed in more general debates about faith-based education, but also reflect particular perspectives on the causes of tensions within Northern Ireland. As in broader discussions of faith schools, critics' concerns tend to focus on the nature of the curriculum and values taught in these schools and the implications of separation for pupils' direct experience of the other group. Surveying these debates, Gallagher (2005a, p.158) makes the point that they reflect two accounts of the role of schools in perpetuating hostilities: the 'cultural hypothesis',

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[3] These figures refer to respondents' answers when asked which religious tradition they belonged to or were brought up in, and is the most widely used measure of religious background in Northern Ireland. When respondents were asked only about the religion they belonged to, however, these numbers fell to 41 per cent and 42 per cent respectively, with a corresponding increase in those reporting 'no religion' or giving no response (17 per cent in total).

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which suggests that the content of the formal curriculum "socialises pupils into distinct worlds" and creates "a sense of difference which could be transferred into antagonism in certain circumstances"; and the 'social hypothesis', which proposes that the simple fact of attending separate schools encourages an understanding of difference that may lead to division.

Supporters of separate schools, responding primarily from the Catholic perspective, argue that their schools' faith-based commitments to values of love, justice, reconciliation and the common good mean that they are well placed to contribute to social harmony and integration (CCMS, 2007; Catholic Bishops of Northern Ireland, 2001). They also contend that Catholic schools have been important in protecting the cultural and religious identity of Catholics, particularly during a period when the Catholic community faced significant inequality and discrimination in Northern Ireland (Gallagher, 2005b). It was this inequality, they argue, that provoked divisions in the region, not any ill-effects of separate schooling (Gallagher, 2004). That the arguments in defence of faith schools originate principally from Catholic authorities reflects the fact that the maintained sector, which remains outside full state control and has the more overtly religious character, has received the greatest criticism for perpetuating division (Murray, 1985). In comparison, the position of controlled schools is more ambiguous: although nominally state-run and non-denominational, these schools often retain strong representation from the Protestant churches and have a mainly Protestant intake (Hughes, 2011).

Evidence of the impact of separate schools

Arguments about separate schools on both sides have usually been made in the abstract, and studies exploring the relationship between separate education and division have been few in number. In an attempt to reduce the reliance on conjecture in this debate, Darby et al. (1977) and Murray (1985) undertook research to identify areas of similarity and difference between Catholic and Protestant schools, and to assess whether concerns about separate schooling were justified. While both studies acknowledged extensive commonality across the schools, the authors of each also found high levels of mutual ignorance regarding the other religious group and the practices of the other school sector. This ignorance, which the authors attributed to an absence of contact between the schools, engendered suspicion and resulted in a reliance on hearsay and unfavourable stereotypes for information about the other community.

More recently, in a study of year 8 students (age 11 and 12) attending a Protestant school, Hughes (2011) reported that pupils frequently invoked stereotypes of Catholics and had limited awareness of viewpoints other than those traditionally associated with the Protestant community. Hughes suggests that, as well as reinforcing the separation that exists in the local area, denominational schools in Northern Ireland may unwittingly contribute to division through their failure to address matters of identity and sectarianism in the classroom. This, she suggests, may result from a desire not to unsettle local relations or, in the case of controlled schools, from a reluctance to acknowledge their (*de facto*) Protestant identity and engage with difference from that basis.

The conclusions of these qualitative studies are supported by emerging findings from research by Queen's University Belfast and the University of Oxford. This suggests that pupils attending schools where at least 95 per cent of their fellow students are of the same religious group have less positive attitudes to the outgroup than those attending either integrated schools or what they term 'super-mixed' schools (that is, controlled or maintained schools comprising at least 10 per cent of students from the other community) (Hughes *et al.*, 2013). These findings are consistent with those of previous studies of integrated education, which have reported more positive outgroup attitudes among current and former pupils of integrated schools than among their counterparts in the controlled or maintained sectors (Stringer *et al.*, 2009; Hayes, McAllister and Dowds, 2007; see section entitled 'integrated schools').

Initiatives to address division and conflict through education

While suggesting a negative association between separate schooling and attitudes towards the other community, this body of literature remains small and assertions about the divisive nature of separate schools continue to be challenged. Less contentious, however, has been the view that the education system in Northern Ireland should have a constructive role in addressing division and encouraging reconciliation. To this end, as Gallagher (2004) reports, initiatives of three main types have been implemented: curricular programmes to standardise the content in contentious subjects and promote mutual understanding; cross-community contact programmes to bring Catholic and Protestant young people together in the hope of challenging negative perceptions and stereotypes; and integrated schools, which are founded with the purpose of educating pupils from the two religious groups in a

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single institution. While the first two initiatives have been introduced into the existing system of parallel sectors, the third aims to reform the system itself (Dunn and Morgan, 1999). Each of these three areas of activity is explored below. This is followed by the examination of a fourth approach that has emerged more recently: shared education.

Curricular initiatives

Early efforts to address the causes and manifestations of conflict through the curriculum began during the 1970s and included initiatives such as the School Curriculum Project and the Schools Cultural Studies Project, which were designed to assist teachers in discussing difference and conflict in the classroom (Emerson and McCully, in press; Gallagher, 2004; Dunn and Morgan, 1999). Much of the work in this field lacked a statutory underpinning, however, until the passage of the 1989 Education Reform Order (ERO). This introduced a common curriculum for the first time and provided for greater standardisation of content within subjects such as history and religious education (Smith, 2005; Arlow, 2004). The ERO also made it compulsory for schools to incorporate the cross-curricular themes of Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) and Cultural Heritage (CH) during Key Stages 1, 2 and 3, and the first year of Key Stage 4. According to guidance issued by the then Northern Ireland Curriculum Council, the objective of EMU was to enable pupils

> "to learn to respect and value themselves and others; to appreciate the interdependence of people within society; to know about and understand what is shared as well as what is different about their cultural traditions; and to appreciate how conflict may be handled in non-violent ways."
>
> (NICC, 1990, cited in Smith and Robinson, 1996: 1)

EMU and CH – which, in 1992, became conjoined themes – represented perhaps the most significant curricular initiatives in this area, but experienced mixed success. Surveying the impact of EMU, Richardson (2011b) reports that, in the most effective examples, its introduction encouraged schools to reflect on their approach to promoting respect, tolerance and understanding, and to explore new practice in these areas. However, the challenges to EMU were significant. Limited inter-departmental planning in many schools, combined with teacher uncertainty about how best to address the themes, contributed to a lack of coherence in its delivery

across the curriculum (Smith and Robinson, 1996). EMU's impact was also hindered by a low profile and ineffective management, with consequent negative effects on the quality of delivery, the auditing process, and the arrangements for coordinating EMU within the school (ETI, 2000; Dunn and Morgan, 1999). Many of the shortcomings of EMU – poor understanding of its purpose, poor management, and a lack of confidence to address controversial issues – were attributed to inadequate training at all levels within schools (Richardson, 2011b; ETI, 2000; Smith and Robinson, 1996).

In the 1990s, the scope of EMU broadened beyond community relations and cultural understanding to include topics such as personal development and civic rights, and it was subsequently replaced by a more comprehensive Local and Global Citizenship (LGC) curriculum in 2007 (Emerson and McCully, in press; Richardson, 2011a). This incorporates a stronger focus on issues of equality and human rights – aspects which were neglected in EMU (Emerson, 2012). Data gathered from the introductory phase of LGC suggested some positive developments, building on lessons from EMU and other programmes: teacher training courses were rated highly by participants and community relations issues were among those that teachers felt most comfortable discussing (O'Connor, Beattie and Niens, 2008). At the same time, however, a number of familiar challenges remained, including a lack of consensus about the purpose of citizenship education, concerns about managerial support for the subject, and a superficial approach to more controversial topics, such as inter-community conflict (Emerson and McCully, in press; O'Connor, Beattie and Niens, 2008).

Cross-community contact schemes

The second of the three community relations initiatives discussed by Gallagher (2004) comprised a suite of programmes designed to promote cross-community contact. These varied in nature, but included holiday schemes, which brought young people from both communities together for residential trips, and school-based contact programmes, which provided joint outings and activities for pupils from the controlled and maintained sectors (O'Connor, Hartop and McCully, 2002; Trew, 1989, 1986). Holiday schemes developed from the early 1970s and, though primarily organised by voluntary agencies, received at least partial funding through the Department of Education (Trew, 1989, 1986). Within schools, the most enduring of the contact projects was the Schools Community Relations Programme (SCRP).

This was established by the Department of Education (as the Cross-Community Contact Scheme) in 1987, and devolved to Education and Library Boards in 1996 (O'Connor, Hartop and McCully, 2002; Smith and Robinson, 1996).

At their most effective, school-based schemes offered opportunities for pupils to meet regularly and experience positive cross-community interaction (O'Connor, Hartop and McCully, 2002). The availability of these opportunities varied between ELBs, however, depending on the political climate, geography and demography of each area (Smith and Robinson, 1996). A lack of clarity over the nature and purpose of SCRP, which was often conflated with EMU, also affected its impact: while contact programmes were underpinned by the principles of the contact hypothesis, these were not well understood and their implementation during contact was erratic (Richardson, 2011b; Gallagher, 2005a). As a result, opportunities for interaction were often limited and pupils could be found "following the same activity in parallel groups, with their separateness relatively intact" (Richardson, 2011b, p.334). Teachers were also reluctant to facilitate interaction and discussion among pupils and reported that they felt under-prepared for such a task (O'Connor, Hartop and McCully, 2002). Research into holiday schemes similarly found that their leaders lacked understanding of the schemes' aims and preferred to avoid contentious issues (Trew, 1989). The paucity of opportunities for participants to meet once the holiday had ended and they had returned to their segregated communities also limited the potential of these schemes to effect long-term change (Trew, 1986).

While cross-community holiday programmes – where they still operate – tend now to be financed through charitable organisations, funding for the Schools Community Relations Programme ceased on 31st March 2010 (DENI, 2011), although programmes between schools with existing relationships continue on a less formal basis. The Community Relations, Equality and Diversity (CRED) policy, published a year later, praised these programmes for their contribution to good practice, but highlighted the need for more strategic planning and greater coherence in their design and delivery (DENI, 2011). In this document, it was recommended that future work in this area should depend less on external organisations and instead become part of the core of schools' activities.

Integrated schools

The third in the triad of initiatives identified by Gallagher (2004) is integrated education, which aims to challenge division and improve relations by educating children from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, and others, in the same schools. The first integrated school, Lagan College, opened in Belfast in 1981, and was followed during the 1980s by a further nine schools, each founded and funded by parents with support from charitable organisations (Hansson, O'Connor-Bones and McCord, 2013; Fraser and Morgan, 1999). Statutory funding was extended to integrated schools by the 1989 Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, which also placed a duty on the Department of Education "to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education". This funding led to strong growth in the sector over the following decade, which increased from ten schools in 1989/90 to 43 in 1999/2000 (DENI, 2014b; Fraser and Morgan, 1999).

There are currently 62 integrated schools across Northern Ireland – 42 primary schools and 20 secondary schools – which together educate approximately 7 per cent of all pupils (DENI, 2014a, 2014b). Of these, 38 have grant maintained integrated (GMI) status, indicating that they were established as planned integrated schools, and 24 have controlled integrated (CI) status, which indicates that they have transformed from formally controlled to formally integrated schools. Reflecting their origins, GMI and CI schools also differ in their governance arrangements: while both the Catholic and Protestant churches, along with ELBs, have a right to nominate governors to the board of a CI school, none of these bodies has a right of representation on the board of a GMI school (Donnelly and Hughes, 2006). All integrated schools are expected to maintain a religious balance among the staff, the governing body and pupils. To ensure this, minimum pupil enrolment ratios – typically 30:70 in grant maintained integrated schools and 10:90 (with the potential to increase to 30:70) in transforming schools – are enforced by the Department of Education (DENI, 2012; Donnelly and Hughes, 2006).

Research into integrated schools has, not surprisingly, sought to test the premise on which they are founded: that educating children from different backgrounds in a single setting will encourage greater social mixing and more positive intergroup attitudes. To this end, studies have explored the relationship between individuals' attendance at different types of school and their views on matters relevant to social cohesion. This research has found that, relative to those who attend(ed) more

segregated schools, current or former pupils of integrated schools display significantly more positive attitudes towards the other group. They also adopt less polarised positions on politics and national identity, and report greater understanding of, and respect for, the other group's culture and religion (Hughes *et al.*, 2013; Hayes, McAllister and Dowds, 2013, 2007; Stringer *et al.*, 2009, 2000). Statistical analysis by Hughes *et al.* (2013) and Stringer *et al.* (2009) found that these differences in attitudes were explained by the more frequent and positive experiences of cross-community contact among pupils at integrated schools. While there is the possibility that a reverse effect may be operating – i.e. that pupils with positive views towards the outgroup are more likely to attend integrated schools – findings from this and other research indicates that the effect of contact on attitudes is more substantial than the effect of attitudes on contact (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; see chapter 3). Critics have, however, questioned whether pupils' adoption of less polarised identities is a positive development, claiming rather that it may reflect a more problematic tendency of these schools to encourage assimilation (Emerson, 2012; McEvoy, McEvoy and McConnachie, 2006).

Practice within integrated settings has also been of interest to researchers, who have explored how commitments to equality and inclusivity are reflected in schools and, in turn, how this might affect pupils' responses to others. Significantly, this work has demonstrated a diversity of approaches to integration between and within schools: while some schools and teachers are proactive in fostering integration and encourage the expression of difference, others favour a more neutral environment and play down distinctiveness (Donnelly, 2008; McGlynn, 2007; Donnelly and Hughes, 2006; Montgomery *et al.*, 2003). Variations in approach are underpinned by diverging understandings of what integration should entail, suggesting that no single vision exists of the nature and purpose of integrated education (McGlynn, 2007). While this lack of consensus might not appear problematic in itself, McGlynn argues that it can weaken the identity and coherence of the sector and impede the development of good practice.

Researchers have offered several reasons for this diversity of approach to integration. These include variations in teachers' experience, training, and understanding of their professional role, as well as differences in their commitment to integration as a concept (Hughes and Donnelly, 2006; Donnelly. 2004a; Montgomery *et al.*, 2003). Also important are local challenges, such as the status of

the school (transforming or planned integrated), its location, and the views of parents (Montgomery et al., 2003). Difficulties in establishing consensus about integration may also be exacerbated by a policy context that focuses on performance measurement via exams and inspections, often at the expense of community relations activity (McGlynn, 2007; Donnelly and Hughes, 2006). In the absence of a common integrated philosophy, the opportunity for intergroup contact appears more important than school ethos in explaining the more positive attitudes of pupils at integrated schools (Hughes et al., 2013). This argument is strengthened by the findings of research in 'super-mixed' schools in the controlled or maintained sectors[4]: as Hughes and colleagues observe, these do not foster an explicitly 'integrated' ethos, but their pupils report positive outgroup attitudes at levels similar to those at integrated schools. As a result, researchers in this area have recommended that these and other educational settings should prioritise opportunities for contact in the promotion of greater cohesion (Hughes et al., 2013).

Shared education

The development of shared education

In more recent years, a fourth approach to improving community relations through education has developed, based on school collaboration across denominational lines. Termed 'shared education', this initiative seeks to involve schools from the controlled, maintained, voluntary and integrated sectors in the joint provision of regular curriculum-based classes and activities for pupils (Hughes et al., 2012; Gallagher et al., 2010). The inclusion of schools from each of the existing sectors in shared education partnerships acknowledges that factors including parental choice, residential segregation, and the interests of religious bodies and political parties, may make the expansion of integrated schools unfeasible, at least in the short term. In this context, shared education reflects the view that all types of school have a role in promoting good relations (Hughes et al., 2012; Knox, 2010).

While shared education thus has an emphasis on community relations, developments in other areas of education policy have also encouraged collaborative working. The report of the Independent Strategic Review of Education (2006), led by George Bain ('the Bain Review'), identified excessive costs and a limited curriculum

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[4] 'Super-mixed' schools are defined by Hughes et al. (2013) as controlled or maintained schools that comprise more than 10 per cent of students from the other religious group.

as key problems facing the Northern Ireland education system, and highlighted the potential of school collaboration to extend the curriculum offer and deliver financial savings (Gallagher *et al.*, 2010). As Gallagher and colleagues note, legislation under the Education Order (Northern Ireland) 2006 to introduce a minimum curriculum entitlement from September 2007 (subsequently postponed until September 2013) also emphasised the potential of collaboration between schools to deliver a wider range of subjects. A straitened economic climate since the publication of the Bain Review and the Entitlement Framework has given further impetus to initiatives which can address duplication within education (Borooah and Knox, 2013). Recognising such imperatives, shared education programmes have adopted formal aims to extend educational opportunities, support improvements in attainment, and promote financial savings, alongside the commitment to improving community relations (Duffy and Gallagher, 2014; Hughes *et al.*, 2012).

As a formal initiative, shared education in Northern Ireland has developed through three projects, each funded by Atlantic Philanthropies and the International Fund for Ireland. These are the Primary Integrating and Enriching Education Project (PIEE), delivered by the North Eastern Education and Library Board; the Shared Education Programme, coordinated by the Fermanagh Trust for primary and post-primary schools in Fermanagh; and the Sharing Education Programme (SEP), managed by Queen's University. The latter involves mainly post-primary schools and is the focus of this thesis. The SEP was established in 2007 and to date has involved more than 100 schools in two cohorts (2007-2010 and 2010-2013) (SEP, 2013). From its outset, individual partnerships have been encouraged to develop programmes of classes and/or activities which address the educational priorities of participating schools. The only stipulation has been that "the partnerships had to contain sustainable, high quality engagement by young people from different cultural traditions and backgrounds" (SEP, 2008). In this respect, like other initiatives before it, shared education is predicated on the principles of contact theory and aims to promote more positive intergroup attitudes via the development of relationships between pupils.

Research into shared education

As with integrated education, the focus of research into shared education has been the impact of pupils' participation on their attitudes towards the other group. The survey evidence to date has been positive in this respect. Compared with pupils at

schools that were not involved in SEP, pupils attending participating schools typically reported a higher number of friends from the other group, a reduction in anxiety regarding cross-community interaction, and more positive intergroup attitudes (Hughes *et al.*, 2012). Students at SEP schools also demonstrated more positive action tendencies – i.e. a desire to help, support, and learn more about the other community – and reported greater willingness to discuss cultural and religious difference (Hughes *et al.*, 2012; Hughes *et al.* 2010). Particularly notable was the finding that students attending SEP schools in divided areas expressed more positive attitudes towards the outgroup than students attending non-SEP schools in areas where relations were comparatively harmonious (Hughes *et al.*, 2010). While these results are promising, it should also be recognised that positive experiences are not universal: survey data suggests that approximately 10 per cent of participants consistently report feeling uncomfortable during shared education (Gallagher *et al.*, 2010; Knox, 2010).

While qualitative research has tended to focus on teachers' perceptions and experiences of collaboration (see below), research into pupils' experiences has reported positive examples of students willingly moving between schools and forging relationships in divided areas (Hughes *et al.*, 2010). More than a third of pupils interviewed by Hughes (2014) also described making outgroup friends via ingroup members who were participating in shared education, indicating what she terms "a ripple effect" (p.202). Echoing the findings from survey data, however, Hughes and colleagues (2010) reported that a minority of students – particularly in more divided areas – had experienced sectarian name-calling and intimidation from younger pupils while attending the other school. In partnerships comprising selective and non-selective schools, teachers have also reported that pupils' perceptions of other students' social backgrounds and academic abilities have made relationship-building more challenging (Duffy and Gallagher, 2012; Knox, 2010).

Evaluative studies of shared education have identified a number of aspects of collaboration that support relationship-building among staff and students. Within school partnerships, these include strong leadership and existing informal links between schools: while the former is important for initiating collaborative working and securing staff commitment, the latter provide the basis on which mutual trust and cooperation can develop (Hughes *et al.*, 2010; Knox, 2010; Donnelly and

Gallagher, 2008). Parental support for shared education is also important (Knox, 2010). Equally, however, the context surrounding shared education can imperil its aims: in the local area, for example, hostilities or periods of heightened intercommunity tension have placed additional pressure on staff and pupils involved in shared classes and activities (Duffy and Gallagher, 2012; Hughes *et al.*, 2010). More generally, funding and performance management regimes which treat schools as individual units and encourage competition have hindered collaboration between institutions and thus relationship-building among individuals (Connolly, Purvis and O'Grady, 2013; Hughes *et al.*, 2010).

The future of shared education

One of the successes of shared education to date has been in securing interest and support among policymakers. Although the initial phases of philanthropic funding have ended, the Department of Education, OFMDFM and Atlantic Philanthropies have recently contributed a further £58 million to projects including shared education (Northern Ireland Executive, 2014). Moreover, the Northern Ireland Executive has included a commitment to develop and extend shared education in its current Programme for Government (Northern Ireland Executive, 2011). This devolves to the Department of Education the responsibility to:

- *Establish a Ministerial advisory group to explore and bring forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education;*
- *Ensure all children have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes by 2015; and*
- *Substantially increase the number of schools sharing facilities by 2015.*

(Northern Ireland Executive, 2011, p.51)

In accordance with the first commitment, the Minister of Education appointed a Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education in July 2012. Their remit was to "advise the Minister on how best to advance 'shared education' in Northern Ireland, within the context of overall education policy and the aim of improving educational outcomes for learners" (Connolly, Purvis and O'Grady, 2013, p.xi). Following a period of public consultation, the Group published its report in April 2013. This included recommendations to introduce a statutory duty on the

Department of Education to facilitate shared education, establish a central unit with responsibility for developing shared education, and provide incentives for collaboration through the funding and inspection regimes. While these recommendations have been accepted by the Minister, a strategy for the implementation of outstanding commitments to shared education remains under development.

Despite the relative success of shared education in policy terms, it is likely that there will remain challenges to the further implementation of shared education programmes. One such challenge may centre on an emerging discourse, fostered particularly by the local media, that presents integrated education and shared education as competing approaches to reconciliation within the education system (Agnew, 2014; Fergus, 2014; Hansson, O'Connor-Bones and McCord, 2013). Also of relevance will be the ongoing process of school rationalisation across Northern Ireland. While school collaboration can contribute to sustainability, it is as yet unclear what ramifications school closures and mergers might have for shared education at a local level.

Conclusion

Shared education is the most recent of a number of educational initiatives in Northern Ireland that have aimed to encourage mutual understanding, improve relations and promote peace in a region with a history of conflict. It reflects a view that is widely expressed in debates about faith schooling and social cohesion: that opportunities for interaction between pupils from different backgrounds are important for developing more positive relations and greater mutual understanding. This, with some refinements is the premise of contact theory, which has been highly influential in peacebuilding activity in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

In view of its influence on educational initiatives such as these, contact theory serves as the theoretical framework for this study. The next chapter provides an outline of the principles of contact theory, the body of work that it has generated, and the criticism that it has received, so as to provide the rationale for the original research discussed in the remainder of the thesis.

Chapter 3: Contact theory

In Northern Ireland, as outlined in chapter 2, the promotion of cross-community contact has been a key strategy for improving community relations through the education system. This has been particularly evident in projects such as the Schools Community Relations Programme, in the emergence of the integrated schools movement, and, recently, as part of the rationale of shared education programmes. These initiatives are informed by the belief that contact can help to reduce prejudice as individuals from different ethno-religious backgrounds learn about each other and build friendships – a view that has been formalised and studied by social psychologists as contact theory.

Contact theory provides the theoretical framework for this study, which explores processes of intergroup contact via shared education in Northern Ireland. This chapter therefore opens with an outline of the principles of contact theory and a summary of recent developments in the field. Particularly relevant for this study is the small but significant body of more critical literature, which has questioned some of the theoretical and methodological approaches in this area, and proposed alternative ways of conceptualising and studying contact. This literature, which addresses issues of theoretical individualism, 'idealism' and cultural essentialism within contact research, is the focus of the latter half of this chapter. The discussion aims to situate the current study within the existing body of work on intergroup contact and to present the rationale for the approach and methods subsequently adopted in this research.

An overview of developments within contact theory

Although the contact hypothesis is most commonly attributed to Gordon Allport (1958, 1954), the impact of intergroup contact on individuals' attitudes towards different ethnic groups (termed 'outgroups') had attracted increasing scholarly attention in the United States during the 1930s and 1940s. The resulting studies suggested that contact with black Americans produced more positive racial attitudes among white Americans, and specified certain conditions – such as equal status between interactants – that could facilitate this outcome (see Tausch and Hewstone, 2010; Dovidio, Gaertner and Kawakami, 2003, for reviews). It was against this background that Allport published *The Nature of Prejudice* (1958, 1954).

He argued that the impact of encounters between members of different racial and ethnic groups depended on "the *nature of the contact* that is established" between participants (1958, p.251, emphasis in the original), and formulated his hypothesis thus:

> Prejudice (unless deeply rooted in the character structure of the individual) may be reduced by equal status contact between majority and minority groups in the pursuit of common goals. The effect is greatly enhanced if this contact is sanctioned by institutional supports (i.e., by law, custom or local atmosphere), and provided it is of a sort that leads to the perception of common interests and common humanity between members of the two groups. (Allport, 1958, p.267)

During the four decades that followed the publication of *The Nature of Prejudice,* work in the field of contact focused on testing Allport's hypothesis and the role and relative contributions of the four 'optimal' conditions: equal status between group members, common goals, intergroup cooperation, and institutional support. This culminated in the publication in 2006 of a meta-analysis of 515 such studies from 38 countries, which provided strong empirical support for the contact hypothesis (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Of the 713 samples included in this study, more than 94 per cent showed a negative association between intergroup contact and prejudice. A number of additional findings from this work were notable. Firstly, while contact had a greater impact when Allport's conditions were present, it nevertheless remained effective in their absence. Secondly, although Allport's hypothesis was limited to ethnic contact, Pettigrew and Tropp's meta-analysis also demonstrated the positive impact of contact on attitudes towards other stigmatised groups, including gay men and lesbians, people with physical impairments, and people with learning disabilities. Thirdly, as outlined in a separate paper from the same study, the effect of contact on attitudes was greater among majority group members than minority group members (Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005a).

A key strength of Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) work was its use of a series of tests to rule out alternative explanations for the effects of contact on prejudice and to identify whether contact effects generalised beyond the immediate contact situation. These tests excluded the possibility that the results of the meta-analysis might reflect publication bias (i.e. that studies that found small or no effects of contact on

prejudice might not be published); moreover, they confirmed that the effects of contact generalised not only to the target outgroup, but to other situations and uninvolved outgroups. These tests also demonstrated that, while the contact-prejudice effect size was 'small' to 'medium' overall, larger effect sizes occurred in more rigorous research and in studies which permitted no choice over participation (and thus no possibility of participant selection bias). The latter finding is particularly important in helping to establish the causal direction of the relationship between contact and prejudice, which had previously been difficult given the paucity of longitudinal studies of contact.

In recent years, this absence has been addressed by several longitudinal research studies, which collectively provide further support for the direction of the contact-prejudice relationship. For example, Levin, van Laar and Sidanius's (2003) four-year study of university students found that outgroup friendship predicted lower levels of ingroup bias, even when controlling for students' prior experience of contact and their ethnic attitudes on entry to university. Similarly, in England, Brown et al. (2007) reported that, when controlling for initial attitudes, more frequent contact with outgroup pupils predicted more positive attitudes among secondary school students over time. Binder et al. (2009) also reported positive longitudinal effects of friendship contact on prejudice in their study of children in Belgium, England and Germany.

Contact via direct and extended friendship

As this selection of longitudinal studies might indicate, much of the recent research in this area has focused on contact via cross-group friendship. Friendship is valued within contact theory because it is considered to offer high quality contact and to be characterised by equal status and cooperation, mirroring Allport's 'optimal' conditions (Feddes, Noack and Rutland, 2009; Turner et al., 2007). Reflecting its perceived importance, Pettigrew (1998, p.76) has suggested "friendship potential" as a fifth condition of contact, supporting this proposal with findings from a European survey which showed that respondents with outgroup friends had more favourable intergroup attitudes. Subsequently, numerous studies have demonstrated the particular benefits of friendship contact, not only for reducing prejudice (see Davies et al., 2011, for a review), but also increasing the strength and accessibility of more positive outgroup attitudes (Vonofakou, Hewstone and Voci, 2007).

The potential of cross-group friendship to change attitudes is therefore widely acknowledged. Also well established is its potential to influence attitudes among third parties who are aware of the friendship. This is the basis of the extended contact hypothesis, which states that the knowledge that an ingroup member has a close relationship with an outgroup member may lead to more positive intergroup attitudes in the observer (Wright *et al.*, 1997). Testing their hypothesis, Wright and colleagues found that knowledge of a friendship between an ingroup member and an outgroup member was associated with lower levels of prejudice, a finding that remained significant when controlling for participants' existing cross-group friendships. They also reported that this effect was greater when the observer knew of multiple cross-group friendships or perceived the cross-group friendship to be close. In addition, subsequent research has shown a stronger effect of extended contact when there is a close relationship between the ingroup friend and the observer (Tausch *et al.*, 2011).

Since Wright and colleagues published their work, substantial research has been undertaken to explore and compare the effects of friendship-based direct and extended contact on outgroup attitudes. Cross-sectional research has found that both direct and extended friendship are associated with lower levels of prejudice towards the outgroup (Paolini, Hewstone and Cairns, 2007; Turner, Hewstone and Voci, 2007; Paolini *et al.*, 2004); higher levels of intergroup trust (Paolini, Hewstone and Cairns, 2007); fewer negative action tendencies (Paolini, Hewstone and Cairns, 2007); and perceptions of greater variability among the outgroup (Paolini *et al.*, 2004). Importantly, Paolini *et al.* (2004) reported that the effects of each form of contact remained significant (if not large) when controlling for the other.

Longitudinally, Christ *et al.* (2010) found that both direct and extended contact led to stronger attitudes, while extended contact was associated with more positive behavioural intentions among residents from segregated areas. Exploring extended contact only, a study by Eller, Abrams and Zimmerman (2011) found that contact over a year led to lower self-perceived ignorance regarding the outgroup, more positive perceptions of outgroup behaviour, and more positive outgroup evaluation. In comparison, Feddes, Noack and Rutland (2009) found that only direct, not extended, contact among majority group children in Germany predicted more positive attitudes towards children from the Turkish minority group over time.

However, this divergence might be explained in part by the authors' use of a broader definition of extended contact than that adopted in other studies.

While research has shown that direct and extended contact act independently on prejudice, data also indicate that extended contact has its most pronounced effects on measures of prejudice among individuals living in divided areas and/or with few or no direct outgroup friends (Cameron *et al.*, 2011; Dhont and Van Hiel, 2011; Christ *et al.*, 2010). Therefore, although advocating direct contact wherever possible, authors in this field have acknowledged the potential of extended contact in settings where direct contact is absent or limited by widespread segregation of housing, education and leisure activities (Christ *et al.*, 2010; Turner *et al.*, 2007).

Vicarious and imagined contact

Following the interest generated by the extended contact hypothesis, researchers have begun to explore other forms of indirect contact, most notably vicarious contact and imagined contact (Dovidio, Eller and Hewstone, 2011). Vicarious contact, as Mazziotta, Mummendey and Wright (2011) describe, involves the observation of positive cross-group interaction involving a member of the ingroup. Whereas extended contact usually assumes that the observer has a connection (e.g. via a family relationship or friendship) to the ingroup member of a cross-group friendship, vicarious contact requires no such relationship. However, Mazziotta and colleagues suggest that there should be some perceived similarity so that the actions of the ingroup member are considered "self-relevant" by the observer.

Research into vicarious contact has frequently explored the effects of fictional cross-group relationships on observers' attitudes towards the outgroup. In this regard, Cameron and Rutland (2006) reported that reading and discussing books which depicted friendships between disabled and non-disabled children improved primary school pupils' attitudes and intended behaviours towards disabled children. Similarly, across two experiments with a sample of German nationals, Mazziotta, Mummendey and Wright (2011) reported that watching video clips of successful interactions between German and Chinese students increased positive affect towards Chinese people and willingness to engage in contact with them. In comparison, Paluck's (2009) research in Rwanda reported no significant changes in attitude among participants who were exposed to a radio programme portraying

positive intergroup contact (designed to parallel contact between Hutus and Tutsis). However, Paluck found that the programme had positive effects on perceptions of social norms regarding intergroup marriage and trust.

Whereas vicarious contact involves the observation of positive intergroup relationships, imagined contact – as the term suggests – requires the "the mental simulation of a social interaction with a member or members of an outgroup category" (Crisp and Turner, 2009, p.234). Imagined contact builds on psychological research that indicates that simply imagining a social situation can have similar effects on attitudes, perceptions and behaviour as experiencing that situation directly (Crisp and Turner, 2009; Turner, Crisp and Lambert, 2007). While the relative ease of implementing and controlling imagined contact is a clear advantage, interventions should nevertheless incorporate two elements. Firstly, participants should not simply visualise an outgroup member, but must imagine interacting with them. Secondly, the interaction should be positive rather than neutral in nature (Turner and West, 2012; West, Holmes and Hewstone, 2011).

With these conditions in place, research has demonstrated a number of positive outcomes of imagined contact, including more favourable outgroup attitudes (West, Holmes and Hewstone, 2011; Husnu and Crisp, 2010; Turner, Crisp and Lambert, 2007), more positive behavioural intentions (Husnu and Crisp, 2010), and greater perceived outgroup variability (Turner, Crisp and Lambert, 2007). Acknowledging, however, that the effects of imagined contact may be weaker and of shorter duration than those of direct contact, Turner, Crisp and Lambert (2007) have suggested that imagined contact may be most useful as a means of improving outgroup perceptions and reducing intergroup anxiety before face-to-face contact interventions are introduced.

Generalising contact effects to the outgroup

Emerging as areas of particular interest in the 1980s were the mechanisms by which contact changed individuals' attitudes towards the outgroup. During this decade, three separate but related approaches were advanced, each influenced by an understanding of social identity theory (Tajfel, 1981). What has become known as the 'categorisation' approach is credited to Hewstone and Brown (1986). The crux of their argument is that contact can transform intergroup relations only when

one's social identity is salient; where this intergroup dimension is absent and contact is experienced primarily as interpersonal, it will have little effect on cross-group dynamics. Accordingly, the authors argue – perhaps, as they note, against expectations – that group affiliations should remain salient during the interaction. Hewstone and Brown also suggest that the encountered individuals should be those considered typical of the wider group to avoid the possibility of subtyping – i.e. where individual group members are considered to be exceptions to the rule and wider outgroup attitudes are unaffected. A number of studies have provided evidence for the importance of category salience and perceived typicality to promote the transfer of contact effects to the outgroup (Brown et al., 2007; Voci and Hewstone 2003; Brown, Vivian and Hewstone, 1999).

The 'decategorisation' approach advanced by Brewer and Miller (1984) seeks, unlike Hewstone and Brown's (1986) approach, not to alter the response to category members, but to disrupt categorisation-based responses per se. To do so, Brewer and Miller advocate greater differentiation and personalisation during intergroup interaction, with the aim of increasing perceptions of outgroup variability and encouraging interpersonal responses. They suggest that contact might most effectively reduce category-based responding when the assigned roles and tasks within a contact situation are unrelated to group membership, and when participants are encouraged to explore individual differences and cross-cutting identifications. Brewer and Miller argue that decategorised contact experiences are likely to generalise to other situations because more personalised contact causes individuals to see category-based evaluations as less relevant to their interactions. Subsequent research has provided support for the role of personalisation, outgroup variability and cross-cutting identities in reducing ingroup bias and promoting more positive outgroup attitudes (Ensari et al., 2012; Brauer and Er-rafiy, 2011; Marcus-Newhall et al., 1993).

Finally Gaertner et al. (1996, 1989) have suggested that changes in perceptions of outgroups may occur via the 'recategorisation' of separate groups into a single ingroup. This alters "members' cognitive representations of the memberships from 'us' and 'them' to a more inclusive 'we'" (1996, p.232). Via this change, the positive regard that one has for ingroup members is extended to former outgroup members, who now share a common ingroup identity. Gaertner and colleagues argue that this recategorisation need not require each group to abandon its existing group identity;

rather, participants may adopt a 'dual identity', retaining their original identification while also seeing themselves as members of a superordinate group (Dovidio, Gaertner and Saguy, 2009; Gaertner et al., 1989). Studies in this area have suggested, however, that the favoured and most effective representations (e.g. dual identity or superordinate identity alone) may differ according to the relative status of the participating groups and the cultural contexts in which contact occurs (Guerra et al., 2010; Dovidio, Gaertner and Saguy, 2009; Eller and Abrams, 2004, 2003).

The three approaches of categorisation, decategorisation and recategorisation need not be seen as competing (Greenland and Brown, 2000), and researchers in this area have proposed models that integrate elements of each. As described above, for example, Gaertner et al. (1996) integrate category salience within their dual identity approach to recategorisation. They also support a subsequent role for decategorisation to promote cross-group friendship and outgroup differentiation. Ensari and Miller (2002) similarly advocate the integration of personalisation and category salience within contact, based on their finding that self-disclosure improves attitudes only when group membership is salient. In perhaps the most thorough integration, Pettigrew (1998) proposes a three-stage longitudinal model, emphasising, in turn, decategorisation to reduce anxiety and promote liking of the contact partner; categorisation to facilitate improved outgroup attitudes which generalise to non-participants; and recategorisation to maximise the reduction of prejudice. Longitudinally, two of Eller and Abram's (2004, 2003) three studies provide support for the direction of Pettigrew's model.

Beyond the outgroup-generalisation effects of contact, a 'secondary transfer effect' has been discussed, whereby the positive effects of contact extend to groups other than the target outgroup. This effect has been demonstrated from cross-sectional (Tausch et al., 2010; Pettigrew, 1998), longitudinal (Tausch et al., 2010; Pettigrew, 2009), and meta-analytic research (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006). Seeking to explain this phenomenon, Tausch et al. reported that attitude generalisation mechanisms better accounted for secondary contact effects than ingroup reappraisal. This appears consistent with Pettigrew's (2009) observation that secondary transfer effects are largest for those groups that are culturally similar to the target outgroup. The possibility of generalisation effects to uninvolved outgroups moves contact theory some way beyond Allport's original hypothesis: as Pettigrew (2009, p.56) has

commented, "[i]f this phenomenon were widespread, then the power of contact to influence intergroup relations is greater than generally appreciated".

Mediators of contact

Since the late-1990s, researchers' interest has focused increasingly on the processes which mediate the relationship between contact and attitudes – in other words, those which explain why contact has a positive effect on outgroup evaluation. While cognitive mediators, such as learning about the outgroup, were previously thought to have the most substantial effects (see Pettigrew, 1998), studies from the past decade have posited a more central role for affective mediators (Tropp and Pettigrew, 2005b; 2004). A meta-analysis of three mediating variables supported the importance of affect, reporting that anxiety reduction and empathy were more powerful mediators of contact than increased knowledge (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008).

The two affective mediators discussed in Pettigrew and Tropp's meta-analysis, intergroup anxiety and empathy, are particularly important in the literature on contact. Intergroup anxiety first received significant attention in the work of Stephan and Stephan (1985, p.158), who defined it as "anxiety stemming from contact with outgroup members". Stephan and Stephan suggested that intergroup anxiety might arise from the fear of four possible negative consequences – negative psychological and behavioural consequences for the self, negative evaluations by outgroup members, and negative evaluations by ingroup members – and may have deleterious effects including avoidance and information processing bias. Research has indicated, however, that contact (via direct and extended friendship) helps to reduce anxiety, which in turn promotes more favourable outgroup attitudes (Hutchison and Rosenthal, 2011; Turner *et al.*, 2008; Paolini *et al.*, 2004), greater perceived outgroup variability (Hutchison and Rosenthal, 2011; Paolini *et al.*, 2004), and more positive behavioural intentions (Hutchison and Rosenthal, 2011).

While empathy is usually regarded as the affective component of putting oneself in another's position, and perspective-taking as the cognitive component (Stephan and Finlay, 1999), the two have been conceptualised differently in research. For example, Harwood *et al.* (2005) defined perspective-taking as an affective variable, while Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) combined the two into a single measure of

empathy. Howsoever defined, empathy/perspective-taking has been shown to have a significant mediating role. Harwood and colleagues (2005) reported that it was the strongest of the five potential mediators that they tested (the others being anxiety, individuation, self-disclosure and accommodation), while Aberson and Haag (2007) found that perspective-taking was involved in mediating the relationship between contact and more positive explicit attitudes. Additionally, longitudinal research from Swart et al. (2011) found that affective empathy mediated the relationship between contact and the three measures of prejudice adopted in their research: outgroup attitudes, perceived outgroup variability and action tendencies.

Several studies in this area have considered the sequential relationship between these two affective mediators. Whereas Pettigrew and Tropp (2008) suggest a possible causal sequence from reduced anxiety to greater empathy/perspective-taking and lower prejudice, Aberson and Haag (2007) found empirical support for the opposite relationship – that perspective-taking related to reduced anxiety. Swart et al.'s (2011) longitudinal study has provided support for the first model, whereby contact lowers anxiety, which in turn promotes empathy. Acknowledging the variation between their research and Aberson and Haag's, Swart et al. pointed to their studies' respective use of the variables 'empathy' and 'perspective-taking', and suggested that future research might incorporate both elements in the same design.

As Pettigrew and Tropp note in their 2008 meta-analysis, anxiety-reduction and empathy accounted for only about half of the relationship between contact and prejudice. They draw attention to the potential influence of a range of other mediators, a growing number of which continue to be identified by researchers. Among the most notable of these is self-disclosure, which appears to have an important mediating role. Turner, Hewstone and Voci (2007) reported, from four cross-sectional studies, that self-disclosure mediated the relationship between direct and extended cross-group friendship and explicit outgroup attitudes, and did so via three mechanisms: generating empathy, encouraging reciprocal trust, and increasing the importance of the friendship to those involved. Subsequent research has endorsed this finding and provided initial support for the mediating role of self-disclosure over time (Turner et al., 2013; Turner and Feddes, 2011). Because self-disclosure is associated with greater individuation and personalisation in relationships, however, there may be a risk that its positive effects fail to generalise. Consistent with this, Ensari and Miller (2002) reported from their research that the

mediating role of self-disclosure was more powerful where category salience and outgroup member typicality were strong than where these were weak.

Among the other variables identified as mediators in the literature are group norms, perceived group threat and outgroup trust. Studies have suggested that group norms may have a particular role in the effects of extended contact, mediating the relationship between indirect friendship and intended friendship behaviours in children (Cameron *et al.*, 2011) and general outgroup attitudes among adolescents and young adults (De Tezanos-Pinto, Bratt and Brown, 2010; Turner *et al.*, 2008). In research undertaken in Northern Ireland, contact has been found to reduce perceptions of symbolic and realistic group threat, which is in turn associated with more positive outgroup attitudes (Tausch *et al.*, 2007). Finally, while more commonly employed as an outcome variable, trust has also been shown to have a mediating role: Tam and colleagues (2009), also in Northern Ireland, found that outgroup trust mediated the relationship between contact and both positive and negative behavioural tendencies.

Moderators of contact

As well as seeking to explain the processes that account for the effects of contact, research has also identified a series of moderators of contact. These are variables which influence the size of the effects of contact on outgroup attitudes: while mediators indicate *why* contact works, moderators help to explain *when* it works. While the moderating role of group salience and perceived typicality has been discussed above, the effects of contact may also be moderated by individual traits of participants, perceptions of their group identity and status, and their current and previous experiences of contact. The full range of moderating variables reported in the contact literature is beyond the scope of this review, but a number of individual- and group-level moderators are discussed in this section. These are chosen in view of Birtel and Crisp's (2012) observation that an understanding of these moderators can be valuable in assessing the likely effectiveness of contact interventions for different targets.

There has been comparatively little research on the role of individual differences in moderating the effects of contact, but extant studies suggest that individuals' existing outgroup attitudes moderate the impact of contact on prejudice. In such

cases, those with more hostile attitudes generally experience stronger contact effects (Graham, Frame and Kenworthy, 2014; Hodson, Costello and MacInnes, 2013; Maoz, 2003). In her study in Israel, for example, Maoz (2003) reported that hawks (individuals who defend their group's interests and resist compromise) showed greater attitude change than 'doves' (individuals who value dialogue and cooperation), despite rating the interaction less positively. Certain individual traits, including tendencies towards social comparison and authoritarianism, have also been shown to moderate the effects of contact: in each case, contact has a greater effect among those scoring highly on these characteristics than among those with low scores (Asbrock et al., 2012; Sharp, Voci and Hewstone, 2011; Hodson, Harry and Mitchell, 2009). In addition, studies suggest that identity strength moderates both the effect of contact on attitudes and the mediating role of intervening variables (Davies et al., 2013; Hodson, Harry and Mitchell, 2009; Tausch et al., 2007).

With regard to group level moderators, the research of Tropp and Pettigrew (2005a) has highlighted the role of majority and minority group status in moderating the effects of contact on attitudes towards the outgroup. Offering further insight into this process, Tropp (2007) found that perceptions of group discrimination moderated the association between contact and interracial closeness for black but not for white respondents in the USA. While the association between these two variables was consistent among white respondents, Tropp reported that it occurred only among black respondents who perceived low levels of group discrimination. In addition, Tausch et al. (2007) found that perceived ingroup status moderated the effects of contact among students in Northern Ireland. When participants perceived their group's status to be higher than that of the outgroup, they anticipated less anxiety and perceived less threat to the ingroup from the interaction.

