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**“Promoting Previously Unthinkable Ways-Some Restorative Learning
Tasks in Northern Ireland”**

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Promoting Previously Unthinkable Ways-Some Restorative Learning Tasks in Northern Ireland

The restorative task in Northern Ireland is deeply entwined with civic, public and political life and the extent to which we can acknowledge our violent past, permit ourselves to take risks, meet in a human manner and discount apparently rational reasons we have been given to distrust others. It is to transgress the historical boundaries of asymmetric relationships with state authority and the more recent conflicted history of deep mutual antagonism in our midst and let the reconciling part in each of us fly more freely, without being smothered by the politics of reason, important though politics is (See Wright, 1987, xi-xv).

In Northern Ireland so many of one's friends and significant others are members of one's own cultural, political or religious traditions and the pressure on more newly arrived citizens is to follow this pattern also. These patterns, aligned with an historical ambivalence to violence that has excused 'my violence as provoked' but has rejected 'your violence as unacceptable', now means that the restorative task is about opening people up to trust those they have previously seen as 'the enemy' and about establishing agreed public institutions that serve all equitably and new and agreed law and order structures that effectively criminalise violence and end any ambivalence about it.

Restoring an openness to those previously seen as my enemy in an ethnic frontier area as well as an openness to those who are new citizens, demands that: citizenship, not group identity, is established as the primary point of identification; people find relationships and civic and political structures that enable all to deal more openly with the legacy of the past; new values are established at the heart of public and civic life about treating one another equitably, appreciating the diversity each brings and promoting our mutual interdependence (Eyben et al, 2007); and that public, civic and political society spaces empower people to create a more civil society.

The restorative task is to empower the voices and actions of people of all ages who wish to take risks, equipping them with the knowledge that violent circles of pessimism, avoidance, communal deterrence and local essentialism can be disrupted through building a case with different others, supporting people in making change a lasting reality, and in promoting commitments between people and groups that establish and sustain 'process structures' in the society that address "both the symptoms and causes of historic polarisation... support constructive change...and bring together strategic, often improbable..." (Lederach, 1997)

The restorative task is not just one for children and young people but for all ages and institutions. The need for citizenship education for children and young people needs couched within a wider inter-generational commitment to see one another as equal citizens of one place and not primarily as members of opposed identity groups.

Building a more restorative society in society is to: build a new practice that works critically and reflectively with existing traditions and institutions; enable people to transgress traditional boundaries and meet; support existing organisations re-envision their role in the light of a new and agreed political dispensation and set up initiatives that are transformative because of their inclusive structures or the focus of their work.

There is a Madagascan image that eggs, once hatched, soar (Atran, 2010). Reconciliation practice over many years has been in rehabilitating relationships between unexpected people so that they, with others, can soar above distrust and fear. It is important that these relationships are now used in the practical task of restoring equity, promoting trust and securing agreed, commonly owned and non-partisan civic, public and political structures within which people of all ages can move more freely and at ease with different others.

Derick Wilson June 2010

An initial question before reading this is "what are we restoring to?"

A Starting Point? People have a deep sense of fairness that gets lost in rivalrous and destructive relationships. The restorative task then is about creating atmospheres and structures where people experience being restored in a more human manner, regaining a sense of fairness, listening to and treating one another fairly. Restorative actions are about promoting transformative learning relationships and securing structures, policies and cultures that enable such relationships to be supported and carried into daily life and practice.

'PROMOTING PREVIOUSLY UNTHINKABLE WAYS- SOME RESTORATIVE LEARNING TASKS IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Dr D A Wilson

1 A Restorative Challenge, Dealing with the Past.

LEGACY ISSUES

1.1 The legacy of the long historical past

There are many excellent texts¹ that outline the political and historical dimensions of relationships between Ireland and Britain since the 17th Century and beyond that this paper will point to and not attempt to repeat. From the perspective of a practitioner in reconciliation and restorative activity the ethnic frontier analysis of Wright² locates Northern Ireland alongside West Prussia, Bohemia, Algeria and the American South as spaces where it was impossible to experience anything that metropolitan societies called peace, where there have been large inequalities and where relationships on a daily basis have been dominated by antagonism. This analysis explains how the legacy of long past history in such areas has the potential to invade and even destroy every potential meeting across lines of difference in the present moment. Daily life is shaped by a force field of antagonism with roots in a long history.

1.2 The legacy since Partition in 1921

The impossibility of self-determination where competing parties live in balanced numbers

In 1919, the Woodrow Wilson principle of national self-determination was established at Versailles (28 June, 1919). However, self-determination in deeply contested places can only be secured with the denial of others in your midst. When identity groups are in relatively balanced numbers, self-determination for one can only be secured in the (unthinkable) act of ethnocentric expulsion and cleansing³. This dynamic needs understanding when trying to understand Northern Ireland in anything more than a naïve manner.

“Within six months, when Poles, Czechs, Serbs and Rumanians celebrated self-determination and the destruction of imperial rule, many Germans, Hungarians, Croats and Turks saw only the hypocrisy of power politics. Self-determination, the doctrine of national liberty, stumbled on the reality that territorial demands did not coincide with the wishes of populations in many of the crucial interstices of Europe. The dream of the pure free nation collapsed on the reality of majority-minority antagonism” (Morrow, D., 2004)

¹ Texts written by Bew, P., Connolly, S., Foster, R., Leichty, J. & Clegg, C. Falconer, A., to name a few.

² Wright, F. Northern Ireland, A Comparative Analysis, Gill & Macmillan, Dublin: 1987

³ To the chagrin of Irish-America, Wilson abandoned previous congressional support for Irish national self-determination to focus his attention on the defeated powers of Europe. But the politics of Ireland was very much part of the maelstrom that was Europe in 1919. The general election of 1918 had radicalised the debates about Home Rule unresolved since before the outbreak of war. The irresistible force of Sinn Fein's insistence on Irish self-determination met the immovable object of Unionist determination to resist most forcefully in the north-east. Partition in many ways represents the balance of forces that prevailed in Ireland at that time, and the line of least resistance for the decisive power, which in this case was the United Kingdom, in contrast to Germany where the victorious powers could dictate terms. (Morrow, D., *Nobody's aspiration, everybody's predicament*. British-Irish Association, Oriel College, 2004)

Wright¹ identified Northern Ireland as an example of an ‘ethnic frontier’ society. Established in the wake of an exhausted Britain winning World War One, “*partition (in Ireland) in many ways represents the balance of forces that prevailed in Ireland at that time, and the line of least resistance for the decisive power, which in this case was the United Kingdom. Critically, in Northern Ireland self-determination and democracy for Unionists was simultaneously ongoing British rule and the betrayal of democracy to nationalists, and in particular to Sinn Fein.* (Morrow, 2004)”

