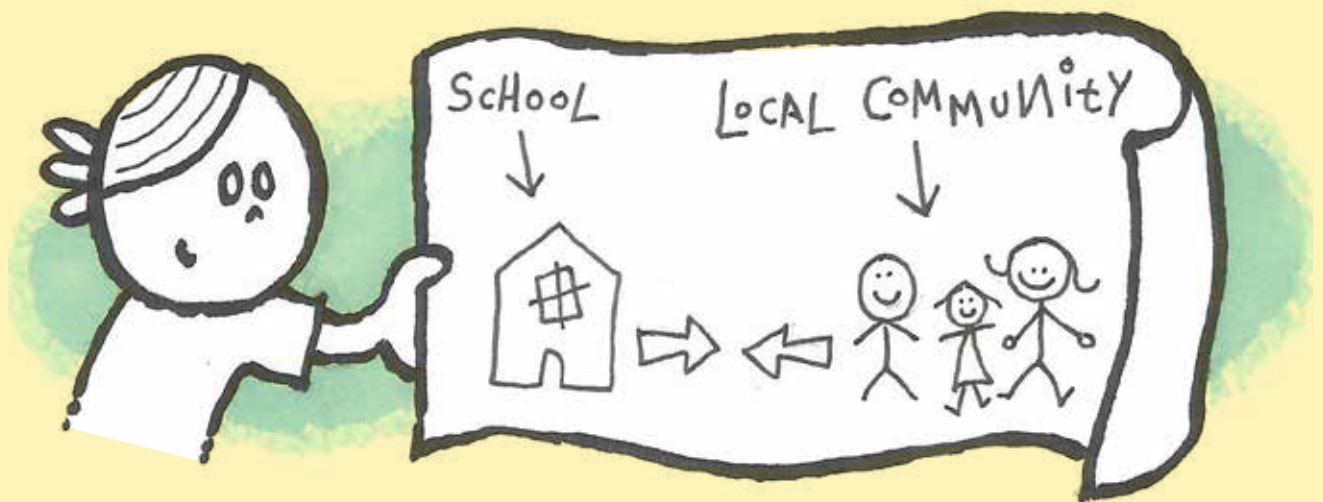
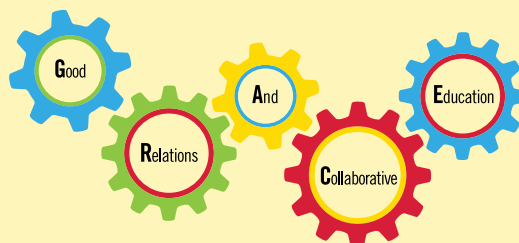


Developing Effective Parental Engagement & Community Connections



**A Resource for Schools and
Shared Education Partnerships**



This resource was written by Mary Potter, on behalf of Community Relations
in Schools (CRIS), March 2021. ©2022.
Illustrations by: Patrick Sanders.

1. Introductory Sections

- What is the purpose of this resource?
- What are the benefits of involving parents in school partnership work?
- How to use this resource?
- Background: Community Relations in Schools (CRIS) and the GRACE Model
- Developing the Partnership to Create a Sustainable Hub (GRACE Stage 3)
- Case Study Introduction: Learning from Edenderry and Holy Cross Nursery Schools
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What is the purpose of this resource?

This resource is designed to support schools in Shared Education and other partnerships to embed sustainability into their collaborative practice around educational and reconciliation outcomes.

It focuses particularly on work with parents and families, as a significant aspect of this. Within CRIS's Good Relations and Collaborative Education (GRACE) Model, this emerges from Stage 3: Developing the Partnership to Create a Sustainable Hub.

What are the benefits of involving parents in school partnership work?

Involving parents in school partnership work has clear educational and reconciliation benefits:

- A strengthened partnership and commitment between home and school which helps to maximise educational and reconciliation opportunities and learning for children and young people;
- A deepened understanding and experience of whole and shared school community across the partner schools;
- Enhanced relational and learning opportunities for adults (parents, staff, governors and others), including around the more challenging aspects of Community Relations/reconciliation/diversity and inclusion;
- The experience of parents as a resource, as contributors and leaders in shaping, facilitating and reviewing the partnership and programme(s), helping to ensure relevance and engagement;
- New opportunities to work with partners and funders beyond the formal education sector;
- Positive impacts beyond the partner schools into family networks; into local and wider communities; and a stronger, shared 'voice' for influencing educational and other policy and practice going forward.

Where this resource refers to parents, there is an understanding that this will look different in different family and household contexts, and includes the range of caring adults who connect with their child's school and who may choose to become involved with 'parent' programmes and partnerships.

How to use this resource

The introductory section provides a brief overview of CRIS's mission and the GRACE model, with specific reference to learning drawn from the partnership case study of Edenderry and Holy Cross Nursery Schools.

It also outlines where work with parents and families fits within Shared Education.

The remainder of the resource provides insights gained from the case study, focused around different themes and including questions/actions which each school partnership might want to consider within their own particular context.

Although the case study is drawn from a Nursery School setting, the resource seeks to support partnerships across all school phases, working with children at all Key Stages and post-16.



The Background to this Resource

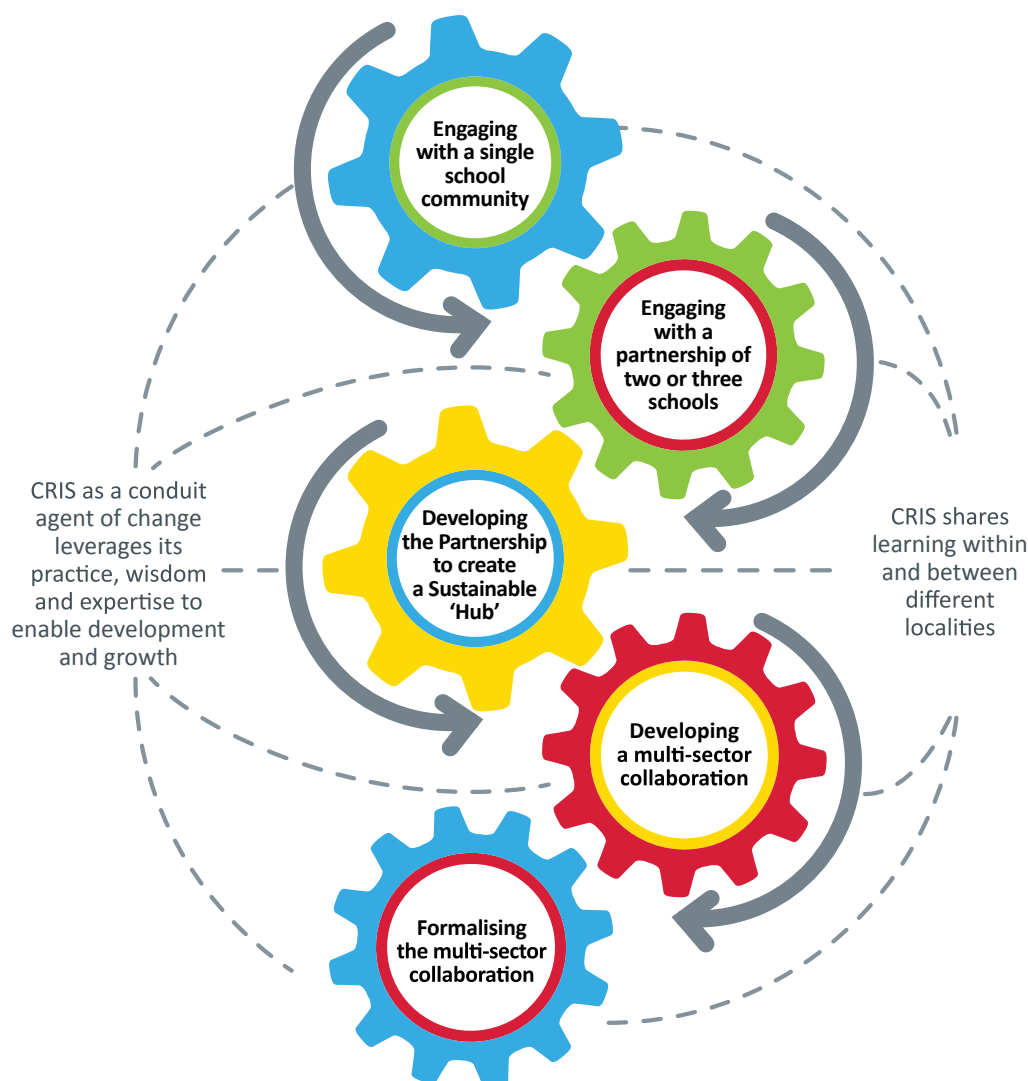
The mission of CRIS is to inspire and equip whole school communities as powerful catalysts for peace and reconciliation.

