Prejudice Reduction Through Intergroup Contact in Northern Ireland: A Social-Psychological Critique

by
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INTRODUCTION

The Equal Status Contact (ESC) hypothesis, of which the Integration Through Play (ITP) model is a variant, has its roots in the post-World War II era, and was originally developed with the aim of improving race relations in the United States.[1] The theory is based upon three assumptions. First is that the fundamental problem of intergroup conflict is individual prejudice. Second is that prejudice is an educational as well as a psychological problem. Finally, is the view that prejudicial attitudes may be altered by re-education; this accomplished, behavioral changes will necessarily follow.[2]

The simplistic view that prejudice stems from ignorance and that ignorance can be cured by contact was elevated to "a cultural truism and a plan for action" in the early 1950s,[3] and has been at the heart of the study of intergroup relations, particularly in the US, ever since.[4] In 1962, Berkowitz proposed the ESC hypothesis as the only successful means of reducing hostilities across racial divides.[5] Subsequently, cross-community contact schemes were widely deployed throughout the period of the civil rights movement in America. Like many aspects of that period, which made their way across the Atlantic, the concept of contact as a means of improving relations between divided communities received considerable support from those working for reconciliation between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland at that time,[6] and is still the prevailing philosophy behind many cross-community endeavors in the province today.[7]

THE ESC MODEL AS A FORM OF EDUCATION

The implementation of the ESC hypothesis in Northern Ireland has taken many forms, all of which may be said to be educational in nature, whether or not they take place in the classroom.[8] Nevertheless, it is in a formal educational setting, where equality of contact is most pronounced, that the hypothesis should, in theory, be best put to the test. In such a setting equality exists not only in terms of age and environment, but also in program of study, criteria for individual assessment, rules of conduct, and even (in some cases) code of dress. Because attendance is compulsory, contact between students is regular, consistent, and long-term: most children spend more than forty hours a week engaged in school-related activities, nine months out of every year, for more than a decade.

Education for Mutual Understanding (EMU) has been developed to introduce a cross-community theme into the design of school curricula at all levels throughout the province; it also forms the basis of the European Studies Project

jointly sponsored by the Education Departments of Northern Ireland, England, Wales, the Republic of Ireland and Belgium.[9] EMU principles may be implemented either as a specific project involving teachers and pupils from more than one school and from both communities, or as a general approach to teaching, which informs the presentation of all areas of study. In either form its aim is to bridge divisions and dispel prejudice, and to promote improved community relations by teaching students self-respect as well as respect for the cultural traditions, backgrounds and beliefs of others.

The call for a program of formal education for peace to challenge Northern Ireland's segregated school system has also been answered by the integrated school movement. Thirteen such schools have come into existence, since the first, Lagan College, opened in 1981, twelve at the primary level and Hazlewood College; a further two opened in September 1992. This pattern of steady incremental growth is repeated in the enrollment figures, and reflects an increasing interest in integrated education on the part of parents from both sides of the community.

There is, however, a considerable gap between the amount of support for the idea of integrated education and its actual extent.[10] Development of an extensive system of integrated schools is further impeded by opposition from some church and community leaders on both sides of the divide. By contrast, extracurricular cross-community contact is rarely met with such official resistance, and therefore more children are still likely to experience contact in this context rather than in the classroom. For this reason, and because EMU is only just beginning to take effect in schools, this essay will focus on programs of nonformal, rather than formal, education for peace.

THE POINT OF CONTACT: INTERPERSONAL VERSUS INTERGROUP

The only real criterion for assessing programs of intergroup contact is the extent to which they achieve their goals. Some aim simply to provide participants with a respite from the stress and deprivation that have characterized life for many people in the province since the onset of the Troubles. Others, however, clearly hope to exert a positive influence on community relations in the long term, beyond the confines of the contact situation they provide.

In a publication released in 1983, the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI) described cross-community holiday schemes as "a practical means of facilitating the coming together of children and young people in circumstances that will contribute to increased understanding between the two traditions." In other words, DENI's goal was not simply to encourage *interpersonal* contact — contact between individuals leading to a personal and unique relationship of a more or less intimate nature, the course and dimensions of which are determined by the characteristics of the individuals involved. Rather, DENI aimed to promote real and lasting *intergroup* contact, which occurs "whenever individuals belonging to one group interact, collectively or individually, with another group or its members in terms of their *group* identifications."[11]

Since 1983, the guidelines issued to applicants for government funding have become more stringent. Programs must now be "coherent, ongoing and systematic" and should "result in cross-community contact which is purposeful and require *(sic)* a genuinely collaborative effort to achieve its aims;" moreover, a preference is stated for projects whose participants have previously been in contact.[12] Each of these conditions makes the possibility of effective exchange between participants all the more likely, and indeed, some such programs do appear to make a real contribution to improving intergroup relations.[13]

Nevertheless, many projects still follow the model established in the wake of the much-cited Doob and Foltz workshop.[14] Those that do are based upon the assumption that "short-term intergroup *(sic)* contact in an isolated setting . . . does have a positive effect,"[15] and that "good 'human relationships'" — which are believed to develop naturally and inevitably between individuals in contact as the "common humanity" they share becomes evident to them all[16] — "will promote [widespread] community harmony in Northern Ireland."[17]

This view that relatively short-term contact between small groups of individuals is an effective means of improving community relations generally is still espoused by the Department of Education. Although the premises upon which such a view is based have been challenged by contemporary analyses of intergroup contact,[18] many of those working for peace in the province, particularly at the community level, have adopted programs in which this view remains enshrined. The most prevalent of these, and the focus of this essay, is the Integration Through Play model.