Negative contact

Reflecting the main concerns of contact theory, the sections above have focused on the impact of positive contact experiences on participants' intergroup attitudes. In comparison, the negative effects of contact have received substantially less research attention, as Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) acknowledged in their meta-analysis. Noting that "the knowledge gained from past contact research is limited by its primary emphasis on positive features of the contact situation" (p.767), they urged greater attention to the factors that impede the ability of contact to reduce prejudice. In recent years, several research papers have begun to address this call,

exploring the social psychological processes associated with negative contact and the effects of such contact relative to positive encounters (Paolini *et al.*, 2014; Graf, Paolini and Rubin, 2014; Barlow *et al.*, 2012; Paolini, Harwood and Rubin, 2010).

Among the most striking findings from this research is that negative experiences of contact have a more substantial and consistent effect on intergroup attitudes than positive experiences. Across two studies based on data from Australia and the United States, Barlow *et al.* (2010) found that increases in negative contact strongly predicted increases in outgroup prejudice, while the relationship between positive contact and reduced prejudice was inconsistent. The greater influence of negative relative to positive contact on attitudes was also reported by Graf, Paolini and Rubin (2014), a finding apparently at odds with Pettigrew and Tropp's (2006) conclusion that contact has an overall positive impact on attitudes. Helping to explain this discrepancy, Graf and colleagues also noted that negative encounters were reported far less frequently than positive ones; indeed, in their study, negative contact was four times less common than positive contact. On this basis, the authors argue that the greater prevalence of positive encounters – at least in societies that do not experience intergroup contact – may enable the effects of positive contact to outweigh those of negative contact, resulting in "in modest but relatively stable net improvements in outgroup attitudes" (Graf, Paolini and Rubin, 2014, p.546).

An explanation for the stronger relationship between negative contact and prejudice is suggested by the work of Paolini, Harwood and Rubin (2010): drawing on Hewstone and Brown's (1986) salient categorisation approach, they found that negative contact increased the salience of an interactant's group membership (what they term a 'valence-salience effect') and thus the likelihood that resulting negative attitudes would generalise to the outgroup as a whole. Subsequent research by Paolini *et al* (2014) has further indicated that valence-salience effects are moderated by prior contact, such that the salience of negative contact is greater among those whose previous experience of the outgroup is limited or negative. Arguing that this points to a vicious circle - whereby those with negative previous experiences are more likely to anticipate and experience subsequent negative contact – Paolini *et al* (2014) advocate the use of structured direct encounters with these participants to maximise the likelihood of positive encounters.

Critical perspectives on contact theory

As the foregoing discussion has shown, contact theory continues to generate much research interest, and this durability – perhaps due in part to the cogency and 'common-sense' simplicity of the hypothesis – has caused Brown (2010, p.244) to describe it as "one of the most long-lived and successful ideas in the history of social psychology". Despite this success, contact theory has also received notable criticism. As Pettigrew and Tropp (2011) argue, some of this criticism reflects a poor theoretical understanding, but much of it raises legitimate concerns about the perspectives and approaches adopted in this field. For example, critics address contact researchers' relative inattention to the social structures that sustain discrimination and their participation in practices of racial and ethnic categorisation. Although this body of literature is not extensive – which may reflect the tendency of writers interested in macro-social structures and processes to disengage from a theory that has been primarily concerned with micro-relations (Connolly, 2000) – that which exists offers valuable suggestions for future research. This literature is discussed below. Subsequently, this chapter outlines three studies which have adopted alternative approaches to researching contact and considers the distinctive insights that each has offered to the field.

Contact, 'prejudice' and the model of social change

The concept of 'prejudice' and its status within contact theory have received critical attention from several perspectives. At a fundamental level, both the understanding of prejudice as 'negative evaluation' and its validity as a cause of interethnic conflict have come under scrutiny (Zuma, 2014; Dixon *et al.*, 2013, 2012). Such criticism addresses the risk that, by positing 'faulty' or 'irrational' beliefs as the cause of intergroup conflict, contact researchers neglect "the broader social processes, institutions and structures that help to create and sustain racial and ethnic divisions" (Connolly, 2000, p.170). Criticism of this type tends to address two points. The first is that contact theory underplays or ignores the possibility that individuals' attitudes and behaviours towards outgroup members might result not (only) from irrational dislike, but from a more rational strategy to safeguard their group's social, cultural and economic interests (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005; Forbes, 2004; Jackman and Crane, 1986). The second point is that contact theory neglects the role that macro-level factors – political discourses, public institutions and economic

arrangements – play in sustaining and protecting these disparities in power (Erasmus, 2010; Connolly, 2000).

According to these arguments, the transformative potential of contact is less clear than its advocates suggest. While contact might increase individuals' positive evaluations of outgroup members, it does not necessarily follow that this will translate into support for greater equality and desegregation. Research in this area encourages caution. While positive contact tends to promote support among majority group members for policies aimed at reducing intergroup inequality (see Saguy, Tropp and Hawi, 2013, for a review), this effect is modest (particularly when compared with the effect of contact on affective attitudes) and might not be reflected in practical action (Saguy *et al.*, 2009; Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2007; Jackman and Crane,1986). Moreover, a number of studies have suggested that positive contact can actually *reduce* support among disadvantaged group members for measures to address inequality, and decrease the likelihood that they will engage in collective action to improve their circumstances (Dixon *et al.*, 2013; 2012; Saguy *et al.*, 2009; Wright and Lubensky, 2009; Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2007). Fundamentally, theorists in this area often fail to explicate the relationship between individual perspectives and the actions required to challenge "the collective and institutionalised bases of discrimination" (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005, p.702; Connolly, 2000).

In light of this criticism, it is perhaps not surprising that a number of researchers have favoured more radical approaches than contact to transforming intergroup relations. These have advocated challenging the practices of categorisation that uphold structural disadvantage (Erasmus, 2010; Reicher, 1986), or building solidarity and support for change among disadvantaged groups (Drury, 2012; Jost, Stern and Kalkstein, 2012). However, others more sympathetic to the possibilities of contact have recommended changes to the scope and focus of contact theory so that it can better address the systems of power that suffuse social relations. In the context of this thesis, two alternative approaches are of particular interest. The first of these speaks to the academic community and argues for research that redresses the theoretical individualism of contact theory by situating "racial and ethnic relations in the context of wider social processes and structures" (Connolly, 2000, p.172). A proponent of this approach, Connolly calls for greater attention to "the complex dialectical relationships between the nature of the intergroup contact itself and the

broader socio-economic and political contexts within which participants are located" (p.175). To this end, he advocates the use of qualitative methods to explore how participants' interpretations and experiences of contact are informed by their social, cultural and political circumstances.

While Connolly (2000) advocates research that locates the day-to-day experience of contact within wider social processes, approaches of the second type offer guidance for practitioners on addressing these processes *within* this interaction itself. These draw on methods of intergroup dialogue, which have developed in peace studies and education, and aim to counteract the tendency during contact to neglect differences of power and privilege (Maoz, 2011; Dovidio, Gaertner and Saguy, 2009). Proponents of dialogue encourage contact as a means to develop "understanding of social identities and of social inequalities and conflicts, to foster relationships across identity groups, and to build individual and collaborative capacity for change" (Nagda *et al.*, 2013, p.211-12). While relationship-building thus retains a central significance, these relationships are valued for their potential to challenge participants' perspectives on inequality, and to facilitate strategies for action, rather than mere changes in attitude (Nagda *et al.*, 2013; Ron and Maoz, 2013; Dessel and Rogge, 2008).

Ethnic categorisation and essentialism

As a psychological theory that explores the interactions of individuals from different racial, ethnic and/or cultural groups, contact theory has been criticised for its involvement in practices of 'racialisation' – that is, the use of discrete racial categories to make sense of social relations – and cultural essentialism (Richards, 2012; Erasmus, 2010; Howarth, 2009; Reicher, 1986). According to this argument, contact theory is problematic because it uncritically assumes the existence of racial or ethnic categories and understands these to be fixed and enduring. Furthermore, it accepts the practice of assigning individuals to these categories, most commonly on the basis of physical characteristics, but also according to their parentage (as in Northern Ireland) or country of origin.

This criticism of categorisation and essentialism takes two forms. Firstly, it is argued that contact research reflects a flawed understanding of racial and ethnic identities: rather than being stable and natural as this research implies, these identities are

constantly under construction. As such, they are contextually contingent, characterised by fluidity and hybridity, and subject to contestation and resistance (Howarth, 2009; Hopkins, 2008; Brah, 2007). Furthermore, racial and ethnic identities intersect with other aspects of identity – gender, class, sexuality, and so on – to inform individuals' experiences (Howarth, 2009). To prioritise one identity over others as a determinant of experience is to neglect that individuals are "accumulations of roles and identities", which cannot be fully understood in isolation from one another (Gillespie, Howarth and Cornish, 2012, p.395).

From the second perspective, it is argued that the acceptance of these categories as neutral descriptors of the social world overlooks the historical and political significance that they carry. In contexts in which racial and cultural labels have been deployed to justify social division and discrimination, their continued use in research may lend legitimacy to the processes of classification that support inequality (Richards, 2012; Erasmus, 2010; Foster and Finchilescu, 1986). Furthermore, research may actually participate in these processes: for example, by employing attitudinal measures which ask about racial stereotypes, researchers may reinforce – and (unintentionally) validate – the use of racial difference to explain social problems (Reicher, 1986). For these critics, contact theory's involvement in practices of racial classification makes it unequal to the task of transforming relations: as Reicher (1986, p.164) has argued, "it cannot solve the problem because it is part of the problem". Instead, both Reicher and Erasmus advocate greater critical engagement with the ways that people employ these racial categories to structure their experiences, with the ultimate aim of disrupting these practices and replacing them with alternative analyses of social relations.

As contact theory is premised on a collective understanding of the existence of different ethnic groups, it cannot easily answer these critics, except perhaps to respond that researchers seek to reflect, rather than reproduce, the categories that people use to make sense of their social worlds (Howarth, 2009). In contexts such as Northern Ireland, where ethno-religious and national identities have generally been defined in opposition to one other and remain the primary bases for social categorisation (Bond and Rosie, 2010; Muldoon *et al.*, 2007), the concept of fluid and hybrid identities can lack widespread resonance. There may be possibilities for a partial reconciliation of these different perspectives, however, in the adoption of a more critical approach to identity within contact research. Authors writing from both

the perspectives discussed above recommend a more critical analysis of the ways that racial and cultural identities are constructed (Gillespie, Howarth and Cornish, 2012; Erasmus, 2010; Howarth, 2009). Rather than assuming the existence and salience of particular categories, it is argued that researchers should explore "the ways they are made meaningful, developed or contested in different contexts" (Gillespie, Howarth and Cornish, 2012, p.396). Within contact research, this approach might encourage researchers to interrogate more thoroughly the meaning and salience of ethnic categories for participants, and to consider how these – and not merely their attitudes to the other – shape and are shaped by their experience of contact. It may also give participants greater agency in the process of self-classification, allowing them to choose, contest and qualify the identities ascribed to them (Hopkins, 2008).

The dynamics of 'space' and 'place'

An analysis of the spaces in which contact occurs, and the meanings that these hold for participants, is important for a more complete understanding of intergroup interaction, but is rarely present in the literature (Foster, 2005; Dixon, 2001). In the few cases where researchers have considered the implications of space, they have largely conceived of it in terms of its role in 'containing' social and psychological processes or in enabling or impeding contact (Dixon, 2001). Concerned by this limited approach, researchers have argued for greater attention, firstly, to the influence of 'space' on participants' perceptions and experiences of contact (Wessel, 2009; Dixon, 2001); and secondly, to the role of place and space in identity construction, and the implications of this for attitudes towards desegregation and contact (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004, 2000).

In the first case, Dixon (2001) advocates greater attention to boundary processes in structuring social space and thereby organising relations between groups. He argues that the construction of material or symbolic boundaries may shape the meanings that participants ascribe to contact and the dynamics of encounters – in the latter case, by increasing or decreasing the salience of identity categories. Moreover, these boundaries may serve a political purpose in excluding outsiders and portraying contact as transgressive, thereby reducing the possibility of equal status or cooperation in encounters between group members (Dixon, 2001). From the perspective of human geography, Wessel (2009, p.15) also urges attention to features of the landscape that have meaning for participants, including "physical

links with the past" and the "presence of marginal spaces". In addition, he advocates greater recognition of the interaction of spatial and temporal dimensions of contact, noting that space may carry different meanings and have different uses according to the time of day/night.

In the second case, Dixon and Durrheim (2004, 2000) highlight the historical and emotional associations that particular places may hold for group members, and the potential consequences of these associations for attitudes towards desegregation. To this end, they borrow from environmental psychology the notion of 'place identity'. While more commonly used to describe individuals' affiliations with favoured places, Dixon and Durrheim (2004, 2000) suggest that place identity is also relevant to understanding how group members come to view their collective relationship to particular spaces and locations. They argue that place identities are founded "on a distinction between insiders and outsiders, our space and their space" (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004, p.459); as a result, they carry ideological significance and may be deployed to rationalise and regulate the nature of relations between groups. The concept of place identity is relevant to contact research because the expectation of contact presupposes a level of desegregation that may threaten this collective association with place. In turn, this threat may elicit social and psychological reactions – including resegregation – that can prevent contact from occurring. Acknowledging this, Dixon and Durrheim argue that researchers should be attentive to the meanings that particular spaces hold for group members and their implications for integration and contact.

Idealism in research design

Whereas the criticism discussed above addresses aspects of theory, the remaining discussion in this section focuses on criticism of the methodologies adopted in studies of contact. Prominent in this regard have been concerns about the 'idealism' of contact research, manifest particularly in the extensive use of experimental methods. In these highly controlled studies, participants' actions and group memberships are manipulated by the researcher and contact is usually brief, raising concerns about external validity (Zuma, 2014; Nesdale and Todd, 2000; Pettigrew, 1986). This idealism was particularly prevalent prior to the mid-2000s when researchers were frequently concerned with identifying 'optimal' conditions of contact. Not only did this work overlook the practical difficulty of implementing these conditions – such as equal status between groups – in 'real world' contexts of

division and inequality (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004; Foster and Finchilescu, 1986), it also resulted in a tendency to explain failed contact simply in terms of the absence of these facilitating conditions (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005; Connolly, 2000; Pettigrew, 1998). As Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2005) acknowledge, accounts that consider the influence of the socio-political context in which contact occurs, and the historical relations between the groups involved, have been rare.

While research has moved away from elucidating optimal conditions, laboratory experiments remain highly valued, as do survey studies that explore the relationship between participants' self-reported contact and their attitudes towards outgroup members. An advantage of survey methods is that they permit researchers to explore the impact of the everyday interactions that participants claim to have, thus partially addressing the issues of external validity discussed above. However, because such research focuses primarily on attitudinal outcomes, and summarises the nature of contact within a few variables relating to its frequency and quality, it remains limited in what it reveals about the course of 'real world' interaction. As Harwood (2010, p.164) observes, "[t]he contact *event* is a bit of a black box – people disappear into it and emerge with altered attitudes. We know relatively little about what they do during the contact itself". This is problematic because it hinders researchers' understanding of the situations and settings in which contact arises and the ways that it develops (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005). Furthermore, it prevents a full understanding of the (inter)actions that facilitate (or impede) the psychological processes thought to promote more positive attitudes – perspective-taking, self-disclosure and reduced anxiety, for example.

Combined, these limitations have prompted calls for greater attention to the ways in which contact arises and unfolds in real-world settings. Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2005) have been among the most prominent critics of the 'utopianism' of contact research and have urged that more studies be undertaken into "the mundane, apparently unimportant encounters that constitute the overwhelming majority of everyday contact experiences" (p.699). This type of 'real world' research, they argue, is necessary for a full understanding of the circumstances and settings in which contact occurs, the extent to which opportunities for contact are taken or lost, and the reasons for the apparent success or failure of contact in particular situations. Such research in everyday settings can also help to illuminate the process of casual contact: while a necessary precursor of the friendship valued in

contact theory, casual contact has received relatively little attention in research (Wessel, 2009). Studies in these areas are important to inform the design of interventions that address the realities of day-to-day interaction and challenge the social processes and beliefs that limit contact (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005).

Inattention to participants' constructions of contact

To understand better how participants make sense of these 'real world' encounters, Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2005) have proposed a shift in methodology to incorporate what might be considered an interpretivist approach. Their proposal reflects a common criticism of positivist social science research: that it privileges academic definitions and understandings over the meanings that participants attach to their experiences. Within contact research, Dixon and colleagues have argued that this inattention to participants' perspectives has significant limitations. Firstly, it further removes the study of contact from participants' lived experience, impeding a deeper understanding of the nature of their cross-group encounters. Secondly, it prevents a full appreciation of lay constructions of intergroup relations and the influence of these on responses to contact and desegregation.

To address these limitations, Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2005, p.704) advocate methodological approaches that are more sensitive to the "interpretive frameworks and practices used by the individuals and communities in contact to make sense of their everyday relations". They highlight the particular value of qualitative research methods, discussing several studies of intercultural relationships and encounters that have effectively employed qualitative techniques to elaborate participants' constructions of these experiences. Among these studies is that of Connolly (2000), who similarly argues for the use of qualitative and ethnographic approaches to the study of contact. These, he posits, best enable researchers to explore the influence of social and political circumstances on participants' views of cross-group interaction.

Despite the strength of these arguments, the qualitative approach remains relatively underused in contact research. While there is some evidence of an increase in the use of qualitative techniques to study intergroup interactions and relationships (see Blackwood, Hopkins and Reicher, 2013; Fozdar, 2011; Halualani, 2008; Hughes, 2007; Dixon and Durrheim, 2003), the number of studies adopting these methods

remains small. Where qualitative studies have been undertaken, however, they have contributed to a better understanding of how contact proceeds in everyday settings and how participants perceive and represent their experiences. Three such studies are discussed below, highlighting the distinctive contributions and insights that qualitative research can provide.

Dixon and Durrheim (2003): practices of segregation on a South African beach

Dixon and Durrheim's (2003, p.2) innovative study starts from the premise that contact research should address the "historical, ideological and material actualities of relationships between groups". Addressing one such actuality, the ongoing existence of *de facto* segregation, their study focuses on a formally desegregated beach in the resort of Scottburgh. Having observed that informal practices of resegregation were occurring on the beachfront, Dixon and Durrheim employed observational techniques to map the position of members of different racial categories on the beach at intervals over a Christmas and New Year holiday period. In addition, they undertook open-ended interviews with 'white' beachgoers to explore how interviewees interpreted the pattern of relations on the beach.

Dixon and Durrheim's (2003) observations revealed the tendency of visitors to cluster in racially homogeneous groups in "umbrella spaces", which served to maintain separation and regulate relations. This preference for non-contact was demonstrated in interviews with 'whites', who expressed displeasure at what they depicted as 'black' visitors' violation of the norms associated with these spaces. The mapping technique also highlighted two intervals – Boxing Day and New Year's Day – when racial distribution across the beach differed significantly from the usual pattern. At these times, the number of 'blacks' using the beach was substantially higher than on other days, and the number of 'whites' substantially lower. This was explained by 'whites' as part of a strategy to avoid 'blacks', whose behaviour – "drinking", "screaming" and "shouting" (p.18) – they portrayed as threatening. As Dixon and Durrheim report, these descriptions served a political purpose, portraying whites' self-segregating behaviours as justifiable responses to such conduct and ultimately sustaining ideologies that supported separation. The qualitative element of this study was thus valuable in expounding the practices that maintain segregation and highlighting how 'whites' justify their ongoing avoidance of 'blacks' through the use of racial tropes, while simultaneously attempting to cast their objections in racially neutral terms.

Halualani (2008): intercultural interaction in a multicultural university setting

Responding to the observation that contact research neglects participants' perspectives, the work of Halualani (2008, p.1) explores how students at a multicultural university "define, experience and interpret such interactions in their own words and in [the] context of their lives". From data gathered through interviews with 80 students at a US university, Halualani identifies two significant and contrasting themes. The first of these explores the perception of one group of respondents that they were constantly involved in intercultural interaction, simply by virtue of their presence on a diverse campus. Halualani suggests that this perspective reflects dominant societal views of diversity in the USA, whereby one's presence in a multicultural setting is presumed to entail engagement with outgroup members and the possession of an open and tolerant attitude. Ironically, she argues, this conflation of diversity and contact might have prevented participants from seeking more meaningful interaction.

The second of Halualani's (2008) themes explores the tendency of another group of interviewees to view intercultural interaction as something that occurred between strangers and to distinguish this from their interactions with outgroup friends. This separation of cross-group friendship from "the terrain of culture and intercultural interaction" (Halualani, 2008, p.10) might, she suggests, reflect the pervasiveness of 'colour-blind' ideologies in the USA, whereby the refusal to acknowledge racial difference represents an attempt to equalise relations between groups. However, Halualani also observes that students seemed reluctant to acknowledge difference in their friendships in case they appeared too "culturally conscious" and provoked accusations of being "prejudiced or racist" (p.13). Among these young people, concerns about self-presentation governed behaviour during interaction and the framing of these interactions in discussion with others. In presenting her observations, Halualani demonstrates the importance of participants' understanding of contact for informing their responses during intergroup encounters. Moreover, in revealing the variation that exists in participants' definitions of intercultural interaction, she demonstrates the value of exploring lay interpretations and not relying solely on academic constructs.

Fozdar (2011): interracial friendship between Maori and Pakeha in New Zealand

Fozdar's work explores interracial friendship between individuals of Maori and white European ('Pakeha') descent in New Zealand. Through qualitative interviews,

Fozdar reveals how historical and contemporary political concerns about group relations infuse cross-group friendships and are manifest in individuals' responses. In the context of an ideology of unity within the political discourse, she observes that participants are careful not to diverge from the "normativity of heterophily" (p.392); for this reason, they appear to over-report their number of outgroup friends and emphasise the irrelevance of ethnicity in their friendships. At the same time, however, the history of colonialism and discrimination continues to inform the experience of interracial friendship. In one example, Fozdar refers to the prevalence of anxiety in Maori's descriptions of these friendships, interpreting this as an indication of "the mistrust a colonised people continue to feel towards those who have benefited from their colonisation" (p.397).

Fozdar (2011) also discusses participants' strategies for managing the interracial dimension of their friendship. She reports, for example, the tendency of more conservative Pakeha to 'decategorise' outgroup friends from their wider ethnic group. This permits their negative evaluations of the outgroup to remain intact and impedes the development of more inclusive 'recategorised' identities (Gaertner *et al.*, 1996). In a similar example, Fozdar discusses participants' careful attention to self-presentation within the cross-group friendship as a means of avoiding conflict. In such cases, where relations appear to be "governed more by rational calculation than by affect" (p.395), Fozdar suggests that there may be limited scope for the development of empathy and the positive effects that this promotes (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008; Paolini *et al.*, 2004). The contribution of Fozdar's work is two-fold. Firstly, it demonstrates how the macro-social context informs micro-level interactions. Secondly, it identifies how participants' behaviours in these friendships illuminate – and sometimes challenge – theory regarding the social and psychological processes associated with contact.

Conclusion

The intention of this chapter has been to provide an overview of key developments in contact theory and to explore the critical response to this work. Since it was first advanced in the context of desegregation in the United States after the Second World War, the contact hypothesis (Allport, 1958, 1954) has generated hundreds of research studies. These have explored intergroup relations across many different settings, including those – like Northern Ireland – which have experienced significant conflict. Although its impact has been substantial, the vast majority of

contact research has been undertaken within the same positivist framework, either in the laboratory or via pre-coded questionnaires, and has paid little attention to participants' everyday experiences and interpretations. Furthermore, this work has largely considered contact in isolation from the cultural, social, historical and political contexts in which it occurs. The present study of intergroup contact through shared education aims to address these oversights. In particular, it aims to contribute to the small body of literature that utilises qualitative methods to illuminate participants' lived experiences of contact within particular contexts. Further discussion of the research design and methods employed for this purpose follows in the next chapter.

Chapter 4: Methodology

This chapter builds on the arguments developed in chapter 2 and sets out the rationale for this research. After outlining the purpose of the study and the research questions, the chapter moves into a discussion of the research design and the methods employed for data collection and analysis. This sets out the reasons for selecting particular approaches, describes how the methods were employed in this study, and outlines any limitations or difficulties that were encountered. Acknowledging the need for criticality and reflexivity during the research process, this chapter also considers the debates regarding quality in qualitative research and includes some reflection on my role within the research process. It concludes with a discussion of ethics in relation to this study.

Purpose of the study and research questions

This thesis aims to address several of the limitations of existing contact literature through a study of intergroup contact via shared education in Northern Ireland. Specifically, the research adopts a comparative case study design and uses qualitative methods to explore pupils' experiences of contact in two shared education partnerships, paying particular attention, firstly, to the interpretive frameworks that pupils bring to shared education; and, secondly, to the features of the contact situation and the dynamic between these and pupils' interactions. Recognising that young people's interpretive frameworks are subject to multiple biographical, social and political influences, this study aims to elucidate the contextual factors that inform their perspectives on intergroup relations. In this respect, the study responds to criticism of the decontextualised and ahistorical nature of previous research and its neglect of the meanings that participants ascribe to contact.

To guide the research project, three research questions were developed, each of which was intended to illuminate a different aspect of participants' experience. The three questions were:

1. How do participants in the two shared education partnerships interpret and navigate situations of contact based on their biography, background and previous experience?

2. How do features of the contact situation influence pupils' relationships and responses to others?

3. How do pupils respond to and negotiate matters of difference within shared education?

These questions address topics that emerged as areas of interest during the review of theoretical literature. Following the recommendation of Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2005), the first question aims to elucidate participants' views of contact and intergroup relations, and explore how these inform their decisions and actions. The second question recognises the current absence of literature that explores the unfolding nature of contact (Harwood, 2010). Against this background, the question focuses attention on the contact situation and its effect on pupils' interactions and responses. The third question is informed by research suggesting that contact theory's emphasis on positive and harmonious encounters may result in the neglect of differences in power, status and identity between groups (Saguy, Tropp and Hawi, 2013). In light of this, question 3 is intended to guide an exploration of the ways that difference is addressed during contact.

While the research involved engagement with both pupils and teachers, the decision to prioritise pupils' perspectives and experiences acknowledges that, from a social psychological perspective, these young people are the targets of shared education as a prejudice reduction strategy. As discussed in the introduction, previous research on shared education has indicated the positive effects of contact on pupils' attitudes (Hughes *et al.*, 2012, 2010), but comparatively little has been written about the content of pupils' experiences. We do not know a great deal, for example, about pupils' expectations of shared classes and activities, their feelings and perceptions when attending a school associated with the other religious group, and the kinds of interaction they experience. Further research in these areas is important to identify the factors which may facilitate positive encounters and to inform appropriate changes to programme design.

In addition, the focus on pupils' experiences is prompted by a concern to amplify the voices of young people in educational research, in accordance with their rights

under Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child to express their views in matters that concern them. This perspective considers children to be "'competent social actors' who actively contribute to and influence their own lives" and can speak with knowledge and authority on topics of relevance to them (Barker and Weller, 2003, p.34). As the young people involved in this study were all in mid- or late adolescence (ages 14-18, with more than two-thirds aged 16 or above), many of the issues associated with research with children were less applicable (see Gallagher, 2009; Lewis and Lindsay, 2000). Nevertheless, research with this age group, particularly in the school context, involved a number of methodological and ethical considerations. These are discussed in the relevant sections below.

Research design and methodology

Research paradigm

In developing the research questions and selecting a particular research design, any research project takes a position on questions about the nature of the social world ('ontological questions'), the way that human action should be studied, and the character of the knowledge that is produced ('epistemological questions'). In this regard, the current study adopts a constructionist-interpretivist perspective. As ontological/epistemological positions, constructionism and interpretivism reject the basic tenets of positivism/postpostivism: that the natural and social worlds share the same "logical and methodological foundations" and can be studied according to the same principles (Hughes, 1990, p.20). Beyond this shared rejection of positivism, however, there exists a lack of consensus about the distinctive features of constructionism and interpretivism, and the relationship between the two. Recognising that these terms are used in varying ways across the literature, the following brief discussion seeks to achieve some clarity in their meaning and application.

The social constructionist paradigm encompasses a number of different perspectives, but their common basis is well summarised by Flick (2009, p.70), who writes that "the realities we study are the social products of actors, interactions and institutions... Experiences are structured and understood through concepts and contexts, which are constructed by [the experiencing] subject." As this definition suggests, social constructionism takes the position that the social world is

continuously produced through interaction and, as a result, the constructs which represent reality are culturally and historically contingent (Bryman, 2012). This perspective on reality has led some writers, including Bryman, to consider social constructionism as an ontological position in its own right; others, like Schwandt (2003), consider it to be an epistemological orientation underpinned by a subjectivist ontology. The central point in each case, however, is that reality is not fixed and external to actors; rather, individuals and groups play active roles in constructing their social worlds. For researchers to understand social phenomena, they must therefore explore these constructions, the processes through which they are formed, and the meanings assigned to them.

This exploration and understanding of subjective meaning is at the heart of the epistemological position of interpretivism, which is frequently seen as a companion of constructionism. The premise underlying interpretivism is that the human social world and the natural world are qualitatively different and thus require different approaches to their respective study. In contrast to positivists – whose work emphasises causal explanation, the testing of hypotheses, and the elimination of subjectivity – interpretivists prioritise an understanding of the ways in which social actors interpret and give meaning to their world (Hughes, 1990). They argue that it is only through grasping these meanings that we can understand why people act as they do (Hammersley, 2012; Hughes, 1990). Reflecting this, as Hughes describes, interpretivists tend to pay greater attention to the unfolding nature of action and interaction in particular settings and circumstances. Unlike positivists, who favour universal explanations of behaviour, interpretivists explore how individuals make meaning in these contexts and how these interpretations inform action (Lincoln and Guba, 2003; Hughes, 1990).

Across the literature on research methods, the relationship between constructionism and interpretivism is understood in different ways: Bryman (2012) sees constructionism and interpretivism as complementary ontological and epistemological positions; Creswell (2009, p.8) appears to conflate them and writes of them being "often combined"; Hammersley (2012) views constructionism as a "radicalisation" of interpretivism; and Schwandt (2003) regards them as distinct epistemological stances. While recognising certain differences of emphasis between them (i.e. constructionism's greater interest in the structure and process of communication), this research takes a view akin to that of Bryman. Constructionism

and interpretivism in this work are considered to be complementary perspectives, sharing key tenets about the constructed nature of reality and the importance of studying phenomena from the perspectives of the actors involved.

Case study design

As outlined in the introduction to this chapter, this research employs a comparative case study design, with two shared education partnerships comprising the cases. Discussions of the case study approach reflect a diversity of methods and purposes (Gerring, 2006), yet from these a number of common features may be identified. Firstly, a case study involves the detailed exploration of a single individual, event, system or phenomenon – the study of "an instance in action" (Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis, 1976, p.141). Case studies thus provide a 'real world' context for exploring a particular issue or theoretical concept (Stake, 1995), "enabling readers to understand ideas more clearly than simply by presenting them with abstract theories or principles" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.289). Furthermore, case studies tend to adopt a holistic approach, exploring the individual features of the case, the characteristics of the case as a whole, and the relationship between the case and other systems with which it intersects (Byrne, 2009; Sturman, 1997; Stake, 1995).

From this description, a case study design appears to offer several advantages to the current research. The focus on specific cases – the two shared education projects – provides the opportunity to study intergroup contact in depth in an 'everyday' context, while the emphasis on exploring the 'wholeness' of the case encourages a detailed examination of the features of the school that inform and influence pupils' experiences of contact. Moreover, the importance of exploring the connections between the case and related systems requires the researcher to give due attention to other relevant structures and groups, particularly the local community within which the schools are situated. Finally, the accessibility and 'readability' of case studies, to which Cohen and colleagues allude, makes this design particularly appropriate to the multiple audiences with an interest in shared education. These include academics, policymakers, programme funders, teachers and pupils (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis, 1976).

While the depth of analysis is a strength of case study, it raises questions about the possibility of generalising from the individual case to other similar phenomena, situations or settings. Generalisation has proved a challenging and contentious issue in case study research. On one hand, authors such as Stake (1995, p.8) have argued that case studies should aim for "particularisation, not generalisation", especially where the research is founded on anti-positivist principles. Others suggest, however, that case studies should aim to make generalisable observations, although they recognise that representational generalisation is unfeasible (Yin, 2009; Tripp, 1985; Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis, 1976). Instead, these authors argue for alternative approaches of analytical and inferential generalisation. According to advocates of analytical generalisation, such as Yin (2009), findings from case studies can contribute to the development and expansion of theory that has application beyond the individual case. Those who propose inferential generalisation suggest that insights from one research context may be applied to others on the basis of readers' judgements about the similarity of the situations and settings (Lewis *et al.*, 2014; Tripp, 1985; Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis, 1976).

As this research is relevant to theory and policy, this study reflects both approaches to generalisation. In terms of analytical generalisation, it aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of cross-group interaction in real-world situations and thus to offer insights of relevance to contact theory and research. To permit inferential generalisation, it provides detailed descriptions of the cases from which practitioners can identify findings of relevance to their own contexts.

The cases and units of analysis

The cases for this research were selected from the 12 school partnerships that were participating in the Sharing Education Programme (SEP) in 2012/13. Two partnerships were selected as I felt that this would enable a detailed analysis of each case while also permitting comparisons between them. This comparative element is a particular strength of multiple case studies as it allows the researcher to identify the distinctive features of each case and the circumstances in which certain findings and/or theories are applicable (Bryman, 2012; Byrne, 2009). To ensure a coherent basis for comparison, I selected two partnerships that shared a number of common features but also differed in several key respects, thus

permitting an analysis of the course and nature of contact in these different circumstances.

Both of the chosen SEP partnerships comprised two post-primary schools, one Catholic and one Protestant, and delivered shared education largely at GCSE and/or A-level. Both partnerships were also located in small rural towns, which have been given the pseudonyms of 'Whitecliff' and 'Bellevue'. In terms of differences, the Whitecliff partnership comprised two non-selective schools and the Bellevue partnership included one selective and one non-selective school; in addition, while collaboration in Whitecliff was well-established and extensive, the Bellevue partnership was relatively new and more limited in scope. The nature of community relations in the areas in which the schools were located also differed: in Whitecliff, relations were relatively harmonious; in Bellevue, there remained substantial intergroup division and tension.

Following Yin's (2009) typology, this research adopted an embedded case study design. These are common in studies of complex systems like schools and incorporate multiple units of analysis (i.e. subjects of study and the focus of the findings and conclusions). For the purposes of this study, the two units of analysis were the school partnerships and the participating pupils. Defining the pupils as a unit of analysis permitted a detailed study of their experiences and enabled comparisons with findings from previous contact research (Yin, 2009). Simultaneously, however, the adoption of the school partnership as the larger unit of analysis enabled the in-depth exploration and comparison of relevant features of each programme and allowed conclusions to be drawn at this level.

Negotiating access

Permission to undertake research at the two case study partnerships was secured by contacting the headteachers at the four schools and asking for written consent for the school's participation. As the schools were already involved in SEP, each responded positively to my request and I did not experience the significant difficulties in obtaining access that researchers often face (see Bryman, 2012; Walford, 2001). Nevertheless, the process of choosing the sites and obtaining access raised two research issues that merit some discussion. The first of these was my connection with Queen's University, the organisation that manages SEP.

This had potential consequences for my relationships within the school and may have implications for the reader's perceptions of this work.

In approaching the schools, I was aware that they might be concerned that I would pass my findings directly to SEP personnel at Queen's. This could have prevented principals from giving consent for the research or affected my interactions with staff members. To assuage any such concerns, my initial correspondence included assurances of confidentiality and anonymity for all participants. I also emphasised that my research was independent of SEP and would not affect any subsequent funding decisions. Moreover, to preserve the independence of the work, I had limited contact with SEP personnel after the selection of the cases. This helped to ensure that my fieldwork, analysis and reporting were not subject to any undue influence. Further discussion of how I maintained the independence of my work is included in the 'limitations' section of the concluding chapter of this thesis.

The second issue to arise when negotiating entry related to the length of time for which schools were willing to allow me access. In designing this study, I had originally hoped to use participant observation as the main method of data collection, with additional interviews to explore pupils' perspectives in greater depth. While the logistics of this were complicated by the selection of partnerships located in towns some distance from my home in Belfast, the approach was further jeopardised by the schools' preference for a shorter period of fieldwork than that required for participant observation. For these reasons, and given the limited number of alternatives to my chosen cases, I opted to adjust the research design so that interviews constituted the principal method of data collection, with observations – which were mostly non-participatory in nature – providing additional information.

Data collection methods

The selection of a constructionist-interpretivist framework and case study design does not entail the use of particular research methods, although both have tended to be associated with qualitative approaches, such as observation, interviewing, and the analysis of documents and visual data (Gerring, 2009; Yin, 2009; Lincoln and Guba, 2003). The current research continues that association. A distinguishing feature of qualitative research is its orientation to the meanings that people bring to particular events and encounters – in other words, how people see things and why

they act in particular ways (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011; Silverman, 2003). This orientation makes qualitative methods particularly valuable for the present study, which prioritises participants' perspectives and interpretations of intergroup contact.

The decision to undertake interviews and observations in combination (albeit in revised form) was taken to enhance the depth and richness of the data. While the strength of observation is the insight it offers into behaviours and actions, interviews can explore in greater detail the meanings and understandings on which these are based. In addition, while observation allows the detailed exploration of a particular moment in time, the temporal dimension of interviews is much broader. Interviews can thus provide access to events and experiences that occurred at other times and in other situations but have relevance for individuals' perceptions and actions in the settings being observed (Warren, 2001). The following sections describe the research methods in greater detail.

Interviews

The interview represents the most widely-used method for gathering data within qualitative research (Rapley, 2004; Fielding and Thomas, 2001), with this prevalence reflecting both the efficiency and versatility of the method. In practical terms, interviews permit researchers to gather a large amount of data in a short period, thus saving time and resources relative to undertaking long periods of observation (Walford, 2001). Moreover, interviews enable the collection of data for a range of research purposes – such as to explore a new topic, to describe a lived experience, or to develop concepts and theories – and for a variety of reasons: as Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) report, these may include gathering information about an individual's experiences of a topic, learning about a specific social situation, or gathering life histories.

Researchers' approaches to interviewing may vary according to their perspectives on the nature of interviews, which have broadly been understood in two ways within the qualitative tradition (Rapley, 2004; ten Have, 2004). In the first of these, which ten Have terms the 'factist' perspective, what is said during the interview is considered to reflect the reality of participants' experiences and opinions. The aim of the interview is therefore to obtain this information as accurately and truthfully as possible through the use of a neutral, non-biased interviewing style (Rapley, 2004;

ten Have, 2004). According to what ten Have labels the 'specimen' perspective, however, interview data are not extracted from the interviewee but jointly constructed with them. From this standpoint, the interview itself becomes part of the reality under study: as well as exploring interviewees' accounts, researchers should consider the data in relation to the situation in which it was created and note how identities and meanings are produced within the interaction (Rapley, 2004). As Rapley argues, this approach acknowledges that there is no single reality to obtain and thus no perfect interview: meaning and reality only emerge in the interaction. Reflecting its constructionist approach, this research adopts a position in line with the latter perspective.

Pupil interviews

To collect data with pupils, this study used a variant of the traditional interview format: the group interview. While, as in one-to-one interviews, the interaction during group interviews occurs primarily between the interviewer and the individual participants, group interviews also offer opportunities for interaction among participants themselves. This has the advantage of enabling the researcher to observe how participants collectively construct meaning (ten Have, 2004; Eder and Fingerson, 2001; Gibbs, 1997). The shift of control from the researcher to the interviewee that this entails was the main reason for selecting the group format for pupil interviews. Conscious as I was of the higher status conferred by my age, educational background and role as researcher, I was keen to interview young people in groups as a way of redressing the imbalance of power (Gallagher, 2009; Eder and Fingerson, 2001). Furthermore, the group setting provided an interactive context more akin to those with which children and young people are familiar, which I hoped would encourage more relaxed discussion. These advantages remained convincing even after considering the risks of group interviewing, particularly that more assertive characters might dominate the discussion and less confident individuals might be intimidated by the group setting (Bryman, 2012; Gallagher, 2009).

Sampling and recruitment

The approach to sampling and recruiting pupils for the interviews varied between Whitecliff and Bellevue. In Bellevue, where only two courses were delivered through shared classes in year 13, all pupils enrolled in these courses were invited, via their

class teachers, to participate in an interview. Although one of these courses continued into year 14, these pupils were not involved in this part of the research because of the proximity of their final exams. All pupils who agreed to take part, and who returned the student and parent consent forms, were included in the study (see the section entitled 'research ethics' for further discussion of informed consent). In Whitecliff, however, the large number of pupils participating in shared education necessitated the use of a purposive sampling approach – that is, where participants were selected on the basis of "their typicality or possession of the particular characteristics being sought" (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, p.156; see also Creswell, 2014). In this instance, the aim was to ensure that the interview sample included students from different year groups, studying a range of academic and vocational subjects, to provide breadth of experience and ability. Those who were selected received an invitation email from the teacher or were approached during a lesson or registration period and asked if they would like to participate. Those who were willing to do so were given parental and student consent forms to complete and return.

In total, 60 pupils (32 in Whitecliff and 28 in Bellevue) took part in 21 interviews across the two partnerships. Each interview comprised between 2 and 4 students. All interviews took place between February and May 2013 and were held at pupils' schools. Table 1 below gives a breakdown (by numbers of pupils) of students' school backgrounds, their gender, their year group and the range of subjects that were represented. In view of the sensitivities associated with cross-group interaction and difference, all interviews comprised students from the same school (and, in most cases, the same ethno-religious background). This helped to reduce anxiety and allowed pupils to speak as freely as possible. Most interview groups also consisted of students who knew each other well, which helped to foster a relaxed atmosphere.

Table 1: Details of interview participants

	Whitecliff	Bellevue
School background[5]	Controlled: 15 Maintained: 17	Controlled: 12 Voluntary grammar: 16
Gender	Female: 17 Male: 15	Female: 15 Male: 13
Year group	Year 11: 14 Year 12: 7 Year 13: 11	Year 13: 28
Subjects represented	BTEC: Hospitality, Land and Environment, Sport, ICT GCSE: Leisure and Tourism, Moving Image Arts, Music, PE, Technology. A-level: Art, Business Studies, Chemistry, Drama, French, Health and Social Care, ICT, Maths, Music, PE, Physics, RE.	BTEC Engineering Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) A-level Health and Social Care
Location of classes	Own school: 16 Other school: 8 Both schools: 8	Own school only: 6 Other school only: 6 Both schools: 16[6]

Designing and conducting the interviews

When planning the interviews, I chose to adopt a largely semi-structured approach and to construct an interview guide for use during the discussions. While constructionist/interpretivist approaches to interviewing do not specify a particular structure (see Fielding and Thomas, 2001; Warren, 2001), this provided me, as a novice researcher, with some confidence as I approached the early interviews. The interview guide was informed by my reading of relevant academic and policy literature, and covered topics that I considered germane to answering the research

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[5] While a pupil's school is a reasonable indicator of their ethno-religious background, there were several instances where participants' religious backgrounds differed from those of the majority of the school's pupils. Two participants at the controlled school in Whitecliff and two at the controlled school in Bellevue reported that they were from mixed Catholic/Protestant backgrounds. One pupil at the controlled school in Bellevue was from a Catholic background. All pupils attending the Catholic schools reported Catholic backgrounds.

[6] In Bellevue, these figures relate only to the BTEC engineering and CoPE courses that took place between the schools. Of the six pupils attending shared classes at their own schools, five were also participating in a shared Health and Social Care class at the local further education college.

questions. Opening with some general 'ice-breaking' conversation about pupils' subject choices and interests, the guide progressed through a series of topics, including their understanding of the aim and purpose of shared education, their experiences of shared classes, their relationships with outgroup members, and their views of the local community and of life in contemporary Northern Ireland. Because I was interviewing students, I was careful to ensure the use of (non-technical) language and to avoid academic terminology (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011). Once complete, the interview guide was checked with my supervisor for content and tested with fellow postgraduate students for sense.

Over the course of the interviews, as I became more confident and familiar with the material, I was able to adapt the questions and my approach to interaction to the specific interview context. In this regard, I was mindful of the advice of Rapley (2004) that interviewers should not "worry excessively about whether their questions and gestures are 'too leading' or 'not empathetic enough'; *they should just get on with interacting with that specific person*" (p.16, emphasis in the original). This responsiveness proved to be particularly important when interviewing young people: although most participants were forthcoming, some – generally the younger ones – were quite reticent, at least initially. As a result, like Ingram (2012), I had to take more of a guiding role in these interviews than I had anticipated, encouraging conversation by presenting a particular point of view for discussion or sharing an experience of my own.

While I was initially concerned that some of these techniques involved more input from me than I had expected, they proved valuable in engaging pupils and strengthened what Kvale and Brinkmann (2009) term the 'dynamic' dimension of the interview. Moreover, like Davies (1989, cited in Eder and Fingerson, 2001), I found that even the quieter pupils were often willing to correct me if I made factual errors or suggested interpretations with which they disagreed, and did not simply accept the perspectives that I introduced. For this reason, I became less concerned that my involvement might be too directive. Instead, rather than seeking to preserve the "mythological (and methodological) interviewer stance" of neutrality and objectivity (Rapley, 2004, p.21), I came to focus more on developing collaborative and responsive interactions with participants, and felt that the quality of the interaction and the data benefited as a result.

