



## Collaborative evolution: The context of sharing and collaboration in contested space

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## **Collaborative evolution:**

**The context of sharing and collaboration in  
contested space**

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## **Executive Summary**

This report was commissioned by the Sharing Education Programme (SEP) at the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast in order to understand more about the context of a cross-sector collaborative partnership comprising of a number of schools operating in the Foyle area. This partnership, referred to in this report as the Contested Space Education Partnership has successfully obtained monies from the Interface/Contested Space Programme 2011-2014 to run a cross-sector shared education project. This is funded by the Office of the First and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) and Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). The partnership is made up of three post-primary schools and five primary schools, many of whom were previously involved in the first cohort of the Sharing Education Programme. The dynamics of this partnership are explained in more detail in Section 2. The schools in partnership identified a range of issues facing young people in the Foyle area and constructed the terms of their partnership around addressing need.

This report is based on a small scale, qualitative study, focusing on the perspectives of educational managers and teachers from the three post-primary schools. In the first instance, the report captures aspects of the planning process leading up to the submission of a funding application to the Interface/Contested Space Programme. Secondly, participants were interviewed in June 2011 shortly after submission of the application and asked to reflect on their experience of SEP1 and outline both the logistics and the benefits of sharing and cross sector-collaboration. Participants were then asked to talk about what it is like to collaborate with one another in the context of their schools existing within contested space.

### ***Lessons learned from SEP1***

In terms of the logistics of sharing, participants highlighted that transport between schools, timetabling and finding space to accommodate two class groups at the same time were the most common. In the shared classroom, participants reported that they were more likely to respond to issues around gender and pupil ability, rather than as a consequence of pupils being from different religious and cultural backgrounds. Crucially, participants were keen to point out that over the period of the

first SEP cohort, most of the logistics, in particular, timetabling and transport had been resolved or systems put in place to compensate for challenge.

Participants identified that the experience of sharing during SEP 1 was beneficial for pupils, teachers, schools and their communities. Participants cited numerous educational and social benefits for pupils including: broader curricular choices, shared school trips, building relationships, growing confidence and a reduced sense of anxiety about mixing and learning with other pupils from different cultural and religious backgrounds. Teachers and schools benefitted in terms of sharing professionalism, sharing resources and sharing professional practice. One of the school managers argued that collaboration encouraged 'systemic school improvement.' Participants talked about whole departments collaborating, schools helping one another (in one case, a school helped another prepare for inspection) and teachers and managers developing professional and personal relationships with one another.

### ***Sharing mitigates the challenges of living in contested space***

Section four examines the context of schools collaborating in contested space. Participants frequently talked about this context in terms of: the legacies of the conflict and the anxiety and reluctance of pupils and parents to move through contested space; they also talked about how the geography of the city can be divisive and how areas of the city remain demarcated along cultural and religious lines. However, participants argued that the experience of sharing and cross-sector collaboration mitigates the impact and challenges of living in contested space by providing: more opportunity for reciprocal movement across contested space; pupils develop and sustain relationships with one another because of shared classes and learn more about each other's cultural and religious differences. Participants argued that cross-sector collaboration between schools in the City acted as a very visible and potent symbol in the community and prevented schools and communities in a divided context from being isolated from one another.

### ***Schools in collaboration can address need in the community***

A key element of the Interface/Contested Space Programme requires projects to offer services that benefit communities where there is evidence of deprivation and

need. Core to the Partnership's proposal for funds was a strategy to address pupil need in the community. Participants in the study argued that as a result of collaboration during SEP1, schools had formed strong institutional relationships where teaching staff and management could openly discuss the types of issues and challenges their schools faced. Each of the post primaries concurred that their pupils were faced with distinctly similar challenges namely: the impact of substance misuse, in particular smoking, alcohol and drugs; anti-social behaviour in the community; the rise and prevalence of social media and appropriate and safe internet usage; sex, sexuality and sexual resilience and the impact of living in contested space and maintaining good community relations. Section five examines participant's contentions that schools must collaborate in order to effectively address need in the community, rather than taking an insular approach. Some argued that the legacy of the conflict had the potential to mask what one school manager referred to as the 'new troubles.' Collaboration was a way in which schools could adopt a common and consistent approach across the community. To address need, participants argued that aspects of the primary and post-primary curriculum were ideal, in particular: Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at Key Stage 2 and Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 3. But more than this, participants proposed to align those school policies that corresponded with the proposed needs and to build stronger relationships with the community and voluntary sector.

### ***An evolving and robust model of collaboration***

Section Six draws the findings of this report together. All participants talked positively about their experiences of collaboration during SEP1. Schools professed a genuine willingness to sustain institutional, professional and personal relationships with one another. While the Contested Space Partnership is a new entity, it is essentially an adaption or evolution of an SEP model. Schools therefore have entered into partnership with a number of years of collaborative experience and a confidence that they can extend the reach of partnership so much so that the model is geared towards addressing need in the community and improving the lives of children and young people. This section attempts to locate and define the Contested Space Partnership within the numerous types of collaborative arrangements identified in the literature. The section concludes that the partnership has the potential to be a robust model of collaboration because it demonstrates strategic vision, a clear

organisational identity, penetrates well below the management structure in each of the schools; it is both innovative and seeks transformation and has essentially or is in the process of normalising collaboration in each of the schools, (Woods et al 2006).

The report is designed to understand the context of cross-sector collaboration in contested space. It is divided into two broad sections. The first (Sections 3 and 4) is based on post-primary perspectives reflecting experiences from the first cohort of SEP; whereas Sections 5 and 6 reflect the perspectives and aspirations of the newly formed Contested Space Partnership. The distinctions between these two models are somewhat blurred. In a sense the Contested Space Partnership has evolved from the institutional relationships that developed in SEP1. All schools with the exception of one primary school are the same schools that were involved in the last year of SEP and for the most part include the same teachers and managers. The report reflects a period of overlap or transition between both models. There are distinctions between both models in terms of: how the project is funded; no one school is a lead partner; the relationship between the post primaries has changed and most significantly, the Contested Space model is designed around addressing need in the community. In some senses the fact that the partnership has developed a clear mission in terms of addressing need, is largely due to the successful experience of collaboration in SEP1. Schools in effect have already built sustainable relationships with one another and are already primed for working together, thus allowing schools more time to focus on how they can extend the potential of collaboration rather than concentrate as much on the dynamics of working across sectors.

## Introduction

Collaboration and partnership working between schools in Northern Ireland takes place amid the context of an education system that is predicated on an historical commitment to denominationalism, which in itself is reinforced by political division. As a result and for the most part, Protestant and Catholic children are not educated together. A caveat to this is a small integrated school sector which emerged in 1981; over three decades later, this sector makes up about 7 % of all schools (DENI, 2007). The remainder of the system remains broadly divided into two main sectors where young people are educated alongside others of the same religious and cultural background. The Department for Education Northern Ireland (2007) illustrate this broad division by highlighting that 92% of Protestant children attend a Protestant controlled or state school; while 91% of Catholic children attend a maintained or Catholic school. A number of commentators (Gallagher, 2004 & 2005; Hayes and McAllister, 2009) have argued that education has now taken a prominent position as a core component in the reconstruction of post-conflict and post-genocide societies as well as underpinning economic stability and reconciliation. Broadly there have been three strands of initiatives which have been designed to address the impact of separate education these include: (i) contact programmes, (including: Education for Mutual Understanding [EMU], Cultural Heritage and the Cross Contact Scheme) (ii) curricular initiatives, (including the introduction of local and global citizenship and common history and religious curriculum) and as previously mentioned (iii) attempts to create an entirely new sector based on religiously integrated schools. Research, however has demonstrated that these initiatives have had limited impact, (Gallagher, 2004; Arlow, 2004; Smith & Robinson, 1996).

More recently, within the last decade, a number of educational legislative changes, and other initiatives have emerged which encourage schools to work collaboratively. The Education [NI Order] 2006 enables schools to work more closely in order to meet the requirements of the Entitlement Framework – which ensures pupils in post primary schools have access to 24 subjects at Key Stage 4 and 27 subjects at post-16. Schools are now able to secure provision for students at other institutions. A consequence of this is schools are encouraged to form Area Learning Communities to ensure provision.



A major initiative which encourages schools to work together is the Sharing Education Programme [SEP], this initiative promotes sharing and collaboration between schools, where pupils from different schools can learn together and where schools and teachers can share resources, expertise with the aim of developing sustainable institutional relationships. A core element of SEP involves creating cross-sector collaborative networks of schools which offer shared learning experiences for pupils in core curricular areas. In doing so SEP is committed to enhancing pupils' educational opportunities, but also demonstrating how resources between schools can be shared and used more effectively. There are also opportunities to address denominational and cultural differences which will emerge implicitly from the relationships that pupils and staff develop through shared learning. SEP has been supported by funding of over £7m from the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies and in addition funding for a series of parallel research and advocacy activities.

There have been two phases of the programme, from 2007 to 2010 [SEP1] and from 2010 to 2013 [SEP2]. SEP1 involved 12 partnerships comprising 65 primary and post-primary schools. By the third year of SEP1 almost 3,500 pupils were involved in a little under 3,000 routine shared classes. SEP2 involves 12 partnerships made up of 72 primary and post-primary schools. After one year of SEP2, over 5,000 pupils have engaged in over 3,000 shared classes.

This study focuses on a collaborative cross-sector partnership that has evolved out of a number of SEP models. Key to this new partnership is the way in which the schools recognise the benefits and potential of collaboration and sharing. Schools have adapted this model of collaboration to become significant agents of change in their community. The schools in this study recognised that in partnership they can provide enhanced curricular provision, share space, teachers and resources, but as a partnership they can also help develop their community, address need and ultimately improve the lives of young people.

## Section One: Methodology

The SEP Implementation team at the School of Education, Queen's University Belfast commissioned a small scale qualitative study in order to understand more about the context of school collaboration in contested space. The commissioners were also keen to search for evidence of collaborative sustainability and understand more about the logistics of cross-sector sharing. All of the schools involved in the study were previously part of the first cohort of the Sharing Education Programme. Data in the form of field notes and interview transcriptions were collected. This study is intended to inform SEP Management, the funders, Atlantic Philanthropies and the International Fund for Ireland and also contribute to the literature on school collaboration.

There were two data collection phases in this study. In the first phase, the researcher was invited to observe and record the Contested Space Partnership's planning meetings prior to the bid submission to the OFMDFM/AP Interface/Contested Space Programme. These meetings occurred between April and June 2011 and involved for the most part educational managers and teaching staff from three post primary schools and to some extent two educational managers from primary schools and a representative from a PSNI community safety team based in the city where the study took place.

