



**EDITOR'S NOTE:** *In 2006 International Educator began a feature article series on international education and peace resolution in divided regions of the world faced with conflict. Articles in the series are published occasionally in the magazine. This article, the third installment of the series, focuses on Northern Ireland (earlier articles were about Cyprus and the Israeli/Palestinian conflict). This author traveled to the region in August 2006 and interviewed several leading figures making efforts toward peace.*

# A LABORATORY OF CONFLICT AND

## PEOPLE IN MANY PARTS OF THE WORLD LIVE AMONG

one another despite vast differences—but it isn't always an easy road to peace among separate communities. Northern Ireland has witnessed more than its fair share of conflict, which has been symbolized by religious differences between Catholics and Protestants but primarily occasioned by significant political and economic disparity between the two communities. But today, the region sees a brighter future as the winds of conflict seem to have shifted and peace appears to be on the horizon. To help bridge the divide and ensure a lasting peace for the future, academics and higher education institutions have been instrumental in furthering the peace process.

A turning point for Northern Ireland toward peace occurred in the spring of 1998 when the Belfast (or Good Friday) Agreement brought the promise of peace and stability to a region that had been involved in continuous violent struggle for nearly three decades. The history of the enmity between the two communities in Northern Ireland is long and complicated (see “A Simplified Look at a Complex Struggle”). But the two sides—the majority community that is primarily Protestant and desires to remain in union with Great Britain, and the minority community that is primarily Catholic and wishes to see the six counties of Northern Ireland rejoined to the Republic of Ireland—still have a long way to go in bringing their common home to a final and permanent settlement.

Since the agreement was reached the international community has often praised the people and leaders of Northern Ireland for the great strides they have made to date—Unionist David Trimble and Nationalist John Hume shared the 1998 Nobel Peace Prize for brokering the agreement. But, most of the local people will concede that although they do not believe that violence on any significant scale will return, the political situation is still very tense.

**Mural art is a time honored tradition in Northern Ireland for expressing political and social messages. These murals from Derry and Belfast articulate the fears, desires, hopes and history of the Nationalist/Republican and Unionist/Loyalist communities.**





# PEACE

**As the citizens of Northern Ireland slowly build on the peace brought about in the late 1990s, educators and researchers are developing new tools for exploring conflict resolution and applying theory directly to problems on the ground.**

**Text and photos by  
Christopher Murphy**

The dove, hand, and barbed wire image is a detail from the hunger strike memorial near Free Derry Corner. The image is taken from the prison poetry of Bobby Sands who died on hunger strike in 1981.





The mural of a young boy with a gas mask and petrol bomb was produced by the Bogside Artists, Kevin Hansson, William Kelly and Tom Kelly. It commemorates the 'Battle of the Bogside' in 1969. The UVF mural from Belfast is intended to show paramilitary might as well as commemorate five UVF members.

Nevertheless, a general sense of optimism can be felt in the region today that was not to be found prior to 1998. As former president of the Republic of Ireland, Mary Robinson noted in an interview with *IE* in early 2006, "the Good Friday Agreement requires that human rights institutions be established in both Dublin and Belfast, and this has happened. And now those institutions are beginning to work together." The cooperation seen since the agreement, though not perfect, is commonly acknowledged today as an excellent example of how a peace process can work if both sides can come to see the value in working politically rather than through physical force.

In Northern Ireland the continuing work toward a lasting peace is both driving and being assisted by work at the local universities. Northern Ireland has become a wonderful laboratory for studying and working through the implications that follow on a successful peace agreement. As President Robinson explains, the current situation is "being studied by university students who are seeing in practice how you try to build on a peace process, how you build

more confidence between communities, as well as what's happening in the political relations between the two governments and the local political parties."

## Education Act Gives Rise to Civil Rights Movement

After the upheaval of the Irish Civil War in the 1920s, there were sporadic episodes of sectarian unrest from the 1930s through the mid-1950s. But, community-wide violence temporarily disappeared from Northern Ireland as the new, thoroughly Unionist/Loyalist regime took firm control and the newly independent Irish Free State (later to become the Republic of Ireland) struggled to deal with its own internal problems. For decades, the Nationalist/Republican sentiment in Northern Ireland lay almost dormant, and the minority Catholic community accepted somewhat fatalistically their political and social status as second class citizens. Although they suffered systematic discrimination in housing, employment, and many other critical areas, and were sometimes disenfranchised by gerrymandering and other means, they made little or no effectively organized efforts to force change in the system.

