

# **COMMUNITY INVOLVEMENT IN URBAN EDUCATION**

**An evaluation of the Community Approaches to Education for Regeneration  
(CATER) project of the Belfast Area Partnership Boards**

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#### **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The Community Approaches to Education for Regeneration (CATER) project was established by the Belfast Area Partnership Boards to address some of the problems of urban education systems in areas of social disadvantage. CATER was funded through the Belfast European Partnership with money going to the five Belfast Area Partnerships (BAP) in North, West, Greater East, Greater Shankill and South. The project ran between January, 2000 and the end of June, 2001.

The heart of the CATER project was to address some of the educational consequences of social disadvantage that are manifested in the City, but also it aimed to strengthen links and networks across the City itself. The main aim of the project was to strengthen the links between schools, their local communities and, in particular, the parents in these communities. The intention was that this would enhance the educational development of children in those areas by raising the importance attached to education within local communities. In this way the CATER project aimed at enhancing the culture of education in socially disadvantaged parts of Belfast.

This paper represents an evaluation of the CATER project. The paper includes an examination of the comparative literature on urban education, an outline of the approaches by each of the Belfast Area Partnerships in developing their part of the overall project and a consideration of the range of activities undertaken through the project.

For the purposes of the evaluation, the activity undertaken through the CATER project was categorised under five main headings. This included a programme of work aimed at promoting parent and adult education programmes, usually in cooperation with City-wide providers. The second category of work comprised a range of out-of-school programmes aimed at school students, including after-school clubs, and Summer and Easter schools. The third category comprised a range of other programmes which had the overall impact of enhancing links between schools and parents. The fourth category comprised a series of consultation meetings organised by CATER in order to encourage parents and others to participate in the Review of Post Primary Education. The fifth and final category of work comprised networking activity across the CATER teams themselves. Examples of each of these five categories of activity are discussed in the paper.

The paper identifies the substantial work carried out by the CATER teams in the relatively short-time period available to the project. Almost inevitably, the level of work varied across the five areas. In part this was related to the different size of the areas and the capacity available to each team. Problems in the recruitment and retention of staff created particular problems in one area, and had the consequence of limiting the extent of networking between another area and the other three CATER teams. Despite these difficulties, the CATER project touched the lives of hundreds of young people, parents and other adults across Belfast. There is extensive evidence that the CATER project opened new links between many schools and their local communities, and provided insight into innovative ways of enhancing the standing of education in areas where, traditionally, problems of social exclusion and disaffection were high.

The paper concludes that the CATER project contains significant links to the broader comparative literature on the problems of urban education and provides new insights into ways in which the consensus principle of community involvement can be achieved in practice. The paper also concludes that the main benefits from the CATER project will be achieved if the lessons and experience of the project can be placed on a more enduring basis. Five overall thematic conclusions are identified:

1. Although CATER set out to adopt an approach that was both flexible and targeted, the paper concludes that it was more successful in the former than the latter. CATER did target its activity at key groups, but the experience of the programme suggested that the most difficult-to-reach, and most socially excluded, groups often remained outside its orbit. The paper concludes that innovative projects, such as CATER, need to be allowed to experiment on ways to tackle this most pressing of problems.
2. Much of the CATER work had the effect of empowering parents. Allied to the varied engagement of schools with the project, this highlights issues about the relationship between schools and their local communities. Since empowered parents are more likely to ask questions of schools, and seek responses, this part of the CATER project highlights the need for the education system to go beyond the simple rhetoric of parental involvement and to articulate clearly the legitimate expectations that parents should have of their right to involvement in their childrens' education.
3. A significant body of work within CATER involved out-of-school educational opportunities for young people. An interesting aspect of this work was that it often involved the creation of quite different learning environments from that typically found in schools. Furthermore, many of the young people particularly liked this aspect of the programmes. It may be that the different pedagogy of these activities, and the different relationship that seemed to exist between teacher and learner, was only possible in the context of out-of-school learning. However, schools may wish to explore the implications of this different type of learning environment.
4. There was extensive networking within the CATER project, but this mainly involved three of the five Area Partnerships, and became more extensive (and effective) as time progressed. The networking that did occur was generally

- viewed as beneficial, but for any future activity of this sort, more pro-active methods to promote networking ought to be established. The paper suggests that this might include some formal staff development programme, perhaps run in partnership with a further or higher education institution.
5. If social inclusion is to mean anything then it should result in pro-active attempts by public institutions to examine critically their programmes and service delivery in order to reduce barriers to participation. One of the important lessons of the CATER project is to highlight ways in which existing programmes might be delivered in more effective or targeted ways. The paper concludes that there should be some engagement between these agencies and the Area Partnerships in the light of this experience in order to promote a more inclusive learning City.

It is understandable that, in an 18 month programme, the priority often revolves around establishing programmes and making them work in order to justify the funding. But it could be argued that too many projects are constrained to operate to such short-term goals and the risk is that the broader and enduring value of the experience gets lost. If we could go back in time then CATER might have devoted more energy on specifically experimental initiatives, especially focused on targeting, engaged in more networking across the City, provided more time for critical examination of practice and engaged in a slightly different way with mainstream providers. But we cannot go back in time. Therefore, the hope must be that the lessons of CATER help to inform the future and that the energy created by the initiative is not allowed to dissipate to the extent that someone else will have to re-discover these themes all over again.

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#### **MAIN REPORT**

##### **Introduction**

The CATER project was run by the five Belfast Area Partnerships and aimed to promote greater community involvement in education. This paper was prepared as an evaluation report on the project. The paper begins by outlining some themes in the general literature on urban education and social exclusion before going on to outline the background and development of the project. The main part of the paper involves a discussion of the type of activity that was carried out under the aegis of the CATER project. Throughout this discussion there are some evaluative comments based on interviews, observations and other data collected as part of the evaluation. The final section of the paper offers some overall conclusions emerging from the experience of CATER and provides some suggestions for future work in this area.

In preparing this paper and carrying out the evaluation I have received invaluable cooperation and assistance from the CATER workers and officials from the Partnership Boards. In addition, I have been aided in the collection of data by Gareth Higgins, Christine Burnett and Christel McMullan. I am particularly grateful for the ready

cooperation I received from the many parents, teachers, community workers and young people I met during the course of the evaluation exercise.

### **Urban education**

It has been known for a long time that there is a link between social background and educational performance. In the first half of the last century it was widely believed that this relationship was innate and, therefore, unchangeable, since ‘intelligence’ was thought to be largely determined by genetic endowment. Few cling to this belief any more. From the 1970s onwards, economic recession led to new concerns about levels of educational performance across a wide range of countries and prompted widespread reform measures. Many of these reforms were based on neo-liberal assumptions and included such elements as school-based management, accountability systems and the enhancement of teacher capacity. One of the consequences of the development of mass unemployment in the 1970s and 1980s was the creation of significant areas of social disadvantage, particularly in urban areas. Some have argued that the attitude of many conservative governments to this development was to see it as ‘hopeless, but not serious’ on the basis that the economically marginalised communities were also socially and politically marginal. JK Galbraith’s identification of the ‘culture of content’, or Will Hutton’s identification of the 40/30/30 society were both attempts to describe this phenomenon whereby the people who suffered most from economic recession mattered little in the development of public policy.

Whatever the accuracy of these claims, in the latter part of the 1990s and into the new century there has been an increasing recognition by governments of the need to address these issues, not least because of the interdependence that exists within and between societies, but also because of the broader needs for skills and qualifications in a knowledge-driven society. In other words, it has become less credible or sensible to abandon significant sections of a population. However, even if many governments have moved to a condition where the problem is seen as ‘serious, but not hopeless’, this does not necessarily mean that the solution is easy to find.

OECD (1998a) reports on a major examination on the characteristics of ‘distressed’ urban areas and a consideration of policy towards this issue in ten countries which together contained about half the total population of the OECD. The survey estimates that between 7 and 25 per cent of urban areas fit into its definition of distressed areas. This accounts for a population of some 20 million people out of the total metropolitan population of 185 million. The point is made that the problems of distressed urban areas are not simply an issue of poverty:

*It is not low income alone that characterises these neighbourhoods, but an interlocking mix of environmental, social and economic circumstances, sometimes exacerbated by public policies, that discourages investment and job creation and encourages alienation and exclusion. (OECD, 1998: 10).*

Among the common characteristics found in the distressed areas are:

*young populations, high rates of single parenthood, very low income levels and high dependence on income transfers, low levels of socio-occupational mixity, high levels of informal economic activity, high crime rates and rates of drug and alcohol abuse, few local commercial enterprises and poor access to retail centres, more households without a car or telephone, and high mortality and disease rates. (OECD, 1998: 11).*

The report identifies three types of context for distressed urban areas: first, 'traditional' inner-city areas with concentrated poverty and, often, poor housing; second, peripheral housing estates built more recently and often on the outskirts of cities; and third, combined patterns containing elements of both types. Most places exhibit the combined pattern, even though the 'traditional' pattern was once the most evident. Many US cities continue to display the 'traditional' pattern with distressed inner cities surrounded by affluent suburbs. There are also differences across the countries in terms of the extent of concentrated problems in urban areas: a number of countries, including Ireland, UK, USA and France show a pattern of concentrated urban distress where there are consistent socio-economic differences between these and other urban areas.

The report identifies two main types of urban distress. One type concerns localised distress, usually following some economic or employment event, but which has a disabling impact on a part of a city, while the economic vitality of the region as a whole is largely unaffected. The second is where the problems of urban distress are more widely shared across a region, in which case larger more strategic solutions need to be found.

The two-stage process of creating distressed urban areas operates as follows: movement from stability to transition status occurs due to rising unemployment, economic recession, or whatever. This leads to a reduction in local income both because of unemployment and the out-migration of wealthier residents. In the second stage, the region may move out of recession or regain employment levels, but some areas remain distressed. At this stage, economic problems are combined with falling levels of educational attainment, reduced rates of family formation, the development of an informal economy and increased

criminal activity. The areas thus affected acquire a poor reputation, which adds to their excluded status and acts to inhibit inward investment. At this point the problem becomes not just economic and spatial, but also social.

There are various theories offered to account for the neighbour effects in distressed areas. These include contagion explanations, which focus on the influence of peer groups in promoting anti-social behaviour; collective socialisation explanations, which focus on the collapse of adult monitoring and role models; and institutional model explanations, which focus on the level of access and quality of facilities and services. Some of these explanations incorporate elements of a 'tipping point', that is a threshold level at which change in a negative direction rapidly increases. All of these explanations emphasise *process* effects over time, but an added factor is the importance of *prospects* which highlights the choices made by individuals in the light of the processes in which they find themselves.