CRIS has drawn on its experience of working with schools for more than three decades as well as its current pioneering practice to distil core principles about the role of schools in peacebuilding work. While CRIS has developed these principles from practice, academic theory also reinforces why this is an important approach. Together they inform principles which underpin the GRACE model and the work of CRIS.

The Good Relations and Collaborative Education (GRACE) model is a relationship-focused five stage model of collaboration which builds durable and ductile interdependent relationships, fosters mutual understanding and builds capacity for meaningful and sustainable sharing with the education sector. GRACE is not a linear

model- and it retains high sensitivity to context. At times, schools and communities may move in and out of several of its five stages. Working through the difference stages of this model can support the development of strong collaborative partnerships, can support school improvement, enhance the professional and personal development of all school staff, and build bridges into local communities¹

GRACE Model of Practice



Stage 1 – Engaging with a Single School Community

Stage 2 – Engaging with a Partnership of Two or Three Schools

Stage 3 – Developing the Partnership to Create a Sustainable 'Hub'

Stage 4 – Exploring Locality-Based Multi-Sector Collaboration

Stage 5 – Formalising the Multi-Sector Collaboration

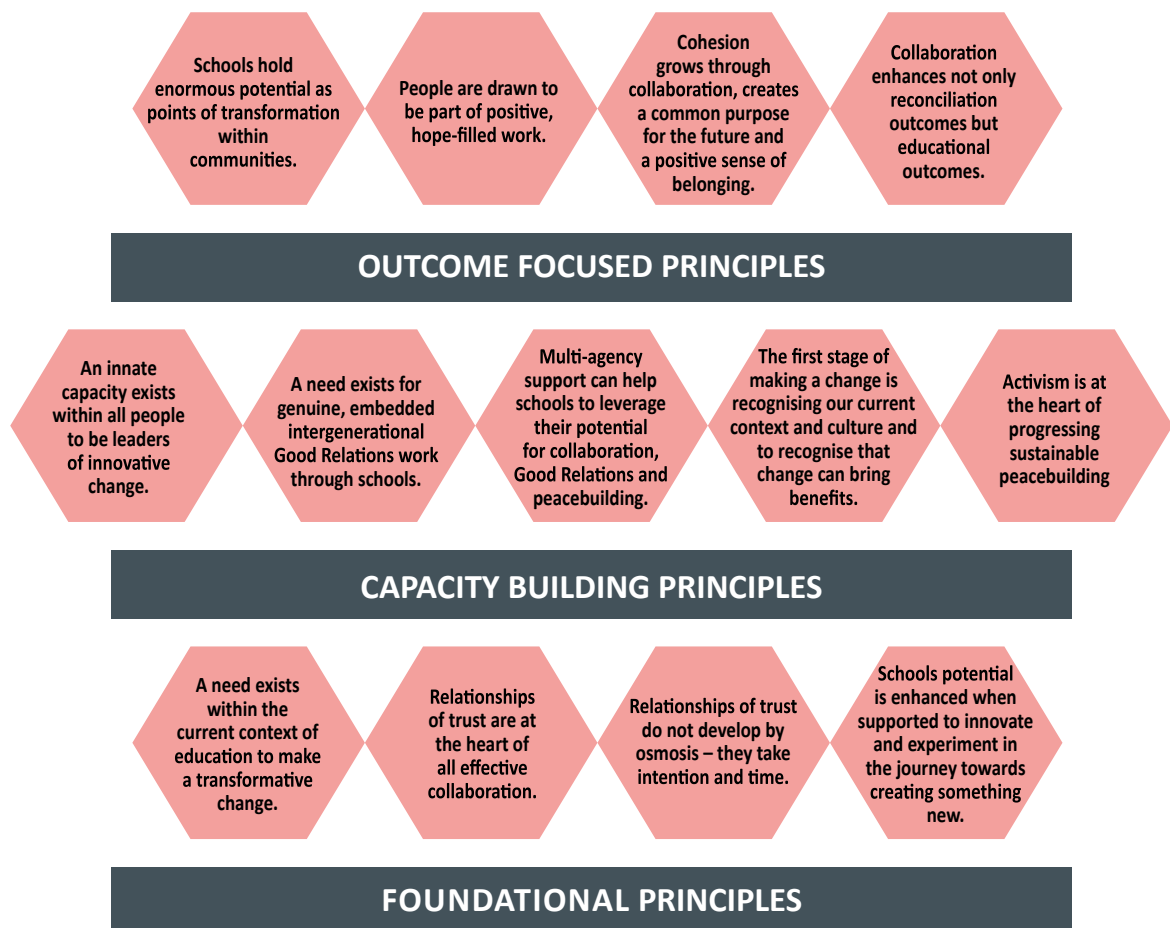
1. For fuller information on the different Stages of the GRACE Model, see CRIS (2018), *Good Relations and Collaborative Education (GRACE): A Whole School Community Approach – A Practice Guide*, Belfast: CRIS.

At every stage of collaboration, there is a need for:

- Planning, Doing, and Reviewing for future learning
- Time invested in relationship care and maintenance

Drawing on their learning and experience in promoting inclusive school communities as part of building a shared society, at every stage of the GRACE model CRIS seeks to support school partnerships through:

- Working with the schools to help build capacity for collaboration
- Being a critical friend
- Acting as a conduit and leveraging agent (e.g. encouraging learning exchanges between different partnerships and accessing funds that are unavailable to statutory organisations)
- System advocacy to champion collaboration



The work of school partnerships seeking to engage in creating strong community and parent connections fits within the GRACE model at Stage 3.

At STAGE 3 of the GRACE model inter-school relationships have become fine-tuned and consolidated. The partnership is increasingly inter-dependent, self-sustaining and able to transcend cycles of project funding. **Integral to this sustainability is the support provided by parents/carers and the wider communities.** Importantly, this support creates a virtuous circle of deepening collaboration.



What does this generally involve?