To ensure that I could concentrate on interacting with participants while capturing a full record of the data, I recorded all the interviews using a digital voice recorder. Pupils were advised before the interviews of the intention to do this, and again at the start of each interview, and no objections were raised. I subsequently transcribed all the conversations verbatim for use in the analysis. Although it is common practice to record and transcribe interviews, this has some limitations, particularly that the transcription "takes us one further step away from the original event. The pace, accent, accentuation, tone and melody of the speech are all lost..." (Walford, 2001, p.94). Nevertheless, the transcripts provided a more accurate record of the discussion than notes gathered during the interview and enabled closer comparison of the interview texts than would have been possible using the recordings alone.

Teacher interviews

In addition to the group interviews with pupils, I undertook interviews with seven teachers who worked across the two case study partnerships. This had not originally been part of the research design: teachers' viewpoints have received more substantial attention in previous research on shared education (see Duffy and Gallagher, 2014, 2012; Donnelly, 2012; Hughes *et al.*, 2010; Knox, 2010), and I was conscious of the risk that pupils' voices would be overlooked in a study that also included the views of adults. However, as the pupil interviews progressed and particular perspectives emerged, I felt it would be valuable to explore teachers' views on the same topics – for example, the features of the setting that enabled or inhibited interaction and the experience of encountering difference. I was interested, in particular, to explore points of confluence and divergence between teachers' and pupils' perspectives, and the implications of these for the course and outcomes of contact through shared education. To this end, the interviews with teachers addressed both their personal involvement in shared education and their perceptions of the pupil experience. The data from teachers is therefore intended to supplement and augment the data collected with pupils, which remains the principal focus of this study.

In view of my interest in the intersection of teachers' and pupils' experiences, I interviewed staff members who were involved in the classroom delivery of shared education, rather than those with responsibility for coordinating the programme. In Bellevue, I contacted the teachers of the two shared classes, whom I had met

during the previous phase of the research, and both agreed to be interviewed. In addition, one of these teachers spoke to a colleague, who also taught on the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE) course, and invited her to participate. In Whitecliff, again, the extent of collaboration meant selecting from the number of teachers involved in the programme. To this end, I contacted each school and requested volunteers for interview, the only stipulation being that they taught mixed classes. Six teachers from Whitecliff (three per school) agreed to take part, but one from each school subsequently withdrew due to other commitments. Given the purpose of the interviews and the representation from Bellevue, however, I opted not to replace them. In total, therefore, four teachers were interviewed in Whitecliff (representing the subject areas of modern languages, PE, physical geography, and history and politics) and three in Bellevue (representing engineering and CoPE).

As I had for the pupil interviews, I prepared a semi-structured interview guide for use with teaching staff, based on the research questions, prior research with teachers in this area, and emerging findings from my interviews with students. The teachers were interviewed on a one-to-one basis, with the exception of the two teachers of CoPE in Bellevue, who were interviewed together. The interviews took place in a free classroom or meeting room and were recorded and transcribed for analysis. Acknowledging that teachers might be concerned that information could be relayed to staff at the university, I opened the interview with assurances about confidentiality and the independence of the research. However, as the schools' formal involvement in SEP had ended in July 2013, and the interviews took place in October 2013, this was less of a concern than it might have been earlier in the programme.

Observation

As a research method, observation is used in both quantitative and qualitative research, although its form and purpose tends to differ in each. Observation in the quantitative tradition is usually associated with non-participatory approaches, which use pre-coded observation sheets with the aim of testing hypotheses. In comparison, qualitative observation largely favours a more unstructured and inductive approach, and may involve greater participation of the researcher in the setting (Basit, 2010; Flick, 2009). In its most participatory forms, observation has traditionally been a central method of anthropologists and sociologists, who adopt an 'insider' role in the setting that they observe (Creswell, 2014; LeCompte and

Preissle, 1993). However, observational studies in qualitative research take a variety of forms and have increasingly featured shorter periods of focussed observation, often in combination with other methods (Lichtman, 2013).

The nature of the observation and the role that the researcher adopts depend on the aims of the research and the level of participation that is feasible. For example, where a researcher aims to explore participants' meanings and interpretations through observational approaches, he or she will usually be highly involved in the setting and interact extensively with the subjects of study. However, where the researcher's interest is principally in recording participants' behaviours, he or she may choose a more unobtrusive approach to observation so as to concentrate on the accurate recording of data (LeCompte and Preissle, 1993; Jorgensen, 1989). Moreover, while some authors present participant and non-participant forms of observation as opposing stances (see Basit, 2010), most acknowledge that they represent points at either end of a spectrum (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011; Gold, 1958). Researchers may occupy different points on this spectrum over the course of a research project.

In the present research, as discussed above, the selection of Whitecliff and Bellevue as cases had consequences for the purpose of the observation. In light of the decision to use interviews to collect data on pupils' experiences and perspectives of shared education, the focus of the classroom observation became their behaviours and interactions during shared classes. As the observation and interviewing took place concurrently, this approach was valuable in sensitising me to certain occurrences – such as the tendency for pupils to sit with ingroup members, particularly in larger classes – that could then be raised for discussion in the group interviews. Conducting the observations and interviews in parallel also enabled me to observe in practice some of the behaviours that pupils had described during the interviews. A potential limitation in this respect was that the interviewees were not in every case drawn from the classes that I had observed. This meant that I could not always follow up particular observations with members of the classes that I had observed. However, this proved not to be a significant disadvantage as it permitted me to explore whether data gathered through observations reflected patterns of behaviour in other classes.

In total, I undertook 10 classroom observations, comprising six shared classes in Whitecliff and four shared classes in Bellevue. In addition, I observed a joint exam skills session and an information event for parents, both in Bellevue, but these proved to be of less relevance to the research project. Within each partnership I observed the same number of classes at either school; and in Whitecliff, where collaboration was more extensive, I sought to include a mix of classes in traditional and vocational subjects. Unfortunately, despite pre-arranging dates for observations in Whitecliff and requesting a range of classes, it transpired that no arrangements had been made with class teachers prior to my arrival. As a result, I had to arrange observations at short notice according to which teachers could be contacted to agree to take part. This led to my observing two classes in the same subject, which was not ideal, although the location, year group and teacher differed between the two. Overall, however, the combination of classes permitted me to observe interaction in groups of different sizes, in different locations, and in lessons taught through a range of styles. The classes that I observed are outlined in table 2 below.

Table 2: Classes observed

Site	Subject	Year group	Location
Whitecliff	Agriculture	Year 13	St Brendan's School
Whitecliff	Business Studies	Year 13	St Brendan's School
Whitecliff	Health and Social Care	Year 13	St Brendan's School
Whitecliff	Health and Social Care	Year 14	Whitecliff High School
Whitecliff	History	Year 14	Whitecliff High School
Whitecliff	Sport (theory class)	Year 11	Whitecliff High School
Bellevue	Certificate of Personal Effectiveness	Year 13	Bellevue High School
Bellevue	Certificate of Personal Effectiveness	Year 13	Holy Saviour
Bellevue	Engineering	Year 13	Holy Saviour
Bellevue	Engineering	Year 14	Bellevue High School

During the observations I usually sat at the back of the classroom, from which position I could observe the teacher and the pupils, and made notes as unobtrusively as possible while the lesson proceeded. As Angrosino and Mays de Perez (2003) comment, this is the most common approach among researchers in classroom settings and minimises disruption to teaching and learning. Like any stance in the field, however, this approach was subject to certain limitations – in this case, most notably, that several of the teachers in Whitecliff appeared wary of my presence in the class. This was perhaps not surprising, as classroom observations are commonly part of internal and external processes of performance monitoring. I was careful to explain the purpose of the research to these teachers and emphasise that I was not evaluating their teaching practice (and here, my non-teaching background was valuable to deploy as 'proof' of my intentions). Nevertheless, it remains possible that my presence in these classes had an impact on the teachers' behaviour (and that of the pupils, although they appeared unfazed by me) in line with well-documented reactive effects (Bryman, 2012; Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011).

To establish some consistency in the format of the observations, I used a basic template to guide the recording of data. While I recognise that a single observer can only ever provide a partial account of the activity and interaction within a setting, this ensured that each observation addressed certain core elements. The template was informed by existing observation frameworks (see Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011, and LeCompte and Preissle, 1993, for summaries), and comprised the following headings: 'settings, spaces and objects', under which I recorded details about the arrangement of furniture, the displays on the walls, and any notable artefacts in the room; 'activities', which focused my attention on the content of the lesson and the kinds of task that pupils were undertaking; and 'interactions and relationships', under which I recorded details of all the pupil-pupil and teacher-pupil interaction that I observed.

In addition, during each observation I sketched the seating positions of the pupils in the class. This has been a common technique in recent studies of the micro-ecology of contact, which have generated multiple maps for use in statistical analyses of segregation over time (Alexander and Tredoux, 2010; Koen and Durrheim, 2010; Clack, Dixon and Tredoux, 2005; Schrieff et al., 2005). In recording pupils' positions, however, my intention was only to identify any emerging patterns in seating

arrangements to supplement discussions of seating preferences during the interviews. Copies of these classroom 'maps' are included in Appendix 1. Both these and the observation notes were typed up at the end of the day while the details of the observation could be easily recalled (Bryman, 2012). At the same point, I also recorded in fieldnotes the details of any experiences in the schools that were relevant to the study, my thoughts on topics for further exploration in interviews, and initial analysis and interpretation of the data that I had collected until that point.

Data analysis

Reflecting the diversity of purposes for which qualitative methods may be used, there exist a number of approaches to qualitative data analysis, including discourse analysis, interpretive phenomenological analysis, and grounded theory. These differ in their objectives and specificity but share a common aim to "'distil' essence, meaning, norms, orders, patterns, rules [and] structures'" within the data (Rapley, 2011, p.276). In this study, I analysed the data using techniques associated with thematic analysis, which involves close engagement with the data to identify themes that appropriately represent the meanings and patterns within it (Guest, MacQueen and Namey, 2012; Braun and Clarke, 2006).

Thematic analysis is arguably the most widely used strategy for analysis, but has tended to be underspecified in the research literature (Braun and Clarke, 2006). In recent years, this limitation has been addressed through the development of more formal guidelines, such as those of Braun and Clarke, Guest and colleagues, and Fereday and Muir-Cochrane (2006). These authors advocate thematic analysis for several reasons relevant to this research, including its flexibility to produce social and psychological interpretations and to explore both the content of the data and the interactive strategies that it reflects (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Moreover, where research has both theoretical and applied relevance, thematic analysis can produce findings that are accessible to academics and educated lay readers alike.

The analysis phase of this research was informed primarily by the six-stage process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), but also incorporated guidance from authors writing on more general approaches to qualitative analysis. Thus, following the advice of Saldana (2009) and Boulton and Hammersley (2006), I commenced the

process of analysis during fieldwork: while collecting and transcribing data, I recorded my initial thoughts about the patterns and themes that were emerging. The more formal period of analysis began with a close reading of all the interview transcripts and notes from the observations, during which I noted anything that I found striking. I then worked more systematically through the data, attaching short codes to sections of text that exhibited a particular descriptive or theoretical idea (Gibbs, 2007). The wording of these codes was derived from the data itself or from my reading of the literature on contact. As each code was developed, it was added to a 'codebook', which outlined what the code was intended to capture and indicated some inclusion and exclusion criteria.

The process of coding was undertaken twice, firstly working on paper copies and then transferring the codes to an electronic version of each transcript using MAQDA, a computer-assisted qualitative data analysis programme. Repeating the process allowed refinement of the coding scheme and the reassignment of data between codes. Once interview transcripts and observations were fully coded, I began searching for themes within the data. As defined by Braun and Clarke (2006), themes reflect broader concepts and patterns than codes and reveal something of significance for answering the research question. The process of identifying themes entailed combining codes of a similar type or on a similar subject into candidate themes and developing these into hierarchies of main themes and sub-themes. Once candidate themes and their associated codes had been identified, these were reviewed in relation to the data as a whole to ensure that they adequately reflected the meanings within it. This process resulted in the development of fifteen sub-themes and five major themes, which provide the basis of the findings reported in chapters 5-8.

Quality and reflexivity in qualitative research

Evaluating qualitative research

As the use of qualitative approaches has become more popular and well-established over recent decades, the question of how to evaluate and assess qualitative research has grown in significance. However, unlike researchers in the quantitative and positivist traditions, who largely agree that research can be assessed in terms of its validity, reliability and objectivity, qualitative researchers share no similar consensus (Lewis *et al.*, 2014; Kvale, 2002). Instead, discussions

about the evaluation of qualitative research tend to reflect one of three main positions. The first of these is that the criteria used to assess quantitative studies have relevance for qualitative research, albeit with minor changes in terminology and application (Lewis *et al.*, 2014; Seale, 2004, 1999; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The second position suggests that criteria are valuable, but should necessarily differ from those employed by quantitative researchers to reflect the different assumptions and aims of qualitative research (Lincoln, 2002; Kvale, 2002). In contrast, writers adopting the third position argue that the use of criteria to assess quality or value is inappropriate to qualitative studies, particularly those which reflect constructionist perspectives and/or political concerns (see Lichtman, 2013, for a review).

Despite this lack of consensus, most researchers agree about the need for a mechanism to establish quality, whether that involves the development of general guidelines that can speak to a broad range of researchers (Hammersley, 2007; Seale, 1999), or requires individual researchers and readers to select and adapt existing guidance (Lichtman, 2013). Following Lichtman's approach, I reviewed a number of discussions of quality in qualitative research, identifying some common criteria. I then used these to inform my approach to this study to ensure its rigour. The first of these is the detailed description of the research methodology, including the rationale for the selection of particular methods and reports of any difficulties encountered by the researcher (Lewis *et al.*, 2014; Spencer *et al.*, 2003; Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999; Lincoln and Guba, 1985). The present chapter offers a full account of the research process and allows the possibility of replication.

Reflecting similar concerns, the second criterion specifies the detailed and convincing reporting of the results of research (Lichtman, 2013; Spencer *et al.*, 2003; Kvale, 2002). The following four chapters report in depth the findings of this study, supported by evidence in the form of interview or observational data and some indication of the prevalence of particular responses and experiences. Finally, this study followed the recommendations of numerous authors for research that is reflexive (Lincoln and Guba, 2003; Lincoln, 2002; Seale, 1999; Elliott, Fischer and Rennie, 1999). While conducting the fieldwork and writing up the study, I have been attentive to the ways that my personal views, biography, and chosen role in the field may have shaped the research process. To allow the reader to assess the study against this background, I provide further details in the next section.

Researcher reflexivity

In advocating a criterion of reflexivity, researchers in the constructionist/interpretivist traditions acknowledge that all findings are mediated through the researcher, whose perspectives are necessarily partial (Lewis *et al.*, 2014; Angrosino and Mays de Perez, 2003). Furthermore, researchers working from a constructionist standpoint argue that knowledge is created in the relationships between researcher and participant, which are influenced by the researcher's identity, manner and approach (Lincoln and Guba, 2003; Lincoln, 2002). A thorough account of any research project must therefore incorporate the researcher's reflections on his/her own role and influence in the research process, permitting the reader to form critical judgements on the research and its findings in the light of this information (Lichtman, 2013).

In discussing the role and influence of the researcher, it is useful to consider two aspects: firstly, the researcher's identity, specifically those characteristics – such as gender, ethnicity and social background – which are beyond the researcher's control and simply "part of the package" (Angrosino and Mays de Perez, 2003, p.133); and secondly, the role that the researcher chooses to adopt in the field. In the first case, to "come clean" (Lincoln, 2002, p.333), I am a white woman, aged 33, from a lower middle class background. I grew up in Greater London and, after completing my undergraduate degree, lived in the south of England until I moved to Northern Ireland in 2011 to begin my PhD studies. I was raised in a politically engaged family and have been active in centre-left politics in both England and Northern Ireland. While I attended an Anglican church and secondary school as a child, I have become a Quaker in adulthood and am committed to Quaker principles of peace and social justice. These characteristics and beliefs inevitably informed my approach to this research and, in some cases, may have influenced participants' responses to me. Significantly, while I moved between 'insider' and 'outsider' positions over the course of the research, my background meant that I was an 'outsider' in respects relevant to this work, particularly ethno-national identity and (in most cases) age.

The benefits and disadvantages of an 'outsider' status are well documented in research literature. While possible advantages include perceptions of greater 'neutrality' and less risk of conflicting loyalties, potential disadvantages include increased difficulty in gaining research access and a more partial understanding of

the local culture and political situation (Lundy and McGovern, 2006; Smyth, 2005; Hermann, 2001). This balance of positive and negative aspects was reflected in my personal experience and the ambivalence I felt about my 'outsider' identity. As an outsider, for example, I was in a favourable position in terms of gaining equal access to Catholic and Protestant viewpoints: while Northern Irish researchers can encounter guarded responses from those of a different ethno-religious background (Donnelly, 2012, 2004a), I was able to avoid similar categorisation along ethno-religious lines. My Englishness also provided a talking point with interviewees and a means of building rapport: several of the teachers had trained and taught in England, while some of the pupils spoke of family members who lived there. At the same time, I was conscious of lacking the 'insider' knowledge that would have enabled me to appreciate certain geographical or cultural references, or provided me with a more nuanced understanding of the sensitivities of particular topics. The latter caused me some unease, as I was concerned that I might not recognise when the discussion was moving into areas that would cause discomfort among participants. Furthermore, I have learnt during my time in Northern Ireland that my southern English accent causes some people to consider me to be 'posh'. If this were the case, it might have had an additional effect on participants' perceptions of me and our interactions together.

Regarding the role that I adopted in the field, I was aware that, as an adult researcher in a school, I would struggle to foster interactions with pupils that were characterised by informality and equality: as Kellet and Ding (2004) comment, children and young people in institutional environments tend to regard all adults as figures of authority. Instead, following Mayall (2000), I minimised status differences wherever possible – e.g. using my first name and sharing some information about myself – but accepted the fact of these differences and their implications. Over the course of the fieldwork, this proved a useful and pragmatic stance. While I aimed for an informal approach, the norms of the schools meant that this was not always possible. For example, while addressing me in private by my first name, teachers often referred to me as 'Miss Loader' in front of the pupils and thus 'claimed' me as one of their own. It also became clear that two of the schools maintained quite formal relationships between staff and students, and in such environments it would have been particularly difficult to maintain a 'least adult' role (Mandell, 1988). Rather than overlooking these differences in status in the school setting, these should be

acknowledged as part of the interactional contexts in which data were produced (Rapley, 2004).

Research ethics

While reflexivity as a stance tends to be associated with ensuring the quality and rigour of knowledge production, it is also relevant to the ethical dimension of the research (Guillemin and Gillam, 2004). From this perspective, researchers are encouraged to reflect on the ethical nature of their practice throughout the research process – when selecting the methods, choosing the sampling approach, working with participants, and writing up the research (Hill, 2005; Alderson, 2004; Ryen, 2004). While the foregoing sections have outlined how ethical concerns regarding power informed the design of this study, I focus now on the issues most frequently raised in ethical research discourse: consent and confidentiality (Ryen, 2004).

Central to any discussion of research ethics is the achievement of 'informed consent', according to which participants "have the right to know that they are being researched, the right to be informed about the nature of the research and the right to withdraw at any time" (Ryen, 2004, p.219). To ensure that participants selected for interview were appropriately informed, details of the research were provided via separate information leaflets for pupils, parents (reflecting the requirement to obtain consent from a child's legal guardian) and teachers several weeks before the interviews were scheduled to take place. These set out the aim of the project and the topics to be covered in the interview, and contained assurances of participants' right to withdraw from the research at any point. Leaflets for pupils and parents were distributed by teachers to potential participants, who were asked to return the accompanying pupil and parent consent forms if they wished to take part. Leaflets for teachers were distributed by email to those who had agreed to be involved, and consent forms were collected at interview. Sample copies of the consent forms are provided in Appendix 4.

My main concern in securing consent from pupils was to ensure that they understood what they were agreeing to and had not been placed under pressure to participate; the latter, in particular, is a widely acknowledged risk of research with children and young people (Queen's University Belfast, 2014; Hammersley and Trainaou, 2012; Hill, 2005; Alderson, 2004). In the first case, research has

suggested that young people from the age of 14 (the age of the youngest participant in this study) can evaluate the consequences of participation as competently as adults (Hill, 2005), so I anticipated few difficulties. However, to ensure informed consent, I began the interview by reiterating key information about the nature and purpose of the research and pupils' right to withdraw. In the second case, the slow process of recruiting students, while frustrating, reassured me that they were not, in most cases, being coerced to participate by their schools. At the grammar school in Bellevue, however, the high rate at which consent forms were returned caused me to suspect that teachers had placed some pressure on pupils to consent. The interview preamble provided an opportunity to remind these pupils that they could withdraw with no adverse consequences.

The information leaflets also outlined the protocols for preserving respondents' confidentiality and anonymity, and for the appropriate storage of data. These included the removal of key identifiers from data and the use of pseudonyms in place of participants' names and the names of the schools and towns. Although important in all cases, this was particularly relevant as part of my commitment to protecting the young people involved in this study. Interviewees were informed that confidentiality would be ensured throughout the process, with two caveats. The first of these related to the disclosure of any information that led me to believe that a participant's safety or that of another person might be at risk (British Educational Research Association, 2011; Hill, 2005). The second caveat acknowledged the possibility that, given the relatively small number of teachers and schools involved in SEP, teacher interviewees might be recognised by colleagues at their own or other schools. In these cases, I outlined procedures for reporting the data responsibly.

In relation to the classroom observations, it was agreed that these should be undertaken with the written consent of the headteacher and the verbal agreement of teachers prior to the class. The decision not to seek written consent from individual pupils and parents was taken on two related grounds. Firstly, the intention during the observations was not to obtain data on individuals, but principally to explore the prevalence and nature of interactions between students. As a result, I would not be recording pupils' names or biographical data and there was no risk of any individual being identified. Secondly, in the light of this, it was agreed that a requirement to obtain signed consent forms from pupils and parents would have placed an unnecessary additional burden on students and their teachers. Such decisions

require a balance between the provision of information, the management of risk, and avoidance of burdening research participants (Alderson, 2004); and in this case it was judged more sensitive and pragmatic to proceed as described.

Conclusion

This chapter has aimed to provide a full account of the methods employed in this study and, in so doing, to bring to a close the introductory chapters of this thesis. These have located the study in particular theoretical and policy contexts, identified the research questions at the heart of this thesis, and provided the rationale for the approach that the research adopts. In the following four chapters, I present the findings from this research into participants' experiences of shared education. These address five broad topics: the context of shared education; decisions and expectations regarding shared education; attending another school; interactions and relationship-building in shared classes; and negotiating difference. The discussion of each of these topics follows a brief description of the towns and schools of Whitecliff and Bellevue, which opens the next chapter.

Chapter 5: The context of shared education

This chapter begins with a sketch of the towns that provide the setting for the two case study partnerships, presenting information on geography, demography and history that is relevant to an understanding of the local area. There follows a brief description of each of the four participating schools and some background to the formation of the collaborative partnerships. The remaining sections of this chapter are devoted to developing an understanding of the local, social, political and biographical contexts of relevance to shared education, based principally on data from interviews with participating pupils and teachers. The discussion explores participants' views of community relations in the local area and in Northern Ireland more broadly, their prior experiences of contact, and the norms and attitudes among their family, peers and the local community.

The intention of this exploration is to elucidate the interpretive frameworks that pupils bring to shared education. The discussion developed in this chapter also lays the ground for the subsequent analysis, as a number of the themes that emerge herein – relating, for example, to perceptions of threat and norms of behaviour in intergroup interaction – recur throughout discussions of shared education. In exploring the influences on pupils' perspectives and identifying these themes, this chapter highlights the value of a contextual analysis of intergroup contact.

The settings for this study

The towns

Whitecliff

The case study school partnerships are each located in a settlement classified as a 'small town' by the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA, 2005). Whitecliff is a rural town neighboured by a series of small villages and townlands. While the local economy is subject to the risks of seasonal work, Whitecliff remains fairly affluent: the local government wards covering the main town are in the third and fourth quintiles of deprivation according to the 2010 Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure (NIMDM), where the first quintile represents the most disadvantaged areas (NISRA, 2010). However, the wards within the surrounding

villages and townlands – from which many local pupils are drawn – have a much more mixed profile, with half scoring among the most disadvantaged third of areas.

Approximately three-quarters of the residents of Whitecliff are Catholic, while the surrounding townlands are by turns either predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant. Flags and other symbols of national and political allegiance are, however, absent from the town's main streets and the neighbourhoods immediately surrounding them. Relations between the two main communities in Whitecliff are generally regarded as good and levels of recorded sectarian hate crime in the local policing area are low. This perception of local harmony was reflected in a number of conversations I had with teachers and local residents when visiting, as well as with colleagues in Belfast who were familiar with the town.

Bellevue

Bellevue is a harbour town, slightly larger in terms of population than Whitecliff. Having experienced a decline in recent years in local industries, such as fishing, it is also the less prosperous of the two as measured by the NIMDM. Disadvantage is largely concentrated in the south of the town, where child poverty levels are approximately 1.5 times higher than the Northern Ireland average. Like Whitecliff, Bellevue is surrounded by a number of villages and settlements, which tend to have lower deprivation scores than the town itself, indicating less disadvantage.

Bellevue's town centre asserts a strong unionist and loyalist identity, which is demonstrated by the permanent presence of a flagpole in the town square which flies flags with loyalist associations. During the annual period of parades, Union Flags also hang from each of the lampposts on the high street, as I witnessed when visiting in late April and early May. While more than two-thirds of the residents of central Bellevue are from Protestant backgrounds, there is a large Catholic population towards the south of the town and in the surrounding townlands. Parts of these areas demonstrate strong nationalist and republican identities, flying Irish tricolours and republican flags.

Relations between the two communities in Bellevue have historically been strained and the local council has previously acknowledged the town's 'sectarian' image. However, rates of reported sectarian crime in the local area are low and are comparable with those in the policing area that includes Whitecliff.

The schools

Whitecliff

Each partnership comprises two schools, one predominantly Catholic and one predominantly Protestant. In Whitecliff, both schools – St Brendan's, a Catholic maintained school, and Whitecliff High School in the controlled sector – are non-selective institutions catering for pupils from age 11 to 18. St Brendan's is the larger of the two, with twice as many pupils on roll than Whitecliff High. Reflecting local demographic composition, St Brendan's tends to draw more students from the town than Whitecliff High, while both schools attract pupils from the villages and townlands surrounding Whitecliff. The intake at St Brendan's is almost entirely Catholic, with less than 1 per cent of students reporting non-Catholic backgrounds during the year in which the research took place. Whitecliff High's student body is more mixed, with 6 per cent and 9 per cent of pupils from Catholic and 'other' backgrounds respectively. The numbers of pupils from minority ethnic backgrounds at both schools are very low.

With no grammar school in close proximity to Whitecliff, the schools' intakes encompass a broader range of ability and social background than might be expected in non-grammar schools in more urban areas. Reflecting this, the proportion of pupils entitled to free school meals (FSM), a measure generally used to indicate disadvantage within schools, was in each school lower than average for non-grammar schools. The percentage of pupils registered as having special educational needs (SEN) was also lower in both schools than the non-grammar school average, substantially so at Whitecliff High. In terms of examination performance at 16 (measured according to the percentage of year 12 pupils achieving A*-C grades in five or more subjects, including maths and English), both schools achieved above the Northern Ireland average for non-grammar schools. Of the two schools, St Brendan's performed more strongly, a differential repeated in the schools' A-level results.

Within Whitecliff, the school partnership benefits from the location of the two schools within five minutes' walk of each other. Collaboration dates back several decades, with the schools originally sharing the delivery of art and science at A-level, and has developed over time to the extent that all sixth form provision is now shared. The two schools became a shared education partnership under SEP in 2010, as part of their strategy to extend collaboration to include the provision of accredited courses

for years 11 and 12, principally in arts, technology, and vocational subjects. During the year in which the research took place, 208 pupils across both schools were involved in shared curricular activity. In addition, the schools jointly organised a number of extra-curricular activities, including a joint school council and a combined rugby team with SEP funding, and a joint choir and orchestra.

Bellevue

In contrast with Whitecliff, the Bellevue partnership comprises a selective Catholic grammar school, Holy Saviour, and a non-selective controlled secondary school, Bellevue High School, both of which provide education from age 11 until 18. Admission to Holy Saviour is on the basis of an exam taken by pupils during their final year at primary school, although it admits students from a wider ability range than some of the more prestigious and highly subscribed grammar schools in more urban areas. For families seeking a non-selective Catholic education in Bellevue, there is the option of St Teresa's, a non-grammar school located just outside the town centre.

The Bellevue schools are closer in size than those in Whitecliff, with Bellevue High slightly the larger of the two. Again, local demographics mean that pupils living in central Bellevue are more likely to attend Bellevue High School, while Holy Saviour draws a greater proportion of its intake from the 'hinterlands' around Bellevue. Both schools, however, admit pupils from a relatively wide area, which encompasses small towns located up to 20 miles from Bellevue. During 2012/13, 95 per cent of pupils at Bellevue High were from Protestant backgrounds and 98 per cent of pupils at Holy Saviour from Catholic backgrounds. Like the Whitecliff schools, both Bellevue schools enrol very few students from minority ethnic backgrounds.

As in Whitecliff, Bellevue High School's location some distance from the nearest controlled grammar school means that it attracts an intake with a more advantaged profile than a typical non-grammar. Both the percentage of pupils entitled to free school meals and the percentage of pupils with special educational needs were lower in 2012/13 than the Northern Ireland average for non-grammar schools. The proportion of students eligible for free school meals at Holy Saviour was higher than the grammar school average, but it had a lower than average number of pupils with special educational needs. In 2012/13, both schools performed in line with or above the average for their respective sectors at GCSE and A-level.

The two schools in the Bellevue partnership are located 1.5 miles from each other and pupils move between them by bus or taxi, via a route that takes them through either the town centre or the nationalist Rerrin Road. Prior to their involvement in the Sharing Education Programme, there were few links between the schools; those that existed were largely informal relationships between staff members which had developed via attendance at meetings of the local Area Learning Community and similar groups. The partnership is, therefore, at a more nascent stage than its equivalent in Whitecliff and this is reflected in its smaller scale. In the year in which the research was conducted, two courses – BTEC Engineering and the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness (CoPE), which accredits the development of key skills and competencies – were provided by the two schools through SEP and involved 67 pupils. In addition, the schools funded a joint health and social care qualification, which was delivered at the local further education college, and had made informal arrangements for individual pupils to undertake an A-level at the other school if the subject was unavailable at their own institution.

Coinciding with the implementation of shared education in Bellevue, Holy Saviour – like other Catholic post-primary schools – has been subject to a review by the Northern Ireland Commission for Catholic Education (NICCE), with the aim of rationalising Catholic education during a period of falling enrolments and depleted budgets. This review has recommended the closure of St Teresa's, owing to its low pupil numbers, and the expansion of Holy Saviour to accommodate a larger intake. It has not stated, however, whether Holy Saviour should remain as a grammar school or formally adopt an 'all-ability' status. The matter remains unresolved, but any reorganisation of Catholic education in Bellevue will have implications for shared education locally.

This section has aimed to provide an overview of the two case study partnerships and the towns in which they are located, drawing principally on available statistical data, documentation relating to the local area, and conversations with school staff, local residents and those involved in the Sharing Education Programme at Queen's. The remainder of the chapter is dedicated to an exploration of the perspectives, norms and experiences which participants bring to shared education and which inform their experiences of intergroup contact. Relevant influences include their personal and family experiences of contact, the nature of local community relations,

national political events, and contemporary narratives surrounding the peace process. These are each addressed in the following sections.

Local communities and intergroup relations

Of the 32 pupils interviewed in Whitecliff, 12 (four from Whitecliff High and eight from St Brendan's) reported that they lived in the town itself, with a further three living on its outskirts. The remaining 17 pupils reported that they lived in one of the villages surrounding the town, which ranged in size from just over a hundred to more than two thousand inhabitants. In Bellevue, 15 of the 28 pupils interviewed were resident in the town (nine from Bellevue High and six from Holy Saviour), a higher proportion than in Whitecliff. The other 13 lived in the surrounding townlands or travelled in from other towns and villages up to 20 miles away.

Pupils' place of residence is relevant to shared education as their locality contributes to the development of the norms and expectations that they transfer to their experience of intergroup contact. The fact that many participants came from outside the town was thus significant because it meant that the locations of the school partnerships represented only part of the picture in terms of assessing the contribution of the local area. For some pupils from the surrounding villages and townlands, attendance at the school provided their main – and sometimes only – connection with the town; the norms and attitudes with which they approached contact had been formed in other, often quite different, local settings. Once this became clear, it seemed less straightforward to classify settings for shared education as 'favourable' (Whitecliff) or 'challenging' (Bellevue), given that a substantial proportion of the participants had only limited experience of each area. This was perhaps particularly apparent in discussions with pupils from both schools in Whitecliff, some of whom travelled from highly divided areas to participate in shared classes.

Among the pupils living in Whitecliff, perceptions of relations in the local area were generally positive. Whitecliff was generally acknowledged to be a peaceful place, where Catholics and Protestants lived side by side and incidents of hostility and prejudice were rare. This view was common among pupils from both schools: while acknowledging that Whitecliff was a majority Catholic town, Protestant pupils agreed

with the perceptions of good relations. In such circumstances, cross-community contact was considered to involve few risks, as Orla, Roisin and Emily expressed.

> Orla: *I don't think, as a community, Whitecliff has a lot of issues, especially to do with religion...*
> Roisin: *Yeah, there's not really anything bad.*
> Orla: *There's no, like, prejudice or anything, I don't think. Just, yeah, if you walk past someone on the street, you say hello, even if you don't know them, you know, that sort of thing.* (Orla and Roisin, year 12, St Brendan's)

> *Whitecliff is mostly very Catholic, but if there are Protestants, they don't seem to mind as much. Like, we've got the integrated primary school and stuff now, and a lot of people do go to it. So you just normally grow up with Catholics and Protestants.* (Emily, year 13, Whitecliff High)

Among pupils from the townlands and villages outside Whitecliff, however, perceptions of local relations were often less positive. In some cases, pupils described their local areas as "*divided*": relations between Catholics and Protestants in these places were cordial, but contact was limited and superficial.

> *They kinda get on, Catholics and Protestants, in [village], but they, like, don't – they get on to speak to, but they're not, like, friendly.* (Sinead, year 11, St Brendan's)

Other pupils spoke of predominantly Catholic or Protestant areas where sectarian hostility towards incoming members of the other group was more overt and occasionally expressed violently. In these areas, contact was uncommon; where it occurred, it could at times be very negative.

> Interviewer: *OK, erm, and is there anything that you don't like about where you live?*
> Simon: *It's wile[7] sectarian.*
> Interviewer: *Is it?*

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[7] 'Wile' is a slang term meaning 'very'.

> Simon: *Yeah, there's like members of gangs and stuff. Like, there was paramilitary gang members lived there, but they've moved now. I think there's one Catholic lives there, and there was one that did live there. They got their windows smashed and their car smashed and, er, graffitied their house and stuff.* (Simon, year 11, Whitecliff High)

In the Bellevue schools, this division between those from the town and those from outside was not evident in the same way. Irrespective of their residential background, the majority of pupils spoke of living in areas characterised by separation of the two ethno-religious groups and occasional incidents of sectarian aggression. As a result, the majority of participants had approached shared education from an environment in which contact was, for the most part, not widespread.

> *Bellevue's, like, sorta divided, like. Whenever you're outside, you wouldn't see, like, Protestants hanging out with Catholics, d'you know what I mean? So it's very divided.* (Luke, year 13, Holy Saviour)

> *There's a couple of houses next to me, but they're all Protestant…but, like, anybody that comes up that's Catholic or anything, you would just treat them normally.* (Christopher, year 13, Bellevue High)

Christopher's comment hints at the extent of this separation: identifying himself with the Protestant community (*"we're not"*), he stresses that he and his neighbours would treat Catholics *"normally"*, where the norm is the way in which Protestants behave towards other Protestants. By referring to the ingroup norm, Christopher implies that outgroup contact is not 'normal' within his local area and draws attention to the 'otherness' (even *abnormality*) of Catholics in this environment. While this separation appeared to typify the experience of students in Bellevue, there were exceptions among pupils who travelled in from a nearby town, Seaport. Only slightly larger than Bellevue, and with a majority Catholic population, Seaport was described by interviewees as being well integrated and harmonious in comparison with Bellevue. While pupils from Bellevue spoke of a context in which unionists/loyalists sought to retain control through symbolic displays of British identity in the town's central areas, similar power struggles were not manifest in Seaport.

Perceptions of local relations and divisions were evident in pupils' descriptions of local geography. In Whitecliff, these descriptions tended to relay students' perceptions of which local villages were likely to be Catholic or Protestant and the kinds of attitudes that one might encounter in each (for example,*"[Village] would be a very stereotype Protestant place. It would be very sectarian against Catholics."*). In Bellevue, however, this understanding was much more detailed, relating to individual streets and even to sides of the street. These descriptions revealed strong associations between place and identity: certain areas were depicted as 'belonging to' one group or the other and the expression of identity in these places had greater (or lesser) legitimacy as a result. In Bellevue, in particular, this knowledge of local geography was important because it prevented young people from transgressing unspoken local 'rules' concerning who could walk, congregate, socialise and shop in particular places. As transgression could entail a realistic threat, this knowledge was considered necessary for one's protection. This was especially the case for Catholic pupils, who, as a minority in an overtly unionist/loyalist town, seemed to feel particularly vulnerable to threats to their safety.

> Malachy: *If you went down the harbour, do you know where the lights are at in the centre?*
>
> Interviewer: *Yeah.*
>
> Malachy: *You know where Clancy's is at, that bar, if you went down that wee road there, I would not walk down there with a top on at all, a Gaelic top on, cos that's just a really dangerous place to go down.*
>
> Interviewer: *OK.*
>
> Malachy: *And that's where most of the people, if they're, er, I'd say most of them would be sectarian, to be honest, but, like, anywhere else I could walk safe enough, I think, but that's because I'm close enough in this area.*
> (Malachy, year 13, Holy Saviour)

> *I would go into Bellevue quite a bit…but I don't know, I don't really like walking by myself. I wouldn't like that at all. Just.. I don't know, it's just not nice.* (Michelle, year 13, Holy Saviour)

As Malachy indicates in this quote, his detailed knowledge of the local geography (*"I'm close enough in this area"*) meant that he had a highly attuned understanding

of the places that might pose a particular risk. Other students, from both Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, spoke of certain areas being off-limits to lone individuals (as Michelle states) or of the town centre being a 'no go' area at particular times of the day or year. Notable among these was 12th July, when Protestant King William's victory at the Battle of the Boyne is celebrated, and 15th August, the date of the Catholic Feast of the Assumption. Some Catholic students from outside Bellevue, lacking this high degree of familiarity with the area, perceived the town as a whole to be hostile and were inclined to avoid it all together. In all cases, concerns about the potentially negative consequences of unplanned encounters with hostile outgroup members were manifest in the young people's use of local space.

These findings are consistent with those of other studies exploring the interaction of geography and identity. The work of McAlister, Scraton and Haydon (2010, 2009), for example, describes the restrictions that fears of sectarian violence placed on young people's mobility and therefore their opportunities for leisure and socialising. Where young people ventured outside their local area, they took precautions by concealing their identities (for example, avoiding certain items of clothing, such as football shirts of teams associated with either community) or travelling in groups for mutual protection (McAlister, Scraton and Haydon, 2010). Shirlow and Murtagh (2006) have reported similar tendencies among adults to avoid areas associated with the other group in north and west Belfast, owing primarily to fears of physical or verbal abuse. The authors locate these fears within "wider ethno-sectarian notions" where "the 'other' community is viewed as a menacing, repressive and unwelcoming ethno-sectarian construct" (Shirlow and Murtagh, 2006, p.83). Other research with young people (McGrellis, 2005) and adults (Hamilton *et al.*, 2008), across both urban and rural areas, provides further evidence of the impact of intergroup anxiety and prejudice on individuals' use of space.

The norms and attitudes of others

Norms and attitudes in the local community

Through discussions about the dynamics of their respective areas, pupils indicated the existence of a number of contrasting local norms regarding intergroup contact. In social psychology, norms are recognised as the "rules and standards that are understood by members of a group, and that guide and/or constrain social

behaviour without the force of laws" (Cialdini and Trost, 1998, p.152). These have frequently been defined in two ways: as *descriptive norms*, indicating what members of a group typically do, and *prescriptive* or *injunctive norms*, indicating what types of behaviour a group typically approves (Hogg and Vaughan, 2011; Smith and Louis, 2008). In practice, there is usually significant overlap between descriptive and prescriptive norms, with people tending to avoid actions and behaviours that are not sanctioned. Social norms have attracted particular interest in contact research in recent years, with researchers investigating the influence of peer and family support for contact on its outcomes (De Tezanos-Pinto, Bratt and Brown, 2010; Ata, Bastian and Lusher, 2009). While this analysis is valuable, the data gathered in both school partnerships suggests that the ways in which these norms have been defined and measured in quantitative research may overlook some of their complexity. In this regard, pupils described diverging and sometimes contradictory norms among different groups.

Generally, as discussed above, the descriptive norm in most areas was one of separation and a lack of contact between the two groups. This was indicated by matter-of-fact statements such as "*this town would be sort of divided*" (Niall, year 13, Holy Saviour) and "*where I live, it's pretty, like, Protestant; there's no Catholics*" (Melissa, year 13, Whitecliff High). Whitecliff appeared to be the exception to this as Catholics and Protestants live side by side and the town's central areas are largely shared. Despite the norm of separation elsewhere, however, pupils from these areas suggested that only a minority of residents would express open disapproval of contact. Whether this was an indication of tolerance among the majority or simply a norm of politeness, it resulted in the apparent absence of a widespread prescriptive norm against 'mixing'. Instead, such prescriptive norms tended to be more salient in certain local neighbourhoods, such as those which were strongly loyalist or republican in identity, or among particular groups of people, especially older adults (echoing the finding from Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011, that older people tend to report more negative views of outgroups in general).

While the absence of a widespread injunction against mixing pointed to a general improvement in relations – and, indeed, comments such as "*it's changed a lot now*" were common – the existence of diverging norms between groups of people and residential areas could bring its own difficulties. On two occasions, for example, interviewees reported that they had received criticism or censure for participating in

intergroup contact from ingroup members who abided by a prescriptive norm against cross-group interaction. These ingroup members clearly felt that this norm should also apply to the pupils in question, even though the latter did not consider it applicable to themselves. Other pupils, mostly in Bellevue, expressed concerns that they would experience similar criticism from ingroup members. Moreover, even where local norms were more favourable to contact, this did not mean that all forms of cross-group interaction were sanctioned. As described in chapter 8, one pupil reported substantial resistance to her decision to accompany outgroup classmates to a Gaelic football match, suggesting that this was viewed as a transgression whereas sharing classes and attending the local cross-community youth group were more acceptable.

Family attitudes

Parents' perspectives were discussed at some length during the interviews. These conversations focused principally on attitudes to shared education, rather than contact *per se*, but this approach itself proved instructive in revealing the types of contact that were and were not accepted within family groups. Previous research has indicated the substantial influence of parental attitudes in supporting or constraining young people's experiences and perceptions of contact (Ata, Bastian and Lusher, 2009; Edmonds and Killen, 2009; Stringer *et al.*, 2000), and these findings were echoed in the data from interviews with pupils in Whitecliff and Bellevue.

Discussions indicated that parents were a powerful source of information about the other group and the nature of Catholic-Protestant relations. When asked about their experience of the other group, interviewees offered numerous examples of parents' and grandparents' friends and colleagues, rather than their own acquaintances. More negatively, several also spoke of their parents' experiences of hostile encounters, which had occurred a number of years previously but had been recounted within the family. While these had not deterred pupils from taking part in mixed classes – and, indeed, they reasoned that relations had improved since then – there remained some trepidation amongst these young people regarding their parents' likely attitude towards their participation.

> Gemma: *But like, for some people, maybe their mum or dad might have a problem with it, cos I thought my mum and dad would've had a problem with it, but they didn't, and I was sort of scared to tell them that I wanted to do GCSE PE.*
>
> Interviewer: *Why do you think they would've minded?*
>
> Gemma: *Erm, I think it was because, like, of the past and, like, my family, my dad's family – they've been assaulted by Catholics and it's just the past and...*(Gemma, year 12, Whitecliff High)

What was particularly striking about these previous experiences (at least to someone raised, as I was, in London with its highly transient population) was that they had, by and large, taken place within the local area. Many pupils – and, indeed, almost half of the teachers – were from families with long-standing local connections and spoke of parents and grandparents growing up in the locality and attending one of the two schools. These local ties appeared significant and may increase the relevance of these negative experiences for pupils' perceptions. Where populations are relatively static, a programme like shared education is faced not simply with bringing together 'Catholics' and 'Protestants' in an abstract sense, but fostering relationships between the children and grandchildren of adults who have experienced hostilities in the local area and become wary of one another in that context.

Pupils and teachers recognised that students in both partnerships were exposed to a diversity of attitudes at home, from those supportive of meeting and forming friendships with people from the other religious group to those that discouraged any form of cross-cultural interaction. Among the pupils interviewed, however, almost all reported that their families had given tacit support to their decision to participate in shared classes. In most cases, this was described in terms of a lack of objection to the young person's involvement, rather than an open endorsement of the programme and its aims: pupils frequently stated that their parents "*didn't mind*" or "*weren't bothered*" that they would be attending classes with students from a different religious background, possibly in another school. In several cases, though, pupils and teachers reported that parents were explicitly supportive of the element of contact. For some, this was because they supported 'mixing' for its own sake; for others, because they recognised it as an opportunity for their child to learn the skills of interacting with people from different backgrounds. In the small number of cases

where pupils were from mixed backgrounds, parents were also reported to be pleased that their children had an opportunity to attend a school which reflected the 'other part' of their heritage and socialise with pupils from the other religious group.

