Coming of Age at Last?
Youth Work, the Good Relations Legislation and the Shared Future Policy in Northern Ireland

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Abstract
Positive youth work practices that seek to develop trust and community understanding have been a reality in Northern Ireland since, at least, 1965. Although such work assists young people to develop self-confidence and prepares them for life in a more open and intercultural society, it has, until more recent times, tended to be peripheral in public policy terms across government departments, with some notable exceptions from Departments such as ‘Education’ and ‘Education and Learning’ and the Central Community Relations Unit (Eyben et al, 1997). The legal duty to promote Good Relations, the Shared Future policy initiative and the associated race relations plans have created a legal floor and policy platform on which to advance a more intercultural and interdependent society. They also provide an opportunity for innovative youth work practices to be acknowledged for their actual and potential contribution to the wider civic good. The Youth Service must examine the social purpose, reach and depth of its provision against the principles underpinning Good Relations policies – equity, diversity and interdependence. It must ensure that the individual, group and community work methods it employs are focused on personal development and on changing how society as a whole values and supports its young people. This article outlines the new legislative and policy context and explores the implications – actual and potential – for youth work practitioners and providers.

Keywords
Youth work; equity; diversity; interdependence; reconciliation; Good Relations.

Introduction
When so many young people experience failure or secure limited success educationally (Kenway et al., 2006), when there is evidence from psychiatry that young men who act violently often experienced humiliation and disrespect as children1 and when we live in a society where so many young people experience bullying (Burns, 2007), it is vital for youth work practice to promote ease with difference.

The legislation on ‘Good Relations’ offers an opportunity for the benefits of youth work practice that promotes ease with difference to be acknowledged, promoted and multiplied. It is part of the Northern Ireland Act 1998 which has its roots in the Good Friday Agreement of the same year. Section 75(1) of the Act requires public authorities
to promote equality of opportunity between people of different religious belief, political opinion, racial group, age, marital status, sexual orientation and gender; and also between those with or without disabilities and with or without dependants. Section 75(2) lays a duty on public bodies and those they commission or aid to promote good relations between ‘persons of different religious belief, political opinion and racial group’. Section 75 also needs to be seen in the context of race relations legislation (Race Relations Order, NI, 2003) and a range of other recent equality measures (see www.equalityni.org). In a sense, it is the beginning of linking past priorities on community understanding and community relations around religion and politics with the emerging need also to promote ease with difference on race, intercultural issues and the broader equality grounds. It is given additional weight because of the growth of hate crime legislation.2

The policy set out in A Shared Future (OFMDFM, 2005) is concerned with how all government departments address the structural and relational dimensions of building a shared society. This is now centrally monitored by, and accountable to, a senior civil service review group chaired by the Head of the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

There has been a consistent strand of community relations work in Northern Ireland since the mid 1960s (Wilson, 1989; Wilson & Tyrell, 1985) carried out by specific groups of youth workers and a raft of voluntary, community and statutory agencies. In an early community relations youth work action research project, Jenvey (1973) documented the experiences of four Belfast-based detached youth workers and youth tutors working with young people who were ‘called stupid’ by many of the significant adults they encountered in school, in their communities and even in their families. These workers sought to establish relationships in which the young people came to see themselves and others different to them in a more positive light. They developed extensive opportunities for these young people to engage with others from different traditions and abilities and promoted long-term community service activities for them. Such practices were the primary starting points of innovative youth work in the area of what is now termed Good Relations. Unfortunately, however, the policy community did not embrace the findings of Jenvey’s report.

In policy terms, the Youth Service has often been seen as peripheral, in spite of many quality pieces of developmental work that have modelled innovative approaches to building personal confidence and that have contributed to wider reconciliation practice (see Wilson, 1994). Research by Eyben et al. (1997) highlighted the marginal position of such programmes in terms of how public policy is developed. Their report stressed the need for this practice to be central in the thinking and organisational cultures of youth and community organisations. It proposed three interconnecting principles – equity, diversity and interdependence – as essential concepts on which to base all policy and practice concerned with building trust and improving relationships between people from the historically opposed political and religious identities in Northern Ireland. It was argued that these principles were essential for building any emerging intercultural society.