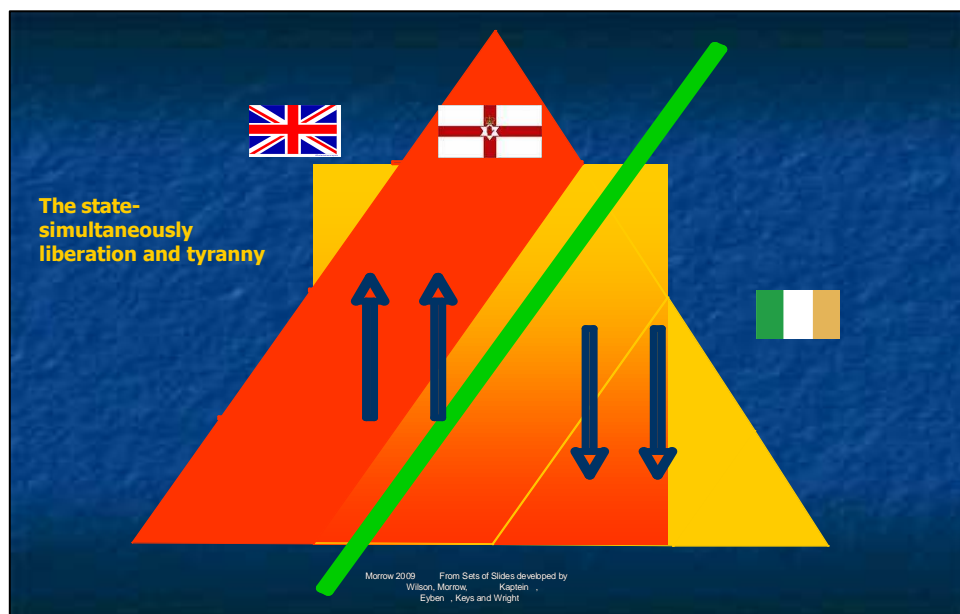


Diagram 1: Ethnic Frontier Dynamics

The ethnic frontier of Northern Ireland is a point where:

For those who wished it and secured it in 1921 the state became a liberation and a security. For many from the Protestant / Unionist / Loyalist Community in NI this was the case, hard though it was and still is for others from the Nationalist tradition to understand this.

For those who wished to accept the 1921 partition, the state became a tyranny. For many from the Catholic / Nationalist / Republican Community this was the case, hard though it was and still is for others from the Unionist tradition to understand this.

Ethnic frontiers are contested places where, in a flash, the daily lives of people and the energies of political parties can be consumed in a vortex of emotions and destructive actions. In such situations the distinctions between ‘legitimate force’ and ‘violence’ and the ability of the law to criminalise effectively is eroded. Establishing an agreed criminal justice system is a major restorative task.

This vortex is dominated by:

a history of asymmetrical relationships and access⁴ to the state internally and with the aligned cosmopolitan neighbours - the Unionists to Britain, the Nationalists to Ireland (see Diagram 1).

⁴ **The asymmetrical experiences of the state** were to a major extent initially dealt with through the responses to the demands of the Civil Rights Movement (1967). The full programme of rights, agreed representation, law and public institutions and safeguards were agreed in the peace building agenda and the establishment of a devolved Assembly anchored in the Belfast Agreement (1998) and an Ireland wide plebiscite vote, the St Andrews Agreement (2006) and the Hillsborough Agreement (2010). The asymmetries in experiences of the law, whilst

1.2 The Legacy of the Recent Conflict

Dealing with the past in such a dynamic ‘force field’ (Wright, 1987) of relationships also has to face into many uncomfortable truths within all sides to the conflict. *“Between 1969-2001, 3523 people were killed as a result of the conflict. Almost 60% were killed by Republicans, almost 30% by Loyalists and 10% by the British and Irish Security Forces”⁵.*

A second asymmetry that needs restorative attention is that of the **differential impact of the conflict**. The direct experience of violence fell on people primarily from: the border areas between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland; contested rural areas of mid Ulster; the urban areas with high levels of poverty in Belfast and Derry; on business people; and staff in the security forces, policing and the criminal justice system.-

The recent and considerable initiatives to assist healing of those impacted by the conflict⁶ whilst singularly important, have revealed the often large gulf in understanding the same events between people with diverse political and religious traditions as well as an element of *“a stubborn refusal to remember”* (Milozc Czelaw) on the part of both.

In a recent review of how victims and survivors, different people, traditions, former combatants, local politicians and the British and Irish governments might deal with the past the Group Acknowledging the Past arrived at a transcending restorative principle of

“The past should be dealt with in a manner which enables society to become more defined by its desire for true and lasting reconciliation rather than division and mistrust, seeking to promote a shared and improved future for all” (CGAPNI, 2009).

Other restorative working principles outlined below are derived from this.

1.3 Why Agreement about the Past is so difficult

In an ethnic frontier the past always has the capacity to invade and destroy present day hope because history always lives close to the surface of daily life. The normal rituals of more secure societies that allow hurt and hurtful events to be both acknowledged and placed at a distance from daily life do not work. Potentially, the past always has *the* ability to disturb the present, even as the society seeks to move on through new political agreements and mutually owned institutions. It takes time and deep commitment to build new institutions that propel people forward and build mutual ownership and cohesion. The hasty and often dismissed diverse and opposed political, religious and victims groups of one of the most thoughtful documents, “the Consultative Group on the Past⁸” in 2009 unveiled this deep asymmetry of understanding. This thoughtful document of restorative proposals across diverse inter personal, civic, religious, political and state dimensionsⁱⁱ has had limited civic discussion. Some positive inter community responses to the Saville Enquiry about Bloody Sunday (1972) may be a more positive sign

critically examined still by many human rights activists, have been mainly attended to with the devolution of Criminal Justice to the NI Assembly In May 2010.

⁵ Consultative group on acknowledging the past, 2009

⁶ Healing through remembering, www.healingthroughremembering.info/; WAVE,

⁷ **From this, other working principles flowed:** Dealing with the past is a process and not an event.

ⁿ Sensitivity towards victims and survivors is essential. Recommendations should be human rights compliant and Relationships matter and are the foundation for reconciliation. Consensual agreement is the ideal.”

(Consultative Group on Acknowledging the Past, 2009, p13).