However, an important piece of legislation passed in Great Britain in 1944, and extended to Northern Ireland shortly afterward, was to have a significant effect on the way in which the Catholic minority dealt with their circumstances. The Education Act of 1947 made primary and secondary education free to all citizens in Northern Ireland and provided funds for some high-achieving students to attend university. This had a profound effect on the ability of the Nationalist/Republican community, which until that time had little access to higher education.

As Paul Arthur, professor of politics at the University of Ulster explains, the "Nationalist Party at that stage was led by people, very few of whom would have had a university education. They would have been small businessmen, publicans, that sort of thing. The SDLP (Social Democratic Labour Party) was formed in 1970 by that first generation that had taken advantage of the Education Act of '47. Up until then, if you were a working class Catholic you couldn't afford to go to the universities. The act provided funding for anyone who passed what are called A Levels. If you got good enough grades in A Levels, you got funding to go to university."

The civil rights movement, founded in the late 1960s by a group of young activists, got the great majority of its leaders such as Bernadette Devlin, Michael Farrell, and John Hume directly from the pool of young people in the Catholic community who had benefited from this liberalization of access to education.

Arthur says, "The classic example of the Education Act, the personification of it, is John Hume. If you read any of Hume's



biographies you'll see he came from a poor background very near (the University of Ulster, Magee Campus). His father had been unemployed for years and years and years—there just wasn't any work. Hume passed the 11+ (exams to determine which secondary schools students can attend), went to secondary school, and then went on to university. And the people who formed the SDLP were that generation of university graduates."

Arthur notes that he, too, as a young man from the Bogside neighborhoods in Derry\*, gained his education through the benefits of the act. Political activism became very common among his contemporaries. "This was just a natural outlet for us. But my parents' generation just wouldn't have had that, and what they would have had was a huge degree of fatalism—'there's nothing we can do.' The system had beaten them down—whereas my generation said, 'no, we're not going to take any more of this.'"

However, the optimism and passion of the early nonviolent period in the civil rights movement gave way to violence after a number of attacks on the civil rights marchers, culminating in the Bloody Sunday killings of 14 demonstrators by British troops in Derry in 1972. These events led a number of the activists to abandon the nonviolent tactics and sign up with the Provisional Irish Republican Army (known generally as the Provos or IRA).

### Continuing the Search for a Peaceful Resolution

However, some among the academics, activists, and politicians of this generation continued to search for ways to bridge the longstanding antagonism between the communities in an effort to find some form of political accommodation. Although their efforts were often outside the notice of the press and the community at large during the height of what they refer to as the "Troubles," they would eventually play important roles in the peace process that developed in the 1990s.

In the early years of heavy violence during the Troubles, a great deal of attention was paid to the conflict by the press and academics from outside Northern Ireland. "At one level this place became massively overresearched in terms of the number of people who were scrutinizing it and looking up and doing research on it," says Professor Tony Gallagher of the Queen's University Graduate School of Education. But initially, this work was not paralleled from within Northern Ireland. Although some individuals were making a few inroads on the topic, it was not catching on at a more institutional level. "I don't think there's much evidence that there was an institutional attempt to find any way of dealing with it," Gallagher notes.

Part of the reason for this was the relatively insulated nature of the universities. Unlike the educational system that feeds into them,

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\* The name of Northern Ireland's second city is often a point of contention—Unionists/Loyalists prefer Londonderry, while Nationalists/Republicans prefer the older name of Derry. Because the city has a majority Catholic population, and for consistency, we are using Derry throughout this article.



Another work by The Bogside Artists, this mural combines a dove for peace with the oak leaf—symbol of Derry. The multi-hued squares represent diversity.

## A Simplified Look at a Complex Struggle

The original cause of the repeated struggles known locally in Northern Ireland as the "Troubles" can be traced back to an action in 1610 by the English Crown called the Ulster Plantation. The Plantation began shortly after the English defeated a nine-year-long rebellion against Queen Elizabeth I by the old Gaelic-speaking leaders of the province of Ulster. Ulster had proven to be the hardest of Ireland's four provinces for the English to control.