As well as examining the processes that lead to the creation and reproduction of urban distress, the OECD (1998a) report also looks at evidence on factors which mitigate these processes. These include changes in economic circumstances leading to 'gentrification', which can occur for a host of reasons including decisions made elsewhere on investment or transportation. The broader factor points to some element of social cohesion as there is some evidence to suggest that the higher the level of social cohesion in an area, either through family or community life, the more likely that this will act as a constraint on the development of urban distress, despite unfavourable economic circumstances. Related to

this is some evidence on the role of community activism and volunteering in an area which suggests that interventions are more likely to be successful in communities where the levels of community participation and involvement are highest.

The report suggests that there is a trend towards more flexibility in service delivery, allied with targeting, partnership models and attempts to include the private sector, all as part of integrated urban policy. The challenge this raises is how policy integration can actually be achieved. It is suggested that innovative methods will be required to kick-start positive processes and that techniques that work in other ‘non-distressed’ areas may not work as effectively in distressed areas – specific and local diagnosis of the dimensions of distress may be an important part of the strategy. Finding ways of involving community groups is an important part of mobilisation and may integrate them into wider institutional networks, but no one set of actors can solve the problem alone. However, the report argues that past experience suggests that community models rarely deliver the degree of local empowerment they promise. This highlights the problems associated with identifying ‘community’, the mix of community/institutional involvement in the ameliorative strategy, and the lines of responsibility and action between the various partners (this theme is discussed also in Evans, 1998).

In conclusion, the paper points to the range of areas where policy will focus, including education, employment training, economic development, housing and the physical environment and community development, with efforts needing to be targeted on young people, lone parents and ethnic minorities in particular. The report suggests that it is not

so much new and different policies that are needed, as active attempts to implement the sort of measures which form the normal part of any urban policy. Six specific recommendations on policy for addressing the issue of distressed urban areas are presented:

1. make urban regeneration policies more comprehensible to the range of local actors and to the population;
2. reinforce horizontal and vertical co-ordination;
3. adapt the strategy to the diversity and complexity of the local context;
4. avoid stigmatising particular areas;
5. act early enough and take preventive measures;
6. develop a transparent system for identifying areas of need;
7. actively monitor and evaluate policies.

(OECD, 1998: 118-9)

*The formation of distressed urban areas often gives rise to the feeling that cities are the victims of forces they cannot control. There is however nothing inevitable about distressed urban areas. They reflect, rather, problems in the way in which economic, social and environmental change affects many cities. This process of change is amenable to the influence of public policy and civic action. (OECD, 1998: 131).*

Walraven (1998) develops the notion of horizontal and vertical integration of services in tackling 'at-risk' young people, on the basis that the concept of 'at risk' implies that young people are at risk of (a) school failure, (b) inability to obtain meaningful employment, and (c) inability to participate fully in society. Horizontal integration implies integration of services across a specific age range, while vertical integration highlights the linkages between points of risk that together make up a person's biography. Vertical integration highlights the need for on-going and evolving support over time. Also, it highlights the need for interdependence between services, with greater or lesser involvement of specific services at different points. Inevitably there will be key transition moments (pre-school to school; school to work, etc) which carry particular risk and

which therefore require particular levels of support. Also there will be overlap in agency responsibility, but this is okay if it encourages strategic cooperation and synergy. This can, however, become a negative quality if too many agencies are vying for influence at particular stages, or if co-existing agencies are competing for predominance in particular fields.

Knipp (1998) analyses a strategic initiative in Missouri, USA, which suggests that successful strategies will need to find new forms of governance which involve local communities in decision-making, and rethinking the way services are financed and delivered. Other research in Britain and the USA suggest that the existing extent of links between schools and communities are limited (Brook and Hancock, 2000; Cairney, 2000; Tett et al., 2001; Vincent and Martin, 2000). Moreover, there is dispute in the literature on the quality and extent of evidence which suggests that educational gains can actually be achieved by these type of links (Amstutz, 2000; Hannon, 1999; Sharp and Osgood, 2000).

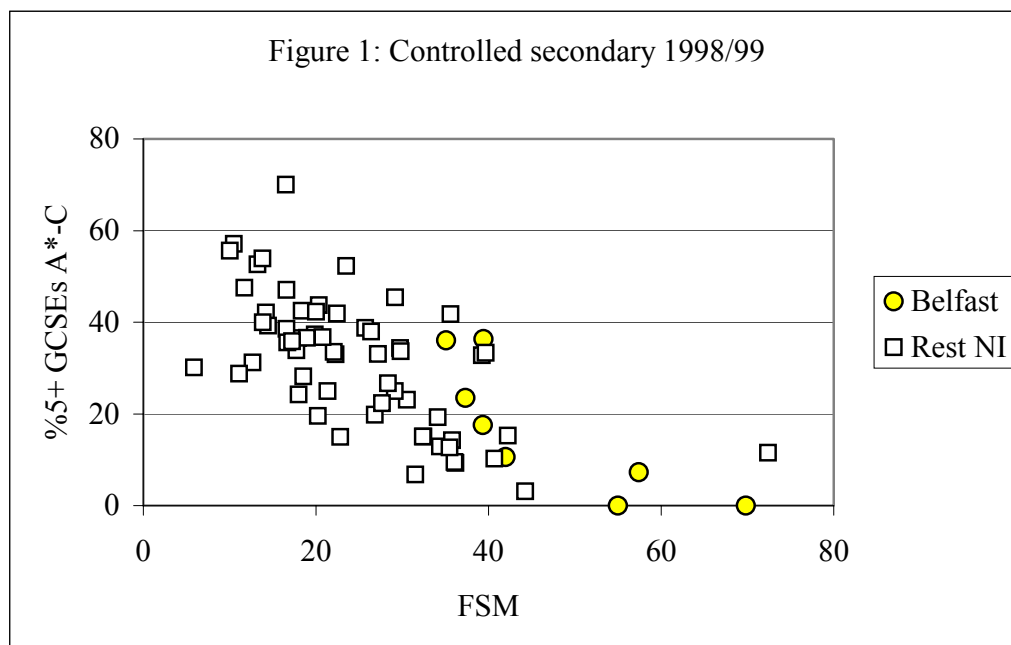
Despite this dispute, however, it is clear that policy directions are taking the idea of community partnership on board. Thus, for example, under the Clinton administration in the USA, the conditions for successful after-schools programmes were seen to include ‘effective partnerships with community-based organisations’ and ‘strong involvement of families’ (Reno and Riley, 2000). Similarly, an Ofsted report on improving city schools (Ofsted, 2000a) highlighted the importance of communication with parents and community links, while adding that while schools ‘warrant, and sometimes receive,

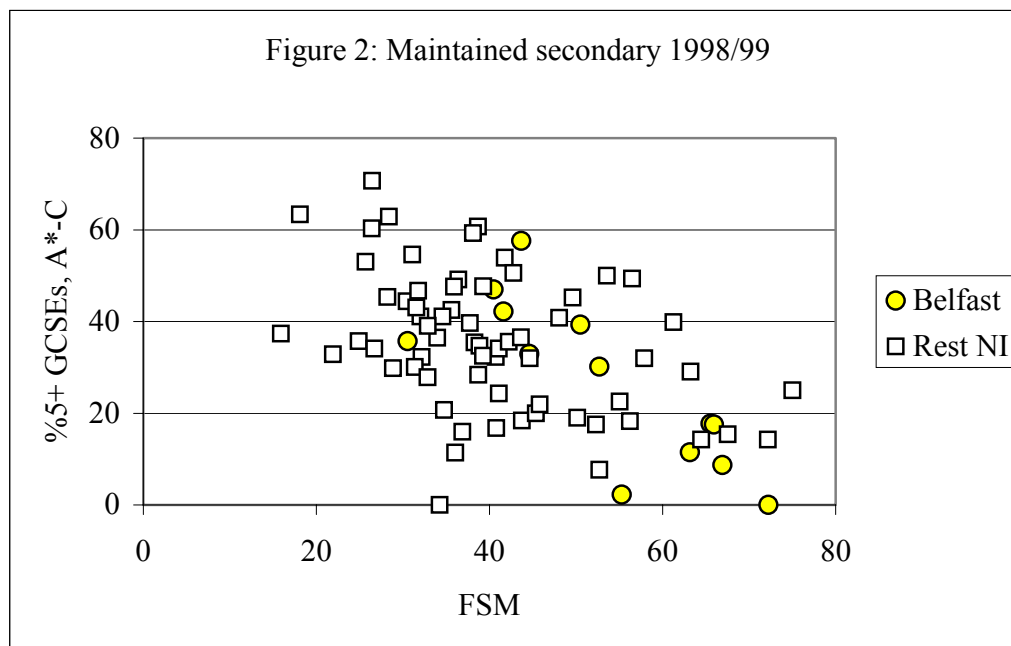
strong support from community agencies' (p8). The report went on to suggest that this support could be more systematic and better integrated, and could include clearer procedures for involvement and communication. In a related vein, Ofsted (2000b) reviewed family learning initiatives across 150 local authorities in England and concluded that while many were offering good value for money, many were not. The problems arose when there was a lack of clear policy on the purpose of the programmes, insufficient linkage between the programmes and a need to raise achievement, fragmentation in provision, insufficient monitoring of the effects of the programmes and poor targeting to ensure that those most in need of the provision actually were in receipt of its benefits. Some of these lessons have been incorporated in the work of the Social Exclusion Unit. Within its strategy for neighbourhood renewal is the extension of early years initiatives through Sure Start, provision for study support for young people and measures to extend opportunities for adult education (Social Exclusion Unit, 2001). Key to all of these lies in the development of local strategic partnerships to ensure local involvement in the diagnosis of problems, and the identification and implementation of ameliorative action. However, the strategy document also serves as a useful reminder of the wide range of service areas that need to contribute to the issue and the limited impact that can be gained through education alone (see also Alexander, 1997).