⁸ The Consultative Group on the Past (pp 60-82, 2009) lists a body of themes that need to be mutually examined.

A third asymmetry that needs restorative attention is that of different groups demanding that the 'others' acknowledge their violence without them acknowledging their own. It is important, and painful, to recognise the circles people and traditions are caught within.

In ethnic frontier society conflicts many, on all sides, wish for a one-sided acknowledgement by the others of their violent actions without acknowledging their own. The only way to break the circular pattern of the endless demands for 'the others' acknowledgement, matched by a refusal to acknowledge 'their own', is if the demand for acknowledgement is free from the accusation that it is one sided and free from a wish to re-write history in a certain manner by pre-determining the evidence that is used.

When acknowledgement is given by all, the circular bind is broken. Then the mutual acknowledgement is seen as a process of dealing with the past and moving forward. The Consultative Group on the Past lists a body of themes⁹ that need to be mutually examined and the recently established Pilot Victims and Survivors Forum has argued for the addition of 'the Effect of the Conflict on Women and Children' an often forgotten theme¹⁰ identified in more recent local and international research in post conflict societies¹¹

2. PRESENT DAY OPPORTUNITIES

"Crossing the barrier from the past to the future is a hazardous enterprise. It is especially so in a place like this (Northern Ireland), where the essence of peace has come to mean making a future with the very people 'we' tried and failed, to defeat."¹²

A restorative task is to promote spaces and relationships where people experience being at ease with different others. Such relational work is made much easier when supported by wider societal imperatives and public policies.

Moving beyond combative relationships with enemies means to promote robust relationships that: engage with sharing responsibility for public institutions; promote more open and less partisan civil society groups and organisations; embed a political culture focussed on social and economic issues rather than identity politics; and that secure more open and shared public spaces in cities, towns and villages.

2.1 Present contributing to a new and better Future?

Existing relationships need re-visited and new relationships and structures are also needed that engage with the need to promote a shared society otherwise the dynamics mentioned above will still shape the day-to-day experience. This process needs underpinned by the concerted will of the public, political and civic institutions engaging with these themes in a robust manner over time.

⁹ These are "The Facts and Figures; Defining the Impact on Society; Understanding Perspectives; The On Going Conflict; Victims Issues; Ulsterisation of the Blame; Extent of Collusive Activities; Victimisation of Communities; The Impact on Young People; Sectarianism; Socio-Economic Issues; Exiles and Conflict Related Convictions (pp 60-82, 2009).

¹⁰ This latter theme has been an area of deep silence within all parties to the conflict and relates diversely to depression, suicide, domestic violence and rape being submerged within organizations and institutions in order that 'the greater cause is served', not being acknowledged and given priority attention (Women into Politics).

¹¹ Cota,D,; Gangadeen,T.G,2010, John Jay College of Criminal Justice

¹² The weight of the past on the way to the future Duncan Morrow, NICRC 29 October 2007

Public

The development of mutually supported public institutional cultures is now being assisted by programmes around 'Shared Cities' and 'Shared Public Spaces'¹³. Through such agreed structures and initiatives the move to a society based on the primacy of the citizen rather than the group becomes a new reality.

Civic

The diverse civil society institutions associated with community, religious, cultural, business, sporting and artistic life also need empowered to promote a new shared and better future and embed a more civil society:

- one more at ease with difference
- one where the 'good society' and the 'public good' can be experienced;
- one where new forms of citizen association can be experienced;
- one of building a more robust and open society beyond antagonism and asymmetry.¹⁴

*"Civil society is a goal to aim for, a means to achieve it and a framework for engaging with each-other about ends and means"*¹⁵

Political

With the fledgling political agreement there is the strong potential for a new political reality evolving that could dissolve the old dynamics of antagonism and asymmetry.

The diverse political parties within this process and interested metropolitan powers are central to assisting people move forward to a new and better future, one characterised in the Programme for Government (2008-11) *'A better future for all – a society which is at ease with itself and where everyone shares and enjoys the benefits of this new opportunity'* (Programme for Government, OFM FMNI, 2008)

2.2 Moving the Restorative Agenda Forward

Dealing with the past in such a dynamic 'force field' (Wright, 1987) has to face into many uncomfortable truths which alludes to the conflict. The establishment of the Commission for Victims and Survivors (2008) and the establishment of the pilot Victims and Survivors Forum (2009) are structural attempts to promote greater acknowledgement of the legacy of victims and survivors in this society, their need for long term services and support as well as supporting them in their considerable contribution to future civil society.

3. RESTORATIVE LEARNING FOR A SHARED FUTURE -MOVING BEYOND MUTUAL DISTRUST**Challenging silence, avoidance and politeness; promoting and enabling Meeting Together.**

Some experience in Northern Ireland reveals that people can be in the same space but skilfully and successfully negotiate relationships through avoidance and politeness techniques. These spaces can be hostage to a wider dynamic of preferring 'separation' and silence, 'avoidance' where people are in the vicinity of one another or 'politeness' where

¹³ <http://www.belfastcity.gov.uk/goodrelations/peaceIII/funding.asp>

¹⁴ Dialogues Project, Healing through Understanding, NICRAS, NICIE, Ballynafeigh Community House,,

¹⁵ Edwards,, M., *Civil Society*, Polity Press, 2004.

people have to share the same space. In such a climate the space for meeting the other in depth is narrowed and so the space for mutual understanding work is small.

It is important that people from diverse backgrounds come together in a contested society and that they have opportunities to work together, meet together, build lasting relationships and build a sense of common purpose between them beyond fear,¹⁶

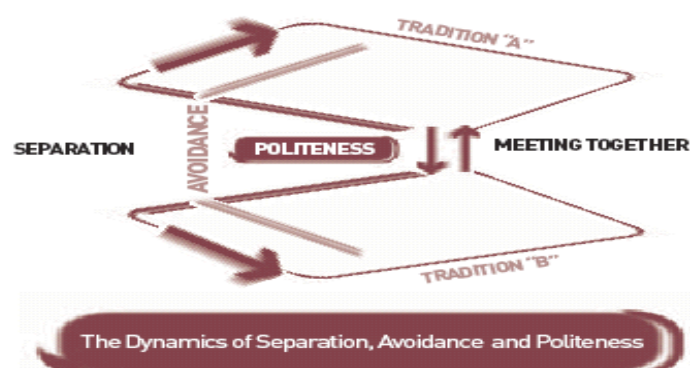


DIAGRAM 1

Diagram 2: Separation, Avoidance and Meeting Together?