In an attempt to rid themselves once and for all of the rebelliousness of the Ulster Irish natives, the English took the best lands away from the Irish, brought in loyal Englishmen and Scotsmen, and gave them the land.

By the definitions of the time, a loyal subject had to be a Protestant because the English rulers were Protestants. The Irish never accepted this concept and remained Catholic. The Plantation created a privileged, Protestant community in Northern Ireland that owed its allegiance and its protection to the English Crown (and later the British government).

Over the ensuing centuries, there has been much tension between these two groups and occasionally open warfare. But when Britain finally tired of ruling the rebellious island in the early twentieth century and looked to grant Ireland its independence, the Protestant community of Ulster insisted that they be allowed to remain part of Great Britain. An accommodation was reached in which all of Ireland would become independent with the exception of those six counties in the northeast that had majority Protestant populations. Many of the Catholics living in those counties object vehemently to this as they were not consulted and would not have agreed to this arrangement, which they see as perpetuating a system that keeps their community in second class status.



# Political Primer on Northern Ireland

**NATIONALIST**—Drawn mostly from the Catholic community, Nationalists would prefer to see a reunification with the Republic of Ireland, but many would be willing to compromise on a hybrid arrangement giving Northern Ireland ties to both Great Britain and the Republic. The largest political party among the Nationalists is the Social Democratic Labour Party (SDLP), which is led by Mark Durkan.

**REPUBLICAN**—The more politically extreme version of the Nationalist. Republicans are sometimes subdivided into those in favor of physical force (who supported the activities of the Irish Republican Army, or IRA) and those who, though uncompromising in their vision of an Ireland separated from Great Britain and united to the Republic, are unwilling to sanction violence. The primary political party of Republicanism is Sinn Féin. The party has been often criticized for having direct ties to the paramilitary IRA. Sinn Féin officially denies that these ties exist. Gerry Adams is the leader of Sinn Féin.

**UNIONIST**—Drawn primarily from the Protestant community, Unionists wish to maintain Northern Ireland's formal connection to Great Britain. However, they have generally shown willingness to compromise on the establishment of a number of cross-border institutions in cooperation with the Republic of Ireland. There are two significant political parties currently in Unionism. The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), which is the larger, is led by the Reverend Ian Paisley. Although the DUP does support devolution of government authority to the local level, the party does not support the Good Friday Agreement. The slightly smaller Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) is more moderate than the DUP and does support the Good Friday Agreement. UUP is led by Sir Reg Empey.

**LOYALIST**—The more extreme version of the Unionist. Generally they favor little or no accommodation be granted to the Nationalists/Republican community's demands and want few if any ties established with the Republic of Ireland. There are a number of well-armed paramilitary Loyalist organizations such as the LVF, UDF, UDA, UFF, etc. The Loyalist political parties are small, but the largest, the Progressive Unionist Party (PUP), has been linked to the paramilitaries in the Ulster Volunteer Force (UVF). In an unusual move in May 2006, David Ervine, the leader of the PUP, announced that when the Northern Ireland Assembly is reconvened he will join the UUP contingent, although he will continue to head the PUP.

the institutions of higher learning in Northern Ireland have always been, at least officially, nonsectarian. As Gallagher points out, "both universities (Queen's University and the University of Ulster) have always been mixed with students from both communities. And in fact, both universities have always been somewhat secular in the way that they operate." This nonsectarian ethos led, in some cases, to a feeling of separation from the Troubles. "In universities it was easier to praise yourself for being part of a mixed institution that was above all that squabble. It was easy to say 'there may well be problems, but they exist elsewhere.' And so it was possible to comfort yourself with that and just try to get on with things," he says.

But, as the conflict wore on, a number of faculty and researchers began to see that they were in a unique position to be able to affect the search for an end to the conflict and the way in which the peace, once established, might bring about a more equitable and tolerant society in Northern Ireland and elsewhere.

## INCORE Works for Peace at Home and Abroad

The University of Ulster's Coleraine campus took the lead early on under the direction of Professor John Darby, when he established the Centre for the Study of Conflict in the 1980s. Toward the end of that decade, Darby began to realize that to focus on Northern Ireland alone was useful, but there was a lot of important international work being done on the topic of conflict resolution and they needed to link the center's work to it. He hoped this would facilitate both learning within Northern Ireland about successful programs and groundbreaking research in other parts of the world, and help scholars and students from abroad to access the work going on in Northern Ireland.



