Practitioners' views on cross-community music education projects in Northern Ireland: alienation, socio-economic factors and educational potential

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This article reports a qualitative investigation of the perceptions on cross-community music education activities of 14 key practitioners with experience with the two main communities in Northern Ireland (NI), Protestant and Catholic. The segregation of the NI education system is outlined in the first section, which is followed by a review of literature, cross-community projects, and the research methodology. Two hundred and sixteen pages of interview transcripts were analysed with NVivo. Interviewees reflected on current activities and on memories of their own experiences when younger, their fears and hopes. They explained how such projects are and have been organised in NI. The participants' perceptions are discussed, including their comments on 'Project processes and effectiveness', 'Music education potential' and 'Music as a sign of identity'. The reported educational activities and aims vary depending on a number of factors, one of the most important being the level of acknowledgement of integration of the educational setting, which appears to be influenced by the socio-economic environment. It is apparent that cross-community music education projects have been and continue to be an effective means of addressing prejudice amongst young people. Nevertheless, the context of each educational setting delimits the potential of such projects. Educational implications are examined in the conclusion.

Introduction

Despite the rhetoric of normality and reconciliation following the peace process, Northern Ireland (NI) remains a deeply segregated society (e.g. Anderson, 2007). In 13 out of 26 local government districts, Protestants are the overwhelming majority,

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whereas 11 districts are predominantly Catholic (Office for National Statistics, 2004). It was only in 2007 that NI had its devolved Assembly restored. The government is currently shared between the two largest and historically irreconcilable parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (loyalist, founded by the Protestant Rev. Ian Paisley) and Sinn Féin (republican, regarded as the political wing of the currently decommissioned Irish Republican Army [IRA]). The present political environment has potential for developing new cross-community projects, some of which focus on musical activities, because the opportunities that music creates for contact appear to allow for the development of better relations (Ulster Orchestra, 2007; Gallagher, 2008). However, there is a lack of information on the keys for success in collaborative music education activities across the divide, and on how to adapt the projects for young children. Therefore, the main aim of this study was to explore experienced practitioners' perceptions on how to develop music skills while bringing children from Protestant and Catholic communities together. Further, as cross-community initiatives with younger children have been proven to maximise results (Connolly, 2007; Hayden & Odena, 2007) the scope for developing positive attitudes within musical cross-community projects is also considered. This is achieved through an investigation of practitioners' views of the potential of cross-community musical activities as a means of ameliorating negative attitudes in young children and promoting better intergroup relations. The study has a practical focus, namely, to find the keys for success in designing this type of educational opportunities and how they can be best used to promote positive attitudes and in some cases relations in a segregated society.

The context

Segregation in NI is most acute in areas which were so-called 'hot spots' during the conflict, where prejudice remains and is coupled with internal violence exacerbated by socio-economic problems such as high unemployment (Northern Ireland Statistics & Research Agency, 2005). During the height of the conflict, from 1966 to the late 1990s, over 3700 people were killed and tens of thousands injured within a population of 1.6 million, due to direct fighting between (and often within) republican and loyalist groupings, the British army and the local police (Muldoon, 2004; McEvoy *et al.*, 2006). All the deaths are carefully documented in *Lost lives* (McKittrick *et al.*, 1999), a comprehensive volume which reports the stories of 3636 men, women and children who died as a result of the troubles. In its latest updated edition the death toll is up to 3720 and includes 75 lives lost between 2000 and 2006, 25 of which were the result of internal loyalist feuding (McKittrick *et al.*, 2007).[1] It is estimated that one in four of the NI adult population knows someone who died during the troubles (Gallagher, 2008). This is still a very sensitive topic and people generally avoid talking about it in public. Furthermore, understandably, the wounds are taking a long time to heal (Gallagher, 2004; Myers, 2006) and there are still sectarian attacks and deaths related to the conflict every year.

The school system reflects the social segregation of the province with approximately 94% of children attending schools that can be classified as Protestant or Catholic due to the homogeneity of staff and students. Just over 60 schools out of more than 1000 primary, secondary and grammar schools are currently classified as 'Integrated', balancing their intake between the two main communities, a movement that was started as early as 1981 as a response to the conflict situation and the separation in the school system (Kilpatrick & Leitch, 2004; Gallagher, 2007; Integrated Education Fund, 2007). This de facto segregation of the school system and other facets of society, such as the leisure and sports facilities, has been labelled as 'benign apartheid' (e.g. Cairns, 2007).

While some argue that cross-community tensions reflected in the local media are not a feature of music education because all schools have to implement the same curriculum (Drummond, 1999), others discuss the 'politicization of music' (Hastings, 2003, pp. 77–78), observing that, over the years, 'the two communities have developed an attitude of alienation from part of their culture, and folk music has developed political overtones' (Jarvis, 1990, p. 276). In an earlier study Jarvis (1990) noted that many teachers were simply not familiar with even one of the main traditional musics (i.e. the Irish folk music tradition, often associated with Catholics, and the flute band tradition, associated with Protestants). Historically, the perception of the co-existing diverse musical traditions has been used to create a sense of identity that is culturally exclusive (Forker, 2002; Ramsey, 2003).