THE INTEGRATION THROUGH PLAY MODEL

The theory behind the ITP variant of the contact hypothesis is as follows. First, individuals from different groups engaged in joint recreational activity will come to know and respect each other as individuals because such activity stimulates conversation and "creates opportunities for mutual recognition,"[19] which inevitably reveal fundamental similarities between participants. Second, strong interpersonal relationships will develop as a result. Third, these interpersonal relationships will challenge preconceptions held by members of one group about those of the other and thus make stereotypical thinking and other forms of prejudice impossible. Finally, prejudice reduction at the individual level resulting from this kind of contact will produce a reduction in prejudice at the community level (i.e., the group level).[20]

In practice, ITP initiatives offered by local community centers are limited by their very design. First, most are short-term, intensive immersion programs,[21] or else involve a schedule of limited, irregular contact.[22] Second, recreational programs, which assume that "mutual recognition" will take place spontaneously as participants converse, rarely provide more structured opportunities for exchange. (The same holds for those programs of joint cultural inquiry and/or community action currently favored by DENI.) Third, groups are often together only for the

duration of the activity; by arriving at the venue separately and then departing the same way, the contact experience is further isolated from the participants' everyday lives. Finally, few staff members have acquired formal training in prejudice reduction or community conflict skills and therefore are uncomfortable in the role of facilitator; many opportunities for constructive exchange are lost as a result.[23]

ITP projects also suffer from the same obstacles faced by all community-based youth schemes, no matter what their purpose or design. Such projects are inevitably low-budget and often rely on financial contributions from participants to defray their costs. As a consequence, cross-community contact schemes must be "sold," and are usually advertised to their potential participants as "holidays." Because the term connotes entertainment rather than education, this label obscures the function and value of the experience as an opportunity for intergroup contact and exchange.

This problem is compounded by the perception of the youth club as a recreational facility. Many young people come directly to the center after school, with little expectation of or desire for anything but play. Similarly, if they have paid for a "holiday," that is what they expect — and often demand. The result is that children returning from self-proclaimed holiday schemes (and especially those organized through the Department of Education involving summer travel to the US) are greeted by friends and relatives whose emphasis naturally is on "What did you do?" not "What did you learn?"[24]

In theory, the success of ITP schemes depends upon the growth of strong interpersonal relationships between participants, links that can be weakened or even destroyed by inconsistencies in the composition of the groups involved. Such inconsistencies, however, are inevitable, and ironically become more pronounced the more extensive and long term the program. The financial strain posed by the cost of frequent holidays can be prohibitive, particularly for parents with several children, making programs of regular contact difficult to sustain. Older children often have other obligations, either to their families or their schoolwork, which can prevent them from regular participation in any extracurricular activity. Often, too, high unemployment and the need to seek work elsewhere will force a family to move. This can be disastrous for some schemes: siblings and cousins often join a club together, and the participation of any one child in its activities is frequently dependent on that of the others.[25] All these factors make programs of regular, extended contact difficult to sustain in their original form.

Finally, ITP programs may be failing to recruit the most needy participants. Fraser and others have shown that stereotypical thinking develops in children as early as age four,[26] yet few programs are available for children so young.[27] Furthermore, those individuals most in need of contact experiences are often the most aggressive, the most deeply prejudiced, and the most likely to be the ring-leaders in the event of intergroup conflict[28] — i.e., the most disruptive, both physically and verbally. Because they are perceived as a potential threat to whatever fragile links may develop between the groups, they are rarely if ever recruited, and

may even be discouraged from participating. Because they are seen as a corrosive rather than a cohesive force, they are seldom involved, despite their greater need.[29]

All these factors have contributed to the failure of ITP projects to produce real improvements in relations between estranged communities, wherever they've been employed. Yet, while such obstacles admittedly are difficult to surmount, there is another reason for this failure, which can be easily rectified, and that is the failure of the model to take certain fundamental principles of group dynamics into account.

WHY THE ITP MODEL FAILS

In pursuit of their goals, projects modeled on ITP theory tend to focus on the similarities between groups in contact; they may even avoid divisive issues altogether. In so doing the organizers of these schemes are guilty of ignoring the nature of prejudice, and of stereotyping in particular. They also appear to disregard the extent to which the pressure to conform influences behavior, both during and following contact. Research into the psychology of social interaction has stressed the distinction between interpersonal and intergroup contact on the grounds that each involves its own mode of behavior and thought;[30] yet the success of the ITP model depends upon the participants' ability to switch easily between the two. ITP theorists appear to imagine that individual prejudice is confirmed or dispelled in much the same manner as a scientific hypothesis — on the basis of empirical evidence, objectively observed. In practice, however, individuals employ both conscious and unconscious strategies to protect themselves from the need to reassess their assumptions, and thus from emotional and psychological harm.

In brief, ITP projects share three basic characteristics, each of which is premised upon assumptions largely invalidated by the field of social-psychology. First is a focus on similarities to the exclusion of differences. Second is an effort to dispel stereotypes as a means of reducing prejudice between groups. Finally, there is a tendency to mobilize normative rather than informational influences in their attempts to combat conformity.

The Denial of Differences

According to Enloe, a society is ethnically divided if each of its communities distinguishes itself from the others by virtue of a bond of shared culture.[31] That culture may be defined in terms of language, religion, ideology, tradition, values, beliefs or some combination thereof. But whatever its form, it has the power to convey upon each member of that group a sense of collective identity that exists alongside but apart from his or her identity as an individual. By this definition Northern Ireland is clearly a divided society. Moreover, Fields and others have noted a marked contrast between the political influences, objectives, and philosophy of republican paramilitaries and those of loyalists, particularly as expressed in their publications and in the wall murals that appear in the areas they each control.[32] Fraser has commented that the form and nature of prejudice within the two

communities differ,[33] while McLachlan goes so far as to suggest that beyond those differences that arise from divergent historical experience, there are those that "derive from psychological differences due in great measure to conflicting elements in Roman Catholicism and Protestantism."[34] Why, then, is the existence of cultural difference between the two communities in the province largely ignored or obscured if not denied by ITP scheme organizers?

