

Centre for the Study of Conflict  
Coleraine  
1st January, 1989

Memo ~~will~~  
To Jeremy Harbinson and Tony McCusker.  
Re The evaluation of EMU.

This is a short new year's present!!. It represents an attempt by me to clear my head about evaluation with respect to EMU. I realise that it is simply an exercise in clearing ground and that the next step is to try to build some models of this. But it does make clear what I think needs to be done, and what the obstacles are.

Happy New Year

Seamus. *(Seamus)*

PS I will send copies of this to Vivian, Tom Johnston, Dave Brittain, and colleagues at Coleraine.

copies to:  
- Dr Cain  
- Dr McWhirter  
- Dr Napier  
and thoughts  
welcome  
*JST*

## THE EVALUATION OF EMU

### BACKGROUND

The analysis that follows is based on two assumptions. One, that the continuing existence of conflict may be in some way connected with the parallel existence of two school systems; and, two, that there is little likelihood of this changing for the majority of pupils (even if the integrated school movement continues to grow and prosper). It follows that much of the contribution that schools may be able to make to community relations will have to be located within the existing school structures. It is this conclusion that has led to the development of Education for Mutual Understanding.

EMU has emerged out of practice and experiment, and not from any prior analysis or grand design. Those concerned have been practising teachers and educationalists, and they have developed activities and projects to suit particular contexts and specific problems. The recent EMU Guide is an attempt to produce a synthesis of this experience in a form that others may find useful. But it is a stage in a still evolving process, and will probably have to be reanalysed and rewritten when there is a wider range of experience available.

However, because of the greater emphasis recently placed upon EMU and the considerable sums of money made available to promote it, there is a need at this stage to develop a more systematic analysis of the philosophy of education - and its relationship with society - implicit in the current 'practice-based' developments. The most pressing reason for this is the need to know if EMU is achieving anything. If it is not, resources are being wasted and the very existence of EMU may be counter-productive in that it ensures that there is little attempt to look for other possibly more effective procedures. So there is a need for a greater consideration to be given to such matters as judgement, appraisal and accountability all of which can be thought to be subsumed within the word evaluation.

### JUSTIFYING EMU

Before evaluation can begin there must be a coherent statement of the motives for doing EMU in the first place, and this involves trying to be clear about the essence of the process and about its intended outcomes. At present the justification rests largely on the intuitive judgement of those involved and arises out of their practice and experience, rather than from any more ambitious theoretical analysis. This is partly because EMU is perceived as being more easily associated with the affective domain, or the domain of feeling, than with the cognitive domain. It is related to intangibles such as values, frames of mind, attitudes and self esteem, and so many of the questions about it and about its

outcomes are not easily answered, and are rarely a simple matter of statistics or tests. There is a parallel with the sort of judgements made by teachers in the humanities, where a degree of subjectivity and a fairly wide margin of error often has to be accepted.

It is possible to use the existing literature to produce lists of aims for EMU and to write about these in detail. This is done to some extent in the EMU guide. (It has also been done in a very interesting way by Clem McCartney in a paper for SACHR). However, it ought now to be possible and useful to begin to translate these essentially abstract ideas into more tangible and practical outcomes. This has not been done before because there has not been time, and because it is not easy. A start might now be made and this would lead to more sophisticated and useful forms of evaluation.

#### EVALUATION

It is an axiom that the system of evaluation to be used should be as sophisticated in its structure and sensitive in its procedures as the object of the evaluation. In particular, with something as multi-faceted, and of necessity imprecise, as community relations, it is not possible to give simple or unqualified answers to any evaluative questions. What is needed instead is an evaluation schema which generates a profile of the constituent activities both with respect to a number of aspects of the work and to a number of differing interest groups. Evaluation therefore demands as many resources and as much work and planning as the innovation it seeks to illuminate.

It is useful to begin by distinguishing between short-term and long-term evaluation. The first is comparatively easier to do but the second probably provides more valuable information. We will deal only with short-term evaluation here, and we can think of this as having three different forms, each providing a progressively sharper focus and each leading to a more complex and detailed picture.

- Activities  
measures*
- a. The first form is relatively uncomplicated in that it records the external manifestations of activity. This includes descriptive narratives, background data and elementary descriptive statistics. It would include, for example, a classification of types of projects, the number of each type, the number of schools (children, teachers) involved in each individual project, the time involved, the number of meetings, the amount of money received, and so on.
  - b. The second form involves trying to measure changes in observable or accessible behaviour of participants in EMU activities. This might include level of factual knowledge, awareness of distinctions and differences, and possibly some measure of understanding. These are essentially cognitive

outcomes, and they must be distinguished from less tangible things such as attitudes and perceptions. Within the educational community there is a considerable knowledge of the 'technology' involved in evaluation of this type, and of its limitations and about how its interpretation may need to be qualified. However comparatively little current activity within EMU is planned with specific cognitive outcomes of this kind in mind, and it may be that more attention should be given to this aspect. One possible approach to this is through the formal school curriculum, and through GCSE examinations.

- c. The third form centres on the more intangible outcomes of the process, that is the extent to which attitudes and perceptions have been changed. These deep-rooted and comparatively ineluctable matters are more difficult to measure and, unlike the second level, there does not as yet exist a widely acceptable and reliable range of techniques for doing it. This, therefore, is the area most in need of creative thought and research. Much of the most useful work in the past has been done by social psychologists attempting to test the 'contact' hypothesis, but little of this has been specific to Northern Ireland, and most of it has employed standard tests and has used comparatively short time-spans. There is a need for more sensitive and less direct approaches to try to uncover the complex and often concealed personal feelings which are related to intolerance and bias.

To summarise, the first is a matter of data-collection from existing sources and can be done immediately, perhaps in a more coordinated and organised way than presently. The second involves a slightly more long-term perspective but justifies more attention than it currently receives. If those involved with EMU were encouraged to begin to be more precise about at least some of the expected learning outcomes of their work then this sort of evaluation could become more important. The third area is the most difficult and demands further research and creative thought. Some work of this sort is going on (for example in the Inter School Links project in Strabane) but probably not enough, and it may be that more resources are needed to provide the necessary thinking and originality.

Seamus Dunn  
January, 1989.