Theoretical background: music, identity, prejudice and contact hypothesis

Recent research demonstrates that music is a defining element in the formation of young people's identity (MacDonald *et al.*, 2002; Hargreaves *et al.*, 2006; Welch, 2006). North *et al.* (2000) studied the questionnaire responses from 2465 adolescents and found that music allows adolescents to satisfy their emotional needs and is preferred to other indoor activities. Warwick (2006), in a consultation of 533 young people living in England, found that music is their third source of hope after 'Family' and 'Friends', and is more valued than 'Television' or 'Sport'. Welch (2006) identified early childhood as a critical period for the development of musical abilities and the formation of musical identity. Research also shows how music is an effective empowering/inclusion tool for individuals, schools and communities (Hallam, 2001; Veblen & Olsson, 2002; Rusinek, 2008) and how schools can be successful spaces to develop music skills (Welch & Adams, 2003; Green, 2008), hence contributing to the development of individuals' identities from a very young age.

Several investigations highlight how children growing up in segregated NI neighbourhoods develop prejudices against the cultural forms of the other half of the divide (e.g. Connolly & Healy, 2004; Connolly *et al.*, 2006). While this systematically happens with children aged six to eight, some studies have shown that respect towards 'different' cultural forms such as sporting traditions and flags can be increased with early intervention (Connolly *et al.*, 2006). The sensitive issue of 'respect for others' was addressed by educational policy makers with the inclusion in the 1990s of the

cross-curricular theme Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU). The objectives of EMU were 'fostering self-respect, respect for others, and the improvement of relationships between people of differing cultural traditions' (Department of Education NI [DENI], 2005, pp. 4–6). However, subsequent studies suggested that the school implementation of the EMU cross-curricular theme did not address its more controversial aspects due to a number of factors, including lack of training and professional development to support teachers, and lack of more specific EMU contents identified in the curriculum (Smith & Robinson, 1996).

If teachers do not feel at ease discussing contentious issues, such as cultural prejudice, it is then difficult for schools to provide space for students to engage with these issues wholeheartedly (Donnelly, 2004). In a case study of nine schools serving NI communities with contrasting socio-economic circumstances and contrasting experiences of political violence, Smith (2001, p. 134) found that the planned curriculum 'was to a large extent devoid of such opportunities'. Hughes and Donnelly (2006) studied two Integrated schools (also reported in Hughes, 2007a) and two bilingual/bi-national schools in Israel, and found that teachers often feel ill-equipped to engage with activities that have the potential to induce tension or conflict. Contrarily, Hanratty and Taggart (2004, p. 19), in an analysis of discussion seminars from nine Catholic and Protestant schools, showed that, with appropriate tools (i.e. selected texts focused on 'The Troubles') and a considerable level of teaching skills and experience, it is possible 'to encourage pupils to critically examine their attitudes and even abandon some prejudices'. In the new Revised Curriculum (DENI, 2007) the EMU's objectives are reworded and included within the area of 'Personal Development & Mutual Understanding', a change that could lighten the most controversial aspects of EMU and leave, once more, the onus of deciding the focus of this renamed area with each individual teacher. Nevertheless, how respect towards 'different' cultural forms is promoted will ultimately depend on the school setting (Smith, 2001) and the teacher's previous experience with cross-community activities (e.g. Donnelly, 2004; Hanratty & Taggart, 2004).

At the heart of organising school and out-of-school cross-community activities lies the idea that intergroup contact, under certain conditions, can be effective in reducing intergroup prejudice and hostility. This theory, also known as *contact hypothesis* (Brown, 2001), was first proposed by Allport (1954) and has been recently corroborated by Pettigrew and Tropp (2006) in a meta-analysis of the results of 515 published studies. The optimum conditions for effective intergroup contact are:

1. equal status of both groups in the contact situation;
2. ongoing personal interaction between individuals from both groups;
3. cooperation in a situation of mutual independence, in which members of both groups work together towards a common goal;
4. institutional support, where there is official social sanction for contact between distinct social groups (after Hughes, 2007a, p. 421).

Allport (1954, p. 489) observed that 'to be maximally effective, contact and acquaintance programs' would need to 'occur in ordinary purposeful pursuits', avoiding

artificiality. Subsequent studies on contact theory highlight that the emotional response during contact is more important than increasing knowledge about the other group, and that the above optimum conditions can be perceived differently by participating groups, for instance when a minority sees the activity as patronisingly unequal (Pettigrew & Tropp, 2006).