- Expanding and consolidating staff commitment widely and within linked teams
- Building sharing and partnership routinely into school development plans
- Joint parental engagement reinforces school partnerships and enriches the wider communities
- Leveraging and using funds to develop and expand collaborative programmes and initiatives
- Remaining choice-driven – this is the work of hearts and minds

This resource focuses on Point 3:

Joint parental engagement reinforces school partnerships and enriches the wider communities.

Learning from the Edenderry and Holy Cross Nursery Schools' Partnership

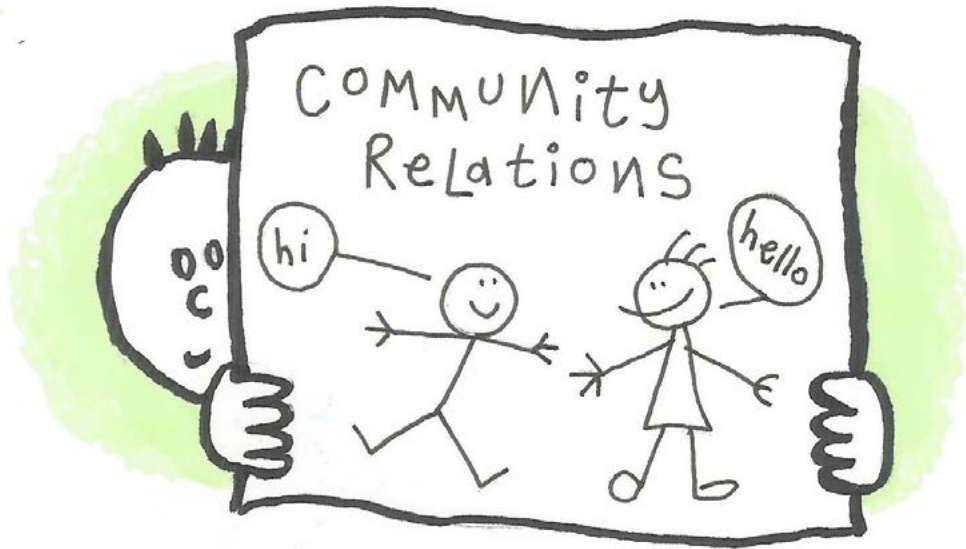
Community Context

Holy Cross and Edenderry Nursery Schools are situated within a mile of each other in North Belfast and have worked in close partnership for the past 24 years. Holy Cross is situated in the Ardoyne area (perceived as a Nationalist, Republican and/or Catholic community) and Edenderry in the Shankill area (perceived as a Unionist, Loyalist and/or Protestant community), and are separated by a peace wall which runs along the Crumlin Road. In NISRA's 2018 analysis of Multiple Deprivation Measures by Electoral Ward, where '1' is most deprived, Ardoyne ranked '3' and Shankill ranked '9', while on the specific Measure of 'Education, Skills and Training', Ardoyne ranked '8' and Shankill ranked '2'.² While this is a somewhat blunt instrument as it does not correlate to each individual person's experience or to smaller areas within a Ward, these and the other Deprivation Measures do give some indication of challenges faced by many individuals and families within these communities.



At the same time, this is also a changing context, with some sense of a 'loosening' of community boundaries. A new Lidl store which is drawing customers from across several local communities and efforts to get the Flax Street gate in the peace wall opened, were mentioned as examples of this by participants in the partnership review process.

2. <https://www.nisra.gov.uk/publications/nimdm17-ward2014-results> [Accessed 18/03/2021].



Programme Focus

The focus of the two schools' partnership work is the 'Buddy Up' programme, which involves children, the school staff teams and parents in regular shared activities throughout the year, including a family Community Relations residential at Corrymeela. CRIS supports the school partnership as a 'critical friend' and facilitative partner.³

Sharing Learning

While Edenderry and Holy Cross Nursery Schools are working in their particular context and at a particular phase within a child's education journey, their experience provides insights and learning which have relevance for school partnership work with parents in other community contexts, as well as for primary and post-primary settings. The sections which follow draw out some of that learning through reflection questions and practical/planning aspects to consider.



3. CRIS (2014), *Buddy Up! A Whole school Community Resource for Sharing in Education at Nursery and Primary School Levels*, Belfast: CRIS.

Parental Engagement, Community Connections and Shared Education

Within the Department of Education's Shared Education Policy (2015), Key Action 12 is to, 'Promote engagement with parents, carers and the wider community.' Schools are asked to,

ensure Shared Education supports, encourages, and enables the development of meaningful relationships with and between parents, caregivers and the wider community,

and to draw up specific plans, referenced within their School Development Plan, as to how they will do this, as part of advancing Shared Education.⁴

This is developed in more detail within the Department's Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) Self-Evaluation Framework for Shared Education (November 2014), under the theme of 'Community Connections' which includes Parents/Carers, External Partners, and Community Access and Engagement. It provides some guidance on what might be happening at the Defining-Developing-Expanding-Embedding stages of 'working towards in-depth and high quality Shared Education.' In terms of work with Parents/Carers, the guidance is outlined in the extract below.⁵

Community Connections	Defining Schools identify the need to:	Developing Partnership schools:	Expanding Partnership schools:	Embedding Partnership schools:
Parents/Carers	Enable parents/carers to understand the aims of shared education within context of NI curriculum and between partnership	Develop ways to engage parents/carers on the purpose, benefits and expected outcomes of shared education	Inform parents/carers regularly of emerging outcomes of shared education between partnership and their views are used to inform improvement	Engage parents/carers in the review of outcomes of shared education to inform further development

This resource will explore how school partnerships might be able to define, develop, expand and embed engagement with parents/carers in ways which deepen understanding and go beyond the guidance given above.

4. Department of Education (2015), *Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education*, p.27.

5. DE Education and Training Inspectorate (2014), *Developing Shared Education: A Framework for School Partnerships*, pp. 5, 9.

Shared Education's concept of **a Pupil Pathway** of experiences from pre-school through every stage of primary and post-primary education is also important here. The Pupil Pathway,

identifies what Shared Education could look like for learners as they progress through school. It outlines the educational outcomes that contribute to reconciliation through the curriculum at all Key Stages and through the development of children's skills and capabilities, attitudes and dispositions.⁶

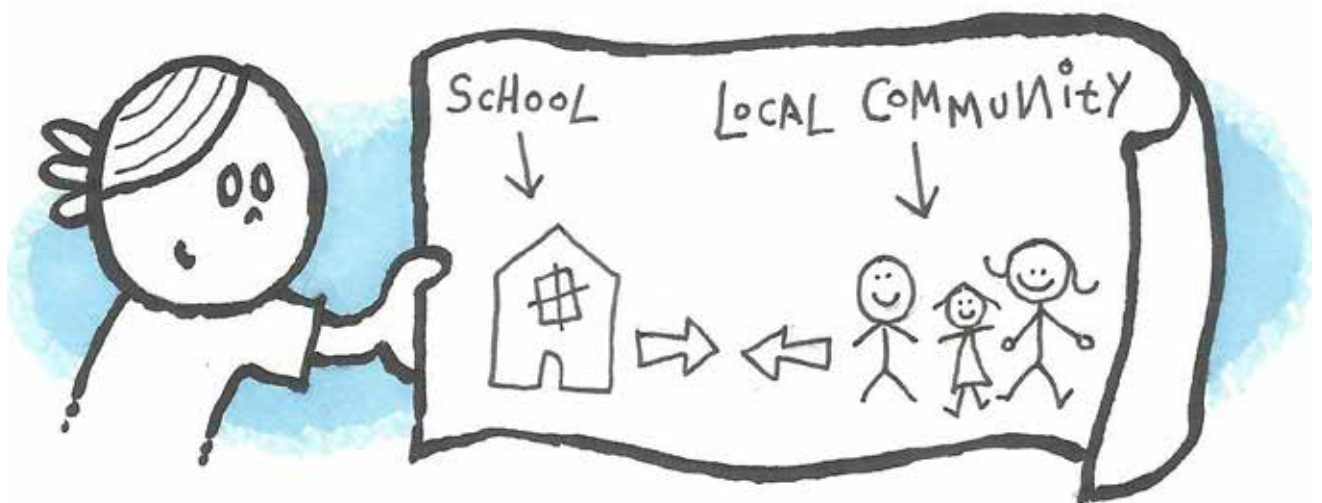
This resource raises the question as to what a **purposeful and connected Parent Pathway** might look like, at different school phases and stages, and in different community/geographical contexts.