> I've also had three different wee CoPErs over the past couple of years [who] have sort of said that their mums and dads were quite glad that they were doing it because they're from mixed- their mum and dad are mixed marriages, so they, you know, wanted them to sort of try and mix. Wee Kirsty McCausland, her mummy went to St Teresa's and she was delighted that Kirsty was getting the chance to go up to Holy Saviour. (Mrs King, teacher, Bellevue High School)

Where support for contact was more tacit, pupils often stated that their parents welcomed the opportunity that shared education offered to study a subject that would not otherwise be available to them. In such cases, the implication was that any concerns that parents might have had about contact were outweighed by the potential for educational gains. Particularly (though not exclusively) at the Bellevue schools, however, interviewees suggested that this would not be the case for all fellow students: where classmates came from homes that were hostile to the other group, it was widely expected that these pupils would not wish to participate in shared education, irrespective of the incentive. Furthermore, where there was an inter-generational difference of opinion, participants such as Christopher suggested that parents would have significant power to prevent their children's involvement.

> It depends on your family, really. If they're open to it, then you're going to be more open to it, but if they're real against it and, like, sectarian and everything, you're not gonna really get the chance. Your family'll stop you. (Christopher, year 13, Bellevue High School)

Christopher's comment is interesting as it indicates the influence of parental attitudes on pupils' attitudes *and* opportunities. If parents are accepting of contact, their child is expected to be similarly accepting; however, if parents are "*sectarian*" and wish to prevent their child's involvement, the child's perspective is considered largely irrelevant. It should be noted that this was not a universal experience: one interviewee in Bellevue reported that he had chosen to participate in shared classes despite his mother's misgivings (although he indicated that these were based

principally on fears for his safety rather than outgroup hostility). Teachers also offered examples of students whose participation, given their family background, had surprised them. Nonetheless, it was significant that the majority in Bellevue considered family perspectives to be so influential in pupils' decisions, even at the age of 16 or older.

When judged against the aims of SEP, these findings above may raise concerns as they suggest that those with particularly negative attitudes or from homes with such views – individuals who, it is suggested, may experience a change of perspective following contact, despite entering with negative opinions (Hodson, Costello and MacInnes, 2013) – may elect to avoid intergroup encounters. Even for those pupils who choose to participate despite ambivalent or unsupportive family attitudes, the experience may be hampered by the difficulties of negotiating the positive contact norms of the school and the more negative, fearful or hostile norms of the home. Observing the effects of these "mutually conflicting pressures" in a shared education programme located in a segregated urban area, Hughes (2014, p.206) reported that pupils struggled to form friendships that they could continue outside school.

Where parents were equivocal about the contact element of shared education, the structured nature of the interaction (i.e. that it took place in the classroom and was subject to the rules of the school) might have made it acceptable to them. The comment below from Jennifer at Bellevue High suggests this: while she stated that her parents were happy for her to take part in shared classes, she felt that they would be unwilling to countenance other, more intimate, forms of contact.

> *Oh, erm, like, see with my family, er, my mum's side of the family, they wouldn't really want anything to do with Catholics, but my dad's side wouldn't care. So it's kind of split like that there, but say, like, for going out places with Catholics or doing classes with Catholics, everything's fine, but say if I was to get married to a Catholic, then they would be like, "oh, don't you dare!"*
> (Jennifer, year 13, Bellevue High School)

Others in Jennifer's group echoed these sentiments, one commenting, *"especially round here, I think it's mostly everybody thinks that."* This perception of parents' greater concern about intimate relationships is also recognised in existing studies of intergroup contact. Adolescents participating in research by Edmonds and Killen

(2009) similarly reported that their parents, while tolerant of friendship contact, expressed discomfort about their involvement in cross-group romantic relationships. This and other work has also suggested, however, that greater contact might result in parents' concerns being realised: research has found that more contact leads not only to closer relationships, but also to an increased likelihood of young people rejecting their parents' judgements on the (in)appropriateness of cross-group intimacy (Edmonds and Killen, 2009; Crystal, Killen and Ruck, 2008).

Peer group attitudes

In addition to exploring the impact of parental attitudes, recent contact research has also considered the influence of peer group approval, measured in terms of whether a respondent believes that his or her ingroup friends would sanction intergroup contact (De Tezanos-Pinto, Bratt and Brown, 2010). Again, the current research suggests greater complexity than this measure would allow, particularly in the context of a school environment, where young people have relatively little power to avoid those who are not their friends. For this reason, the attitudes of the wider peer group – which might differ from the attitudes of a participant's friends – may have implications for an individual's decisions about, and experience of, school-based contact.

Across both sites, the majority of pupils were felt to be tolerant of the presence of those from another school, but interviewees indicated that there remained a minority who had found shared education difficult to accept. These tended to be pupils in lower years, who were not yet participating in shared classes but were known to be hostile to members of the other group. In some instances, this hostility had been manifest in low-level sectarian incidents, such as name-calling directed at pupils from the other school in the corridor or playground. Participants attributed these negative reactions principally to pupils' age, lack of maturity and general ignorance of shared education, with their family's views and their own lack of experience of the other group also offered as explanations. There was a noticeable reluctance among interviewees, particularly in Bellevue, to be censorious of these younger pupils. Their responses suggested that, while they recognised such views to be unpalatable, they also considered them to be somewhat inevitable in areas characterised by widespread hostility and division.

Across both school partnerships, older pupils were generally considered to be more accepting of the outgroup and of cross-community contact. This was attributed, at least in part, to the greater maturity of this age group. As meta-analytic research from developmental psychology has suggested there is little change in prejudice during adolescence (Raabe and Beelman, 2011), this 'maturity' might reflect older adolescents' greater sophistication in concealing prejudice in particular contexts. However, in Bellevue – and specifically Bellevue High, where the hostile minority appeared largest and most vocal – this improvement in attitudes was also explained by the tendency of those with more negative views to leave the school after their GCSE exams in order to attend further education colleges or to enter work.

> Interviewer: *Erm, and what would you say other students in this school think about shared education?*
>
> Leah: *It's kind of a mixture.*
>
> Natalie: *It depends – when they're younger-*
>
> Anna: *Yeah, they're not as mature about it.*
>
> Natalie: *It seems to be a lot worse. They don't like it at all. But as they sort of grow older, they sort of-*
>
> Leah: *They're more mature and they realise.*
>
> Interviewer: *Right. OK.*
>
> Natalie: *They sort of grow up.*
>
> Leah: *The fifth year boys and fourth year boys, like- not loads, like, just a wee small minority group would be very, like, against all this here and shared education and all. They'd be very, wouldn't they?*
>
> Anna: *Very bitter about it.*
>
> Leah: *Very bitter and sectarian.*
>
> Natalie: *You see, they leave at the end of fifth year anyway, to go to tech or whatever, so it doesn't really matter when they come back in sixth year. Most people that come back are usually more understanding.* (Leah, Natalie and Anna, year 13, Bellevue High)

As mixed classes were only available to pupils continuing to A-level, the absence of those with more overtly negative views is perhaps not surprising: young people who attend further education colleges or training schemes are more likely to come from lower socio-economic backgrounds than those who attend sixth form (DENI, 2014d;

DfE, 2013), and research suggests that individuals from low status areas or with lower levels of education tend to express less positive intergroup attitudes (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2011; Hainmueller and Hiscox, 2007; Branton and Jones, 2005; Oliver and Mendelberg, 2000). While, as outlined in the previous section, the absence of these pupils might appear problematic from the point of view of improving intergroup relations, participating pupils viewed their absence positively. Fearing that these students would be unable to conceal their prejudice, participants felt that it was only without them that a comfortable and supportive environment was possible. These comments suggest some tension between the type of contact that is experienced as positive and enjoyable by participants, and the type that researchers consider to be most 'effective' – i.e. that which achieves substantial attitude change among those who formerly held very negative views.

Discussions about peers usually concentrated on the attitudes of other pupils at the interviewees' schools: few pupils reported speaking about shared education with friends or relations outside the two partnerships, which perhaps highlights the importance of their schools in providing their main friendships. Where pupils had discussed shared education with others, most reported that these friends had been accepting and were often interested in their experiences. However, among the three pupils who had recently transferred to Holy Saviour from schools outside Bellevue, there were suggestions that their previous peer groups would have strong reservations about shared education.

> Interviewer: *OK. And have you mentioned to your old [school] friends that you do this?*
>
> Niall: *Er, no, I haven't mentioned it, no.*
>
> Interviewer: *What do you think they'd think if you did?*
>
> Niall: *Och, they would sorta- they'd probably, like, keep me going and all that there, saying, "oh, you shouldn't be doing that there", like, but I know myself, like, there's no point in, you know, worrying about what they think.* (Niall, year 13, Holy Saviour).

For these young people, transferring schools at sixth form had entailed a transition from a peer group that would not have sanctioned contact to one that was more supportive. It was notable, however, that pupils like Niall had refrained from

mentioning the shared classes to previous classmates. In Niall's case, this allowed him to avail of the opportunities offered through shared education while continuing to be accepted by his former school friends. While he claimed to reject the norms espoused by his previous peer group, he had not done so in a way that might challenge their views or threaten his place in the group.

As a whole, these findings demonstrate the dynamic nature of peer norms and attitudes, particularly in a school context: these not only differ according to the boundaries that one draws (whole school, year group, shared education participants, friends), but are also subject to change as some pupils leave the school and others join and adapt to different norms. The existence of multiple, conflicting norms in this way is not well addressed within literature on contact, which tends to posit a singular peer norm, based on the attitudes of a research subject's closest friends. Pupils such as Niall, whose participation in shared education required him to negotiate contrasting views among his peers, highlight the importance of a more nuanced approach in this area.

The political context and contemporary events

While pupils' local settings provide the most immediately relevant source of information about intergroup relations, they constitute only part of their environment. As the interviews demonstrated, an awareness of the nature of relations elsewhere in Northern Ireland, and of recent history and current political events, also informed their perspectives. Pupils often drew comparisons between relations in their local areas and in other towns and cities in Northern Ireland, most commonly Belfast. These comparisons revealed their perceptions of Northern Ireland as disharmonious, and at times violent, particularly in urban areas.

> Interviewer: *OK, so what do you think are the best things about your local area?*
>
> Amy: *It's peaceful. It's not like [nearby town] over there.*
>
> Interviewer: *What's [nearby town] like?*
>
> Amy: *Like, erm, there's no bomb scares.*
>
> Victoria: *Oh yeah.*
>
> Amy: *Like every five minutes, near Belfast and that, like, they're always saying about dissident republicans and all.*

Victoria: *And you hear about Londonderry and bombs being found and people being murdered, and it's a wee bit off-putting.* (Amy and Victoria, year 12, Whitecliff High)

Particularly interesting were some of the comparisons made by a small number of pupils from predominantly Catholic or Protestant areas, who had relatively little experience of contact with the other group. Hearing about negative incidents in other towns, these young people suggested that they were grateful for the absence of outgroup members – and the corresponding absence of threat – in their own areas. This was a minority view, but was instructive in demonstrating how stories and second-hand experiences could inform pupils' perspectives, to the extent that they associated diversity with conflict and viewed separation as desirable.

Interviewer: *Erm, and what do you think are the best things about living round there? What do you like about it?*

Liam: *Well, it's, er, it's very well divided. Catholics and Protestants are very far apart so there wouldn't be any fights or riots or anything, but up at [nearby large town], they have fights in bars and stuff.* (Liam, year 11, St Brendan's)

In this example, family members' reports of intergroup violence in a nearby town had caused Liam to value residential segregation as a means of reducing the threat of conflict. Having little other contact with the outgroup to provide countervailing information, he was particularly reliant on such accounts for his understanding of relations between Catholics and Protestants. Perhaps for this reason, Liam viewed intergroup relations in highly conflictual terms, referring to *"our side"* and *"their side"* in his responses during the interviews.

Across all schools, discussions such as these demonstrated participants' perceptions of the varied, unpredictable and often context-specific nature of Catholic-Protestant relations in Northern Ireland, and reflected an awareness of the potentially negative consequences of contact. While contact through shared education occurs in the local setting, this broader perspective is relevant as part of the context in which pupils make sense of their experiences of the other group. During the period of fieldwork, the wider context was particularly salient following several high-profile events and incidents. The most significant of these was the decision by members of Belfast City Council in December 2012 to restrict the flying

of the Union Flag at City Hall to formally designated days only, where previously it had flown on every day of the year. This decision was followed by widespread protests, which extended beyond Belfast to many local areas, and included minor gatherings in Whitecliff and larger ones in Bellevue. Also notable during February and March 2013 were a number of high-profile security alerts, which included the discovery of a rocket launcher and warhead in Belfast and several mortar bombs in Derry. Together, these events ensured that political and cultural conflict was constantly in the headlines.

Among pupils, exasperation was the most common response to these events and to the reactions of a minority of their peers who used these to fuel rivalries. This irritation resulted either from personal inconvenience (for example, when local flag protests had impeded their passage between home and the town centre) or from an expressed wish to move away from the political and religious tensions of Northern Ireland's recent past. This exasperation was, at times, accompanied by a sense of threat: in several interviews, pupils spoke of the fragile nature of peace and the possibility of a return to violence.

> Sean: *It seems like some people still want to bring back the Troubles with the mortar bombs and all that that was going on.*
> Interviewer: *Oh yes, yeah, that was the other week, wasn't it?*
> Sean*: Mm-hm. And just all the rioting and...*(Sean, year 12, St Brendan's)

While many pupils claimed to have little interest in the cause of those protesting against the removal of the Union Flag from Belfast City Hall, and some (both Catholic and Protestant) appeared bemused by the strength of feeling that the flag evoked, stronger sentiments often lay behind these initial appearances of disinterest. In approximately half of the interviews at controlled schools, pupils expressed some support for the view that the Union Flag should not have been removed. While critical of the protesters' tactics, these pupils sympathised with their cause and suggested that "*there was no real need to take the flag down*".

> Interviewer: *Is there anything, any particular sort of issues that you think face Northern Ireland at the moment?*
> Ben: *Taking down the Union Flag.*

Interviewer: *Oh really?*

Ben: *Mm-hmm. [Laughs]*

Interviewer: *OK. Erm, so what's the issue round that? Is it the fact that they've done it or the way people have reacted?*

Ben: *There's a lot more protests, just the way people have reacted.*

Interviewer: *Yeah, yeah. So...*

Ben: *And the way that [the police] go harder on Protestants whenever they would do a protest or something than what they would do with Catholics.*
(Ben, year 11, Whitecliff High)

These discussions about protests and violence highlighted the extent to which conflict continued to inform pupils' perceptions of Catholic-Protestant dynamics. They were also interesting in terms of what they revealed about young people's appropriation of community narratives. Like Ben, above, a minority of pupils across both sites interpreted the removal of the Union Flag and the treatment of protesters as acts of hostility towards Protestants as a group. Moreover, they did not regard these as isolated incidents, but ones that formed part of a trend towards anti-Protestant discrimination. In voicing this perspective, these young people were reflecting what Nolan (2013, p.8) has termed a "unionist narrative...of loss", whereby policy commitments and actions to reduce inequality have been perceived as part of an attack on Protestant culture and identity. This narrative has grown in strength in recent years, particularly in working class communities, and has been reflected in the formation of groups campaigning for the 'civil rights' of Protestants (Byrne, 2013).

Among Catholic pupils, it was notable that there was no equal and opposite attempt to defend the decision to restrict the flying of the Union Flag. Rather, pupils disengaged from the issue or, in Whitecliff, attempted to understand the protesters' viewpoints and seek compromise.

I think it's partly just people being stubborn about, like, people don't want their individuality and what makes them who they are to be taken away. So even though it's just a flag, like, you know, it doesn't really mean anything, they're still angry about it because it's a part of them. (Roisin, year 12, St Brendan's)

The lady I work for, actually, she's from Belfast and she was like, "youse[8]
really don't want anything like this to start up" sort of thing. She was like,
"you know, we lived in absolute hell for years," you know. She was like, "they
should've just maybe kept it up there. It wasn't doing very much harm." Like,
she's a Catholic, but she was saying that, like, you know what I mean, just
to, like, avoid any sort of confrontation. (Grace, year 13, St Brendan's)

These conciliatory perspectives may reflect what Nolan, in the same report, describes as a nationalist narrative of *"an upward trajectory"* and *"parity of esteem"*. Possibly because they were confident and secure in their own identities, particularly in a largely Catholic area, these young people were able to take the perspective of the other group without feeling that they should defend their own community's interests. The contrast between pupils' comments, and between the community narratives that Nolan describes, highlights the fragile, shifting nature of relations and groups' relative status. These dynamics are relevant as part of the background to contact, which informs individuals' perceptions of the purpose and nature of shared education. This was apparent in a statement published by the Free Presbyterian Church in January 2014, which criticised shared education for contributing to a perceived weakening of Protestant faith and identity (Bradfield, 2014).

Prior experience of contact

Existing quantitative research suggests that one's personal experience of the outgroup is a significant influence on decisions to participate in intergroup contact: prior contact is associated not only with more positive attitudes, but also with intentions to participate in future intergroup interaction (Gaunt, 2011) and with subsequent reports of cross-group friendships (Al-Ramiah *et al.*, 2013). While first-hand experience of the other group provides a reference point for future interaction, an absence of contact has been associated with greater intergroup anxiety and more negative outgroup evaluation (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2006; Blair, Park and Bachelor, 2003; Voci and Hewestone, 2003). While prior contact might not be regarded as a contextual factor in the same way as local norms or the political backdrop, it is included here because it represents the sum of intergroup experiences that pupils bring to shared education.

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[8] 'Youse' is an informal term denoting the second person plural.

In interviews, young people were asked about their prior contact with pupils at the other school and members of the other group outside the school. Immediately striking from these discussions was the similar level of prior contact experienced by pupils in Whitecliff and Bellevue. Having assumed that contact would be more widespread in Whitecliff, given the more harmonious relations and supportive local norms, I was surprised by this finding. On reflection, this can perhaps be attributed to differences between participating cohorts. In Bellevue, the age profile of interviewees was slightly older than in Whitecliff, as shared education in Bellevue was offered only from year 13. Not only had pupils in Bellevue had more time to develop cross-group acquaintances, but, being older, they were also more likely to have had experience of socialising independently and outside their local area. Prior to attaining this independence, opportunities for young people to meet were quite limited in both areas. Attendance at separate schools often precluded contact before shared classes began, and popular leisure pursuits, such as most sports and church-based activities, were largely organised along religious/cultural lines. Furthermore, a larger number of interviewees in Whitecliff lived in rural areas, which provided fewer opportunities for encounter than the local towns.

Nevertheless, levels of contact were generally low across both sites. Of the 60 pupils interviewed, nine reported close or well-established relationships with members of both communities, and in five cases this was, at least partly, because they were from mixed backgrounds. For three of these pupils, these family relationships constituted their only strong cross-group relationships; the other six described friendships across both groups. Most of the remaining students fell into two categories: those who had had little experience of contact, among whom encounters were limited to sporadic, isolated meetings or to extended contact via ingroup friends and family members (constituting 21 pupils in total); and those for whom contact was more established, but was either irregular or superficial (23 pupils). Seven pupils, all living in predominantly Catholic or predominantly Protestant areas, reported almost no prior contact at all.

Previous contact had occurred through both informal and formal channels. Informal contact had usually developed through residential proximity and had extended into occasional football games or 'hanging out' with outgroup members in the town. By comparison, more formal contact had occurred via school-based activities or structured leisure pursuits. Informal contact was rare in the more rural areas but

occurred in both towns, particularly Whitecliff, and had reportedly grown more common in recent years. While generally casual and lacking some depth, the advantage of this type of contact was that its informal nature allowed it to 'spread', with young people introducing ingroup friends to outgroup acquaintances and thereby extending their social networks.

> Interviewer: *So were they, the people you know, were they people you met doing this or were they people you knew before?*
>
> Max: *Just people I knew from just out and about, seeing them and then talking to them and stuff. Getting to know them.* (Max, year 13, Whitecliff High)

Less positively, informal contact appeared at times to be furtive and accompanied by some mistrust. This is apparent in the excerpt below where Kirsty reports that her Catholic contacts would conceal from their friends and family members the fact of their association with Protestants. Whether or not this was the case, her response had the effect of positioning Catholics generally as hostile to contact with Protestants.

> Danielle: *It's quite split, though, too, because up round the Rerrin is more Catholic side, and then down here, round here…*
>
> Kirsty: *But the ones from there would mix with some of us, but they wouldn't let on to the people up there they mix with us.* (Danielle and Kirsty, year 13, Bellevue High)

Prior formal contact occurred primarily through school and was more widespread in Whitecliff than in Bellevue as a result of the close relationship that existed between Whitecliff High and St Brendan's. Before their GCSE and A-level courses had commenced, pupils in Whitecliff had typically participated in one or two joint projects and had the opportunity to become members of the joint music groups. Contact through leisure activities was reported at similar levels across both areas, via an integrated youth club in Bellevue and a mixed football club and Girls' Brigade in Whitecliff. While the mixed nature of the Girls' Brigade was notable given its Protestant associations, contact during leisure time was otherwise confined to activities that were not strongly identified with one community or the other. For this

reason, it tended to be more limited in extent than residential or school-based contact. Nevertheless, along with school-based schemes, these activities were important in providing settings in which contact was sanctioned and pupils could mix relatively safely.

With the exception of most school-based activity, pupils' previous contact experiences had been freely chosen and largely appeared to be positive or neutral in nature. In the small number of cases where pupils spoke of less favourable experiences, they indicated that they had disliked being put under pressure to 'make friends' in ways that felt forced and unnatural, or had experienced what they regarded as provocative behaviour from outgroup members (such as wearing the jersey of a football team associated with the other group). While several students reported experience of sectarian name-calling – and knew of others, including family members, who had suffered physical violence – none of them recalled other negative experiences during prior direct contact. Of course, it must be acknowledged that these interviewees were pupils who had chosen to participate in shared education; those who had had particularly negative experiences may simply have opted not to take part.

Conclusion

Recent literature on intergroup contact, in both quantitative and qualitative traditions, has emphasised that contextual factors should be taken into account in research that seeks to understand the dynamics of contact and its effects on attitudes (Hughes, 2014; Ata, Bastian and Lusher, 2009; Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005). Acknowledging this, the current chapter has aimed to provide a detailed analysis of the local context in which shared education takes place. In so doing, it has illuminated a number of influences on the interpretive frameworks that young people brought to their experience of intergroup contact. These include the intergroup dynamics of the local area, the attitudes and norms of peers and family members, pupils' previous experiences of the other group, and their understanding of the socio-political context.

In exploring these influences, this analysis has raised several important and inter-related themes: the persistence of separation between Catholics and Protestants in residential areas, during leisure activities, and at school; the limited intergroup

contact that occurred between young people prior to commencing shared classes; the existence of diverse (and sometimes ambiguous or conflicting) norms and attitudes towards contact among peers, family members and the local community; and the perception of intergroup encounters as potentially threatening. These themes are relevant to understanding pupils' expectations and experiences of school-based contact, and are discussed in subsequent chapters in terms of their influence on participants' perspectives.

Chapter 6: Choosing shared education and attending the other school

In this chapter, the focus shifts to the school context, in particular to pupils' experiences of selecting shared classes and attending the partner school. In the first half, the analysis considers pupils' views of the purpose of shared education, their reasons for participating in shared classes, and their expectations of contact with students from different school sectors (Catholic/Protestant and grammar/non-grammar). In the second half of the chapter, the discussion explores the nature of pupils' outgroup encounters when moving around the partner school and reflects on the themes of identity, threat, belonging and exclusion raised by pupils attending a school of a different religious character for (usually) the first time. The chapter closes with a brief discussion of the ways that schools could unintentionally foster feelings of exclusion and suspicion among pupils, particularly when their actions were interpreted against a background of intergroup separation and anxiety.

Section 1: Decisions and expectations concerning shared education

Choosing shared education

Shared education differs from most previous community relations initiatives in that, while relationship-building and reconciliation are core aims of the programme, they are not its only goals. Also explicit in the rationale of shared education are the aims of contributing to educational improvement by broadening the curriculum available to pupils and increasing access to specialist resources and teaching. In light of this, it was recognised that pupils' reasons for participating in shared classes and activities were likely to be diverse and reflect more than simply a commitment to integration. To ascertain what motivated pupils' involvement, the interviews included some discussion of their understanding of shared education and the influences on their decisions to participate. Responses revealed that pupils' decisions were informed by both long-term concerns regarding their educational and career aspirations and more immediate concerns about the experience of sharing, particularly at another school. Pupils' decisions about which subjects to take, and where, depended on the relative emphasis they placed on these.

All pupils were familiar with the term 'shared education' and, when asked what they understood to be the purpose of the programme, referred both to social and educational aims. Of the two, social aims were mentioned more frequently, particularly in Whitecliff, and in this respect pupils mentioned objectives such as increasing mutual acceptance, developing cross-group friendships, and building a more unified education system. Educational aims, which were discussed more often by pupils in Bellevue than in Whitecliff, included increasing the number of course enrolments, extending access to other schools' (better) resources and facilities, and creating a broader, more diverse curriculum. For each group of aims, pupils appeared to conceptualise the intended beneficiaries quite differently: while they felt that opportunities for peacebuilding would principally benefit the local community, they considered an enhanced curriculum and shared resources to be most beneficial for the individual student.

That pupils considered the educational benefits of sharing to be more personally relevant was also apparent in discussions about their motivation for choosing a shared course. Here, interviewees overwhelmingly offered reasons relating to the programme's educational aims, responding that they chose the subjects which most interested them, or which they felt would be most helpful for university entry and/or their future career. In contrast, few spoke of the social aspect of shared education as a key motivating factor. This is not to say that they were disinterested in this element, or that they did not regard it as a benefit subsequently, but rather that it had been at most a secondary motivation. Where the social aspect of shared education was mentioned as a reason for participating, the emphasis was often on developing skills – such as the ability to interact with people from different backgrounds – which young people could use at university and in the workplace.

> Lisa: *Well, I want to be a social worker, so that's why I chose health and social care, and CoPE because it's worth 70 UCAS points[9], and I wanted to do religion, but it was in the same block as a different subject.*
> Interviewer: *Right, OK. Yeah. [To Siobhan] What about you?*

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[9] 'UCAS points' are the numerical scores allocated by the Universities and Colleges Admissions Service in the UK to the qualifications that students achieve at 18 (e.g. 140 points for an 'A*' grade at A-level, 70 points for an 'A*' grade at AS-level). Universities may make conditional offers to applicants on the basis that they achieve a minimum score across three or more subjects.

Siobhan: *I was just interested in health and social care, and I just thought the 70 UCAS points were useful and I wasn't doing a fourth subject.*

Interviewer: *Oh, OK, so was it the idea of getting the UCAS points that was the main motivation?*

Siobhan: *Yeah.* (Lisa and Siobhan, year 13, Holy Saviour)

I think like, mixing with different schools gives more of, like, an experience and you can do it for work later on in life. (Orla, year 12, St Brendan's)

These comments illustrate the concerns about future prospects in the higher education and labour markets that influenced pupils' decisions to choose shared subjects, particularly post-16. In these and similar comments there were echoes of those of the students interviewed by Tomlinson (2008, p.58), who, aware of discourses of 'employability' (see Knight, 2001; Morley, 2001), were "concerned with teasing out the potential market value" of any experience, academic or extracurricular. For the pupils involved in this research, the primary value of shared classes was in gaining qualifications, technical knowledge and interpersonal skills that would be useful to them in the future, rather than in building relationships and learning about the other group in the present.

With respect to the participants' motivation, therefore, shared education differs from other voluntary community relations programmes in which participation follows from an interest in reconciliation and peacebuilding. For pupils involved in SEP, participation was guided by more instrumental objectives of obtaining qualifications and 'soft' skills. While some observers might be disappointed by pupils' lesser motivation to learn about one another's cultures and backgrounds, the involvement of these pupils may signal one of the strengths of shared education. By offering an incentive for involvement that speaks to young people's priorities, SEP is able to attract those who might not otherwise choose to take part in a reconciliation programme, whether due to anxiety about contact or a simple lack of interest. Indeed, several participants indicated that the subject offer had provided the inducement to participate when their own and others' anxieties might have dissuaded them.

Selecting shared classes at the other school

Among some pupils, considerations about future education and career plans were weighed against more immediate concerns about the practicalities of participation, particularly the location of shared classes. In Bellevue, pupils' control over this was limited: as the two shared subjects were each run across Bellevue High and Holy Saviour, those opting for shared education did so in the knowledge that they might have to attend lessons at both schools. In Whitecliff, however, where some subjects were only available in one of the two schools, it was possible for pupils to be strategic in their selection of courses to avoid taking a class at the other school. It was apparent from discussions that three of the younger pupils (in years 11 and 12) had made their decisions on this basis. In addition, three others stated that they had intended to choose subjects only at their own school, but had been persuaded otherwise by teachers or former participants of shared education.

> *James: I picked most of the subjects here, cos- like if I went over to, maybe, like St Brendan's, I'd get lost or something.*
>
> *Interviewer: Right, OK.*
>
> *Louise: Aye, I picked them most here, because if you go over there, you don't really know anybody or know where to go or anything like that.*
>
> *Interviewer: OK, so did you choose the subjects that let you stay in this school?*
>
> *Louise: Yeah. I did, anyway.* (James and Louise, year 11, Whitecliff High)

Two emotional responses were implicated in pupils' decisions not to attend the other school. The first, expressed by James and Louise above, was the anxiety that pupils felt at the prospect of a strange setting, where they would be surrounded by unfamiliar people. For James and Louise, this anxiety was likely to have been exacerbated by their limited experience of the other group, leaving them unsure of what to expect at St Brendan's. The second response was aversion, with antipathy towards the other religious group provoking avoidance of institutions with which they were associated. This aversion was not reported by pupils themselves, perhaps for fear of appearing intolerant or simply because this had not been a live concern for them. Such attitudes were, however, reported by one of the teachers at Whitecliff High.

Oh, yes, I think there's still pupils who, when they're doing choices, erm,
they're trying to work out where their subjects for GCSE are going to be held,
or where their- less so their A-levels, but certainly their GCSEs, you know.
Some pupils will still, because of maybe their family background or their
community background, won't want to pick a subject that is across the road.
It's become a massive, massive minority of pupils, but there still would be a
few. (Mr Lamb, teacher, Whitecliff High)

Here, Mr Lamb spoke principally of the influence of negative perceptions of the
outgroup among pupils and their families: although these pupils tolerated outgroup
members' presence in classes at their own school, they resisted any inducement to
attend the other school. Related to this, while concerns about becoming the target
of discrimination were not explicitly discussed as a reason for avoiding the partner
school, these might also figure in pupils' decision-making. As discussed in the
previous chapter, young people were keenly aware of outgroup hostility in their own
school and community, and may have anticipated similar sentiments among
students at the other school.

Among pupils who *had* chosen subjects that involved attending the other school,
there were reports of similar pre-participation concerns relating to the size of the
school and their lack of acquaintance with other students, but these were not a
deterrent to the same extent. In Whitecliff, these pupils often took confidence from
their friends' previous experiences: for example, when they were choosing A-level
courses, ingroup friends' experiences of shared education at GCSE were relevant.
Where possible, pupils new to shared education also relied on these friends to
guide them around the other school. In relaying positive experiences of the partner
school and its pupils, these friends served as sources of indirect contact (Turner *et*
al., 2007; Wright *et al.*, 1997). This encouraged more favourable perspectives of the
other school and its pupils among observing students and led to their subsequent
attendance.

In Bellevue, where pupils had less access to indirect contact than those in Whitecliff,
participants spoke frequently of feelings of trepidation about visiting the other
school, but were prepared to endure these to study a subject that they considered
interesting or potentially useful. As Swim, Cohen and Hyers (1998, p.41) describe,
participants entering situations where they may face prejudice must evaluate "the

costs and benefits associated with both entering and avoiding", where the costs include anxiety, potential exclusion, and discrimination. For pupils willing to attend the partner school, the benefits were deemed sufficient to outweigh this cost; for others discussed in this section, the costs of attending the other school were too great, resulting in more limited participation at their own schools only.

These findings raise key points regarding both the social and educational goals of shared education. Firstly, for shared education to achieve its objective of promoting contact, it is clearly important that sufficient numbers of pupils are confident and willing to move between schools to create mixed classes. This remained too daunting an undertaking for several of the younger pupils interviewed for this study, as well as for other pupils who were mentioned by interviewees in these discussions. These young people actively stayed away from the other school, whether due to anxiety about navigating an unfamiliar institution, concern about the response they might receive, or antipathy towards the outgroup. While, for the purpose of fulfilling the programme's objectives, it was important that these pupils were still able to meet and interact on the familiar terrain of their own school, it seems that further preparatory work to familiarise pupils with one another's schools could help to reduce such avoidance. Through school tours and shared events, anxieties about locating classrooms and cloakrooms may be alleviated and pupils might be more confident to visit the partner school. However, where resistance stems from negative intergroup attitudes, or from concerns about others' reactions, it may be more likely to persist.

Secondly, while a core goal of shared education is to extend the curriculum available to students, it appears that this remains only a theoretical offer for some pupils. If a minority continues to avoid certain subjects because these are taught at the partner school (an environment which they found daunting or potentially threatening), it is debatable whether the legal right to an extended curriculum under the Entitlement Framework is fully available to all students. Moreover, there may be some question about the ethics of making subject choice contingent on attendance at the partner school when this entails accepting the realistic possibility of victimisation (as discussed below).

Expectations of contact

Expectations of contact between ethno-religious groups

While the opportunity to pursue a particular subject provided pupils' primary motivation for participating in shared education, uppermost in their thoughts prior to commencing shared classes was the prospect of meeting and socialising with pupils from the other school. For just over half of interviewees, this was a cause of some anxiety. Pupils' worries encompassed both interpersonal and intergroup concerns: they worried about not knowing anyone, were anxious about being ignored or disliked, and expressed fears that tension and hostility would arise between members of the two schools. Anxiety was heightened among pupils who were due to attend the other school for shared classes, but was also reported by those participating only at their own schools, such as Maria and Sinead below.

> Interviewer: *Why did [not knowing incoming students from the other school] make you worry?*
>
> Maria: *Like, you didn't know what they were going to be like, so you didn't know if you'd like them or not, and then you're going to have to spend, like, two years with them in the same class...*
>
> Interviewer: *OK.*
>
> Sinead: *And, like, here, like, usually Catholics and Protestants don't get on, so you think, like, it would be a bit awkward.*
>
> Interviewer: *When you say 'here', do you mean...?*
>
> Sinead: *Northern Ireland.* (Maria and Sinead, year 11, St Brendan's)

In discussing their expectations of contact, pupils made reference to their previous experiences and their understanding of the wider social and political situation in Northern Ireland. The quotation above illustrates this, as it is evident that Sinead – who had had limited prior experience of Protestants – had formulated her expectations of contact in the light of her understanding of intergroup relations in the region. The influence of context and the views of significant others (peers, parents and family members) were particularly evident in the expectations of pupils who had had little prior contact with the other group. In the case of Niall, who had recently transferred to Holy Saviour, expectations of intergroup hostility were informed by the stories and descriptions he had heard from peers at his previous school:

I didn't know any Protestants and, you know, especially coming from [previous school], when you sort of get that, er, boys sort of talk about Protestants in a different way, like, you know, in a bad way. And you sort of get that sort of idea of what they're going to be like towards you, but once I got down there and once I got into it, like, it's just totally changed my idea about it. (Niall, year 13, Holy Saviour)

In common with Sinead and Niall, pupils from more divided areas tended to anticipate more hostile interactions than those from areas characterised by more positive relations. In practice, this meant that a higher number of pupils in Bellevue anticipated tension than in Whitecliff, where at least some pupils were familiar with more favourable norms of contact. Pupils commonly also reported anxiety stemming from their lack of previous intergroup contact. With little direct experience of the other group, particularly those at the other school, these pupils were unsure of the nature of the reaction that they might encounter from outgroup members, especially those who were not participating in shared classes.

Not all pupils reported anxiety prior to participating in shared education, however: across both partnerships, just under half described feelings of indifference or, more positively, curiosity and excitement prior to taking part in shared classes. This more positive attitude was partly attributable to pupils' prior experience of the other school and its pupils. Interviewees made such links themselves, suggesting that they had felt more comfortable because they could look out for a few *'familiar faces'* and had a better sense of the likely nature of the interaction. In most cases, this previous experience was limited to one-off school trips and activities (which had taken place in Whitecliff in years 8, 9 and 10) or had come second-hand from siblings who had taken part in shared classes in previous years. However, even contact at this level proved helpful in alleviating feelings of anxiety prior to shared education.

Ben: *I wasn't worried about that much because I knew a lot of the ones over there before doing it.*

Interviewer: *Ah, OK.*

Ben: *I knew some of them, so I did, from doing the peace project, so it wasn't just so bad.*

Interviewer: *How well did you know them?*

Ben: *I didn't know them a lot, but I knew to speak to them, so I did.* (Ben, year 11, Whitecliff High)

This accords with previous research demonstrating that prior direct and indirect contact is associated with reductions in intergroup anxiety (Gomez, Tropp and Fernandez, 2011; Paolini *et al.*, 2004; Blair, Park and Bachelor, 2003). Moreover, it suggests that even limited contact (in the form of one-off meetings and short-term research projects) was effective in attenuating some of suspicion and anxiety associated with cross-group interaction. These previous experiences provided a precedent that encouraged more favourable expectations of subsequent encounters.

Expectations of contact between selective and non-selective schools

In Bellevue, the partnership of a selective grammar school and a non-selective secondary school proved to be a cause of some further anxiety. This was felt most keenly among pupils at Bellevue High School, who were conscious of being regarded as academically and socially inferior by students at Holy Saviour. As described above, this anxiety appeared to be aggravated by the limited contact that these pupils had had with those who attended grammar schools.

Interviewer: *What sort of impression had you had of Holy Saviour before going there? Did you know anything about them?*

Sophie: *No. You just sort of think, since they're a grammar school, they'd be really sort of posh and they wouldn't be like us.* (Sophie, year 13, Bellevue High)

Before I came into sixth year, I would've thought, 'oh, they're all the smart people, they're all the ones that get straight As all the time'. (Jennifer, year 13, Bellevue High)

While interviewees from Holy Saviour occasionally suggested that they had expected unruly behaviour from Bellevue High pupils, they made few other comments that hinted at social class differences between the schools. This silence might have arisen from politeness, but potentially also indicated the complexities of social status in Bellevue. As noted in the previous chapter, Catholics in Bellevue

tended to be geographically and socially marginalised: they largely lived in the less affluent areas on the outskirts of town and were afforded little recognition in the displays of (Protestant) loyalist identity that dominated the town centre. Reflecting the disadvantage experienced by the Catholic community, and unusually for a grammar school, Holy Saviour also had a higher proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals than Bellevue High. As a result, while pupils at Bellevue High might have perceived a threat to their social status from grammar school pupils, (Catholic) pupils at Holy Saviour might not have considered themselves to pose this threat. In such cases, both socio-economic background and ethno-religious identity appear relevant to expectations of contact.

Holy Saviour's pupils gave greater credence to Bellevue High's students' anxiety about academic performance, with one interviewee acknowledging that "*since we're a grammar school, we're probably expected to be better*". Among some Holy Saviour pupils, particularly those pursuing academic studies in engineering, expectations of their higher academic status appeared to generate a different kind of concern: that sharing classes with Bellevue High School might compromise the quality of their education. This was implicit in the responses of students such as Joshua, whose comment – that other pupils at Holy Saviour were "*all for [shared education] now, cos we come out with the same grades anybody else would*" – suggested that support had been contingent on participants achieving high marks. This provides a further example of the priority that students placed on the acquisition of credentials, perhaps particularly at a grammar school where pupils' and teachers' expectations were high. Here, shared education was of little value unless participation resulted in good grades.

In practice, interviewees at Holy Saviour commented that their expectations had been wrong, as Bellevue High students had proven themselves to be academically capable. This parity in students' ability may have resulted from the decision to provide shared classes only at A-level: at both schools, pupils could continue to this stage only if they had met a qualifying standard at GCSE. Had shared education taken place prior to 16, however, concerns about differences in academic ability might have been greater. This, in turn, might have resulted in discomfort and resentment that could threaten participation and the possibility of effective contact. This highlights once more the difficulties that a selective education system poses to shared education, echoing arguments which have been rehearsed elsewhere

(Connolly, Purvis and O'Grady, 2013; Knox, 2010). In the absence of structural educational reform, these difficulties are likely to persist.

The anxieties described by pupils anticipating shared classes with members of the other ethno-religious group – and, in Bellevue, with pupils from a different sector – are well recognised in literature on intergroup relations, particularly in the work of Stephan and colleagues (Stephan, Ybarra and Morrison, 2009; Stephan and Stephan, 1985). They propose that intergroup anxiety stems from fears of negative psychological and behavioural consequences for the self, and negative evaluations by ingroup and outgroup members. The findings herein point to the particular relevance of the first and last of these concerns in the context of shared education. In terms of negative psychological consequences, it was apparent that pupils anticipated "discomfort, frustration and irritation due to the awkwardness of intergroup interactions" and, particularly at non-selective Bellevue High School, feared "a loss of self-esteem" (Stephan and Stephan, 1985, p.159). Anxiety regarding negative evaluation and rejection by the outgroup were also common. A number of the antecedents of anxiety identified by the authors – such as a lack of prior contact and a context characterised by conflict – also emerged from pupils' discussions. More positively, however, findings from this research suggest that even brief, low-level contact within the same setting (as had taken place in Whitecliff) may help to reduce this anxiety for at least some of those participating in shared education.

Section 2: Attending the other school

In the following sections, the discussion turns to pupils' experiences of the other group, firstly within the school and, in chapter 7, in the environment of the shared class. In the remainder of this chapter, the focus is on those students who attended classes at the partner school. For these pupils, participation involved negotiating both the practicalities of attendance at a different institution (such as finding one's way around) and the experience of being an outgroup member at a school associated with the other religious group. By examining the school setting, this analysis seeks to respond to criticism that studies of contact and desegregation have overlooked the influence of the physical environment on participants' perspectives and experiences (Wessel, 2009; Dixon, 2001).

Pupils who attended classes at the partner school indicated quite different feelings about, and experiences of, contact according to where it took place in the school. In particular, there emerged a sense of difference between encounters which took place in the transitional spaces of the school, such as the entrance hall and corridors, and contact in the classroom. While the fixed membership of the class and the presence of a familiar teacher permitted pupils, over time, to become more comfortable with each other and the norms of cross-group interaction, this was largely not possible in other spaces of the school. In these places, particularly in the corridors, students were more aware of being a small numerical minority, on territory that was not 'theirs'. They were also conscious of being surrounded by unfamiliar outgroup members whose attitudes and reactions were difficult to predict. As these encounters outside the classroom were transitory, they were also not bound by the same norms that regulate more established, ongoing relationships. Pupils indicated that they felt more vulnerable in these spaces and their responses revealed a sense of anxiety and threat. This was particularly true for pupils in the Bellevue partnership, where the concerns and suspicions surrounding contact in the local area were often replicated in the school setting. In some cases, these concerns were realised in experiences of negative contact in the school; as often, however, they were (unintentionally) reinforced by the well-meaning actions of teachers.

School uniform and identity

Most pupils reported some discomfort when first visiting the other school, as they were unsure of the response they would receive and were conscious of knowing few of the other students. These pupils were particularly aware of their different uniform, which they expected to prompt assumptions about their ethno-religious identity and, in the worst case, antagonistic behaviour from other students. That young people wear their school uniforms during shared classes is central to the rationale of shared education: following Hewstone and Brown (1986), this is considered important for maintaining the salience of group identity, thereby increasing the likelihood that changes in attitude towards encountered group members will generalise to the wider outgroup. Unless identity is salient, Hewstone and Brown argue, cross-group relationships will remain only *interpersonal* in nature and have no influence on *intergroup* dynamics. However, maintaining identity salience in this way had the effect of increasing pupils' levels of anxiety: wearing a different uniform, and thereby displaying their religious identity, in a school associated with the other group made them feel more vulnerable:

I don't like the idea that people can judge us because of the uniform. The uniform is such a difference, cos it's green over there and it's blue here, people can definitely see that you're Catholic, I suppose. If you saw someone down the corridor of a different, erm, uniform, you instantly think 'different religion', do you know what I mean? I think that's a big part of it. (Orla, year 12, St Brendan's)

Orla's comment – that, on seeing a different uniform, "*you instantly think 'different religion*" – indicates the strength of the symbolic association between school uniform and ethnoreligious identity. It also highlights the negative associations that are attached to the 'different religion', as Orla appeared to anticipate hostile judgements from outgroup members on the basis that their backgrounds differed. This, her comments suggest, caused some unease when at the other school, a sentiment also expressed by Sarah at Bellevue High.