**Gillian Robinson,**  
director of INCORE.

"From that, there grew the idea of a new center, INCORE, International Conflict REsearch, as it's now called. It would do comparative, international research and so on. And the politics of the time dictated that INCORE be based here in Derry, so the Centre for the Study of Conflict continued with its Northern Ireland focus, and INCORE had the international focus," says Gillian Robinson, current director of INCORE and ARK (the Northern Ireland Social and Political Archive).

Eventually, the work of the original center was subsumed by INCORE, which now handles both internal research on Northern Ireland and international projects.

Paul Arthur, who teaches at the University of Ulster and is an associate with INCORE says that the organization often works with representatives from regions or nations around the globe who are involved in conflict. They either invite key individuals to Northern Ireland or go to other countries to help local leaders and academics assess their own peace process and discern how Northern Ireland's experience might apply.



**Paul Arthur, director of the master's program in peace and conflict studies at the University of Ulster.**

Arthur believes this has been a very significant opportunity for the University of Ulster to contribute to peace in other hotspots. "We say, 'these are the things we did and there may be lessons in this for you.'" Arthur has gone to Columbia, Sri Lanka, Macedonia, the Middle East, and other areas to assist with work on conflict resolution as part of the INCORE program.

Individuals from the Centre for the Study of Conflict and INCORE have played a direct role in some parts of the peace process in Northern Ireland.

In some cases, the reasons for this have been personal as well as professional. Northern Ireland is not a big place, with a population of only 1.7 million. Many of the academics at INCORE have worked on various projects with one or more of the key political parties. But even more tangential relationships can sometimes lead to playing a positive role in the peace process.

Arthur recalls one such instance when he was called upon to help make some important connections. In the mid 1990s a major conference was being planned for New York in the period

immediately after the Northern Ireland ceasefires went into effect. The meeting had the support of the governments of the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland, as well as the U.S. government. It was to include major players from various areas which, at that time, were either involved in conflicts or currently working through the post-agreement phases of a peace process. Representatives from the Middle East, Eastern Europe, and South Africa were going to be in attendance. But the Americans wanted to get the participation of Sinn Féin (the primary political party of Republicanism), so Arthur was asked to make the overture to Martin McGuinness, one of the key figures in the party's leadership.

"Martin grew up two streets away from me in this city (Derry)," he says. But Arthur felt he had to warn the Americans that the fact that he had known McGuinness for many years might not help their cause. As he says, "once the Troubles broke out, I didn't speak to Martin McGuinness between the late 1960s and the early 1990s." Although they were both from the Catholic Bogside neighborhood, their paths had diverged over time. McGuinness had become a major player in the Republican movement while Arthur had committed himself to more moderate politics.

Nonetheless, the meeting was successful. "When the meeting was over (the Americans) said, 'we would have guessed that you were speaking to McGuinness every week of the year.'" He credits this,

**These two murals by The Bogside Artists depict a British soldier breaking in the door of a Catholic home during Operation Motorman in 1972 and boys running from CS gas. The artists intended this second mural to be a cautionary reminder to the young of the dangers inherent in civil conflict**





not to his own negotiating skills but to the fact that “the Republicans were into the business of beginning to do business, and they saw the advantage in getting involved in this immediately.” Sinn Féin’s participation led to the first public handshakes between a British government minister, McGuinness, and Sinn Féin President Gerry Adams and, as Arthur notes, “the symbolism of that was huge.”

### Graduate and Undergrad Programs Benefit from the Peace

The University of Ulster also developed a very well-regarded master’s degree program in peace and conflict studies that Arthur directs. This program began to thrive in recent years once the level of violence in Northern Ireland dropped after the 1994 ceasefire took hold. As Gillian Robinson notes, the master’s program “has benefited from the peace. Over the years it has always attracted a number of external students. But once the agreements were signed, then we had many more applicants from outside.”

The peace and conflict studies program was founded with an eye to how it might influence the conflict in Northern Ireland and elsewhere, not just as an academic exercise. “We started our program in 1987 on a part-time basis because some of us started to say that at some stage this conflict has to come to an end. And when it does come to an end, we have to put people in place who’ve got some understanding of these issues,” says Arthur. “And we tried to identify key players from the churches, from education, from the trade unions, from business, etc. And that’s the way we sold it.”