The report by Eyben et al. was a new stimulus for a ‘commitment led’ base of workers and agencies to reinvigorate this practice, supported by the ‘Joined in Equity, Diversity and Interdependence’ project – JEDI for short – which was established by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (see www.jedini.co.uk). Although a number of other
publicly minded organisations took the ‘commitment led’ approach which was argued for in the report, the Youth Service agencies have marked themselves out as the single constituency that has maintained this strand of work for nearly ten years. Some other sectors only moved when the legal levers of Good Relations had to be responded to.

The *Shared Future* policy in 2005 signalled a new landscape around the promotion of trust and shared resources. This policy statement rooted the three interweaving principles which had been set out by this author and colleagues in 1997 (Eyben et al., 1997) into paragraph 1 of the document (OFMDFM, 2005: 7). This policy was a significant change in community relations approaches; it was to apply across all government departments and those they supported. This development now brings the trust-building agenda and Good Relations practice into mainstream public policy. *A Shared Future* presents structural challenges to government departments concerning how their policies promote sharing over and against separation. They must advance the concept of shared and integrated community services and remind people that they are interdependent. They must promote and support relational work between children, young people and adults from diverse communities, schools and youth provision. They must stimulate and encourage intercultural understanding.

As a result of the legal requirement on public bodies to improve Good Relations between people of diverse religious beliefs, political opinions and racial backgrounds and the policy drive of *A Shared Future*, there is now an opportunity for the strand of innovative youth work practices about trust building – evident since at least 1965 (Wilson, 1994) – to become central to our institutions and our society. It is now possible to link a relational understanding that underpins good youth work practice with the institutional challenge to public and civic organisations to promote Good Relations and become active contributors to our shared future.

The main learning from this is that a ‘commitment led’ approach raises institutional and organisational practice way above the floor level that a ‘compliance level’ approach starts and finishes at. ‘Commitment led’ work begins to address the challenge of meeting across lines of difference as people inter-depending with one another. Compliance approaches, from experience, tend not to move into this relational domain (Eyben et al., 2003: 40–43).

**Research Informing Professional Youth Work Practice – Promoting A Shared Future**

In political science terms Northern Ireland is an ethnic frontier area. Ethnic frontier areas (Wright, 1987) are places where there have been, and are, groups firmly opposed to one another and there is no shared identity among all the people. An ethnic frontier is a particular form of colonial settlement where the contesting traditions are in relative balance with one another and each is unable to finally dominate the other. Some areas of stable societies begin to approximate to the dynamics of an ethnic frontier, where identity groups share one space and citizens experience differential access to the state and to the criminal justice system. In such dynamics lessons learned in Northern Ireland have much to offer other societies about building an intercultural society.

In an ethnic frontier, when fears are high, opportunities for innovative organisational work are often limited; conversely, when fears are low, there is more space to be innovative.
By and large national communities that coexist on the same soil develop in rivalry and antagonism with each other. It is more common for them to eventually separate from each other than to become reconciled … and the features of their histories that are most important to them are therefore the things that have clearest bearing on their antagonism (Wright, 1988: 68–9).

Youth workers promoting Good Relations have to be prepared to push forward new practices when they can, knowing that some progress might fall back. Extended research with youth workers, young adults, adults and informal educators in 330 groups and involving weekly and intense residential meetings over a period of three years informed the learning outlined below. Except where otherwise indicated, quotes and excerpts are from Wilson (1994).

Mixed meetings in the midst of a conflict can be emotional spaces
Many meetings between people from different traditions in an ethnic frontier are filled with an emotional content that few people feel confident to acknowledge and address. It is important that the youth worker has explored these dynamics and can draw on her or his experiences to assist others to move through and beyond such fears together. The achievement of situations where young people can feel comfortable with people ‘you have been told are different to you and even threatening’ enables youth workers to grow young people’s confidence and ease in the midst of difference.