In a more recent reformulation of contact theory, Pettigrew (1998) proposes a sequential model to reduce conflict between communities containing three stages, which might aid our understanding of the participants' experiences in cross-community activities:

1. the initial contact, where anxiety is likely to be more pronounced and where personal identity and interpersonal interaction are emphasised in an effort to 'de-categorise' the individual;
2. the stage when contact is well established, which affords an optimal situation with less anxiety in which the old salient categorisation of belonging to a particular group is highlighted, resulting in weakened prejudices that are generalised beyond the activity;
3. the stage in which, after extended contact, individuals begin to think of themselves as part of a redefined new larger group that comprises all communities (involves the development of the idea of a new community, or a 're-categorisation' of the old ones).

In a further meta-analysis of previous research Kenworthy *et al.* (2005) observe that the intergroup anxiety that stems from the anticipation of negative consequences of cross-community contact is likely to be increased by minimal prior contact. Reducing this anxiety (and potentially alleviating prejudice formation) is often one of the aims of cross-community activities, some of which use music as a facilitating/inclusion tool with young people.

Cross-community music education projects in NI and elsewhere

With the recent improvement of the political environment a few music education projects are bringing together schools from both communities in a way that would have been unthinkable two decades ago; for instance, the project *A marvellous medicine* (Ulster Orchestra, 2007), which brought together primary school children for a final performance at the Belfast Waterfront Hall, or the activities of the self-explanatorily named Cross-Border Orchestra (www.crossborderorchestra.ie). Often the main aim of these projects is to bring youngsters together rather than to teach them a formulated set of values, and the opportunities presented by a shared interest in music allow for the development of cross-group friendships.

Music education activities have been used successfully in other countries where there was a need for increasing inclusion and respect for ethnic diversity. For example, in Spain, festivals comprising public music student performances have been used for promoting inclusion and reducing the absenteeism of Roma children (Almau, 2005).[2] In The Netherlands, music workshops providing 'Memorable Moments' are

being employed to promote positive attitudes in nurseries with high percentages of migrant children (Brenman, 2007). And in Colombia, a network of music schools in some of the poorest neighbourhoods of Medellin is developing children's music skills alongside their social inclusion, counteracting the exclusion and social alienation suffered by many young children at the hands of local crime gangs (Helena Rey, 2008).

Another well-known example of a musical project that is seeking to bring reconciliation and build understanding, focused on Palestinian and Israeli young people, is Said and Barenboim's West-Eastern Divan Orchestra (http://west-easterndivan. artists.warner.de). Since 1999 young musicians from Israel and Arab countries have toured regularly across the world carrying the idea of dialogue through music (Barenboim & Said, 2004). The idea of the orchestra is 'to provide a metaphor quite removed from politics' and to have music, or 'the abstract language of harmony', as the common framework (Mackenzie, 2003).

Whereas in the above cases of Spain, Netherlands and Colombia the music activities are designed to facilitate the social inclusion of disadvantaged minority groups, in the Divan Orchestra the activities appear to function as a neutral environment in which classically trained young musicians can develop respect for each other's communities. All these projects have been widely documented and it is not the purpose here to present a comprehensive analysis of them but, rather, to highlight that many contexts outside NI have been studied, and that research is now needed that is based in NI.

Research methodology

After a review of literature and documentation from previous projects, a number of adults involved in music education activities with young people at different levels/ institutions were approached for a confidential interview. The initial sample was 'purposive', starting with music teacher educators from the main colleges, and was increased by asking all participants for more contacts (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Kvale, 1996).[3] The 14 final interviewees were selected following a 'maximum variation' sampling approach, taking into account their potential as 'key informants' (Cohen *et al.*, 2000). Key informants were chosen in line with the following criteria: having extended experience in cross-community educational activities; and having worked in at least two different contexts. The maximum variation approach was employed to focus on key informants (or key practitioners) with experience of activities with young people working together, regardless of the educational setting. The number of practitioners and their occupations are summarised in Table 1.

Two interviewees provided continuing development music education courses for teachers in Catholic, Protestant and Integrated schools. Another participant completed her teacher education in England and, since returning, had worked in the denominational and integrated sectors. The composer was well known for leading projects with children across the divide and for his large-scale music works for young people.

Table 1. Number of interviewees and their occupations

Number	Occupation
1	Teacher, nursery school
1	Teacher and music coordinator, integrated primary school
1	Music teacher, integrated secondary school
3	Music education lecturer, teacher education college
1	Director, school of music
2	Course leader, in-service courses for teachers, local education and library board & school of music
1	Composer and workshop leader
2	Director of music, grammar school
1	Music teacher and conductor, grammar school
1	Music education inspector (recently retired)
Total: 14	

The cross-community educational activities reported varied from a yearly work-shop pairing two schools of different denominations from a 'hot spot' neighbourhood, to projects involving schools for a few weeks/months, to weekly cross-community activities such as after school music clubs, orchestra rehearsals and regular classroom teaching. Some activities were integrated due to their circumstances—e.g. a music school servicing both communities—while others were created to develop bridges. All activities provided ample opportunities for cross-community contact and were led by professionals who were enthusiastic about this type of setting.