### **Education in Belfast**

Evidence on the links between social background and educational performance in Northern Ireland in general and Belfast in particular has been widely available for a

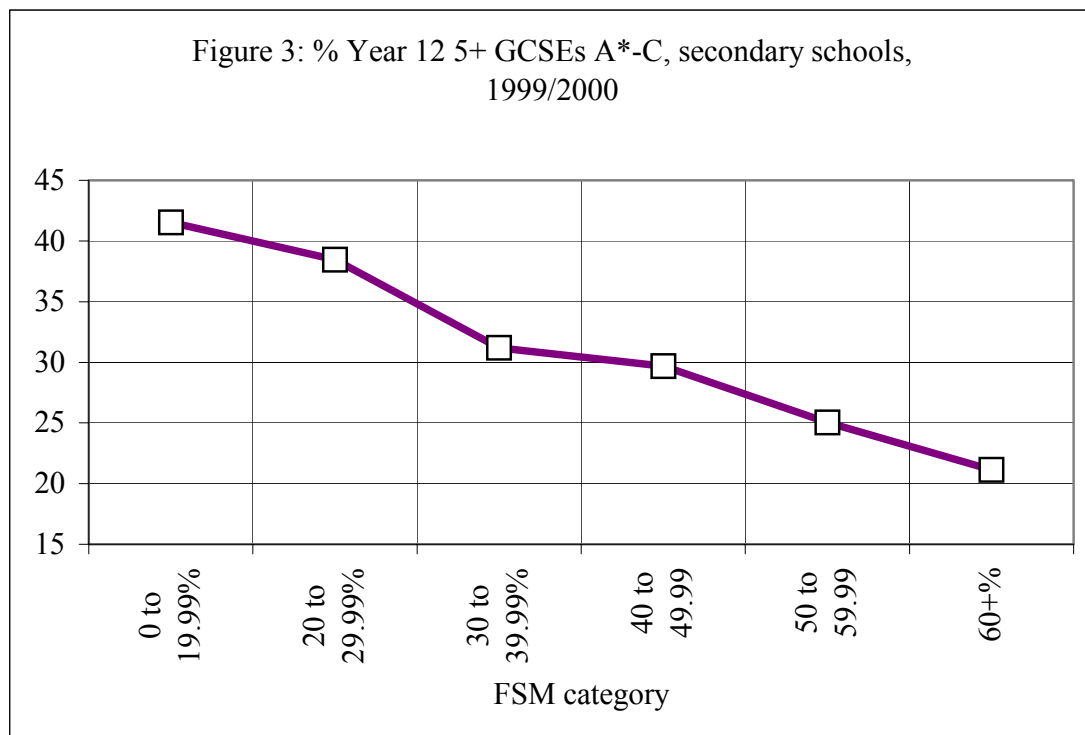
number of years (see for example, Gallagher et al., 1997; 1998; Gallagher and Smith, 2000; Shuttleworth and Daly, 2000). The basic patterns can be illustrated quite simply. Figures 1 and 2 show the relationship between school performance (as measured by the proportion of Year 12 students achieving five or more good GCSEs) and social background (as measured by the proportion of students eligible for free school meals) (the data are derived from the 1998/99 school performance tables). Since the factors influencing performance vary as between controlled and maintained secondary schools (Gallagher, 2000), the figures show the patterns for the two school types separately. In addition, the figures distinguish between secondary schools in the Belfast urban area and those in the rest of Northern Ireland.





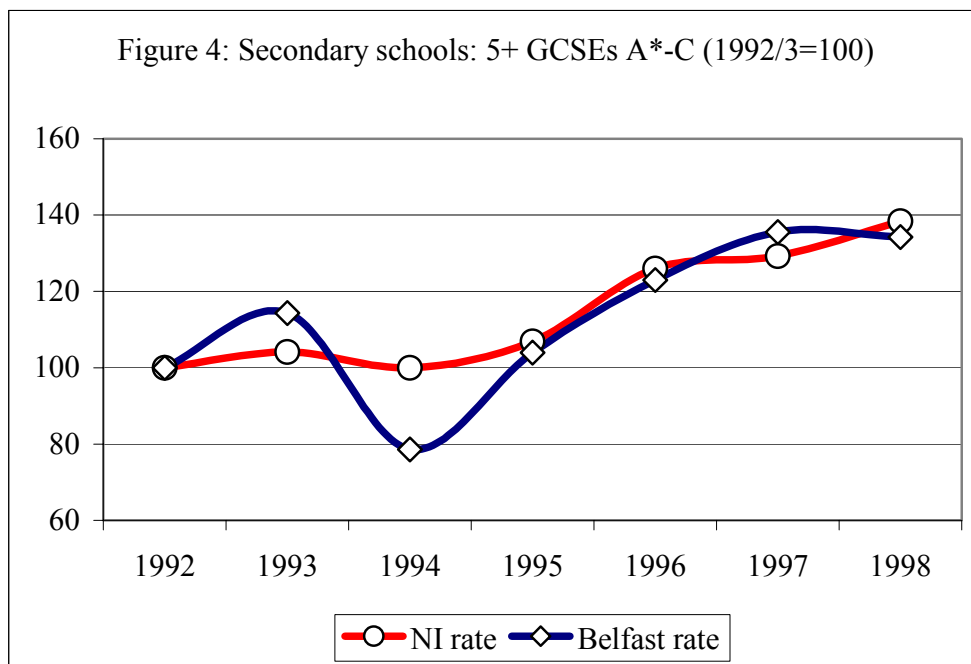
Figures 1 and 2 highlight two particular points of significance. First, the figures show that, as the proportion of students in a school who are eligible for free school meals increases, then the level of performance in the school decreases. This is by no means a deterministic relationship as at any particular level of FSM there is variation in the level of school performance, but the general relationship is evident. Second, the situation facing schools in Belfast is somewhat more parlous than in the rest of Northern Ireland, not least because whereas the average FSM for secondary schools in Northern Ireland in 1998/99 was 32 per cent, for Belfast secondary schools it was 42 per cent. The controlled schools in Belfast tend to be bunched towards the high FSM/low achievement end of the distribution (Figure 1). The pattern for maintained school is a little more complex, but many of them are also bunched towards this end of the distribution: an additional variable for these schools is the number of single-sex schools, as five of the highest achieving seven maintained schools in Belfast are single-sex girls' schools.

Although school performance data for 1999/2000 are not available for individual schools, due to a decision to cease publishing school performance tables, data from the Department of Education shows the continuing strong relationship between social background and school performance. Figure 3 shows the performance levels of students attending secondary schools within six FSM categories in 1999/2000. It can be seen clearly that as the FSM level increases, so the performance level decreases.



The basic patterns illustrated here have been known for some time and have promoted various government initiatives, perhaps most notably the Belfast Areas of Need and the Making Belfast Work initiatives. Figure 4 shows the rate of increase in school performance for Belfast secondary schools and other secondary schools between 1992

and 1998 (1992=100) and while there has been a steady increase in performance over time, particularly since the mid-1990s, as we have already seen above, the relationship between performance and background remains stubbornly intact. This should only serve to remind us that the problems that are considered here are not amenable to simple solutions, while the comparative experience discussed in the opening section of this paper is a reminder that the problems are being faced in very many different places. In other words, while the problems faced by Belfast have their own distinctive flavour, they are by no means unique.



Evidence collected over a number of years in Belfast and in many other places suggests that there is a close correspondence between social background and educational attainment, and that this correspondence involves three interacting elements:

- individual circumstances
- school circumstances
- area circumstances

Thus, a pupil from a socially disadvantaged background will have, on average, lower attainment in comparison with a pupil who is not. Second, a pupil in a school with a high proportion of pupils from socially disadvantaged backgrounds will have, on average, lower attainment in comparison with a pupil who is not. Third, a pupil who lives in an area with a high level of social disadvantage will have, on average, lower attainment in comparison with a pupil who does not. The particular challenge facing urban education systems is that in these systems many pupils combine two or all three of these factors, a pattern which is probably exacerbated by the selective system of grammar and secondary schools currently operated in Northern Ireland.

In the past many initiatives aimed at addressing the educational consequences of social disadvantage have tended to focus at one or other of these factors. Thus, for example, some initiatives have attempted to redress some of the individual social circumstances of pupils which are likely to have had negative educational consequences: this has included measures which seek to provide more opportunities to learn (homework clubs, or other out of school activities) or which seek to raise nutritional levels (breakfast clubs).

Other initiatives have focused on raising the capacity of schools to act as compensatory mechanisms for individual social circumstances. This has included initiatives which have

strengthened the curriculum, physical or teacher resources available in schools, or which have attempted to enhance the capacity of schools to respond to need in specific areas (such as literacy and numeracy through, for example, reading recovery).

To some extent the CATER project has carried out some work on both of the above levels (although perhaps more on the individual pupil factor than the school level factor), but its main focus has been on enhancing the capacity within communities by strengthening the links between parents and schools, and providing opportunities for parents to enhance the educational contribution they can make as part of a broader aim of raising the culture of education in disadvantaged areas.

### **CATER Initiative**

It was within this context that the CATER (Community Approaches to Education for Regeneration) initiative was established. CATER was funded through the Belfast European Partnership with money going to the five Belfast Area Partnerships (BAP) in North, West, Greater East, Greater Shankill and South. The project ran between January, 2000 and the end of June, 2001.

The CATER project was conceived by the five Belfast Area Partnerships. At its heart the purpose of the project was to address some of the educational consequences of social disadvantage that are manifested in the City, but also it aimed to strengthen links and networks across the City itself.

The main aim of the CATER project was to strengthen the links between schools, their local communities and, in particular, the parents in these communities. The intention was that this would enhance the educational development of children in those areas by raising the importance attached to education within local communities. In this way the CATER project aimed at enhancing the culture of education in socially disadvantaged parts of Belfast.

Two other objectives of CATER are also worth mentioning at this stage. The first was the intention of enhancing City-wide links and networks in order to contribute to the development of a more socially inclusive City. The second was to attempt to provide some degree of coordination and strategic oversight for educational initiatives in the City.

### **Background and development**

The Belfast Area Partnership Boards have engaged in work aimed at contributing to the regeneration of the City over a number of years and all have identified education as a key area of activity. It was this shared sense of priority that encouraged the Area Partnership Boards to seek funds for an education project aimed at strengthening the links between communities and their schools. Each Area Partnership Board identified a set of priorities relevant to its own area. In some cases this arose from an extensive history of education work. Thus, for example, the experience of the Upper Springfield Development Trust played an important role in framing the proposal from the West Belfast BAP, while the

experience of various educational initiatives over along period played an important role in the proposal generated by the Greater Shankill BAP. In other areas extensive consultation with local interests helped to shape priorities and strategies for action. It should be noted also that the size and social characteristics of each area differed considerably, so both the nature and extent of the challenges faced by the BAPs varied, as did their strategies and plans.

The combined proposals from each of the BAPs formed the CATER proposal, with aims and objectives set at City-wide and local area levels. In this way each of the BAPs aimed to carry out specific work within its own area that seemed best geared to meet the educational needs of their communities, while all this would be set within a wider framework of aims for the City as a whole. Not the least of these City-wide aims was the intention to promote contacts and links across the City.

In part due to the different levels of development in different areas, there has been varying degrees of success in developing the CATER initiative. In those areas where an extensive history of work in education already exists there has been little difficulty in building on this. In other parts of the City, however, practical constraints and the reality of starting from a low base has limited the extent of achievement thus far. Also, the reality of projects such as these is that tactical approaches almost inevitably evolve over time as plans and intentions confront practical realities. In most instances the planned work has been carried out, some issues only emerged after the CATER proposal had been accepted but were deemed important and relevant enough to warrant inclusion within the

CATER framework, while other plans had to be altered when practical blockages were met. However, it should be noted that all this evolution occurred within an overall strategic framework for CATER as a whole.