There are at least two broad restorative learning links. One is to assist people understand the present day dynamics that are influenced by the asymmetries mentioned above and that continue to feed mutual antagonism in daily life. The second is to practically learn to dissolve their power through the promotion of more open relationships and structures.

Drawing on the work of Wright (see above), Girard and Kaptein¹⁸, the Future Ways Programme¹⁹ identified a number of dynamics that feed this mutual distrust and, in some cases, fear. These dynamics are explored visually with citizens, groups and institutions as they explore how they can promote trust. The models are offered whilst listening to story telling about life in the place or they are taught experientially through guided group exercises²⁰.

The work operates within an approach that invites participants to examine how much or little of their lives and organisational cultures they belong to are caught up in avoidance, politeness or silence and to what extent the potential for really meeting one another is taken.

¹⁶ Wilson, DA, 1994

Girard, R. 1978. *To Double-Double Bind: Essays on Literature, Mimesis, and Anthropology*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press. ISBN 978-0801836558. This book contains essays from *Critique dans un souterrain* but not those on Dostoyevski. 1978. *Des choses cachées depuis la fondation du monde*. Paris: Grasset. ISBN 224661841X. (English translation: *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World: Research undertaken in collaboration with J.-M. Oughourlian and G. Lefort*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987); 1982. *Le Bouc émissaire*. Paris: Grasset. ISBN 2246267811. (English translation: *The Scapegoat*. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986) 1988. *Violent Origins: Walter Burkert, Rene Girard, and Jonathan Z. Smith on Ritual Killing and Cultural Formation*. Ed. by Robert Hamerton-Kelly. Palo Alto, California: Stanford University Press. ISBN 0804715181. 1991. *A Theatre of Envy: William Shakespeare*. New York: Oxford University Press. ISBN 0195053397. The French translation, *Shakespeare : les feux de l'envie*, was published before the original English text.

¹⁸ Kaptein, R., *On the Way of Freedom*, Veritas, 1992

¹⁹ The Future Ways Programme was established by a grant from J Rowntree Charitable Trust, the Lawlor Foundation and other anonymous trusts

²⁰ *Way Out of Conflict*, Corrymeela Press, 1994 &

<http://www.socsci.ulster.ac.uk/research/education/futureways/woc.pdf> ; www.bbcnieyewitness for group learning materials

LIBERATING EXPERIENCES AND KNOWLEDGE THAT NEEDS PROMOTED

In ethnic frontier societies there can be no eventual outright winner. Some characteristics of ethnic frontier areas are that no group can dominate the other finally and that peace within the boundaries is an 'uneasy tranquillity'. Over time the lines between the different traditions become blurred as all become long-term residents and left/ right politics is usually trumped by identity politics.

a. A central restorative theme today still is 'to promote an ease with different others'

Deep mutual distrust still readily pervades many relationships between people from all social backgrounds, drawing on the old histories of distrust and the more recent challenges of accepting more recent residents as equals²¹

b. Space to morally re-evaluate each tradition's actions-The Experience of Deep Learning

We need hard but respectful conversations in diverse companies through which people re-evaluate their positions and understandings. This deep learning deals with the complexity of hurt, distrust and misunderstanding between us, going beyond the spectacles of cultural identity that so many have grown up with.

c. Supporting 'critical lovers of traditions'.

Shriver argues that for societies to become strong and more oriented they must have people who are 'critical lovers of their traditions'. He argues that closed societies have many who opt out as 'loveless critics of their traditions' or many who are 'uncritical lovers of their traditions'²².

d. Promoting active experiences that carry the message that 'change is possible'

"Thou shalt not be a victim. Thou shalt not be a perpetrator. Above all thou shalt not be a bystander" (Amos Oz, *The US Holocaust Memorial*, Washington)

Some people hold the view that the past cannot be changed. It is not that facts can be changed but that, in the midst of a contested society, we grow to understand that each person can see the same event through very different eyes and come to very different positions. In such ways the experience change.

e. Acknowledging that Dealing with the Past is a task for more than the dispersed community of Victims and Survivors.

We now need a more concerted approach by many people and institutions to ensure that the violence done to people is acknowledged on all sides. This is a societal task to harness goodwill and bind diverse people into some new common reality capable of withstanding the violent urges for retaliation and revenge that still emerge. It is important to acknowledge the moral courage of the many small groups outside the political mainstream that, until now, have kept these themes alive when there was an absence of political will to address them²³

²¹ Police Service for NI 2009-10/Race related crime
http://www.psni.police.uk/3._hate_incidents_and_crimes_final.pdf.

²² Shriver, D., *Honest Patriots*, OUP, 2005,

²³ Tyrell, G. & Wilson, D.A., *Institutions for Conciliation and Mediation in Facets of the Conflict in Northern Ireland*, ed.Dunn,S., Macmillan Press, 1995.

f. An understanding that truth telling, justice and empathy between diverse people can assist healing

In a review of diverse truth and reconciliation processes Shriver identified four aspects of truth²⁴ that heals rather than divides. He argued for an understanding of justice that repairs rather than revenges. This would include the development of a more restorative approach within communities as well as within the court system²⁵. He also argued for a societal culture of empathy that expands rather than constricts the ties that bind a political community.

LINGERING HABITS THAT NEED UNDERSTOOD AND DISSOLVED

g. Dissolving a culture of 'Pessimistic Common Sense'

'Pessimistic common sense' (Wright, 1987) readily dominates ethnic frontier societies and frustrates the building of trust between people. Such a culture frustrates risk taking and forward-looking actions. In the creation and sustaining of the Victims and Survivors Forum²⁶, where people from all sides meet together, there is a possibility that just by staying together over a year to date, members challenge this culture and assist the wider society 'mourn some features of our ...past with new present awareness that we must never repeat such events in our future' (Shriver, 2005, p9)

h. Eroding an ambivalence to building trust

"To take now the final steps out of conflict will be difficult for many. However, the divisions that led to the conflict in the first place are all too present and only by honestly addressing the past can we truly deal with it and then leave it in the past." (Foreword, CGAP, 2008)

In systems thinking exercises undertaken with diverse mature student groups over a number of years the Future Ways Programme team consistently identified a deep ambivalence²⁷ about the value of 'promoting trust with diverse others' as a central hidden constraint undermining the development of better community relations in Northern Ireland.)²⁸

i. In an ethnic frontier communal deterrence' (²⁹) is dominant.

In the presence of fear people often 'hide in tradition' and generate their understandings of the other through the stories of 'their community' and the myths of 'the dangerous other' are told. The violence of the other side, real or potential, dominates the views of all people on that side and the power of those offering to undertake more violence on behalf of the

I.²⁴ Forensic truth-What happened when and where and with whom.