Interviews were always set in a place chosen by the interviewee and lasted 25–65 minutes (with one exception which was shorter due to work commitments). In three instances participants were interviewed in pairs using a focus group format, allowing for interaction, which explains their extended length. Difficulties regarding 'insiders' researching mixed groups in NI, such as the tendency to relate to one community more than another or the need to keep one's own background undisclosed (Carlisle, 2007) were avoided due to the researcher's 'outsider' Spanish status.

The interviews were semi-structured and attempted to explore the following themes: the participants' musical background and their past and current work; their views on music education in NI; and their advice on how to increase the effectiveness of cross-community projects in terms of involvement and development of music skills and positive attitudes towards the other community. Questions varied slightly depending on whether they were working mainly in schools or out-of-school settings, for instance when enquiring about EMU and the school curriculum (see examples of questions in the Appendix). In addition, further clarification of issues and ideas as they appeared throughout the interviews were obtained, hence interviews developed into 'conversations with a purpose' (Burgess, 1988).

All interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The full transcripts were analysed employing NVivo, using thematic/recursive comparative analysis (Odena, 2001a, 2007a; Gibbs, 2002). This process of testing and refining using specialist

Table 2. List of categories (in italic) and subcategories

1 *Teacher education*
Practicum organisation provided
Student teachers' background

2 *Music education in NI*
Different activities in different schools

3 *Project processes and effectiveness*
Barriers for cross-community education

4 *Cross-community projects*
Marvellous medicine
The School of Music's 'Music Makers'
Nursery EMU projects
Music at Integrated School A
Music at Integrated School B
Grammar School A cross-community project
Grammar School B music education

5 *Music education potential*
Children's potential
Music potential in participants' paths

6 *Music as a sign of identity*
Stereotypes and alienation

7 *Perception of EMU*

8 *Intergenerational differences*

9 *Information on potential key practitioners*

10 *Socio-economic factors*

11 *Participants' backgrounds*

software has been successfully used in previous investigations.[4] A total of 253,742 characters out of 271,905 (93.32%) of the text of over 216 pages of transcripts was coded into categories. The process consisted of repeated readings of all transcripts, looking for commonalities and themes, which were tested with each new reading and evolved into a number of provisional categories. In successive analyses the provisional categories were compared with each other, which resulted in some reorganisation, merging and refining until settling into the final 11 categories, six of which contained additional subcategories (see Table 2). The final categorisation was discussed with two colleagues, giving further reliability to the analysis.

Discussion of results

Following systematic analyses, the four most relevant categories for the research aim were found to be 'Music as a sign of identity', 'Socio-economic factors', 'Project

Table 3. Number of appearances of main categories in transcripts

Category	Number of appearances categorised	Number of interviewees
'Project processes and effectiveness'	51 (16 in subcategory 'Barriers for cross-community education')	14 (100%)
'Music education potential'	29	14 (100%)
'Music as a sign of identity'	23	10 (71%)
'Socio-economic factors'	12	8 (57%)
Total no. of quotations for this set of categories	115	

processes and effectiveness' and 'Music education potential'. These were not only relevant for the purpose of the research but, overall, they were the strongest themes emerging across all interview transcripts, as shown in Table 3.

In some instances comments appeared to fall into two categories, for example 'Project processes and effectiveness' and 'Music education potential'. In such cases, the comment was categorised according to the context of the conversation. It has been argued elsewhere that disclosing the amount of qualitative data analysed, the procedures followed with the software used, and how the analyses substantiate the researcher's claims (e.g. percentage of data categorised and relative weight of emerging themes) affords increased rigour and transparency to the analysis (Odena, under review). For reasons of space, other categories that complement the issues discussed in this article, such as 'Music education in NI' and 'Intergenerational differences', will be examined elsewhere.

In the next sections the participants' comments are presented in order to provide the reader with rich descriptions of the participants' experiences in their own words (Eisner, 1991; Odena & Welch, 2009).

Music as a sign of identity

This category included comments on the use of music as a (sometimes) alienating sign of identity and explanations of the stereotypes associated with both sides of the divide. All participants felt that music education activities, attended outside of their denominational schools while growing up, had been a good way of addressing their own prejudices:

> Growing up in NI you were either a Catholic or Protestant, it was very much a definition of who you were, and the first time that I met a Protestant was through the School of Music on Saturday mornings, and you suddenly realised they didn't have two heads and their eyes weren't closer together … we had an awful lot of banter and I think a real realisation that these people were not that different from us.

However, the same participant was still encountering alienation between cultures in some of the school visits for her current work. She recalled an illustrative instance with a nine-year-old boy:

> His poem was about how he hated the Brits and I said, 'Have you ever met a British person?' and he went, 'No. If I met one I would shoot him dead' … and I said, 'But why?' and he said, 'Because they're horrible' and I said, 'But you've never met them so how would you know?' and he says, 'Awk, well, everybody knows that!' … and it struck me that we have so far to go.

There was a general consensus amongst key informants for welcoming change, but segregation and prejudices, particularly in 'hot spots' still experiencing internal conflict, were perceived as high. Different musical traditions are still very much alive and these are sometimes perceived as exclusive by one community. Three participants expressed this divide as follows:

> The historical background of brass bands is in the British military system … [and] tends to attract more Protestants; similarly Irish traditional music is part of the folk culture of the Catholics.