To answer this question, we must first examine the goals of the ESC approach. They are to limit, if not eliminate, mutual estrangement, stereotypes and prejudice between participants by challenging these views with visible evidence; to create an atmosphere of mutual tolerance, understanding and cooperation at the socio-cultural level; to develop an awareness among participants that each group is composed of human beings with whom it is possible to empathize; and, to encourage the growth of lasting bonds of friendship that will survive re-entry and serve as a stimulus to continued tolerance and open-mindedness.[35] Stephan and Stephan[36] are among the most contemporary adherents to the contact hypothesis approach. They stress similarities over differences on the grounds that empirical data demonstrate a tendency for people to like those whom they perceive to be similar to themselves. Programs that highlight the differences between individuals could, by this reasoning, threaten the development of friendly relations.[37]

However, to imply that two groups are essentially the same by glossing over differences between them can lead to "a shocking disconfirmation of expectations when differences do occur."[38] Moreover, "dissimilarity is likely to become obvious when . . . group identities are reinforced by the coincidence of many different distinctions."[39] Where this is the case (as it often is when Protestant and Catholic children are brought together in Northern Ireland), discovery of differences is virtually inevitable, and it cannot be assumed that the recognition of similarities will be an inevitable consequence of contact. In fact, "according to the causal process alleged to underlie the contact hypothesis (i.e., similarity = attraction), [contact] should then result in less, not more, intergroup liking."[40]

Moscovici and Zavalloni have argued that in order for a group shift to take place, an atmosphere in which all participants feel able to express themselves freely *must* be provided.[41] If the organizers of contact schemes, by failing to acknowledge that differences between the groups do exist, appear to deny the legitimacy of those differences, this could be experienced as a threat to group identity and could thus limit freedom of expression within and between the groups. This "social identity" perspective emphasizes the need for each group to retain the distinctive aspects of its identity. Turner warns, for example, that even those contact experiences, which have been designed to promote cooperation between groups by establishing a positive, functional interdependence between them, will fail if the role and contribution of each is not clearly recognizable.[42]

Hewstone and Brown suggest that contact schemes would be better engaged in working to establish a sense of *mutual intergroup differentiation* than attempting to deprive individuals of the collective identities they value so much.[43] Each group

should be seen as it wishes to be seen, and differences should be highlighted as desired. At the same time, those who adopt this approach must be careful to discourage ethnocentrism, avoid the implication that one group is better than the other, and prevent the development of out-group discrimination whereby in-groups appropriate the most valued dimensions of identity for themselves. Such a strategy is clearly difficult and potentially risky, and it may be for these reasons that it has only rarely featured in contact programs of any form.[44] Whatever its challenges, however, it is a strategy that must be part of ITP schemes in the future if they are to have a lasting effect.[45]

The Destruction of Stereotypes

The ability to categorize is an essential human cognitive process.[46] The segmentation and organization of the social world into categories or groups serves to reduce the complexity of incoming information, facilitate rapid identification of stimuli, and to guide behavior. To paraphrase Heider, categorization allows us to understand, predict and control our environment, to describe the unknown in familiar terms.[47] As such, it is an adaptive strategy for survival that pervades the structure of both human language and society. Stereotyping, one form of the categorization process, likewise serves explicit psychological and social functions. Although stereotyping has traditionally been dismissed either as "an inferior cognitive process in the form of an overgeneralization or oversimplification, or as a process that was morally wrong because it categorized people who had no desire to be categorized,"[48] such definitions have since been proven false. Stereotyping is not the psychological aberration suggested by early contact theorists; on the contrary, stereotypes are employed by all human beings, all of whom are prone to biased thinking.[49]

The ITP thesis that exceptions disprove the rules of prejudiced thinking is challenged by analysis of the cognitive aspects of prejudice and stereotypes. Ashmore has shown that in encounters with individuals from a group other than one's own, exceptions to one's concept of what is "typical" of that group will be perceived as such.[50] The Protestant child who becomes friendly with a Catholic of the same age and with compatible interests and disposition, for instance, will not change his view of Catholics generally, or stop thinking in terms of "Taigs;" he will see his friend as atypical, unlike other Catholics, and he will justify the friendship on these grounds. The same tends to be true whatever the groups involved. Individuals naturally resist information contrary to their stereotypes, and will "subtype" discrepant information. Thus, contradictions that may arise between one's experience and one's stereotypes will be classified as a subset of the out-group as a whole.[51] Allport too recognized that when the evidence conflicts with pre-existing categories, the "special cases" will be excepted, but the category will remain intact.[52]

This phenomenon is due in part to the cognitive process which causes people to better remember and to rely more heavily upon category consistent information

than on data that challenges those categories. Moreover, studies have shown that people retrospectively distort their recollections of their own experiences and will selectively search for data which uphold their prejudiced views.[53] The Catholic who returns to her own community following contact with Protestants, for example, will later discard the positive aspects of the encounter and focus instead on those which in some way confirm her preconceptions; her observations will be affirmed by her own community and will serve to reinforce the collective bias against the out-group.