II. Personal or narrative truth: When victims speak-The truth that does not bring back the dead but releases people from their silence.

III. Dialogical truth-When personal stories are heard as part of a socio-political change process.

IV. Truth that heals and is subtle, complex, comprehensive and ambiguous. Such an approach is a means of: clearing the air; exposing the facts; digesting then in dialogue; clearing the public air; getting rid of the malignancy of evil.

²⁵ The Northern Ireland Juvenile Courts now has a mandatory restorative conferencing structure for all juveniles who plead guilty.

²⁶ The Pilot Victims and Survivors Forum, 2009-10, CVSNI.

²⁷ "FIT FOR PURPOSE?" Wilson & Eyben, Future Ways Programme, University of Ulster, June 2006, p44,

²⁸ In recent (2008) survey returns 59% of people surveyed by NI Life and Times²⁸ are looking forward to better relations between people in Northern Ireland and it is this almost 40% that do not see any difference or it even being worse that evidences an ambivalence. Another ambivalence is highlighted in the actual choices exercised by most people that reinforce segregated education provision even though the stated preference for shared education²⁸ is consistently high. The reluctance of the devolved administration, the Catholic Church and diverse Protestant Churches (xxxx) to formally support integrated education are further aspects (xxxx). The acknowledgement of prejudice being high is an additional impediment to securing a more open and shared society (NILT,2008, xxxx).The continuing reality of sectarian and racist incidents (xxxx) continue to demand time and attention.

²⁹ Wright, F, Northern Ireland, A Comparative Analysis, pp112-163.

tradition gains strength. The threat or actual use of violence is used to communally deter the others.

Those who are open to meet are branded 'traitors' and relationships across the traditions are not readily tolerated. Faith leaders, community leaders and local politicians are always subject to veto by those willing to be the most violent. Deterrence relationships make for uneasy and unstable agreements and truces between groups. In earlier times the major internal parties used their special relationships with either Britain or the Irish Republic to deter the other side. This allowed each side to avoid building responsible and responsive relationships locally.

j. An act of violence has a communal meaning; private acts of violence are rare.

In a conflict, acts of violence against an individual are rarely read as random acts but are seen as communal acts of violence by a member of one group against all members of the other group. A collective identity is readily affixed to both victim and victimiser.

k. 'My violence is understandable and your violence is unacceptable'

In ethnic frontier areas revenge and tit for tat cycles of retaliation quickly generate their own logic, once started. In such a cycle each side only sees the part of the other in hurting things. It always sees its own actions as provoked and justified.

l. Challenging the assumption of 'Cultural Good Reasons' and not trusting 'the other'

In an ethnic frontier everyone has a 'cultural good reason' for his or her actions. Just as the on-looker, sometimes, has distance and discernment, this is precisely what those caught up in a conflict do not have. The restorative learning work is to alert people to these dynamics and give them some distance and discernment about:

- how people caught up in a conflict may have their 'cultural good reasons' for doing actions;
- how every emotional outburst can ignore buttons of history in us that we can justify.

4. ACTIONS AND VALUES TO BUILD A SHARED SOCIETY-EQUITY, DIVERSITY AND INTERDEPENDENCE (EDI)

In restorative terms the challenge is to build a societal commitment to the values that underpin a shared society: create relationships, places and structures where mutual regard is experienced, acknowledgment and regret expressed, and interdependence can flourish. In such ways peace with difference is secured and a culture that is open to people from minority ethnic communities in a midst, who often have had to behave in an invisible manner, is also generated.

Above and apart from this compliance base it is now possible to develop humanising, transgressing, envisioning and transformative work³⁰ (see pages 18-19) that builds new commitments to, and structures that support, a shared society. A restorative aspect is to empower people and groups to move hopefully and together beyond the different asymmetries of experience and to boldly live and move beyond experiences of mutual distrust.

There is a restorative learning possibility to promote and secure spaces committed to treating one another well and promoting the norms of respect. Such generative platforms

³⁰ A practical aid is currently being developed for people, groups and organisations on these themes of 'humanising, transgressing, envisioning and transforming practices, D A Wilson'

work at “both the symptoms and the causes of historic polarisation,...support constructive change,...and bring together strategic, often Improbable alliances³¹.”

4.1 EDI as values and policy principles informing the creation and securing of a Shared Society

Equity, diversity and interdependence are principles emerging from extensive research with individuals, groups and organisations in Northern Ireland in terms of how they understood and committed themselves to improve community relations (Eyben, Morrow & Wilson, 1997³² . These principles became the fundamental principles for the ‘Shared Future’ policy produced by Government in 2005³³

Equity involves ‘treating people fairly and justly’ (Eyben et al., 2002). In professional practice, this involves standing, in a preferential manner, with those who have little and with those who are being bullied, victimised or scapegoated. In organisational terms it is a fundamental value through which the actions of a public or community agency can measure its actions.

Diversity is primarily about recognising each person as an equal and different citizen. This principle is at the centre of future oriented formal and informal educational practice and youth work especially where people’s voice is being acknowledged. Social inclusion is important in groups and organisations. In organisational terms it challenges agencies to examine the reach and breadth of their actions.

Interdependence refers to individual, social and global interdependent relationships. It is about the quality of relationships between people and how they give one another their place (Kaptein, 1995) It acknowledges that people are bound out of the relationships with those they have been with, for good and ill. In organisational terms, in a contested society, it is an experience people need as a goal to work towards.

4.2 EDI informing the daily professional practice of workers and board members of agencies.

Equity, diversity and interdependence principles are capable of informing the daily work of teachers, health workers, social workers and community workers in a contested society in order that they stay free of servile partisan and narrow interests. Thoughtful workers, workers to an intercultural vision, can use these principles to measure whether their practice promotes this wider vision. Board members, managers and policymakers can ensure that the vision, structures and policies associated with their agencies are explicitly and implicitly committed to building an interdependent society. (See Appendix, Table 1)

4.3 EDI in institutional Culture:

EDI principles can be applied to ensure that need is the focus of agency community work policy and practice. An organisation could review its goals against the extent to which they address inequality (the equity theme), challenge narrow practices that exclude (the diversity agenda) and consider how they could secure a shared society (the interdependence drive) the end point to which everything else works (Murtagh, 2006). Some desired outcomes are summarised in Appendix Table 2.

³¹ Lederach, J.P. From Truce to Transformation, NICRC, 2007.