> Flute bands petrify me because to me they signify the Twelfth of July and marching … for many it's a very appropriate way of being part of the community, but it still frightens me because it's an alien culture.

> Like any stereotype, once you start to dig into it, you see that that's not the case, but music has been used as a weapon to sort of define communities … it's like gang mentality.

The musical stereotypes associated with the two communities (i.e. loyalist flute bands versus republican Irish traditional music sessions) also cause unease to some parents:

> Last year we did a project with ten Protestant primary schools, but there was no attempt whatever to try and broaden their view of what Irish music is, because at the moment they don't want to know, their parents don't want to know … On the Shankill Road [a notoriously loyalist 'hot spot'] you wouldn't do that at all, it would be stupid to do that. So I think I would respect completely the nationalist tradition in Catholic West Belfast, and we would do then something different in Protestant West Belfast.

Socio-economic factors

Comments on the socio-economic characteristics of families, the educational environment and their influence on the type of music activities were included within this category. Participants acknowledged that their views were probably influenced by their particular upbringing. They felt 'fortunate' to have 'professional parents' or a family background 'where there was more tolerance', and also to have mixed with music students across the divide with similar upbringings: 'if I had grown up on a housing estate here I might have had a different view'.

The normalisation and slow disappearance of segregation in more affluent areas brought with it a wealth of (de facto cross-community) music and music education activities:

> Quite often people would have come together for operatic societies and choral groups and, again from a variety of traditions, there would have been a pool of performers … I would have freely attended different churches to perform a particular musical work. But again, I suppose, I would be speaking from a very sort of middle-class perspective.

> It works on the professional level and the leafy green suburbs … [and] I think it works to a certain extent in grammar schools.

In contrast, Cairns (2007) observes that apparent unprejudiced middle-class contexts need to be analysed with attention, as educated adults are able to develop sophisticated denying mechanisms and copying skills to hide their dislikes and prejudices. The following comment by a practitioner working in a prosperous area exemplifies this possibility:

> A lot of people now have much more contact with the other side and there's more initiatives, I've had never any problems with people … some of them have become firm friends, they make fun of each other but in a very friendly way, and it's taken in a very light way, nobody's ever taken offence, or nobody's ever said anything that's really outrageously bad, but they actually get along very well and have grown accustomed to and I think enjoying each other's company.

Conversely, it is apparent from the practitioners' comments that cultural alienation remains in poorer areas, where the sort of music which people identify with would reflect socio-economic differences:

> There is a social element to classical music in that well-to-do families will identify with classical music and children from disadvantaged areas cannot identify at all … So the only division that I see on a regular basis is to do with social status.

A teacher educator observed that the 'distinction between Catholic and Protestant' is over-simplistic:

> I think the socio-economic differences are more problematic … The 11+ [i.e. comprehensive testing of students aged 10–11, eliminated in 2009], which actually results in probably more affluent middle-class children going to grammar school education and more working-class children going towards vocational education, has resulted in a divide that is much more profound than the religious and political divide and so probably exacerbates the [religious] divide.

Project processes and effectiveness

All participants had extended experience of music education with children from a variety of areas. In terms of school and out-of-school activities with young children, singing and composing were regarded as ideal to engage all pupils; specifically, 'practical activities' that they could easily relate to: 'that's when they get interested … when they're getting involved in actually doing rather than listening or just watching'. Another practitioner expressed this preference for singing and composing, particularly with primary school pupils, as follows:

> The idea of getting children to sing is one of the prime ones. They need a song which is catchy and easy to learn and a song where the words are not too difficult … It's important that what it is they're coming together to do is absorbing, and that's the advantage of a composing activity which tends to work very well because it tends to use the whole of your brain and if you're focused on something with somebody else then the other person isn't a disturbance. So an activity which absolutely absorbs the children tends to unite them better.

In terms of repertoire, the general consensus was to ignore any type of music that could be related to one of the two main communities. This was a historical de facto position expressed by participants, which had not been negotiated amongst them. An exception to this were the Integrated schools where, for instance, Irish traditional music was taught with the parents' approval, as well as particular denominational schools in affluent areas, which had musical ensembles and extracurricular activities that could be directly associated with both main religious groups in the same building. Everywhere else it was felt that the most appropriate way to run successful activities was to avoid anything that had 'a political overlay or what might be perceived as a political overlay'.

Another key for success was to make clear from the outset that, whatever the activity, it was not a competition between schools or communities, but rather cooperative work with a shared objective. This finding concurs with the conclusions of a recent English study of effective school collaborations (Atkinson *et al.*, 2007), as well as with Allport's (1954) optimum conditions for effective intergroup contact, in which members of both groups work together towards a common goal. For instance, two participants were involved in coordinating *Music makers*, an innovative project that brings together primary school children from each community who would not normally meet, to participate in music education workshops with their teachers:

> We really stress the importance that it's not competitive … it's very much to give the children an opportunity to show off what they have done and … to encourage the children to be creative and the teachers not to be frightened of creativity.