X was in a position where transport for a group had not turned up on time and ‘a young person from a Catholic group visiting my club was going to get beaten up by local youths outside the club. I was being ridiculed for safeguarding a child from “the other tradition” as I stood with that child. I challenged the youths to take me on if they wished, maybe being the size and weight I am put them off.’ (Voluntary youth club worker in a loyalist area)

Y was working on a voluntary basis in a church club within a peace line area. ‘Openly working across the traditions against opposition from within my own community is not easy and yet I believe it just has to be done. It is still possible for me to maintain open friendships with people from the other tradition. I suppose coming from here people know of my own involvement in the schemes for the local kids, they trust me.’ (Voluntary youth club worker in a republican area)

Separation, avoidance and politeness frustrate just and open relationships
In the Northern Ireland conflict, individuals have found it more comfortable to seek out those they think they are like and move apart from those they see as different. Separation is preferred by some, and avoidance and politeness are practised by many. The spaces for real meetings and engagements across lines of difference between individuals and groups of people committed to building personal understanding and promoting organisational links have been, at times, hostage to wider fears.
‘In our town Catholics and Protestants are not afraid of each other, but there is a certain ‘standing off’ from each other. Protestants are very much the majority. There are Catholics in the town who are civil servants and a lot of police officers too. All the locals agree that, if there is any trouble, it is caused by outsiders coming into the town. Any feelings of ambiguity on this, or any people who support political violence, keep quiet.’ (Suburban town young person)

It is hoped that with worker ease, institutional support and a shared political agreement a more open environment will be created where such experiences are diluted and even curtailed.

**Male-female relationships and the separation of differences**

A recurring theme requiring further work is the link between males and females and their involvement with different types of violence (Hanson, 2005: 43–58). The ‘Young Men and Violence’ research by Harland through the Centre for Young Men’s Studies and the work of Beattie (2004) are exploring dimensions of this theme. Men are culturally associated with violence (Girard, 1977: 125–6) and have little opportunity to meet in a new manner across lines of opposed identity.

‘When boys from the other side come into “our” territory, they are evicted because they threaten more. As the places are exclusively one tradition, there is no equilibrium. Yet because local boys can bring in girls from the other estate, there is tension between the local boys and local girls. There are no possibilities for politeness here; there is no ritual way to be in the midst of each other. Strict separation, between the men anyway, by ghetto boundaries, is what operates.’

‘In our town centre, if you’re young and male, you know not to walk on the side of the street that does not belong to your tradition. There are shops we identify as being “one side” or “the other” and you stick to them. A boy got his head split when he walked on the wrong side, a gang of boys smashed a hardware shop window, took out a large shaft from it, and proceeded to lay into him with it. Any outsiders on the wrong side get beaten up.’

(Rural town teenagers)

**Organisations and staff can model inclusive ways of working**

Youth work that enables people to be at ease with difference is becoming a central challenge in democratic societies. Community-based youth workers, as well as their line managers, who are prepared to acknowledge how partisan dynamics are experienced in their own lives can be such models. Such workers recognise the pulls these different dynamics evoke. They establish ways through which they can continue to work to the wider vision of a more open and shared society, personally as well as institutionally.

Recently, an initiative by the Belfast Education and Library Board youth work training panel gave staff from across the city an opportunity to examine the extent to which staff may have implicitly diluted a citizenship based approach by becoming more locked into area based approaches that tacitly reinforce partisan approaches.
The staff concerned established a priority for themselves that they work towards an interdependent vision of the city for all young people and an interdependent team approach between the staff. This is an example of the societal need to promote openness to difference and interdependence (BELB Youth Service, 2006).

**Meeting together creates points of change and contrast**

Good Relations practice that offers experiences of meeting over time can, at least, provide a contrast and question mark to all the discussions and behaviours that a partisan society secures. Such a practice enables young people and youth workers to develop a critical and reflective distance from the many subtle partisan dynamics that surround them. Reflective meeting spaces can be points of contrast through which people question old established patterns of separation. Such spaces, where previously threatening differences can be explored, make Good Relations more possible between people from different religious upbringings, political opinions and racialized experiences (Eyben et al., 2002).

Among many innovative programmes that are contrasts and question marks to practices that do not deal with contention and difference, the ‘Youth in Community’ Programme of the Corrymeela Community has taken the challenge of the Equality and Good Relations legislation into the development of a most innovative programme with young adults whose collective experience crosses all the grounds of the legislation relevant to this age group. Especially for the themes of inclusion and acceptance of difference, this programme pushes the boundaries of quality youth work practice to promote change and points to what can be attempted by youth workers concerned with building a practice that enables young people become more at ease with differences.