He, like Robinson, thinks that the master’s program at the University of Ulster has benefited from the recent years of greater peace and stability as the politicians work on trying to implement the Good Friday Agreement. He says that although the program has received little in the way of marketing, word-of-mouth has significantly increased demand. “Once the ceasefires came, that changed the dynamic completely. We began to get the odd overseas student, Japanese or Scandinavian or Irish-American. From 1998 on, the master’s program began to get about two-thirds of the students from overseas. We’re now getting students from every inhabited continent in the world,” says Arthur.

Some very competitive academic scholarship programs are sending students to the University of Ulster to gain an inside perspective of the ongoing peace process. “This year I’ve got a guy who’s on a Mitchell scholarship,” says Arthur. “I have a student from Columbia on a British Council scholarship, and I’ve got a guy from Canada on a Rotary scholarship. So we are attracting genuinely highly distinguished students from around the world, and they want to come here because it is a perfect laboratory for studying issues of peace and conflict.”

Undergraduates have also begun to see Northern Ireland as a relatively safe environment in which to study an actively occurring peace process. Robinson says the connection is pretty obvious, “if you’re an American parent of a young person, you probably don’t



This is a composite image of the civil rights marches of the late 1960s. The artists included the images of several prominent community leaders in the mural.

want to think of them coming into a conflict where there’s bombs exploding everyday. The less Northern Ireland is on the news internationally the more attractive it is to foreign students.” Queen’s University’s Gallagher sees the phenomenon in Belfast as well. “The numbers of overseas students coming here is picking up. It’s almost as if the appeal is that there is still a whiff of Cordite about the place without any danger any more. It’s been generally a very positive test case of trying to deal with the aftermath of a conflict.”

But, although the majority of the violence is now apparently in the past, there are still many hurdles for the people of Northern Ireland to overcome if they are to build a truly integrated society and a lasting peace.

### Voluntary Segregation: The Primary and Secondary Education Systems

One key example of this can be seen in the education system itself. Although the higher education system in Northern Ireland has a long history of being nondenominational, the primary and secondary education systems, for the most part, remain divided by religion. Shortly after the partitioning of the island in the 1920s, there was an attempt



Unionist marches like this one in downtown Belfast are a significant point of contention as they usually commemorate Protestant military victories over the Catholic minority. Catholics consider them triumphalist exercises and often protest when the marches come through Catholic neighborhoods.



**Tony Gallagher**  
of the Queen's  
University Graduate  
School of Education.

by the British government to create a single state-supported school system that was open to all, but it was soon overwhelmed by the segregated nature of the society.

Tony Gallagher explains, "Lord Londonderry tried to establish a state system of schools which was designed to encourage everyone to participate and where religious education and religious instruction weren't allowed in the school curriculum." However, the majority Protestant community effectively ended this evenhanded approach. "Protestant churches opposed that and tried to get various changes, like getting Protestant church representation on all the school boards and getting every day to begin with a Bible reading. All of which had the net effect of creating a state school system that was, for all practical purposes, a Protestant school system," says Gallagher.

Although this did not sit well with the Catholic community, their primary objection was not that the state was supporting a Protestant schools system, but "the gripe that the Catholic school authorities had was that they weren't getting the same amount of state support," says Gallagher, because the Catholics had set up their own system. Eventually, the Catholics were able to get equal state support for their schools. This has meant that at the primary and secondary levels, the children in the two communities almost never mix.

Even their sporting activities, which might normally be expected to create a bridge between otherwise separate school communities don't have that effect for young people in Northern Ireland. "A lot of sports clubs would sort of reinforce some of those processes—rugby,

cricket, and things like that are Protestant sports in Northern Ireland and other things, like Gaelic football and hurling would be Catholic sports. You also have some ridiculous things like cycling, there are two organizations, and even in ten pin bowling," Gallagher says.

Arthur recalled that, when he was growing up in Derry's Bogside neighborhood, he actually had the unusual experience of participating on a religiously mixed swimming team. "It was pretty unusual. For example, the club was called City of Derry, and we went away in competitions. So a lot of the supporters would shout, 'Come on Londonderry,' but the rest of us would be saying, come on Derry," he said.