Sarah: *I don't feel uncomfortable walking around, but it's still sort of like, 'oh, I don't know if I want to walk there or not' cos of the uniform…. At the start, it was sort of like, 'oh, I don't know if I want to go up there or not.'*
Interviewer: *Yeah, yeah. What were you worried might happen, then?*
Sarah: *Just people might, like, say things and just look at you. It gets very uncomfortable.* (Sarah, year 13, Bellevue High)

Sarah's experience had an interesting additional dimension as she had previously attended St Teresa's, the Catholic non-grammar school in Bellevue, and had transferred to Bellevue High School to pursue sixth form studies. While Sarah came from a Catholic background, she was conscious that her uniform imposed on her a Protestant identity that might make her unacceptable to some students at Holy Saviour; her previous uniform, however, would have 'identified' her as a co-religionist. While it is common practice in Northern Ireland to read identity from school uniform, and there may be theoretical justification for shared education to exploit this, Sarah's case (and those of several interviewees of dual heritage) highlights its problems: in an intergroup context, it ascribes an identity that pupils might not choose or recognise, with potentially negative consequences – e.g. intergroup anxiety, intergroup hostility – that pupils have to manage. In this, there are echoes of wider criticisms of contact-based approaches for assuming and imposing ethnicities, ignoring individuals' self-identifications, and thereby

"flatten[ing] the complexity" of race and ethnicity (Erasmus, 2010, p.390; Howarth, 2009; Reicher, 1986). As the number of people refusing the labels of 'Catholic' and 'Protestant' for themselves continues to rise (NISRA, 2014, cf. NISRA, 1997), this criticism is likely to become increasingly relevant.

Experiences of exclusion and intimidation

Experiences of exclusion

For the majority of interviewees, the initial discomfort of attending the other school had diminished over the months since they had begun shared education. Pupils indicated that they had been put at ease by teachers' efforts to make them feel welcome (for example, greeting them as they passed in the corridor), the support of their peers from both schools, and their observation that most pupils were reasonable and posed little threat. For two students in Whitecliff (of the 16 interviewees who took classes at the other school), and ten of those in Bellevue (of the 22 interviewees who took classes at the other school), however, feelings of discomfort persisted. These feelings appeared to be strongest in Bellevue, where sharing was less extensive than in Whitecliff and where pupils were especially conscious of being an unusual presence in the other school. Moreover, as separation was the norm outside the school, and young people rarely entered areas or institutions associated with the other community, their sense of being 'out of place' appeared to be amplified. Specific experiences in the other school increased the salience of these feelings, particularly their awareness of being the object of other pupils' attention.

> Interviewer: *How do you find it when you're walking round?*
>
> Kevin: *It's not too bad, like. It's just when you're walking in, people just stare at you. It's like...*[laughs] *a different person or something, you know.*
>
> Interviewer: *Do they still stare at you?*
>
> Kevin: *Yeah, they just, like, whenever they walk along, they just look at you as if...I don't know.*
>
> Interviewer: *Who's that? Who does it?*
>
> Kevin: *It's just, like, everybody.*
>
> Peter: *I think it's just it's a different uniform and you're walking in, like, you know.*

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Interviewer: *Right.*

Kevin: *It's just like you don't really belong there.* (Kevin and Peter, year 13, Holy Saviour)

While some students seemed able to dismiss or ignore this experience as time went on, pupils like Kevin continued to be disconcerted by the stares of others, which had the effect of reinforcing his sense of being the 'other' within the school. Although pupils' descriptions – for example, "*some of the people there stare at you as if you had two heads*"– suggested that they attributed the attention to outgroup students' feelings of curiosity or confusion rather than malice, these incidents nevertheless reinforced more general feelings of marginalisation and exclusion. Often, however, incoming pupils did not need outgroup students' reactions to remind them of their 'otherness'; simply being in the other school caused them to feel out of place.

Liam: *You sort of find, whenever you go over there, you're sort of to the side with the pupils. You have a feeling like you don't belong there.*
Interviewer: *Do you feel like that when you go in?*
Liam: *Yeah, other different years and stuff stand outside the classrooms and you sort of having a feeling like you don't belong there and you shouldn't be there.* (Liam, year 11, St Brendan's)

The sense of dislocation expressed by Liam and others points to the strength of the association between the other school and the community that it served. In Liam's eyes, as his comments elsewhere in the interview made clear, the partner school was a *Protestant* school: it existed to cater for Protestant pupils and espoused views and values associated with the Protestant (and unionist) communities. Coming from a Catholic, nationalist background, Liam felt that an institution with a strong Protestant identity was not somewhere that he could "*belong*", or even somewhere that he should be present. While Liam did not mention any explicitly negative treatment from his classmates, these feelings of exclusion and displacement – perhaps allied with the fact that he had not forged any cross-group friendships – caused him to view his experience of shared education quite negatively, to the extent that he stated that his opinion of Protestants had worsened as a result of participating.

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Sentiments such as Liam's were implicit across several interviews and pointed to a shared understanding of place and identity that is explicated in the work of Dixon and Durrheim (2004; 2000). Writing about the concept of 'belonging', for example, Dixon and Durrheim (2004, p.459) note that it is "often based around a distinction between insiders and outsiders, our space and their space". Furthermore, one's identification with a place may be "defined in terms of the absence of others (and all that they represent)", such that the presence of these others "becomes a form of place transgression" (Dixon and Durrheim, 2004, p.459). For most pupil interviewees, this perception of "our space/school" and "their space/school" was entrenched, which was perhaps not surprising in a context where areas and institutions were commonly understood to be either 'Protestant' or 'Catholic', and were rarely visited by those from the other group. While Dixon and Durrheim write primarily of the dominant group's sense of displacement as a result of desegregation, Liam's comments here revealed his feelings as an *incomer*. Suggesting that he "*shouldn't be there*", he indicated an awareness of his group's historic absence from the school and thus of their own 'place transgression' in crossing the threshold.

The fact that students in the host school often speculated that visiting pupils would feel out of place served, tacitly, to endorse this sense of transgression. In addition, while most of the host students also expressed empathy for the feelings of incoming students and acknowledged an obligation to be welcoming, students in two interviews in Whitecliff were more critical of visiting pupils' behaviour, describing them as "*standoffish*" and "*not pure friendly*". Such comments placed the responsibility for integration and relationship-building on incoming students, an attitude that might have contributed to visiting pupils' sense of discomfort. At the same time it must be recognised that most pupils did not speak of persistent feelings of exclusion, but had reached at least some sense of comfort and ease at the other school. Furthermore, five students reported that they had developed a sense of affiliation with the partner school and spoke of feeling like members of a combined institution. This is in line with Gaertner and colleagues' (1996, 1989) model of superordinate identity development and suggests some potential to move from perceptions of separate identities and institutions to a common ingroup identity. However, at least at the stage of shared education described here, the distinction between 'our school' and 'their school' remained.

Experiences of hostility and intimidation

Reflecting an awareness of their 'outsider' status, more than a third of students in Bellevue spoke of feeling "*intimidated*" when walking around the other school. Contributing to these feelings were pupils' perceptions that some – perhaps many – of the outgroup pupils they passed were likely to hold negative intergroup attitudes. This in itself appeared to disconcert pupils like Karen, below, even if they did not expect these views to be manifest in acts of direct hostility.

> Karen: *When you're not walking about with the teacher, it's a wee bit nerve-wracking cos some of the people there would be, like, bitter and they'd sort of look and stuff.*
>
> Interviewer: *Would, er, do they ever say anything?*
>
> Karen: *No, they wouldn't. I don't think they would ever say anything.*
>
> Interviewer: *OK, but are you worried about it?*
>
> Karen: *Not worried about it. It's just certain people, like, you know what their views are on it.* (Karen, year 13, Holy Saviour)

However, these feelings of intimidation were also fostered by experiences of antagonism at the other school. Four interviewees reported specific incidents of hostility directed at them, while students and teachers in another six interviews described experiences that had affected others. Eight of these ten discussions related to the partnership in Bellevue. Catholic students more commonly reported experiences of victimisation, although three interviewees referred to Protestants being targeted in Catholic schools. A range of intimidating behaviour was described: verbal abuse, which was sometimes overtly sectarian in nature; non-verbal gestures; speech and actions that mimicked or made fun of outgroup pupils; and the singing of songs with sectarian connotations. While most pupils (like Cathal below) could identify what was provocative or abusive within the behaviour, others (like Sean) struggled to pinpoint the specific offence, but understood that such actions were intended to discomfort and exclude them.

> Cathal: *We were getting in the taxi to go home and a group of fellas walked in front of us whistling 'The Sash'. It's a Protestant song or something - I don't know what it is. And then, like, just if you're sitting in a classroom and*

you look out the window, there's boys sitting and giving you fingers and all, and calling you a wanker and stuff, like.

Interviewer: *Right. When was the taxi incident?*

Cathal: *A few months ago.*

Interviewer: *OK.*

Cathal: *Didn't think much of it. I just thought it was just stupid.* (Cathal, year 13, Holy Saviour)

Sean: *It's more the younger classes that are right beside you that are, say, more immature or, like, seem to try and take the hand*[10]*, take the piss. Like, think they're funny or whatever.*

Interviewer: *So do they, when you go into the other school, do they say things to you then?*

Sean: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *What do they say?*

Sean: *Don't know, like, just…*

Orla: *Like, do they talk to youse or is it just more like pointing at or making faces or what?*

Sean: *No, they just talk to you, like, just strangely.* (Sean and Orla, year 12, St Brendan's)

In each case, pupils were faced with a decision about how best to react to these incidents or experiences. Responses varied, but could be broadly aligned with the three categories identified by Swim, Cohen and Hyers (1998) in their study of responses to prejudice: 'assertive', 'non-assertive', and 'psychological'. Assertive responses were uncommon: none of the pupils spoke of confronting a perpetrator, and in only one case – where the friend of an interviewee at Bellevue High had experienced verbal abuse from pupils at Holy Saviour – did interviewees mention that an incident had been reported and the offenders reprimanded. Even in this instance, there was some reluctance about this approach: the pupil's friends reported that she "*didn't even want them* [the perpetrators] *to be talked to*" because "*she kind of expected something to be said*". The implication of this – that hostility was to be expected in intergroup interactions – helped to account for the relatively high number of non-assertive responses to experiences of antagonism. In Bellevue,

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[10] In parts of Northern Ireland, the phrase 'taking the hand' refers to making fun of someone.

in particular, where sectarian behaviour was not uncommon in intergroup encounters outside the school, incidents of this nature were considered almost inevitable in the course of contact. Pupils were therefore somewhat resigned to their occurrence and indicated that they were unlikely to challenge the offender or report the incident to staff.

In addition to making judgements about how to respond during an incident, pupils were tasked with making sense of a negative experience in a way that would not deter them from visiting the other school; the alternative approaches of avoidance and withdrawal would have the unwelcome consequence of terminating their studies. Here, students described what Swim, Cohen and Hyers (1998) refer to as psychological responses, i.e., emotional reactions and coping strategies. Most commonly, students sought to minimise the significance of the experience: they either dismissed the actions as "*stupid*" and the culprits as "*immature*", or attributed the incident to ignorance or a desire for respect from peers, thus stripping it of genuine malicious intent. Both the targets of hostility and their ingroup classmates also indicated that they had drawn confidence from the presence of ingroup friends at the school and from their more positive encounters with outgroup members. In these ways, pupils had begun to develop alternative perspectives on these experiences, which in turn put them at greater ease when returning to the partner school.

Perceptions of the schools' actions

While schools generally had the best of intentions in their approach to shared education, their actions sometimes served to exacerbate pupils' feelings of exclusion and intimidation. The examples in this section demonstrate how schools' actions can be subject to locally-specific interpretations in accordance with the histories and dynamics of the area in which the partnership is situated. In some cases, as this shows, similar arrangements may be understood quite differently between SEP partnerships. Findings in this regard highlight a need for schools to be more cognisant of the ways that certain features of shared education could be interpreted by pupils, particularly in contexts that are not supportive of integration.

Recognising that visiting the partner school could cause students to feel anxious, teaching staff across both sites sought to ease the transition by organising school tours and escorting visiting pupils between the entrance and the classroom. The

response to this from pupils across the two school sites, however, was quite markedly different. In Whitecliff, where teachers stopped escorting pupils after the first few weeks, there was little indication that students viewed this as anything other than practical help to navigate a new building. In Bellevue, however, where teachers continued this practice throughout the year, these actions had the effect of reinforcing pupils' sense of being under threat in the partner school. This was one of several cases in Bellevue where, within the context of hostile local relations, the schools' actions were interpreted by pupils in a way that was not intended. In this case, while Mrs King saw it as "*a courtesy to the children*" to provide a friendly welcome at the entrance, pupils viewed her actions as confirmation of the existence of danger within the school.

> Aine: *Like, she would walk us – once we've finished our class – would walk us to the door again.*
> Michelle: *Back, yeah, back down.*
> Aine: *She would always walk us down.*
> Interviewer: *OK.*
> Aine: *Which is good in a way, too, because you can see she's looking out for us, just in case anything was to happen.* (Aine and Michelle, year 13, Holy Saviour)

While there was no reciprocal meeting of pupils from Bellevue High at Holy Saviour when classes were held there, other practices at each school contributed to perceptions of danger. At both schools, visiting pupils tended to arrive later (after registering at their own school) and depart earlier (to return to their school for the next class or the end of the school day) than those at the host school. This meant they were regularly moving around the school when other pupils were in lessons. Particularly in the early days of shared education, both visiting and host pupils regarded this as part of a deliberate strategy "*to make sure you get them in and out before everybody's out of class*" (Natalie, year 13, Bellevue High School). Similarly, locating shared classes at Holy Saviour in a classroom block separate from the main school building implied a desire to minimise contact between pupils as they moved around the school; so too, at Bellevue High, did the practice of meeting at least one group of students at a rear entrance. These actions fuelled a sense of intergroup threat, particularly in the absence of an alternative explanation for such arrangements.

Lisa: *We have to go in through the back door of CoPE, the back door of the school.*

Siobhan: [Laughing] *We have to stand there for a while, like, until the teacher comes.*[11]

Lisa: *Until their break's over. We just stand there.*

Interviewer: *OK. Why do you go round the back? Do you know?*

Siobhan: *I don't know...I don't know, like.*

Lisa: *In case anyone says anything or whatever, I think.* (Lisa and Siobhan, year 13, Holy Saviour)

As well as reinforcing a belief among pupils that there was something to fear, some of these practices had the effect of emphasising the separateness of the two schools. The experience described by Lisa and Siobhan of being physically locked out served to reinforce, symbolically, that the visiting pupils did not belong to Bellevue High. While part of the goal of shared education is to relax the physical and ideological boundaries between schools of different management types (Boorah and Knox, 2013; Donnelly and Gallagher, 2008), such actions have the effect of re-establishing these margins. Furthermore, ushering visiting pupils in through the back door or locating their classes in outbuildings served to limit their visibility around the host school. Again, if part of the purpose of shared education is to normalise intergroup mixing, this may be achieved by increasing the visibility of outgroup members and by making non-participating pupils aware of the positive interaction that is taking place – in other words, promoting forms of indirect contact (Dovidio, Eller and Hewstone, 2011; Mazziotta, Mummendey and Wright, 2011). This may help to change pupils' perceptions of the outgroup and alter the norms of interaction within the school, as well as demonstrating the school's institutional support for positive contact. This was unlikely to happen, however, when visiting pupils were kept away from the main body of the school.

Conclusion

This chapter has sought to foster deeper understanding of pupils' experiences of shared education through the exploration of three themes: pupils' reasons for participating, their expectations of shared classes, and their experiences as

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[11] Later in the conversation Lisa and Siobhan mentioned that the door was locked until the teacher arrived.

outgroup members within the other school. The latter theme, in particular, has received comparatively little attention in prior research into shared education, but is important as it highlights the influence of perceptions of place and 'belonging' on students' experiences. In turn, this reveals a need for schools to be alert to their use of space and how this might be interpreted.

This chapter has also begun to demonstrate how factors external to the school inform pupils' experiences within it. In this respect, the analysis has indicated how educational discourses relating to skills development and preparation for employment informed pupils' decisions to participate in shared education. Moreover, and more extensively, it has demonstrated the influence of the community relations context on pupils' experiences of shared education, identifying how perceptions of group status, the nature of intergroup relations (including the normalisation of sectarianism), and 'place' and identity inform pupils' perspectives. In this way, the discussion has built on the findings of chapter 5 and begun to explore how pupils employ their interpretive frameworks to make sense of 'sharing' in practice.

Chapter 7: Contact and relationship-building within shared classes

While an appreciation of pupils' thoughts and feelings when navigating the other school is crucial for an understanding of the full experience of contact, it is in the shared classes that relationship-building is expected to occur. Here, it is hoped, the fixed nature of class membership and the frequency of meeting (at least weekly, over the course of one or two academic years) will permit the development of trust, positive regard and, ideally, friendship between pupils. This chapter therefore focuses on processes of contact between pupils in shared classes, exploring the features of the contact situation that influence interaction and the nature of the relationships that develop in these settings. While it is beyond the scope of a qualitative study like this to assess the outcomes of shared education in terms of attitudinal and behavioural change, the final part of this chapter reflects on pupils' descriptions of the personal impact of their experiences. On the basis of these accounts, the chapter concludes with some comments on the potential of contact through shared education to begin to re-shape intergroup relations.

The experience of contact

In quantitative research, intergroup contact is commonly measured in terms of quantity (or frequency) and quality. The latter is captured in subjective measures of 'closeness', 'pleasantness', 'equality', and/or 'cooperativeness' (Brown et al., 2007; Tam et al., 2006; Islam and Hewstone, 1993), and is reflected in Pettigrew's (1998) concept of "friendship potential". Across a number of studies, the quantity and quality of contact have both been associated with more positive outgroup attitudes, although quality generally emerges as a stronger predictor (see Binder et al., 2009, for a review). Acknowledging the importance of both dimensions, SEP (2008) has advocated "sustainable, high quality engagement" between young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds.

While this understanding of contact is relevant to the current chapter, it is important also to consider how pupils themselves evaluate their experiences, and in this respect there were a range of perspectives across the two partnerships. Where pupils spoke most positively of their experiences, they described classes in which

students from the two schools were well integrated and there was a comfortable and welcoming atmosphere. These classes made frequent use of active learning approaches and provided opportunities for interaction, and the class teachers were perceived to treat students from both schools fairly. By contrast, where pupils spoke less positively of their experience of mixed classes, they tended to report more limited cross-group interaction. In these examples, separation persisted and some pupils had barely spoken to students from the other school. Several pupils spoke of their disappointment at this, suggesting that it constituted a missed opportunity. As this indicates, most students expressed a preference for classes that permitted some degree of contact and the possibility of building relationships; however, a minority appeared satisfied by more limited contact, apparently because this allowed them to avoid the awkwardness and discomfort of initiating and sustaining intergroup interaction (see Stephan and Stephan, 1985). These observations are developed in further detail during the course of this chapter.

From a research perspective, the diversity of pupils' experiences proved valuable as it permitted comparisons between classes that were more effective in promoting interaction and those that were less effective, in order to identify the factors that were relevant to this difference. Particularly notable from this analysis was the lack of a clear link between the nature of contact in the class and the partnership in which that class was held. Indeed, some of the most favourable descriptions of contact occurred in the shared CoPE classes in Bellevue, contrary to my initial expectations that the Bellevue schools would struggle to foster effective contact in the divided local context. Rather, class- and subject-specific factors appeared to account for the differences between pupils' experiences, particularly where students were taking two or more shared classes and spoke of quite contrasting experiences in each. These factors included the nature of the subject, the size and composition of the class, and the teachers' skills in facilitating interaction.

Influences on the extent and nature of contact

The subject and teaching

Among the most significant influences on contact were the types of subject and course that pupils were studying. Certain subjects appeared more favourable to interaction than others, particularly those in which collaborative group work was a core component, such as drama, physical education and CoPE. Whereas in other

subjects pupils were often working towards objectives which could be achieved individually (for example, completing written coursework and passing exams), their goals in these subjects could not be achieved without the involvement of other pupils. As a result, interaction was a necessary feature of the class, providing students with more extensive opportunities to get to know one another than in other classes. Through these interactions, pupils could begin to share information about themselves and learn about their classmates' experiences and viewpoints – processes that social psychologists have termed 'self-disclosure' and 'perspective-taking' and identified as important in improving outgroup evaluation (Turner and Feddes, 2011; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008; Turner, Hewstone and Voci, 2007).

> *Grace, Joseph and I, the three of us do drama. It's not really a normal class situation, you sort of do have to interact with everybody, so it's a really good subject if you want to get to know someone.* (Nathan, year 12, St Brendan's)

> *You always find out different things about them [in CoPE]. Like, you'd say you would know everything about them now, like most of their interests and stuff, and then they'll come out with something in class and you would be like, "oh, you do that?"* (Christopher, year 13, Bellevue High)

In subjects that did not require the same level of interdependence, interaction could be fostered through the inclusion of group tasks in lessons. As Orla describes below, these encouraged pupils to work together and could help them to develop a sense of shared purpose and identity.

> *I think it's if you push towards a task and you're acting like a team, I think that's better shared education – if you're working as a team, instead of doing individual, when you feel more separate.* (Orla, year 12, St Brendan's)

Such comments speak to the importance of cooperative group work in fostering interaction and acquaintanceship, a finding also reported in research undertaken in desegregated schools in the United States (Schofield and Eurich-Fulcer, 2001; Slavin and Cooper, 1999; Slavin and Madden, 1979). The value of group work is emphasised within the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum at Key Stage 4 as a means of developing pupils' skills of working with others (CCEA, 2007a), but it was

not clear that teachers made full use of it across shared classes: several of the lessons that I observed featured no group tasks or opportunities for interaction between students. While I acknowledge that this may not have been representative of more widespread practice in these classes, discussions with pupils and teachers suggested that the use of group work could vary according to subject. While group tasks and opportunities for discussion were common in subjects like English, modern languages and politics, there appeared to be fewer opportunities of this type in more technical subjects such as engineering. This may reflect the accepted pedagogy of science and technology subjects, which continue to emphasise the transmission of facts from teacher to student (Noyes, 2012; Pampaka et al., 2012; Dow, 2006).

The extent of interaction also depended on the intensity of the course that pupils were studying. The most substantial difference in this regard was between the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness and more traditional subjects and qualifications. Pupils routinely described CoPE as "quite laid back" and "not really like a subject" as its less intensive structure allowed them to spend more time in conversation than was possible in other classes. No clear differences emerged in the intensity of other subjects and qualifications, however; rather, the level of intensity seemed to vary depending on the time of year and the proximity of exams and deadlines. As these neared, and teachers sought to move quickly through the remaining syllabus, classes appeared to become more focused and teacher-led, with fewer opportunities for pupil-to-pupil interaction. This was illustrated in several classroom observations, when teachers reminded pupils about the amount of material they had still to cover and appealed to them to be quiet in order to progress through it.

> The teacher reiterated several times the need to be quiet and work individually on their studies. She threatened the class with coming back in on the following Bank Holiday Monday – St Patrick's Day – and emphasised that they would have no more class time in which to do this work. (Notes from observation, year 13 agriculture class, St Brendan's)

> The sense of exam-related pressure is very strong. The class teacher herself expressed anxiety about covering the material for the exam, and the

students had to reassure her. (Notes from observation, year 14 health and social care class, Whitecliff High)

As preparation for exams began in earnest in the second term, this could mean that opportunities for contact were limited, as described, for at least a third of the school year, and often more.

The size and composition of the class

In addition to subject-specific influences, features such as the size and composition of the class could have a substantial effect on the nature of interaction. Smaller classes, which were more typical at A-level, generally permitted more extensive and intensive interaction as they tended to foster a more relaxed and intimate atmosphere. In such an environment, it was not only easier to chat to others but also more difficult to avoid doing so due to the greater exposure of each individual. In smaller classes, too, pupils were less likely to be surrounded by friends from their own school, and in such cases were obliged to form relationships with pupils from the other school to avoid the awkwardness of isolation.

> *It's definitely easier to make friends if you're in a smaller class, cos you have to kind of stick together, but if you're in a bigger class, with all your own friends from your own school, then you tend to stick to them.* (Emily, year 13, Whitecliff High)

The tendency for greater separation to occur in larger groups has been identified previously in micro-ecological studies of segregation in a university cafeteria (Clack, Dixon and Tredoux, 2005) and in university lecture theatres (Koen and Durrheim, 2010). In larger shared classes, as Emily's comment indicates, separation seemed to be more common because pupils were more frequently joined by friends and acquaintances from their own school. In the initial stages of shared education, the company of ingroup peers could be helpful in providing reassurance and reducing anxiety, especially among pupils attending classes at the other school. As the course progressed, however, this could hinder interaction, particularly where the numbers of pupils from each school were roughly balanced. With their ingroup friends around them, pupils in larger classes did not have the same social need as those in smaller groups to form cross-group acquaintanceships. Even where they

wished to initiate contact, the presence of ingroup and outgroup friendship networks made it difficult to do so. Pupils felt self-conscious approaching outgroup individuals in the company of others and were concerned that, having established friendships at their own school, other pupils might reject their approaches. Girls, in particular, also spoke of an unwillingness to flout the norms of teenage friendship, which disapproved of approaches by 'outsiders' that might disrupt existing friendship groups.

> *You sort of don't want to break up their friendship groups, cos, like, I know in our RE, they're paired, and the pairs are friends, like, or a wee small group of them are friends, so you kind of feel awkward, like, trying to go into their wee group, you know.* (Abigail, year 13, Whitecliff High)

In other cases, large classes were not balanced, but comprised a majority of pupils from one school and a minority (in some cases only one or two) from the other. The prospect of being among the minority, particularly in a class taught at the partner school, provoked nervousness among pupils, but the impact of this composition in practice appeared mixed. As in small classes, minority pupils were at times under pressure to interact with the majority to avoid the alternative of social isolation; similarly, majority group members recognised that social norms of politeness, if not feelings of empathy, obliged them to be friendly and welcoming. In two examples, minority pupils appeared to be fully integrated within the class and to have a positive experience; however, in two other instances, this had not been the case. While the reasons for these contrasting outcomes were not entirely clear, there were indications that some minority group pupils continued to feel vulnerable in large classes, causing them to keep to themselves or to stick closely with ingroup classmates and to resist contact with outgroup students.

Gender

In terms of class composition, a third factor of relevance to contact was the gender balance in the class. Having begun the research with few expectations about the effect of gender, I noticed during classroom observations that it seemed to have a substantial influence on pupils' preferences regarding seating and interaction. I followed this up in interviews and found a common theme: where pupils had the

option of sitting and interacting either with an ingroup member of the other sex or an outgroup member of the same sex, they almost always preferred the latter.

> Michelle: *There's four girls and two boys [from the other school]. From our school, there's me and my friend – she's a girl – and then a boy, so at the start he kind of felt a bit left out with staying with me and my friend, but now he's, like, become really good friends with the two boys in our class, so he'd sit with them and all, and chat away with them.*
> Interviewer: *So the girls and the boys keep to themselves a bit, do they?*
> Michelle: *Yeah.* (Michelle, year 13, Holy Saviour)

> *I'd say our chemistry class, though, is quite, erm- cos I know that the boys from our school and then the two boys from St Brendan's sort of sit together, and then I'd go sit with St Brendan's girls, so it's sort of like girls against boys!* (Melissa, year 13, Whitecliff High)

This gender preference emerged consistently across the interviews, and accords with the body of research reviewed by Mehta and Strough (2009). While adolescents in these studies reported higher numbers of other-sex friends than pre-adolescents, they spent more time with same-sex peers, reported more same-sex than other-sex friendships (and closer relationships with these same-sex peers), and, in one study, were more likely to choose same-sex partners for classroom group work. In the shared classes discussed and observed in this research, these gender preferences interacted with class size and ethno-religious membership to create or impede possibilities for contact. For example, in mixed-sex classes that were small or medium in size, gender subgroups tended to form and offered opportunities for cross-group interaction (albeit along gender lines); in these circumstances, gender acted as a cross-cutting category as advocated by Brewer and Miller (1984). Where classes were large and/or single-sex, however, there was a greater likelihood that pupils would remain with same-sex friends from their own schools. In these classes, one could expect to observe the dynamics discussed by Clack, Dixon and Tredoux (2005), with pupils clustering in groups of the same religion and gender, and less frequently engaging in cross-group interaction.

Pupils also referred to gender characteristics during the interviews to account for differences in classroom dynamics and friendship development between boys and girls. Teachers and pupils alike described girls as "*better at mixing*" and "*more friendly*", while boys were thought to be "*quieter*" and "*more awkward*". While these descriptions appear to reflect common gender stereotypes, an extensive body of research supports the existence of differences between boys' and girls' relational behaviours (see Rose and Rudolph, 2006, for a review). Together with this literature, participants' comments point to the possibility that gender differences might influence contact processes and outcomes. For example, studies have highlighted (adolescent) girls' greater propensity to express empathy and discuss their feelings and worries with friends (Rose *et al.*, 2012; Rose and Rudolph, 2006). Boys' comparative reticence in these areas has been linked to concerns about proving one's masculinity and avoiding ridicule for expressing emotion and appearing vulnerable (Oransky and Marecek, 2009; Phoenix, Frosh and Pattman, 2003). If one accepts current models of contact, which place central importance on processes such as self-disclosure and empathy, these findings may raise questions about the potential of adolescent boys' friendships/acquaintanceships to promote changes in attitudes to the outgroup.

The classroom environment

In addition to class size and composition, the classroom environment was an important influence on the nature and dynamics of interaction. Most classes, with the exception of subjects such as drama and PE, took place in traditional classrooms (or laboratories/workshops), where the arrangement of desks, chairs and equipment variously created or inhibited opportunities for contact.

> *In the class here, we're all in the middle of the room, facing each other, so you just kind of like have conversations among each other.* (Karen, year 13, Holy Saviour)

> Melissa: *And then in RE, it's like St Brendan's and then--*
> Abigail: *One row. Middle row, separate.*
> Melissa: *One row, and then the other one, and then there's like us.*
> Abigail: *So there's one row in between us.*

Emily: *I think it's just cos in the first week, you wanted to stick to the people you knew, and then you just had to stick with them seats.*

Abigail: *Those just became your seats.* (Melissa, Abigail and Emily, year 13, Whitecliff High)

In the classes that I observed, pupils tended to sit in separate, school-based clusters, particularly where the classes were larger and included a mix of students from each school. During each observation I made a sketch of pupils' seating positions and these are included in Appendix 1. As each class was only observed on one occasion, these sketches serve principally to illustrate a tendency towards separate seating and should not be taken to characterise any individual class. However, it was notable that pupils spoke in interviews about rarely deviating from their chosen positions: once they had selected their seats at the start of the year, they usually remained in these places for the duration of the course. As a result, the observed seating arrangements were likely to be typical of seating patterns in those classes, irrespective of the length of time that pupils had been meeting.

Having identified this tendency among pupils to choose and retain particular seats, I was interested to explore whether this primarily reflected a desire to sit with ingroup members or to avoid outgroup members. Interview data suggested that the former was the more significant concern: in a new class with people they did not know, pupils sought the reassurance of sitting with ingroup schoolmates with whom they were already familiar and felt comfortable. In this respect, the shared classes explored in this research differ from the lecture and tutorial groups studied by Koen and Durrheim (2010) and Alexander and Tredoux (2010), in which most or all participants were unfamiliar to each other at the outset, and are more akin to the workshop groups studied by McKeown *et al.* (2012). Where group clustering emerged in the first and second of these studies, it was attributed principally to self-segregating behaviours; in the third, to the existence of prior intra-group friendship. As Clack, Dixon and Tredoux (2005) have discussed, however, these seating arrangements may also serve to maintain existing boundaries and regulate interaction, particularly where whole classroom spaces – and not merely individual tables – were divided between Catholic and Protestant pupils (see Schrieff *et al.*, 2005).

Even where prior friendships influence seating patterns, careful classroom design could help to limit the extent to which clustering was possible, or permit some level of interaction even where pupils sat in school groups. In this respect, seating arranged in a horseshoe shape or, where numbers permitted, around a single table appeared especially effective, as pupils could sit with ingroup friends while still facing most of the members of the class. The traditional classroom layout of several rows of desks facing the front was less likely to promote interaction, as was a classroom comprised of several 'islands' of desks. The latter typically seated four pupils around each table, and in theory could permit small group contact; in practice, however, pupils tended to sit around these desks in their school groups. These observations are in line with those from studies of classroom design, which advocate circular and U-shaped designs, and discourage row and column seating, if the purpose is to promote interaction and dialogue (Martin, 2006; Randeree, 2006; Blatchford et al., 2003). As Martin (2006, p.93) observes, "physical and spatial aspects of a learning environment communicate a symbolic message about what is expected to happen in a particular place" – messages which may conflict with the intentions of teachers. Thus, even where teachers were striving to encourage interactive group work, their efforts could be undermined by a classroom arrangement that implied a preference for quiet individual study.

Where clustering in seating occurred, the main options available to teachers were to alter the arrangement of tables and chairs or to retain the current layout and simply change pupils' positions within it. It did not appear that the first approach had been followed; certainly, teachers and pupils did not indicate that this had been tried in their classes. Several interviewees, however, reported attempts at the second approach, moving pupils into new places to encourage more frequent contact. In view of research suggesting an association between desegregated seating in the classroom and greater social mixing outside the class (Wellisch et al., 1976), this may be a valuable strategy. However, in Bellevue, where teachers of the health and social care class (which took place at the local further education college) and engineering class had altered pupils' seating patterns, this approach had had mixed results.

> Anna: *The teachers [in health and social care], they've put, like, one Holy Saviour, one Bellevue High.*
> Interviewer: *Oh, really?*

Anna: *But on the first day, we had ice-breakers and everything, which I thought was really good, cos it just made it a lot easier.*

Interviewer: *Yeah. What's it like when they sit you like that? How did people react?*

Anna: *Well, first of all, like, you would just be kind of nervous, but they were all friendly. Like the girl I sat beside, I got on really well with her so I was happy enough.*

Interviewer: *And do you still sit like that now?*

Anna: *Yeah.* (Anna, year 13, Bellevue High)

Malachy: *I have never really talked to many of them, to be honest. At the start of the year, they'd like mixed everyone around so everyone was sitting beside someone new and I sort of talked a wee bit to one of them, but I wouldn't really know their name or anything like that. You wouldn't really know what to talk about cos you don't know what each other likes or anything. So it's hard to make conversation, pretty much.*

Interviewer: *Yeah, yeah. And what happened? Do you still sit like that?*

Malachy: *No. We just sit where we want now, so we just sit beside our mates.*

Interviewer: *Right. Erm, and what did you think of it when you were sat, kind of, mixed up?*

Malachy: *Just kind of boring. You wouldn't really know what to talk about. And I'd just be talking about engineering and that's boring, like, so...*(Malachy, year 13, Holy Saviour)

While gender differences may be relevant in these examples, given that each of the classes was single sex, another key difference appeared to be the level of contact encouraged by the teacher when mixing the seating. Health and social care pupils spoke about complementary 'icebreaking' activities and group work, whereas it was unclear that similar activities had taken place in the engineering class. The importance of actively fostering this rapport was emphasised by Mrs King.

I know Mr Kelly had talked to me initially about, "oh, well, I tried putting them, you know, Bellevue High, Holy Saviour, Bellevue High, Holy Saviour round

*the room", but that doesn't work, they don't talk to each other. You need to
kind of encourage a wee bit of chat first...*(Mrs King, teacher, Bellevue High)

Where this "*chat*" and familiarity was not encouraged and facilitated, however,
forcing pupils into proximity could have a backlash effect, causing them to withdraw
from one another. As Mr Kelly noted from his own experience, "*it creates a different
atmosphere...there's an awkwardness there*" and pupils had eventually retreated
back into their friendship groups, where they remained for the rest of the year.

As well as examining the influence of the classroom arrangement, I was interested
to explore whether other features of the classroom might inform pupils'
perspectives. During the observations, details of wall displays and the locations of
whiteboards, furniture and equipment were recorded, but these appeared to have
little effect on students' experiences. In only one of the classroom observations did I
notice any indication of the school's religious or cultural identity in classroom wall
displays: in the history classroom at Whitecliff High, there hung a series of small
posters on the themes of conflict and remembrance. These had been produced by
the Royal British Legion and featured their poppy motif, an emblem that remains
contentious in Northern Ireland. More often, wall displays featured uncontroversial
aspects of the curriculum, careers and university options, study skills and rules for
classroom behaviour. Participants also made no reference to features of the
classroom during the interviews, except in a few cases where Protestant pupils
commented on the presence of religious iconography – "*wee crosses and symbols*"
– on the classroom walls in Catholic schools. Again, these had the effect of
increasing identity salience, but appeared primarily to be objects of curiosity to the
pupils. Compared with the impact of classroom layout, the effect of these and other
features of the classroom on contact appeared marginal.

The facilitation of contact

'Ice-breakers' and social activities

The findings from the previous section highlight the risk of assuming that bringing
members of two or more groups together in the same space will result in interaction
and the development of relationships. In a classroom environment, where the norms
have typically discouraged interaction between pupils, the persistence of separation
may be particularly likely. Effective facilitation of contact can therefore be crucial in

putting participants at ease and helping them to begin to communicate. Data from interviews with pupils revealed this to have been especially important at two points: firstly, prior to the commencement of shared classes, in induction and 'ice-breaking' sessions held in both partnerships; and secondly, in the early phase of shared classes, to continue the momentum created by the induction activities and prevent the re-establishment of separate ingroup/outgroup blocs.

In both partnerships, pupils who were enrolled in shared classes had taken part in induction days prior to the start of their course. These were facilitated by staff from the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust, a charity established after the 1987 Enniskillen bombing with the aim of promoting cross-community dialogue and reconciliation. In Whitecliff, induction was held across both sites, with the morning session taking place in one school and the afternoon session in the other; in Bellevue, pupils were taken to the neutral venue of a local hotel for their induction. Participants, who did not wear uniform on that day, were assigned to groups comprising a mix of pupils from the two schools and were guided through a day of 'ice-breaking' activities, games, and tasks that addressed issues such as identity and nationality. In addition to this induction day, students in Bellevue had taken part in bowling, Laser Quest and/or go-karting outings at the start of the year to give them an opportunity to socialise as a mixed group outside the more formal environment of the classroom. These induction activities were valued highly by pupils when discussed in interviews.

> Yeah. I think, er, what really helped as well was that we had, like, a Spirit of Enniskillen day, where everyone met up and we all did activities and stuff together, and got talking about each other's views and things like that, so we got to know about them a lot...(Jessica, year 13, Whitecliff High)

Interviewer: *OK. Erm, and if you were in charge of engineering or CoPE here, what would you do differently?*
Kevin: *More, like, you know the way we went go-karting? More things like that.*
Peter: *More trips.* [Laughs]
Interviewer: *Right. Why would you do more of that?*

Kevin: *I don't know, you just get to know the people, cos in class you don't have time to talk to them. And like, it seems pointless.* (Kevin and Peter, year 13, Holy Saviour)

As these quotes suggest, these induction days were appreciated because they provided pupils with opportunities to socialise outside the formal learning environment. While the norms and rules of the classroom were considered to hinder communication, pupils' interactions in these other spaces were freer and more relaxed. The Spirit of Enniskillen days were valuable because they helped pupils to become familiar with one another and provided structured activities to facilitate interaction. In comparison, the social activities provided opportunities for students to enjoy themselves together and take part in the informal conversations through which they could get to know one another.

The value that pupils attached to these activities suggests the importance of building periods of informal 'social time' into shared education, alongside (if not within) shared classes. Other than during these organised social activities in Bellevue, pupils across both partnerships rarely spent much time in each other's company outside lessons: break times were all taken separately, for example, even in Whitecliff where the close proximity of the two schools would have permitted shared breaks without difficulty. Certain extra-curricular activities were the exceptions, such as the joint choir in Whitecliff and newly-formed joint rugby and soccer team in Bellevue, and some of the interviewees compared these favourably with shared classes as a means of meeting others and making friends. These activities were adjuncts to shared education, and as such were attended by only a minority of participants of shared classes, but they provided a further indication of the potential of social time to strengthen the development of cross-group relationships.

Teacher facilitation

Following this induction period, there appeared to be a tendency among pupils in the early phase of shared classes to return to some level of segregation. Contributing to this was the fact that membership of pupils' induction groups and subsequent classes often differed, meaning that they were entering shared classes with unfamiliar others. Simultaneously, this propensity to separate into school groups was influenced by factors previously discussed: uncertainty in a new

environment, the presence of ingroup friends, and the conventional classroom norms against conversation. To prevent pupils from retreating into their school groups, and to build on the foundations of the induction, it was important that the effective facilitation of contact continued in the classroom. Here, the responsibility fell to individual class teachers.

All teachers interviewed for this research accepted that encouraging contact was, to a greater or lesser extent, part of their role and had tried to create opportunities for interaction through different methods. These included altering pupils' seating arrangements, facilitating group conversations, and, in one case, devoting 10 minutes to social conversation over tea and biscuits during the last lesson of the week. While these had met with mixed success, the discussions highlighted examples of practice that was sensitive to pupils' anxieties about initiating interaction and helped to foster and support their early encounters.

> *I am acutely aware that I still need to go through the same process every single year with the pupils, and the first week of term every year is name games and a bit about their background, a bit about their identity, just so they're comfortable and happy with me, and I take part in that, and we all try and learn a bit about each other before we go into actually doing any proper teaching…I think the first few years that I did it, where I didn't do as much induction stuff, the classes tended to be a bit more quiet and reserved with each other, but now I'm very aware, you know. (*Mr Lamb, teacher, Whitecliff High School)

> *With the best will in the world, they will just always sit with their friend, but maybe if you put a few Holy Saviour pupils nearby, or just say, "oh, what do you think about this?" or "didn't you do that before?" and just start actually acting as the sort of intermediary, and if you do that for a little while, and then you step away, they continue.* (Mrs King, teacher, Bellevue High School)

Observing classes led by Mrs King, I was able to see this approach in action. Over the course of the lesson, Mrs King asked pupils if they were watching a television drama that was due to conclude that evening. While none of the students had seen it, her question promoted some discussion between pupils about the television

programmes they were following. With conversation running smoothly, Mrs King participated only occasionally, at one point to mention a science fiction programme that her young sons followed avidly. In this way, she both initiated interaction and, by offering brief information about her family and some of the things she enjoyed, encouraged similar self-disclosure among the students. Such approaches were appreciated by her pupils, who frequently commented in interviews on the friendly and relaxed atmosphere within the class.

It was apparent that some teachers were more comfortable with this facilitating role than others and, in general, preparatory training had been limited. One teacher, Mrs McAleenan at St Brendan's, spoke of a training session for staff in Whitecliff, also run by the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust, which was designed to sensitise them to "*the difficulties of getting to know people and feeling comfortable mixing with people that you don't fully know*"; but others reported no similar preparation. In the absence of such training, teachers often relied on the skills and experience they had gained from subject teaching. Those who specialised in humanities and languages were generally more experienced in facilitating class discussions and were thus more confident in supporting students' interactions. Where teachers were less effective at fostering contact, the benefits of 'ice-breaking' sessions and shared activities were largely lost: across both sites, several pupils expressed disappointment that, after a promising start, their relationships did not progress further.

> *Well, I thought at the start, when we were talking and I'd just met them, like, as we got more to know them [we would become friends]... but we just end up doing work.* (Peter, year 13, Holy Saviour)

> *Spirit of Enniskillen, yeah, we had that. We were fine for that whole week. We were, like, talking, we were doing teamwork, and then after that, something just got lost, we were just not talking. I think there must be something to push along, like, talking to other people.* (Orla, year 12, St Brendan's)

In addition to facilitating interaction directly, three of the teachers spoke of the importance of creating supportive conditions for contact within the class. This included establishing a welcoming and inclusive environment, fostering an informal atmosphere so that pupils felt able to converse and ask questions, and ensuring

that they as teachers did not appear to favour one school's pupils over the other's. Such responses were important, and encouraging, in light of research from the USA which found that teachers' attitudes and interpersonal behaviours were associated with the frequency and quality of intergroup contact in the class (Epstein, 1985; Serow and Solomon, 1979). In all cases, teachers' involvement in shared education had caused them to reflect on their own values and behaviours in the classroom and the extent to which these were supportive of interaction.

> *An environment where they're able to speak [is important] and where they're able to ask questions too...And open...I think we are really open down here, and that's what a lot of ours appreciate, our pupils, but also Holy Saviour, because they can kind of feel like they can ask us anything.* (Miss Lewis, teacher, Bellevue High School)

> *One of the big challenges that I've definitely found is that you have to be so careful to make sure that it is a classroom built on equality, that no one set of pupils feel that they are favoured more, or that they are attended to more... That was a big challenge, just making sure that you are equal* (Mr Lamb, teacher, Whitecliff High School)

The importance of these conditions, particularly equal status in the classroom, was highlighted by comments that demonstrated pupils' sensitivity to inequalities between classmates from different schools:

> *The teacher sometimes would- like, you could see that there was a wee bit of favouritism there...It's not that we're discriminated against, it's just, like, sometimes you get left out, stuff like that. Picked last in things....And when the teacher, like, if she's giving us marks, she'll maybe give them a 10 and us, like, an 8 or 9 or something.* (Victoria, year 12, Whitecliff High)

In this example, Victoria's perception of unequal treatment reinforced a sense of division between 'them' (the classmates from St Brendan's) and 'us' (classmates from her own school). The resentment that can result, both towards the teacher and the other pupils, may impede the development of positive relationships. Perceptions

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of unfair treatment are to some extent inevitable and likely to occur with greater or lesser justification. Without professional development or training to draw teachers' awareness to the influence of their behaviour in shared classes, however, they may inadvertently exacerbate these risks, with potentially negative consequences for pupils' relationships.