Such unconscious selectivity is not only characteristic of the retention process. All stereotypical thinking includes a theory of attribution, a set of assumptions designed to explain to the in-group why out-group members behave as they do. These assumptions refer to *dispositional* attributes, but as Hewstone and Brown have pointed out, the need to legitimize "any behavior which violates the stereotype [can] be avoided on the basis that it reflect[s] *situational* influences and thus [does] not derive from the personal characteristics of the actor."[54]

Kahneman and Tversky have noted that the attribution process, which is clearly fickle, can appear to be irrational.[55] It is a human tendency, for example, to ignore *consensus information — information* about how human beings behave generally — despite the obvious value of such information. Instead, we tend to attribute the causality, regularity and intentionality of others' behavior internally, arguing that other people behave as they do because of something inherent in their biological makeup or character. Such thinking naturally reinforces our stereotypes.[56] This phenomenon has been labelled "the fundamental attribution error,"[57] and it persists even when environmental forces are clearly predominant. As a result, the argument that violent elements in either community are in the minority in Northern Ireland, for example, or explanations (even though distinct from justifications) of antisocial behavior in terms of legitimate, historical grievance, are unlikely to be well received.

It is important to remember that these behaviors are the natural result of inherent perceptual and cognitive limitations, and do not indicate a conscious desire to misperceive. Often, as Taylor and Moghaddam suggest, misperception is simply a result of unfamiliarity: the less familiar we are with a group, the more likely we are to have a uniform stereotype of that group.[58] (It is, of course, this form of misperception that ESC schemes seek to correct.) Moreover, when societies are under stress, misperception may arise as an adaptation (i.e., as a means of denying one's own responsibility for events or actions), or from fear (in the form of psychosis due to stress), or from hostility (as an expression of anger, a desire for revenge, or as part of a search for scapegoats). All these responses are interrelated,[59] yet ITP programs address themselves only to the last of the three. They attempt to reduce hostility without examining the reasons why hostility exists; they seek to alter opinions without challenging the opinion-making process. At best the ITP model prescribes a cure for a local manifestation of a larger disease. At worst, it provides an inadequate dosage of an ineffectual drug.

Conformity: Normative versus Informational Pressures

Like many contact schemes, ITP programs often claim to be successful if children from different communities are observed playing harmoniously together within the context of the contact situation. It is then concluded that the experience has been positive, and that the contact hypothesis approach in general "works."[60]

Such a conclusion may be premature. The pressure to conform, to behave in such a way as to facilitate cohesion within and between groups, may be placed upon one individual by another or by a group. Such pressures can be classified as follows. First are *informational influences*, which are exerted when new information, knowledge, or arguments are presented to the individual that succeed in altering his or her views or behavior. This type of influence tends to be long-lasting and resilient in the face of efforts to challenge it. Second are *normative influences*, which are experienced by an individual who seeks acceptance by the group. This type of influence tends to be fragile, temporary and dependent upon the continued existence of the group. The normative forces that influence the dynamics of groups in contact are likely to produce a superficial cohesion, which cannot withstand the greater pressures exerted by pre-existing informational influences after re-entry. Given that the need to be accepted by one's peers is especially great among children,[61] this phenomenon is perhaps the primary reason why ITP schemes so frequently fail to achieve their long-term goals.

When our interactions are relatively short and superficial, we tend to succumb to short-term normative influences by trying to make a good impression.[62] We do this as much for ourselves as for others: self-perception is not, after all, "independent of what others think of us, but [rather] the product of it . . .. It is our representation of how other people see us, the internalized equivalent of their reactions."[63] We generally avoid conflict if at all possible, especially with strangers, out of concern for how our actions might be interpreted by others. We tend to follow the familiar, accepted rules of interaction more closely under such circumstances, to control our behavior and to speak and act strategically in order to be perceived favorably.[64]

Fraser has argued that a child's refusal to behave seriously — a problem so frequently encountered by youth leaders attempting to initiate "serious" discussion between groups in contact — may itself be such a strategy.[65] Rather than risk censure or rejection (by *either* group, though of course on different grounds), children adopt ambiguous patterns of speech, as do adults in equivalent situations. In this sense the conversations between participants alleged to ensue from contact and so vital to the ITP scenario for success, may be guided primarily by normative influences that do not affect or alter any of the informational influences previously experienced. Thus ITP-style contact may proceed along tamer, less provocative lines than would usually be the case, lulling group leaders into a false sense of achievement.

External factors can also exert a normative influence. Conformity to the general social norm is more likely when one's actions are observed by an authority

figure, because of the implicit expectation of punishment or reward.[66] Indeed, according to Fisher, "Conformity in groups is also expressed through obedience to authority in which the group [i.e., youth] leader is seen as the primary definer and enforcer of norms."[67] If children are issued a pre-departure warning that the expression of "radical" views will jeopardize their chances of participation in the future, this principle will almost certainly hold.[68]

Belonging to a group can provide identity, security and a source of self-verification, as long as the general perception of that group is positive.[69] The views and behaviors to which we conform as children are often learned from others — e.g., our parents, relations, peers, and community leaders. These fall under the heading of "informational influences" and it is often acutely uncomfortable for us to hear them challenged. When we are asked to critically examine — let alone to reject — the views and opinions of those we most respect and to whom we are usually bound by much closer ties than those that link children to their educators, formal or otherwise, we necessarily cast doubt upon the basis of our own identity. Few adults are able to subject themselves to such an unpleasant and potentially threatening self-analysis;[70] it is not surprising that children should be unwilling to do so.

It is not, however, impossible for informational influences to arise from and have an effect during the contact experience; pressure to conform is rarely exclusively of one type or the other. Unfortunately, the informational influences of one context may be outweighed by the normative pressures of another.

Upon re-entry (i.e., the return to one's own community), an individual whose views have been genuinely challenged by his or her experience of contact with members of a different community may find the price of dissension from the norm too high. Schacter has shown that in groups where one individual refused to conform, "all communications towards him stopped: in effect, the group ceased to regard him as one of its members, and he was no longer eligible for any role within the group."[71] This presents a practical dilemma for ITP theorists, as well as an emotional dilemma for participants in such schemes. An unspoken but nevertheless implicit objective of all contact schemes is to produce dissenters who will return to their communities and influence others, yet how can one initiate change within a group if one is no longer accepted as a part of it?