6. Department of Education (2019), *A Pupil Pathway: A Resource for Teachers to Support Shared Education*, p.2.

Developing Work with Parents and Families: Themes and Aspects to Consider in Your Context

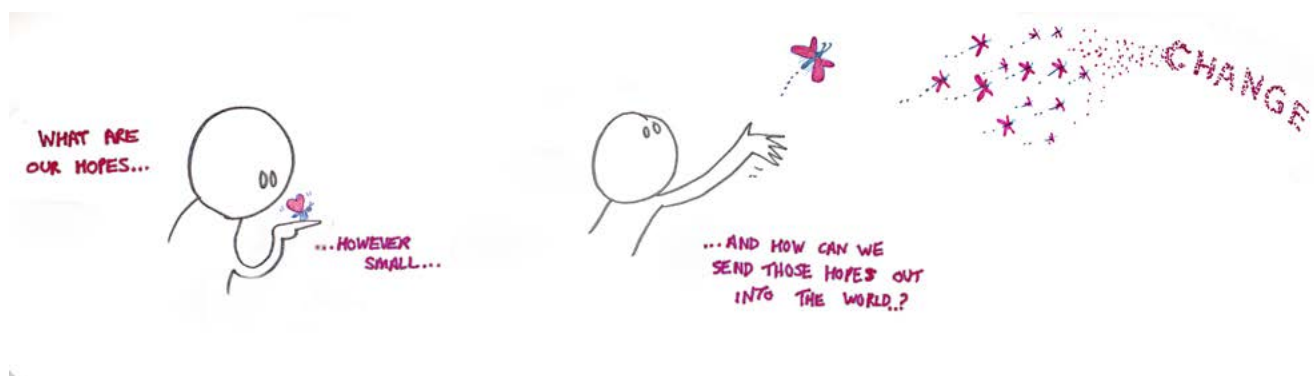
Many of the questions and suggestions which follow may be things which you have already thought of and tried. However, it seems helpful to gather them together in one place, under the different themes which emerged from the conversations with parents, staff and others involved in the Edenderry and Holy Cross partnership. We hope that you will find them helpful, encouraging and challenging in your context, supporting you to deepen your engagement with parents, and strengthening parents' contribution and leadership towards educational and reconciliation outcomes.

The experience of Holy Cross and Edenderry Nursery Schools is that, although there is some hard work, honest self-reflection and conversation needed to continually build the partnership and make it effective, the educational and reconciliation benefits are tangible: for the children and young people, the school partnership community, and rippling out beyond.



Purpose and Vision

At the heart of all schools-based work will be the experiences, opportunities and benefits for children and young people. Whether engagement with parents and families is solely about this or whether it also has other purposes and benefits may vary from partnership to partnership. However, it can also be argued that attending appropriately to these other purposes will ultimately also be of wider and long-lasting benefit to the children and young people themselves, not least because parents who are engaged in a parent programme tend to have a stronger relationship with school staff and a stronger sense of commitment to the school and its partnership.



The purpose of engagement with parents and families could also involve, for example:

- Shared personal development opportunities for adults (parents, other family members, school staff teams, governors and others);
- Strengthened community connections, partnerships and community development;
- Wider reconciliation objectives for adults, families, local communities and wider society.

Purpose and vision may begin with particular leaders, for example, the principals within the school partnership, but need to be developed together by all members of the school communities, with a recognition that it will change and continue to develop over time.

Questions for Reflection Together:

- What is our Purpose in working together? What educational, reconciliation and other outcomes do we hope to work towards? Where do parents and families fit within this?
- What are our hopes? If anything were possible, what would we really like to see happen through our partnership work and our engagement with parents?
- How will we communicate our Purpose and Vision to all members of our school communities, and beyond? What are the key messages which it is important for us to get across?

Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- Consider who needs to be involved in the conversation about Vision and Purpose. Check with others who may name stakeholders you haven't thought of.
- What will be the most effective ways of holding these conversations and consultation? You may need to use several different methods and approaches. This may need to involve conversations in the individual schools as well as, crucially, across the partnership.
- Build in space and time for initial and follow up conversations.
- School communities change over time as families and staff members move on and new families and staff members arrive. Other factors will also change over time. Build in space/time for reviewing Purpose and Vision, and to ensure shared understanding and commitment.

REFLECTIONS

Place and Community/Geographical Context



A school partnership's vision, purpose, plan and programme need to relate to its particular context(s), in order to have meaning, relevance and effectiveness – and to be something with which parents and others will want to become involved.

Taking time and making focused efforts to get to know families, to connect with other bodies, organisations and groups working in the area(s), and to build understanding of community context(s) is crucial in shaping a way of working and a programme which is relevant and responsive to individual and local needs and interests. This is also important for signposting to services and opportunities, to avoid duplication and to strengthen impact at wider community level.

In all community and geographical contexts, school partnerships will also need to consider the shared and differing experiences of Covid-19 and the needs of children, young people and families emerging from that.

Questions for Reflection Together:

- What are the shared and different factors which shape our local community/communities?
- In relation to reconciliation outcomes: what have been and are the experiences of sectarian division and conflict within our community/communities and wider society, which have shaped people's experiences, attitudes and ways of being?
- Who else could we be working with to build relevance, effectiveness and positive impact – other local schools; community and youth groups; statutory and voluntary agencies; freelance artists, programme facilitators and others?
- What have been the impacts of Covid-19 on individuals, families and the wider communities around the schools, and what might be some appropriate, shared responses?