Relationships resulting from shared education

The purpose of the foregoing sections has been to identify and explore the range of influences on interaction within shared classes. An understanding of these is important for creating classroom environments that promote the types of interaction that students find enjoyable and offer the "friendship potential" described by Pettigrew (1998). While it is beyond the scope and intentions of this thesis to examine the outcomes of contact using the types of attitudinal measure developed by social psychologists, the following sections note the emphasis placed on friendship in existing contact literature and consider the nature of the relationships that had developed among participants of shared education in Whitecliff and Bellevue. The discussion explores how pupils spoke about these relationships and their impact, and concludes with some reflection on the potential of shared education to reshape relations.

During the analysis, pupils' descriptions of the relationships that had resulted from shared education were placed into one of three categories, indicating the strength of the relationship described: 'friends', 'acquaintances' and 'strangers', each of which is defined below. It is important to state that these categorisations are based on my understanding of each of these terms and do not in every case reflect the labels that young people themselves used, for two reasons. Firstly, it became apparent that 'friend' was a very broad term among the young people interviewed and was applied to relationships of varying depth. As a result, it was difficult to construct an understanding of these relationships based only on the label that interviewees ascribed to them. Secondly, there were indications that some students may have chosen to describe their outgroup contacts as 'friends' because they wished to provide a 'desirable' response, given their knowledge of the aims of shared education and my research interest in the area. Gentle probing of the nature of these 'friendships' often resulted in some qualification (*"not that close"…"not good friends"*) that indicated a less established relationship. In view of this, it seemed most appropriate during the analysis to focus on the nature of the relationships that

pupils described, rather than the terms they employed. Again, these observations have implications for those undertaking quantitative studies of contact, whose measures often employ the term 'friend' on the apparently inaccurate assumption that there is widespread consensus as to the meaning of the term.

With this caveat, the analysis placed ten students across the two sites (four in Whitecliff and six in Bellevue) into the 'friend[ship]' category on the basis of the relationships they had formed with outgroup members through shared classes. For eight of these pupils, the most significant cross-group relationships were with members of the same sex, but two (one boy and one girl, both in year 13 in Bellevue) reported significant friendships with a member of the other sex. These friendships had generally arisen in classes which were small in size and/or had permitted substantial interaction. This had enabled pupils to get to know one another well during the year and to discover shared interests, as Nathan's comments illustrate below. The higher number of friendships in Bellevue relative to Whitecliff might appear surprising, but was indicative of the sympathetic environment provided in the CoPE classes. The relatively relaxed pace of this course, the opportunities it provided for social conversation, and the teachers' skill in fostering interaction made it particularly conducive to friendship-development. Consistent with this type of relationship, pupils in the 'friendship' category were the most likely to meet their outgroup friends outside school.

> *Well, one of the guys in my music class, I'm in a band with him now, so [our relationship]'s pretty close. I only met him this year, but he had the same sort of musical taste and, like, taste in everything that I did, so we just hit it off right away, and around December time we decided we'd just start a band together so we've had a pretty close relationship.* (Nathan, year 12, St Brendan's)

At the other end of the scale, 12 pupils (six in Whitecliff and six in Bellevue) described students from the partner school as still being relative "strangers". These pupils reported knowing little more about the outgroup students than their names, and in some cases they did not know even this. These students had exchanged at most only a few words with pupils from the other school, usually in relation to the content of the lesson. Lacking much knowledge of their outgroup classmates, these pupils were unsure what to talk about and felt they would be unable to hold a

conversation if they were to meet one another in town. These students were often participants in larger classes with a mix of pupils from both schools, and at times in subjects which were substantially teacher-led. Notable among these were some of the GCSE-level classes in Whitecliff, where class size and composition appeared relevant, and the engineering class in Bellevue, which was both large in number and didactic in nature.

> Interviewer: *Erm, OK, and do you feel you've got to know people from the other school who you didn't know before?*
>
> Kevin: *I haven't talked to one of them since I came.*
>
> Interviewer: *Really?*
>
> Kevin: *Yeah. I've never even said one word to them.* (Kevin, year 13, Holy Saviour)

By some way the most common type of relationship was that of "acquaintances", in which category 38 pupils were included (22 in Whitecliff and 16 in Bellevue). The nature of this type of relationship varied: while some pupils took part in frequent social conversations within their classes and attended occasional activities at one another's schools, others' interactions had focused primarily on schoolwork and their acquaintanceship was at a relatively early stage. In all cases, these relationships were confined to the classroom, although several students reported that they had met in the street and held a short conversation, and most others felt confident about doing the same. Although some of these relationships might serve as a precursor to more established friendships, several of these pupils were doubtful of the possibility of this. They suggested that their classes were not frequent enough, and did not allow for sufficient social contact, to enable a deeper friendship to develop.

> Interviewer: *How would you describe your relationship with them?*
>
> Grace: *Well, I haven't really, like, on a social basis, I haven't really made friends with anybody, but I suppose I would be friendly with the girls in drama, like, so I would. I would be friendly with them, but not on a social basis...*
>
> Interviewer: *How about you?*

Megan: *Like, I wouldn't be really friendly with them, but if you see them you say hello to them and, like, talk to them in class and stuff.* (Grace and Megan, year 13, St Brendan's)

Meeting outside school

As the description above suggests, only a small number of pupils had met outside school. Among other students, this lack of out-of-school contact was attributed to factors intrinsic and extrinsic to their relationships. In the first case, pupils referred to the closeness of the friendship, suggesting that relationships had to reach a certain level of intimacy before moving outside the classroom and theirs had not. Several pupils spoke of feeling awkward about inviting their outgroup classmates to spend time with them because they did not know them well enough. The nature of the local area exacerbated this: as there were few local activities and facilities for young people, and fewer that were not associated with one of the two religious groups, much of young people's socialising revolved around informal activities requiring extensive interaction, such as shopping or visiting a friend's home. Pupils reported that they were not yet (after between seven and 15 months of shared education) sufficiently at ease in each other's company to feel comfortable with this type of meeting and confident of sustaining conversation. Most, however, could imagine meeting in the future, albeit in the context of a group activity. This, they suggested, would provide a focus for the interaction, alleviating the pressure to maintain conversation and reducing any feelings of awkwardness.

The most notable extrinsic factor preventing pupils from meeting was the depth of division between Catholics and Protestants in many of the areas in which they lived, which was manifest both geographically and socially. In respect of geography, pupils from the two schools in each town often lived in different parts of the county, reflecting the tendency for Catholics and Protestants to dwell in separate areas, and thus had to travel some distance to meet. As most students were not yet old enough to drive, they were largely reliant on parents or public transport, which was infrequent in country areas; as a result, they often struggled with the logistics of meeting. In Whitecliff, however, three pupils also cited geographical distance as the rationale for not meeting when, as became evident in later conversation, they did not know where outgroup students lived. This response might have been based on reasonable assumptions about their classmates' backgrounds; however, distance

seemed rather to be offered as a 'socially acceptable' impediment to meeting when pupils might have had other reasons for not doing so.

Socially, norms of separation, and associated fears about others' reactions to contact, also hindered meeting. Among pupils in Bellevue, for example, there was some reluctance about meeting in town in case of hostile responses to mixed groups from local residents. While there was less concern about potential hostility in Whitecliff, there were few 'shared' venues in which pupils could meet. In one notable example, three Protestant students at Whitecliff High reported receiving an invitation from Catholic classmates to an under-18s event at a local bar, which they declined on the basis of their perception of the venue as "*kinda like a Catholic nightclub*", where they "*wouldn't fit in*". Separation across most areas appeared so entrenched that, even where contact was not proscribed, it seemed unlikely that pupils would contravene these (descriptive) norms for anything other than a strong cross-group friendship.

Contact via social media

In the absence of face-to-face meeting, social media offered the potential for pupils to socialise outside the classroom, albeit in a virtual environment. Previous research on shared education has suggested that the extension of classroom contact to social media represents a positive development (Hughes *et al.*, 2010), but the findings of this research were more ambivalent. Where pupils used social media websites, particularly Facebook, they had usually added as 'friends' pupils from the partner school with whom they shared a class. However, this had often taken place in the early weeks of the course and was not a clear indication of the strength of their relationship in person: as Abigail from Whitecliff High observed, "*you'd go to your class the first time and within the first week, everyone in your class has added you. You still don't speak to them in class yet, but you've got them all on Facebook!*"

Among teenagers, maintaining contact with others is only one use of social media; the construction of an image of the self is also an important function. Several studies have reported that the wish to appear popular is significant in motivating teenagers' and young adults' behaviour on Facebook, including the adding of 'friends' (Barak-Brandes and Levin, 2014; Utz, Tanis and Vermeuelen, 2012). Moreover, such research has found that these 'friends' include individuals whom the

Facebook user knows only very slightly and even those whom he or she does not like very much (Barak-Brandes and Levin, 2014; Agosto, Abbas and Naughton, 2012; Hooper and Kalidas, 2012). As such, connecting via social media may not be a good indicator of the strength of pupils' offline friendships. However, a number of interviewees in this research, particularly older girls, reported exchanging telephone numbers and text messages, and this seemed to indicate a more established relationship, a finding which echoes that of Agosto and colleagues (2012). While these pupils reported that their communication related primarily to school and homework, the fact that they were willing to make contact showed confidence in the relationship and could open the channels to further social interaction.

Other outcomes of shared classes and activities

The finding that few pupils had formed 'friendships' (as defined above) is perhaps not surprising given the constraints identified in the foregoing discussion. Because most contact was classroom-based, and within many lessons there was limited opportunity for interaction, pupils had often not experienced the level of social contact that they considered necessary for friendships to form. While several of the friendships looked likely to continue beyond the duration of the course, less established relationships, being classroom-based, were liable to end once pupils had achieved their qualification. Only those who were in years 11 and 12 in Whitecliff, and were planning to continue to post-16 study at either school, had a further school-based opportunity to deepen existing relationships or form new ones.

These findings might suggest that shared education has only limited potential to effect long-term changes in relations, even among pupils who have elected to participate. However, when considered in the local context, the partnerships' contribution to SEP's aims of improving community relations appeared more substantial. The fact that positive relationships, including friendships, were developing in both partnerships suggests not only that shared education can facilitate such friendships, but, crucially, that it can do so in deeply divided settings. Given the tension that characterised relationships in Bellevue, it was striking that a higher number of Bellevue pupils than Whitecliff pupils reported forming close relationships. While there are multiple influences on such an outcome, the sympathetic environment fostered within the Certificate of Personal Effectiveness appeared to be an important factor.

Beyond the formation of friendships, interviewees in both partnerships also offered numerous examples of the shifts that had been precipitated by shared education. While these might at times appear quite minor, they were considered by participants to be significant developments in the local and regional context. In Whitecliff, for example, pupils in two interviews spoke of a decrease in violence between students from the two schools since shared activities had extended into the lower school. Whether this reflected changes in pupils' attitudes or the development of a stronger social norm against conflict (Dovidio, Eller and Hewstone, 2011), the reduction in fighting was noted and appreciated by these interviewees. In Bellevue, too, where the schools had had little contact prior to joining SEP, just the presence of pupils in one another's schools and classes was regarded by teachers as an important marker of progress. That pupils had attended one another's school productions, formed a joint rugby team, and turned out to support the partner school in major sporting events was indicative, in their view, of shared education's success.

> There've been huge breakthroughs. I mean, I know just even from being - I'm still a relatively new teacher here in this school, but from when I started, er, there wasn't a peep of Holy Saviour, and now, you know, as I look out, I can see them running out to play. And as I said earlier, they attend many of our events that are here. (Miss Lewis, teacher, Bellevue High School)

> There's some really lovely examples of positive stuff happening and coming from outside. I know one of the examples recently has been St Brendan's boys reached the- I think the final of the All-Ireland schools' hurling and, erm, this was great because a lot of our kids were coming in really, really pleased and trying to book places on the bus to go and support their friends from their classes, which was really positive. (Mr Lamb, teacher, Whitecliff High School)

In both Whitecliff and Bellevue, participants suggested that the experience of meeting and interacting with others had had a positive impact on their perceptions of cross-group contact. Christopher's comment below was typical of those from pupils who had reported anxiety prior to shared education: while previously nervous about interacting with outgroup members, these pupils now spoke of greater comfort and confidence in their interactions with classmates and unfamiliar members of the outgroup. Approximately half of the interviewees also reported positive changes in

their opinions of the other group following involvement in shared education. The possibility that pupils' responses reflected a desire to present themselves as tolerant and/or reformed individuals (in this case, now possessing 'desirable' attitudes) should be acknowledged here; nevertheless, such responses are worth noting as they may point to the potential of even nascent relationships to influence perceptions of the outgroup, particularly where pupils had otherwise had little prior experience of contact.

> *Well, before I went there, and I was in third year, I used to think, no, pure hate them, just because they're Protestants, but once I went over, I was just like, they're no different from me.* (Declan, year 12, St Brendan's)

> *At the start of this year, I would've been scared to talk to them – well, not scared, but more cautious, and now I would just talk away to them, and, like, anybody else in their school.* (Christopher, year 13, Bellevue High)

> *I'm more accepting of them, like, you know. And like, beforehand, you're sort of thinking, like, they're the opposite of you, they're the opposite of all your beliefs, what you stand for, whereas now, like, you sort of just think it's alright for them to have their own beliefs and you to have yours, you know. You just get along with each other.* (Niall, year 13, Holy Saviour)

While shared education might not have resulted in significant numbers of friendships, these pupils indicated that participation had altered their perspectives and thus that the school partnerships had made some progress against SEP's aim of improving community relations. As discussed earlier, the potential for interaction was not fully exploited in some classes and, in these cases, participants suggested that opportunities for relationship-building had been lost. Similarly, it is important not to overstate the potential of shared education, as a number of constraints – particularly relating to the nature of the subject and the pressures of exams – are likely to persist. However, recognising that markers of progress and impact will vary between settings, a locally sensitive approach can be valuable in assessing the contribution of each partnership to the programme aim of promoting intergroup relations. This point is also made by Hughes *et al.* (2010) and Knox (2010), who comment that, in divided areas, students' willingness to attend mixed classes, and

their feelings of reduced anxiety, represented important indicators of progress against SEP's aims.

Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to explore participants' experiences of contact in the classroom, the main arena for interaction within shared education. Across this discussion, two aspects have emerged as particularly notable. Firstly, that the location of a class – either in Whitecliff or Bellevue, or in pupils' own schools or the partner school – had no clear influence on students' experiences of contact within it; rather features of the class seemed more relevant to shaping pupils' encounters and their feelings towards the other group. Relatedly, students who reported anxiety or overt hostility when moving around the school could go on to report positive experiences of in-class contact. This was important as it created a sense of the classroom as a separate space, somewhat insulated from the dynamics of the rest of the school, with the potential to counter more negative experiences of contact that occurred in the corridors or playground.

Secondly, certain classroom factors emerged as particularly relevant for promoting contact and relationship-building. Some of these have received prior attention in research into shared education, such as the nature of the school subject (Hughes *et al.*, 2010), but others – including class size, aspects of class composition, and the arrangement of the classroom – are novel in this regard. Importantly, where these features were conducive to interaction, the shared class could provide a significant counterpoint to the norms of separation with which most pupils were familiar.

In addition, recognising the role of friendship in contact theory, this chapter has explored the kinds of relationship that developed through shared classes. While these findings were mixed, two points are worth attention. First, while most of the relationships described by pupils lacked depth, there were examples of strong friendships in both partnerships. These indicated the potential of shared education to support positive relationships even in highly divided circumstances. Second, while friendship is a desirable outcome of shared education, too great a focus on friendship-building may obscure an awareness of other positive developments (a point also made Schofield and Eurich-Fulcer, 2001). While these other outcomes may appear more minor, they were nonetheless considered significant given the

level of separation in many areas and the limited prior contact that most pupils had experienced.

Chapter 8: Negotiating difference

In this chapter, having considered the nature of the relationships formed through shared education, and the factors that support or hinder their development, I focus on a particular feature of the process of relationship-building: the encounter with difference. 'Difference' is here understood in terms of variety in religious belief and practice, national and cultural identity, and political opinion. These aspects provide the focus of group identities in Northern Ireland, which have largely been constructed and defined in opposition to one another. As the key points of cleavage in Northern Irish society, religious, cultural and political differences have been identified as central issues for educational initiatives that aim to promote reconciliation and improve intergroup relations (Emerson and McCully, in press; Donnelly, 2004b).

The chapter opens with a brief discussion of the treatment of 'difference' within contact theory, before going on to explore how difference is negotiated through shared education. This analysis considers, firstly, pupils' views of addressing diversity of identity and belief in the shared context and, secondly, their reported encounters with difference during shared classes and activities. The chapter closes with some reflection on the impact of these experiences and the approach to difference in the two partnerships.

Addressing difference through contact

Contact theory has often paid limited attention to difference: while some researchers have argued for the importance of maintaining group distinctiveness (Hewstone and Brown, 1986) or a dual identity (Dovidio, Gaertner and Saguy, 2009), there has been little consideration of the ways that difference is or should be addressed in practice within interaction. Moreover, given the emphasis in contact theory on the production of cooperative, harmonious encounters, there may be a tendency to suppress difference so as to avoid conflict (see Dovidio, Gaertner and Saguy, 2009, for examples from recent research). Recognising this, there has emerged some concern about the potential of polite encounters to engender strong, trusting relationships (Donnelly, 2012), or to challenge inequality and prejudice, particularly in contexts characterised by asymmetrical power relations (Dixon *et al.*, 2013; Nagda and Derr, 2004; Abu-Nimer, 2004). Dixon and colleagues argue, for

example, that intergroup contact may in fact reduce support among members of disadvantaged groups for policies that redress inequality, and decrease the likelihood that they will participate in collective action to combat disadvantage.

In response to such concerns, several authors have argued for greater consideration of difference during intergroup interaction. They advocate the sensitive exploration of cultural and religious differences (Anderson, 2010; Council of Europe, 2008) and, from a more critical perspective, the analysis of inequality and discrimination between ethnic and religious groups (Nagda et al., 2013; Dessel, Rogge and Garlington, 2006; Nagda and Derr, 2004). These approaches differ in emphasis, but share a common purpose of addressing conflict, promoting equality, and enabling deeper mutual understanding through the exchange of perspectives on issues germane to existing tensions. In addition to changing participants' perspectives, the models of intergroup dialogue discussed by Dessel, Nagda and colleagues also aim to promote action to address inequality. To this end, these seek to develop alliances between groups and build "capacities for collaborative action towards greater social justice" (Nagda et al., 2013, p.210).

In common with other aspects of shared education, decisions about how to address matters of religious, cultural and political difference within shared classes and activities are left to the participating schools. While provision has been made through SEP for the training of (some) teachers in dealing with sensitive issues, there is no explicit requirement that such discussions take place. In practice, previous research into shared education has identified a range of approaches and attitudes on this subject. Although some teachers reported discussing difference during shared classes – and, indeed, considered it crucial to do so when the opportunity arose – others lacked the confidence to facilitate these discussions and preferred to keep them to a minimum (Hughes et al., 2010; Knox, 2010). These attitudes mirror those of teachers interviewed for research on integrated schools, who were often – though not unanimously – reluctant to broach matters of identity, politics and culture (Donnelly, 2008, 2004a, 2004b; Donnelly and Hughes, 2006). Similar perspectives were also reflected in the responses of pupils participating in shared education: while a minority reported having conversations about difference, others had avoided doing so (Hughes, 2014).

Responses to political, cultural and religious difference

To explore whether a similar reluctance to address religious, cultural and political identity was prevalent in Whitecliff and Bellevue, interviewees were asked about their feelings regarding the discussion and expression of difference in shared classes. In line with previous research, the most frequent response referred to feelings of awkwardness and a preference to avoid these subjects, with more than half of interviewees suggesting that such topics would not be raised among students. While seven of these pupils framed this in terms of passive avoidance, suggesting that group differences simply did "*not really come up*" in their classes, the remainder depicted this as a more active process, requiring some care in one's choice of conversation topic. This avoidance was common in both Whitecliff and Bellevue: pupils appeared especially keen not to discuss political issues, such as the (then) ongoing flag protests, but also avoided other less immediately controversial topics, including their plans for St Patrick's Day or the Twelfth of July, their use of the Irish language, and what they described in more general terms as their "*different traditions*" and "*different views*".

> *Like, well, we've never really had the experience, I suppose, of talking about, like, different subjects. Like, we wouldn't ever talk about what football team do you support or, like, nobody would say that they preferred hurling to hockey or, like, do you know, that sort of way? We'd never go into the terms of treading on anybody's toes. It would just be general conversation, trying not to offend people.* (Grace, year 13, St Brendan's)

> Interviewer: *Are some issues off-limits, would you say, or is anything open to discussion?*
>
> Jessica: *I think maybe people try their best to avoid that [i.e. the flag protests], if you know what I mean? Erm, if anyone's joking around about it, then they'd maybe be like "oh, keep quiet about that. Don't kinda bring it up."*
>
> Interviewer: *Oh, OK, so you'll kind of try and avoid it?*
>
> Jessica: *Yeah.* (Jessica, year 13, Bellevue High)

The most common reason for limiting conversations about difference was, as Grace suggests, to avoid giving offence. After hearing this response several times, I was interested to establish what pupils thought might be "offensive" in these discussions.

Responses indicated that simply to acknowledge the existence of certain community differences was to risk causing offence: notably, in one interview a pupil suggested that merely to mention aspects of one's cultural background was potentially to be regarded as *"push[ing] it on"* the other group, and might be construed as intimidating or provocative. In avoiding any subject that might provoke resentment, pupils also sought to avoid the consequences of offence, which included arguments and resulting tensions between pupils. Furthermore, there was also an indication that these concerns were informed by norms of politeness that disapproved of asking others too much about themselves and their backgrounds: in one example, a Protestant pupil was described as *"nosey"* by a friend for enquiring about her Catholic classmates' religious practices. This suggests that such norms might further constrain opportunities to learn about the experiences and perspectives of outgroup members.

The tendency to avoid issues relating to the conflict in Northern Ireland – where, as Donnelly (2004b, p.12) observes, "it is deemed 'socially gauche' to be completely open about one's political or cultural views in mixed-religion company" – is well recognised in literature on relations between the two communities (Hargie, 2014; Nelson, Dickon and Hargie, 2003; Donnan and MacFarlane, 1985; Harris, 1972). In this respect, students' reactions were typical and reflected their conformity to the pervasive social norms. What was perhaps particularly striking, however, was the extent to which the very acknowledgement of difference was considered not only potentially offensive, but also, in itself, an expression of sectarianism. As a result, pupils were at pains during the interviews to emphasise the similarities between Catholics and Protestants, apparently so that I (and perhaps also their co-interviewees) would not think that they held sectarian views. In this regard, comments like *"they're exactly the same as us"* and *"there's not one bit of difference between either of you"* were fairly common – the latter, memorably, following a lengthy discussion of political opinions and flags. Some pupils, moreover, suggested that a belief in the relative unimportance of cultural and religious difference (*"it's just a religion; it doesn't really mean anything"*) was a desirable outcome of shared education, and perhaps part of its intended purpose.

This high level of sensitivity around difference accords with the findings of Donnelly's (2008) research in integrated schools. In these institutions, she notes, "the expression of the different 'world views' or allusion to the different political and

cultural perspectives of Catholics and Protestants posed particular challenges and seemed to be framed as 'controversial', 'sectarian' and 'bigoted'" (Donnelly, 2008, p.196), an observation also made by McEvoy, McEvoy and McConnachie (2006) and Emerson (2012) in other contexts. If difference is so contentious that even to recognise its existence is to risk appearing sectarian, it is understandable that interviewees were sensitive to the possible consequences of such discussions and were keen to avoid them. Furthermore, given that most pupils had chosen to participate in shared education primarily for academic reasons, rather than from an interest in reconciliation, it is perhaps not surprising that few were willing to challenge or violate these norms.

Influences on the discussion and expression of difference

While the general tendency was thus strongly towards avoidance, there were nuances within this: certain topics or activities were regarded as more taboo than others, for example, and particular individuals were considered more or less amenable to discussing difference. In the first case, there was widespread agreement that certain differences provoked greater sensitivity than others and were therefore more likely to be avoided. Comparatively less controversial, and thus more acceptable to broach, were religious practices and certain cultural differences, particularly those relating to sport. More than two-thirds of the discussions or experiences of difference reported by students, including those conversations initiated by pupils themselves, related to either of these topics. The most delicate subjects, and most studiously avoided, were those relating to political and constitutional issues (including the flag protests) and the conflict: interviews yielded only one example of these matters being raised spontaneously by young people themselves, reflecting the widespread anxiety that these topics raised in mixed groups. This preference to focus on less sensitive topics suggested that, even when they appeared to be tackling controversial issues directly, pupils and teachers still employed strategies of avoidance.

> Orla: *I don't think [pupils at the other school] would take offence to us talking about St Patrick's Day.*
> Interviewer: *What sort of things do you think they might take offence to? Is there anything in particular?*

Orla: I think if we were talking about, like, Irish as a language or something like that, or we started talking Irish language.

Roisin: If you talk about being British and being Irish, I'd say.

Orla: The difference, I'd say.

Roisin: I think, yeah, depending on how strong you feel about it, people will get offended by it. (Orla and Roisin, year 13, St Brendan's)

In addition to selecting their discussion topics carefully, pupils in more than a third of interviews also spoke of being cautious in their choice of conversation partner and were careful to ascertain other students' views and likely responses before entering any discussion of potentially controversial issues. These pupils indicated that they would only introduce difference as a conversation topic if they could be sure that others would not misinterpret their intentions and think that they were being deliberately provocative. This required the existence of a certain level of intimacy and trust between participants, such that each would know the other well enough to recognise his or her intent; yet, as discussed in chapter 7, most pupils lacked this level of familiarity with outgroup classmates and were therefore reluctant to refer to any potentially divisive subjects. Among those who had developed stronger relationships, there was greater confidence that they could raise difference with their friends without discomfort, but only four reported that they had done so in practice. Where they had had such conversations, these had often been light-hearted and humorous – a preference discussed later in this section.

Nathan: It depends on the comfort zone you have with the person.

Interviewer: Right, OK. So...do you mean if you're more friendly with them?

Nathan: Aye. Like the guy I'm in a band with, he wouldn't care. He's very open to talking about [difference], but, like Grace said, there would be- we're not sure, but maybe there would be one of them who's felt strongly about it and, sure, if that happened, if one of them didn't want to talk about it, I just wouldn't talk about it myself. (Nathan, year 13, St Brendan's)

Aine: There's two girls in particular in my class that we would be quite good friends, and me and the two other girls would sit there and we just all made a big joke out of it and- oh, you know, it's good as well that we're able to do

that, like there's no hard feelings if someone says something wrong, you
know, we'd laugh about it actually.

Interviewer: *OK, so people aren't worried about what they can and can't*
say?

Aine: *Yeah. Like, say if there was something big happening in- say, for the*
flag protest, the Protestant girls in our CoPE class, they don't care. You
know, it doesn't faze them. They're not into all that fighting and violence, so
we just make a joke out of it, you know. (Aine, year 13, Holy Saviour)

Implicit in both these excerpts is a concern to avoid alluding to group differences in the presence of students who were thought to hold strong beliefs. From Aine's comment, for example, it appears that a discussion of the flag protests with her Protestant friends was possible because *"they don't care…it doesn't faze them"*, while Nathan suggested that a girl in his class, who was thought to feel strongly on such issues, might be unwilling to discuss them. This was indicative of a common view that it was undesirable to raise topics relating to political, cultural and religious difference with students who were strongly committed to particular identities (British or Irish, loyalist or republican), especially in an environment where individuals might hold contrasting positions. Interviewees expressing this view suggested that discussions of contentious subjects with these individuals would lead to resentment and arguments, or were futile due to the disinclination of each party to listen to the other. As Sinead at St Brendan's expressed, *"no one would be willing to listen to the other person…because they have their own points of view and they just disagree anyway."*

The result of this was a somewhat ironic situation where pupils would only consider discussing more contentious issues with outgroup members who claimed – accurately or not – to lack 'strong' views or to have little interest in political matters; as a result, they were unlikely to become involved in an exchange with those who (openly) held a contrasting perspective to their own. Moreover, as there were few opportunities within shared classes for pupils to engage in open discussions of difference, this widespread assumption about the impossibility of constructive dialogue between individuals with diverging opinions was largely unchallenged. This had the effect of limiting pupils' opportunities to exchange views and personal histories, and thus to experience the self-disclosure and perspective-taking that are central in the literature relating to contact theory and conflict resolution (Ron and

Maoz, 2013; Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008; Turner, Hewstone and Voci, 2007). The absence of discussion regarding different viewpoints and experiences also impeded opportunities for pupils to begin to think critically about their own identities, and the narratives they had embraced, in the light of new perspectives. In addition, the implied distinction between 'moderate' and 'extreme' outgroup members raised the possibility of subtyping (Richards and Hewstone, 2001; Johnston and Hewstone, 1992), whereby outgroup members with more moderate views were dissociated from those with 'extreme' perspectives, permitting suspicions and stereotypes of the latter to remain intact.

Finally, as reported above, pupils identified certain approaches to discussing controversial issues as being more appropriate than others, and tended to favour a light-hearted and humorous attitude. While serious discussions were considered off-limits, pupils spoke of referring to contentious subjects in jest.

> Interviewer: *Do you think you could talk about those sorts of things [religious differences] with students from the other school?*
> Ciara: *It's just a bit serious. Like, we're all teenagers. We don't really want to talk about that in particular.*
> Erin: *I think if you did, like, you'd probably joke about it and nobody would take it seriously.* (Erin and Ciara, year 11, St Brendan's)

> *I think [the flag protest] was mentioned in one class, cos our teacher was going down to Belfast with some other children to see a play, and they were just saying like, "be careful. Watch yourself!"...I think everyone was just sort of laughing about it.* (Nicola, year 13, Bellevue High)

From these and other examples, it appeared that the use of humour served principally as a mechanism for avoiding an issue: although pupils acknowledged the existence of difference in these cases, their involvement was rarely more substantial than this. While the use of humour in encounters between Catholics and Protestants is recognised as a means of reducing awkwardness and smoothing relations (Dickson and Hargie, 2006; Donnelly, 2004a; Nelson, Dickson and Hargie, 2003), it seemed to serve an additional purpose for these pupils as part of a process of mutual reassurance. By adopting a light-hearted approach, pupils signalled to one

another that, while they were aware of difference, they did not intend to make an issue of it. In this way, the use of humour could actually forestall conversations on culture, politics and identity by conveying the message that pupils were not keen to broach these issues seriously within the context of shared education.

Experiences of difference via shared education

Despite the general preference to minimise difference between members of the two groups, just under half of the interviewees (27 in total, 11 in Whitecliff and 16 in Bellevue) mentioned some experience of difference during shared education. It is possible that such experiences were more widespread, but were not raised during the interviews: as discussed above, the sensitivity around difference meant that pupils could be quite reticent on this topic. Recognising their nervousness, I was reluctant to push participants too far beyond what they were comfortable discussing. However, the responses that pupils willingly provided were instructive in themselves and indicated that their experiences of difference had generally been limited to one-off events and encounters, although four pupils (two in Whitecliff and two in Bellevue) described greater interest in and/or engagement with these issues.

The encounters that pupils described arose in several settings within the school: in induction sessions prior to the start of shared education; in spaces of transition around the school, such as the entrance hall and corridors; in shared classes, through informal discussion and teacher-led activities; and via extra-curricular pursuits. The following sections provide details of these experiences and consider what they reveal about the possibility of exploring difference through shared education. In so doing, this chapter aims to address a gap in the literature, which acknowledges the existence of widespread norms of avoidance in Northern Ireland, but gives less consideration to those occasions when cross-cultural encounters and discussions *do* take place.

Experiences at induction

As outlined in chapter 3, induction sessions were organised for pupils in years 11 and 13 in each shared education partnership prior to the commencement of shared classes. These were coordinated by the Spirit of Enniskillen Trust, which specialised in the facilitation of activities to promote greater mutual understanding and more positive relations. In Bellevue, these induction sessions provided the most common

setting for the exploration of difference: of the 16 pupils who spoke of discussing matters relating to culture, politics and religion, half reported that their only experience of doing so was during these sessions. It was particularly notable that these meetings provided the only occasion that the subject of national identity had been discussed among interviewees. The sensitivities around this topic were evident in the responses of pupils who reported participating in an activity which had required them to disclose their nationality, with all but one stating that they had felt uncomfortable doing so.

Natalie: *They did a thing where you had to sit on the floor and you had to decide whether you thought you were British, Irish or Northern Irish. Do you remember that?*

Anna: *What it says on your passport, as well, that's what we got.*

Natalie: *Yeah. We got "what do you think you are?"*

Leah: *So of course, a lot of the Holy Saviour ones went to Irish and then it was, like, a mix: a few went to British and most people went to Northern Irish, didn't they?*

Interviewer: *OK. And what was that like, doing that?*

Leah: *It felt very awkward.*

Natalie: *I didn't really like it. I thought it was a bit awkward. I don't think we should've done that.*

Leah: *Cos they're meant to be joining us all together and then they just basically separated us all.*

Natalie: *It felt like they were trying to take us apart a little bit.* (Natalie, Anna and Leah, year 13, Bellevue High)

Malachy: *There was a group that you'd go to that side if you believe Northern Ireland's part of Britain - if you did believe that, you'd go there, and then if you didn't, you'd go over there, and if you were a bit iffy on it, you'd go in the middle.*

Cathal: *Yeah, so it just sort of like made it a bit uneasy and brought a bit of bitterness back. Cos you sort of forget, like, cos if you're real into nationalism and stuff, and you're a part of Ireland and that's it, and then someone goes and says, "if you believe you're a part of Britain, go over there," and then you*

go over to the Ireland side, it sort of would spark an argument, really, and tensions could rise.

Malachy: *Yeah, and they asked why they thought they were part of the place and it sparked a bit...*

Cathal: *Yeah, it just sort of made it a bit uneasy.* (Malachy and Cathal, year 13, Holy Saviour)

Despite their common discomfort, Malachy and Cathal disagreed over whether it was appropriate to raise topics like national identity in such a setting. Malachy felt that it was better to broach these subjects than to ignore them, although he advocated using a different approach from that adopted during the induction. This view was shared by one other pupil, Anthony, for whom learning about one another's views *"was the whole point of going to that."* By contrast, Cathal agreed with the predominant viewpoint that such topics were best not discussed.

Pupils' feelings of awkwardness may have been heightened by the timing of these discussions. These took place at the very start of the year, when students from the two schools were largely unfamiliar with one another, and some studies have suggested caution regarding the introduction of controversial issues at this stage (Donnelly, 2012; Dovidio, Gaertner and Saguy, 2009; Nagda and Derr, 2004). However, the apparent absence of discussions of nationality from shared classes suggested that pupils did not address this subject even as they got to know one another better. This also indicated that certain particularly sensitive topics were unlikely to be raised spontaneously by pupils, regardless of the nature of their relationships; only when introduced by an adult facilitator were these issues, and students' different perspectives, likely to be addressed openly.

Experiences around the school

Among pupils who moved between schools, journeys around the partner school often provided the first encounter with symbols of cultural and religious difference. In all four schools, sports trophies and team photographs were exhibited in reception areas and reflected the different sports played in the two sectors. Moreover, in the Catholic schools, religious iconography was prominent and the Irish language featured on plaques and in displays. Unusually, Holy Saviour occupied a building

which had formerly been a convent and still included features that indicated its previous function, including a large chapel.

While pupils' comparisons of the schools typically referred to differences in their size, layout, and facilities, the greater visibility of identity in Catholic schools was also raised by Protestant pupils. These participants variously commented on the presence of statues and portraits of the Pope and other significant figures, the use of Irish around the school, and the display of a crucifix on the wall of most classrooms. These objects drew pupils' awareness to the existence of difference and served to increase the salience of the school's (and potentially its pupils') 'Catholic' identity: as one Protestant pupil commented, "*you just really see the difference then between the two schools.*" While most pupils appeared unperturbed by this, two students reported being taken aback by the difference reflected in the school buildings.

> Jessica: *They have, like, a chapel as well, and a big grand piano and stuff, so I thought that was really, really different.*
>
> Sophie: *Yeah, like, they would have Mass in their school and we seen that room and we were a bit shocked, we didn't realise what it was, cos we're not used to that. I think cos we don't really get much education on what they're like, so that was why we were so shocked about it!*
>
> Interviewer: *Had you been told about that before you went in?*
>
> Jessica: *No, not really. I never really heard.*
>
> Sophie: *No one explained to us about their religion or anything. I think, maybe, if we did get it explained to us, we wouldn't maybe feel so weird in the school, if that makes sense.* (Jessica and Sophie, year 13, Bellevue High)

Sophie and Jessica's reactions are revealing of the degree of separation between the two religious groups in Bellevue (and their respective schools) and the lack of awareness of the other group that resulted. Having little previous contact with Catholics of their own age, and no prior experience of a Catholic school or Catholic traditions, they were surprised by the presence of the chapel and by the extent to which Holy Saviour differed from their own school. It was clear from such comments, too, that pupils had received little information that might have prepared

them for these differences between schools, either through general education about the Catholic faith or specific information about the other school to ease their transition to shared classes. However, in what Jessica regarded as a positive outcome, she reported that this encounter had inspired a discussion with a new friend from Holy Saviour, who had explained that the chapel was used for religious services and celebrations during the school year. In this way, the visibility of difference within the school could stimulate discussions between pupils and thus provide opportunities for learning about one another's traditions and practices.

Experiences in the classroom

In view of the curricular focus of shared education, it was the classroom that offered the greatest potential for more sustained engagement with difference, either through informal discussions between pupils or through the subject teaching. In total, a quarter of pupil interviewees reported experiences of either type.

Informal discussions and encounters

Informal discussions of difference had usually arisen between pupils over the course of a lesson and were thus more likely to occur in classes which permitted more substantial interaction. These conversations had usually focused on the less sensitive issues of religious practice and sport, although three pupils from Whitecliff High also reported discussing cultural or political topics, such as the British royal family. Discussions about sport typically took the form of conversations between (usually) boys about their successes in the previous weekend's matches or competitions; as sport *per se* was the favoured topic of boys when seeking to build rapport with others, these conversations provided a basis for relationship-building. Among the pupils who spoke of discussing religious practices, these conversations had been stimulated by specific incidents, such as when pupils from the Catholic schools had reported that they would be late to the following class because they were due to attend a school Mass. These conversations were mainly factual, with pupils explaining and making comparisons between their different religious practices, and were valued for the chance they offered to learn about the other group, often in the absence of other opportunities to do so.

> Leah: *You hear them talking and occasionally say, like, "Mass" or, like, "chapel" or something and you...It's actually more interesting, like. You're*

like "what?" And you like have to [listen], you know, the way they explain it all.

Natalie: *She'd be quite a nosey person.*

Leah: *Yeah, I ask all about it, like.*

Natalie: *She goes, "what's Mass?" and "why do you do this?"*

Leah: *I find it really interesting. I just find it really interesting, learning all about it.* (Leah and Natalie, year 13, Bellevue High)

The two examples of informal conversation on a topic other than religion or sport were reported by pupils from Whitecliff High. The first of these had taken place during a joint PE lesson at St Brendan's and had begun as a discussion about the British royal family. Initiated by Catholic students, this conversation had opened with questions about the role of Queen Elizabeth and perceptions of her among the pupils at Whitecliff High.

Victoria: *They wanted to know, like, what we see the Queen as, like, what it is she does. And then they talked about the Pope and going to Mass and stuff like that.*

Amy: *Yeah.*

Interviewer: *So did that just come up in conversation?*

Amy: *Yeah.*

Victoria: *There was something on the TV at that time, and they asked us about it…We just said the Queen was just like their Pope. Like, just who they follow kind of thing.* (Victoria and Amy, year 12, Whitecliff High)

Notable in this example was the way that the pupils' interaction reflected their different national and cultural identifications. In asking pupils from Whitecliff High about the royal family, the students from St Brendan's recognised the other group's British cultural identity and positioned themselves as outsiders to this culture, thereby expressing their own Irish identity. Similarly, in their response to the question, and their attempts to explain the monarchy in terms they considered meaningful to their Irish/Catholic classmates, the pupils from Whitecliff High recognised their identification as Irish. In this mutual acceptance of identity, the acknowledgement of each as an authority on their culture, and the reciprocity of perspectives, this conversation – which was reported in positive terms –

demonstrated what commentators have described as basic conditions for intercultural/intercommunity dialogue: a recognition of the legitimacy of the speaker's identity and their right to express it, and an appreciation of their competence and contribution (Emerson, 2012; Anderson, 2010; Baraldi, 2009).

The second of these conversations was reported to have arisen in a BTEC sport class at Whitecliff High School and to have focused on the protests against the removal of the Union Flag from Belfast's City Hall. This exchange did not appear to have been particularly constructive: reporting the conversation, year 13 student Tom expressed the view that *"they [the Catholic pupils] were talking a pile of rubbish."* Reflecting on the experience, Tom and Max, who were both from mixed backgrounds, explained why they had felt confident to take part in the discussion of such a contentious topic.

> Interviewer: *Some people would avoid a conversation like that, because they'd be worried.*
>
> Tom: *Ah, see, we can do what we want.*
>
> Max: *We can take whichever side we want to.*
>
> Tom: *We have no biased opinion on it. We can just choose what we want, when we want. We get the best of both.*
>
> Interviewer: *OK, so you feel quite comfortable to talk about it?*
>
> Tom: *Yeah, see, people know that we're, like, both, so they're not like, "you're just saying that" sort of thing.*
>
> Interviewer: *Oh right, OK.*
>
> Tom: *They would sort of listen to us more than they would just a- you know, just a Protestant.* (Tom and Max, year 13, Whitecliff High)

This excerpt is instructive for what it suggests about the challenges that pupils may face when discussing different perspectives. Max's comment – *"we can take whichever side we want to"* – indicates that his and Tom's mixed heritage allowed them to choose their opinions on a given topic. This option was understood to be unavailable to students without dual heritage, perhaps because of peer pressure to adopt a particular viewpoint on the basis of their background. However, it appears from this discussion that when other pupils *did* express the expected view, their opinion was dismissed because it was considered to be *"biased"* and therefore

lacking legitimacy. In contrast to the example given by Victoria and Amy above, it is apparent that the conditions for constructive dialogue were not met in these discussions: when individuals expressed an opinion that accorded with their community background, their competence was denied and their contribution considered less valid (*"you're just saying that"*).

In addition, it was notable that informal classroom encounters also provided the occasion for pupils to observe and discuss differences in rules and practices between the two schools. These were often quite minor, but were a source of great interest (and occasional envy). In Whitecliff, for example, pupils frequently mentioned that students at Whitecliff High were permitted to undo the top button of their school shirts and to place their mobile phones on the desk during lessons, while those at St Brendan's were not. Similarly, in Bellevue, pupils spoke of a more relaxed approach to the wearing of blazers at Bellevue High and a greater tolerance of make-up at Holy Saviour. While such differences were not explicit expressions of religious and cultural identity, their presence served as additional signifiers of the distinction between the two schools. Although mostly benign, these differences had the potential to be more contentious, particularly when they resulted in treatment that pupils considered unfair. There were several examples of this, such as when a teacher from Holy Saviour had censured visiting students from Bellevue High for disobeying uniform rules that did not apply at their own institution. In cases such as these, there was a need for greater clarity when communicating to staff and pupils what was expected of students attending a school other than their own. During the interviews, it was evident that there was some confusion on this matter.

Curricular content and lesson material

Although there were examples from both partnerships of difference being made salient through the curriculum, these were more common in Whitecliff. This was due largely to the provision of a wider range of shared subjects, including several which entailed more substantial engagement with culture and politics. Among these were GCSE and A-level PE and BTEC Sport, which offered opportunities to learn about and experience activities that were commonly associated with the other community. While pupils tended to be separated during practical PE lessons to allow them to continue to play the sports that were offered in their schools (Gaelic football, hurling and camogie in Catholic schools; rugby, hockey and soccer in Protestant schools), some practical lessons had introduced pupils to sports played at the other school,

and theory classes featured examples drawn from different sports. Shared RE and history lessons at sixth form also, by their nature, provided encounters with a range of viewpoints, either via class discussions or the presentation of different perspectives by the teacher. In a history lesson that I observed at Whitecliff High, for example, the focus was the history of Ireland in the years after the First World War, including the Irish War of Independence and the partition of Ireland. This lesson presented the viewpoints of each of the relevant parties – the British government, Irish nationalists and Irish unionists – and had echoes in the contemporary situation. Opportunities to engage with the subject matter varied, however, by subject, teacher, and the intensity of the course: where teachers were trying to cover material quickly, these opportunities were more limited.

In Bellevue, most of the examples of difference being raised in the lesson material occurred in the CoPE classes. One of the activities undertaken by pupils completing the 'working with others' module was a joint project on behalf of a Catholic charity, St Vincent de Paul, which had enabled Protestant students to learn more about the organisation's work and mission. Another component of the course, 'improving own learning', had required pupils to choose a skill that they wished to develop, and it was reported that one student had chosen to improve his performance on the flute, which he played as a member of a local Protestant marching band. This had led to some amicable discussions between this pupil and some of the Catholic boys in the class about his experiences of practising with the band and playing in local parades. Beyond these examples, however, matters of difference had only otherwise arisen during social conversations in the CoPE class; in the engineering class, these topics had not been discussed.

The inclusion of difference within lesson material required teachers to make connections between the subject content and contemporary issues in Northern Ireland. Data from interviews with teachers suggested that, while three teachers had been able to make these links and use the presence of diversity in the classroom to enhance their lessons, others struggled to incorporate cultural difference into their teaching.