In the second phase, senior educational managers and teaching staff responsible for programme delivery in the classroom were contacted by email and telephone in May 2011. Participants were briefed as to the purposes of the research and consents sought. In all cases managers and teachers were present in interviews together. Participants responded promptly and qualitative semi-structured interviews were carried out prior to end to the academic year 2011. Each interview lasted approximately one hour. The semi structured interview focused on the following themes:

1. The history and dynamics of collaborative activity and shared education with partner schools
  - How collaboration came about
  - Pupil contact and classroom context
  - Staff context
  - Whole school context
  - Context of contested space
2. Logistical challenges of collaboration and shared education
  - Challenges of collaborating in contested space
3. Motivations to collaborate with your partner school(s)
4. Evidence of sustained collaboration and shared education
  - sustained pupil to pupil initiatives
  - remaining institutional links
  - continued teacher to teacher contact
  - INSET opportunities throughout the academic year
  - evidence of online/virtual collaboration
  - Contested Space
5. Community relations benefits for pupils and staff
6. Generalised benefits of collaboration and shared education for pupils, school and community
7. Institutional relationships
8. Good practice and transferability across the education system in Northern Ireland

The city in which the schools are situated is referred to in this report. The decision to do this came about after consultation with the SEP Management team. The writer proposed that key aspects of the data could not be referred to in the report without identifying the city. When participants talked about the geography of the city this also easily identified it. Being able to identify the city also meant that key aspects of the funding bid could be interwoven into this report namely: discussions about need, contested space, deprivation indicators and the impact and legacy of the conflict on

the city. To compensate, school names are not used and participants are not referred to by title; terms such as Principal, vice principal or head of department are in main avoided in order to protect participant's anonymity and instead generic terms such as teacher and manager are used.

Interviews were transcribed and coded using Nvivo 8 in June and July 2011. For the most part the themes explored at interview were used as the basis of a broad coding structure. After data analysis, the most significant themes, as well as the core research questions, pertaining to the context of collaboration in contested space, are addressed in the following sections.

### **1.1 Limitations in the study**

The scope of this study is somewhat small scale in that it has focused on one collaborative school partnership. In particular, the findings based on interviews, reflect the perspectives of six participants who in turn represent only the post-primary schools. At the time of data collection, the primary schools had yet to confirm their membership in the partnership and access to the post-primary schools was much easier given their involvement in SEP1. For the most part, the post-primary schools were instrumental in the desire to maintain institutional links and continue collaboration and they invited the primary schools to join the Contested Space Partnership. It was agreed given this context to focus on the post-primary schools. Caution must therefore be applied to the findings here, in terms representativeness. Similarly, statements on programme impact or benefit should be treated carefully. Nonetheless the perspectives of participants are valuable and provide a rich and in depth account of programme implementation. Missing then are perspectives of the other key stake holders involved, particularly the perspectives of pupils.

## **Section Two: The context of collaboration prior to the formation of the contested space partnership**

The following section provides a summary of the extent to which each of the schools involved in this study have experience of collaboration and cross-sector sharing. From the outset each of the schools have been involved in the first cohort of the Sharing Education Programme and have at the very least, three years of experience and insight into cross-sector collaboration. All three schools are also part of the same Area Learning Community and each made some references to having contact via the Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) initiative. School 1 and School 3 were both lead partners in SEP1 and formed separate partnerships with School 2.

### **2.1 Partnership between School 1 and School 2**

School 1 is a maintained post primary. The school caters for approximately 1000 students between the ages of 11-18. School 1 was the lead school in an SEP 1 partnership with School 2, a controlled post-primary, catering for nearly 1000 students between the ages of 11-18. Also involved in this partnership were four primary schools. Collaborative activity in terms of SEP1 between both post primary schools has involved shared lessons around Learning for Life and Work and Citizenship at Key Stage 3. Both schools have been engaged in shared learning for four years as they were in receipt of an extra years SEP1 funding. Each school shared pupils and took turns to visit each other's school weekly and also ran a number of shared parent evenings and sought to establish relationships between both school's Parent teacher Associations (PTA). Collaboration and sharing between the post primaries and primary schools involved School 1 engaging with the primary schools in order to provide science lessons to over 250 pupils at KS2.

Prior to SEP1 both schools collaborated through a summer school whereby year 10s from both schools would meet and share lessons on a week long summer programme focusing on Science, hosted at the University of Ulster. This level of contact stemmed from an EMU initiative. School 1 also held a Saturday School and reported that School 2 pupils attended. An educational manager at School 1 commented that contact via the summer school and Saturday school were 'fabulous' but contact was not sustained and thus the benefits 'dissipated very quickly.' Contact

with School 2 was described by the manager as more like 'dip in and dip out' for pupils. In contrast SEP1 activity was described in much more sustainable terms:

*I would have poo pooped EMU and things like that. I thought it was a lovely experience for people but I wouldn't have seen the long term impact, Whenever they started (SEP) now its gonna be curricular and its gonna be structure [...]*

*Education Manager School 1*

## **2.2 Partnership between School 2 and School 3**

School 3 is another maintained post primary and is located within the same city setting as Schools 1 and 2. It caters for over 900 pupils aged 11-18. School 3 specialises in Performing and Visual Arts. As part of the first cohort of SEP, School 3 formed a partnership with two post primary schools: an integrated college and a controlled secondary college (School 2). There were a number of aspects to this partnership including shared dance, drama and music classes for post-16 pupils. In the first year of SEP1 this involved sharing between School 3 and the integrated school; pupils from the controlled college became much more involved in years 2 and 3. The other aspects of the shared education programme involved students being able to avail of a Diploma in Health and Social Care and pupils and staff from all three schools visiting a WW1 museum in Europe with the aim of looking at the impact of conflict and remembrance through History. Other sharing activity involved post-16 pupils working together in a young leaders programme and a mentoring scheme. After SEP1, the integrated college was no longer involved in the programme but institutional relationships between Schools 2 and 3 continued.

## Section Three: Lessons Learned from the Sharing Education Programme

The following section will outline participant's perspectives on the logistics and challenges schools encountered while engaged in cross-sector collaboration. To balance this, this section will also outline participants' perspectives on the benefits of shared education and collaboration between institutions. Lastly this section will consider if educational managers and teachers thought that sharing was a sustainable enterprise.

### 3. The logistics and challenges of collaboration

The challenges of sharing and cross-sector collaboration identified by participants, remain largely consistent with previous research (Knox, 2010; Donnelly and Gallagher, 2008; Duffy 2011 and see also Hughes et al 2010). The most consistent challenges cited included: schools agreeing a timetable for shared lessons and organising transport and time taken up with travel between schools. Other logistical issues cited by participants included the challenge of finding space to accommodate a number of class groups at the same time and challenges which were less to do with religious and cultural differences and more to do with other differences such as gender and ability.

The teacher representing School 2, which had separate partnerships with both School 1 and School 3, indicated that transport between schools was perhaps the most significant challenge to sharing. The following extract is based on partnership with School 1:

*Once it is fixed in the timetable then it is fine. Once it's there it's in stone and then it's just the transport. It's making sure the bus turns up on time and the buses are booked and School 1 get their chairs booked. We have kept the same day and time for the last three years now and it is just the transport now. The bus having to back early, the School 1 bus goes back early, so you lose maybe 10 minutes of your lesson. If the bus is late you maybe lose 10 -15 minutes of your lesson. It is the physical transport, it would be our biggest problem, just getting them to and from and traffic and things like that.*

Teacher: School 2

Travel and timetabling were the most consistent themes among the schools but each school described ways in which they had resolved these. The manager in School 3

explained that 'timetabling and transport can always be used to as an excuse not to do something'. The above extract demonstrates how both schools agreed and fixed a time slot over the three year period of SEP1 for sharing to take place. Similarly the manager in School 1 explained that timetablers from both School 2 and School 3 would meet regularly to coordinate suitable times for shared lessons.

Both School 1 and School 2, in discussing their partnership, did not identify that pupils' cultural backgrounds presented any challenges in the classroom. However School 3, in discussing its partnership with School 2, did make references to the challenges of school collaboration in contested space. These challenges will be discussed in more detail in Section Four. Rather than focus on pupils' cultural backgrounds, staff from School 1, while discussing their partnership with School 2, suggested that 'social differences' and classroom dynamics such as classroom size or numbers of pupils engaged in sharing, were more likely to pose challenges. In terms of social differences, the teacher and manager referred to differences such as gender, ability and the challenges of managing two class groups in the same space:

*They are finding it more difficult to cope with... and it's not religious differences, it's not political differences, its social differences, somebody who talks out of turn somebody who is always hitting something or flicking something. You can see the girls getting frustrated sometimes... and they find it more difficult. I have found that really interesting they have found it more difficult being with the boys they have found it more challenging.*

Teacher: School 1

Over the three years staff indicated that they had learned to be more mindful of the impact large class sizes had on those students with special needs or those who were perhaps not as confident as others. Staff in School 1 talked about the challenges posed in the early stages of SEP and gave a number of examples pertaining to classroom dynamics whereby pupils from different schools would not sit beside one another or girls were reluctant to sit beside boys. However over time as students became more comfortable shared classroom settings these challenges subsided and pupils integrated well:

*I have had one wee girl come to me, a very shy wee girl. Basically she said I don't want to be here anymore. Her Daddy had written a note. I said to her look we'll give it a chance, we'll give it some time. We had given them a wee treat or some sort and I said to her look*



*you don't want to miss that. The next week I couldn't believe it, two weeks later she actually came to me and asked miss can I please go down and meet [School 2 children] today, can I be the one. We always send two down to escort them up. I thought for her to turn around in a short space for somebody that was nervous [...] She went from finding that very difficult. I phoned her Dad and her Dad said that's ok as long as she is comfortable going back in. I couldn't believe it.*

Teacher School 1

Staff in School 1 highlighted there was not enough time built into the project for students to engage and mix outside of the classroom context. Staff were not critical of shared lessons, but rather highlighted that opportunities for students to get to know more about one another were curbed by factors such as classroom space, the need to spend more time managing two class groups, as well as remaining focused on meeting curricular requirements. Staff in School 1 highlighted that social interaction between students was often limited to only a few minutes at the beginning of each lesson but argued that they were essential for students to get to know each other. Peers in the same school setting could socialise after classes and during breaks whereas visitors had limited time to socialise and usually left as so as the shared lesson was finished. It was argued that if students were to better understand each other's cultural contexts then shared lessons were distinctly valuable but they should be supplemented with other shared opportunities where students could engage in a less formal way:

*It didn't take us long to realise even within a classroom there is still the formality of the classroom and while they are interacting at a certain level but in order for them to interact as young people then it needs to be in a more informal setting. You do need to build that time where they can just be children together, doing something together. For me that was big. I would have said that...but it is different in a structured three year programme and it has been built up over three years.*

Manager: School 1

### **3.1 Responding to challenge**

Schools involved in the Sharing Education Programme were asked to design models of sharing that offer sustainability, allow young people from different cultural backgrounds to be educated together in shared classes and to ensure high quality educational engagements which are grounded in the curriculum. Aside from these

common features, collaborative activity between schools is not prescribed<sup>1</sup>. Key to meeting the challenges that arise from sharing is to build into programme design, room for teachers to innovate and develop models of sharing that best suit the context of their school and their partner schools. In discussing the logistics of sharing and the individual contexts of their schools, participants identified that it was important to have a level of flexibility and room to make mistakes. Schools involved in sharing and cross-sector collaboration are essentially pioneers in this regard. For a staff member in School 3, collaboration was ‘a learning curve in itself.’ It was suggested that schools who are preparing for sharing should adopt an ‘honest approach to collaboration’ and ‘not put gloss on it’:

*We have to be brutally honest throughout the whole SEP experience and with our partners of SEP themselves. So that has been the best way for us to learn, by unpicking it ourselves and going maybe we could have done that differently. [...] I think being allowed to make those mistakes was a valuable part of the experience. [...] The learning curve itself was enough and we were granted that at least. So I have to say that is important that people feel comfortable and trust the process and that is ok to make mistakes as you go along.*

Staff Member: School 3

Participants agreed that another effective means of meeting challenges posed by sharing was to ensure that the teachers involved in shared education are committed. The manager of School 1 aptly describes these challenges and identifies what constitutes as a committed teacher:

*People who see the value of it, people who believe in the value of it and people who are prepared... It's not easy what [teacher name] and [teacher name] do and I mean physically. It would be so easy for them at any stage to see look [manager name] can you get somebody else to do it next year because I am fed up going on a bus to go to School 2 to come all the way back again. Their commitment and belief in it really for me has been the driving force.*

Education Manager: School 1

Teachers in turn identified the importance of having Principals and vice-principals who were supportive, approachable and who understood the logistical challenges involved in cross sector sharing.