### **CATER activities**

An Advisory Committee was established to provide the main mechanism for the CATER teams to work together and liaise on project activity. The Committee included representatives from all five BAPs, plus invited representatives from a range of other agencies. This section of the paper outlines the broad chronology of CATER activity based largely on reports to meetings of the Advisory Committee. There is no attempt to provide a comprehensive account of all the activities undertaken by the CATER teams, but rather to provide an overview of the range of activities that were planned and implemented.

At the inaugural meeting of the Committee the primary aim of CATER was described as:

*... engaging parents and the wider community in meeting the educational needs of children, young people, and adults returning to education (Advisory Committee minutes, January 31, 2000)*

CATER was to operate on a City-wide basis with a number of overall action areas sitting alongside distinctive activity in each area. A number of agencies were identified as potentially having a valuable role to play in the project and consideration was given to inviting some to join the Advisory Committee. In practice, however, it would appear that

productive links were only maintained with the Belfast Education and Library Board (BELB) and the Belfast Institute of Further and Higher Education (BIFHE), despite active encouragement of the other agencies by the CATER teams.

By April, 2000, an evaluation contract had been issued and plans were being put in place for the first major City-wide event which was to be a conference highlighting the work of the Better Reading Partnership (BRP), a scheme operated through the BELB. At this point four of the five BAPs were able to report project developments:

- In South BAP agreement had been made with a number of primary and secondary schools to work with the project; after-school support was being provided; links with BIFHE family learning programmes had been established established and links had been made with NGOs in the City with a view to supporting summer schemes focused on literacy.
- In West BAP summer schemes were being planned, specific support for 11+ preparation was being planned, an audit of educational provision in the area was being prepared, a liaison committee for community activists and school principals was organized, and an ICT course had been established for a group of parents.
- In Greater East a range of school-based activities involving parents were being planned, a breakfast club was being established in one of the primary schools and links with a local football club were being made in order to organise a football coaching project for fathers and sons.
- North reported some difficulties in recruiting workers for the CATER team.

By June, 2000, plans for the City-wide BRP event were well in hand, although there was some concern that the City-wide dimension of CATER was not strong enough. There were reported to be meetings between some of the CATER teams, but these appeared to be fairly informal and no records of the meetings were kept. Updates were available on CATER project activity for four of the five areas:

- In Greater East a range of courses and activities had been established; the establishment of parents rooms, after-school clubs and a school breakfast project had all been agreed with some primary schools and versions of the BIFHE 'parents as co-educators' programme were being established.
- In South strong links had been established with BIFHE, a number of its family learning programmes had been completed and more were being organised; 11+ support programmes had been organised; specific support was being provided for two secondary schools in the area; and, courses to meet parental requests for ICT training was being organised.
- In West an 11+ preparation summer school had been organised; a series of projects on ICT, team building, Maths and language support had been organised, with some of these aimed at secondary school students and some at adults; a liaison committee for school principals and community workers was established; and the CATER team had begun preparing an audit of educational provision in the area.

- In Greater Shankill a range of celebration events were being organised in order to raise the profile of education in the community, and a variety of specific programmes were being run in schools and community venues; plans for more informal provision to meet adult education needs were being examined; and, links had been established with BELB to develop a project aimed at Year 1 pupils to build on the Shankill Early Years initiative.

By August, 2000, the main areas of report concerned the degree of success achieved by various summer activities and programmes, including 11+ preparation courses and a summer school run by the Greater Shankill for GCSE preparation for Year 11 students. The Shankill event involved 120 students divided into three groups each of which received a one week programme. Unfortunately, due to political problems on the Shankill Road during the third week, that programme for the last cohort had to be curtailed. In West an additional activity had been a programme of discussion on the future of the 11+ procedure run through the community radio station. The main City-wide event remained the BRP conference, but there was some suggestion that the BAPs might coordinate responses to the expected consultation on the future of the 11+ procedure and selective schools system.

By October, 2000, the research on the selective system of secondary education had been published (Gallagher and Smith, 2000), a consultation process had been announced by the Minister of Education and the CATER teams had decided to run consultation meetings within their areas. By this time the overall approach adopted in three of the

BAPs was well established. In South the main core of the activity was centred on links with BIFHE family learning programmes, with additional programmes being established as needs and interests were identified. In West the main links were with BELB programmes and a range of other programmes arising from networking and contacts with schools. And in Greater East the approach was more focused on projects which sought to generate contacts between parents and schools, often with a focus that was specific to the particular circumstances of different schools. In this respect, the approaches adopted in West and South had many common features, but differed from the approach adopted in Greater East.

There was little evidence of CATER activity in North where it appeared that recruitment problems had continued to bedevil any progress. Although there was some activity continuing to occur in Greater Shankill, the political problems in the area over the Summer months had placed significant constraints on what was now possible and, for a period, links between the CATER team in Greater Shankill and the other BAPs became a little tenuous. A further factor was that there were some personnel problems in the Greater Shankill, one consequence of which was that, for a time, there was no post-hold with specific responsibility for liaison with the other CATER teams.

By the end of the year the BRP event had been held in the City Hall and was deemed by all to have been an enormous success. There were indications that it had significantly raised the profile of CATER in its developing relationship with the BELB. There was some emergent evidence of networking across the City as some parents in Shankill

expressed interest in the initiative, an interest which was pursued through discussions between West and Shankill. An appointment had been made in North to allow CATER activity to begin, but the programme identified bore little relation to the original proposal. This itself led to a period of discussion to clarify the type of activities which could be supported financially through the CATER project. The overall approach now adopted in North was based largely on the theme of emotional literacy. The CATER teams in West, South and Greater East were carrying out an on-going series of meetings related to the consultation on the future of post primary education.

Meetings of the Advisory Committee in 2001 focused on the review of post primary education, coordinating a joint NoF bid and organizing the final June conference on CATER. During 2001 a series of meetings were held between the evaluator and the CATER teams to discuss the consequences of some of the activities they had put in place. The main participants in this process were West, South and Greater East, although there were representatives from Greater Shankill and North at each of these meetings.

The discussion above provides an outline chronology of CATER. It is possible to categorise the range of activity carried out under the programme into five main areas:

1. parent and adult education programmes
2. out of school programmes aimed at students
3. other programmes aimed at enhancing links between schools and parents
4. consultation exercise on the 11+ and the future of post primary education
5. networking activity among the CATER teams

In the next part of this report we will consider each of these areas in turn, outlining details on aspects of the programmes and highlighting issues that emerged during the evaluation process. After this there will follow a discussion on some of the evidence and themes that emerged in interviews with parents, teachers and community activists carried out for the evaluation. Some of the themes from these interviews relate to specific areas of activity under CATER and some relate to more general issues.

The first of the main headings, that is relating to parent and adult education programmes, mainly covers work carried out in collaboration with BELB and BIFHE, so we will begin by examining both these areas.

### **BELB programmes**

The BELB supports a number of reading initiatives, one of which maintained a significant link with some of the CATER teams: these were the Flying Start and Better Reading Partnership programmes.

The Flying Start programme is aimed at Year 1 and 2 pupils and is based on the involvement of parent/guardian volunteers. Each participating school appoints a teacher coordinator who receives training and receives up to £1K for materials to support the work of Flying Start volunteers. The training for the teacher involves an outline of the structure of the programme which, in turn, is to be presented by the teacher to the volunteers. This comprises seven sessions of 1.5 hours per week: one hour from the

teacher and 30 minutes peer working by the volunteers. The focus of the programme is on promoting the enjoyment of books and other aspects of reading where the volunteer can provide support and help for children. Selected library books are available and the parents talk among each other on the children's reactions to specific books, supported by the teacher coordinator.

An additional aim of the programme is that volunteers become better able to identify and choose books for their children, or better at helping their children to choose books. The parents learn specific themes and issues which allow them to provide additional and technical support for reading. Volunteers who wish to seek accreditation for their involvement with the programme prepare a portfolio of materials used. Normally successful completion of the programme and the portfolio entitles the volunteers to Level 1 accreditation.

Among the CATER teams, Greater East, West and South were all involved with Flying Start programmes.

In Greater East and South financial support from CATER made the programme more attractive to schools as it permitted substitute cover for the training of teachers. The main potential advantage of this is that the teacher remains as a resource within the school and can train future cohorts of parents in the Flying Start techniques. In West there appeared to be a higher level of involvement, including practical support, canvassing of parents as recruits, supporting training for schools and following up candidates to encourage

completion for accreditation. In South the pattern of support was very similar to that evidence in West, although teachers in schools were largely responsible for recruiting parents.

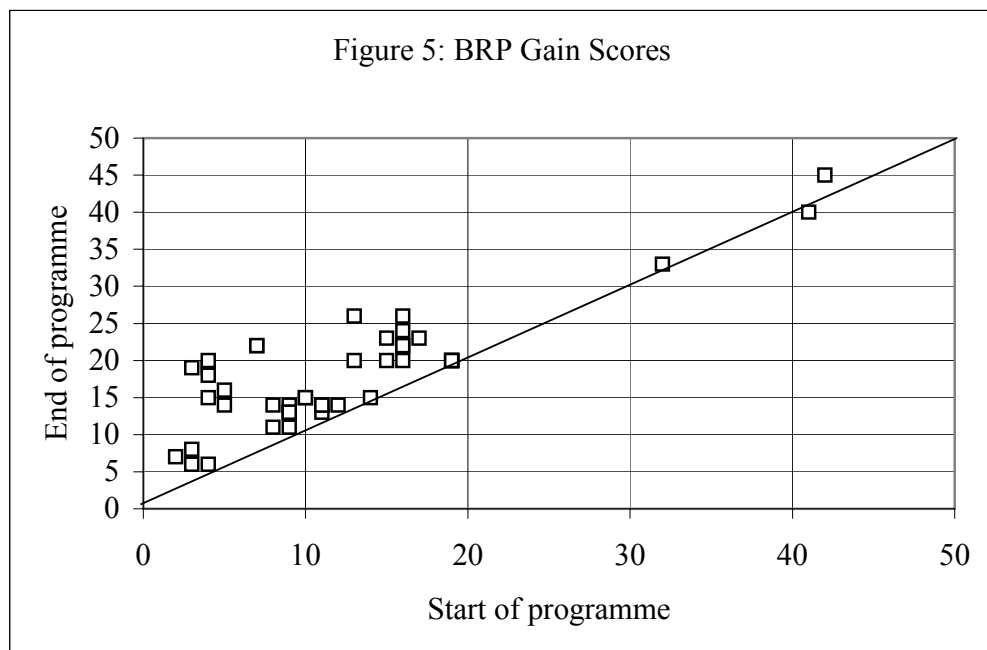
The Better Reading Partnership (BRP) programme is a linked programme, but is targeted at older age groups. Participating schools are allocated £1.5K per year for three years, with this money being provided to pay for materials, books and other resources to be used by the Better Reading partners. The volunteers to be trained as BR partners are allocated three pupils with whom they work. They assess the pupils at the outset of the programme to provide a baseline measure, although a variety of measuring systems are used across schools. Each training programme lasts ten weeks and is targeted as pupils in Years 3-7 preferably. The aim is not to start the children reading, as they should already have done this, but to encourage a love of reading and to build reading strategies. The schools identify the pupils for the scheme and while they are told that statemented pupils should not be used, it was suggested that many of them do tend to focus on pupils who need special support of some kind.