> *I sat down and worked out, well, how am I going to use this in my [politics]*
> *classes for bit of debate, and we had a couple of lessons where we looked*
> *at, well, why has it [the flag protest] happened, what's the underlying thing,*

and that was very interesting, because in the class I had very strong opinions and had some great background, you know. (Mr Lamb, teacher, Whitecliff High)

My subject's engineering, so it's very rarely would we have that type of topic coming up. Maths, talking about machines, it's never really going to be there, you know, unless something's just randomly come up, like some type of comment or something. (Mr Kelly, teacher, Holy Saviour)

Although the topics of 'mutual understanding' and 'cultural understanding' are included as 'key elements' to be addressed across all subjects in the Northern Ireland Curriculum (CCEA, 2007b), Mr Kelly's comment reflects the widespread view – also expressed by teachers interviewed by Knox (2010) – that certain subjects are more amenable to these elements than others. The effect of this was that opportunities for intercultural learning were likely to vary according to the subjects that pupils had chosen to study. By way of further example, Mrs McAleenan (modern languages) and Mr Devlin (PE), both based in Whitecliff, also discussed occasions when they had referred to differences in culture and identity in their lessons, partly as a function of the nature of their subjects. In comparison, Mrs King and Miss Lewis, who taught the more self-directed CoPE course, tended to facilitate discussions of difference as these arose in classroom conversation.

Finding opportunities within the curriculum was only part of the process, however; teachers also had to choose to exploit these opportunities when they arose. Their decision in this respect was dependent, firstly, on whether they saw this as part of their professional remit, and secondly, whether they felt confident to teach material on controversial matters (see Emerson and McCully, in press; Donnelly and Hughes, 2006; Smith and Robinson, 1996, for previous research on this topic). While none of the teachers interviewed for this study was openly opposed to addressing difference, it was evident that two – Mr Kelly and Mr Greer, who taught geography at Whitecliff High – were less confident to do so and, perhaps conveniently, less inclined than others to see this as part of their professional purpose. Rather, conscious of the pressure to achieve good results in their subjects, and – particularly in Mr Greer's case – feeling uncomfortable about managing difference, they kept such discussions to a minimum.

Neither Mr Kelly nor Mr Greer, nor any of the other teachers, reported receiving preparative training to equip them with the skills and confidence to teach controversial issues with a mixed class. In light of their discomfort and lack of confidence in addressing difference, however, it was significant that all of the teacher interviewees struggled to identify what additional training might have been helpful. One interpretation of this might be that, as a result of the collective adherence to avoidance norms in the classroom, teachers' skills in this area had not previously been challenged. Consequently, they had not been confronted with gaps in their knowledge and practice, and did not anticipate this being different in future.

Extra-curricular activities

Across both sites, the shared education partnerships had evolved to provide opportunities for extra-curricular contact, including joint sports activities. In Whitecliff, this was via a joint rugby team for pupils in year 8; and in Bellevue, through joint rugby and soccer teams at sixth form. In Bellevue, particularly, this was a new initiative, with the joint rugby team having recently played their first tournament at the time of my visit in October 2013. As rugby and soccer have historically been considered 'Protestant sports' in Northern Ireland and been offered primarily in controlled schools, these joint teams provided Catholic pupils with their only opportunity to play rugby or soccer for a school team. For some keen sportsmen in Bellevue, this opportunity remained unavailable, as Holy Saviour had recently reached the latter stages of a prestigious Gaelic football competition and had requested that team members did not participate in other sports so as to avoid injury. Nevertheless, at least one pupil had defied this request in his eagerness to play rugby. Among female students, there were no similar examples of shared sport: while Miss Lewis had mooted the possibility of a joint hockey team at Bellevue High, this had attracted little interest.

It was notable, in both Whitecliff and Bellevue, that there was no corresponding opportunity for Protestant pupils to take part in Gaelic sport. While the reasons for this were not explicit, interview discussions indicated that sports such as soccer might be more conducive to sharing as they had more general appeal: both Catholic and Protestant pupils spoke of their support for English Premier League football teams and reported playing soccer informally with friends. This meant that Catholic pupils often also had some experience of playing these games, so did not have to start from scratch. Furthermore, with the Irish national rugby team enjoying

considerable success in recent years, the perception of rugby as an elite Protestant sport may have diminished, while Gaelic sports retain a strong and historical association with Irish (and nationalist) culture (Bairner, 2009; Cronin, 1999).

At both school sites, the major opportunity for Protestant pupils to experience Gaelic games directly came via the success of the two Catholic schools in Gaelic football and hurling competitions during the 2012/13 season. Protestant pupils at both partnerships had requested tickets to attend the matches in which classmates from shared courses were playing, including pupils involved in the CoPE and engineering classes in Bellevue. This attendance was significant in demonstrating support and regard for their classmates, particularly as some risked suspicion or censure for crossing perceived cultural boundaries to do so. In Bellevue, where four pupils from Bellevue High reported attending a Gaelic football match, one attendee, Danielle, spoke of the discomfort and hostility that she had experienced as a result of her decision.

> Danielle: *We got the buses with [Holy Saviour pupils] and it was only a few of us with, like, the whole of Holy Saviour senior year, so it was kind of awkward at first because when we got onto the bus, their, erm, it was their vice-principal or something, he was just like, "now give a big cheer for the Bellevue High School ones who came to support us" and everybody just sat silent and I was just like, "oh, goodness, this is really awkward". Like nobody cheered. I was like, "oh my goodness, get me off this bus quick!" But after a while, I was sitting [with] one of the girls that's in my tech class, so it was alright.*
>
> Interviewer: *Did you feel like they didn't want you there?*
>
> Danielle: *Yeah. It was just as if they were sort of like, "why are they here watching us?", but we were just there to support them.* (Danielle, year 13, Bellevue High)

> Danielle: *Like, there's some people who, like, I have said that I have went to the Gaelic football match to support them and they'd be like, "oh, why did you go to that?"*
>
> Kirsty: *But that's your own choice.*

Danielle: *Yeah, that's my own choice, but it wasn't just my, like, my religion that people said that, but it was like other religions as well, as if to say, like, why did you go to a sport like mine? I'm just like, why can I not just go to support?* (Danielle and Kirsty, year 13, Bellevue High)

The reaction of the Holy Saviour pupils on the bus provides further support for the points made in chapters 5 and 6, in which it was suggested that the positive contact norms promoted through shared education were resisted by some pupils. Despite the vice principal's endorsement of the attendance of pupils from Bellevue High, the gesture of support from Danielle and her friends was rejected by senior pupils from Holy Saviour. Furthermore, the comments that Danielle encountered after the match also highlight the contrast between the norms of contact advocated by the school and those observed by some within the community (Hughes, 2014). In this example, Danielle had been encouraged by teachers and pupils from her shared classes to attend the Gaelic football match and thereby participate in a symbolic act of cultural 'boundary-crossing' (Hughes, 2014; Todd *et al.*, 2006). However, in subsequent discussions with others outside the school, Catholic and Protestant, Danielle found that these boundaries were reasserted. As a result, her actions were questioned for violating the norms that served to maintain separation and preserve cultural distinctiveness in Bellevue.

The impact of encounters with difference

During the course of the interview conversations, pupils were asked for their thoughts on the experience of meeting those from different backgrounds and the impact that they felt this had had on them. With respect to difference, two of the outcomes described by pupils were particularly significant. Firstly, reiterating one of the outcomes discussed in chapter 7, pupils commonly reported feeling more comfortable when mixing and interacting with those from different backgrounds than they had done prior to participating. Their responses suggested that they had become more familiar, and consequently more at ease, with the norms of cross-group interaction, and as such felt more confident about similar meetings in the future. The fact that pupils had generally not discussed matters of intergroup difference with their outgroup classmates did not appear to hinder this outcome; indeed, the preference for avoidance may have been of assistance, with most pupils reporting a positive experience *because* these matters had not been raised.

While avoiding difference helped to facilitate harmonious interactions, and was thus a source of relief to pupils, it may be considered more problematic from the point of view of developing trust and promoting equality. As discussed above, pupils' limited engagement with difference meant that they had few opportunities for self-disclosure and perspective-taking, both of which are considered important for building strong and trusting relationships. Furthermore, pupils also had few opportunities to discuss, and begin to challenge, inequality and discrimination on the basis of ethno-religious identity. The silence on these issues was of concern in both areas, but particularly so in Bellevue, where inequality was evident: culturally, expressions of Catholic identity were marginalised among the overt displays of loyalism in the town; and economically, there existed a wealth differential between Catholic-dominated and Protestant-dominated areas. These disparities, and the disadvantage that Catholics faced locally, were not addressed by pupils or teachers, nor were the causes and effects of inequality discussed in more general terms. In line with the risks identified by researchers in the areas of intergroup contact and dialogue (Nagda *et al.*, 2013; Maoz, 2011; Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005; Connolly, 2000), the result was that the structures and narratives that upheld inequality remained unchallenged.

The second notable outcome, reported by approximately a quarter of interviewees, was greater understanding of the other group's culture and/or viewpoints. As it had become apparent that little discussion of these subjects had taken place, this was particularly striking. While these students included the four who had engaged more substantially with difference, most had had very limited exposure to the experiences and perspectives of the other group, and had usually tried to avoid discussing such matters. That, despite this, they spoke of the benefits of hearing "*a different opinion*" and "*what they think of things*" might be attributed to desirability bias (in that they felt that this was what I wanted to hear), but might also be explained in terms of their limited prior experience of the outgroup. Where the discussion of difference is uncommon or informally proscribed, small insights – even just overhearing a discussion of different religious practices – may appear to those involved as significant learning opportunities. As Al-Ramiah *et al.* (2013, p.70) observe, "any particular kind of contact is more powerful when it is relatively rare or is a new experience in a person's life".

Alternatively, it may be that, like the students interviewed by Halualani (2008), these pupils conflated simply being in the presence of diversity with learning about and exploring that diversity. As Halualani reports from her study, a culturally mixed context

> becomes a substitute and stand-in for actual intercultural interaction on a personal and individualised level. Respondents therefore define, perceive, and experience intercultural interaction *without* intercultural interaction actually taking place between/among individuals. (p.10)

Halualani suggests that students' perspectives reflect a more general "societal view of diversity in which [students'] membership to a diverse campus…automatically makes them more interculturally engaged, and by extension, culturally aware, open-minded, and non-prejudiced" (p.10). She identifies several risks of this, including the danger that students will miss opportunities to "transform how they think, view and act towards other cultures on a daily basis" (p.11). In the current study, responses suggesting that pupils were now more understanding of outgroup perspectives might reflect similar assumptions, and likewise discourage more substantial exchanges of opinion and experience.

Conclusion

The intention behind this chapter has been to explore the ways in which difference was addressed in the two case study partnerships. To this end, it has considered, firstly, pupils' attitudes to acknowledging and discussing political, cultural and religious diversity, and secondly, their experiences of difference during shared classes and activities. By exploring the encounters with difference that occur during shared education, this chapter contributes to a better understanding of the nature and outcomes of these comparatively uncommon experiences.

In accordance with previous research, this study has identified a widespread desire to avoid references to difference in mixed contexts for fear of causing offence and increasing intergroup tension. Nevertheless, as it has also demonstrated, difference may be difficult to avoid (as when attending the other school), and intercultural encounters were reported to have occurred via both structured activities and informal conversations. These encounters tended to be relatively infrequent and superficial in nature, however, and more extensive challenge to, and critique of,

group differences – including differences in status and power, as well as in opinion and practice – did not occur. The implications of this, along with those of other key findings discussed in the previous three chapters, are considered further in the conclusion which now follows.

Chapter 9: Conclusion

The aim of this chapter is to draw together a number of the central themes that have emerged during the analysis and to explore their implications for policy and research. With this purpose in mind, the following sections consider the findings of this thesis in relation to previous studies of shared education and the existing body of literature on intergroup contact, identifying conclusions and recommendations for theory and practice. The chapter concludes with a discussion of the advantages and limitations of the methodological approach adopted for this study and some thoughts on possible future research in the area of education and community relations in Northern Ireland.

The research study

This thesis represents the most extensive in-depth study of shared education to date and aims both to complement and extend research undertaken during the first phase of the Sharing Education Programme. To this end, it has explored the processes of contact that occur among participating pupils, a group whose perspectives have at times been under-represented (relative to those of teachers and school managers) in published studies of education and social cohesion in Northern Ireland. In line with this focus, the thesis has been guided by an overarching research aim to explore pupils' experiences of participation in a shared education programme against the programme aim of enhancing community relations.

Reflecting the aim of the study and the objectives of the Sharing Education Programme, contact theory has served as the theoretical framework for this research. However, cognisant of calls from researchers to consider alternative approaches to the study of contact, this thesis has moved away from the positivist outlook and quantitative methods that have traditionally characterised contact research. Instead, following the recommendation of Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux (2005, p.709) for research that addresses the ways that "ordinary people make sense of, and manage, their encounters with others", this study has adopted a constructionist/interpretivist approach and qualitative methods to explore how participants interpret and negotiate their experiences of contact. Acknowledging the "complex dialectical relationships between the nature of the intergroup contact itself

and the broader socio-economic and political contexts within which the participants are located" (Connolly, 2000, p.176), the research has addressed the contextual and biographical influences on participants' interpretive frameworks. It has also considered how the features of the contact situation and setting affect pupils' experiences and responses.

Informed by criticism of prior contact research, the following three research questions were devised to guide the project and contribute to fulfilling the research aim above:

1. How do participants in the two shared education partnerships interpret and navigate situations of contact based on their biography, background and previous experience?

2. How do features of the contact situation influence pupils' relationships and responses to others?

3. How do pupils respond to and negotiate matters of difference within shared education?

To answer these questions, a comparative case study approach was employed. Two case study partnerships were selected on the basis that they shared several similarities – both were located in small rural towns and comprised two post-primary schools, one Catholic and one Protestant – but also differed in meaningful ways, most notably in the nature of the local relations. Data were collected using qualitative methods, principally small group interviews, so as to capture pupils' experiences and perspectives in their own words. These interviews were complemented by observations of shared classes and supplemented by interviews with seven teachers, the latter focussing both on teachers' personal involvement in shared education and their perceptions of the pupil experience.

The following sections provide a brief overview of findings from this research and consider these in relation to previous studies of contact through shared education.

Returning to the research questions

Question 1: How do pupils interpret and navigate situations of contact based on their biography, background and previous experience?

Across the interviews, pupils' understanding of the nature of relations, their perceptions of the prevailing group norms, and their previous experiences of the other group emerged as relevant to informing the interpretive frameworks that they brought to shared education. In each case, young people's perspectives were informed primarily by their local context, with most living in areas where separation was the norm and contact was uncommon, sometimes unwelcome and, in a small number of areas, potentially dangerous. The main exceptions were pupils living in the more integrated town of Whitecliff, although even here prior outgroup contact was limited by the separation of leisure and cultural activities along community lines. Also influential within the local context were the perspectives of peers and family members (especially parents), whose personal experiences, attitudes and friendships informed young people's understanding of the nature and desirability of relations between Catholics and Protestants. Beyond the local level, reports from the media and from personal acquaintances concerning the nature of group dynamics elsewhere in Northern Ireland were likewise relevant to pupils' perspectives. Often negative, these accounts contributed to perceptions of intergroup relations and interactions as precarious and frequently hostile.

These prior perspectives and experiences informed the "interpretive frameworks and practices" (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux, 2005, p.704) that pupils employed when navigating shared education, as their responses revealed. When making decisions about participation, for example, students spoke of weighing educational aspirations against concerns about negotiating unfamiliar (outgroup) territory and being the target of sectarian behaviour, in some cases opting to limit their involvement to shared classes at their own schools. When anticipating shared classes, pupils' limited experience of cross-group interaction contributed to uncertainty and anxiety about the likely nature of contact. Moreover, among pupils from more divided areas, perceptions of conflict and threat were apparent in concerns that tensions outside the school would re-emerge in the shared class. This sense of threat was also perceptible in pupils' feelings about attending the other school and was heightened by the fact that they wore a uniform that denoted their different religious identity. More positively, however, some degree of previous

contact with pupils at the partner school, even at a low level, helped to reduce these concerns and provided a template for future encounters.

The norms, experiences and expectations that pupils brought to shared education also informed the nature of contact at the school and the possibilities for its continuation outside. At school, much of this interaction appeared to replicate that which pupils described in their local communities, being polite and civil but often lacking in depth. More worryingly, there were indications that pupils perceived conflict in intergroup encounters to be so routine that experiences of sectarianism at the other school were considered almost inevitable. Beyond the school, the same norms and circumstances that inhibited cross-group contact prior to shared education prevented the development of relationships outside the shared class. These included residential segregation, a lack of genuinely 'shared' meeting places, and concerns about the reactions of third parties to pupils' cross-group relationships. Thus, while schools sought to challenge norms of separation, the persistence of these norms in the community could hinder this aim.

Question 2: How do features of the contact situation influence pupils' relationships and responses to others?

In exploring the influence of the contact situation, two points emerged as particularly significant. Firstly, while young people's responses to others were informed by the perspectives they brought to shared education, it was equally the case that the contact setting could moderate the effects of these external influences. Where the features of the situation supported contact, tendencies towards separation could be reduced, enabling cross-group relationships to develop, even among pupils in more divided areas. Where the setting discouraged contact, however, external norms of separation were reinforced. Secondly, and not surprisingly, shared classes were more effective in fostering relationships when opportunities were created for cross-group interaction, particularly when this permitted the exchange of personal information. This type of contact offered the possibility of the "true acquaintance" that Allport (1958, p.252) envisaged as important for lessening prejudice – a feature now more commonly advocated in contact theory as "friendship potential"(Pettigrew, 1998) – whereas proximity alone was insufficient to initiate interaction.

The features of the situation that facilitated or hindered contact may be categorised into three main areas: those relating to the subject being studied, the composition of

the class, and the classroom setting. The first of these included the nature of the subject and the pedagogy that was normative within it, with practical and discursive subjects (drama, PE, humanities) appearing more conducive to the type of collaborative group work that fostered interaction. The intensity of the subject was also important: where the subject delivery was more intensive, opportunities for interaction were more limited. In regard to the composition of the class, relevant factors included class size and the balance of religion and gender. Smaller classes permitted more extensive and intensive interaction, in part because smaller groups were more cohesive and their members were less likely to attend with ingroup friends. In terms of gender, pupils largely preferred to sit and interact with others of the same sex, whether ingroup or outgroup members, and this permitted cross-group interaction along gender lines. Finally, with respect to the classroom setting, both the arrangement of the room and the environment created by the teacher were relevant to the frequency and nature of cross-group contact. Effective classroom design could encourage interaction and limit the extent to which clustering by school groups was possible. In environments supportive of contact, teachers also fostered an informal atmosphere and facilitated discussions between students, thereby counteracting the traditional classroom norms of silence and individual work.

Question 3: How do pupils respond to and negotiate matters of difference within shared education?

In exploring responses to difference, this research has highlighted the tendency to avoid contentious issues and to focus on shared interests and experiences. Pupils' reticence concerning political, cultural and religious difference revealed their understanding of the prevailing social norms in Northern Ireland, which discourage the discussion of these subjects when members of the other group are present. Their reluctance to raise controversial issues also reflected a desire to avoid causing offence or appearing 'sectarian'. While some pupils felt that it might be possible to broach these topics within established cross-group friendships, most felt that such discussions would threaten more nascent relationships.

Encounters with difference were not entirely absent, however, and just under half of pupils spoke of discussing or otherwise experiencing difference through shared education. A small number had initiated conversations on this topic, but for most pupils these experiences were an inevitable consequence of participation, partly as a result of the visible presence of cultural and religious symbols around the schools.

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In certain subjects in which group differences were difficult to avoid, such as politics and PE, teachers also appeared more willing to introduce these topics, although the provision of opportunities for the discussion of contentious issues was otherwise limited across both school partnerships. Where difference was raised, pupils employed a range of strategies to ensure that encounters were as amicable as possible, including limiting the conversation to less controversial topics (particularly religious practices and sporting pursuits) and employing humour to forestall more in-depth discussion. Although these strategies had the desired effect, they meant that pupils' engagement with difference was in most cases limited, even in the setting of shared education, which might have been considered more favourable to dialogue between groups.

Comparison with previous research into shared education

A number of findings from this thesis support those of previous studies of shared education. In reporting the prevalence of anxiety at the prospect of attending mixed classes and visiting the partner school, this research supports the findings of Hughes and colleagues' (2010) qualitative study and those of a survey of SEP participants reported by Knox (2010) and Gallagher *et al.* (2010). The latter found that a "persistent minority of pupils" felt anxious prior to their involvement in shared education, particularly about attending another school (Knox, 2010, p.49). The present study also adds to these findings by suggesting that this anxiety could act as a deterrent to involvement: several pupils reported that they had either chosen to avoid classes at the partner school or had thought about doing so. Pupils' responses indicated that feelings of discomfort could arise, at least in part, from pupils' sense of discordance between their own identity and that represented by the school. In a local environment in which the real or symbolic boundaries separating Catholic and Protestant were rarely crossed, one's presence at an institution associated with the outgroup evoked feelings of dislocation and transgression (see Dixon and Durrheim, 2004).

With respect to the features of shared education that encourage interaction, this thesis endorses the observation of Hughes *et al.* (2010) that the nature of the subject and the teaching style influenced the possibility of social contact. The same research also reported a "dissonance between the values promoted by the school…and those that permeated the local community" (p.47) that was equally applicable for most pupils in this study, at least insofar as they attended classes that

were supportive of interaction. On other points relating to pupils' experiences of relationship-building, however, some contrasts emerge. It is notable in Hughes's (2014) study, for example, that a considerably higher proportion of pupils reported that they had met their 'best' friends through shared education than did so in this research. One explanation for this difference may lie in the greater opportunity for Hughes's interviewees to continue their relationships outside the school: unlike most participants of this study, a large number of these students resided in areas amenable to intergroup interaction. In the same work, Hughes also reports that young people from strongly divided areas demonstrated "limited friendship commitment to pupils from 'other' schools" (p.204). While this was observed at some points in Whitecliff and Bellevue, it was as often the case among these pupils that a willingness to form acquaintances was thwarted by nervousness about initiating contact, teachers' lack of will or confidence to facilitate interaction, and the tendency for educational imperatives to take precedence over relationship-building.

In relation to the management of difference, the tendency towards avoidance described in this study has been widely observed in previous educational research in Northern Ireland (Donnelly, 2008; 2004a, 2004b; O'Connor, Hartop and McCully, 2002; ETI, 2000; Smith and Robinson, 1996). Although this thesis differs from these previous studies in focusing on pupils' experiences (rather than teachers' perspectives or curriculum delivery), it found that young people were similarly reluctant to broach sensitive issues. In terms of pupils' levels of comfort with difference, apparent divergences between this thesis and previous studies of shared education appear less substantial on closer analysis. For example, Hughes and colleagues' 2010 survey found greater willingness to discuss "issues related to the conflict" among pupils at SEP schools than among those at non-SEP schools, a finding that might imply less avoidance among SEP pupils than this research identified. However, it is not possible to compare these studies directly as this thesis did not include non-SEP schools. It may be that, despite their reluctance to discuss issues of difference, Whitecliff and Bellevue students were less reticent than their peers at other schools as a result of their involvement in SEP. Moreover, while Hughes (2014, p.202) reports that up to a third of the students she interviewed spoke of "the ease with which they were able to discuss religious and cultural differences", her subsequent findings suggest that, as in this study, a reluctance to discuss the more sensitive topics of politics and nationality prevailed.

Discussion of findings and implications for shared education

The foregoing analysis highlights the contribution of this thesis to the wider body of knowledge on shared education. In the following sections, the discussion reflects on some of the most significant findings from this research and considers their implications, firstly, for the design and delivery of shared education and, subsequently, for theory and research regarding intergroup contact.

Exploring young people's interpretive frameworks

A significant contribution of this thesis has been its exploration of the interpretive frameworks that young people employ while participating in shared classes and activities. As discussed above, these are informed by their family and peer group perspectives, their previous contact with the other group, their experiences of Catholic-Protestant relations in their local area, and their understanding of inter-community dynamics in Northern Ireland more widely. This analysis is valuable because it provides further insight into the ways that young people born between the years of the IRA ceasefire (1994) and the signing of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement (1998) relate to the conflict and make sense of social relations in Northern Ireland.

The findings of this research suggest that experiences of division continued to inform young people's understanding. By the time pupils had reached year 11, they tended to be highly aware of the nature of relations in their local area and beyond, of the implications of their identity in different social and geographical contexts, and of certain conventions governing cross-group interaction. At the same time, however, pupils frequently acknowledged the improvements in relations that had occurred since the mid-1990s and demonstrated little tolerance for actions and behaviours that perpetuated division. In these respects, young people's experiences were of liminality: they occupied what Conroy (2004, p.7) describes as "a space that is neither inside nor outside but lies at the threshold of our social, political [and] cultural...spaces" – in this case, the threshold between a society in conflict and one of peace. Despite growing up without direct experience of 'the Troubles', and with hopes for a more harmonious society, young people's perspectives and decisions – including those relating to intergroup encounters – continued in many cases to be informed by the legacy of conflict. In highlighting this, the research queries the perceptions of Knox's (2010) interviewees, who suggested that young people "don't

view the world through the lenses of their parents or adults" (p.18). While their experiences differed, the vestiges of past hostilities and ongoing segregation continued to influence pupils' frames of reference.

In relation to shared education, this analysis is particularly important as it uncovers the complex mix of factors that inform pupils' views and experiences of intergroup contact, and may help to sensitise those coordinating such programmes to the implications of these. Specifically, this research highlights a number of points at which pupils' prior perspectives may be especially relevant, including when deciding whether to participate in shared classes, during the early stages of shared education when feelings of uncertainty and anxiety are heightened, and when attending classes at the other school. The latter setting provided several striking examples of the influence of pupils' pre-existing frameworks, as young people interpreted certain actions of teachers – for example, escorting them around the school or meeting them at a rear entrance – as responses to the danger they faced from outgroup members at the school.

Revealing the ways in which pupils make sense of their experiences, particularly in the absence of other explanatory information, such examples suggest a need for shared education programmes to be more cognisant of, and responsive to, students' perspectives and expectations. Appropriate responses might include involving pupils in the design of programmes; arranging for previous participants to talk to new students about their experiences, so as to reduce new pupils' reliance on existing perceptions; and discussing with pupils the rationale for the schools' decisions, with the aim of avoiding the discrepancies between intention and interpretation that were observed in this study.

Balancing the educational and social aims of shared education

A persistent theme in this research has been the relationship between two of the aims of shared education: the educational aim to extend curricular provision and increase attainment; and the social aim to encourage cross-group contact and enhance community relations. While these aims were often compatible, in that extended subject choice provided the incentive for pupils to participate in mixed classes, there also emerged some tension between them. When making decisions about shared education, for example, it was notable that a minority of pupils had

strategically avoided classes at the partner school. This appeared to result from anxiety about attending a new school or, according to teachers, negative intergroup attitudes among pupils or their families and communities. In these cases, there was a reverse effect from that which was intended, as the prospect of attending a mixed class at another school *discouraged* pupils from choosing particular subjects and therefore prevented contact.

In the delivery of shared classes, similar tensions existed between the programme's social and educational components. These were particularly evident in the contrast between the norms and behaviours that some teachers deemed necessary for educational progress and those identified as important for relationship-building. While the development of friendships depended on opportunities for interaction between pupils, including time for more social conversation, there were indications that teachers saw interaction as impeding progress through the curriculum and hindering educational success, particularly as exams approached. Rather, a quiet environment, in which pupils worked individually, was seen as more conducive to learning, with the effect that contact in the classroom was sometimes considered undesirable and thus discouraged. In such cases, educational concerns took precedence over social aims, resulting in classes that were formally 'mixed' but involved little mixing.

This trade-off between the educational and social objectives of shared education could have adverse consequences. In the first example above, pupils' non-participation may be a concern from the point of view of improving community relations, particularly as those who avoided classes at the partner school had generally had little experience of the other group and tended to live in segregated areas. In educational terms, pupils' avoidance of shared classes may also be detrimental because it prevents them from accessing the full curriculum: rather than increasing the number of subjects available to pupils at 14 and 16, the effect in these cases was to restrict their options. In the second example, teachers' preferences for quiet, individual study limited the opportunities for interaction in these classes, and this lack of opportunity was cited by interviewees as a major impediment to developing relationships with outgroup pupils.

Resolving these tensions requires action at both programme and government policy levels. At the programme level, staff might consider introducing shared activities for

all students from the first year of post-primary education, with the aim of increasing their familiarity with the partner school and normalising their presence within it. This may help to improve pupils' confidence to attend the other school for shared classes in subsequent years. Furthermore, shared education coordinators might consider, as far as possible, arranging for courses to be delivered across both schools, as was the practice in Bellevue. This would prevent situations where pupils were required to attend the other school for all their shared classes, and would potentially reduce the salience of institutional boundaries in line with SEP's stated vision (Borooah and Knox, 2013).

In the classroom, this research suggests the need for pedagogical approaches that are appropriate to both the social and educational purposes of shared education, balancing individual study with adequate opportunities for interactive group work. Such approaches are already recommended in the Northern Ireland Revised Curriculum (CCEA, 2007a), but may benefit from wider promotion through initial and in-service teacher training courses, as recommended by Connolly, Purvis and O'Grady (2013). At the same time, these approaches should be complemented by opportunities for social contact outside the classroom. The provision of joint extra-curricular activities, shared sessions on careers and university applications, and perhaps the option to stay at the other school for break or lunchtime could provide, at low cost, the social time that was valued by pupils but limited in lessons.

At the policy level, more formal support of community relations activity will be required if the social aims of shared education are not to be permanently relegated by educational and financial concerns. As discussed elsewhere (Donnelly and Gallagher, 2008; Donnelly and Hughes, 2006), initiatives to promote community relations have frequently been marginalised by schools in favour of a greater focus on areas in which they are subject to performance targets, notably curriculum delivery and examination performance. The effect of this can be seen in the model of shared education itself: in the absence of community relations targets, SEP exploits economic and educational policy imperatives in an effort to promote greater social integration. As Hughes and colleagues (2010) have observed, however, and as the present research reiterates, the potential of these mechanisms alone is limited. This thesis therefore lends support to the recommendation of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education that the statutory duty to promote good relations, under Section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act (1998), should be extended

to schools (Connolly, Purvis and O'Grady, 2013). While it is recognised that the measurement of progress in these areas is complex (see Knox, 2010 for teachers' concerns), this duty may help to ensure that schools give due consideration to social cohesion at the strategic level and in day-to-day practice.

Managing difference

The aforementioned tensions between social and educational goals had consequences for the exploration of religious, political and cultural difference through shared education. Where time to interact and discuss topics outside the syllabus was limited, so were opportunities to raise and address group differences. This was compounded by pupils' preference to avoid any issues that they considered sensitive, a tendency which mirrors that of adults interviewed in previous studies (Donnelly, 2012, 2008; Hughes, 2007). This finding is significant for two reasons. Firstly, it belies the assumptions of teachers that pupils are unconcerned about difference (Knox, 2010); on the contrary, pupils were highly aware of the potential of these topics to cause discomfort and heighten tensions. Secondly, it suggests that it may be optimistic to expect that discussions of difference will arise naturally as pupils develop relationships. Even those students who had formed friendships were unlikely to broach more sensitive topics, and most pupils were sceptical of the possibility of discussing these subjects without provoking offence or discord.

These findings suggest that a more structured approach to addressing difference through shared education may be necessary. While the current lack of a requirement to tackle these issues may be helpful in securing the involvement of more reluctant participants (Hughes, 2014; Maoz, 2011), the evasion of difference could have negative consequences for mutual understanding in the long term. In this respect, it may preclude the legitimate expression of identity and exchange of views (Emerson, 2012), and reduce opportunities for the self-disclosure and perspective-taking that are valued in contact research for building trust and positive regard (Pettigrew and Tropp, 2008; Turner, Hewstone and Voci, 2007). Importantly, the avoidance of difference may also prevent pupils from developing skills of conflict resolution, learning how to negotiate diverse viewpoints, and analysing issues of social inequality that have been germane to division in Northern Ireland (McEvoy, McEvoy and McConnachie, 2006; Schofield, 1986).

If shared education is to adopt a more proactive approach to difference, this must be accompanied by further training to prepare teachers to introduce and lead activities that address contentious issues. While this is a well-worn recommendation, there remains a need for further guidance in specific areas, including finding opportunities within the curriculum to introduce these topics and creating an environment in which sensitive issues can be comfortably discussed. This training should be supported by the development of partnership-wide policies for responding to incidents of conflict and managing periods of heightened tension outside the school. These were generally lacking in both the partnerships studied, which adopted a largely reactive approach. In terms of providing opportunities to discuss difference, schools might consider extending shared education to include Learning for Life and Work classes, which are compulsory until the age of 16 and would allow more time to consider these issues. Outside the classroom, schools might also consider the joint provision of extra-curricular activities that are commonly organised along community lines, e.g. rugby, hockey, Gaelic sports, and Irish dancing. This would permit students not only to learn about the other group, but to experience, share, and become comfortable with different expressions of culture and identity.

Assessing the potential of shared education

As outlined at the start of this chapter, the overarching aim of this thesis has been to consider pupils' experiences of shared education in relation to the programme aim of enhancing community relations. Given this focus, it is important to take some time to consider the potential of shared education to contribute to reconciliation and social cohesion. While a single study, particularly one which adopts a case study approach, can only provide a partial response on this matter, it can nevertheless offer some reflection and raise a number of issues for further consideration.

As discussed, shared education is informed by principles of the contact hypothesis and seeks to enhance community relations by promoting the development of relationships, preferably friendships, between Catholic and Protestant pupils. In the two shared education partnerships studied in this thesis, the effectiveness of this approach was mixed. While most pupils reported that they had developed acquaintances with outgroup pupils, only a minority had formed firm friendships. Furthermore, a slightly higher number reported that they had had almost no interaction with their outgroup classmates. In part, this was a function of the classes

in which they had been involved: those pupils who had forged the closest relationships had done so through participation in classes that offered substantial opportunity for interaction. On this basis, one might expect that the extension of similar techniques and strategies into other subject classes would help to increase the strength and number of relationships.

Equally, however, it must be recognised that, even where these facilitating factors were present, participating pupils often did not develop strong relationships. While some may simply fail to 'click' with one another, and others may have less interest in forming cross-group friendships, school and community factors were also implicated in the lack of close relationships. Firstly, even where shared classes provided opportunities for interaction, pupils suggested that the frequency of meeting and the provision of social opportunities were insufficient to permit the development of good friendships. Indeed, the direct comparison between the frequency with which they saw their ingroup friends and their outgroup classmates seemed to emphasise to pupils the qualitative difference between these relationships. Secondly, in cases where pupils might have considered meeting outside school (and most had not, feeling their relationships were not sufficiently well developed), this possibility was hindered by features of the local context – for example, the distance between Catholic and Protestant areas, the lack of 'shared' venues in which to meet, and the frequent absence of norms and exemplars that endorsed contact. On this basis, the potential for shared education to effect widespread change, particularly through building cross-group friendships, may appear modest.

Moving away from this focus on friendship as the mechanism of change, however, and assessing each partnership in its own terms, the potential contribution of shared education appears more substantial. When one considers the prevalence of intergroup suspicion and limited contact in the areas in which many of the pupils lived, particularly in Bellevue, the simple act of bringing pupils from the two religious groups together in a shared class, over a period of a year or more, represented a significant advance. This point was expressed in several interviews with pupils and teachers. For many pupils, shared education provided the most extensive period of outgroup contact that they had experienced. Furthermore, the changes that young people described – for example, no longer feeling nervous about talking to outgroup members, or discovering that pupils at the other school were friendly – were

important not only as outcomes in themselves, but as possible precursors to further contact in the future (see Al-Ramiah *et al.*, 2013; Gaunt, 2011). Therefore, while the potential for shared education to challenge patterns of separation directly may not have been substantial, it may nevertheless lay important foundations for greater integration.

Seeing shared education in this way offers a more nuanced understanding of its contribution and its potential to promote change even in cases where friendships do not result. Placing shared education in the context of a broader, long-term process of change also draws attention to the relationship between education and other areas of policy, and the need for complementary action within these. In housing, town planning, and leisure policy, for example, measures to increase residential desegregation and develop 'shared' amenities could strengthen the impact of initiatives like shared education by providing opportunities for cross-community contact in other settings. Moreover, these measures should be accompanied by the development of a political discourse that is both tacitly and explicitly supportive of integration. As Bar-Tal (2004, p.264) acknowledges, "the messages transmitted by schools should not differ from those transmitted by other channels and institutions". Peacebuilding in education can best realise its potential if supported by concomitant changes in other areas of society.

Contribution to theory

As outlined at the start of this thesis, the aims and approach of this study have been informed, in part, by literature critical of the prevailing approaches to researching intergroup contact. While sympathetic to the principles of contact theory, this work has sought to shift the focus of research by encouraging more structural and contextual analysis of contact, more 'real world' studies, and the use of research methods that prioritise participants' interpretations. The present thesis is among the most extensive of several resulting qualitative studies (see, for example, Fozdar, 2011; Halualani, 2008; Dixon and Durrheim, 2003), each of which has contributed to a fuller understanding of the dynamics of cross-group interaction and relationships. In this section I wish to outline briefly the potential contribution of this research to the study of contact in two ways: by elucidating the content and nature of encounters, and the influences on these; and by highlighting the complexity and contested nature of certain key concepts within contact research.

Perhaps the most significant contribution of this research, from a theoretical perspective, has been its exploration of what actually occurs when members of different groups meet, in this case Catholic and Protestant young people participating in a shared education programme. As Harwood (2010, p.164) has acknowledged, the focus on pre- and post-intervention tests in contact research means that the "contact *event* is a bit of a black box—people disappear into it and emerge with altered attitudes. We know relatively little about what they do during the contact itself." Through the use of qualitative interviews and observations, however, this research has begun to address this limitation, illuminating pupils' behaviour in intergroup encounters and the features of the contact situation that influence their responses.

While mindful not to add to an already extensive list of "conditions" of effective contact, this study has indicated certain factors that may restrict interaction and relationship-building between group members, including the physical arrangement of the setting and the composition of the group. The research has also highlighted a complex range of social processes within the contact situation that could thwart interaction, even when participants might be willing to engage with the outgroup. Among these was the observance of norms and codes of (teenage) friendship, which stipulated "sticking with" one's existing friends and prohibited intrusions on other friendship groups. Contact could also be stifled by uncertainty about making initial approaches and by associated fears of rejection. If this was not addressed at an early stage, the effects could continue over the long term. In addition, the pervasive influence of traditional classroom norms of silence and individual work could suppress interaction, particularly as these norms tended to have greater salience than those that encouraged communication in class.

This exploration of the course and nature of contact, and the identification of processes that enable or hinder interaction, is valuable because such accounts have greater practical utility than more abstract "claims that the optimal conditions were not properly implemented" (Dixon, Durrheim and Tredoux 2005, p.709). They may thus provide the basis for the "meaningful and practical set of guidelines" for promoting cooperative relations that Connolly (2000, p.189) advocates. Furthermore, in light of recent criticism of contact theory for focusing on 'prejudice' as the underlying cause of conflict and non-contact (Zuma, 2014; Dixon *et al.*, 2012), these findings demonstrate the extent to which behaviours largely unrelated

to prejudice can perpetuate separation. Taken together with findings regarding the widespread norms of non-contact outside the school, this highlights the complexity of social, geographical and psychological factors that can sustain a lack of contact.

With relevance for theory and methodology, this study has also highlighted shortcomings in the ways that certain concepts have been defined and operationalised within studies of contact, in particular the concept of 'friendship'. As discussed, while it is doubtless desirable to foster the strongest relationships possible, the focus on 'friendship' within contact theory may cause researchers to overlook an increase in the frequency and quality of contact when this does not result in friendship; worse, it may cause them to view contact as a failure on this basis. Moreover, this focus on friendship may be questionable, from a methodological perspective, due to the lack of clarity over its meaning. While this study found little consensus regarding the types of relationship that might be termed 'friendship', studies of contact appear to assume a shared understanding, adopting a variation of the question "how many friends do you have who are [insert ethnic/religious/national identity]?" (Al Ramiah *et al.*, 2013; Paolini, Hewstone and Cairns, 2007) or conflating 'good friends' and 'acquaintances' (Pettigrew, 2009). If individuals define 'friendship' in different ways, it is difficult to know what levels of cross-group intimacy are experienced by respondents to these studies (Davies *et al.*, 2011). This lack of clarity may undermine the validity of the data if, as indicated by this research, relationships of a similar type are reported as 'friendship' by some participants and not others. It may also obscure an understanding of the effects of more casual relationships, some of which may at present be subsumed under the term 'friendship'.

Throwing further light on the limitations of current quantitative measures, the use of a qualitative approach has also highlighted the complex nature of phenomena that are captured within single variables in contact research. Taking 'group norms' as an example, chapter 5 drew attention to the range of contact norms that young people have to negotiate, the variation that exists within the norms of particular groups (e.g. peers), and the different circumstances in which certain norms become salient. In comparison, quantitative research has tended to neglect some of this complexity, defining ingroup norms only in terms of the views and behaviours of one group, typically a respondent's 'friends' (De Tezanos-Pinto, Bratt and Brown, 2009; Turner *et al.*, 2008; Pettigrew *et al.*, 2007). Furthermore, quantitative studies have often

paid limited attention to the ways that the norms of different groups or settings (in this study, the classroom and the local neighbourhood) interact and shape one other. Together, these observations suggest the need for some reappraisal of the ways that these variables and others are defined in quantitative research, and point to the value of qualitative approaches which can uncover and explore this complexity.

Finally, I would argue that this study makes a further contribution by highlighting the value of other bodies of literature in explicating the processes and outcomes of contact. A potential risk of the great deal of research activity that takes place in this area is that researchers tend to speak and respond to each other, and rarely engage with other disciplines which have much to offer. As the contact literature pays limited attention to the dynamics of intergroup encounters, this study has drawn on research from the fields of education, social work, and peace studies, specifically that which addresses intergroup dialogue and the negotiation of difference. These bodies of literature offer insight into the challenges of relationship-building, particularly in societies characterised by asymmetric relations, and present practical strategies for addressing matters of difference and conflict within intergroup encounters. They may therefore warrant further consideration by those who wish to address current gaps in contact research or seek to translate theoretical insights into practical guidance.

Limitations of the research

While the specific methodological limitations of this study are outlined in chapter 4, two limitations merit further consideration at its conclusion. The first of these is the question of the generalisability of the findings of this research. Because case study research prioritises depth over breadth, this study may be of limited interest to those looking for research that is 'representative' of all shared partnerships and participants. For those seeking a more complete understanding of shared education, however, the value of this work is two-fold. Firstly, it provides a depth of insight that complements and explicates the findings of quantitative studies that have used more representative samples (Hughes *et al.*, 2012, 2010). Secondly, in confirming a number of findings from previous qualitative research into shared education (Hughes, 2014; Knox, 2010), this thesis permits greater confidence in using these studies for the purpose of inferential and/or theoretical generalisation (Lewis *et al.*, 2014; Yin, 2009; Adelman, Jenkins and Kemmis, 1976). Because this

research was conducted over a longer period of time than previous studies, it has also considered in detail aspects of the programme and its context that have not been discussed at length in prior research. Thus, where the qualitative case study approach may be limited in terms of generalisation, its advantage is in contributing to a fuller picture of the phenomenon under study.

The second potential limitation arises in relation to my own institutional affiliation. I have undertaken this research as a student of Queen's University, which is also the organisation that coordinates the Sharing Education Programme that I have studied. This raises the possibility of a conflict of interest and associated risks to the research process: that the researcher might have been inclined to overlook negative experiences in order to present the programme in a favourable light; and that participants might have been reluctant to offer criticism for fear of jeopardising their future involvement in SEP. Regarding the first risk, several safeguards exist or have been implemented to limit this possibility. For example, the delivery of SEP is financed through a different funding stream from that which finances research, and the programme is managed by personnel working separately from academic and research staff at Queen's. Each group is therefore independent and at no time are research funds and appointments contingent on the decisions of programme staff. Moreover, other than advising on the nature of potential research sites, programme personnel have not been involved in the research process, so as to prevent undue influence on the selection and presentation of findings.

With respect to the second risk, I sought to make it clear to schools from the outset that participation in the research would have no bearing on subsequent funding decisions. Despite these assurances, it is still possible that schools viewed me as a representative of the programme, with teachers potentially responding on this basis and encouraging pupils to do the same. However, while alert to the possibility, I saw little evidence of this; indeed, in pupil interviews, in particular, I was frequently surprised by participants' candour and critical reflection on their experiences.

Future research

In the present study, potentially the most significant absences have been those pupils who chose not to participate in shared education. This resulted from my decision to focus on pupils' experiences of taking part, but it has prevented a more

complete understanding of the reasons for non-participation or the effects of indirect contact among uninvolved pupils. While partial insights on this subject were obtained from students who had chosen shared classes only at their own schools, or had participated after learning of friends' positive experiences, future research might address this more fully by including the viewpoints of non-participants.

With a longer perspective, future research could also adopt a longitudinal design to consider the impact of participation in SEP over the medium and long term. This would permit researchers to ascertain more fully the contribution of shared education to social cohesion. Future projects might consider two questions: firstly, whether the impact reported during participation – such as the development of cross-group friend/acquaintanceships – persists beyond the duration of the programme; and secondly, whether involvement in shared education encourages subsequent behaviours and actions that could contribute to integration. The latter might include involvement in cultural activities associated with the other group or a willingness to reside in more mixed areas. As in this research, an interpretivist perspective could usefully be brought to such a study, enabling access to participants' perspectives on the impact of SEP and the factors that support integration or sustain patterns of separation. This could complement a more traditional survey-based approach to exploring the long-term impact of shared education on attitudes and behaviours.