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.schoolsworkingtogether.com/documents/sep-booklet.pdf>

*But you do need commitment from the top too [...] If you have good management bringing you forward and you know that you can approach them on a daily basis and you know if you have concerns or worries or fears or even visions, but not that we have visions too often [laughs]. I know if I did wake up some morning with a what if, you know it is ok to knock on [manager's] door and say I was thinking about...what do you think? There is that openness, you need that, you need trust as well.*

Teacher: School 1

By extension, key to successful partnership, required effort fostering and sustaining good relationships between institutions, as well as developing relationships between teachers involved in delivery. The next section will discuss relationships between teachers and institutions in more detail.

### **3.2 Benefits of shared education**

The data collected from interviews with participants reveals, from their perspective, a variety of benefits as a result of cross-sector collaboration. This section will address how pupils, staff and institutions benefit. Participants also talked about the significant community relations benefits to come from shared education, these will be discussed in Section Four.

### **3.3 Pupil Benefits**

Participants identified that sharing and collaboration between schools improved pupils' opportunities to avail of different courses and broadened curricular choice. School 2 and School 3 discussed the fact that in collaboration they were able to offer additional post 16 qualifications. The manager at school 5 also explained that SEP funding has helped them increase the schools capacity to meet the Entitlement Framework by allowing them to add two extra subjects at A Level. Participants argued that the experience of shared learning would increase the likelihood of students feeling much more comfortable about attending other schools to do courses currently not available in their own school. Sharing in effect was preparing pupils for the Entitlement Framework:

*It has been good for young people because I find that they are more likely to move out of our school to follow subjects that they wouldn't have accessed in the past and particularly for the very first time we have children who came from [School 2] to a Catholic school to study engineering which was a first because [School 2] children would go to [School name], which is an integrated school. They might have gone to [FE College] if they could get into [FE College] but they certainly wouldn't have come to a Catholic school and this*

*is the first year that they have done that. In terms of their education they are not allowing themselves to be held back by the school that they opted to go to whenever they were 11 and not allowing anyone else to dictate to them what they can and cannot be. They are taking that course and accessing that choice wherever they may be and I hope that will continue to develop into the future.*

Manager: School 2

The manager in School 3 argued that aside from the many community relations benefits, any opportunities for pupils to visit other schools, to be taught in other schools and meet and learn with other young people was always going to have benefits in terms of broadening young peoples' perspectives and educational opportunities.

Participants argued that SEP funding allowed schools to provide students with a variety of educational and cultural opportunities and crucially allowed pupils from different schools and to spend time together outside of classroom context. The manager in School 1 also explained that a trip to London was part financed by SEP and part financed by both schools raising money together. This in itself, argued the school manager, was a valuable experience for pupils.

All participants talked about the fact that the experience of sharing helped pupils grow in confidence and that visiting and learning in another school was a significant undertaking for young people. The manager in School 2 highlighted that Year 8 pupils were generally apprehensive about visiting their partner school and sharing lessons at the beginning but by the time pupils reached Year 10 they were relaxed and much more comfortable in their partner school. The manager in School1 joked that pupils from the other school were so comfortable in their other school that they were often found talking to other teachers in the staffroom and were happy to walk around the school without being accompanied by their own teacher or fellow pupils.

The manager in School 1 highlighted, that having young people with different uniforms from the other side of the community, walking around their school, was also beneficial for the rest of the students who were not involved in sharing activities. Seeing pupils in different uniforms, regularly, over a sustained period time, helped normalise differences.

### **3.4 How schools and staff benefit from sharing**

Participants talked about how institutions benefit from collaboration. In particular, staff highlighted that schools in collaboration can help each other improve as a whole school and at departmental levels. The manager at School 2 suggested that collaboration provided the conditions for 'systemic school improvement.' The manager in School 3 talked about being actively involved in helping their partner school prepare for and respond to school inspection. Additionally the manager also talked about how both schools' science departments have as a result of school collaboration formed a working relationship, whereby science teachers and heads of department frequently visit each other schools to share knowledge and resources. Both departments are currently discussing achievement in science and considering collaborating to offer new courses to both student bodies. The manager of School 2 indicated that sharing and collaboration between schools had been so beneficial for their school that sharing was now a significant feature of the school's development plan. Participants talked about how collaboration allowed schools to share knowledge, resources and facilities. The manager in School 1 said: 'we share ideas all the time... it makes sense to work together' and the manager from School 3 said: 'if I walked into [School 2] for half an hour I would learn something that I would want to bring back here.'

Other benefits arising from collaboration, cited by participants, were the relationships that developed at senior management and Governor levels:

*Governor relationships have developed through SEP and they are very good and we would have [School 2] Governors at our events, that relationship is very strong and at leadership level as well, between [Principal name] and [Principal name] and our leadership team. The teacher contact, [name] would have made some very good contacts at [School 2] and they would obviously be maintained as well. Those relationships are now very easy to sustain.*

Education Manager: School 3

Participants talked about senior management and Governors frequently attending their partner schools' major events and in some cases travelling together on school trips. The manager of School 3 talked about the extent of the relationship that they

had formed with the Chair of the Board of Governors from School 2, as a result of contact during SEP1:

*The chair of the board of Governors, when he was in difficulty over an issue, came and asked me because simply he had built up a huge relationship with me in the school and because he felt that it was one that was very sensitive for their principal. He said I want to go and talk to another head teacher and so he choose to come over here.*

Manager: School 3

Participants at interview aired concerns about how detrimental it would be on the partnerships between schools if senior managers were to leave their partner schools. This would mean significant effort would have to be put in to recapture the relationships that currently exists between principals and vice principals. Some also worried that new principals or vice principals might not be as receptive to the idea of collaboration. Relationships and trust according to Woods et al. (2006: p7) are fundamentally important for collaboration to be successful:

Collaboration is fundamentally concerned with human relationships. In particular it depends on the degree of trust that exists between the partners at the start of the venture, how trust is developed and maintained and on whether it survives the inevitable turnover of personnel and the challenges that arise. Trust is affected by many factors, including personalities and the contextual factors we have highlighted such as the steepness of any hierarchy of esteem among participating schools and the extent of competitive relations between them.

Teachers described their relationships with each other and with their managers as positive. The teacher in School 1 described their relationship with teacher in School 2 as 'excellent'. Both teachers frequently talked about enjoying working with each other. The teacher in School 2 recognised that a key focus of SEP is about children having the opportunity to mix but emphasised that teachers involved also benefit from similar contact:

*I would have been bereft to have to give up my trip to [teacher name in School 2]. I enjoy that aspect too. I enjoy seeing the children mix, I enjoy talking to girls from a different school. I think also because the lessons work and you can see them interacting and the girls are dead keen to come over here and our children are dead keen to go over there. You think that's good they are enthused about it. I also have such a good working relationship with [vice principal] and [teacher name]. Part of it is selfish. We just wanted to go ahead because we enjoyed it as well as the benefits for the children.*

Teacher: School 2

Teachers identified that collaboration afforded them opportunities to share practice, share resources, team teach, observe each other teaching and to be able to talk about practice.

Participants argued that good relationships between staff improved the collaborative outcomes between pupils. When pupils observe positive relationships between teachers from different schools this has a pro-social modelling effect according to the teacher in School 1. The following is worth citing in full:

*They learn a lot about how we treat people and how we treat them and how we speak to them. We don't always get it right but we are the role models for them about how to treat people and the way to behave when things go right and when things go wrong and how to manage your temper when you feel cross. And unbeknownst to us the children pick up and will know when teachers in this school don't like each other and when we don't have a good relationship. They pick that up quicker than another staff member would. I think they learn a lot from watching teachers from different schools and how they interact. You can work with somebody in a very professional, a very capable way, but you are not necessarily role modelling a good relationship. If they see banter and laughter and fun and that sort of thing they really start to realise that our teacher is ok with this. Our teacher is ok with these people so they start to relax as well. So I think that the teachers who are involved in it are absolutely critical. It's through the hidden curriculum, it's nothing that is taught but it is how they treat each other. It's when you laugh with them, have a joke with them, when you slap them and say wait till you hear this. So that it is a very easy, natural, good humoured relationship. I think when children and young people see that and post 16 as well I just think they learn an awful lot from that. And so they will think our teachers are ok with each other.*

Teacher: School 1

### **3.5 Sustainability**

Each of school managers talked about a sense of impetus or desire to sustain the institutional links and relationships that had been established as a result of being involved in SEP 1. Participants talked about a genuine willingness to want to sustain partnership post SEP. Schools appeared committed to sustaining collaboration largely because of the relationships that had been fostered between institutions and individuals over time and because each recognised that collaboration was beneficial for pupils, schools and staff.

*We just wanted to go ahead because we enjoyed it as well as the benefits for the children. The girls enjoy it too and the girls from last year will come back and tell me miss so and so is on Facebook telling me about this, that and the other. And the girls from [School 1] if they see me they will come over and chat with me. The relationship is there and because it has been built up why would you not continue it?*

Teacher: School 2

The teacher in School 3 indicated that their school had as a result of SEP formed strong relationships between senior managers and Governors and were reluctant to allow those relationships to decline once SEP funds stopped. The teacher in School 2 argued that collaboration had to be sustained between schools because pupils enjoyed the experience so much and were especially keen to visit each other's schools. In a similar fashion the manager in School 1 said:

*We are committed to it and we would hope that this will be something that always happens in our schools; however we go about financing that in the future. This is a relationship and a programme that we don't ever envisage letting go.*

Manager: School 1

Participants indicated that once funds from SEP 1 had finished, schools currently in partnership would strive to sustain a level of collaboration. Schools identified that some funds were still necessary to cover the costs of transporting pupils between schools and in some cases to cover teacher costs, venue hire or the use of external facilitators. However there appears to be a shift from a model whereby staff and pupils build relationships with each other through sustained shared activities to a model more securely couched at an institutional level.