**General Secretary**  
of the Alliance Party  
**Stephen Farry.**

Stephen Farry, a leader of the Unionist leaning, politically moderate Alliance Party says that this separation has had significant impact on community relations. It has "contributed to the divisions in society, and it is a product of the divisions. In turn, it has reinforced the divisions by educating children separately and reinforcing in their minds that they are separate and different from other people in Northern Ireland."

## A Small Integrated School Sector

There is a small formally mixed school sector that began independently in the early 1980s that is now receiving government support, but only about 5 percent of Northern Ireland's primary and secondary school students attend these newer institutions. Former British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Mo Mowlam was a strong supporter of growing the integrated school system during her tenure,



but even those in the local communities who support the idea of greater levels of contact between the Protestant and Catholic students feel skeptical about the possibilities for this alternative. They note that the huge existing infrastructure of the currently segregated systems tends to limit the need for creating these new mixed schools, especially given the current downward trend in the population demographics of Northern Ireland. The result is that very few exist today, and the mixed school sector is not likely to grow rapidly in the future.

Gillian Robinson says, "The fact of the matter is that only four to five percent of kids in Northern Ireland go to formally integrated schools. And if I (wanted) to send a child to a formally integrated school, I'd have very little choice to do so. Even here in Derry, which is the second city, there's only one primary school and one secondary school that are formally integrated."

Gallagher notes that the debate about separate schools has been around since the period immediately after partition. "Since the very early days when the violence broke out, a lot of external commentators came in and said, 'This is crazy. Religious violence, sectarian violence, all these sectarian divisions, and you have separate schools. Put all of the students in the same schools and the problem goes away.'"

But, in practice this has been much more difficult than it might seem to outside observers. Both the Protestant and Catholic school authorities, with the backing of their respective communities, have strongly objected to abolishing their separate systems. Both sides claim that they teach tolerance in their schools, so they don't see themselves as a source of the problem. Interestingly, it is the minority Catholic authorities in particular who object most strongly because they say the primary problem is one of lack of economic opportunity and political power for their community rather than one of integration within the schools.

### School Collaboration Across Communities

An alternative concept has gained significant traction recently. The idea is to have the government encourage significant collaboration among schools from across the divide to not only improve the amount of contact between students, but also help overcome other areas of need for resources.

The idea, says Gallagher, is "to allow separate schools to exist, but by linking them formally together, try to make the experience that the young person has at the school much more diverse. The system is going to remain largely segregated for the foreseeable future. So the tack we're taking now is to try to encourage formal collaborations between schools. It's linked into other changes going on in the education system about trying to ensure every young person has access to the wide range of curriculum choice, and trying to incorporate that in a statutory way because no single school will be able to provide a full range of choice. So we're accepting the reality of the institutional barriers that exist at the school level, but to trying make those barriers more porous."



This stained glass window in the Derry Guildhall commemorates those killed in the city during the Troubles.

### Bringing in the 'Other Voice'

The academic community has been working on other ways to help make contact possible and to help teachers bring the other community's perspective into the schools that remain segregated. Much of this work began to get official sanction in the 1990s, and it is becoming part of the regular school curriculum. But there are many challenges. In their graduate work with teachers, the Graduate School of Education at Queen's has often found the going difficult.

"One of the things we said to the teachers here is that in the absence of the other voice, the teacher is probably the only person who can bring the other voice into the classroom," Gallagher says. "But that means that a teacher in a Catholic school should be able to make the case for the Orange Order's (a Unionist group) right to march anywhere in Northern Ireland. Or a teacher in a Protestant school should be able to make the case for the right of a local (Catholic) resident's group to try to stop the Orangemen from holding a march down the roads in their housing estate. But when you raise this with a group of teachers they often look to their feet."

He continues, "first of all, you're not sure if they can do it because I'm not sure that a lot of Catholics could actually, in any meaningful sense, say this is why the Orangemen should be able to march through a Catholic village because they literally don't understand the case at all. And

similarly, very many Protestants couldn't make the case for a resident's group having a right to try and stop a march from happening."

In addition, teachers sometimes fear that playing 'devil's advocate' in the classroom might cost them personally. "There's also a concern about the reaction of parents, or other teachers in the schools, or the pupils. So that's the sort of thing you've got to break through," he says.

