

# Promotion of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding

Cranmore Integrated Primary School, Belfast

The promotion of Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (previously E..M.U.) on a whole school basis through the implementation of a series of projects and programmes during the academic year 2005-2006. These were used as one way of promoting a core element of the school's ethos namely the recognition of the value of other people regardless of social, religious or cultural background.

## **School Background**

Cranmore Integrated Primary School is a grant-maintained all ability co-educational primary school. The school was opened in 1993 and since 2001 has been located on a purpose built site in Finaghy Road North in Belfast. The current enrolment is approximately 200 with an additional 24 children in the integrated pre-school playgroup.

## **Overall Learning Intention(s)**

- Understanding that it is acceptable to be different
- Knowing about similarities and differences between cultures in Northern Ireland
- Exploring the impact of prejudice and racism on others

## **Who was involved?**

All classes, all teaching staff and a wide range of external agencies all of whom had experience in devising and running Community Relations workshops.

# Development of the Project

## **Preparing for Take Off**

Although we got involved formally in the following projects much of the ground work had been done in informal ways through promoting the school ethos and the cross-curricular theme of E.M.U. in a variety of ways. The following projects, which began at different times during the previous five years, enriched and formalised existing practice.

**Primary 1 and 2** A once-a-week series of ten workshops aimed at promoting understanding and empathy for those with disabilities (work was supported by materials produced by 'Playback' – a Scottish organisation aimed at promoting the rights of disabled people).

**Primary 3** A once-a-week series of six workshops celebrating cultural traditions in Northern Ireland (work was supported by the Irish School of Ecumenics).

**Primary 4** A series of four one-day workshops aimed at exploring similarities and differences between themselves (as a class) and those from a Primary 4 class from another school.

**Primary 5** A series of five one-day workshops aimed at developing co-operative team skills and exploring differences and similarities between two schools.

**Primary 6** A series of five one-day workshops on stereotypes, prejudice and racism. These included a visit to the Indian Community Centre.

**Primary 7** A series of five one-day workshops on exploring flags and symbols in Northern Ireland and a project on finding out about religious minorities including workshops on Islam and a visit to a mosque. (Primary 4 – 7 work was part of a Schools' Community Relations Project with another local primary school).

## **Cruising**

The school's approach to P.D.M.U. is underpinned by careful Action Planning and rigorous self-evaluation by both staff and pupils. Projects were thoroughly evaluated and planning for future work depended on building on successes of completed work. Opportunities were always taken to promote the work through the local media, school website, school newsletters and Principal's bulletins. This helped maintain momentum and keep interest up.

Whenever possible staff attended relevant training to develop their own understanding of issues involved and often debated and discussed issues relevant to their position regarding contentious issues such as Remembrance Day.

## **Turbulence encountered**

Many workshops involved discussions on issues which both pupils and sometimes staff had little previous opportunity to explore with those of differing views. It was therefore very important that time was spent getting the ground-rules and atmosphere correct so that pupils could explore any fears and prejudice in a non-threatening environment. This in turn allowed them to begin to reach a more mature understanding of the values and behaviours of others.

## **Safe Landing**

These projects evolved (particularly the P4-7 ones) over the last six years and pupils have increasingly become accustomed to and at ease with exploring the needs and traditions of others who may be very different from themselves. On completion of evaluation questionnaires many pupils stated that they enjoyed finding out about others and were frequently surprised at what they shared in common with others and the richness that diversity brings to their experiences.

It is important to mention though that the promotion of P.D.M.U. at Cranmore and the positive outcomes achieved was due to the work being more than just the running of these projects. They ran in parallel with ongoing circle time work, citizenship work with the P.S.N.I., assemblies which celebrated religious difference as well as a desire to explore day-to-day problems within the classrooms.

### **Advice to others**

1. Involve pupils and staff in self-evaluation exercises from the beginning and use findings to help direct future planning.
2. Become familiar with the extensive range of external facilitators in Northern Ireland who can support the development of this type of work.