The Contested Space Partnership is an exemplar of sustainability at an institutional level. Participants clearly demonstrated at the planning stage of the application a commitment to sustain partnership. The experience of SEP has provided schools with a lexicon of collaboration and created a foundation at an institution level, enabling schools to adapt the SEP model. Arguably participants are more likely to view Contested Space activity as a continuation of or an evolution of the SEP model. A number of managers described the new partnership in this way. One referred to it as an 'extension' or a 'natural evolution of the Sharing Education Programme'. All



participants argued that the learning experience based on SEP made the process of establishing a new partnership less complicated:

*If we hadn't had that existing relationship and that level of trust there is no way we would have met the timescale to have put in a bid for Contested Space. Let alone one that was well informed and was grounded in need and something where all the schools were able to have a very open and honest conversation very quickly, this is what our young people are facing, let's do that.*

Teacher: School 3

The manager at School 3 argued that the partnership between schools was not 'starting from ground zero' and that the new partnership is now in a position to be able to draw from previous experience of collaboration. Similarly, the teacher in School 2 argued:

*If somebody said to me without the experience we have had [from SEP], you are going to put two classes together one from [School 2] and one from [School 1] and you are going to tackle serious issues like drugs and alcohol and not in a wishy washy way but getting stuck in there and sectarianism and racism and all of those issues I would say no way I am not touching that with a barge pole, because we have had this experience it is like it's no bother. Yes there are going to be challenges but to me all we are doing is expanding on what we wanted to do. There is part of us who have always wanted to involve more classes with School 1 but we just didn't have the capacity or the time. To me it is a bit more of that now and we are able to do a bit more of what we wanted to do and get more and more children involved in the work.*

Teacher: School 2

## Section Four: The context of cross-sector collaboration in contested space

Each of the schools in the new cross-sector partnership is situated in what has been defined as an interface area or contested space. Contested spaces are usually characterised by different communities or populations living within the same space (such as a village, town or city) but segregated along ethnic, religious, political and cultural lines. The NI Census of 2001 revealed that two thirds of the population live in an area that is either almost exclusively Catholic or almost exclusively Protestant. In many cases in Northern Ireland, these almost exclusive communities live side by side, creating focal points where sectarian tensions are common place. Some city areas are figuratively, like a patchwork quilt and made up of small segregated communities, North Belfast is a good example of this. In the context of the newly formed partnership which is situated in Derry/Londonderry, it is one of the most contested spaces in Northern Ireland and continues to deal with the legacy of the conflict as well as the emerging challenge of dissident activity. The Sutton Index<sup>2</sup> records that 350 people died in the county and of this figure, 227 died in the City as a result of the conflict. Of the total number, 66 young people aged 19 years and under died in the county, 47 of those died in the City. As a consequence of the conflict and a distinct historical legacy, Derry/Londonderry tends to be particularly divided along religious lines, which is also compounded by the natural geography of the area, as both communities are separated by a river and have become clearly demarcated. In the 1970's, as a direct consequence of the 'Troubles', most Protestants in the city either left the area all together or relocated settling on the other side of the river on the city outskirts. The Population Change and Social Inclusion Study published by the OFMDFM (Shirlow et al. 2005) estimates that approximately three quarters of the population of the city is Catholic and that there is a keen sense of alienation felt by the Protestant community. This in itself is likely to limit movement within the contested space, maintain segregation and is not likely to promote good relations. There remains much evidence of sectarianism and fragmented community relations in this area. For example, statistics on sectarian incidents, detections and recorded crimes 2009/10 released by the PSNI demonstrate that there was a significant rise in

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<sup>2</sup> <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/sutton/index.html>

sectarian incidents compared to the year before (08/09). The district saw a rise of 178.8%<sup>3</sup>, in terms of sectarian incidents, the highest in Northern Ireland. Some of the consequences of living in contested space may mean that there is reluctance to connect with other communities or groups that do not share the same cultural or religious background. There may also be a reluctance to travel to other communities or move through contested spaces.

A summary of the findings of an ethnographic study (Roche 2009) based on the city, which explored community relations and sectarianism with 16-35 year olds, identified that there remains despite the peace process, significant community relations issues, namely: three out of four participants in the study expressed a fear of the *other* community or expressed fears about entering areas where people from the other tradition live. One third identified that they had been involved in violent skirmishes and one third talked about how their parents or grandparents held on to negative views of the other community. Roche (2009) introduces the term 'bounded contentment' to describe a resulting scenario whereby individuals are essentially limited in their exposure to the other community. As a consequence young people from different community backgrounds had limited contact with one another; they developed fears about or extended parent's fears about, going into the *other's* community areas and as a consequence movement within and across the contested space becomes limited therefore increasing the likelihood of communities becoming isolated from one another within the same city setting. In the same sense, schools representing different communities might also operate in isolation of one another. Hughes (2010) argues in a similar vein that separate schools based on a co-religionist paradigm run the risk of being divisive and perpetuating intergroup hostilities; where young people with different religious and cultural backgrounds have minimal contact with one another. Schools and their pupils can operate in physical, ethnical and cultural isolation from one another.

The nature of contested space and the geography of the city was often reinforced by the way in which participants labelled and distinguished parts of the City from one another; frequently referring to areas such as the 'Waterside' (mixed area but where

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<sup>3</sup> PSNI Annual Statistical Report (2010) Hate Incidents and Crimes 1<sup>st</sup> April 2009- 31<sup>st</sup> March 2010 Report No.3, Central Statistics Branch, Operational Support Department: PSNI

the vast majority of Protestants live), the 'City side' (majority Catholic), and the 'Bogside' (majority Catholic) as well as making numerous references to the bridges and the way in which the river divides the city:

*The river is a physical division and barrier but it masks sectarianism as well and it is a convenient mask that is used. If the only Catholic school closes on the Waterside we will have a very difficult separation in terms of it reinforcing this physical barrier. So we really, really, need to get our young people engaged with one another. The Waterside as you know is a relatively mixed area. The Cityside doesn't have that.*

Manager: School 2

Teachers and educational managers in schools highlighted that it was common for parents from the other side of the community to have never been in their school or the area within which their school was located, despite living only a few miles away; therefore the act of visiting a school on the other side of the community becomes all the more significant:

*I think even physically, taking people over the bridge to parents meetings and the fact that they have come over the bridge. I mean our parents didn't know where School 2 was and that shocked me, [...] I am from the Waterside so I suppose I am comfortable on the Waterside because I was brought up there. I suppose I was shocked with some of our parents who were really unfamiliar with the Waterside. And you knew that the Protestant community really felt uncomfortable coming across to the Derry side. I never really believed that it happened the other way around. And the fact that they had been over at School 2, hopefully that will be of benefit as well.*

Education Manager School 1

Similarly a teacher in School 2 commented:

*Our children would say you cannot go through the Bogside Miss. You cannot go through the Bogside. And we went every other week and then it just became normal. We took children into a Catholic school with the statue of Mary at the door and the roof did not fall in on them. It just became normal. We took their parents into the Creggan for meetings, when we arranged their trips. It is really simplistic and sounds really daft but it is parents who would have never ever have been past the city walls and yet drove into the Creggan for meetings about their children and the same for parents from Creggan, who wouldn't have been to the Waterside apart from going to the hospital. We were always on this side so it wasn't the same as taking them up into [street name]. I always think that it was amazing that the parents went into the Creggan for meetings considering the prejudice I had experienced from people, oh you don't go near the Bogside.*

Teacher School 2

Another consequence of a reluctance to move across contested space, results in young people from the Waterside, who are making the transition to post 16 education, opting to leave the city to attend schools and FE colleges in neighbouring towns, rather than 'cross over the bridge' to attend similar institutions which are on the Cityside. The educational manager in the following extract elaborates on this, also arguing that there was very little cross over between controlled schools and maintained schools:

*We are very much aware in Derry of the physicality of our town. We have a river that acts like a natural barrier between two sides. That sounds terrible but to the extent that children if they choose to go on to further education, they will go to the college in Limavady or the college in Strabane, rather than cross over the bridge. We also entered into the Foyle Learning Community, where schools were encouraging their students to access courses, post 16 that were available in other schools. I suppose every school was struggling to encourage their children to do that, they are very much home-birds who like to stay with their own school. But there was very little cross over between controlled and maintained and then of course you had the bridge because they had to go across the bridge, which was a no-no.*

Education Manager School 1

Corroborating this perspective, a teacher (School 2) who was involved in the first cohort of SEP reported reluctance on the part of some of the pupils to travel to the Cityside in search of employment. The teacher explained that she frequently challenged young people's stereotypes and prejudices and that 'not every Catholic is the person who called them names or not every Protestant is an Orangeman.' These prejudices and misconceptions about each other, the teacher argued, sustained a reluctance to move across contested space and thus compounded division in the city:

*One of my standard lines with our children is you will have to go over to that town if you want a job. You can't stay here if you want to find a job. You will have to work with whoever is there. You can't work in a Protestant place of employment that is illegal, you know equality law, and all of this is to just broaden their minds.*

Teacher: School 2

The nature of living in contested space, argued one participant, meant that at times, parents were hesitant or cautious about their children visiting schools and spending

time with pupils from other side of the community. The Manager of School 3 argued: 'You have to be prepared to run the media gauntlet, people questioning you and parents questioning you. Why are you sending my children there?' This educational manager felt that parents personally held them responsible for their children's wellbeing while they visited schools on the other side of the community.

The manager from school 3 described an interesting scenario whereby events that transpire in the community have a tendency to be felt in the shared classroom and similarly events in the school can reverberate back out and impact on the community. The manager described schools in the city as 'communities within communities'. Events such as sectarian incidents, the marching season, elections and republican dissident activity are keenly felt within the school. Schools were not sheltered from the events that troubled the city.

*There were days and flashpoints where I would have talked to our girls and said be vigilant in this upcoming period and that was particularly true after the death of a police man, particularly after dissident graffiti in the [city] [...] So at particular times, Easter, marching season, any marching season, you would talk to your girls and say just be particularly vigilant [...] It just depends on the political outlook at the time, like before the last election. It is an intense political time and it affects the school as the school is a community within a community, so whatever goes on outside in the community goes on inside the school.*

Education Manager: School 3

The manager went on to explain that despite the nature of contested space, in the main, sectarian incidents in the classroom or around the schools, as a result of pupils being involved in SEP, rarely occurred. However in year 2 of SEP1 an incident occurred between pupils, whereby a visiting pupil in one of the schools was assaulted by another pupil, sectarian comments were also directed towards visiting pupils and a stone was thrown at a taxi containing pupils from the visiting school. These events in the school in turn impacted on the community mostly via parents and were discussed on a local BBC Radio Foyle programme as well as appearing in the local press, prompting both Principals to issue a joint statement explaining that they remained committed to sharing and developing collaboration between both schools. Principals also took part in the radio programme and responded to questions from the local community.

#### **4.1 Shared education mitigates the challenges of contested space**

Reflecting on the experience of SEP, participants talked at length about how sharing and cross-sector collaboration helped mitigate the challenges of contested space and improved community relations. An analysis of this data reveals four broad perspectives:

1. Shared education and collaboration between schools provides a wealth of opportunities for reciprocal movement across contested space, for pupils, education staff and parents
2. The impact of collaboration extends beyond schools into the community
3. Pupils develop relationships in shared lessons and maintain them beyond the remit of their schools
4. Sharing helps students learn more about each others' cultural and religious identities

#### **4.2 Moving across contested space and the impact of collaboration**

Firstly, education staff, in referring to SEP, talked about how shared lessons created more opportunities for young people, teachers and parents to physically move through contested space. Staff talked about the importance of creating more opportunities to visit each others' schools and communities, thus challenging the implications of 'bounded contentment' (Roche, 2009). Participants emphasised the importance of creating and maintaining opportunities for reciprocal movement through contested space and thus preventing children and schools on either side of the community from becoming ethnically isolated (Hughes, 2010) from one another:

*The children would get used to seeing the [School 2] uniform in our school and that our children would physically move across the bridge and to the [street name] and move into [School 2] and our uniform would be seen in their school, and that the children wouldn't be isolated.*

Manager: School 1

Participants suggested that sharing and cross-sector collaboration acted as a visible and potent symbol in the city and demonstrated improving community relations. The manager in School 1 suggested that the children involved in sharing were like a 'living breathing symbol of what schools and our society are hoping to achieve'.