**The need for a values framework in working for a shared and interdependent future**

Youth work is a values-led, informal, educational practice based on the central understanding that relationships matter. It draws on the broader community work values of according dignity and respecting individual rights and is commonly agreed to be centred on four areas: the worth and value of the individual, justice, claim to freedom and the essentiality of community. However in contested societies, people learn that these professional values cannot be taken for granted and have to be explicitly re-visited. This is because cultural pressures to conform can result in giving preferential treatment to people from one’s own tradition, justice can be understood as promoting one group’s dominance, freedom might be seen as the freedom to mistreat or ignore others and community might become a narrow form of local essentialism over all others. To assist youth workers to embrace the Shared Future principles of promoting equity, valuing diversity and securing interdependent relationships and structures for a shared society, there is a need to establish a values framework encompassing these important standards within public service and voluntary and community organisations.

Lorenz (1994) draws attention to how some social workers in 1930s Germany ‘did their job’ but did not work to a value base and so equipped those in power with an ability to take away many ‘different’ people to the camps and the gas chambers: people with disabilities, Romanies, gay and lesbian people and members of the large Jewish
population. The work of the well-known social group work writer and practitioner Gisela Konopka (1963) was part of the challenge to that lack of a value base.

In a contested society, the narrower values of each cultural group can be more dominant than the interdependent set of societal values. Many people learn forms of ‘cultural common sense’ that leave them unprepared for open meetings with those different to them. Such ‘cultural common sense’ can be summarised as ‘seek separation when you can, avoid others different to you if possible and if you have to meet, be polite’ (Wilson, 1994). Similarly, when stable societies, often based on an assumed homogeneity, become more diverse it is not inevitable that people will respond to the change in an open and inclusive manner. In these societies, identity communities can become culturally attractive and each can argue for group rights to be accorded (Fukuyama, 2007).

Learning from recent work the author has been involved in with youth workers from across Belfast, and similar work with the existing JEDI group established by the Youth Council for Northern Ireland (bringing together senior practitioners from 12 agencies) has resonated strongly with earlier findings (Wilson, 1994). These more recent insights have been validated in discussions with youth workers in Birmingham and Bradford (Khan (ed.), forthcoming). Some of the key points are presented below.

**Sustaining and supporting reflective youth work practice**

Meeting others from a different tradition or culture involves a journey of emotion, rationality and politics, especially in a contested society. Emotionally, people have to acknowledge their histories and fears as well as the stories they have been told about the other. Rationally, they are forced to recognise that excluding groups of people because of identity, religion, social background, gender and all other equality grounds is no longer sustainable behaviour. Politically, they are required to renegotiate power relationships and to build a new society where the old, bi-polar identities have to acknowledge the new diversity and interdependence agenda that is evident, even in a contested space.

To work in situations where people too readily, and often with their ‘own cultural good reasons’, gather around essentially partisan identities, the youth worker who is prepared to work for the wider citizenship agenda and to remain at a thoughtful and critical distance from the different local identities makes a reflective contribution. Youth work volunteers and staff need learning spaces in which they, their agency supervisors and, ideally, their management board come together to examine the extent to which they are working on a Good Relations approach.

Many youth workers have experience of friendships across lines of supposed hostility. People use these friendships as proof that they are not among the bigoted when, in fact, they are evidence of an underlying sense of their fundamental improbability and fragility. Northern Ireland remains a country of …

… innocent people, in which those who would damage community relations are always others and never us – yet somehow we end up where we are … On the old and well-tried principles of safety first, people profess their commitment to a common future, but first construct their defence (Eyben et al., 2002).

In a contested society, the desire for Good Relations between people associated with opposed traditions is the shadow side of the communal reality that people are brought
up with, namely that the other is to be feared and can never be trusted. Wishing for Good Relations is, in fact, a desire to be ‘on the other side’ of vigilance, to be in a place where the intentions and connections of the other have ceased to threaten or injure.