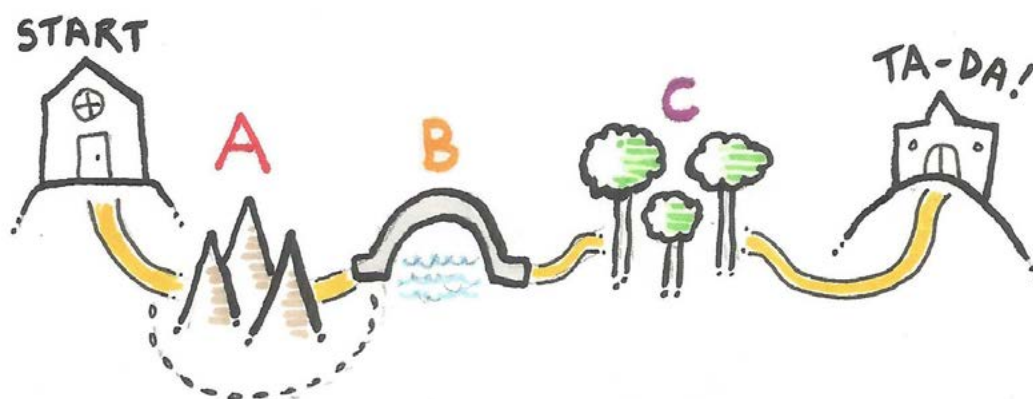
Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- Create events and informal opportunities to listen and get to know families.
- Familiarise yourselves with the community context, as well as how it may be changing over time – primarily through listening and conversation, and perhaps also through using resources such as the NISRA statistics mentioned in the Edenderry/Holy Cross Nursery partnership case study above.
- Develop a resource bank of local services and opportunities, for both referral and co-working purposes. A starting point could be an audit of who the school is already in contact and working with, and identifying any gaps and potential helpful additions.

REFLECTIONS

Working as Partner Schools

Your school partnership may be long-standing, with inherent commitment to relationship across communities and to intertwined educational and reconciliation outcomes which pre-date the Shared Education policy model; or it may be a fairly new partnership developing within the context of Shared Education; or anywhere else along a continuum of possibilities.



Whatever the roots and starting points of a school partnership, it is important to think about what you can offer and achieve together that you could not offer and achieve separately. While the reconciliation focus within Shared Education partnerships needs to have a central and underpinning place, it can be helpful to think widely about what the shared offerings and achievements might be, both for children and young people, and in terms of how you see your engagement with families and local communities.



Benefits of partnership can be significant, for example:

- mutual support;
- shared learning, creativity and achievements;
- new friendships;
- pooling and maximising resources;
- access to funding which would not be available to an individual school;
- a stronger shared voice within local community and more widely.



At the same time, effective partnerships require a high level of commitment and can involve 'hard work' at times. It will be helpful to think about things which will sustain and regenerate the partnership for 'the long haul', including building in space for rest and reflection.

Questions for Reflection Together:

- How do we build trust, shared values and inclusive friendship among ourselves?
- Are parents already part of our partnership? In what ways are they contributing and leading? If not, what are the barriers to this and how might we work to overcome those?
- What expectations do we have of each other?
- What do we feel able to offer and bring to the partnership?
- Are we being as honest and as clear as we can be about expectations and what we can offer? Would it be helpful to write some of this down? When might it be helpful to re-visit this?
- What benefits are we seeing and experiencing because of our partnership working? What are we able to offer and achieve together, particularly in relation to education and reconciliation outcomes, that we could not achieve separately?

Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- Build in time throughout the school year for both relationship building AND practical planning. Protect the informal, relational spaces around formal meetings and programmes – view them as core to the work.
- Without overburdening the partnership with paperwork, work together to develop some structures and plans which will help to keep expectations, roles and responsibilities clear.
- Where it is helpful, build in training/support for individuals or groups within the partnership, in relation to their particular role/responsibilities, or more widely around what it means to be 'good partners'.
- Build 'Community Connections': Who else/what other organisations and groups can be appropriately involved, bringing their particular skills, resources, etc., for 'one off', occasional or longer term input and support?

Leadership

The starting point here is that everyone can offer leadership and has leadership potential. This requires a level of trust in other people's capacity for leadership, and at the same time takes away the pressure of one person, or one person in each school, feeling that they have to 'do everything.'



There are particular aspects of leadership by Principals and Senior Leadership Teams which are important:

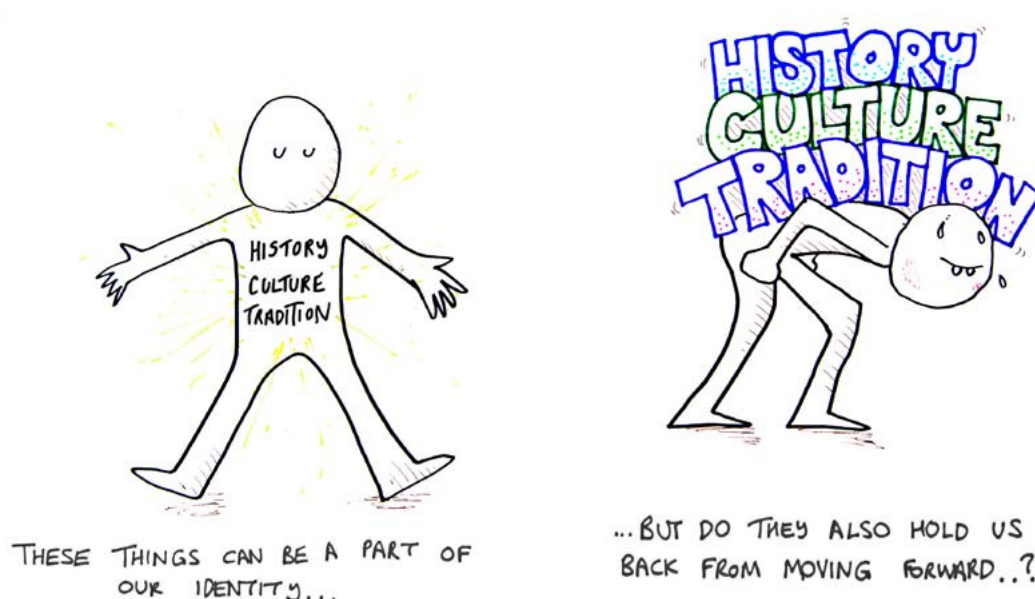
- Igniting, committing to and encouraging the vision and commitment to the partnership and its purposes;
- Modelling partnership and friendship across the schools and with others;
- Facilitating the leadership of others (school staff teams, the Parent Workers, parents and other partners) in shaping and contributing to the development of partnership and programme;
- Leading together with honesty and courage in engaging with the more challenging aspects of identity, diversity and conflict within the programme, and in related decision making for partnership and programme development within their specific community context.
- Openness to honest conversation, review and reflection on the partnership and programme to date, taking on board different perspectives and new possibilities.

School staff teams, not only teachers, are 'learning leaders' who work collaboratively 'with all partners in the interests of children and young people,'⁷ not just those within their own school, and also with and for parents and families.

7. Department of Education (2016), *Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning*, p.10.

Parents also demonstrate leadership through contributing ideas for the shaping of programme content; becoming advocates of the partnership, programme and outcomes; encouraging and supporting other parents to join in; taking a lead in continuing friendships across the school partnership beyond their child(ren)'s direct involvement; extending that commitment into other community and work settings.

Children and young people are leaders, not least in their positive relationships with those from community or other backgrounds perceived as different to their own, and their ease with talking and listening around themes of identity, diversity and conflict. This has particular implications for how they carry this through school transitions and beyond, and how they are supported (in school and at home, through school-parent partnership) to continue to develop that kind of leadership in each new school context.



Questions for Reflection Together:

- In our partnership and context, what are the potential benefits and possibilities of a facilitative leadership approach which invites each person's contribution and recognises each person's potential for leadership?
- What examples of leadership do we notice (by children/young people, parents, school staff, community partners, school governors, principals)?
- How might we be able to encourage and build further opportunities for leadership for all members of our school community? What support might individuals and groups need? What support and encouragement/positive challenge do I need?

Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- Think about creating a 'Partnership Committee' across the schools, drawing on parents, governors and support staff as well as teachers. This will already begin to spread leadership as well as understanding/commitment, and the practical sharing of tasks and responsibilities.
- There could also be a specific Parents' Partnership Group which might develop some level of autonomy and/or could feed into the Partnership Committee.
- Think about whether a similar group of pupils could be formed across the schools, to contribute programme and communication ideas, feedback and evaluation, etc.

REFLECTIONS

Participation

The first step into this kind of leadership by parents and others is engagement with the schools and participation in some form of parent programme, both with their child(ren) and as a group of adults. What this programme might be and how it might develop is discussed in more detail in the section below.

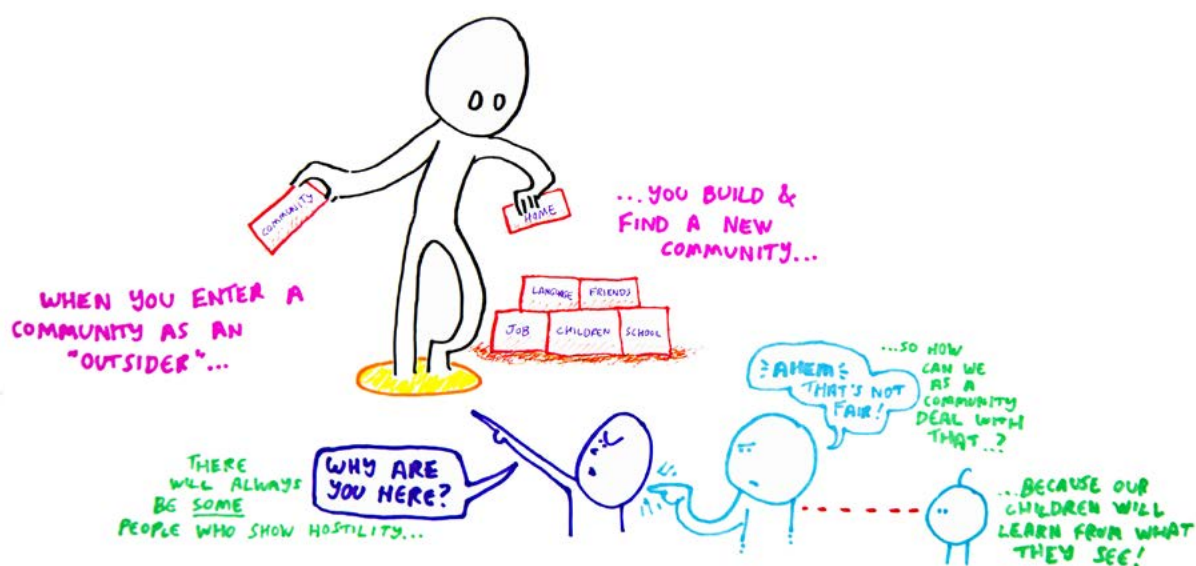
Participation may involve parents who are already connected into a school through, for example, a Parents' Group or Parent Teacher/Staff Association. These existing groups might be a strong starting point for building connections between parents from the partnership schools. However, if there is not an equivalent group in each school or if an existing group is perceived as only being for certain parents (e.g. those who are interested in fundraising, those who are in an existing friendship group), it may be more helpful to start afresh, focusing specifically on the educational and reconciliation intentions of the school partnership, to maximise participation across the whole parent body of the partner schools.

It is important for parents to understand the benefits of their participation, particularly for their child(ren) but also for themselves, their families and possibly even for their community.

Participation is likely to be dependent on:

- an understanding that there are benefits;
- a sense that it will meet their needs and interests;
- that it is relevant and worth being part of;
- that they will enjoy it.

This needs to be communicated clearly by the schools.



Some parents will also experience barriers to participation. These might include:

- Working parents and parents with other children at home being unable to join in with daytime activities;
- Lack of confidence to take the first step;
- Linked to this, difficult personal experiences of school as a pupil, leading to a reluctance to get involved;
- Fear of the 'other' and potential repercussions of joining in with 'cross-community' activities;
- The perception that the group of parents is not inclusive;
- A perception that the school staff teams don't really want their involvement, that the invitation is tokenistic or that parents are not really and fully welcome as genuine partners in their children's learning.

Beginnings are crucially important: much consideration and effort is needed to ensure that there is a clear message that the welcome and opportunity is for everyone.

Questions for Reflection Together:

- What does/could participation by parents involve in our school partnership context, particularly in relation to educational and reconciliation outcomes? Where might our existing parent group(s) fit in (or not)?
- What are our hopes and concerns in relation to this?
- For school leaders and staff teams: do we *want* parents to be involved? At what level – will this be a partnership, and a learning together, with parents?
- For school leaders and staff teams: What do we feel ready to try and to offer now, and what openness do we feel to allowing that to develop further?
- With parents: What are some of the things that mean we want to be involved, and what are some of the things that prevent or discourage our involvement? Who's not here, and why might that be?

Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- Consider the factors which will contribute to clear messages and experiences of inclusive welcome, and how to implement those in practice.
- Be invitational – create opportunities where parents can enjoy being in the schools, both with their children and as a group of adults; send attractive invitations for these events and encourage participation through individual, welcoming conversations.
- Listening to and working with parents, identify and explore ways of overcoming barriers to participation – talk with parents who aren't joining in. What variety of opportunities for participation can be offered to maximise participation? What practical support and specific messages/evidence of welcome and reassurance might some parents need to overcome hesitations and fears around participation?

- Thinking also about programme: develop a framework for participation together with parents. Think about how participation can begin, how it could develop and about endings/transitions to different stages and different schools. Can/is it beneficial for parental participation continue after their child has moved on to another school?
- Parents who have been involved in a parent programme in previous years can be great advocates and encourages of other parents, especially those who are hesitant or anxious about participation. Explore with them how they might use their experience and skills as advocates and as mentors for others.
- Build 'Community Connections': where is there scope to broaden participation outwards to other informal educational and reconciliation opportunities and outcomes?