"For example if you start talking about victims and you discover that in your classroom you've got kids whose fathers have been killed, how are you going to deal with that? The schools traditionally have taken a position that you don't talk about it, and hopefully it'll go away. And so what we started doing then was trying to give our teachers access to classroom management skills, to show them that it was possible to deal with these things in ways which were safe and productive and constructive," Gallagher says.

### A New Tack on Citizenship Education

One of the initiatives that the universities have been working on in recent years is a new curriculum for primary and secondary schools dealing with citizenship education. As Gallagher notes, this is a very prickly subject in Northern Ireland. "You have a fundamental problem because the people ask, 'citizens of what?'" The Nationalist/Republican community tends to see themselves as Irish, while the Unionist/Loyalist community sees themselves as British.

The University of Ulster developed an innovative curriculum that changed the focus of the citizenship materials and the entire curriculum. "Most citizenship education programs in most countries are about, 'here is our system of government, this is how you vote, this is how parties are organized, this is how decisions are made, this is our flag, this is our anthem, this is our history,'" says Gallagher. "We have none of those things that we share—in fact, all of the things that are part of the focus of contention."

To overcome this they developed a program that, as Gallagher puts it, says to students, "here are the language and the processes and the principles upon which notions of citizenship rests. Now that you have this language and these tools and these concepts, be part of the conversation of trying to create a new society in Northern Ireland, informed by these sorts of principles and see them as (tools) to create a new society based on principles of inclusion, and justice, and equality."

### Hopeful, but Realistic

The pace of change in the late 1990s in Northern Ireland was swift and far reaching. But the conflict is very old and the wounds run deep. As anyone in Belfast or Derry can attest, virtually everyone in Northern Ireland has a friend or family member who fell victim to the violence of the last few de-

CADES. Additionally, the political stalemate that has ensued since the Democratic Unionist Party and Sinn Féin came out on top in the last election has been a source of consternation. The parties that originally brokered the agreement, primarily the Ulster Unionist Party and the SDLP, were more moderate, less strident in their rhetoric than Sinn Féin and the DUP.

In October of 2006 the British and Irish governments, along with key leaders within Northern Ireland worked out a process at a meeting in St. Andrews, Scotland intended to get Sinn Féin and the DUP to form a coalition so that the Northern Ireland assembly could once again take on local governance. A deadline of November 24, 2006 was set for the two parties to nominate a first minister (from the DUP) and a deputy first minister (from Sinn Féin). However, the day the deadline arrived, while the Assembly was in session at Stormont debating the requirements of the agreement, a longtime Loyalist extremist, Michael Stone, tried to storm past the guards with a gun and several nail bombs in an attempt to both end the session and kill members of the Assembly. Stone was subdued and the process appears to be back on track for the Assembly to be in operation again by this spring, although some critical issues remain to be resolved.

Despite this sort of difficulty the educators interviewed for this article were uniformly optimistic that virtually no matter what happens or does not happen in the political realm in the next year, the pervasive violence would not return.

As Gillian Robinson says, "I feel the peace has entered into everybody's way of life, and we don't expect that there will be a return to violence. And that somehow the next obstacle will be overcome, although it may not happen that quickly. In the early years after the ceasefire, every obstacle and every timeline that wasn't met was seen as an absolute disaster. Now it has gone on so often with things only being resolved right at the wire or not being resolved, but finding another way around it, that it may keep going."

This attitude—that the peace process has taken on a momentum of its own that can't easily be derailed by the likes of Michael Stone—

is a very hopeful sign. And the educators of Northern Ireland will continue to fan the spark of peace that has taken hold in the last decade. The longer the two communities refuse to let the violent extremist from either side dictate the terms of progress, there is a reasonable hope that eventually the momentum toward a lasting peace in both communities may become too great for the bomb-throwers to overcome. **IE**

**CHRISTOPHER MURPHY** is the editor of *IE*. He holds a master's degree in Irish Studies and is active in programs that promote interest in the culture, history, and arts of both Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.



**WEB EXTRA!**

For a compendium of useful resources on the history of Northern Ireland's conflict and the current state of the peace process go to [www.nafsa.org/webextra](http://www.nafsa.org/webextra).