The schools are responsible for recruiting the volunteers who act as better reading partners. In many schools it appears to be classroom assistants who are recruited to undertake the training, but one of the contributions of CATER has been to act as a link to parents and to enable the recruitment of parents and other guardians. In one area of South Belfast, for example CATER helped to generate interest among parents in running the initiative and then recruited a number of them to the programme. There is a belief that, in

some areas, parents are reluctant to get involved in a programme like this due to their own negative experience of school, and that CATER helps in areas where this degree of reluctance is perhaps strongest.

This theme was evident in conversation held with a number of teachers at a coordinators' meeting organised by BELB at which 28 primary schools were represented. These teachers talked about the importance of the role played by CATER in recruiting parents as volunteers, especially among parents who were alienated from school. One respondent described CATER as a 'bridge between school and community'.

To date only limited data are available on the impact of the Flying Start and BRP programmes, and the quantitative data available has not been collected in a standardised form: the limited data available to the evaluation are presented in Figure 5 and show gain scores, but these data are based on a variety of age groups and measures, and have no control or comparison groups. Currently there are moves to establish a firmer empirical base for this impact assessment. On the basis of qualitative evidence collected through the programme, the BELB office believes that Flying Start and BRP are very powerful programmes and that they do enhance the development of a culture of education in the schools in which they operate. Evidence of improvement in reading levels and on a variety of other qualitative indicators is claimed: children enjoy reading more, they see it as a purpose of reading material rather than an obligation, learn how to gather information from books and to see reading as an enjoyable activity for its own sake.



Schools report an improvement in reading levels. While even for those pupils for whom there is no quantitative evidence of reading improvement, the schools report a better approach to reading by the pupils. Some supporting evidence was available from an examination of portfolios that had been prepared by Flying Start and BR volunteers, and teacher coordinators.

The Flying Start portfolios included an impressive collection of props and resources made by the children (and parents) to help illustrate the poems and stories they were working with. The file contains a before and after evaluation form on the parents orientation towards reading. There are detailed reports on each of the stories read during the programme, including comments on the reading aspects raised on each page or section of the story. The file is interspersed also with examples of the supporting

materials developed for the reading activities and photographs of evidently happy children.

The parents' comments often reflect the sense that while reading happened prior to the programme, it was often a bit of a chore. Flying Start appears to provide a wider and richer set of tactics which the parents can use. This appears to make the reading experience more enjoyable and rewarding for both parent and child. Others comment on the wider repertoire they use both in reading with their child and in helping the child to select reading material. It was also quite noticeable that the parental questionnaire contained very much more comment and material when the 'after' paper was being completed, in comparison with the 'before' paper.

While there was a general lack of consistency in the testing data used to assess reading progress on the BR programme across the portfolios (something which is being addressed by BELB), there were good qualitative reflections by the tutors on how they had experienced the programme. Also, some of the portfolios contain detailed case studies of children which demonstrate impressive analysis and diagnosis of the situation facing these children and the approaches that have been used by the tutors to address these issues. Some of the tutor comments reflect a better understanding on their part on how they can support and relate to their own children.

Other reports from teacher coordinators were available in a separate file. The comments generally were very positive about the programme, with comments on improved

confidence, enthusiasm and interest being very frequent, although only a small number mentioned improved community links through involvement with parents. A very small number mentioned administration problems in the timing of training sessions and related matters, but there appeared to be only one case where the programme collapsed due to parents dropping out of the training.

A series of reports from parents and volunteers was available from West Belfast schools as well. Again the main themes to emerge from these reports were that pupils became more confident and enthusiastic as a consequence of being involved in the programme, and the volunteers felt they were much better skilled to provide support for reading as a result of the training and actual practice. There were some cases where the pupils were identified as good readers at the start of the programme, but even here the volunteers noticed indications of improvements in confidence and concentration – one noteworthy comment was that a good reader had tended to be afraid of anything new and assumed he couldn't handle it, prior to the programme. It would seem that the skills acquired as a consequence of working one-to-one with a trained support volunteer had broadened this child's repertoire to such an extent that he no longer feared new texts.

For a variety of reasons not all the volunteers go through the full accreditation process despite completing the programme. This is usually attributed to nervousness about the process and about their own writing ability – for some of the parents keeping the reading portfolio may be the most substantial body of written work they have maintained since their time in school. The BELB office identified two distinct groups involved among the

volunteers. One group comprised young mothers, many of who reveled in the opportunity to get involved in learning again. Some of these mothers may have been taking the chance to make up for lost opportunities, while another factor may have been the possibility of developing a new career path through work in school and/or with young people. A second group involved retired people who saw volunteering as a way of 'giving something back'. There is an issue around the potential role of men, particularly unemployed men. This relates to another broader issue relating to the extent of targeting in the programme. There have been other innovative developments as well. In South a new version of BRP was organised to train school students as better reading partners so that they could support work in an after-school club. In addition, there is on-going work on accreditation with NVQs and key skills as this is seen by the CATER teams as a potentially important contributor to lifelong learning.

### **BIFHE programmes**

The BIFHE Community Education Department is responsible for promoting family learning programmes. The main programmes which were linked to the CATER project were the 'Parents as Co-educators' course, and the more specialist courses 'Read to Succeed' and 'Count on Success'. Originally the Parents as Co-educators programme was aimed at parents of pre-school children, although over the last couple of years it has been extended to parents of pupils in Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2. In 2000/1 the first Key Stage 3 programme was run. All the programmes are offered by a BIFHE tutor. BIFHE invites participation by nursery of primary schools, provides an information evening for

interested parents and others, and provides the trained tutor for the course. Each course has 12 weekly sessions and includes elements of theory, practice and write-up. Participants compile a portfolio from their work for which they can receive OCN accreditation at a variety of levels. The themes for each course are linked closely to the appropriate curriculum level. A key purpose of the course is to provide a starting point for parents and others in providing support for their children. It is usually the first course they take and, according to BIFHE, many go on to the next level of more specialist courses.

The Read to Succeed and Count on Success programmes represent specialist developments from Parents as Co-educators, although there is no prior requirement for taking these courses. Read to Succeed has 15 weekly sessions, while Count on Success has 10 weekly sessions. The Read to Succeed programme is based on three modules: an emergent reading module; a practical module with observed practice; and a third module on the approaches to reading used in the host school.

Across all the courses the BIFHE team prefer 10/12 participants, both because of viability reasons and because of the group dynamic created by this number. They have found varying levels of interest among schools. Most nursery schools are very keen to be involved, as are many primary schools. However, some primary schools are reticent, perhaps due to a more traditional orientation which does not seek to provide active encouragement of parental involvement in school.

The links between these programmes and CATER has varied across the City. The Parents as Co-educators programme has received significant support from South. Of the 30 or so programmes run since September 2000, about half have been in South and have involved some level of support from CATER. One of the main benefits perceived by the BIFHE team was that CATER helped with the recruitment of parents. On other courses the BIFHE staff had to recruit via information sessions and they could never have the same level of regular contact with parents as is potentially available to local community workers. In addition, CATER in South has specifically provided financial support for the courses. This has included enrolment fees, fees for OCN accreditation, payment for childcare and crèche facilities, and a bonus payment for successful completion by participants. BIFHE does not have funds available for these costs and money would come either from the school, the participants or both. Also, in South, CATER money allowed the viability level of a course to be set at a slightly lower level and thereby to ensure that it did actually run, although the information available on actual participant levels did not suggest a markedly lower participation level on South courses: this may be because CATER support allowed courses to begin with lower than average enrolments, which then picked up once the course was seen to be running. Versions of the programmes have been run in some schools in Greater East.

The Read to Succeed and Count on Success programmes have been running as part of the Family Learning Programmes for five years across the whole city. When schools express interest in the programme then they are encouraged to seek sources of funding from a variety of courses. Over the past year or so CATER has become one of the potential

funding sources, but it is by no means the only one. In South the prior connection between CATER and BIFHE meant there was a fairly close working relationship, with CATER pro-actively seeking to work with BIFHE in support of programmes. In Greater Shankill there had been close liaison and support for the BIFHE programmes, but that was disrupted, as were contacts, following the political problems in the area in Summer, 2000. Some schools in West have obtained CATER funding for courses, but usually following the identification of this source from BIFHE: unlike South the initiative in this case tended to come from BIFHE rather than the CATER team.

The main point of these programmes is to provide positive gains for pupils and parents. In addition, the aim is that trained parents will remain as a resource to be used within the school. There is anecdotal evidence from teachers that the reading and numeracy levels of pupils are enhanced by their association with the programmes. The evidence is less clear in regard to parents, but the BIFHE team is aware of parents who go on to take other courses and sometimes to develop a new career path in childcare as a consequence of their engagement with the family learning programmes. At the moment there are no empirical data available to check these claims, although, anecdotal evidence suggests that some principals believe that their key stage profiles have been enhanced as a consequence of the programmes.

In discussions with BIFHE officials a number of other themes were raised:

- there is an issue on the targeting people who could potentially benefit most from the programmes;
- there may be something of an overlap between the BIFHE and BELB programmes, even though they have different implications and consequences for schools;
- the relationship between BIFHE and primary schools vary, with the role of the school principal being crucial; some programme are offered in community settings;
- BIFHE feels that there is a distinctive approach involved in adult education and that some school teachers may not be aware of this distinctiveness.

Some time was spent discussing the issue of bonuses for participants and the more general issue of financial support. On the general issue, concern was expressed that providing financial support for participants on every aspect of a programme might lead to a situation where participants did not appreciate the value of what they were doing – some level of personal contribution might enhance perceptions of value. More particularly, there was some concern about the idea of paying bonuses on the grounds that some parents might have been taking courses, even multiple courses, simply in order to get the money. On the other hand, it was recognised that sometimes the promise of a bonus might act as an appropriate incentive to encourage completion. The general point was made that BIFHE activity in this area pre-dated the time when extra funding was available and would continue to exist even if the money disappeared. That said, the level of activity and the extent of targeting is probably enhanced by the availability of

additional funds, there is tangible evidence of a growth of parent education programmes and some indication that this is having an accumulator effect as more schools become aware of the possibilities available through these type of activities.

Having examined some of the activity and experience gained through links between CATER and the two main education providers across the City, we next turn to consider some of the experiences gained through examples of out-of-school support organised by CATER teams and targeted mainly at school students. We begin this part of the paper by examining some of the Easter and Summer schools organised by the CATER teams and then outlining a range of other out-of-school support that was provided.