This non-competitive and cooperative ethos permeated the children's activities, the coordinators' and the primary teachers' work in *Music makers*. All classes participating in the project prepared an original composition on a given theme, using voices and school instruments, and rehearsed a number of common songs. Teachers were offered music training workshops at the start and were regularly asked for feedback, which fed into the organisation of the project, in a way akin to collaborative action research (e.g. Sagor, 2000). In addition, the coordinators went into primary schools to advise and mentor the teachers' development of music skills, running sessions alongside teachers before the final cross-community mornings in which children played their compositions in front of other classes and sang the common repertoire together.

Various impediments to projects were also described by interviewees. The primary school teachers' insecurities were highlighted as one of the obstacles for participation in cross-community activities, on top of the 'extra work' involved and the insufficient funding for transport. The teachers' insecurities were attributed by two interviewees to the limited music skills of the generalist school teachers, which stem from their lack of musical training:

> Music hasn't been a very strong part of [compulsory] teacher training for quite a long number of years, so many teachers feel insecure about teaching music and they don't do a great deal and therefore the idea of getting together on a music project wouldn't normally arise from within the school.

Given the findings from previous studies in NI, the above insecurities might also be fuelled by a lack of experience on how to deal with cross-community situations and with potentially conflictive issues within their own group (e.g. Hughes & Donnelly, 2006).

A common characteristic of successful projects in 'hot spots' was parental involvement. This could take the form of consultations during parents' meetings, attendance at the school workshops/performances, and parental voluntary collaboration in out-of-school projects. It appeared that the gradual development of a 'caring relationship' between teachers and parents was important for the acceptance and smooth running of this type of activities:

> We always take a group of mothers with us, so they have the benefit of meeting, they always make it a very social occasion, have tea and coffee and scones or whatever that morning … We establish and develop friendly and caring relationships between our two groups of parents, children and staff, facilitating a climate of caring and respect for each other's culture, this is what you're aiming at really.

The above quotation refers to a project where two nursery schools visited each other for the day, and the children had a music education workshop provided by a specialist from the local Education and Library Board. The same teacher explained that she was not sure parents would be ready for a longer more permanent type of project yet:

> It's very difficult even to get the parents through our door [for regular events] never mind trying to say, 'We're going to do something with a Catholic school down the road' and an awful lot of the parents here in this area would not be ready for that yet, I mean, we're in times of peace, but it's going to take a long time before they're ready.

Apart from the obvious reluctance of parents in more polarised neighbourhoods, school principals were also perceived as key facilitators/obstacles. Two participants expressed this idea as follows:

> These projects in school really only work if they are backed by the principal of the school. If it's left to a music teacher or a drama teacher or a sports teacher, it really doesn't work if your principal doesn't believe in it and is the driving force … Involvement of parents is very important, I think, parents should know that it's happening, should know why and what the sense of involvement is, and what the expectations are. There's always the risk that some parents will not approve, but usually the children don't ask those questions.

> Unfortunately … it's down to the value the principal puts on music, you know … A number of principals do not understand the value of music … they don't understand the value that children will get out of it; they see it as getting in the way of teaching English, maths and science, and it's holding the teachers back.

The above perception resonates with a summary of findings by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI, 2001), which found that in over half of the schools there were areas for improvement, such as poor accommodation for music education in relation to the size of teaching groups, sound interferences, inappropriate furniture and a cramped and hazardous environment. In a survey of 123 post-primary school music departments in NI, Drummond (1999, p. 23) found that the budget available to them depended 'very much on the whim of individual heads'. For example, the music department's yearly budget in schools with more than 900 students could

range from (an unspecified amount of) less than £249 to more than £1750, with three out of 10 schools in the lower range of the bracket with a financial provision below £1.15 per music student per year.

Music education potential

Conversely, certain schools were described by participants as having a very good music reputation, attracting parents regardless of their denomination. One example of this was the Methodist College, which is located in the university quarter of Belfast and has a variety of choirs, orchestras, brass bands and Irish traditional groups:

> Certain schools will have a strong musical tradition … a strongly led department or somebody with significant expertise in music, and quite often parents and older children will elect to go regardless of denomination to the particular school for the sheer musical experience … Issues regarding identity quite often just fall by the wayside. You would find that in Belfast with 'Methody' [the Methodist College] for example, which has a very strong musical tradition … Catholic children and particularly their parents, if they found that they have a particular leaning towards music, would want them to have the very best education and may send them regardless of religion.

Again, these are not the parents that live in the polarised neighbourhoods. It would appear that middle-class families are more willing to encourage their children to mix with children from diverse religious groups, which would explain that in middle-class areas these opportunities can be taken up, whereas in working-class areas the barriers for cross-community education are more acute. Nevertheless, the potential to develop music skills while bringing children from both communities together regardless of their background was acknowledged by the participants' many positive experiences in their own education and their regular work with children:

> [Music] is a superb tool for encouraging children to work together … they throw themselves into it wholeheartedly and are quite prepared to work with other people in doing that.