Participants talked about how the community was able to witness how schools from different cultural backgrounds were working together rather than in isolation.

Participants argued that sustained trips to each others' schools were important, especially for the visiting pupil, because they helped reduce levels of anxiety that may have developed as a result of prejudice or stereotyping borne out of communities being isolated from one another. Similar findings emerged from a recent evaluation of school collaboration in Northern Ireland whereby sustained contact with other had the effect of reducing anxiety and a sense of threat associated with the other community (See Hughes et al. 2010). In the following extract the school manager attempts to quantify the impact that sustained contact has on the community:

*There is this fear of going over to [street name] with the uniform on, there is a genuine fear. [street name] just happens to be a melting pot of all the school youngsters who are there. There are a number who do go over and there is no problem, but there is a fear of being confronted by people. [...] So there is approximately 240 youngsters who know each other in this city who would never have had that opportunity. If we move that over the next three years and are doubling it, that's touching people, bringing understandings... its just a small drop in the ocean but it is causing ripples and I think it could be very positive for us you know.*

Manager: School 2

Participants felt that it was important for the pupils and staff both involved in the project and across the wider school, to become more accustomed to seeing children in different uniforms that were representative of the 'other side of the community'. Similarly others argued that it was just as important for the wider community to observe children travelling through contested space. A teacher from School 2 argued that something as simple as parents seeing a school minibus from the other side of the community parked in the school grounds was significant. Similarly others talked about the potency of parents from both communities attending school plays, prize-givings and when schools fundraised together in the city:

I think it is really good for our community to see the [School 2] mini-bus parked outside our school or at Saturday school or every second Tuesday. That says something very powerful to our community that we are working together. And the same for our children going over to the Waterside, I think it makes a very powerful statement to our community.



Manager: School 1

Participants argued that it was vital to get parents moving across contested space. The teacher in School 2 indicated that parents in a similar fashion were able to access aspects of each others' ethos and religious and cultural practices through schools, in the same way that pupils were exposed to each others' cultural identifiers such as symbols, crests, photographs on walls, iconography, and school documentation etc. Parents were also able to witness pupils and teachers from different backgrounds working together. The manager and teacher in School 1 talked about a joint fund raising event which involved parents and pupils from both sides of the community packing bags at a local supermarket; both argued that this event was particularly significant in terms of demonstrating a positive message to the broader community. Participants also suggested that when pupils involved in shared lessons went home after school, they were likely to propagate the experiences of visiting schools on the other side of the community. The manager in the following extract suggests that over time sharing and collaboration would become normalised both for pupils and parents:

*But even going home and saying to your mummy and daddy I was over at School1 today and do you know what I heard or they are doing such and such or were planning this. Is that not what it's about? It is kind of normalising day to day life and carrying wee tales from one to the other good or bad. To me that's where it starts, it's not about the grand or opening the new bridge, that's wonderful too and we need all of that too, but I think it is just the normalisation of it.*

Manager: School 2

### **4.3 Relationships**

Secondly, participants frequently talked about how many of the pupils in both SEP partnerships maintained various degrees of contact outside of the remit of shared lessons and beyond schools. The manager at School 3 gave a number of examples of this. In one case students from both School 2 and School formed a band and play traditional Irish music in various locations across the city. In another example the same member of staff described meeting pupils from School 3 at an evening student drama production in School 2. The students had attended this event on their own volition and explained that they were at the event to support the pupils in School 2 who were involved the play. The manager explained that students had developed

relationships with one another as a result of shared lessons. All participants cited that many of the students involved in SEP continued to stay in touch using various social media in particular Facebook and email. Participants also talked about how their students would tell them about meeting and talking to each other if they were to meet, say at weekends in the city. The following extract from a teacher in School 2 demonstrates the importance of such events in terms of promoting community relations:

*Because this project was sustained and it was over three years and they have spent time together, it's like, you know, Miss I saw so and so up the town last week and things like that. Even the boys would have come in and said so and so waved at me up the town. It does sound absolutely ridiculous to think that that is a big deal, but for those children it would have been a big deal. For those children it would have been something positive that happened in the town as opposed to, there's Catholics and they are gonna chase us out of the town.*

Teacher: School 2

#### **4.4 Learning more about each others' religious and cultural identities**

Teachers and Managers frequently talked about how shared lessons provided opportunities for pupils to learn more about each others' religious and cultural identities. In some cases these themes were explicitly addressed via the curriculum, in particular through looking at inclusion and diversity using KS3 Citizenship; but in other cases indirectly through opportunities for pupils to mix, interact or talk to one another about religious and cultural differences in shared lessons. Participants claimed that pupils regularly engaged in conversations with each other about religious and cultural symbols; indicating that pupils were genuinely curious about each other. Staff cited examples whereby pupils have had conversations or discussions with each other in the classroom about symbols and identifiers such as: crucifixes, the St Bridget's cross, flags, jewellery, poppies, ashes on foreheads, the fainne and pioneer pins. Below is a selection of extracts from interviews to reinforce these claims:

*The materials at KS3 are also good. The citizenship materials in particular are very good at KS3. The best lesson we did this year was the symbols one. Have you seen it? [...] There was a girl sitting with her fainne on. They knew the St Bridget's cross and they knew the pioneer pin. We didn't have to explain it to them [...] she was able to explain things that I wasn't able to explain and I was able to explain things that she didn't understand.*

Teacher: School 2

*Particularly our girls who would have wee religious bracelets and they have different wee things on them or they might have something on their blazer or something. And they will ask why are you wearing that? What is that? You know? What's that? What's that mean? They do get information from that. People are very straight. I love that. Last year we were in [School 2] and I think one of the teachers said tell them to take off their poppies, they are going over to [School 1] and [teacher in School 2] quite rightly said no, they are wearing their poppies and if the girls want to find out about it then they can tell them. And they did, they wore their poppies in and I though you know, I like that; I thought it was great. And I love [teacher name] confidence in us, in knowing that would be the right thing to do; that to actually ask those children to take those poppies off would have been the wrong thing to do coming into our school because it would have been stereotyping their heads again; that it's a protestant thing and that if you are going to a Catholic school you can't have that. In the same way in Ash Wednesday our girls were all over there with big black crosses on their heads (laughing). And the kids would go, what is that on your head? The priest did what?! (Laughing)*

Manager School 1

*The thing is if they see somebody coming into the class wearing a poppy and they understand why they are wearing a poppy, the chances are none of those kids will ever have an issue with a poppy. They might choose not to wear it themselves, that's their choice but the chances are they won't look at someone who is wearing a poppy and think they are doing it to annoy me... Things aren't done to cause offence we have differences, ask about it, learn about it and get over it.*

Manager: School 1

In summary, the city in which the partnership is located remains a contested space. Evidence would suggest that sharing and cross sector collaboration provides a plethora of opportunities for young people and adults to move across this contested space. This has a number of positive impacts on the community, namely it provides opportunities to expose those involved to a diversity of cultural practice. It encourages actual reciprocal movement and reduces the likelihood of bounded contentment (Roche 2009). There is also evidence based on the perspectives of education staff that over time and with sustained contact pupils become less anxious about moving across contested space and less anxious about mixing with pupils from the other side of the community. The out-workings of this are that some pupils develop genuine relationships with one another. It may also be that schools collaborating acts as a potent symbol in the wider community largely through parents, although more research is needed here considering the views of parents

are not well represented the body literature on sharing and collaboration in Northern Ireland.

## Section Five: Translating local need into a shared curriculum

Key aspects of the OFMDFM / AP funding programme required applicants to ensure that their proposed project takes place within and benefits an interface area or contested space in Northern Ireland. Proposed programmes must also take place within areas identified in the Noble Indices as the most deprived and must therefore address need in the community. Discussions at planning meetings, prior to submitting the Contested Space funding application, identified a number of key need areas that staff unanimously agreed, impacted on pupils from key stage 2 through to key stage 5. These included:

1. The negative impacts of substance misuse on young people particularly from alcohol, drugs and cigarettes
2. Encouraging young people to remaining sexually healthy and resilient and helping them understand more about sexuality and challenging homophobia in schools
3. The impact of and appropriate use of the internet, various social media (such as Facebook) and mobile phones
4. Improving community relations, encouraging more movement across contested space, identifying shared space and challenging sectarianism
5. Anti-social behaviour and criminality

A representative of the planning committee argued:

*illegal substances, alcohol, and sexuality issues – these are real issues that are causing anxiety amongst young people and they are resulting in self harm. We can see in the schools particularly from the perspective of designated teachers and the pastoral end how this is manifested in many kids, obviously through behaviour and self harming behaviours. You can see families fragment and spiral downwards. These are real issues that are spiralling out of proportion.*

## **5.1 Identifying Need in the Community**

The following paragraphs are not meant to demonise young people but rather augment the need areas the Partnership sought to focus on. The first section will examine research on substance misuse use and the prevalence of anti-social behaviour amongst young people in Derry/Londonderry.

## **5.2 Young people and substance misuse**

A Lottery funded project (Drink Think)<sup>4</sup> based in Derry/Londonderry contends that there is now more alcohol consumed in the City than ever before and a drinking culture in Ireland is leading to much higher incidence of alcohol abuse and alcoholism by young people. Alongside this, a study focusing on the extent of underage drinking in the Derry City Council area (Doherty and McCormack, (2003)<sup>5</sup> identified that 86% of the sample of young people involved, had taken alcohol. The average age when young people first try alcohol is 12 years old. The study argues that alcohol use among young people is prevalent and drinking to get drunk is not unusual, there was also evidence of binge drinking, particularly at weekends. During planning meetings, a number of staff described how large groups of young people tend to gather in parts of city at weekends; members of staff expressed concerns that amongst these groups, younger children were being influenced to drink and take other illicit substances. A member of the PSNI community safety branch corroborated these descriptions. An educational manager argued that there was a distinct role for schools to play in terms of educating young people about alcohol and substance misuse. Crucially they felt that such a programme should be directed at younger students as a preventative strategy:

*“Quite a lot of the young people are drinking, some aren’t. My belief is that within these groups there are 11 and 12 year olds watching what’s going on and they are next. We have started to deliver lessons to P7 children around the topic of health. I do feel that the time is coming when we are going to be bringing primary school kids home to their parents on a Friday and Saturday night. We would have traditionally worried about our sixth and fifth years. The older ages in terms of what they have become involved in, now that has gone big time down. They are now very young, it is first years and second years and a lot of third years”.*

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.drinkthinkproject.org/>

<sup>5</sup> Doherty, E. and McCormack, J (2003), Underage Drinking in the Derry City Council Area, Derry Londonderry: Western Investing for Health Partnership.