### **West Belfast Easter School**

The current Easter School is the fourth annual session to be run in West Belfast. In the first year of operation it attracted 35 participants, but this has grown to 75 and 152 in subsequent years and 276 signed up for the 2001 Easter School.

The programmes offered in the 2001 programme included intermediate and higher maths, and a series of modern languages including French, Spanish and Irish. Each student paid £20 per course and got four days of classes and free lunch. The classes begin at 11.00am and end at 3.00pm with a 45 minute break for lunch. In previous years the timetable had

differed, but this year's approach arose from student feedback which requested a later start and a more concentrated period for classes.

The programme is advertised through flyers sent to all schools in the area and left in various community settings. A couple of articles and ads are also placed in local newspapers. Given the success of the Easter School over previous years, a positive relationship has developed with some of the schools so that the organisers know that the Easter School is being recommended for some students within these schools. Close contact is maintained with Year Heads and Heads of Department in the schools to add to this confidence.

Students apply to participate in the programme either through their school or as individuals. Given the growth in the programme it has only been possible to provide it by moving to bigger premises (for the 2001 Easter School the facilities of St Mary's University College were used, which had the added potential benefit of giving the students some experience of using a university-type setting). The 2001 programme originally had a waiting-list but the organisers did eventually find a way of squeezing all those who applied into the programme (although in part only by creating an additional class at the last minute).

They did receive requests to run the Easter School across a wider range of subjects, but decided that they had to stick with the core subjects both because of the manageability of this and the difficulty of extending subjects and hence, presumably, numbers. The

teachers are, in the main, recruited from local schools. They are paid for their time on the programme and are given an allowance for preparation.

The classes are organised into single groups for the duration of the Easter School. The preferred class size is 15 students, although they can go up to 20 students. There is a deliberate attempt made to mix the classes with students from different schools. Where possible they always try to ensure that there are a couple of students from each school in each class, but that each class is fairly heterogeneous in terms of student origins.

The majority of the student participants are young women. In the 2001 programme the majority of the students came from grammar schools. There was particularly involvement by students from St Dominic's and St Genevieve's in particular. There were also significant numbers from La Salle and St Rose's. There were smaller numbers of students from Corpus Christi, St Colm's, CBS secondary, BIFHE and a number of training organisations; in addition there were small numbers from Rathmore, Aquinas and Dominican College, schools which, strictly speaking, operate outside West Belfast, but which attract students from this area.

The CATER team acknowledged that a constant problem in the Easter School has been in attracting the participation of students in the most difficult circumstances – in this case that would involve targeting students from three of the local secondary schools. In part this may have been because part of the motivation for the programme in the past had been to target potential GCSE 'D grade students' in order to raise them to 'C grade students', a

pressure that was directly attributable to school performance tables. Thus, the original target group for the programme is well defined, easily identified and is a group that might expect to be open to motivation due to the parameters involved. While this may be of benefit to the students, it runs the risk of leaving behind a group that is easy to identify, but hard to motivate and likely to constitute a more significant challenge.

There was an opportunity to talk with some of the student participants on the Easter School who were taking the intermediate and higher mathematics, and to two groups of language students. When asked why they were prepared to give up their Easter holiday to attend the School most indicated that they saw it as a 'good use of their time'. Some wanted to improve their GCSE grade, others wanted to work towards 'a pass rather than a fail grade' (their words) while others said they simply wanted to improve their work in the subject. There was no evident sense of panic about the upcoming GCSEs in their comments, nor was there any sense that the Easter School was making up for deficiencies in what they had learned at school – more often it was seen as a complement or addition to their formal school work. A few indicated that good GCSE results were important to get back to school or to aspire towards better jobs eventually.

Participation in the Easter School did not seem to require an extraordinary level of motivation: most of the young people said that time spent here was useful, while otherwise they would not have done so much if left to their own devices. It would seem that once they had made the decision to come along then their attendance rate was going to be high. Some of the young people indicated that their teachers had made them aware

of the opportunity, but there was a clear sense that they had decided themselves that this was a worthwhile thing to do. The students generally liked the arrangements for the Easter School. They found the classes relaxed and productive, they liked having the opportunity to devote extended time to one subject and they felt that the teachers took a more relaxed approach during the classes (this was so even for a group who were being taught by their normal school teacher in their subject). All this, they felt, made the time more productive. They liked the fact that they did not have to wear school uniforms, that the classes were mixed with different school groups and were of mixed gender – a group each of boys and girls said they would have preferred more gender mixing, although in practice this is limited by the preponderance of girls in the group as whole. The language students liked the opportunity to concentrate time on oral work.

These young people are motivated, but unproblematically so – they appear to have a very common-sense approach to the value of the additional time and value the opportunity to meet with other young people. Schools might take some lesson from the value attached by the young people to extended work on a specific subject and the relaxed atmosphere encouraged by a number of different aspects of the Easter School.

### **West Belfast Summer School 2000**

This event was organised to provide preparation for the pupils who were due to take the 11+ tests in October/November 2000. The CATER team had some angst about whether they should provide this type of support, not least because they are not well-disposed

towards the selective tests or the selective system. However, they decided to go ahead with the preparation sessions both because there was a parental demand for such support and because they saw it as providing some level of equivalence to the out-of-school coaching that many advantaged parents pay for – it hardly amounts to a level playing-field, but it does attempt to provide some degree of leveling. In the Summer School there was a total of 228 pupils participating from 25 West Belfast primary schools. On average the free school meal level for these schools is around 54 per cent, in comparison with an average of 38 per cent for primary schools in Belfast.

Table 1 below is an attempt to provide some picture of the effects of the Summer School. The table shows the transfer grade profiles for pupils: percentages are provided for all Belfast primary schools, all pupils in the West Belfast schools that sent some pupils to the Summer School, and Summer School participants. Two versions of the profile are provided: the top half of the table shows the percentage of the entire cohort, while the bottom half shows the profile for pupils who entered the transfer tests.

The table highlights a number of features. First, the profiles for the West Belfast schools generally are lower in comparison with all Belfast schools, but this can be explained by the different social profile of the pupils as measured by FSM. The overall profile for the Summer School participants appears to be much higher than the profile for all pupils in their schools, although in large part this is explained by the very low proportion of Summer School participants who subsequently opt not to take the tests. It is not unreasonable to infer that the Summer School participants constituted a self-selected

group in which there would be few pupils who had already decided not to take the 11+ tests.

The second half of the table shows the profiles only for pupils who entered the tests. Here again the profile for the West Belfast schools is lower in comparison with all Belfast schools. This time, however, there is little difference in the proportion of pupils achieving a Grade A among the Summer School participants and the West Belfast primary schools. The difference that does emerge is that a higher proportion of the Summer School participants achieved Grades B or C. This is likely to have enhanced the probability that these pupils achieved a grammar school place, particularly among the pupils with Grade B.

Table 1: Transfer grade profiles for Belfast primary schools, West Belfast primary schools and Summer School participants (percentages)

<b>Schools</b>	<b>Grade A</b>	<b>Grade B</b>	<b>Grade C</b>	<b>Grade D</b>	<b>opted-out</b>
All Belfast	25	11	10	27	27
West Belfast	16	10	11	34	29
Summer School	22	18	22	36	3
All Belfast	34	15	14	37	
West Belfast	23	14	15	48	
Summer School	23	18	22	37	

### **Other out-of-school support for pupils**

In addition to the above activities, a number of other types of activities were provided by the CATER teams. As noted above, the Greater Shankill CATER team ran a 2000

summer school for Year 11 students who were to take their GCSEs in May/June, 2001. A detailed report on the numbers of participants and the range of activities in which they were involved was drawn up. The main perceived benefits of the Summer School was that it helped to focus the young peoples' plans for revision and study, and helped to build positive links between the young people and community organisations. The schools appeared to be generally enthusiastic about the initiative. In an echo of a theme that emerged from the West Belfast East school, the CATER team on the Greater Shankill suggested that the Summer school had created a different type of relationship between teacher and student, a theme that might of interest to schools themselves.

An additional out-of-school activity linked to CATER was through support for Homework Clubs. The purpose of Homework Clubs is to provide pupils with a supportive environment for the completion of homework and other study activities. In many cases the pupils would not have access to such a supportive context in their homes. CATER's role towards Homework Clubs has taken a number of forms. In some instances CATER was involved directly in establishing new Homework Clubs, while in other cases CATER funds were used to sustain or support existing Homework Clubs that were under threat. In addition, CATER was one of a number of groups who coordinated a bid for external funds to maintain a network of Homework Clubs across Belfast. Also included within this category is a number of after-school clubs focusing on extra-curricular activity including dance, music, modern languages and Judo. As a general approach, CATER teams have not been involved directly in running Homework Clubs. However, since the value of these facilities is well-known and has been demonstrated across a number of

places, CATER was keen to ensure that the opportunities available in these initiatives were available to as many pupils as possible.

A range of other more specific activities have been organised by one or other of the CATER teams and can be seen to fall into the general category of out-of-school activities aimed at pupils. These have included special programmes focused on literacy and numeracy, GCSE preparation in mathematics and modern languages, library tours and ICT preparation. South supported a series of Summer School activities in conjunction with Barnardos and was also able to provide support for specific needs identified by schools in its area. Thus, for example, South supported two programmes identified by secondary schools: one involved the establishment of an after-school club, while the other provided support for a home/school liaison teacher whose role was to address attendance problems.

### **Other activities including those linking parents and schools**

A host of other programmes have been run or supported within the CATER project aimed at strengthening the links between parents and schools. This has included CATER organised work around theme weeks, such as facilitating a local library and its contribution to Maths Year 2000, and development work which aims at providing a valued service within local areas, such as the teacher training for DELTA being run in South.

One of the opportunities available to CATER has been the ability to organise courses to meet specific requests from parent or community groups in their areas. An example is provided by a first aid course for parents organised by West. In a similar vein, a number of courses on computing for parents have been supported in South and West. Normally the CATER supported activity involves an introductory programme, but some parents have gone on to take CLAIT courses as a consequence. These courses are run by the FE colleges or by other agencies such as WEA. CATER's role has been either to pay for courses or to encourage other agencies to put them on. Similar courses have been run in Greater East but in slightly different ways. This has included direct financial support for courses, paying course fees to get activity started, paying for follow-up activity, or providing childcare for participants. In Greater Shankill a project aimed at connecting children and grandparents as part of a local history initiative developed into a computing course for grandmothers at their request. Their hope was to develop a sufficient level of computing skills so that they could help their grandchildren with homework.