> Kids are equipped with the enthusiasm and passion and energy, they can inspire people like no other group of people can.

Even though in most of the cross-community contexts reported, national identity issues were avoided and the priority was on developing music skills, these activities were considered by interviewees as an ideal tool to bring children together. Many of these children might not have come into contact until a later stage in their lives due to social segregation. For instance, some participants reported 'going to university' as the first intergroup setting they experienced outside musical ensembles while growing up, and the participating lecturers observed that current student teachers come to college with limited experience of intergroup settings.

Conclusions and educational implications

From the interviewees' experiences it seems that progress is being made in developing more opportunities for cross-community music education. As noted, remaining

prejudices combined with socio-economic factors in deprived areas do pose a chal-lenge. However, a number of educational implications and recommendations for practice can be elucidated from this study. These recommendations would apply to NI but also, to some extent, they might be relevant to other post-conflict societies emerging from decades of ethnic violence.

It is apparent that in successful cross-community activities, teachers, schools and students participate on a voluntary basis. If hesitant schools are to be involved in future projects, they may like to participate in their design. Further, teachers may require support in the form of training and development, not only for their music skills, but to develop their ability to lead cross-community activities. Previous studies have highlighted that teachers feel ill-equipped to engage in activities that have the potential to induce tensions (Donnelly, 2004; Hughes, 2007a) and that the promo-tion of positive attitudes between historically irreconcilable communities can not be addressed solely with changes in curriculum guidelines (Smith & Robinson, 1996).

It would appear that an appropriate approach to carry out such projects, when teachers are willingly engaged in their development working alongside other practi-tioners, would be a collaborative action research model, in which aims and activities are set and periodically reviewed through individual and collaborative group work and reflection (e.g. Sagor, 2000; Cabrera *et al.*, 2006; Odena & Cabrera, 2006; Reason & Bradbury, 2007). In addition, teachers need time and space to develop an understanding of their own values to avoid reinforcing 'the psychological barriers which sustain division' (Donnelly, 2004, p. 263), particularly as the implementation of classroom activities is ultimately down to the individual teacher. As Smith (2001, p. 138) noted in his investigation of schools as institutions for peace, teachers are all products of the environment: it is 'very easy to pass on preconceived social-political ideas' that children are quick to pick up on.

The above recommendations concur with the key issues in achieving prejudice reduction and improving intergroup relations identified by Hughes (2007b) and Tausch *et al.* (2005); for instance, that intergroup activity should involve cooperative work towards a commonly agreed goal, and that contact should be sustained in order to develop greater attitudinal change. Other key issues include the need to promote activities in a range of contexts to maximise generalisation to other situations, and the need for intervention programmes to be rigorously evaluated, including not only the assessment of attitudes but also the assessment of the 'societal indicators of success', for example shifts in friendship patterns (Hughes, 2007b, p. 11).

In the contexts described by participants there were different approaches to cross-community activities; in most instances any potentially contentious issues such as the traditional repertoires of both communities were avoided, whereas in a few cases these were acknowledged and studied (for example, in Integrated schools or in contexts outside 'hot spots'). Nevertheless, most music education cross-community activities recalled by participants would fall within Pettigrew's (1998) first stage, i.e. ignoring any type of music that could be related to one of the two main communities, hence de-categorising the individuals and the environment. Experiences of activities such as Saturday rehearsals of county youth orchestras facilitated this 'neutral' environment

in which young people could build friendships beyond their group (first stage). Meeting regularly would lead to a more relaxed context where group belonging was informally highlighted and prejudices weakened (second stage): 'we had an awful lot of banter and … a real realisation that these people were not that different from us'. Some of the interviewees could be located within a redefined new larger group (third stage), arguably, thanks to the opportunities they had while growing up, but this stage could not be extended to all their students.

Interestingly, the approach taken in activities located within Pettigrew's first and second stages differs from the approach taken by recent initiatives in England, such as *Musical futures* (www.musicalfutures.org.uk) and the National Curriculum for Music, which focus on the pupils' interests and backgrounds (Qualifications and Curriculum Authority [QCA], 2008). The National Curriculum states that music teaching can contribute to the students' ability to 'value diversity and challenge racism' by providing opportunities for pupils to develop an understanding of 'the preferences of others' and to explore 'values and feelings' (QCA, 2008, pp. 1–2). *Musical futures* is an English initiative that encourages students to start with their own musical interests, and has been recently shown to increase the attainment of pupils aged 11–14 (Hallam *et al.*, 2008). Nevertheless, in the current NI situation of 'benign apartheid', a similar diversity approach was only deemed feasible by interviewees when used in cross-community activities outside polarised neighbourhoods.