### **5.3 Young people involved in anti-social behaviour**

The PSNI provides statistical data via the Northern Ireland Neighbourhood Information Service (NINIS) by ward on the number of detectable offences and number of anti-social incidences. In the Foyle area between 2010 and 2011 incidences of anti-social behaviour had overall decreased, but incidences of street drinking had increased by almost three fold (PSNI, 2011). A representative from the PSNI Community Safety Branch in the Foyle Area, who sits on the steering group and advises the Partnership, was able to provide up to date statistics on alcohol and drug consumption by 12 to 17 year olds<sup>6</sup>. Between January and Dec 2010 the PSNI recorded 163 incidences involving alcohol and drug use by young people. Of these 163 incidences, 11 were deemed to be offence related, while 152 were not. Based on the data, boys were much more likely to come to the attention of the PSNI involved in 99 incidences where girls were involved in 62 incidences. Sixteen year olds were most likely to be involved in drug and alcohol related incidences. Marginally there were more 15 year old girls than boys involved in alcohol and drug related incidences in 2010 and overall 19 young people aged 14 were involved drug and alcohol related incidences in the period. The Foyle Constituency Report by the NI Assembly (2011)<sup>7</sup> indicates that overall the Foyle area has, compared to other parts of Northern Ireland, a higher rate of crime, violent crime and anti-social behaviour orders. The Diamond, Strand and Ebrington areas recorded the highest levels of anti-social activity. An article in Derry Journal (2008)<sup>8</sup> reported that from the mid 1990's onwards there had been a steady increase in anti-social behaviour involving children and young people, often fuelled by alcohol and drug consumption.

### **5.4 Young peoples' sexual health and sexual resilience**

The next area identified by Contested Space Partnership was a need to address young people's sexual health, sexuality and resilience in schools. In 2008, within the Western Health and Social Services Board there were 224 births to teenage

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<sup>6</sup> Email correspondence between researcher, Lisnasharagh Community safety Branch and Community safety liaison Officer in Derry/Londonderry. Attached data involved an excel file with a breakdown of gender, age and alcohol/drug related incidents in 2010 from the Foyle area.

<sup>7</sup> NINIS (2010) Constituency Profile Foyle September 2010: NI Assembly

<sup>8</sup> [http://www.derryjournal.com/news/local/thousands\\_come\\_off\\_the\\_streets\\_in\\_derry\\_1\\_2128736](http://www.derryjournal.com/news/local/thousands_come_off_the_streets_in_derry_1_2128736)

mothers, 112 (the majority) were born to mothers from Derry (FPA 2010)<sup>9</sup> The Foyle Constituency Report from the NI Assembly (2011) indicates that this area of Northern Ireland has the 5th highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Northern Ireland. Drawing on Aggleton et al. (1998) the FPA (2010) argue that there are number of reasons why unplanned pregnancies happen: including a lack of knowledge about contraception; false beliefs about protection; the unavailability of and / or barriers accessing contraception; the wish to have a baby and the fulfilment of being a mother; the desire to be an 'adult'; the need to feel wanted and needed; status and prestige within the family and among peers; physical excitement and passion; love; trust and commitment. Such reasons and the extent of teenage pregnancy in the area give rise to the need to develop a sexual health and resilience programme. The partnership argued in the funding application to Interface/Contested Space Programme that there was a need to develop a common approach in schools via shared education and in turn schools should develop a common policy in this area. A member of the partnership from School 3 argued that a classroom approach to sexual knowledge and teenage sexual resilience resided 'comfortably within the Learning for Life and Work area at Keystage 3, (See table 2). An educational manager from School 2 argued:

*I have been teaching for 23 years in the Waterside area and I can see a massive change in terms of the whole idea of values and we get into an area which is very contentious, which is moral values. Their school typically maintains values and this school has very very proud values and many schools do. All of these are being kicked out of touch now. How we deal with them in citizenship, when there is a boy or girl in the class who has come out as gay and how that young person is maintained in the class or in the school without other young people bullying them. So those are real issues. We have got to look after the kids in our school who are homosexual.*

Education Manager: School 2

### **5.5 Appropriate use of social media, internet and mobile phones**

In preparation for the funding application, the Contested Space Partnership was in agreement that students are using social media such as Facebook more and more. As usage becomes much more prevalent, there is a need to ensure students are using such media appropriately and are safe online. A member of staff responsible for co-ordinating SEP1 activity in School 3 explained that they were aware that sites

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<sup>9</sup> FPA (2010) Teenage Pregnancy in Northern Ireland Factsheet: Published by Sexual Health



such as Facebook were being used to advertise and organise weekend activity. A member of the partnership indicated that Facebook was being used by students to gather “in large groups on weekends” Some had concerns that parents could not always monitor how Facebook was being used. Other staff members had concerns that Facebook was being used by students to organise and glorify anti-social activity taking place at weekends. The partnership proposed to deliver shared learning opportunities in schools by discussing internet safety and social media as well as appropriate mobile phone usage with students. The three post primary schools in particular agreed to develop common policies on internet and mobile phone use.

## **5.6 Addressing need through school collaboration**

For some of the participants in this study, children’s needs had in the past, been masked by the conflict and now, as Northern Ireland emerges out of conflict, need comes to the fore. According to some, the social policy discourse has been overly focused on responding to community relations in contested space but now, in the context of the peace process, it should adjust to some degree to include young people’s needs, as their city emerges out of conflict. One educational manager described need as the ‘new troubles’:

*I think city centre schools are facing huge issues which are not just political anymore; it’s very much what we would refer to as the new troubles out there. I keep saying this previously that when you are a society coming out of conflict, you have kept the lid on a whole lot of social issues, that when you lift that lid they come to the fore. I have had to face in this my ninth year more challenging problems on a social, child protection side than I have ever had to before and that is the case of any society coming out of conflict. It is the same set of tools for community relations building your children, building their self esteem, building their confidence and building their resilience.*

Education Manager: School 3

As such, schools suggested that in order to respond to needs, that pervade cultural, political and religious boundaries in the city, it was necessary to develop a common and collaborative approach:

*This is work that needs to be done in all three of our schools, with all of our children. If we did this and we got this right we could make a real difference in these children’s lives. We might even save lives. I strongly believe that in this moment in time that there are issues out there that if we don’t tackle head on in school that some of our children in the future are going to lose their lives over it. And from that need in the three schools we were able*

*to see a common programme that could be delivered in the schools that could tackle common issues. It would make a difference in our society, in our communities.*

Education Manager: School 1

Prior collaboration under SEP1 meant that schools had already a significant platform with which to develop and sustain institutional relationships. Participants in the study all agreed that after almost four years of partnership and sharing that, despite living in contested space, and the different contexts of each of their schools, pupil need remained a commonality. Collaboration provided a platform for schools to have sustained dialogue with one another and as a consequence aided the process of identifying which needs were most prevalent to pupils. The education manager at School 1 talked about the fact that a conversation about pupil needs 'could only have happened because of the relationship between the schools' which had developed because of SEP. Schools, according to the manager, are 'reluctant to admit, especially to other schools, if they are having problems'. The manager indicated: 'We don't easily in the company of other schools say that we are having a difficulty with this or we are noticing this particular issue' but because of the confidence generated by positive institutional relationships, schools were able discuss common concerns about the issues facing young people in the community. According to the same manager it was 'great sense of relief' to realise that pupils needs were not indicative of the school's inability to cope but that other schools were facing the same issues and as a consequence, pupils' needs were more about systemic problems in the community. Participants suggested that they could address need in the community more effectively as a collaborative, rather than in isolation of one another:

*Sometimes in isolation you think at this moment, in our school, we are having these issues. I am teaching 23 years and I haven't seen those particular issues together like this ever before. When we started to talk we found that every one of our schools, [School 1], [School 3] and [School 2] were experiencing the same issues that hadn't maybe raised their heads to the same extent in years gone by. There was a common feeling that these things are happening around us and we don't really feel that we are best placed to deal with this or how to go about doing this and so we started to talk about how we could do it together as a group , rather than isolation.*

Education Manager: School 1

A number of participants argued that adopting a collaborative approach to need enables schools to provide a 'consistent message' to the pupils involved in shared learning. Schools argued that in isolation of one another, there is a risk that pupils could receive mixed messages about, for example, sex, sexuality and sexual resilience. Schools may also approach this area differently depending on ethos.

### **5.7 Aligning school policies**

When schools came to offer shared learning opportunities obvious difficulties would arise if schools did not agree in advance, a common approach to such themes. In writing the funding application post primary schools proposed to deliver a consistent message at an institutional level by aligning each of their policies that corresponded to the need areas identified in the bid. At a planning meeting in April 2011, prior to submitting the application, an education manager proposed that schools would need to revisit and rewrite policies; this was met with approval from all of the post primary partners. In doing so this enables schools to operate a consistent approach to need that permeates through the community:

*It's the commonality of it. If we do it the same way because our girls are going out and they would be mixing with the [School 3] girls and hopefully they will be meeting the [School 2] children and that they are getting the same message from all of us that it is a consistent message. And if we got that right within those three schools then you could take that out wider and you could bring it to [School name], [School name] and [School name] and [School name]. So the whole town could be dealing with these issues with consistency and that the language we all use is common and the strategies that we are giving them to deal with certain situations are common; so if they say something the kids can say that's what we learned in school as well.*

Education Manager: School 1

### **5.8 The challenge of addressing need in the classroom**

A previous study (Hughes et al. 2010) highlighted the importance of preparedness in terms of building teachers' capacity in preparation to manage intergroup contact and address contentious or controversial issues in the classroom across the sectoral divide. This study corroborates the above perspective, however it also wishes to emphasise that by introducing the need themes into the classroom, amplifies the complexity of what is being asked of teachers. In order to address this, a number of strategies were proposed, firstly, to locate and thus legitimise the identified need

areas in the existing curriculum; identify existing resources that teachers could use; draw in and utilise expertise from the local community, voluntary and statutory sectors to help build teacher capacity and to assist in the delivery of learning relevant to the five need areas.

### **5.9 Translating local needs into the curriculum**

In planning meetings, prior to submitting an application to the Contested Space Programme, participants agreed that shared learning would be pitched at Key Stage 2 and Key Stage 3. According to post primary participants, young people at Key Stage 3 were most at risk; targeting a shared education programme at this age, meant that schools still had an opportunity to intervene and build awareness among pupils.

The need areas correspond well with the existing curriculum, particularly in the Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) aspect of the curriculum at primary level and Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at post primary level. Additionally schools recognised the obvious synergy between the themes addressed in PDMU and LLW:

*When we got together and we had the option to expand the partnership as it currently is by bringing in other schools and expanding the primary school partnership as well. We have never ever wanted it to be something that was put onto us. We didn't want it to be an add on. We wanted it to be something that was needed in our schools and was of value. We still knew that the best vehicle for that was through LLW programme. It is common it is PDMU in the primary schools; it is a common theme that goes through the primary school into the secondary schools.*

Education Manager: School 1

How these need areas align with the primary and post primary curriculum is demonstrated in Tables 1 and 2. Locating the five need areas in the curriculum would allow teachers involved in delivery to avail of existing educational resources and utilise their own expertise or any previous experience delivering LLW. Two of the teachers involved in the planning phase had been involved in SEP1 delivering shared LLW at Key Stage 3 between Schools 1 and 2.