West supported a number of mathematics courses for Key Stage 3 students held in a local girls' secondary school and supported a team-building initiative organised by boys' secondary school. In South childcare support was provided to enable a CCMS courses entitled Families First to run in a local primary school. The WEA provides a number of Second-Chance courses which are aimed at adult returnees to education. CATER's main role has been to provide links between WEA and local community groups interested in this type of course. In discussion the CATER teams felt that their local involvement was important in providing a link in this way, since they often had good links with local

groups. Greater Shankill ran a series of courses on 'junk art' which appeared to be similar in style to the Flying Start programme in that it shows parents ways in which readily available materials can be adapted for educational use in the home.

More generally, an approach adopted in Greater Shankill was based on ways of raising the profile and standing of education in the local community. With this in mind a series of 'celebration events' were organized. These included a celebration event held in June, 2000, which included graduation ceremonies for nursery children and others: this particular event involved hundreds of youngsters, parents, grandparents and guardians. As has already been noted, however, the political problems that beset the Shankill area in Summer, 2000, created difficulties in running events as loyalties and, to a significant extent, the local community, divided.

While West and South CATER teams, and to a slightly lesser extent Greater Shankill, decided to work very closely with City-wide providers such as BELB and BIFHE, in Greater East a different strategy was adopted. The main approach here was to identify activities which were much more focused on the specific circumstances and needs of schools and parents. Thus, in this area a series of short courses have been run on a variety of topics, including 'starting primary school' and 'dealing with bullying at school'. These courses arise from perceived need among parents and in schools and normally have as their long-term aim the establishment of some sort of parent facility in the schools, although even this can take a number of formats including a liaison arrangement between a school and parents, a parents' room or a drop-in center. In the same way Greater East

has run programmes for lunchtime supervisors, a series of activities aimed at enhancing the environment (either gardens or playgrounds) of schools. One innovative activity in Greater East was targeted on the involvement of fathers with their sons and worked with a local football club to organise coaching sessions. This had an in-built literacy dimension as the pupils participating in the project had to write match reports on football games (see below for more details).

West has run a number of similar types of courses including summer activity programmes for young people and mathematics workshops. Key underlying themes in some of this work were the attempts to make communities more aware of educational opportunities that were available and to break down some of the barriers between school and communities. In relation to the first of these objectives, West organized a community information forum where parents were able to obtain information on a wide range of community and other providers. Linked to this was the principals/community liaison committee. In addition, the West Belfast Partnership Board publishes a regular newsletter which is widely circulated throughout the area and in which the CATER team was able to run a series of articles on educational issues.

In general discussion with the CATER workers on these experiences a number of themes emerged, but an important theme focused on some of the dilemmas that arose from enhanced parental involvement in education. One dilemma is that the empowerment of parents may make them more astute consumers of education. In some cases this leads them to question schools and teachers more closely than before, and may lead them to

move their children to other, perceived better, schools. This could have the consequence of making life more difficult for the schools that are already facing extremely challenging circumstances. On the other hand, one of the constraints to parental participation is the reluctance on the part of some schools and teachers to encourage such activity. Possibly these are the sort of situations where more parental action ought to be encouraged.

There is a perception by some of the CATER teams that the extent to which schools and their local communities are linked is greater in the maintained than the controlled side. This is, however, an impression more than anything else. It is clearly not a general truism as there are many examples of active involvement in this type of work by controlled schools. Also, it may simply reflect the different social dynamics of different parts of the city. On the other hand, it may suggest that there is a slightly higher level of understanding of families' circumstances and/or empathy for this position, on the part of teachers in some Catholic schools, which in turn might be related to closer generational links, greater social heterogeneity or the existence of other overarching links through such organisations as the GAA.

On the general issue of teacher-community links, it was suggested that few teachers working in inner city schools actually lived in or were drawn from these communities. An emergent theme from the evaluation is that the CATER teams have acted as an important link between local communities, schools and larger educational providers. But there are also many local people working in or around schools who also contribute to this role. In this circumstance these people could become potentially crucial gatekeepers for

links. They include classroom assistants, ancillary staff and even people such as the local lollipop woman. Recognising the role of these people in the schools could provide an important conduit for enhancing school community links.

### **Review of secondary education**

The research report on the effects of the selective system of secondary education was published in September, 2000 (Gallagher and Smith, 2000) at which point the Minister of Education established a Review Body to bring forward recommendations for the future organisation of schools. Although the Review Body wrote to over 1,000 voluntary and community organisations, organised many public meetings, including four in Belfast City, at which people could offer their views on the future of education, and set up a website to encourage participation in the review process, it was unclear just how many parents from the socially disadvantaged areas of the City were going to participate. Partly for this reason the CATER teams decided to facilitate meetings for parents at which views on the future of secondary education could be discussed. In addition, the CATER teams felt that they should facilitate discussion on this issue as it was of immense educational significance in its own right.

In the event, there were less than 20 written contributions to the Review Body from the voluntary and community sector, and while there were many meetings called to discuss aspects of the debate, the meetings organised by CATER teams were among the very few that were specifically organised to encourage parental participation in the process.

Groups of parents and community activists from South, Greater East and West asked for and obtained meetings with members of the Review Body to present their views on the future of post primary education.

### **Networking and information sharing among CATER workers**

An important aim of the CATER project had been to strengthen links across the City in addition to the specific educational activities promoted within areas. Four main mechanisms were operated to promote this aim including the establishment of a CATER Advisory Committee, informal meetings organised by CATER workers to discuss issues of common interest and the organisation of key events, meetings aimed at specific aims such as the preparation of funding bids, and a series of meetings established as part of the evaluation process. An additional level of cross-City contact has been maintained by the meetings of the CEOs of each of the area partnership boards.

The success of this aspect of the project has been mixed. The CATER workers who have been able to participate in the networking activities have found the experience rewarding and valuable, and it has proved to be an opportunity to share ideas and practice. However, for a variety of reasons not all the CATER teams have been able to be active in these meetings and this has clearly limited the extent to which networking can take place. In practice most of the networking has taken place between South, Greater East and West. There have been significant, if sporadic, contacts maintained between West and Greater Shankill. Until relatively late in the day there was little activity undertaken under CATER

in North and very limited contact between North and the other CATER teams. In the last few months of CATER North did generate a significant body of activity arising from its focus on emotional literacy. This included support for read to succeed programmes, but with an extended curriculum (and sessions) devoted to emotional literacy concerns. North has provided support opportunities for portfolio preparation, and provided residential programmes on circle-time and related activities. Other activities have been generated through advertising in schools and encouraging them to come forward with specific initiatives and programmes – these proposals have been supported where they have fitted within the North’s strategy.

The networking activity that has taken place, limited though it was, has proved to be valuable. In particular, the meetings undertaken towards the latter third of the project provided an opportunity for a degree of reflective engagement with the experience of each of the areas. That said, however, it was only towards the very end of the project, and sometimes only as an indirect consequence of evaluation activity, that opportunities for networking between parents in different parts of the city emerged. The Advisory Committee operated in a mainly administrative role and did not appear to provide an opportunity for a comparison and consideration of practice across the areas. There was valuable networking between the CATER teams around the major City-wide events which were organised, that is, the BRP event in the City Hall, the consultation on the review of post primary education and the closing event. However, it seems clear that any future programme of work would need to make more direct efforts to organise and underpin networking activity. In particular, the project probably would have benefited

from earlier critical engagement between the CATER teams, especially since the areas adopted quite distinctive approaches to their work.

### **Interviews with parents, teachers and community activists**

As part of the evaluation of CATER interviews were held with teachers and principals in schools that had worked with some of the CATER teams. Group interviews were organized for parents who had participated in some of the parenting and adult education programmes. In addition, interviews were held with community activists who had had some links with the CATER initiative.

Principals of West Belfast primary schools that had sent some pupils to the Summer School 2000 reported themselves as happy with the outcomes. All of the principals who agreed to be interviewed felt that the additional educational work over the Summer had helped to maintain the momentum of learning in months when, ordinarily, they would expect to see some evidence of regression. In addition, all of the principals felt that at least some of their pupils had benefited from the Summer School in terms of their achieved grades. Only one principal was defensive about the justification of providing 11+ preparation, but argued for it on equity grounds. It should be noted that one principal whose school had sent some pupils to the Summer School, and who declined to be interviewed for the evaluation study, did indicate some disquiet that the focus of the Summer School activity had been on 11+ preparation and, thus, primarily relevant for the higher ability pupils. All of the principals who were interviewed indicated that they had

been involved, to varying degrees, in other aspects of CATER work. A spin-off benefit of the Summer School for one school had been enhanced communication between teachers and parents and, it was felt, an improvement in this relationship.

As was noted above, the approach adopted by Greater East was much more focused on school-specific initiatives and this was reflected in the interviews with teachers and principals from some of the participating schools. In all cases the nature of the school's engagement with CATER had varied in line with negotiations with school and parents. Thus, for example, in one school the preferred goal was to provide some mechanism for regular discussion and contact between the principal and parents. The method adopted was to organize fortnightly coffee mornings at which parents and the principal discussed topics of common interest. On occasion visitors spoke to the group: these included a speech therapist and a community nurse. In order to ensure the coffee mornings worked CATER supplied funds to provide substitute cover for the principal, and paid for chairs and other furnishings for the reception area in which the meetings were held. In a number of the schools the focus of some of the activity was on the environment of the school, when parents and other members of the local community helped to improve the school: in one case this involved re-designing the playground, while in another it involved volunteers improving the garden facilities. A number of the schools were aided to put on schools for parents whose children were about to enter the school and, in one case, parents who had been involved in the Greater Shankill Early Years project were brought across to talk to parents in Greater East.

The nature of the approach adopted in Greater East allowed for the type of specific targeted work as described above and a high level of flexibility in approach. Another example is provided by the school which expressed some concern at the level of attention of the pupils early in the school day. A contributory factor was thought to lie in many of the children not receiving breakfast before arriving at school so, with CATER support, a breakfast club was established and is now thriving. In a number of instances, some of the principals had expressed some disappointment that the level of interest and involvement by parents in some of the educational opportunities that had been set up had been disappointing. As an alternative way of trying to get parents to see the schools in more positive terms, it was decided to organise some social events in the school. Other schools were involved in the fathers and sons project linked to the local football club.

The teachers and principals in Greater East expressed high satisfaction with the CATER project. One teacher suggested that CATER had acted as a 'critical friend' to the school, had provided a new and effective link with parents and provided the basis for imaginative improvements to the work of the school. A key to this satisfaction was the targeted and flexible approach taken within CATER, with a strong emphasis on a 'bottom-up' strategy. Another teacher noted that a benefit of CATER had been that the school was involved in successful activities which helped to boost the mood of the school and its community and put them into a 'virtuous circle' of improvement.