In order to be effective, any call for social change (in this case, for dissent from erroneous group judgments) must have popular support,[72] and support for a movement depends in large part upon the popularity and charisma of its leaders. Potential leaders must accumulate a certain degree of status and respect, "often first by displaying conformity" — or by being assumed to conform — "before [they] can seek to influence others."[73] Yet Janis and Mann claim that the wrath of an in-group scorned is greatest when directed toward those who were once closest to its heart.[74]

It has been noted that the third assumption underlying the Equal Status Contact hypothesis is that behavioral changes will follow attitudinal ones. Though it has yet to be proven empirically, this assumption makes sense, and is embodied in the definition of informational influences proposed by Forgas. It would be

difficult, for example, to continue to throw stones at Catholics having once been convinced that they too are people who share many of one's own concerns, who are valuable in their own right and deserving of one's respect. While it is true that we may fully respect our opponents without liking them in the least, and without altering the fact of our opposition to their beliefs, recognizing their intrinsic value as fellow human beings (and, subsequently, their right to their beliefs) should ensure that we at least attempt to resolve our "differences and conflict by peaceful and creative means."[75]

Assuming, then, that such a process does take place, the real question is whether it can proceed more rapidly than the process by which individuals, upon re-entry, embrace their previous attitudes and the behavioral patterns exhibited by their peers. Festinger has shown that the greater one's personal investment in group membership, the more tenaciously one will cling to those ties.[76] In Northern Ireland, membership in certain groups puts some outside the law; others claim membership by virtue of all they have lost since the start of the Troubles, if not before. With so much invested in the groups to which they claim allegiance, it is hardly surprising that few individuals are willing to abandon those ties.

The primary role of group membership is to confer a positive sense of identity upon its members.[77] As a consequence, all collective behavior, cognitive or otherwise, will have that as its objective: "the price of deriving satisfaction and a positive sense of identity from our group memberships is to subjugate our individual wishes and conform to group norms . . .. Once a group is established and its norms are clear, members identify with those expectations relatively easily, and no longer see them as restrictive impositions."[78] It is this that is the most discouraging aspect of conformity for those engaged in the efforts of reconciliation in Northern Ireland; it is also the most difficult to combat.

CONCLUSION

It is now more than twenty-five years since the onset of the Troubles and it is difficult to be anything but pessimistic about the likelihood of reconciliation between the two communities. As one generation after another matures with no experience of a society at peace, the chances of empowering people to confront their habituation to violence and to take charge of their future grow ever more slim. Seligman has described the phenomenon of "learned helplessness" whereby a sense of one's own inability to change the nature or structure of one's society results in one's abandoning all efforts to do so;[79] this process has already begun in Northern Ireland.[80]

Proponents of the contact hypothesis in the province believe strongly that "positive contact" — whatever its form — "under 'micro' conditions is better than no contact at all."[81] Indeed, Lemish argues that "the primary accomplishment of the Contact Approach in plural societies is that . . . meetings [between groups in conflict] take place,"[82] even if such encounters produce only superficial modifications in the outcome of the larger conflict.[83] For despite the evidence that contact

in and of itself has little or no direct impact on personal or group ideologies,[84] the social isolation that would result in its absence would only serve to widen the divide between estranged communities. The use of violence then becomes justified in defense of what are perceived to be opposing values, and opportunities for reconciliation are reduced as each community's interpretation of events increasingly diverge.[85]

With this in mind, Fisher has proposed that the following assertions be incorporated into Pettigrew's original outline of the contact hypothesis.[86] First is that institutional discrimination is at the core of the problem of intergroup conflict rather than individual prejudice, which, while important, is not fundamental. Second is that prejudice is based on a variety of cognitive processes involving misperception and stereotyping and is embedded in the culture of society. The final point is that education is a woefully insufficient remedy in contrast to institutional change requiring new intergroup behavior to reshape intergroup attitudes.[87] Though it is of course true that intergroup conflict may arise in the absence of institutional bias,[88] to acknowledge its possible role in the perpetuation of a conflict can only improve the odds of a successful resolution. Without tackling the problem of individual prejudice, attempts to implement institutional change will be met with suspicion and fear; in the face of such resistance they will proceed only impartially, if they do not founder altogether. At the same time, impatience with (and accusations regarding) the slow pace of change on the one hand, and resentment against its scope on the other, will continue to flourish in the absence of concerted efforts toward prejudice reduction at the grassroots level.

Intergroup contact works, when and if it does, because it changes the nature of the intergroup relationship, and not because it encourages or permits interpersonal friendships between members of different groups; such relationships are a result, not a cause, of positive changes generally.[89] Whether or not contact serves to strengthen "the *readiness* for intergroup relations" depends as much on the general socio-political climate as the dynamics that develop each time contact takes place.[90] While it is encouraging, then, that the concept of integrated education appears to have full official support at last, and that increasingly children participating in holiday schemes will have been involved in joint-work arising from Education for Mutual Understanding activities in their classrooms,[91] nevertheless without real political progress toward a climate conducive to social change such efforts will be of little use. Indeed, should the commitment and creativity of all those working for peace in the province be wasted because of the intransigence of their representatives — both paramilitary and political, on both sides of the border and on both sides of the Irish Sea — it will only deepen their frustration and lead to despair.[92]

Endnotes

1. T. F. Pettigrew, "The intergroup contact hypothesis reconsidered," in M. Hewstone and R. Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1986), p. 188.
2. Ibid., p. 172.

