PUPIL EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
EVALUATION OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE ‘PROMOTING RECONCILIATION THROUGH A SHARED CURRICULUM EXPERIENCE’ PROGRAMME.
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TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH EVIDENCE.
Education for transformation.

Queen's University Belfast

The Centre for Effective Education
SCHOOL OF Education

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Executive summary

What is this about?

Beginning in 2011, some pupils took part in new lessons based around understanding and working with pupils from different community groups. The Curriculum Advisory and Support Service (CASS) from the Western Education and Library Board (WELB) created these new lessons with lots of different activities. A research team from Queen’s University Belfast had the job of trying to work out whether these lessons were useful in helping pupils to think about people from different communities.

All of the pupils involved took part in a special questionnaire online before they started the lessons and when they had completed the programme. Teachers’ views were also collected. Karen from the research team at Queen’s University also spoke to some pupils to hear their views. Thank you for your excellent work here. Everyone was very honest.

The questionnaires and interviews were carried out because we wanted to know if these lessons worked and what the pupils’ views were. This research was very important because we do not have a lot of information from young people about lessons like this.
In fact this was the first study of its kind! Your answers were extremely useful because they allowed us to see what you really thought. Your views were so good that they are now being used to change how work like this is carried out.

Some useful words explained

Before reading this booklet it will be useful for you to know what some of the words mean. Here is a list of useful words with a sentence explaining what they mean:

CASS – the Curriculum Advisory and Support Service

Catholic – someone from one of the main religious communities in Northern Ireland

Celebratory event – when people come together to celebrate something and have a good time

Culture – this is a word for people’s 'way of life', meaning the way they do things. Different groups of people may have different cultures.

Curriculum – this is an outline of study. It is used to plan teaching or training. It shows all the details so others can know what is going to happen.

Different community groups – people who belong to different groups within our country. For example, a community group may be called ‘Catholic’ or ‘Protestant’ because of their religion.

Identity – this is how people see themselves, the culture they think they belong to.

Interviews – talking to people to find out what they do or think.

Programme – an outline of something with all the details on how it should be carried out.

Protestant - someone from one of the main religious communities in Northern Ireland.

Questionnaire – a set of questions to find out more about people.

Research – a way of finding out about things in an organised way. Research is done by using what we already know and building on it.

Sectarianism – not liking or treating or viewing other people in a bad way because of the religious community they belong to, without actually knowing them as a person.

Series – something which must be carried out in order, one after the other. In this leaflet it means the series of lessons carried out by the pupils.

WELB – the Western Education and Library Board.
What was the programme made up of?

The programme was split into different series of lessons for each of year groups involved – Years 6, 7, 8 & 9. Each year group had a different focus.

Year 6 looked at what things matter to people for example similarities and differences, facts and opinions about Northern Ireland for different communities.

Year 7 built on the previous work about what matters to people but also looked at history, culture and making choices.

Year 8 explored some of the symbols and barriers that can separate people e.g. flags, uniforms and peace walls using a human rights framework.

Year 9 tackled factors which influence identity and the importance of putting yourself in other people’s shoes.

Some pupils completed the programme with their own class and some pupils completed the programme with a class from another school. Other pupils completed the questionnaire in the first year but only started the programme in the second year. This was very important as we were able to look at the differences between all groups of pupils and what they thought.

What did we find out?

Overall, the research team found that these programmes were better for helping pupils to think about people from different community groups compared to what they normally do in school. However the results were complicated because there were lots of different opinions.

What we found out from the questionnaires

There was increased learning about relationships between people from different communities in Northern Ireland.

*Working with own class*

These pupils were able to look at their own community in a more detailed way. They also had a greater knowledge and understanding of different cultures and traditions. These pupils also answered questions about dealing with unfairness, in a more peaceful way.
Working with another school

These classes found shared lessons more enjoyable but they did not help the pupils to look at their own community in as much detail as the pupils who worked in their own classes. However the curriculum still worked with this group and they were more positive about other cultures.