Similar themes, but from a different perspective, were found in interviews with community activists. In Greater East a number of community activists praised the way in

which CATER activity had helped to demythologize aspects of schooling and provide new ways for parents to talk about education issues and re-engage with schools and teachers. A particular point made by some of these activists concerned the extent of change in education over the past decade. This had changed the internal working of schools, and even the language of educational practice, in ways which rendered them unfamiliar to many parents. When the alienation which some parents feel from school is added to this mix, largely as a consequence of their own negative experiences as pupils, then the danger of complete disengagement becomes even more profound. Activities carried out as part of CATER appeared to help break through aspects of these barriers, even if this involved a range of different activities (as noted above) or the organization of meetings in community settings outside school.

On a number of occasions above the project with the local football club has been mentioned. This project involved a link between CATER and the Youth and Community Development Officer of Glentoran FC. As part of the project fathers were permitted to bring their sons to matches free of charge, the boys were linked with a local journalist who helped them write match reports, and an unused part of the clubs premises were converted into a family milk lounge. The club engaged in outreach activity through visiting local schools to invite their participation and benefited through the enhancement of its young person's soccer school. Some of the boys who were linked to the club through the project have become ball-boys or are involved with the use of the club mascot. The club is happy that its soccer school has benefited and that its connections with the local community have been tangibly improved. Beneath all this are the literacy

benefits arising from the writing activity and the imaginative way in which fathers were involved with their sons' education.

Interviews with community activists in other parts of the City found many of the same themes emerging. One common point raised by respondents was that many of the CATER projects acted as a launching pad for adults' re-engagement with education. Often the starting point was the most difficult and, as noted above, even when parents did get involved in some course or other, some of them were reluctant to put their work forward for accreditation. However, many of the community activists, and parents, indicated that once some accreditation had been received then this acted as a spur for further courses and work. In some cases new opportunities for career paths had developed as a consequence of the experience. Noteworthy in this respect are the ICT courses organised in different parts of the City which have encouraged some parents to seek further accredited courses. Even more so, the parent education programmes have, in some cases, launched participants on new careers working with children.

Many of the community activists expressed common concerns on ways the project could be enhanced. Two themes emerged in particular. The first was on the need to sustain these type of activities and the problems from relying on relatively short-term funding to try to identify potential solutions to what are long-term and enduring problems. The second common theme to emerge from the interviews was the importance of targeting. Some community activists felt that the focus of CATER work on schools had been potentially misplaced on the grounds that the young people who are, arguably, least well

served by the education system have already disengaged (physically) from school well before the end of their 'compulsory' period of schooling. Some community activists argued that their sector provided distinctive provision which was often more attractive to these alienated young people, in comparison with school, and that CATER might perhaps have focused more attention in this direction. In a sense, this view was suggesting that while CATER did appear to play an important role in re-engaging parents and others with schools, and providing opportunities for additional learning opportunities for many young people, it might have had more engagement with sections of community provision. It is perhaps inevitable that any programme of work in this area, especially one that was bounded to a relatively tight time-frame, would contain some gaps or areas in which alternative attention could have been provided. It serves as a reminder of the scale of the problem that no attempt at a solution ever appears sufficient. It should, however, be noted that West did engage with some EOTAS (Education Other Than At School) programmes as part of its activity.

## **Conclusions**

This paper has outlined the range of activities carried out over a period of 18 months under the aegis of the CATER project. A more detailed account has been provided of specific examples of that work and evaluative comments on aspects of the work have been included. Where it was available, empirical data were used to examine aspects of the activities. This final concluding section of the paper will discuss a range of more

general issues that emerged from the evaluation and which may of some value for any considerations on future work of this kind.

Before beginning this discussion, however, it is worth highlighting some key aspects of the impact of CATER. Over the course of a little under 18 months the CATER teams across Belfast organized a wide-ranging series of activities and events that directly involved hundreds of young people, parents and other adults, and indirectly engaged with hundreds more. From conversations with some of the people who participated in these activities it is clear that some lives were affected in significant ways, and some participants felt their future course had been significantly altered for the better. Despite these undoubted successes, the problems addressed by CATER were, and are, enormous. These problems, which largely derive from a constellation of social and economic processes and are found in a concentrated form in urban environments, are not unique to Belfast. Nor are these problems amenable to simple and immediate solution.

In the opening section of this paper there was some consideration of the policy implications arising from work in other places on these issues. To a very great extent it is possible to identify continuities between this broader comparative literature and the particular experience gained through CATER. Thus, for example, CATER was based on a flexible and consultative approach that sought, from its initiation, to target activity to meet identified need. CATER was premised on the need to include local communities in educational issues. However, while much of the comparative experience recognizes the importance of this principle, CATER has gone a significant way in providing models for

how that principle can be realized in practice. On that basis, perhaps the greatest benefit that can be derived from a programme of work, such as that embodied in the CATER initiative, lies in trying to identify ways in which the impact of the activity can be encouraged to endure. It is this objective that informs the remainder of this paper.

One key issue that emerges from the evaluation concerned the extent to which activity is or can be targeted on specific groups. As was noted in the introductory discussion in this paper, there are a number of interacting dimensions to the influence of social background on educational performance and one of the characteristics of urban education is an area basis for this influence. On the grounds that young people and others within defined areas will face more risk factors than those who do not, there is a case for concentrating activity within these geographical areas even if not all the people in the areas display all the typical characteristics of social disadvantage. On the other hand, the level of need is not equivalent across all people so there is also a case for trying to target activity on groups with particular levels of risk, even though the groups that carry the highest level of risk are probably also the hardest to reach. It was noted above that some community activists thought that CATER should have been more targeted. There is a more general sense that, for some of the activities that were organised under CATER, the priority was in setting the activities up and making sure they ran successfully, rather than specific devoting attention to targeting. At the same time, some of the efforts that were made to target specific at-risk groups resulted in activities which did not get off the ground. However this is interpreted, a clear lesson from CATER is that time and attention needs to be given to the targeting of activity and, perhaps, experimentation in ways of engaging hard to

reach groups. This carries the implication that some activities should be allowed to fail as part of this experimental approach.

One of the consequences of CATER was to empower some parents, and to provide them with the confidence to ask questions of their children's schools and make choices for their children's future. This is not an outcome that all schools will necessarily be happy with, but it is an inevitable and realistic consequence of the idea of partnership in education. Mainstream educational providers should work to encourage more links between schools, parents and local communities, but should accept also that this will lead to more active involvement by parents and others.

Related to the above point, the CATER teams found varying levels of enthusiasm among schools for involvement in project activities. More generally, there was a sense that school principals varied in the extent to which they wanted to encourage parental involvement in their schools. Some of the reticence that is felt by some principals is undoubtedly related to the points in the previous paragraph, but some agreement needs to be established on the legitimate expectations parents can have: arguably at the moment there is a rhetoric of parental involvement that is not always met in practice. If positive effects can be seen to be derived from closer school-community links, and the balance of evidence in CATER and beyond would suggest this, that schools perhaps should not be able to so easily keep parents at the school-gates.

Again related to the above point, greater parental involvement in schools probably has the most beneficial effects when part of the link is through adult education activities: one of the outcomes of CATER was to demonstrate some of the advantages of these type of programmes for parents and their children. However, if schools are going to be required to engage in this type of activity, then the education system needs to recognise the resource implications of this requirement. Specifically providing funds for schools to engage in this work might be seen as a legitimate element of TSN policy.

One of the lessons to emerge from the after-schools programmes operated by CATER is the different pedagogy and learning environment they created. It was noteworthy also that young people were generally very positive about these alternative contexts. Of course, they may work well precisely because of their atypical (in comparison with school) character, which could be lost completely if there was an attempt to mainstream these practices in schools. Nevertheless, there may be value in trying to find ways to connect the experiences of these after-schools programmes with schools and teachers in order to encourage them to reflect on traditional approaches. One possible criticism of schools in Northern Ireland is their over-reliance on an old-fashioned approach to pedagogy.

Networking within CATER had some benefits but was not built into the project strongly enough, did not really extend beyond the CATER workers and was not used sufficiently for reflective and critical examination of practice. In part this is explained by the practical constraints faced by the CATER teams in carrying out planned activities within a

relatively short time period, but it does imply that in any future project then the networking dimension needs to be placed on stronger foundations. It might be helpful, for example, if this includes a specific staff development component, with a link to one or other of the local further or higher education institutions, there to act as a critical friend to the project.

Another dimension of this critical reflection lies in the potential lessons that could be learned by other agencies as a consequence of the CATER project. We have seen above that a key part of CATER work involved engagement with a range of educational providers. In many cases the CATER teams provided a crucial link between these providers and local communities, precisely because of the standing of the CATER workers within the areas. However, in any future work there should be some space to engage with these providers to encourage them to consider the implications for their way of doing things of the CATER work: a key part of a social inclusion agenda is that existing institutions critically examine their current way of operating to consider if services can be provided differently and better. A CATER-type activity should encourage this type of thinking.

This raises a question as to whether some of the activities carried out within CATER actually need the project. By this is meant that a possible implication of CATER is that some of the City-wide educational providers could learn to provide their services more effectively as a consequence of the CATER project. If this was to happen, of course, then there would be no need for a CATER-type project as mainstreaming would have

occurred. An alternative possibility is that CATER provides a necessary link between local communities and larger providers and that the CATER teams function as the type of 'educational entrepreneurs' identified in some of the Social Exclusion Unit's reports on the development of learning communities. In practice it is likely that elements of both outcomes will apply in practice, but this reinforces the need to provide opportunities for critical engagement between CATER-type projects and mainstream providers in order to identify that which can and should be mainstreamed, and that which needs to be provided at a different level in order to enable mainstream services to be delivered more effectively.

As a final note it is worth reiterating the point that the problems that CATER sought to address are not unique to Belfast or the contemporary age. The development of cities also saw the growth of areas of concentrated social disadvantage, while the advent of mass education has been accompanied by varying degrees of inequality and exclusion. Some of this pressure has been particularly evident since the oil shock of the 1970s and has been found in most cities of the Western world. It is hardly surprising then, that CATER has not solved those problems, as they are not amenable to easy or quick solution.

At its best, CATER provided insights into the necessary or possible processes that form part of the solution to the difficulties that beset urban education. CATER also allows us to see some of the practical constraints that need to be addressed in this effort, and highlighted some of the elements of practice that would need to be tightened and placed on a more formal basis in any future CATER-type project. In particular, it highlights the

need to establish more formal mechanisms for networking in a divided City. It is understandable that, in an 18 month programme, the priority often revolves around establishing programmes and making them work in order to justify the funding. But it could be argued that too many projects are constrained to operate to such short-term goals and the risk is that the broader and enduring value of the experience gets lost. If we could go back in time then CATER might have devoted more energy on specifically experimental initiatives, especially focused on targeting, engaged in more networking across the City, provided more time for critical examination of practice and engaged in a slightly different way with mainstream providers. But we cannot go back in time. Therefore, the hope must be that the lessons of CATER help to inform the future and that the energy created by the initiative is not allowed to dissipate to the extent that someone else will have to re-discover these themes all over again.

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