Need Area	Primary KS2 PDMU
Substance Misuse	<p><b>Strand 1: Personal Understanding &amp; Health Health, Growth &amp; Change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tobacco, alcohol, solvents &amp; Illicit substances</li> <li>• What shapes positive mental health</li> </ul>
Anti-Social Behaviour	<p><b>Strand 2: Mutual Understanding in Local &amp; Wider Community Relationships in the community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rules and laws are essential in an ordered community</li> <li>• Effects of anti-social Behaviour</li> </ul>
Safe Internet & Social Media	<p><b>Strand 2: Mutual Understanding in Local &amp; Wider Community Keeping safe</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pro-active response to safety: on the internet</li> </ul>
Sex, Sexuality & Resilience	<p><b>Strand 1: Personal Understanding &amp; Health Health, Growth &amp; Change</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Knowing how the body grows</li> <li>• Physical and emotional changes due to puberty</li> <li>• How babies are conceived grow and are born</li> <li>• Importance of good parenting</li> </ul>
Improving Community Relations	<p><b>Strand 2: Mutual Understanding in Local &amp; Wider Community Relationships in the community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• ways in which conflict can be caused by words, gestures, symbols or action</li> <li>• Knowing about cultural heritage, including diversity of cultures in NI</li> <li>• Similarities between cultures in NI (food, clothes symbols and celebrations)</li> <li>• Identifying the variety of groups, roles responsibilities in the community</li> </ul>

Table 1: Locating the need areas in the PDMU curriculum

Need Area	Learning for Life and Work KS3
Anti-social Behaviour	<p><b>Citizenship: Key Concept - Democracy and Active Participation</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the rule of law, why rules and laws are needed, how they are enforced and how breaches of the law affect the community.</li> </ul> <p><b>Personal Development: Key Concept – Self awareness</b>  <b>Investigate the influences on a young person,</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>peer pressure, media, social and cultural trends, fears, anxieties and motivations etc</li> </ul>
Substance Misuse	<p><b>Personal Development: Key Concept – Self awareness Exploring Self Awareness</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the influences on a young person, for example, peer pressure, media, social and cultural trends, fears, anxieties and motivations etc.</li> </ul> <p><b>Key Concept – Personal Health</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate the effects on the body of legal and illegal substances and the risks and consequences of their misuse, for example, effects on behaviour, physical and mental health, life and work changes etc</li> </ul>
Sex, Sexuality & Resilience	<p><b>Personal Development: Key Concept: Relationships</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Explore the implications of sexual maturation, sexual health, fertility, contraception, conception, teenage pregnancy, childbirth etc. Explore the emotional, social and moral implications of early sexual activity, for example, personal values, attitudes and perceptions, the Law, STIs, the impact of underage parenting</li> </ul>
Safe Internet & Social Media	<p><b>Personal Development: Key Concept Develop strategies to promote personal safety</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>responding appropriately to different forms of bullying, abuse, physical violence; developing safe practice in relation to the internet, getting home; understanding and managing risk, the place of rules and boundaries etc</li> </ul>
Improving Community Relations	<p><b>Citizenship: Key Concept Diversity and Inclusion</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Investigate factors that influence individual and group identity, e.g. age, gender, youth culture, ethnicity, community background, multiple identity, changing identities etc.</li> <li>Investigate ways in which individuals and groups express their identity, dress code, language, musical and sporting traditions, religious and political opinion, beliefs etc</li> <li>Investigate how and why conflict, including prejudice, stereotyping, sectarianism and racism may arise in the community</li> <li>Investigate ways of managing conflict and promoting community relations, reconciliation. Investigate the opportunities arising from diversity and multiculturalism and possible ways of promoting inclusion, e.g. community relations work, shared festivals and sporting events, integrated education</li> </ul>

Table 2: Locating the need areas in the LLW curriculum

Drawing on the lessons learned from SEP, participants argued that shared lessons must be embedded into the school timetable rather than something that was an add-on or an extra-curricular activity. Building shared activity into the normal school day meant that addressing need was given a certain gravitas. The manager of School 3 said: I think through curriculum is a brilliant place to put it [contested space programme], classes are timetabled, buses are scheduled and I think that will support that. In a similar vein others argued that positioning the contested space programme within the normal school day also helped foster parental trust:

*They trust, because it is curricular, because it is part of the curriculum and because it is very much teacher led they do tend to trust you to use good judgement and that you wouldn't do anything that would not be the right thing. They do tend to trust you as a teacher. We didn't hype it in any way we just wanted it to be seen as the way we do things, this is the way things are delivered. I think for us that worked, it was the way we do things.*

Manager: School 1

Participants also commented that grounding the shared learning in curriculum provided teachers with a level of confidence in terms of being already being familiar with the curricular requirements but also in terms of knowing how and where to access resources. Participants argued that PDMU and Learning for Life and Work were flexible and could be adapted to meet the requirements of the programme

### **5.10 Making stronger links with the community**

For a number of participants improving and crucially sustaining links with the community was essential if schools, in partnership, are to effectively address need. More specifically this should involve utilising the skills, knowledge and expertise of community groups, voluntary organisations and statutory bodies. The education manager at School 3 proposed 'finding what was good in the community' and 'bringing it into schools' with the aim of developing teacher capacity and assisting in the delivery of lessons and programmes relevant to the need areas identified by the partnership:

*The timing is fantastic, contested space has come along at a time when schools are going ok we are facing a different situation here. We need staff to be up-skilled here, we need the curriculum to be different; we need the community coming in. We need the*

*support of all those experts and this is about to be formalised in a way but it could have taken a long time to do.*

Education Manager: School 3

Both the managers in School 2 and School 3 argued that the community sector had an important role to play in building staff capacity to enable them to confidently deliver many of the controversial aspects of the proposed shared education project. The education manager at School 3 argued that in relation to the need areas identified, there was a 'huge skills gap for staff'. It was suggested that community groups were better equipped and had a wealth of experience in dealing with many of the need issues. The education manager in School 2 insisted it was important to foster 'genuine interest' and links with the community.



## Section Six: Discussion

### 6.1 An evolving model of collaboration

This study focuses on an evolving model of collaboration. The Contested Space Partnership has emerged as a direct consequence of the schools involvement in the first cohort of SEP. This has provided continuity in terms of the schools involved (in the post-primary aspect); staff involved in the management and implementation from one programme to next; QUB continues to be involved in supporting the partnership and the process of sharing resources, space, and learning stems from the SEP model. There are however distinctions between both models in terms of: how projects are funded; the criteria upon which the partnership is funded is different from SEP1; how resources are allocated to schools has changed; there is no lead school in the same way there was in SEP1; the relationship structure between the two maintained post-primaries has changed to some extent and there is now a focus on addressing needs in a divided city setting.

This section of the report will apply a series of criteria suggested by Atkinson et al (2007) and Woods et al (2006) in order to assess how effective the partnership is. At the time of writing this report, the Contested Space Partnership was operational for approximately 4 months. Ultimately this section will propose that the partnership demonstrates elements of effective practice, but more so, demonstrates the potential for effective practice. This assessment is also based on the idea that the Contested Space Partnership while new also retains elements of sustainable practice carried forward from the SEP model.

### 6.2 What type of collaborative model is the Contested Space Partnership?

Much of the literature reviewed for this report on collaboration tends to do three things: define what is meant by collaboration, in an educational context; typify models of collaboration (Atkinson et al. 2007; Woods et al. 2006) or assess models on their strength, depth or effectiveness (Hodgson and Spours, 2006; Higham and Yeomans, 2009; Atkinson et al. 2007; Woods et al. 2006). A number of commentators (Atkinson et al, 2007) have highlighted that defining collaboration has been conceptually problematic and that definitions are often intertwined, overlapping and sometimes inaccurate. To illustrate this, Nicholls (1997) discusses how terms

such as cooperation and collaboration often conceptually over-lap despite being distinct. Key to defining collaboration as opposed to merely co-operation is the emphasis on joint venture. Gill Nicholls (1997, p8) in making the distinction between what is co-operation and what is collaboration emphasises that collaboration tends to involve individuals, groups or in this case schools examining a problem together – ‘discussing the issues, identifying strategies and possible solutions. They work jointly to establish the means of solving the problem.’ From the outset the proposed Contested Space Partnership should be considered as joint venture where schools are able to articulate shared or common goals which are articulated in their joined up approach to addressing the needs of pupils.

Rather than get bogged down by definition and conceptual ambiguity, commentators appear to have found it more productive to assess the effectiveness of collaborative models rather than specifically define them. This discussion section, based on the aforementioned literature will attempt to broadly locate the Contested Space Partnership within the numerous types of collaborative arrangements identified in the literature and ultimately steer the reader towards identifying the partnership as being a potentially strong and effective model of collaboration. Collaborative models that are strong according to Hodgson and Spours (2006: p333) are those that have the following four dimensions: ‘vision, purpose and underpinning principles’, ‘professionalism, pedagogy and leadership’, ‘planning, organisation and governance in a local area’, and physical learning environments and communication systems.’ This report would argue that the Contested Space Partnership displays either most or all of these dimensions or has the foundations in place to develop a strong partnership.

This report applies two strategies; firstly, locating the positionality of the partnership on a loose spectrum which demonstrates the distinctions between collaborative models that are considered less formal and those defined as more formal (See figure 1). And secondly, applying a strategy used by Atkinson et al. (2007) and others particularly Woods et al. (2006) to assess the effectiveness of a collaborative model by using a series of key questions to determine how deep the practice and culture of collaboration penetrates throughout an institution.

Figure 1 presents a spectrum which identifies the distinctions between informal and more formal models of collaboration. Alongside this, a number of collaboration models, widely used in the literature are positioned as either informal or formal models. Formal models of collaboration such as federations and amalgamations are more tightly bound together by contractual and financial arrangements and having more formal management and governance arrangements. In many cases such partnerships become legal entities and the process of withdrawal is complex.

The Contested Space Partnership has been identified as an informal model but is located along the spectrum between formal and informal models because the schools in partnership are bound together by some contractual obligations (non-statutory); they share resources and teaching staff; have joint committees and a clear partnership infrastructure and longstanding institutional links. However membership remains voluntary and schools in partnership can come apart with comparative ease.