³² Eyben, K., Morrow, D., & Wilson, D A., *A Worthwhile Venture-Practically Investing in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence in Northern Ireland?* University of Ulster,1997

³³ A Shared Future, OFMDFM, 2005, para 1, px

4.4 EDI as social group work principles in learning together across traditions and as principles in infusing learning spaces.

Equity, Diversity and Interdependence are parameters for innovative social group work. Applying the themes to work with people and groups is to see:

- equity (fairness plus justice) as the structure of the space the worker creates for people to come into;
- diversity (being different and having a place) as the stimulus and ease which different people gradually sense when they enter the group; and
- interdependence (being valued as a person and valuing others with you) as the increasingly open engagement between members about living in this place and elsewhere. Interdependence is the experience when a group comes to life and engages.

Some central tasks for the social group worker are to create the potential for individual and interpersonal growth where each person has his or her place and does not have to rival for it. In these spaces people meet and engage together and the worker brings his or her ease with difference to the individual members of the group, setting them free to imagine new activities and make new choices.

Appendix Table 3 outlines how these principles inform the provision of learning spaces and events to promote ease with difference and build an interdependent society.

5. PROMOTING COMMUNITIES OF INVITATION-CHALLENGING TRADITIONAL COMMUNITY CONCEPTS

Pavlich³⁴ speaks of the often hidden and violent edges of traditional models of community. In a contested society these silent and extensive edges are very evident. In contrast the learning groups or communities that restore or reconcile tend to have boundaries more shaped by hospitality and invitation; they are more open, inclusive, permeable and future oriented.

Challenging 'Local Essentialism'

Identities can become too localised and become future prisons that may limit opportunity and imagination for adults and children alike. *Local essentialism* closes people to difference. Ethnicity, Irishness or Britishness are only tenable on the fringes of those historic cultures and reflect little of the growing diversity at their centres. Such dynamics feed excluding cultures and a politics of 'ethnic essentialism'³⁵ that is '**only my group and my place counts above all else**'.

As citizens within an expanded Europe, promoting good relations between people of different religious beliefs, political opinion and racial groups is to promote ease with those who are equal citizens and newcomers and ask, "have our existing cultural and political formations the space and openness to different others or do the major traditions here only want the newcomers if they 'assimilate' into our existing ways?"

³⁴ Pavlich, George. 'Restorative Justice's Community: Promise and Peril', in Barb Toews and Howard Zehr (eds) *Critical Issues in Restorative Justice*, Criminal Justice Press, 2004.

³⁵ Ranjit Sondhi CBE explores ethnicity in a variety of ways. See for example his talk to the Oxford Centre for Hindu Studies, 2008.

Current Interfaces³⁶ are Places of Societal Failure not only Local Failure

In Belfast there are distinct physical interfaces between some neighbourhood communities. These physical interfaces are not just made by those who live there—they are signs of our collective failure to engage with one another further upstream. Interfaces are places that speak to all of us about our failure to build an inclusive society and our societal flight from difficult engagements.

In wider society people need to understand that such places are, in fact, places that are at the epicentre of wider communal histories of distrust and a failure to resolve the challenge of creating safety and security for all. Such places challenge all to change our behaviour and to change the views we have of others different to us by class, religion, race or political tradition.

6. PLATFORMS FOR LEARNING ANEW

One element in the restorative agenda is to promote new ways beyond the old adaptive ways. It is to promote and support new models and experiences that contrast with the old. It is to offer experiences that address issues sensitively and move people beyond them in a new manner.

The challenge now is to promote a restorative civil and public culture³⁷ that moves people beyond the importance compliance base established in the past, and that underpins a more equal and open society, to promote a commitment to treating all fairly and building a new culture of ease with different others.

Communication is not just about what is spoken. It is about the structures behind the words of symbols, power relations, memories and agendas. The conversations that are needed are about the quality of relationships that exist between us as human beings, and the level of trust that allows people to acknowledge and value each other's experiences, cultures and insights.

Change means transforming organisational structures so that people communicate in new ways. This means creating new spaces to facilitate such conversations, irrespective of religion, race or politics. This means attending to the internal relationships and the external links organisations have with diverse members of the communities they serve.

LIBERATING NEW PRACTICES TO PROMOTE

Promoting, Developing and Sustaining new 'process structures'

In the traces of reconciliation practice before and during the conflict³⁹ there has been a stubborn refusal to give into despair and distrust and a wish to create a sense of interdependence. Such interdependence may only be a level of listening to the other while

³⁶ An Interface is a space where different traditions live separated by physical walls or 'no go' areas, See Belfast Interface Project, <http://www.belfastinterfaceproject.org/>

³⁷ Platforms for a Restorative Culture in Northern Ireland, Wilson, D A., www.restorativejustice.org, 2009

³⁸ Equality and Good Relations Legislation, Section 75 (i) (ii), Northern Ireland Act, 1998.

³⁹ This practice has been part of track two and three strands alongside the track one political reconciliation processes that led to the political agreement of 1998. Montville, Joseph. 1990. *Conflict and Peacemaking In Multiethnic Societies*. Lexington, MA and Toronto: Lexington Books. Montville, Joseph. 1993. "The Healing Function in Political Conflict Resolution." In *Conflict Resolution Theory and Practice: Integration and Application*, edited by Dennis J. D. Sandole and Hugo van der Merwe. New York: Manchester University Press.

still disagreeing. When such meetings develop further they nurture imagination and gain a life of their own.

Such movements can influence how people work within different organisations and structures and they can lead to people creating new and joint structures. (See, as examples, the history of Corrymeela; the growth of Integrated Schools; WAVE, NI Mixed Marriage Association) Lederach⁴⁰ refers to these acts as ‘process -structures’. They are the outworking of generative meetings between people and certainly one aspect of the healing processes needed post conflict.

Sustainable peace...require(s) the robust participation of many sectors, people, and levels within the society. It requires a vision that includes the ending of open violence and the building of a shared, desired future. ... Sustainable peace represents the permanency of dynamic and respectful interaction between different, even opposing, but ultimately interdependent people -- who recognize they are to build flourishing lives and communities together.(Lederach,2007⁴¹)

Such platforms are the basis of reconciliation practice between people from diverse backgrounds and include victims⁴²; people who have committed violence and wish to reconsider their views and actions⁴³; young people from diverse histories of mutual distrust⁴⁴; people of all ages examining the need to address poverty and inequality in new and non partisan ways; people from diverse faith traditions; police and security personnel⁴⁶, public servants, local and first level politicians⁴⁷, school children and diverse professionals from teaching⁴⁸, social work⁴⁹, youth work⁵⁰, probation⁵¹ and health and community development⁵².