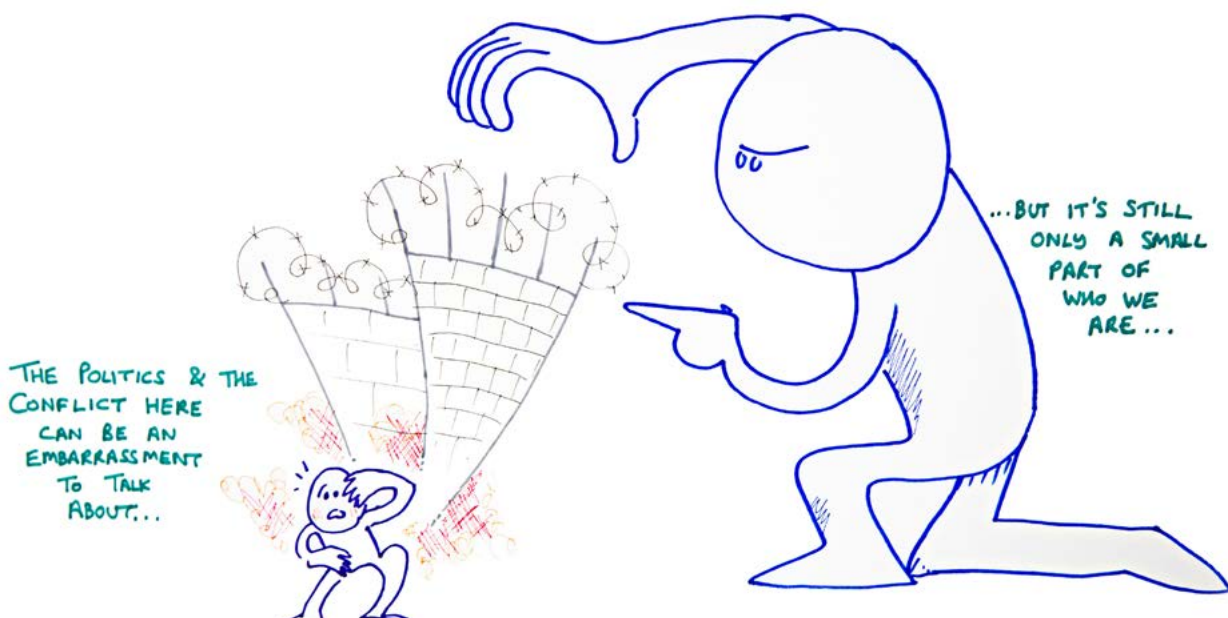
REFLECTIONS

Programme

Programme work with parents tend to be most effective when there is consultation with parents and when parents are involved in its creation, development and evaluation. Therefore, the actual content will vary between school partnerships, shaped also by what the school partnership feels is currently possible, by factors relating to community/geographical context and by school phase/Key Stage.

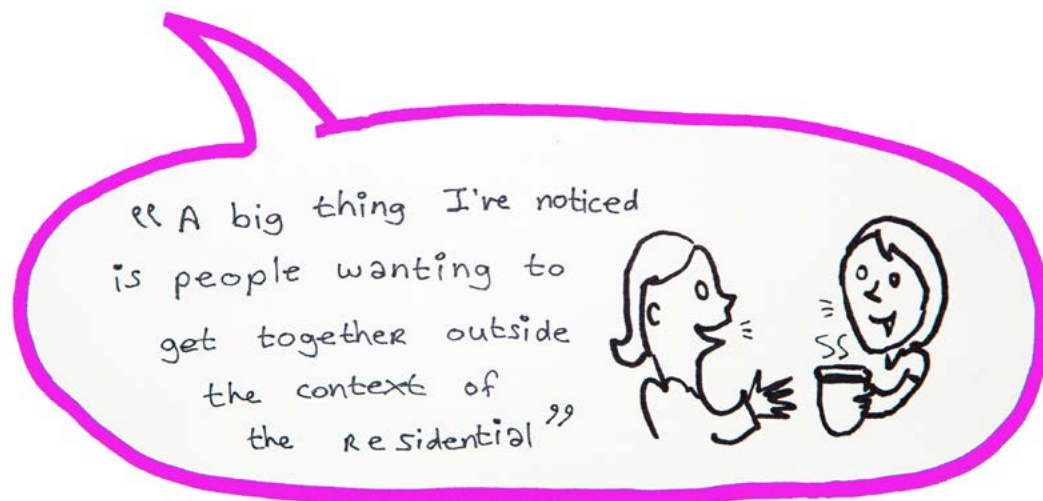
Some general programme possibilities which it may be helpful to consider are:

- Joint parent and child activities and programmes, although these will look very different from Nursery through to post-16;
- Social opportunities for parents to meet and develop friendships across the school partnership;
- Linked to this, 'drop-in' space within the school(s) to allow informal space/time to chat, have a cup of coffee/tea together and build relationships within their own school and across the partnership – where schools are geographically close enough together for it to be practical, in one school one day, in another school another day;
- Opportunities for 'talking while doing': creating opportunities for natural conversations and relationship building while walking, gardening, engaging in other practical and creative activities, etc.
- Personal development and learning programmes for parents, including opportunities to gain accreditation/qualifications;
- Opportunities for parents, possibly with other adults in the school communities (staff, governors, etc.) to have honest conversation and to learn from and with each other in relation to identity, community, conflict, etc.;
- Family 'fun' and learning activities and residentials;
- Partnership programmes (co-)led/offered by other community groups, statutory and voluntary agencies, etc.



Programme activities have the potential to deliver benefits on a range of levels. For example, driving theory classes for parents, delivered by PSNI officers working in partnership with Holy Cross and Edenderry Nursery Schools were recognised as having multiple positive outcomes, including:

- Personal development, achievement and confidence outcomes in relation to completing and passing the course;
- Increased freedoms, access and opportunities for individuals and their families due to acquiring driving skills, including in relation to employability;
- Benefits in relation to community and wider public safety through supporting people's knowledge, understanding and skills for driving;
- Opportunities in the spaces around the classes for conversations about other matters with which PSNI officers might be able to help or provide information;
- Opportunities for people to actually meet a PSNI officer when they may not have before, and the potential for more positive relationships.



Questions for Reflection Together:

- Explore together: What would we really like to see happening? What could the school offer that we (parents) would really like to get involved with? What might be a good welcome activity/event to try?
- Who needs to be at the design, implementation and evaluation table?

Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- Take a facilitative leadership and ‘co-creation’ approach to programme development. Explore together with potential participants: with regard to programme and activities, what will be meaningful, relevant and beneficial for children/young people, for joint staff teams, for parents and others?
- Try one or two activities with parents. Take feedback from parents and others, review together and build next steps from here.
- Consider the potential multiple layers of outcome and benefit; notice and record these as they are experienced. What are the outcomes and benefits for individuals, for teams, for each school and the school partnership, for the local community/communities, etc.?
- Ensure the place of ‘reconciliation outcomes’ within the overall programme, and explore whether support is needed around building the skills and confidence to engage in and/or deliver the more challenging or potentially controversial aspects of this.
- Think about time, pacing and progression planning: what will be possible and prioritised in the ‘busy-ness’ of the school year?
- Think about beginnings and endings, including what will be needed at ‘transition points’: at the end of a school year and, particularly, when a child/class group and, therefore, their parent(s) also, is moving on from one school to a variety of new schools.
- Build ‘Community Connections’: what programme opportunities could be offered by drawing on the skills and resources of other individuals, groups and statutory/voluntary agencies?
- Think widely in terms of the family and community ‘reach’/benefits of the parent programme: what funding and resource possibilities might this enable access to, beyond the formal education sector?

REFLECTIONS

Pupil and Parent Pathways/Cross-Phase School Partnerships

Shared Education envisages a Pupil Pathway which enables education outcomes that contribute to reconciliation across all Key Stages. Where work with parents becomes an integral part of a school partnerships' work, there is the possibility of creating and implementing a connected Parent Pathway.

Both Pathways will be dependent on building good relationships with schools where pupils attending partnership schools come from and move on to.

There needs to be an understanding of how parental involvement may change as their child progresses through school. For example, as children and young people become more independent, there can be practical consequences, such as parents being less likely to be present at the school gate or connecting with teachers at the start/end of the day, and some parents choosing to return to (full-time) work or other commitments when they no longer have young children at home.

This both highlights the importance of seizing the particular opportunities which are offered at the Nursery phase for engaging with parents, and of thinking creatively about what meaningful engagement with parents might look like at different Key Stages and Post-16: what will be the 'levers', needs and interests that will encourage parental involvement, and what benefits for their children and themselves will they perceive?