3. Ibid., p. 173.
4. W.G. Stephan and J.C. Brigham, "Intergroup contact: Introduction," *Journal of Social Issues,* 41, no. 3 (1985), pp. 1-8.
5. L. Berkowitz, *Aggression: A Social Psychological Analysis* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1962).
6. M. Fraser, *Children in Conflict* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1973); K. Trew, "Catholic-Protestant Contact in Northern Ireland," in Hewstone and Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters;* and Pettigrew, "Intergroup contact hypothesis."
7. Martin Hannigan, former Assistant Project Officer, Cultural Diversity Program, Co-operation North, and Judith Wright, currently Youth and Community Worker, Cornerstone Community.
8. In order to draw a distinction between "teaching" and "learning" situations, education may be said to be of three types — formal, nonformal, and informal. *Formal* education takes place at the primary, secondary and tertiary levels. *Nonformal* educational experiences involve trained professionals outside of the classroom (e.g., church people, health and social workers, community leaders, etc.). The *informal* category includes any experience or situation in which professional people are *not* involved, and in which the educational element is largely incidental; peers, parents, and the media are good examples of informal "educators."
9. Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development (NICED), *Education for Mutual Understanding: A Guide* (Belfast: Stranmillis College, 1986).
10. F. Wright, "Integrated education and new beginnings in Northern Ireland," *Working Paper No. 6 — Understanding Conflict and Finding a Way Out of It* (Belfast: Corrymeela Press, 1991).
11. Italics added; Hewstone and Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters,* pp. 13-14.
12. DENI 1991/92 guidelines for applicants to the 'Youth, Community and Sports' Cross-Community Contact Scheme.
13. L. McWhirter, "Evaluation of Catholic-Protestant Workshops," paper presented at the Conference on Contact and Reconciliation of Conflict, Northern Ireland Regional Office of the British Psychological Society, Belfast, 1985.
14. Trew, "Catholic-Protestant Contact," p. 100.
15. Ibid.
16. Pettigrew, "Intergroup contact hypothesis," p. 173.
17. Trew, "Catholic-Protestant Contact," p. 104.
18. Pettigrew, "Intergroup contact hypothesis," p. 173.
19. P. Lemish, "Cultural conflict and the curriculum," paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Research Association, San Francisco, 1989.
20. The four points outlined have been developed from the author's own observations as a youth worker with the Shankill Community House and as a participant in the Shankill/Falls Youth Link, an umbrella organization sponsored by the Cornerstone Community, which provides a forum for discussion by youth leaders working in Christian-based centers in north and west Belfast.
21. Lemish, "Cultural Conflict," p. 17.
22. One reason for this in Northern Ireland is that most community centers operate a separate program of activities during the summer months which requires most of the center's resources. Consequently, cross-community ventures begun the previous year tend to recess during the summer; after such a lengthy hiatus, they rarely reconvene in the autumn.
23. In Northern Ireland most community projects are staffed primarily by ACE (Action for Community Employment) and volunteer workers on 12-month contracts. These annual changes in staff, as well as a policy of flexible hours, make for inconsistency in leadership and tend to weaken the over-all authority of the adults in charge: by the time the staff have been "broken in," they may have only a few months left before they retire from the project.
24. Fisher cites as *the first facilitative condition of contact* "a high acquaintance potential," which he argues is essential if participants are "to get to know one another as persons and not simply stereotypical members of the other group." R. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and*

International Conflict Resolution (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1990), p. 181. The resulting requirement that interaction be "informal, personal and intimate as opposed to formal and impersonal" is also responsible for the largely recreational nature of ESC schemes. Ironically, friendships built on the basis of similarities, without discussion of difference, usually prove all the more hurtful when divisions eventually are revealed.

25. The extensive renovation in recent years of many sections of north and west Belfast (from which many of the participants on such schemes are drawn), for example, has forced the relocation of many families to housing too far removed from their former neighborhoods to permit their continued attendance.

26. Fraser, *Children in Conflict.*

27. This is not always the fault of scheme organizers, however. Efforts to introduce a residential cross-community contact program for six-and-unders have been met with resistance from parents (Shankill Community House minutes, May 1988). Non-contact, residential holidays for children of this age group, though better received, often prove too physically and emotionally demanding on both children and staff.

28. Fraser, *Children in Conflict.*

29. Fisher's fifth facilitative condition for effective intergroup contact depends upon the characteristics of individual participants, who should demonstrate "moderate to high competence and mild to moderate prejudice" — and thus reflects a theoretical bias against involvement of the most needy. Moreover, and quite apart from the practical difficulties posed by the effort to compose such a group, it is a practice which could make the experience of less convivial contact in the future all the more uncomfortable. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution,* p. 181. By contrast, Hewstone argues that what is so often missing in situations of intergroup contact "is information that leads the participants to view their partners as typical outgroup members, and thus to prevent them from explaining away positive behavior of the outgroup member." M. Hewstone, "Attributional bases of intergroup contact," in W. Stroebe, A.W. Kruglanski, D. Bartal and M. Hewstone, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict: Theory, Research and Applications* (New York: Springer-Verlag, 1988), p. 61. In order to prevent exceptions being made to the rules of prejudiced thinking, contact must be seen to be intergroup in nature. Yet this theory is dependent upon each individual being a 'typical' representative of the community from which s/he is drawn, and a number of scholars, most notably Simard, have shown that this is not the case in practice. L.M. Simard, "Crosscultural interaction: potential invisible barriers," *Journal of Social Psychology,* 113 (1981), pp. 171-92. Moreover, because groups are almost never homogeneous, consisting instead of individuals with a wide range of personal traits, self-fulfilling prophecies are practically inevitable in the course of an intergroup interaction, as it is likely that at least some evidence will be found to support one's preconceptions. J. Cooper and R.H. Fazio, "The formation and persistence of attitudes that support intergroup conflict," in W.G. Austin and S. Worchel, eds., *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations* (Monterey: Brookes/Cole, 1979). It seems that the perception of contact as intergroup is helpful only if the experience is unequivocally positive — an outcome that even the most skilled youth leader can never guarantee.