LINGERING OLD PRACTICES TO DISSOLVE

A critical question then is with so many involved in peace building, why is the society still relatively fragile about embracing the securing of a shared society? An openness to the different other as a fact is a reality for some but not yet a societal norm.

⁴⁰ J.Lederach, John Paul (2003). *The little book of conflict transformation*. Intercourse, PA: Good Books

⁴¹ Lederach, J. P. ‘Truce or Transformation?’ Belfast, 2007

⁴² Towards Understanding and Healing, www.thejunction-ni.org/towardsunderstandingandhealing.htm

⁴³ Fitzduffell, From Ritual to Consciousness, 1987;

⁴⁴ Wilson, D. A. ‘Coming of Age at Last’, Irish Youthwork Journal, xxxx

⁴⁵ Northern Ireland Association for Mental Health

⁴⁶ Policing Our Diverse Society, Mediation Northern Ireland & Future Ways Report to Patten Commission,1998,, Changing Police Culture, A Critical Dialogue Project, Morrow, Wilson, Mc Allister & Campbell,, Unpublished, 2004

⁴⁷ Civic Leadership- A Western Routes Programme Report, University of Ulster, 2002;

“A New Shape For One Of The Oldest Professions?” Politics and Civil Society, The Good Relations Task, Belfast City Council, Eyben, Keys & Wilson,2006

⁴⁸ Magill C.; Smith A. and B. Hamber The Role of Education in Reconciliation. Report for EU Peace and Reconciliation Fund. Coleraine, Ulster, 2009 . Paper for Principals of Integrated Schools, NICIE, Wilson, D.A.,2006

⁴⁹ CCETSW(NI) (1999) Getting Off the Fence: Challenging Sectarianism in. Personal Social Services, London: Belfast.

⁵⁰ Wilson, D. A., (2007) Coming of age at last? Youth Work, the Good Relations Legislation and the Shared Future Policy in Northern Ireland, Irish Youthwork Journal.

⁵¹ Wilson, D.A., (2007) Probation Practice and Citizenship, Good Relations and the Emerging European Intercultural Agenda, Irish Probation Journal

⁵² Marie Therese Fay, Mike Morrissey, Marie Smyth and Tracy Wong (1999, April) [The Cost of the Troubles Study. Report on the Northern Ireland Survey: the experience and impact of the Troubles](#) Derry Londonderry: INCORE. ISBN 0-9533305-5-9 Paperback 161pp

Here we return to the deep ambivalence that exists about trusting the other. Essentially separatist political ideologies implicitly underpin the dominant and opposed major political parties. The ability of these parties to act in a mature political manner and understand the views of those opposed to them is only in their infancy (see Shriver, 2005). There has also been a dominant theology of 'a chosen people' and 'a sacrificial theology' in catholic and protestant traditions that has subordinated a more liberating and inclusive theology of reconciliation, with notable exceptions⁵³

However there also is a significant body of people of all ages that have participated in meeting the other. In a sense many citizens have more experience of meeting different others than their political representatives. There may be a critical mass developing of diverse people from diverse backgrounds that know deeply that meeting the enemy is the only way forward⁵⁴.

LIBERATING NEW PRACTICES

Excluding practices are now illegal. Platforms of minimum compliance standards and agreed public institutions now exist. Under the 1998 Belfast Agreement and internationally recognised by the British and Irish Governments and accepted to by a plebiscite on the whole island there are now agreed public structures under the devolved NI Assembly that is responsible for all areas, including law and order. There are minimum compliance standards underpinned by the equality and good relations law that govern fair treatment and challenge actions of a sectarian, politically exclusive or sectarian nature (Section 75 (i) & (ii), NI Act 1998)

7. THE RESTORATIVE TASK IN A SOCIETY EMERGING FROM CONFLICT

The restorative task is to work for a Shared Society based on the principles of EDI within the process-structures of everyday life, to employ choice, to promote new norms, to discern values at work; and envision a Shared Society.

At the centre of the restorative task coming out of conflict there are specific ways of being with one another that need to be promoted and embedded. These are practical tasks to promote within the old as well as the new structures. All people who have lived through a conflict have 'good reasons' for their positions and are understandably ambivalent. The shared society project needs promotion in their relationships, policies and structures of everyday life.

Some learning from the past years of reconciliation practice is:

Firstly that development and innovative work on the edge has to be balanced by patient and dogged work at the centre of institutional, structural and civic life. It is to seek some very incremental gains at the centre and reconfigure that centre, however difficult, so that more learning from the developmental edge can be incorporated there⁵⁵.

Secondly that self-interest must unselfishly be used if the broader body of people are to buy into the new shared society project. The interests of adults for their children and grandchildren, for greater safety in the communities and societies and for the well being of

⁵³ Mc Donagh, Falconer, Smith, Leichty, Clegg, Mc Master & Higgins, Hurley, Davey, Barkley are some examples.

⁵⁴ See Nature 465, 292-293 (20 May 2010), "Decentralize, adapt and cooperate," R. Sagarin, C. Alcorta, S. Atran, et al.

⁵⁵ Eyben, K. Wilson, D.A. & Morrow, D. J. (2003), Investing in Trust Building and Good Relations in a Public Sector Organisation. Coleraine, University of Ulster. (Reprinted May 2004) ISBN:1 85923 167 5

older people must be slavishly used as levers if we are to bring more people to the shared society table.

Thirdly that a shared society that is restorative in character is a practical gift to people in terms of children at school being seen as assets and possibilities not problems and deficits; that less bullying and intimidation is what everyone wishes; that fairer treatment for all means better use of public and civic resources, especially in a time of financial need.

Building a more restorative culture in society is to engage in a number of strands of work that:

a. Change the character of engagement between different people and the traditions they come from so that people meet more as citizens than as members of identity groups.

a.

This means that viewed as citizens, children, young people and adults are understood to be assets not problems. This means that, whether children and young people attend separated or integrated schools or youth programmes, the 'other' they are with and 'different others' they meet are acknowledged as assets also.

This demands that formal and informal educators need to work more energetically to promote a culture that is open to experiencing ease with difference and where 'the other' is experienced or referred to as an equal citizen.

•

b. Inform and infuse the language and values used when people come together in diverse groups, public spaces and civic institutions. It is the language of shared spaces and the common good.