The research team also found there were no major differences in the answers from boys and girls and Catholic and Protestant pupils. There were also no major differences between classes who spent longer on the programme.

What we found out from the interviews

Generally pupils liked the content and style of the lessons. Most of all they liked the activities.

One pupil said:
“I liked the lessons, like I thought they were quite good, and my favourite thing was this human bingo thing or the dot on the head...they were good craic, like we had a good time when we were doing them.”
The pupils who completed the lessons with their own class shared more of their feelings. Pupils who worked with another school talked a little more about enjoying the programme. Here is what some pupils said:

**Pupil 1:** Enjoyable and exciting.
**Pupil 2:** Fun, yeah.
**Pupil 3:** Really good and just enjoyable.
**Pupil 4:** Good craic and we had good laughs

In the interviews, the word sectarianism was mentioned a lot and all groups said they did not fully understand the word. A lot of pupils said they had learnt about Catholics and Protestants and found out that they did not always get on with each other. However pupils who worked with other schools talked more about what they had in common with the other community. Here is what some other pupils said:

**Pupil 1:** Sometimes they have the same hobbies as us.
**Pupil 2:** I don’t mind them, they're just the same as us, they aren’t any different.

Pupils who worked in their own class groups talked about their community in a more detailed way.

In the interviews the pupils were also asked about how the programme could be made better. Both groups said more school pupils, even at a younger age should be given an opportunity to take part in the programme. Pupils also said the programme should be taught with other schools but not all lessons should be shared and that the programme should be taught in a special place outside of the school buildings. They also said time should be spent getting to know each other better before starting the lessons.

Pupils who completed the lessons with another school said that the programme will make life in Northern Ireland more peaceful and help people live together happily in the future and be friends.

Here is what one pupil said about the programme:

*...if they were going to grow up and if they started fighting or anything, and then if they did the programme then it would stop them...fighting and... the way Catholics and Protestants fight.*
Teacher findings

Before the programme started, teachers went on a special course on how to teach these lessons and people from CASS helped them whilst they were teaching it. The teachers were very happy with these two things. Teachers also really liked the content and style of the lessons, just as pupils had mentioned. Teachers also liked working with the other teachers and learnt a lot from it.

Teachers, like the pupils, talked about sectarianism. They too found it difficult to teach. Teachers also felt that these lessons should be carried out with teachers and pupils from other schools. Teachers said they would like better ways to record the learning from lessons and that the end of the programme should be marked with a celebratory event. This was because, overall the research team found that these programmes were better for helping pupils to think about people from different community groups than what they normally do in school.

What now?

After a research project like this is finished, the research team work with all the people who took part to make a list of things which should be done in the future or things that could be done better if the lessons were to be taught again. In the interviews, the pupils and teachers were asked what they would like to change about the programme to make it better. Some of these are listed below. Also, the research team at Queen’s University worked with the people in CASS to list some of these things:

1. There needs to be more research projects like this to find out more about why the results were so complicated.
2. Also, it would be good to use more research to find out why there were some differences in the answers from children who worked with their own class and those who worked with another school. This research should then be taken to the Government to help make lessons like these more helpful for children.
3. This research should be used to help teachers to plan lessons with other schools very carefully and make sure that everyone has enough time to get to know each other before they start these lessons. Also, to make sure that pupils know about each other’s
backgrounds before they meet and that the lessons are carried out in a space which everyone is happy with.

4. Research projects and changes to the curriculum should also look at how children think about Catholics and Protestants in their everyday lives, in their families, in their communities, and what they think about the things that they see in the news.

5. The research team found that we do not need to change the programme for boys or girls or for Catholic or Protestant pupils. It works just as well for all of these groups!

6. All teachers should go to the special course on how to teach these lessons and still get the help from people in CASS.

You can find out more about the research study and the findings in the full report. It is on the Centre for Effective Education website at: www.qub.ac.uk/cee