Finally, shared education represents one of several new or emerging models in the UK and Ireland that aim to promote greater integration of separate schools: shared school campuses have recently been established in Scotland and there are plans for similar in Northern Ireland, while in England and the Republic of Ireland there exist several schools that are jointly managed by the Anglican and Catholic churches (BBC News, 2014; O'Sullivan, O'Flynn and Russell, 2008). A future study might compare these different approaches, which have to date been under-researched. This type of research could explore how school managers and staff negotiate their different faith commitments alongside the commitment to inclusiveness within the school(s)/campus. As in this study, it could also consider pupils' experiences of attending these schools, including their encounters and relationships with students from different religious backgrounds. Through a critical analysis of approaches that seek to encourage further integration within the

framework of faith-based education, this research could help to advance the debate about faith schooling across the jurisdictions concerned.

Closing remarks

At the time of writing, the Northern Ireland Executive and Atlantic Philanthropies had recently announced a joint commitment of £58 million for educational and health programmes, including shared education (Northern Ireland Executive, 2014). This announcement coincided with the launch of an Inquiry into Shared and Integrated Education by the Northern Ireland Assembly, which will consider the barriers and enablers of relevance to shared education and the actions required to improve provision. The Education Committee is due to report on its findings in April 2015. Meanwhile, building work continues at the Lisanelly Shared Campus in Omagh, which will provide the new location for six existing controlled and maintained schools when it opens from September 2015 (Strategic Investment Board, 2014). Elsewhere in Northern Ireland, a further three school partnerships have also been selected for funding to develop shared facilities (BBC News, 2014).

With such a range of activity taking place, it is an exciting time for those involved in shared education, and the increase in opportunities for contact between young people is to be welcomed. As this research has demonstrated, however, proximity alone is only one element. If these initiatives are to foster relationships that can begin to challenge social separation, they must facilitate opportunities for positive interaction between pupils through the use of effective teaching approaches, appropriate classroom design, and the provision of shared social activities. They should also be complemented by the development of shared public space and activities in local towns and neighbourhoods to ensure that relationships that begin at school can be strengthened and deepened in the community. It is hoped that this research, along with previous studies in this area, can help inform these initiatives and maximise their contribution to a more integrated and cohesive society.

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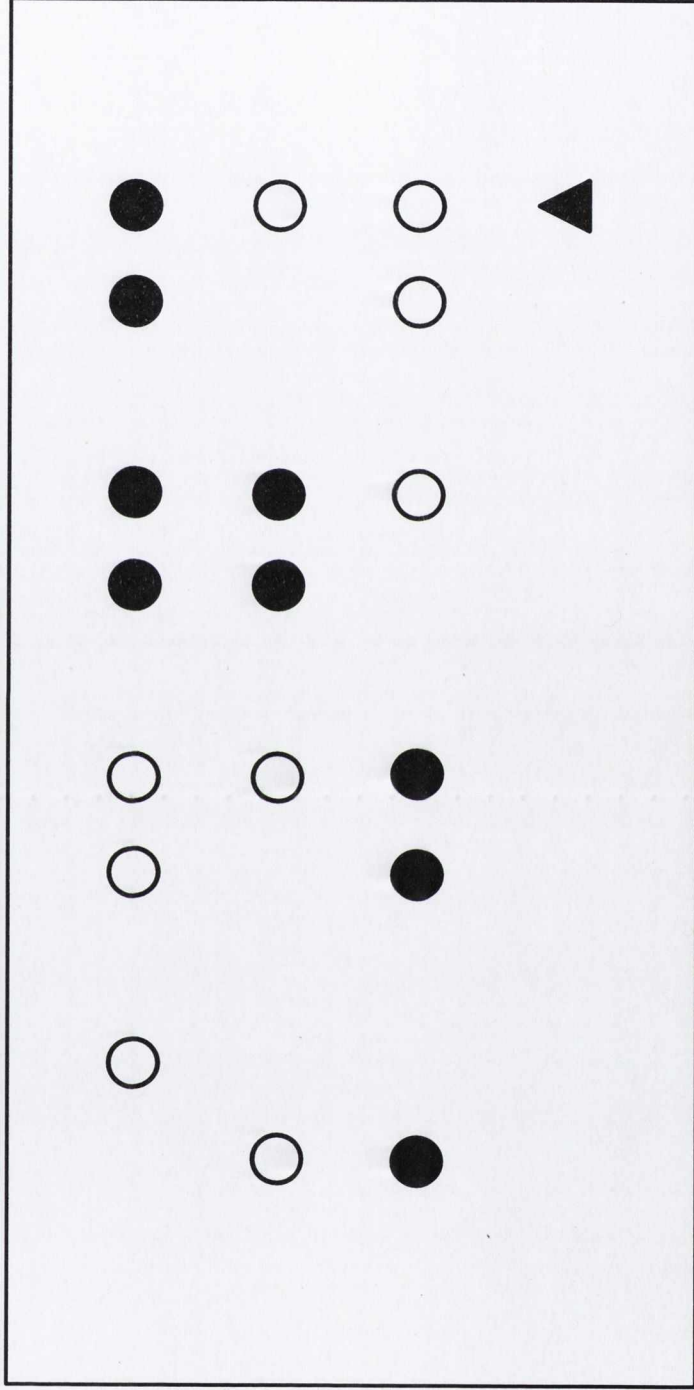
Appendix 1: Diagrams of seating arrangements in observed classes

1a. Agriculture, year 13, St Brendan's School
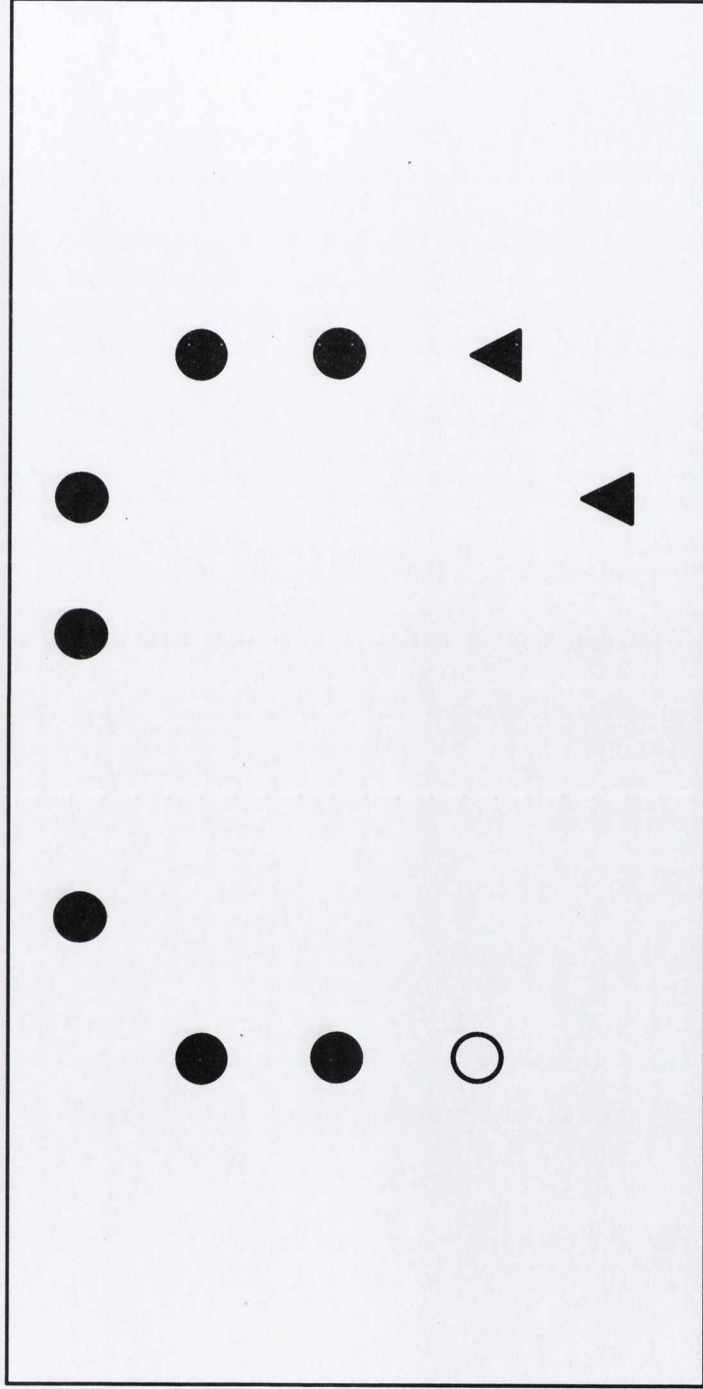
● = Boy, Catholic school

○ = Girl, Catholic school

▲ = Boy, Protestant school

△ = Girl, Protestant school

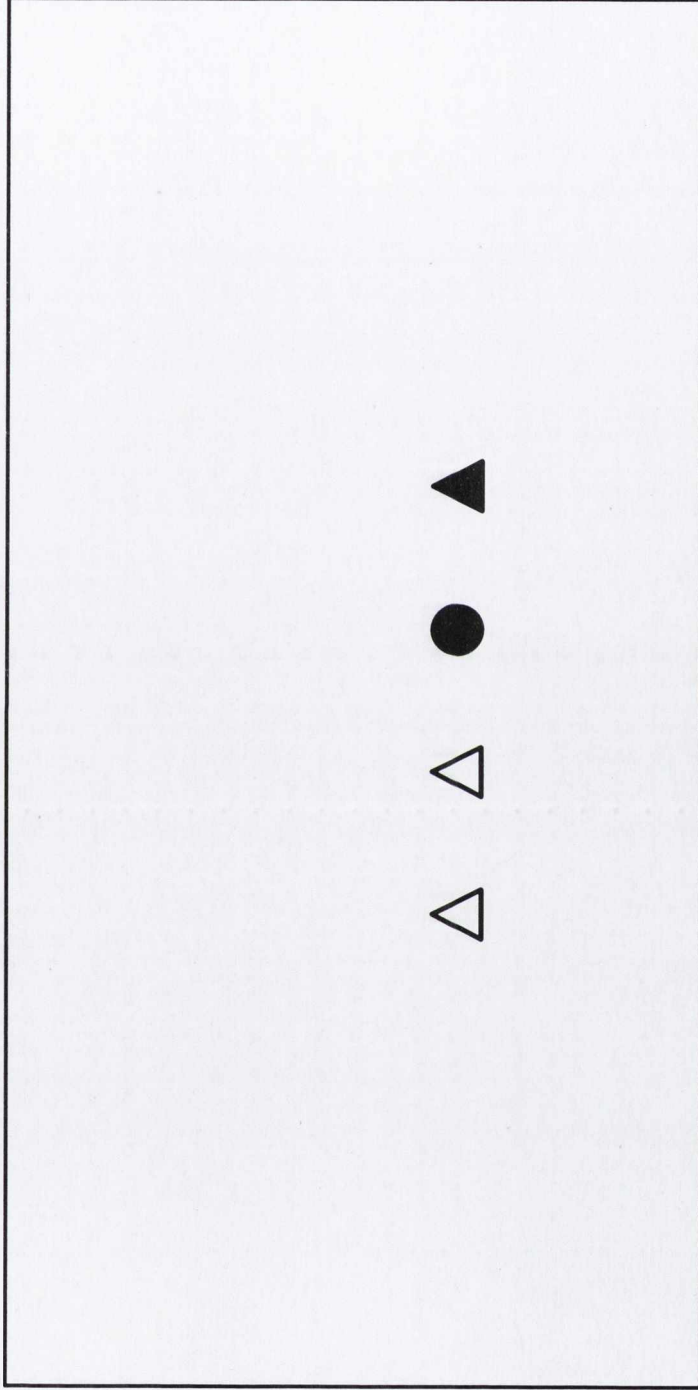**1b. Business Studies, year 13, St Brendan's School**

● = Boy, Catholic school

○ = Girl, Catholic school

▲ = Boy, Protestant school

△ = Girl, Protestant school

1c. Health and Social Care, year 13, St Brendan's School
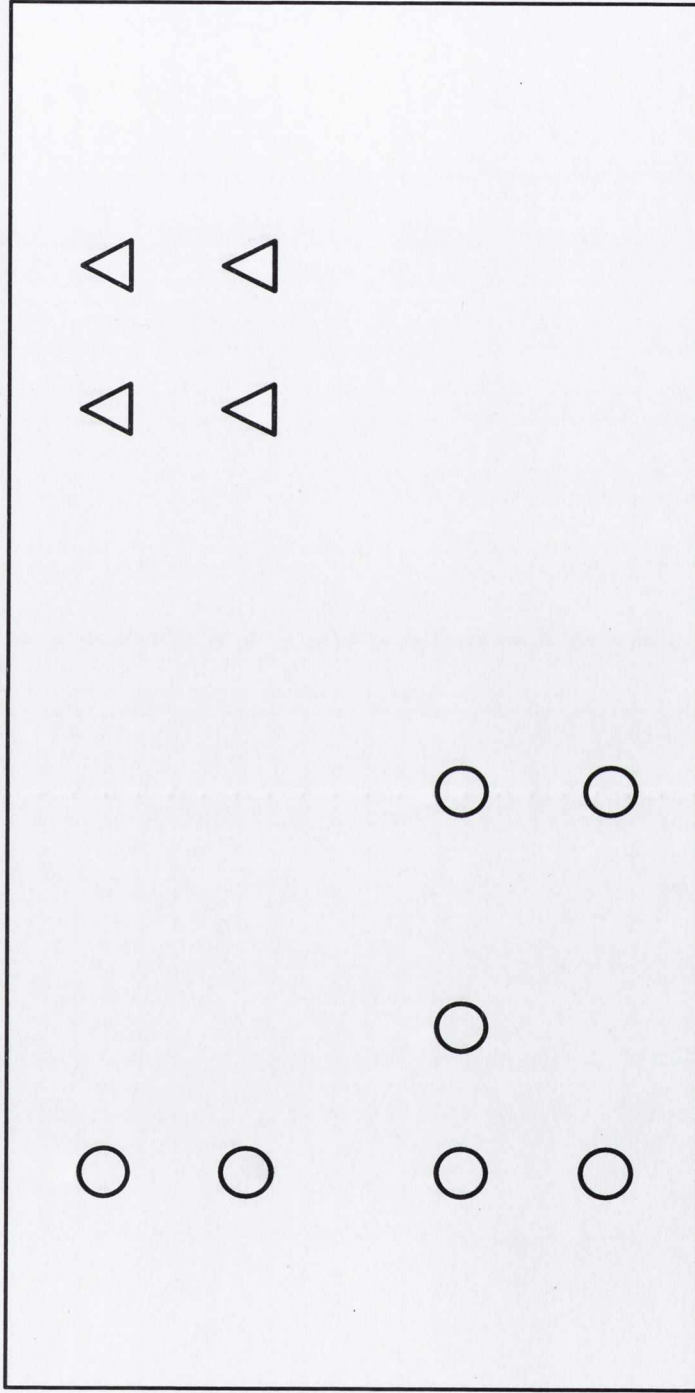
● = Boy, Catholic school   ◯ = Girl, Catholic school   ▲ = Boy, Protestant school   △ = Girl, Protestant school

1d. Health and Social Care, year 14, Whitecliff High School
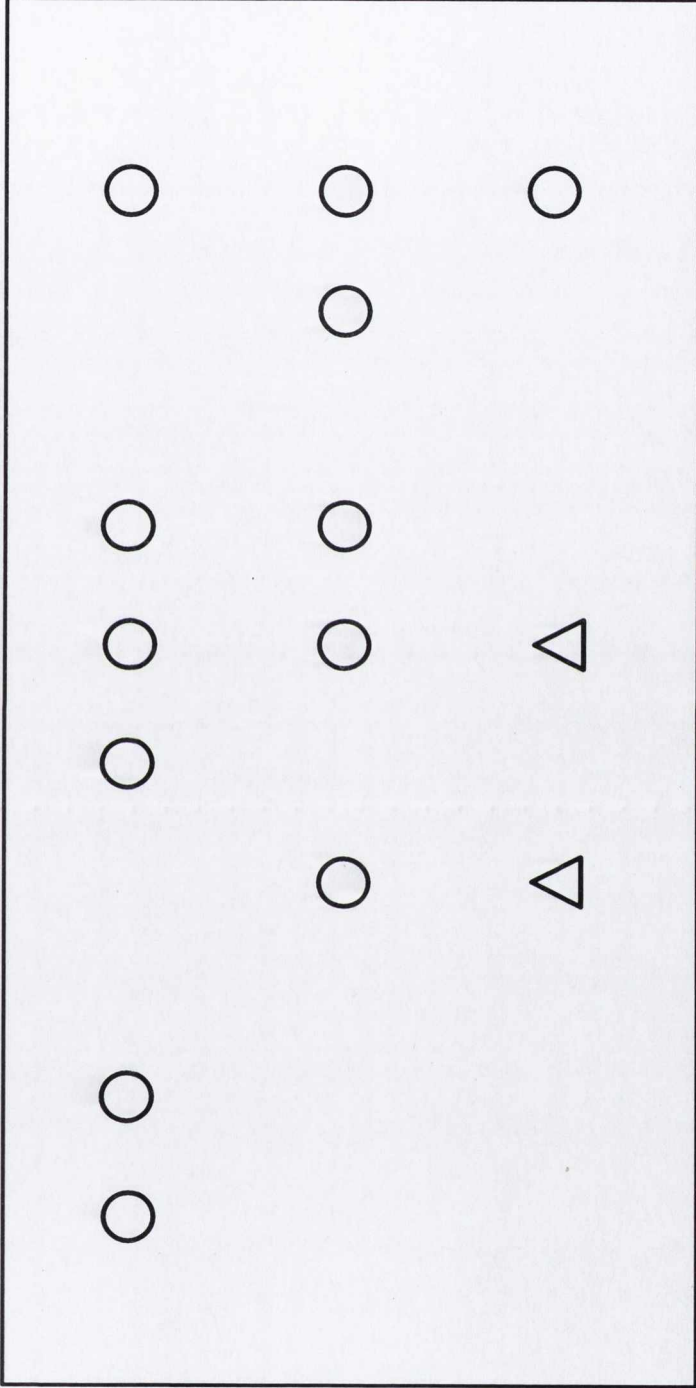
● = Boy, Catholic school   ○ = Girl, Catholic school   ▲ = Boy, Protestant school   △ = Girl, Protestant school

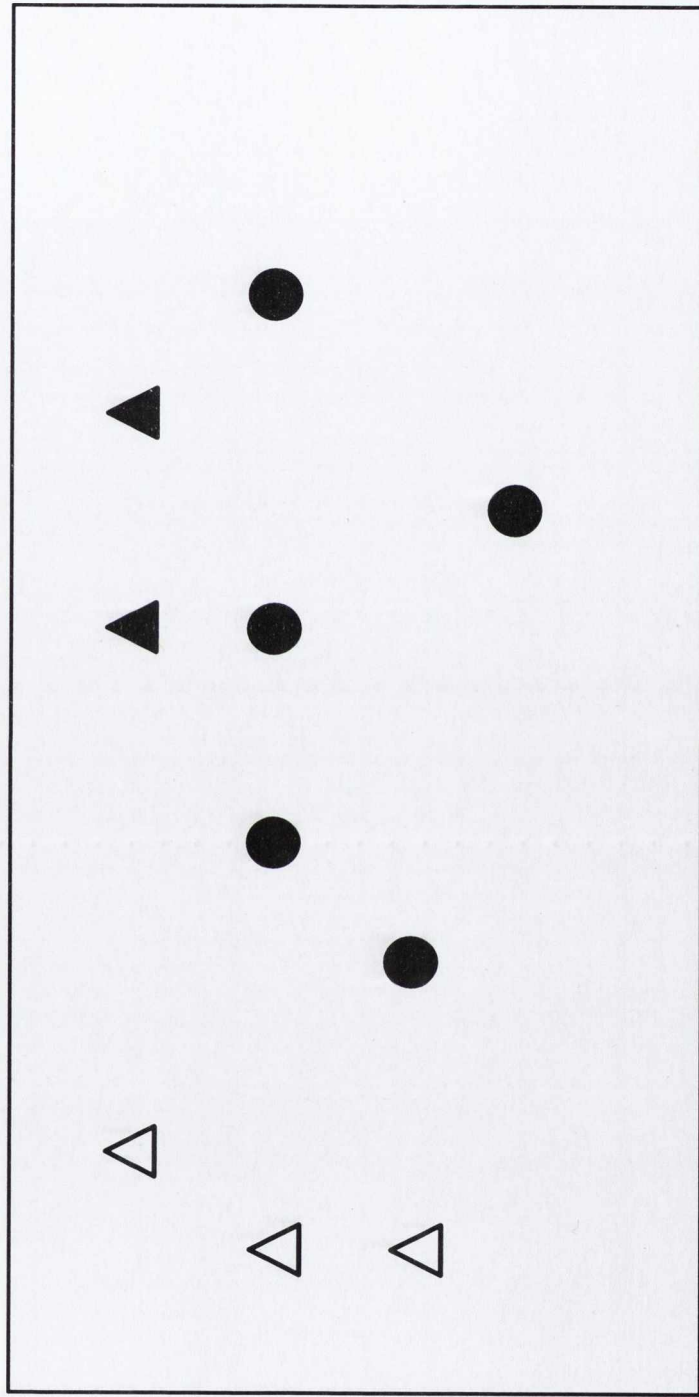**1e. History, year 14, Whitecliff High School**

● = Boy, Catholic school   ○ = Girl, Catholic school   ▲ = Boy, Protestant school   △ = Girl, Protestant school

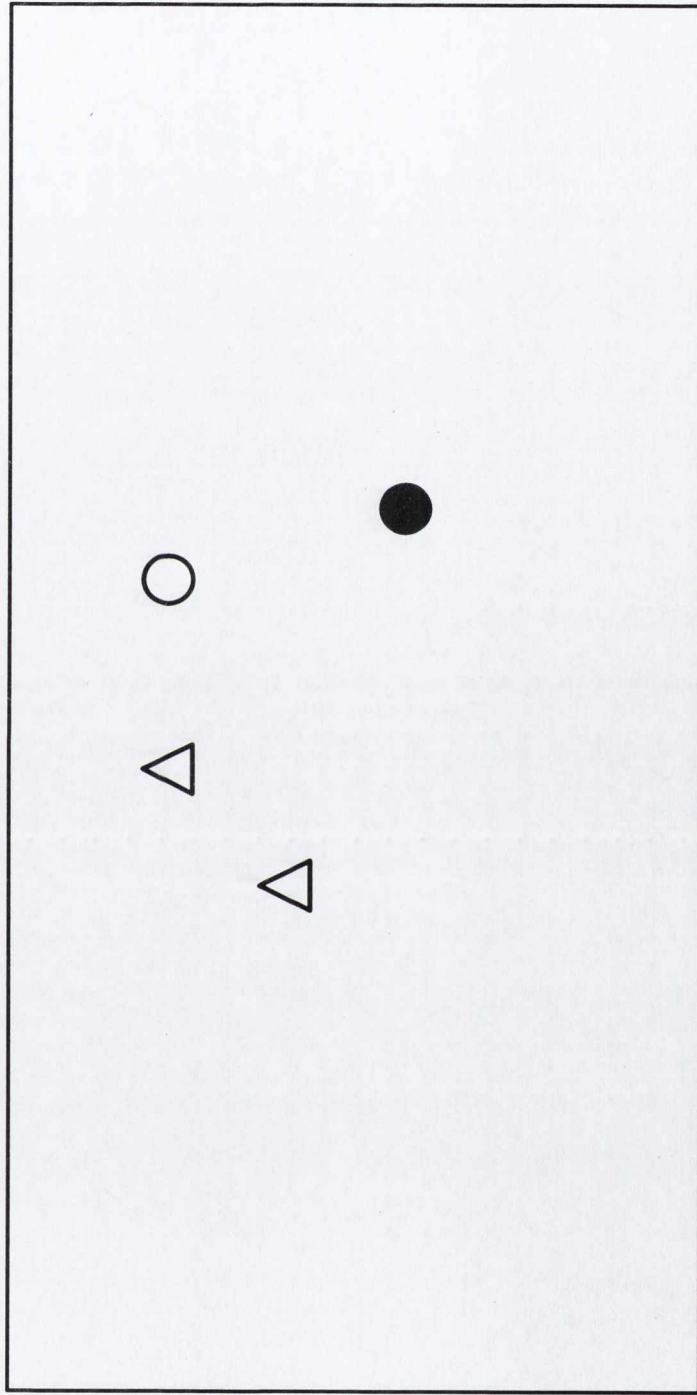1f. Sport (theory class), year 11, Whitecliff High School
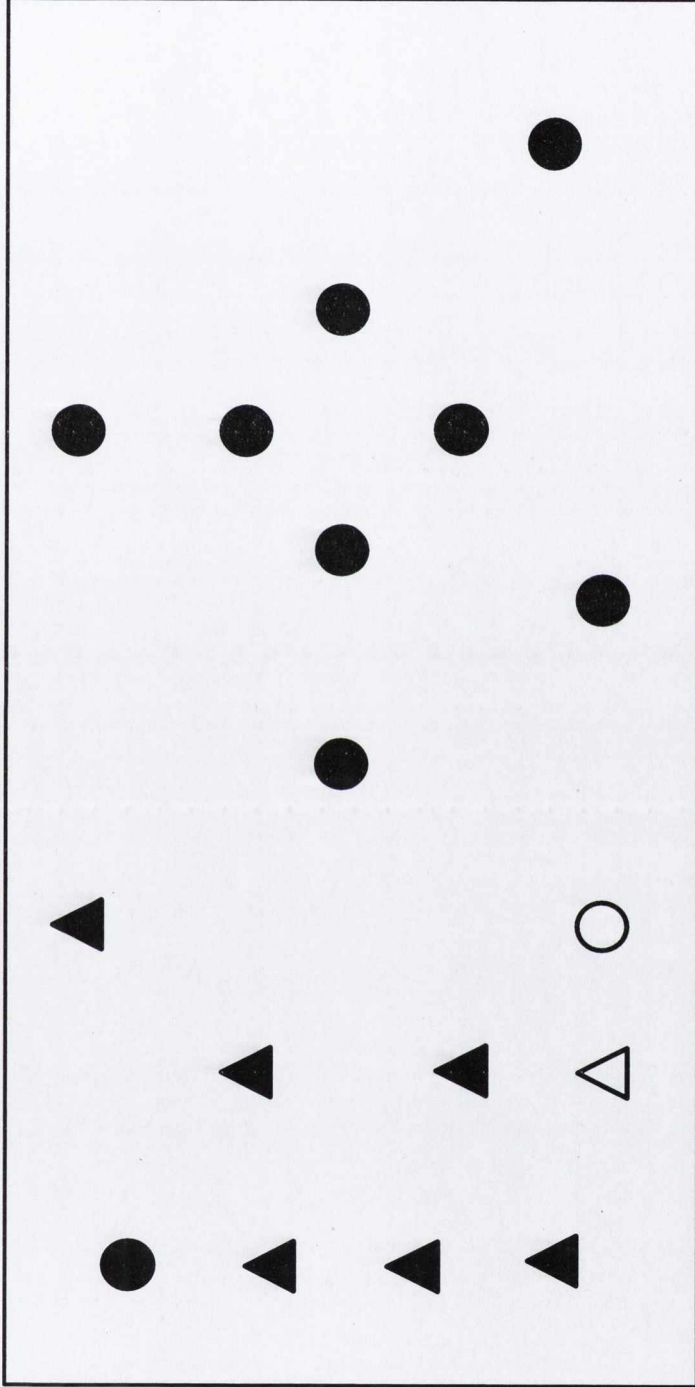
● = Boy, Catholic school   ○ = Girl, Catholic school   ▲ = Boy, Protestant school   △ = Girl, Protestant school

1g. Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, year 13, Bellevue High School
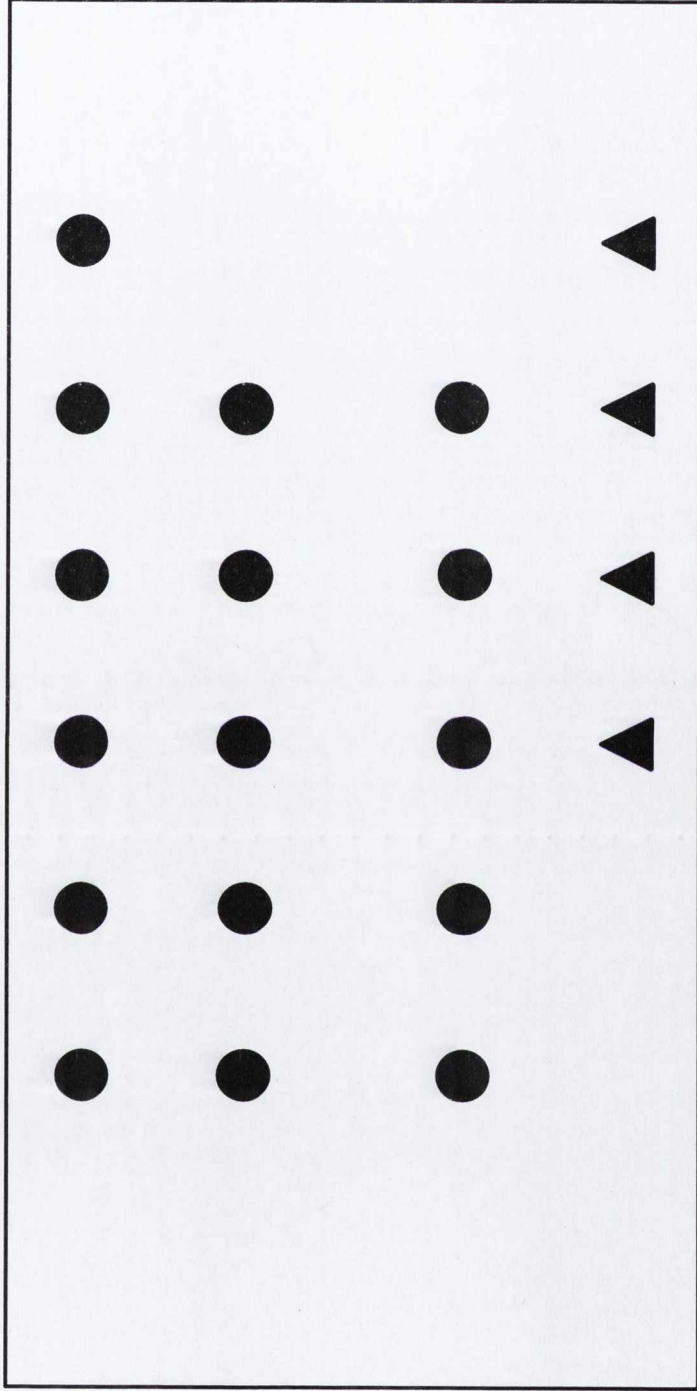

● = Boy, Catholic school   ○ = Girl, Catholic school   ▲ = Boy, Protestant school   △ = Girl, Protestant school

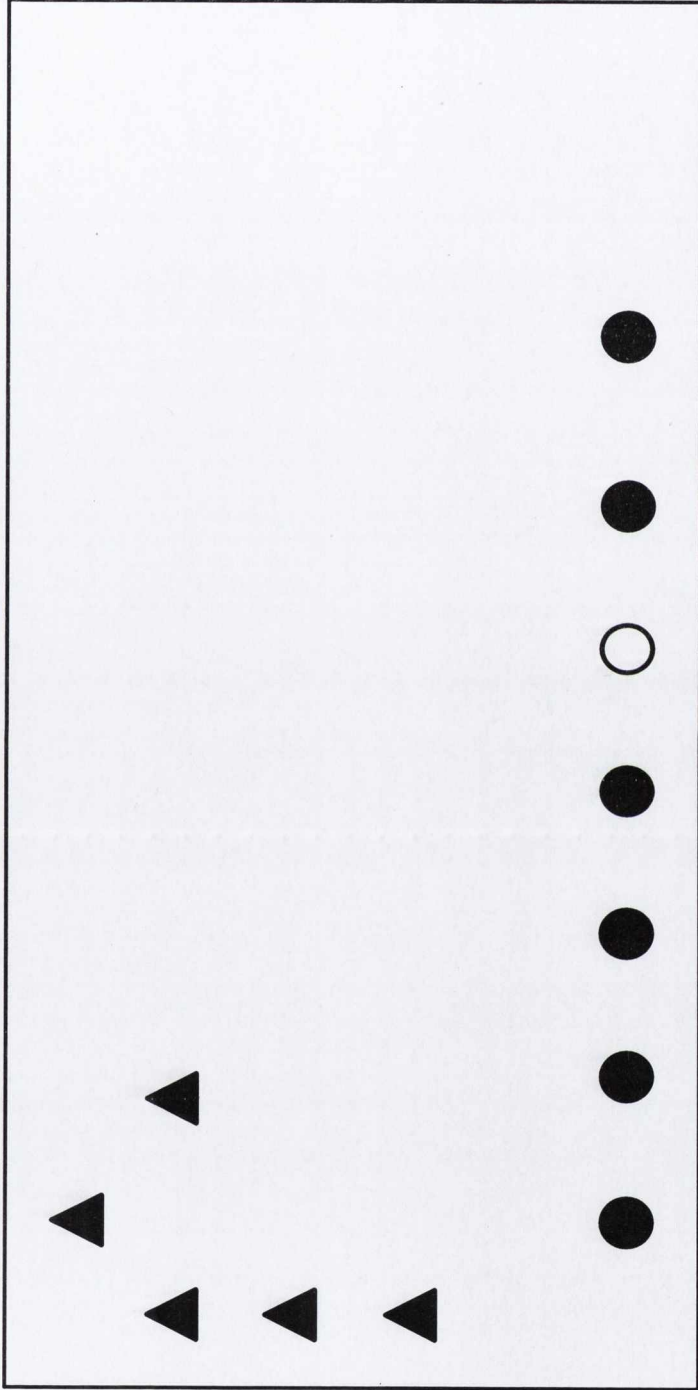**1h. Certificate of Personal Effectiveness, year 13, Holy Saviour Grammar School**

● = Boy, Catholic school   ○ = Girl, Catholic school   ▲ = Boy, Protestant school   △ = Girl, Protestant school

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1i. Engineering, year 13, Holy Saviour Grammar School

● = Boy, Catholic school   ○ = Girl, Catholic school   ▲ = Boy, Protestant school   △ = Girl, Protestant school

1j. Engineering, year 14, Bellevue High School.

● = Boy, Catholic school   ○ = Girl, Catholic school   ▲ = Boy, Protestant school   △ = Girl, Protestant school

Appendix 2: Discussion guides

2a. Discussion guide for students

Preamble

Introductions

Reminder about confidentiality and anonymity

Check it is OK to record the interview.

Reiterate my interest in their thoughts and views – there are no 'right' or 'wrong' answers.

Check whether there are any questions.

Introduction

Can you tell me what year you're in? How long have you been at this school?

Why did you decide to come to this school?

What do you enjoy about school? What don't you like?

Shared education – meaning and involvement

My research is looking at shared education. Are you familiar with that term?

- *If yes,* Could you tell me a bit about what the term 'shared education' means to you? What does it describe?

- *If no*, What do you think is meant by the term 'shared education'? What do you think it might be describing? What do you call these arrangements in your school?

What do you think are the reasons that your school does shared education? Are there any other reasons why schools would do shared education?

What does shared education involve for you?

- *Check subjects, frequency, location, how long they have been involved.*

Why did you choose the shared subjects and classes that you're doing?

Before shared education

Going back to the start of shared education, what were your thoughts/feelings about shared classes?

What thoughts or ideas did you have about [other school] before you started doing shared classes?

Did you know anyone at the other school before you started going there for classes?

- *If yes, ask how they met.*

- *If yes or no, ask whether they knew anyone (else) from the other community, and how they met.*

Did you talk to anyone about these classes before you started them? What did they think?

Setting and class

What is it like to go the other school?

And/or

What is it like to have students from the other school here? What do you think it is like for them?

What is it like in the shared classes?

- *Follow up issues from observations – e.g. size of class, composition of class, atmosphere?*

[For those who go in to the other school] What do you like about the other school? What don't you like?

[For those with classes in both their own school and the other school] Would you say shared classes at this school and the other school are the same, or are they different? How? Which, if either, do you prefer?

[For all] What kinds of similarities and differences do you notice between the two schools?

- *Follow up school differences, community differences in the context of shared education.*

Relationships

Have you got to know people at [the other school] who you did not know before?

- *If yes,* how would you describe your relationship with them?
    - o *Follow up to gauge nature of relationship.*

  o *Ask what helped them to get to know the other students.*

- *If no, follow up the reasons for this.*

Do you spend time with pupils from the other school outside lessons?

- *If yes, ask where they meet, when, what they have done together.*
- *If no, ask if they can imagine meeting up in future; if not, why?*

Views of shared education

How would you describe your views of shared education now? How do these compare with your views before you started?

What do you particularly like/dislike about shared education? (Up to 3).

- *If several reasons are offered, ask what the main/most important benefit of shared education is.*

What do you think other students in the school think about shared education?

What opinions do you think people outside the school would have of shared education?

Background

Can you tell me a bit more what it's like to live round here?

- *What do you like about it? What do you dislike about it?*

- *What do you think are important issues in the local area at the moment? Are these the same as in the rest of Northern Ireland?*

  o *In response to discussions about local issues, where relevant, follow up whether they have discussed these issues during shared education and what facilitated this.*

Finishing

Just to finish, what would you say to students at another school who were just starting to do shared education?

And if you were in charge of shared education here, is there anything you would do differently?

Is there anything you would like to say but haven't had a chance to? Is there anything you would like to ask me?

Close

2b. Discussion guide for teachers

Before starting

Introductions

Reminder about confidentiality and anonymity

Check it is OK to record the interview.

Check whether there are any questions.

Introduction

Which subject(s) do you teach at this school? Do you have any additional responsibilities within the school?

How long have you been teaching at [school]? Do you work at the school on a part-time or full-time basis?

Beginning shared education

How did you come to be involved in shared education?

Prior to beginning to teach shared classes, what were your thoughts and feelings about doing so?

What support or training, if any, was available to help you prepare for teaching a mixed class?

- *If yes, who provided the support / who organised it? What is your opinion on the training/support you received? Has this support been ongoing?*
- *If no, what kind of support/training might have been helpful?*

- *Follow up, as appropriate, anything they did as individual teachers to prepare.*

Teaching shared classes

Within a typical week, how many shared classes do you teach?

- *How many different groups does this comprise? Where do these classes take place – home school or other school?*

- *And do you have any other involvement in shared activities? (e.g. joint visits, joint sports/music)*

How does your experience of teaching shared classes now compare with your initial experiences?

- *What has changed? What has made a difference?*

What benefits, if any, do you feel your involvement in shared classes has brought for you?

Can you identify any particular challenges that you have faced in teaching shared classes, or from your involvement in shared education in general?

- *How were these addressed? Did you feel this was handled appropriately?*

Addressing controversial issues and questions of difference

Has there been any discussion among staff involved in shared education about how to address issues relating to difference within mixed classes?

- *What have these discussions involved?*
- *Are discussions held and decisions made across both schools or within each school?*

- *Have any discussions/policies about difference included anything relating to equality?*

- *Follow-up whether the approach tends to be proactive or reactive, or both.*

Have there been any occasions when matters relating to difference have arisen or been discussed in the classroom?

- *If yes, could you describe what happened? How did you feel in this situation?*

Relationships

(For those who teach across both schools) How has it been for you to teach in [other school]?

- *Any particular differences/challenges?*

- *For those moving between grammar to non-grammar schools, does this have an impact?*

What links do you have with staff involved in shared education at the other school?

- *How have these relationships developed?*

- *How would you describe communication across the schools?*

Pupils' experience

What was your sense of pupils' initial thoughts and feelings about participating in shared classes? How would you compare that to their experience and approach now?

- *Follow-up differences at the pupils' own school, other school.*

- *Are there any differences between classes?*

What benefits do you think students have gained from participating in shared classes?

In your experience, what challenges do students face when participating in shared education?

What factors do you think help the development of relationships between pupils from the two schools?

Overall view of shared education and closing points

One of the stated goals of shared education is to contribute to an improvement in relations between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland. Based on your experience, how effective do you think shared education can be at making a difference in this area?

Do you have any further thoughts regarding shared education that have not already been discussed? Do you have any other comments or questions?

Close

Appendix 3: Observation sheet

Settings, spaces and objects:

Activities:

Interactions and relationships:

Seating arrangements (sketch)

Appendix 4: Sample copies of consent forms

4a. Pupil consent form

Queen's University
Belfast

Rebecca Loader
School of Education
Queen's University
69-71 University Street
Belfast BT7 1NN
rloader01@qub.ac.uk

Consent form – group interviews (students)

Research: Shared education in Northern Ireland.

Please
tick the box

I have received and read the information leaflet, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. ☐

I understand that this research will involve participating in a group interview with 1-3 other students, lasting up to 1 hour, which will be recorded using audio recording equipment. ☐

I understand that participation is voluntary. I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason. ☐

I understand that the information collected by the researcher may be used in her research thesis, in articles for academic journals, and in presentations to other researchers and to people interested in education. ☐

I understand that everything I say will be confidential (except if I say something that makes the researcher think I or someone else may be in danger) and no information that could identify me will be included in the research reports or presentations. ☐

I understand that all data collected by the researcher will be held securely and subsequently destroyed in line with Queen's University's ethical regulations. ☐

I agree to take part in this research project. ☐

Name of student (please print)   Signature   Date

Name of researcher   Signature   Date

4b. Teacher consent form

Queen's University
Belfast

Rebecca Loader
School of Education
69-71 University Street
Belfast BT7 1NN
rloader01@qub.ac.uk

PhD supervisor: Professor Joanne Hughes
joanne.hughes@qub.ac.uk

Consent form – interviews (teaching staff)

Research: Shared education in Northern Ireland.

Please
tick the box

I have received and read the information leaflet, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. ☐

I understand that this research will involve participating in an interview, lasting approximately 45-60 minutes, which will be recorded using audio recording equipment. ☐

I understand that participation is voluntary. I can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason. ☐

I understand that the information collected by the researcher may be used in her research thesis, in articles for academic journals, and in presentations to other researchers and to people interested in education. ☐

I understand that everything I say will be confidential and that no personally identifiable information will be included in the research reports or presentations. ☐

I understand that all data collected by the researcher will be held securely and subsequently destroyed in line with Queen's University's ethical regulations. ☐

I agree to take part in this research project. ☐

_____   _____   _____
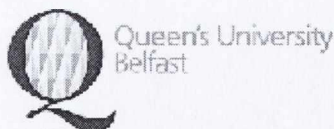
Name of staff (please print)   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____

Name of researcher   Signature   Date

4c. Parent consent form

Rebecca Loader
School of Education
Queen's University
69-71 University Street
Belfast BT7 1NN
rloader01@qub.ac.uk

Queen's University
Belfast

Consent form – group interviews (parents/carers)

Research: Shared education in Northern Ireland.

<u>Please</u>
<u>tick the box</u>

I have received and read the information leaflet, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. ☐

I have discussed participation in this research with my child. ☐

I understand that this research will involve my child participating in a group interview with 1-3 other students, lasting up to 1 hour, which will be recorded using audio recording equipment. ☐

I understand that participation is voluntary and that my child can withdraw from the interview at any time, without giving a reason. ☐

I understand that the information collected by the researcher may be used in her research thesis, in articles for academic journals, and in presentations to other researchers and to people interested in education. ☐

I understand that everything that my child says will be confidential (unless he/she says something that leads the researcher to believe that they or someone else may be in danger) and no information that could identify my child will be included in the research reports or presentations. ☐

I understand that all data collected by the researcher will be held securely and subsequently destroyed in line with Queen's University's ethical regulations. ☐

I agree that my child _____ may participate in the research if he/she wishes to do so.   (please print child's name)

_____   _____   _____
Name of parent/carer (please print)   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of researcher   Signature   Date

4d. Headteacher consent form[12]

Rebecca Loader
School of Education
Queen's University
69-71 University Street
Belfast BT7 1NN
rloader01@qub.ac.uk

Queen's University
Belfast

Consent form – headteacher/principal

Research: Shared education in Northern Ireland.

<u>Please</u>
tick the box

I have discussed this study with the researcher, and I have had the opportunity to ask questions about the research. ☐

I have discussed participation in this research with colleagues involved in SEP at the school. ☐

I understand that this research will involve observation of shared classes between students at [school] and [other school], and small-group interviews of students with others from their school. I have been informed that interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed. ☐

I understand that participation is voluntary. Participants can withdraw from the research at any time, without giving a reason. ☐

I understand that the information collected by the researcher may be used in her research thesis, in articles for academic journals, and in presentations to other researchers and to people interested in education. ☐

I understand that everything that staff and students say will be confidential. ☐

I understand that no information that could identify the school, staff members, or students will be included in the research reports or presentations. ☐

I understand that all data collected by the researcher will be held securely and subsequently destroyed in line with Queen's University's ethical regulations. ☐

I agree to [school name's] participation in the research project. ☐

_____   _____   _____
Name of principal (please print)   Signature   Date

_____   _____   _____
Name of researcher   Signature   Date

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[12] An additional request for consent was issued to headteachers prior to the teacher interviews, as this phase of the work had not originally been included in the research design or on this form.