Promoting ease with difference and establishing low levels of inequality are two elements that are essential to the economic development of sustainable regions⁵⁶. Children and young people meeting across lines of difference religiously, politically and culturally contribute to this societal agenda. In such meetings the experience of the common good and shared spaces grow within them and between them. This demands that adult educators work to a shared value base around inter-cultural understanding and are at ease with this task in themselves.

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c. Create and motivate more critical lovers of traditions within cultural groups who challenge and cajole their cultures to live up to the best values and beliefs in those traditions that respond to the challenges of diversity and inclusion and who are prepared to critically challenge those values that do not do so in this modern age.

Educationalists traditionally have both a reproductive and reconstructive function (Connell⁵⁷, 1981). Currently, it appears that the reproductive function dominates the education profession in Northern Ireland, at least implicitly. Higher education tutors hold an important bridging position in terms of their freedom to ask critical questions of teachers in training and on refresher courses.

For the foreseeable future, and in my view regrettably, the educational structures of the NI devolved assembly will primarily offer formal and informal education in

⁵⁶ Morrissey, M; Dunford, S.

⁵⁷ Connell, W.F., A History of Education in the 20th Century World, Teachers College Press, 1981.

separated strands, whilst encouraging integrating or shared programme strands between schools. This means that people will primarily still meet ‘their own side’ more readily. The new agreed societal structures must not cement these separations. The recently announced programme cuts in community relations work (DE, 2010) imply that the Minister does not see such organised meetings across the traditional lines as important. In the long run we must hope that the positive developments of the digital age and youth culture of horizontally linking young people across lines of difference grows and that parents make different choices in support of a more open society⁵⁸.

Building a more restorative culture in society is to work on a number of axes.

One axis is to develop the elements that secure a shared society through work that empowers voice; promotes new norms; discerns values at work and envisions a Shared Society.

Publicly funded programmes relevant to the broader experience of citizenship and understanding recent history must be more focused on this theme. Giving time and voice to children and young people who experience being diminished is important. Promoting more restorative spaces for the young care (VOVIC) as a priority is essential to this axis. Enabling a more diverse base of children and young people to be visible and acknowledged in wider society here is the goal.

It is also important that young people are empowered and supported in undertaking new youth-adult partnership working⁵⁹ that promotes and secures a more open and shared society, to experience that change and the possibilities for change are real and that such civic engagements are promoted in ways that enable adults and young people to advocate for change and understand the complexity of social change.

A second axis is the practice that supports a Shared Society through humanising work, transgressing practices, envisioning work and transforming work.

Humanising work is the act of building a more open set of relationships within groups and organisations. Transgressing work assists people move beyond the often-limiting boundaries of traditional cultures to meet different others and being supported in questioning cultures. Envisioning work is re-orienting existing organisations around the theme of whether the group or organisation addresses and promotes a more open and shared society. Transforming work is creating new groups and organisations that model new ways of being together across lines of difference.

A third axis is integrating the work across relationships, supporting structural change, engaging politically and challenging civil society cultures.

The restorative task requires work within adult and youth cultures that engages people with the reality of the political, public and civic spheres. This requires people to articulate the importance of building a more open society secured by the values of fairness, diversity and interdependence.

⁵⁸ Some recent work by the Integrated Education Fund and the Integrating Schools Project at Queens University Belfast suggests such movements (Discussion with Author, June 2010).

⁵⁹ [Zeldin, R., Journal of Community Psychology Volume 33 Issue 1, Pages 121 – 135 Special Issue: Youth-Adult Relationships in Community Programs: Diverse Perspectives on Good Practices, Wiley Periodicals, 2004.](#)

The restorative task is about promoting and supporting any willingness to meet and engage openly and robustly. It is to never lose sight of the cost of the conflict and be committed to ensuring that we never return there.

The restorative task is to ensure that children and young people are equipped, through the governance cultures of formal and informal educational organisations and institutions, to experience being at ease with different others and through a more restorative culture being encouraged within organisations that work with them to put relationships right in a restorative manner rather than let relationships and grievances fester for too long.

There is a Madagascan image that eggs, once hatched, soar.⁶⁰ Reconciliation practice over many years has been incubating relationships between unexpected people so that they, with others, can soar above distrust and fear. It is important that these restorative relationships, with the capacity to restore hope and possibility between diverse and separated people, are now used in the practical task of restoring equity, promoting trust and securing agreed, commonly owned and non-partisan civic, public and political structures within which people of all ages can move more freely and at ease with different others.

ii The Legacy of the Past and Reconciliation

- 1) An independent Legacy Commission should be established to deal with the legacy of the past by combining processes of reconciliation, healing and information recovery. Victims and Survivors. The suffering of families from Northern Ireland and Great Britain should be recognised.
- 2) Society Issues arising from the conflict which should be tackled include: addressing sectarianism; promoting healing activities; working with young people; providing improved services for healthcare needs; ensuring that even spread economic benefits; and helping those exiled from Northern Ireland during the conflict to return.
- 3) Processes of Justice and Information Recovery. The process of recovering information of importance to victims (information recovery). The Legacy Commission would examine themes arising from the conflict which remain of public concern such as specific areas of paramilitary activity, or alleged collusion.
- 4) The Government not proposing an amnesty but recommends that the Legacy Commission itself make recommendations on how a line might be drawn at the end of its five-year mandate so that Northern Ireland might move to a shared future.
- 5) Remembering. The Legacy Commission should...support...facilitating and encouraging the telling of stories, including by young people, about the impact of the conflict on individuals and communities; and the stories of intra-communal difference.
- 6) ...in developing the existing ways in which the conflict and its impact are remembered. This should include the development of educational projects; providing support and guidance for those facilitating remembering projects in line with certain criteria; and promoting the value of remembering across society as a means of achieving reconciliation.
- 7) The continuation of the annual Day of Reflection, initiated by Healing Through Remembering, on 21st June each year. Each year, on or around the Day of Reflection and Reconciliation, the First Minister and deputy First Minister should together make a keynote address to the Northern Ireland Assembly and invited guests, reflecting on the past in a positive way and confirming their commitment to lead Northern Ireland society towards a shared and reconciled future.
- 8) an initiative, at the end of the five year mandate of the Legacy Commission, whereby Northern Ireland, with the support of the two Governments and the Northern Ireland Assembly, should conduct a ceremony remembering the past and all those who suffered during the conflict.
- 9) A shared memorial to remember the conflict in and about Northern Ireland...at the end of (a) five year life span, make recommendations to Government in this regard.

Extracts from the Summary Document, Consultative Group on the Past, 2008.

⁶⁰ Scott Altan spoke of this in a seminar on 'For Friends and Heros, John Jay College, June 2010.