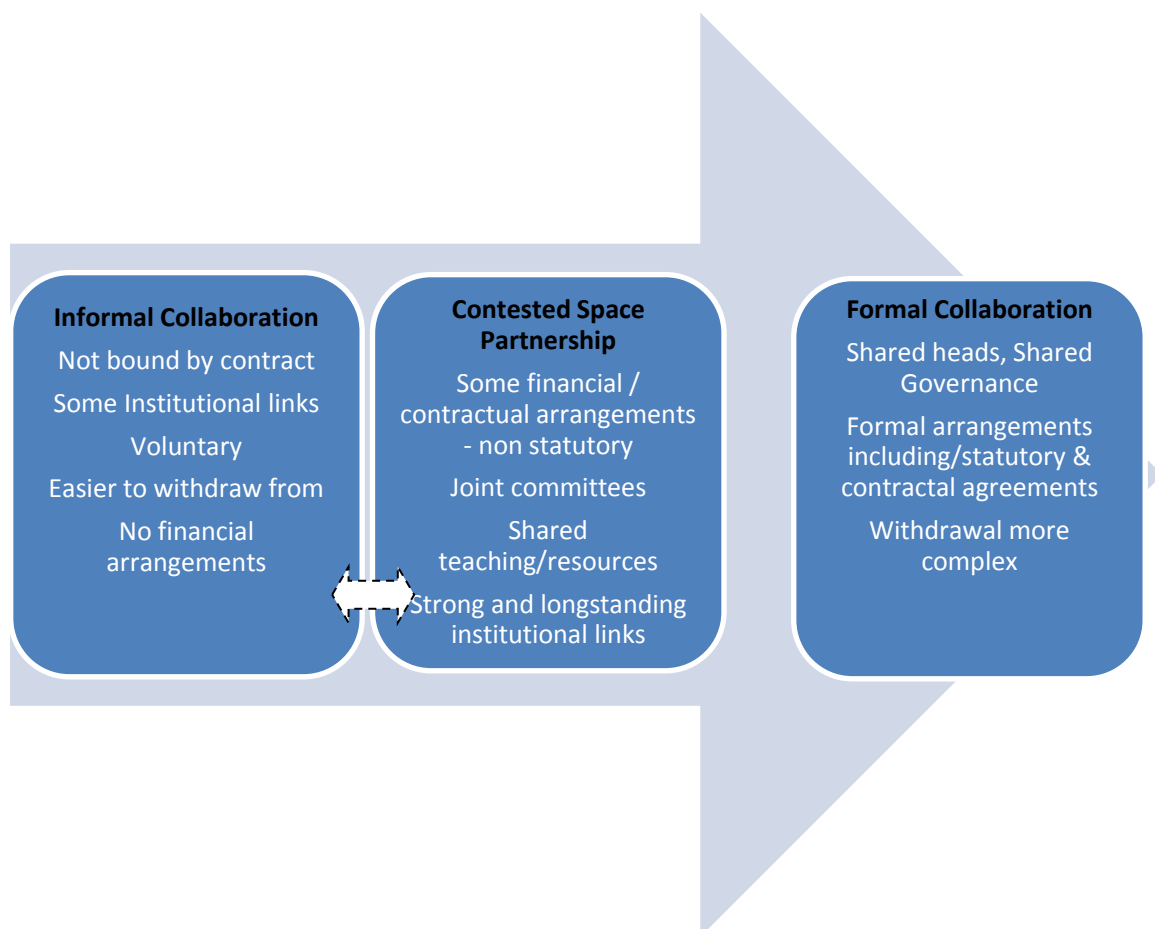




Figure 1: Collaboration Spectrum

The second strategy used to locate and assess the effectiveness of the Contested Space Partnership involves synthesising a series of criteria suggested by Atkinson et al. (2007) and Woods et al. (2006) in order to understand more about the depth and strength of a collaborative model. Woods et al. (2006: p59) outline seven points used to measure the extent of collaboration between institutions. These measurements include the degree to which collaborative partnerships have: strategic vision; group/area identity; organisational infrastructure; professional collaborative activity; penetration below senior management; innovated to seek significant transformation and normalised collaboration as part of the school's culture. These criteria are useful and can be applied to the activity proposed by the Contested Space Partnership. Arguably, partnerships that can evidence all or most of the criteria are likely to be described as deep collaborations (Head 2003). Atkinson et al (2007: p11) demonstrate that the notion of what constitutes collaboration is not entirely settled in the literature. They argue however, that three questions can be asked of collaborative models to determine their depth:

1. How far do organisations support collaboration?
2. How deeply does collaboration penetrate the organisation?
3. To what extent do partners share vision and aspiration for their collaboration?

(Atkinson et al 2007: p11)

If we combine the criteria outlined by Woods et al. (2006) and the questions posed by Atkinson et al. (2007) they form a useful tool kit to assess the strength and depth of the partnership that already exists between schools and the collaborative model proposed by the Contested Space Partnership. This section will contend that the

schools experience of collaboration while involved in the Sharing Education Programme has provided the partnership with an already strong foundation upon which to build and crucially to adapt the collaborative model beyond SEP to begin to address community based needs.

### **6.3 Strategic vision and innovation to seek change**

Arguably the Contested Space Partnership is particularly strong in terms of partnership working and is able to articulate a strategic vision of what it hopes to achieve. Hodgson and Spours (2006: p335) describe the notions of vision and underlying principles as the 'glue that binds wider actors together'. Participants were from the outset, in agreement as to the benefits of sharing, there was also accord in terms of the challenges posed by collaboration and similarly an agreed vision of how school collaboration across the city could positively impact on children and young people and by extension the community. The desire to collaborate is mediated by a localised context (Higham and Yeomans, 2009). The schools in this study demonstrate innovation by adapting the SEP model of collaboration and broadening its potential to include at the partnerships' core, an aspiration that schools in collaboration can address need in the community. The partnership's strategic vision along with the localised context was clearly articulated in the funding proposal:

*The Partnership has identified a number of key need areas which impact both on pupils and the community as a whole and intends to address these needs through a shared and collaborative approach in schools using Key Stage 2 PDMU and Key Stage 3 Learning for Life and Work curriculum. In order to effectively address the identified need, the Foyle Partnership is in agreement that classroom activity must be relevant to the live issues affecting young people in the City of Derry/Londonderry; therefore schools need to address the following: young people using drugs and alcohol; sexual health, sexuality and resilience; impact of the internet and various social media; community relations, space, shared space diversity, inclusion, sectarianism and anti-social behaviour.*

(Foyle Contested Space Partnership Outline proposal to OFMDFM / Atlantic Philanthropies Contested Space / Interface Programme 2011 / 2014)

### **6.4 Group Identity and Organisational Infrastructure**

This study has demonstrated that the constituent schools that make up the Contested Space Partnership do have a clear sense of collective identity. Much of this identity is embedded within the schools' previous involvement in the Sharing

Education Programme. Rather than a new identity, the post primary schools have retained their SEP identity but adapted it. Participants described a mature and already developed partnership rather than an emergent one, with some suggesting that it is an evolution from SEP, similarly others described the experience of SEP as a foundation for the Contested Space Partnership. In short, teachers and managers are already well versed in what is required for effective cross-sector collaboration and this has made the transition to or formation of, the Contested Space Partnership all the more easier. Group or partnership identity is also reinforced by its organisational infrastructure. At the time of writing, the partnership has established a working Steering committee; a Principals committee; a post-primary coordinators forum that meets and plans on a weekly basis and a primary based co-ordinator who liaises with the primary schools partners. There are also extended partnerships with PSNI, WELB, local community and voluntary agencies and Sharing Education Programme at Queen's University Belfast.

#### **6.5 Professional collaborative activity and penetration below management**

Participants have indicated that professional collaborative activity takes place at a number of levels. The senior staff and teachers who took part in this study are clearly involved and committed to collaboration in terms of strategic planning and programme management. The notion of penetration is important (and frequently used in the literature) because it demonstrates how deeply the partnership's strategic vision has embedded within the school. Hargreaves (1992) referred to the idea of bounded collaboration, whereby the impact of collaboration is constrained and is prescriptive and therefore does not penetrate deeply enough into the culture of a school. Bearing this in mind there are multiple ways of thinking about penetration. Firstly, penetration in schools could be shallow and confined to the managerial level. Or, penetration could be deep but a narrow penetration; in other words collaborative activity might penetrate all the way through a school from management through to teachers, pupils and even into the community. But this may be limited to only to those directly involved in the project. Another way to think of penetration is deep penetration that is wide, where the impact of collaboration travels down through the school but is osmotic and permeates across the school and community.

The core of this project is about shared education utilising PDMU and LLW at KS2 and KS3 and involves hundreds of young people. The scope of the project is therefore, from outset, wide and ambitious. Many of the pupils will be engaged in sustained contact and sharing for three years. It's noteworthy that many of the Year 7s will transition from primary to secondary level and will continue to be involved in the programme up until Year 9. There is recognition in the proposal that the strategic vision of the partnership should permeate through the wider school rather than be confined to those involved in the project. The partnership has held shared INSET training days at primary and post primary levels, focusing on building teacher capacity and held events where school Governors have come together on a shared basis. The programme intends to penetrate beyond the school into the community. This is clearly evident in the bid document and reflects the staff perspective at interview. The partnership emphasised the importance of utilising community, voluntary and statutory expertise in order to build the capacity of teachers and to bring this level of community expertise into the classroom, (see section 5). An example of this includes PSNI involvement at both primary and post primary levels looking at being safe online and exploring the impact of anti-social behaviour in the Foyle area. The partnership also intends to involve parents and has developed a programme designed to encourage parents from across the community to get involved in shared activities in each of the post-primary schools. At the time of writing many of these activities had either taken place or were being planned out over 2012.

### **6.6 *Normalised collaboration as part of the schools' culture***

The process of collaboration between schools is in itself significant, irrespective of the outcomes. By the end of the Contested Space Programme, the post-primary schools will have amassed almost seven years worth of sustained collaborative activity (including involvement in SEP1). Previous sections have demonstrated participants' willingness to sustain institutional links. Arguably collaboration has already penetrated into each of the schools cultures (Atkinson et al. 2007) and become normalised, particularly with the post-primary partners. There is a wealth of evidence for this. For example, schools within the partnership have committed themselves to aligning school policies that reflect the need areas. These policies include: child protection, sexual health and resilience, and mobile phone and internet safety. This is important, because school policies are an essential aspect of a

school's culture or ethos; by aligning policy, schools in partnership with different ethos go some way to creating a common and consistent approach to need in the community.

Key to normalising collaboration as part of a school's culture, according to participants, involves ensuring that activity is sustained and regular rather than ad hoc. Staff frequently referenced how it was becoming common or normal to see different students with different uniforms walking around each other's schools. Participants described how, based on SEP, that over time and through regular contact, students got used to the idea of visiting each others' schools and hoped that the community and parents would similarly become more accustomed to pupils moving through contested space and engaging with one another in shared classes.

## **Conclusion**

The experience of collaboration for the participants in this study has been decidedly positive. As a consequence, institutions have formed strong bonds with one another, which are mediated through the relationships between teachers and managers. The experience of sharing appears to have fostered a genuine willingness to sustain partnership. Schools have developed a keen sense of the logistics and challenges involved in sharing, and through experience are able to mitigate these challenges. It is also clear that teachers and managers recognise that sharing and collaboration offers benefits for pupils, staff, schools and the community.

The introduction to this report provides a timeline of sorts demonstrating the role that education has played over the decades in terms of responding to the legacy of ethnic conflict and division. The Contested Space Partnership is also part of this timeline. Unlike interventions such as EMU, sharing and collaboration between schools offers a much more robust and sustained means of cross sector contact between pupils and indeed staff. The Sharing Education Programme encourages schools to make sharing integral to school life. It encourages schools to maximise the use of resources, enhance curricular choice, minimise duplication and subsequently advocates that sharing offers educational, societal and economic benefits.



The Contested Space Programme is a cross-sector partnership that has evolved beyond SEP into a model that is capable of enacting government policy by responding to need, tackling the impacts of deprivation and working in partnership in contested space in order to improve and develop the community in which the schools reside. Schools in partnership are well positioned in communities to become agents of change.

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