**Breaking out of old patterns and building contrasting experiences**

Good Relations work in a conflicted society has to be about the experience of change being possible as a human reality as well as about changes in policy that, overall, drive institutions forward on the journey towards a shared future. Supporting an abstract objective like ‘change’ is one thing, creating mechanisms that allow people ‘to change’ is quite another. Now that the legal and policy parameters have been secured, it is time for youth workers to develop and multiply their models of residential and community-based youth work practices around relationships that cross lines of difference, around relationships in which people experience change.

Individual adults who have lived through a conflict can easily feel overwhelmed because the source of their fear is not an individual who can be removed, as in a crime, but a whole group of people and the ideology and structure which unites and supports them. Good personal relationships therefore always take place in the shadow of this fear, which can never be fully forgotten. Good Relations work is about the development of a body of knowledge, experience and practice through which difficult issues of violence and fear can be faced and transformed. Real learning and progress in Good Relations practice will be measured by the extent to which people can face and withstand the pressures of examining and exploring issues associated with violence and fear. There will be a real change when youth workers, together, build a lasting hopefulness in children and young people and secure an adult society that welcomes and embraces difference.

**Valuing interdependence, interculturalism and reconciliation**

Youth workers at all levels within agencies need spaces in which to learn to be at ease and interdependent with those they perceive to be different. The intercultural challenge is that people make relationships freely and responsibly across lines of difference and that people are open to others, regardless of their identity. To hear others’ experiences, to build understanding, to develop shared respect and shared values are and will remain key experiences essential to creating and sustaining fair and open societies, societies that continually work at reconciling differentials of power and background and addressing inequalities of access and opportunity. Youth work has a part to play in this process.

All societies, whether contested or stable, need some level of reconciliation practice as they become more diverse. Good Relations practice challenges understandings that favour particular religious, political and racial identities over the desire to meet together and live in one space interdependently. To experience others as human beings, equal before the law, is at the centre of this practice and indeed of the word reconciliation, whose Greek root, *allos*, means ‘the other’ (McDonagh, 1985: 565). Reconciliation, the overcoming of hostile otherness, is a task that carries with it both relational and structural dimensions (see Stevens, 2004; Volf, 2002). Reconciliation requires that the other is taken seriously and accorded respect and dignity, and so it not only carries within itself hints of improved relationships but also notions of rights and safeguards requiring that each other has their place.
A quality youth work practice that works to a wider value of interdependence and that seeks to promote Good Relations, where each person gives the other his or her place, and each secures the boundaries that ensure respect and dignity for all, is a major contribution to community understanding in any society. *A Shared Future* now gives the space for youth work policy makers, agencies and practitioners who have been committed to promoting ease and trust across lines of difference to impact more centrally on formal and informal education policy, economic and social development and on ‘community well being’, a function that new local councils will have in law when the Review of Public Administration in Northern Ireland is actioned.

It is conceivable that the Youth Service, collectively working on a shared future and Good Relations agenda, can build a constituency of young people from diverse backgrounds and cultures at ease with themselves, open to others and intolerant of all that works against their shared future together. These same policy and legal platforms would support organisations re-visiting their organisational values in order that they underpin *A Shared Future* by incorporating the themes of justice, difference and interdependence into their cultures and into the innovative forms of practice they support. Professional staff and volunteers could then work to make the Good Relations and intercultural agenda the explicit focus of their work, again knowing that this work is central, not peripheral.

**The principles of equity, diversity and interdependence**

Equity, diversity and interdependence are three interconnected principles that can be used to illuminate and reinforce the day to day practice of youth workers, managers and board members or others involved in governance.

- Firstly the principles can underpin a vision for the practice of youth work.
- Secondly the principles can ensure that the boards of management are focused on resourcing work that meets the needs of young people.
- Thirdly the principles can enhance the group work and other programmes of a youth work organisation committed to building a shared society and encourage young people to be more at ease with differences.

The comments offered below are dealt with in more detail in materials prepared by the author. The JEDI Programme of the Youth Council for Northern Ireland will be publishing these and other materials later in 2007.

**A vision for youth work practice drawing on equity, diversity and interdependence**

Equity, diversity and interdependence are principles that ensure people are treated fairly, acknowledged as being different and encouraged to live together across differences of tradition, background, class and experience.