Questions for Reflection Together:

- Explore together: what could a 'Parent Pathway' look like in our particular partnership now and through wider school connections over the longer term? What would an 'ideal' Pupil and Parent Pathway look like?
- Think beyond: Just now we are exploring the beginning of a programme with parents – where would we like that to be in 2/5/10 years' time, within our school partnership, and for pupils and parents over the journey through schools?

Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- Looking beyond the school partnership, compile a list of the schools which pupils come from and/or move on to. Think about where you already have good working relationships and where you might need to do further relationship work. What Pupil/Parent Pathway conversations could you begin, or develop further where they are already happening?
- Think together about what will progression in programme content look like over one year (Nursery), seven years (Primary), five/seven years (Post-Primary) – and as a full Pupil/Parent Pathway throughout a child's experience of formal education? Begin to develop a 'flexible framework' for this, in consultation with relevant stakeholders.
- Consult with children, young people and parents: what do they need, what would they like and what is possible in different phase (nursery, primary, post-primary) contexts?
- Look out for existing opportunities and connections which could be developed one step further. What might be the next step again from that?

REFLECTIONS

A large, empty rectangular box with a blue border, intended for a student's reflections. It occupies the upper half of the page.

Parent Worker

At different times over the life of their partnership, Edenderry and Holy Cross Nursery Schools have had the benefit of a Parent Worker, either in each school or working across the partnership.

In other school contexts, the job title and details of the role might vary (e.g. Community Engagement Worker, Family Hub Co-ordinator, etc.), but the Holy Cross/Edenderry experience is that, with the 'right' person in this role, parental participation, programme development and benefits of all kinds are significantly enhanced. Having someone in this role for a settled period (i.e not dependent on uncertain short-term funding) also has significant potential to extend the remit and positive impact of the work.

However, not every school partnership will be able to employ a Parent Worker, so a commitment to meaningful engagement with parents cannot be dependent on this one role/person. Schools are very busy places with competing priorities, so there will be challenges in the development of this work, pointing back to the importance of understanding and committing to the benefits of partnership between schools and with parents in the first place.



Kahlil Gibran (poet)

Questions for Reflection Together:

- Explore together: What might be the benefits of a Parent Worker or similar for our school partnership? Do we actually need someone in this role? If it would be helpful, in what ways?
- What would the ideal 'Parent Worker' for our partnership look like? How would they support us to be even more effective in reaching meaningful educational and reconciliation benefits within the schools and into local community/communities?

Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- If a Parent Worker or similar is a possibility, work from the 'Ideal Parent Worker' discussion above to develop a Job Description and Person Specification.
- Where possible, aim for a post secured for at least 3 years to enable relationship building, programme development and stability.
- Think about possible funding sources. Ask for advice/help from community partners who may be aware of potential funders outside formal education networks.
- If a Parent Worker is not a possibility, explore both realistically and creatively what other resources and contributions can be drawn on within the school partnership and more widely: as well as school principals, Shared Education Co-ordinators and the wider staff team, who else might be able to contribute – parents, governors, pupil/student council or Shared Education committee, community partners, etc.?

REFLECTIONS

Feedback Loops: Ongoing Development and Regeneration

One of the key learnings from the Edenderry/Holy Cross partnership has been the value of taking time to reflect, evaluate and think creatively about ways forward, both immediate 'next steps' and bigger picture thinking.

It would, therefore, seem worthwhile to build this reflection space into the rhythm of partnership work: for the inherent value of designating a 'rest time' within the process, for the thinking and creativity which emerges, and for the strengthened sense of ownership which it builds.

For the partnership and work to 'stay alive' and to continue to grow over the longer term, it needs to be more than 'doing what we have always done', rather having space to notice and respond to changing context, needs and interests of everyone who forms part of the school partnership and wider communities.

The noticing and celebration of learning, achievements and partnership benefits also forms an important part of the rhythm of the work.

Sharing these positive stories can encourage others in their partnership work, can extend the influence of positive outcomes more widely into local communities and, by demonstrating what is possible, can help shape future policy and practice.



Questions for Reflection Together:

- What have we learned; what have we achieved; in what ways are our relationships being strengthened and deepened?
- What are the challenges; what could we do differently; what aspects of our relationships/partnerships (between schools, between schools and parents) do we need to work on or get support for?
- Where do we want to go/what do we want to do together next?

Practical Tasks and Considerations:

- Take time to reflect, evaluate and think creatively about ways forward, both immediate 'next steps' and bigger picture thinking, building periods of rest within the busy-ness of doing.
- Explore the possibility of using a model such as the International Futures' Forum's 'Three Horizons' framework as a tool for partnership and programme development, moving from sustainability to regenerative approaches.⁸
- Take time to celebrate learning, achievements and partnership benefits. Plan for this – and think about who can be invited to the 'party'.
- Notice, record and celebrate the personal and shared stories of friendships, learning, effective partnerships, reconciliation and community impacts. Explore ways of sharing these beyond the immediate school partnership, thinking about the positive impacts these stories could have.

REFLECTIONS



8. <https://www.iffpraxis.com/three-horizons> [Accessed 23/03/2021].

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Acknowledgements

This resource benefited from collaborative input from school partners, and CRIS staff and Associates. Particular insights were drawn from conversations with staff linked to Holy Cross and Edenderry Nursery Schools who have worked with CRIS over the last 20 years to involve parents in their Buddy Up! Programmes. Consultation to learn from practice was led by both Mary Potter and Mary McAnulty from January -March 2021. This resource has been deeply informed by this consultation and particular thanks are extended to Mary McAnulty for her support, facilitation and insights on parental involvement gained during this research process.

The illustrations throughout this resource guide are the work of the late and great Patrick Sanders. Patrick sat in on the parents' workshops on CRIS's Family Residential Programmes and captured the words, feelings, concerns and hopes participants shared as they worked together across three days and in a further follow up evaluation sessions. These words were brought to life through the captivating art work as Patrick listened intently to all that was being shared. We are delighted that some of Patrick's work continues to bring our resources to life in a unique way, similar to the unique contribution Patrick made to peacebuilding and the lives of children across Northern Ireland.

CRIS wishes to extend its thanks to everyone who contributed their time and thoughtful reflections during the review and development process:

- The Holy Cross and Edenderry Nursery School parents, staff teams, Parent Workers and principals, both past and current, and their community partners
- Kevin McAreevey, Principal of Holy Cross Boys' Primary School and Wesley Wright, Principal of Glenwood Primary School
- Frances Donnelly, Education Authority School Improvement Professional: Shared Education and Sectoral Support
- Professor Colin Knox, Emeritus Professor of Comparative Public Policy, Ulster University
- David Price, Moving Forward Together (Antrim & Randalstown Schools) Co-ordinator
- The CRIS staff team and associates: Lisa, Mary, Gerard, Neídín, Gareth and Emily.
- Community Relations in Schools (CRIS) are grateful to the funders whose financial support has made this resource possible :
- While this resource was made possible with support provided by The Executive Office's Central Good Relations funds we are indebted also to many other funders whose support has enabled CRIS programme and practice learning. For example, support has been offered by the International Fund for Ireland, The Community Relations Council, Antrim and Newtownabbey Borough Council, The Irish Government's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade's Reconciliation Funds who each have, over various years, been CRIS's valued funding partners.



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