30. Hewstone and Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters,* pp. 13-14.

31. C.H. Enloe, *Ethnic Conflict and Political Development* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1973).

32. R.M. Fields, *Northern Ireland: Society Under Siege* (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1980); B. Loftus, *Mirrors: William III and Mother Ireland* (Dundrum: Picture Press, 1990); and, B. Rolston, *Drawing Support: Murals in the North of Ireland* (Belfast: Beyond the Pale Publications, 1992).

33. Fraser, *Children in Conflict.*

34. P. McLachlan, "Does Northern Ireland need cross-cultural interpreters?" (Parts I and II), *PACE Journal,* (Spring 1988), p.9.

35. Adapted from the objectives of the Beit HaGefen Arab-Jewish Center in Haifa as set out by Lemish, "Cultural Conflict," p. 18.

36. W.G. Stephan, and C.W. Stephan, "The role of ignorance in intergroup relations," in N. Miller and M.B. Brewer, eds., *Groups in Contact* (New York: Academic Press, 1984).

37. In trying to produce "an atmosphere of mutual tolerance and understanding," ITP programs create an artificial social reality in which, it might be argued, the level of understanding achieved is similarly contrived. The irony is that program developers recognize the need to create such conditions if contact is to take place at all, yet "they resist talking about why these conditions — necessary in order for society to function democratically — do not exist in society in general." Lemish, "Cultural Conflict," p. 21.

38. Hewstone and Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters,* p. 10.

39. Ibid., p. 11.

40. Ibid.

41. S. Moscovici and M. Zavalloni, "The group as a polarizer of attitudes," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 12, pp. 125-35.

42. J.C. Turner, "The experimental social psychology of intergroup behavior," in J.C. Turner and H. Giles, eds., *Intergroup Behavior* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1981).

43. M. Hewstone and R. Brown, "Contact is not enough: an intergroup perspective on the 'contact hypothesis,'" in Hewstone and Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters.* M.J. Esman offers similar advice to those who seek to resolve ethnic conflict through intervention: "Rather than attempting to transform attitudes and perceptions, external mediation should search for practical structures and procedures that may accommodate these divergent interests and enable the parties to the dispute to practice coexistence as an alternative to mutual destruction." "Political and psychological factors in ethnic conflict," in J.V. Montville, ed., *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies* (Lexington, MA: Lexington, 1990), p.63.

44. Ibid., p. 36. To deny the salience of differences in the form of policy which promotes assimilation poses a similar problem: "Historically, assimilation has ended some conflicts by eroding the communal basis for intergroup hostility. But the failures of assimilation have also provided the motivation for new and potentially destructive rounds of intergroup conflict." T.R. Gurr, *Minorities at Risk* (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 1993), p. 309.

45. D.L. Horowitz, rejecting both the "naivete of those [policy makers] who would abolish ethnic differences" and "the cynicism of those who would simply suppress those differences," argues that there are approaches through which it is possible to "contain, limit, channel, and manage ethnic conflict" which "involve living with ethnic differences and not moving beyond them." *Ethnic Groups in Conflict* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1985), pp. 599-600. ITP schemes would benefit from adopting such an approach.

46. Ibid., p. 29.

47. F. Heider, *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* (New York: Wiley, 1958). Horowitz ascribes a similar function to ethnicity itself, which he argues "provides a convenient way to simplify reality in unfamiliar circumstances by avoiding the necessity to make wholly individual judgements with every new encounter." *Ethnic Groups in Conflict,* p.82.

48. D.M. Taylor and F. M. Moghaddam, *Theories of Intergroup Relations: International Social Psychological Perspectives* (New York: Praeger, 1987), p. 172.

49. Pettigrew, "Intergroup contact hypothesis," p. 173.

50. R.D. Ashmore, "Solving the problem of prejudice," in B.E. Collins, ed., *Social Psychology* (Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley, 1970).

51. R. Weber and J. Crocker, "Cognitive processes in the revision of stereotypical beliefs," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 45 (1983), pp. 961-77.

52. G. Allport, *The Nature of Prejudice* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1958).

53. B. Fischhoff, "Hindsight [does not equal] foresight: the effect of outcome knowledge on judgment under uncertainty," *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance,* 1 (1975), pp. 288-99.