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. This principle is at the centre of any well-considered and ethically guided professional youth work practice. Diversity is primarily about recognising each person as an equal and different citizen. This principle is at the centre of formal and informal educational
practice and youth work. Social inclusion is important in groups and organisations. In group work experiences, people from different backgrounds and viewpoints should be acknowledged and not demonised. Interdependence refers to individual, societal and global interdependent relationships. It acknowledges that people are not islands but rather are formed in relationships with all those around them.

Youth workers in a contested society – in the midst of people with often opposed emotions and identities – have to remain open to everyone. Thoughtful youth workers, working to an intercultural vision, can use these principles as checks on whether their practice is promoting this wider vision. Board members, managers and policy makers associated with professional youth work have to ensure that the vision and structures associated with their agencies are explicitly and implicitly committed to building an interdependent society (interdependence). Agencies, having taken public money, have to be committed to promoting greater social justice, especially for young people who are disadvantaged (equity). Their management systems need to support fieldwork staff, continually challenging them to remain open to wider professional values and the concept of a more open civil society where all are equal and different citizens (diversity).

Table 1 lists some questions which can be applied in order to reflect critically on the application of the three principles to organisations.

**Table 1:** The application of equity, diversity and interdependence to organisational vision

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Equity</strong> (fairness plus justice)</th>
<th><strong>Diversity</strong> (being different and having a place)</th>
<th><strong>Interdependence</strong> (being valued as a person and valuing others with you)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Does the worker, manager or board member</td>
<td>Does the worker, manager or board member</td>
<td>Does the worker, manager or board member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● deal with all, justly and fairly?</td>
<td>● recognise that each individual is important?</td>
<td>● build the quality experience of being together in a group?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● advocate for resources for those in need?</td>
<td>● model ease with sensitive themes such as race, politics, religion, sexual orientation, disability?</td>
<td>● support open meetings between members from different traditions that can dissolve fears?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● enable those with additional educational needs to have their place?</td>
<td>● welcome differences of condition, ability, tradition and culture?</td>
<td>● support work that challenges pre-judgement and stereotyping of people?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>● have a preference in supporting young people from economically deprived and or vulnerable backgrounds?</td>
<td>● ensure that each person is treated as an equal citizen?</td>
<td>● value experiences that enrich individual members in a group?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A focus on equity, diversity and interdependence at the level of governance

A youth organisation could review its goals against the extent to which they address inequality (equity), challenge narrow practices that exclude (diversity) and consider how they could secure a shared society (interdependence). In this flow interdependence is the end point to which everything else works. Diversity helps to identify the areas of difference that the programmes need to address. Equity explicitly relates to ‘social justice’ and adds rigour and direction to concentrate on policy issues which prioritise groups, areas or interests that are excluded (Murtagh, 2006).

Embedding equity, diversity and interdependence in the experiences and practices of the boards of management of organisations is very important, given their particular responsibilities and authority. Some desired outcomes which would demonstrate the application of the three principles at this level are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Equity, diversity and interdependence: themes for board members

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>A continual focus of the board of management</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Equity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Programme resources for people or groups from areas of need are in place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The board takes its advocacy work seriously on behalf of young people who are unsupported or who have limited access to resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Diversity</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is evidence that the board has challenged all to be more open</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The board has secured resources to grow the organisation’s diversity work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A measure of diversity is evidenced or being worked towards in staff, board and members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Interdependence</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How to promote a shared and interdependent society is a central plank of the work at management/board level</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The theme of interdependence is evidenced in minutes and activities and articulated in engagements and submissions with policymakers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Enhancing group work and programmes of youth work organisations

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 youth 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.
Table 3: Equity, diversity and interdependence and the use of resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Spaces/Events</th>
<th>Energy/Resources</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Being given air time and discussion/practice time</td>
<td>The spaces for events and experiential learning the organisation creates</td>
<td>Energy and resources the organisation controls</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Equity**
- Members, staff and volunteers actively promote relationships that are fair and open to others
- Enabling people to be confident and at ease is a central drive of the programme work
- More people from vulnerable backgrounds grow in self-confidence every month

**Diversity**
- Assisting people to be at ease with difference is a central theme in the processes and programmes of the agency
- Learning events and projects on this theme are evidenced annually
- The organisation can point to a developing history of practice in this area

**Interdependence**
- There are formal links made between the organisation and other organisations about Good Relations practice

Table 3 shows how the principles of equity, diversity and interdependence can be used to critically inform and examine how people, formally and informally, use their...
time, organise spaces and events for experiential learning and use the resources available to them. These are tools for the enthusiastic practitioner, team, manager and management board.