As observed, schools in affluent areas seem to have less obvious segregation and come together when they wish to do so. Therefore new projects would need to focus on schools in deprived areas. In a study of intergroup contact in two Arab-Israeli schools, Hughes (2007a) found that although the school work facilitated prejudice reduction between children from Arab and Jewish backgrounds, there were counter-vailing forces, including the social inequalities in the wider Israeli society and the related 'political/social baggage' that individuals brought with them. The challenge for the schools was how to develop attitudes that could then be generalised within a wider societal context that Arabs perceived as highly discriminatory towards them.

The situation in NI is clearly not the same, but the 'political/social baggage' of many people living in polarised neighbourhoods could have a similar effect. Paraphrasing Hughes (2007a, p. 435), the challenge that some schools face is how cross-community music projects can improve attitudes that apply beyond the educational setting within the context of the school's polarised Catholic or Protestant neighbourhood, where most people perceive the other community as a threat (e.g. 'On the Shankill Road you wouldn't do that at all, it would be stupid to do that'). A recent 10-year longitudinal study of social attitudes to community relations highlights that 73% of Catholics believe that Protestants are treated better and that Protestants have an increasing 'desire to live and work in isolation from the other community' (Hughes & Donnelly, 2001, p. 19).

As in many qualitative investigations, a number of questions for further research arose from the data analysis. Teachers involved in cross-community in-service music courses gave encouraging written evaluations to their workshop leaders (who partici-pated in this study). Taking into account that primary teacher education has been

historically provided by two separate main colleges,[5] an interesting area to research would be the effect of the teachers' involvement in cross-community music courses on their professional and personal development over a number of years. A longitudinal study with teachers from both communities would offer the possibility to explore this topic. Another area for future enquiry would be the children's views on the importance of music in their lives and in the formation of their identities.

All participants (apart from two that grew up outside NI) clearly remember the first time they, as children or adolescents, came across youngsters from across the divide in voluntary musical activities that helped to dilute their own stereotypes. This observation would support the suggestion that the negative anxiety produced by the anticipation of cross-community contact is likely to be ameliorated by early participation in contact activities under optimal conditions (Kenworthy *et al.*, 2005; Tausch *et al.*, 2005). In polarised contexts where unresolved community tensions are much higher than those openly acknowledged, to be able to move beyond Pettigrew's (1998) initial contact stage, projects would need to offer something that entices children (fun) as well as parents (quality) and schools (status), focusing first on quality musical experiences and leaving positive attitudes towards the other community to develop naturally.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1. The breakdown of the 75 lost lives between 2000 and 2006 is as follows: 19 lost lives in 2000, 20 in 2001, 11 in 2002, 10 in 2003, four in 2004, eight in 2005 and three in the first half of 2006 (McKittrick *et al.*, 2007).
2. The name generally accepted for this ethnic group differs slightly depending on the country. For instance, Spanish scholars use the word '*Gitanos*' where British use 'Travellers' and EU policy makers often use 'Roma' (see, for example, the website of the EU 6th Framework Programme Integrated Project *INCLUD-ED. Strategies for Inclusion and Social Cohesion in Europe from Education*, available at: www.ub.es/includ-ed).
3. This enquiry builds on and extends a Study Paper commissioned by the Bernard van Leer Foundation in which key practitioners were interviewed with the aim of drafting recommendations for music activities as a way to address social inclusion and to develop positive attitudes towards ethnic and developmental diversity amongst young children (Odena, 2007b). Parts of this study were presented and discussed at the Research Commission Seminar of the International Society for Music Education, held in Porto in July 2008.
4. Previous investigations in which I employed this process of testing and refining using NVivo include the Economic and Social Research Council Teaching and Learning Research

Programme, *Consulting Pupils on the Assessment of their Learning* Project (Leitch *et al.*, 2006, 2007a, b) and a study of English secondary school music teachers' perceptions of creativity supported by the Department of Universities and Research of the Catalan Government (Odena, 2001b, 2004, 2006, 2007c; Odena *et al.*, 2005; Odena & Welch, 2007, 2009).

5. At the time of writing, a full merger between one of the training colleges (Stranmillis) and Queen's School of Education has been confirmed, and is initially planned for 2009–2010.

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Appendix 1. Examples of questions

OWN MUSICAL BACKGROUND

—What is your own background, starting as a young music student …?
WORK

—Could you explain what education activities do you provide? (Age level, type of students, etc.)

—Do students have any prerequisites for enrolling? (If yes, what are they?)

—How would you describe the background of your average student?

—Do you work on the cross-curricular theme of 'Education for Mutual Understanding' in Music? (If yes, how?) [only for school teachers]

MUSIC AND MUSIC EDUCATION IN NI

—In the past, did you feel that the two main school-communities were using music as a sign of identity? (How? Has it diminished?)

PROJECT ADVICE

—Could you provide some advice for successful music education activities where children from both communities participate?

—When preparing activities do you try to include music from both traditions or do you try to avoid anything to do with them?

—Would you like to add anything regarding any ideas you might have on cross-community activities/projects?

—Do you know of any other music education activities/projects that have brought together children from the two main communities?