54. Italics added; Hewstone and Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters,* p. 31.

55. D. Kahneman and A. Tversky, "On the psychology of prediction," *Psychological Review,* 80 (1973), pp. 237-51.

56. L. Ross, "The intuitive psychologist and his shortcomings: distortions in the attribution process," in L. Berkowitz, ed., *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology* (New York: Academic Press, 1977). By contrast, we tend to attribute our own behavior to external, situational factors, thus enabling us to absolve ourselves from responsibility when we lose control. Not surprisingly, when we behave admirably or in such a way as to make ourselves proud, we attribute our behavior to some internal source.
57. Ross, *Advances in Experimental Social Psychology.*
58. Taylor and Moghaddam, *Theories of Intergroup Relations.*
59. Fields, *Northern Ireland: Society Under Siege.*
60. Trew, "Catholic-Protestant Contact," p. 101.
61. Fraser, *Children in Conflict.*
62. J. Cooper and E.E. Jones, "Opinion divergence as a strategy to avoid being miscast," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 41 (1981), pp. 232-42; S.J. Morse and K.J. Gergen, "Social comparison, self-consistency, and the concept of the self," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 16 (1970), pp. 125-35.
63. J.P. Forgas, *Interpersonal Behavior: The Psychology of Social Interaction* (Sydney: Pergamon, 1985), p. 184.
64. Ibid., p. 186.
65. Fraser, *Children in Conflict.*
66. Forgas, *Interpersonal Behavior: The Psychology of Social Interaction.*
67. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution,* p. 61.
68. Such ultimata are not uncommon, and even have a theoretical basis. According to Fisher, one of the essential preconditions for effective intergroup contact is "the existence of institutional supports that set expectations for friendly, respectful, and trusting interaction. This includes formal prescriptions and sanctions as well as informal customs and preferences." Ibid.
69. Ibid., p. 297. Moreover, Horowitz argues that a common ethnicity can provide protection against the arbitrariness of a state in which the "impersonal criteria of fair treatment and impartiality are novel, suspect or imperfectly understood." *Ethnic Groups in Conflict,* p. 81.
70. T.A. Kolditz and R.M. Arkin, "An impression management interpretation of self-handicapping strategies," *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology,* 43 (1982), pp. 450-92; E.E. Jones and S. Berglas, "Control of attributions about the self through self-handicapping strategies: the appeal of alcohol and the role of underachievement," *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin,* 4 (1973), pp. 200-6.
71. S. Schacter, "Deviation, rejection and communication," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1951).
72. S.E. Asch, "The effect of group pressure upon modification and distortion of judgments," in H. Guetzkow, ed., *Groups, Leadership, and Man* (Pittsburgh: Carnegie Press, 1951).
73. Forgas, *Interpersonal Behavior: The Psychology of Social Interaction,* p.283
74. I. Janis and L. Mann, *Decision-making: A Psychological Analysis of Conflict, Choice, and Commitment* (New York: Free Press, 1977). Moreover, it is the irony of relatively open systems like Northern Ireland and the Basque country that extremists can succeed in outbidding those who are willing to compromise, and "may then attempt to intimidate, neutralize, or even eliminate moderates in their own community. Virtually every Palestinian leader who has attempted to initiate negotiations with Israelis has been assassinated by one or another faction of the PLO." Montville, ed., *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies,* p. 56.
75. One of the aims of EMU; *Education for Mutual Understanding: A Guide,* p. 9. At the same time, the importance placed on territorial and/or cultural integrity by some groups must not be underestimated or ignored. It is possible to recognize the humanity of one's opponents and yet remain committed to the pursuit of a conflict on the basis of rational calculation: a group may conclude, for example, that there are advantages to ethnic solidarity, that it could win the fight in

the end — or simply that it cannot afford to lose. Gurr, *Minorities at Risk*, p. 313. Such reasoning may explain the motivations of many Ulster Protestants. J. Foster, "Notes on intellectuals and intellectual life in Ireland [Obstacles to Irish intellectual life]," paper delivered at the Institute of Irish Studies, Queen's University, Belfast, 1993. Added to this is the considerable profit, both political and material, to be made from the continuation of intergroup hostilities: some argue, for example, that the Troubles have created a "rock-solid" economy which is viable only as long as the conflict remains unresolved. S. Anderson, "The price of peace in Ulster," *New York Times*, 18 January, 1994. This phenomenon is by no means unique to Northern Ireland. Horowitz, *Ethnic Groups in Conflict*, p. 564.

76. L. Festinger, "Informal social communication," *Psychological Review*, 57 (1950), pp. 271-92.

77. J. Turner, "Social comparison and ethnic identity," *European Journal of Social Psychology*, 5 (1975), pp. 5-34.

78. Forgas, *Interpersonal Behavior: The Psychology of Social Interaction*, p. 297.

79. M. Seligman, *Helplessness* (San Francisco: Freeman Press, 1975).

80. Fraser, *Children in Conflict;* Fields, *Northern Ireland: Society Under Siege.*

81. Hewstone and Brown, eds., *Contact and Conflict in Intergroup Encounters*, p. 40.

82. Ibid., p. 19.

83. Ibid., p. 21.

84. The ideological impact of contact can be enhanced, however. R. Ben-Ari and Y. Amir "Intergroup contact, cultural information and change in ethnic attitudes," have proposed that cognitive training, i.e., information, be provided to participants prior to contact in order to prepare the individual for exposure during contact. "This will consequently enable the individual to assimilate new information and ensure that the new information provided during the contact falls within the latitude of acceptance rather than within the latitude of rejection. *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Conflict: Theory, Research and Applications*, p. 155.

85. Pettigrew, "Intergroup contact hypothesis."

86. Fisher, *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution.*

87. Ibid., p. 182.

88. Gurr, *Minorities at Risk*, pp. 61-88.

89. R. Brown and J.C. Turner, "Interpersonal and intergroup behaviour," in J. Turner and H. Giles, eds., *Psychology and Social Problems* (Chichester: J. Wiley, 1981).

90. Lemish, "Cultural Conflict," p. 21.

91. Nonformal peace education programs can learn much from these models. One of the strengths of the integrated school movement, for example, is its insistence on the need for parental involvement. D. Wilson and S. Dunn, *Integrated Schools: Information for Parents* (Coleraine: Centre for the Study of Conflict, University of Ulster, 1989). It is the rare ESC scheme that facilitates, let alone requires, the active participation of parents.

92. T.R. Gurr argues that to be effective "[policies of accommodation] must be pursued cautiously but persistently over the long term, slowly enough not to stimulate a crippling reaction from other groups," and persistently enough so that no party to the conflict defects or rebels. *Minorities at Risk*, p. 313. Whatever the policy response to ethnic conflict, the ontological needs of individuals and groups for security, identity and human development "cannot be compromised, bargained away, or negated by legal judgements, constitutions, electoral systems or treaty language . . .. Failure by would-be peacemakers to understand these needs and provide for them in conflict resolution strategies assures failure of the process." *Conflict and Peacemaking in Multiethnic Societies*, p. 535.