A central task for the youth worker is to create the potential for growth and development in relationships where each young person has his or her place and does not have to rival for it. A youth work practitioner whose work is informed by these practical insights believes in creating, maintaining and being vigilant about the spaces he or she administers or organises. In these spaces people meet and engage together and the youth 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.

**Conclusion**

In Northern Ireland, community is often another word for sides; it is less a question of ‘our interdependence’ and more a declaration of ‘political opposition’. Communities here have tended to develop as communities in antagonism, defined by beating their opponents. The peace process has been the search for an alternative to such active hostility, and the political agreement restorations of institutions in 2007 is perhaps a new acknowledgement of diversity and interdependence.

Recent history alerts us to the need for promoting Good Relations, a shared future and fair treatment in this society, this island and elsewhere also. We live in the shadow of Auschwitz, the Black Civil Rights Movement, apartheid, the horrors of genocide where communal antagonism led inexorably to destruction and barbarity and the legacy of the Northern Ireland conflict. Antagonism, if nursed and never addressed, will turn our current transition into a gap between periods of violence. Improving the quality of life for all is the imperative and it is no longer helped by organisations that only fight for resources for their own traditions or protect their place above all else.

Trust building is too important to be the responsibility of only children and young people. Trust building and Good Relations work must be owned by adults and by the wider political and civic society. This can be partly achieved through the outworking of policies such as *A Shared Future* and the securing of Good Relations through legal demand. However it is only when people embrace this challenge – because it makes sense to develop a society where people are treated fairly, differences are acknowledged and yet where people live and work together as interdependent citizens – that we will advance the pace of social change.

Adult society needs to commit to securing greater equity for all young people, beyond conflict. Such a shared society would make space for young people to move within and between different areas freely and at ease in order to meet others, seek opportunities and improve their educational, social and economic position. To be at ease with difference, young people must acquire the skills of dialogue, inquiry, negotiation and mediation in their relationships and group life in a more diverse society. These are skills that good youth work practice, allied to the new school curriculum in 2007, can provide.

Interdependence in reality is the search for an end to hostility and enmity, the search for relationships in which people who are different receive the same treatment and are recognised, appreciated and assured of a place where they are given value and dignity. The Youth Service has much to offer, in both visionary and practical terms, to this wider societal challenge. For the first time in over thirty years in Northern Ireland
there are building blocks in place at the legal and policy levels to promote trust building. This means that the valuable learning and experimental work in trust building pioneered by many youth workers and agencies over the years can now become central to the development of trust-building policies and programmes.

The principles of equity, diversity and interdependence can be used to motivate the internal structures of youth organisations to focus on promoting social justice, celebrating and preparing young people to be more open to difference and building trust between diverse people. As such, youth work has an opportunity to position itself more centrally and promote itself as explicitly encouraging and delivering desirable social change and building a new intercultural society.

Notes
1 Interview between author and Dr John Alderdice, Director of Green Park Psychotherapy Centre, Belfast, August 2006.
2 http://www.homeoffice.gov.uk/crime-victims/reducing-crime/hate-crime/
3 The relevant paragraph reads:
   Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland
   The establishment over time of a normal, civic society, in which all individuals are considered as equals, where
   differences are resolved through dialogue in the public sphere, and where all people are treated impartially. A society
   where there is equity, respect for diversity and a recognition of our interdependence.
4 http://www.corrymeela.org/sitepage/youth.aspx
5 Values in Teacher Education, a research programme currently within the UNESCO Centre, University of Ulster.
6 See www.ccea.org.uk for Northern Ireland school curriculum developments

References
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**Biographical Note**

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