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New information from four surveys

INTEGRATED SCHOOLING

A research note by Dr. JAMES RUSSELL

OBSERVERS of campaigns for integrated schooling in Northern Ireland must take account of the Churches versus the State conflicts in educational provision and of instability in the political regime. Since the setting up of the Northern Ireland regime over fifty years ago there has been almost continual conflict between either Protestant or Catholic Churches and the State over how and where children should be educated. The educational conflict has been mirrored from the communal group conflicts between those with Irish nationalist sentiments and those who stress a British, or Ulster Protestant, way of life. Political disorders and population movements to religious ghettos have made outside observers of educational provision conclude that many "neighbourhood schools" must be segregated religious schools for some time to come. Yet the debate on integrated education continues with unabated force. Campaigners for integrated schooling insist that compulsory education along sectarian lines helps maintain a conflict between adults which began before the introduction of compulsory education. Integrated schooling is seen as a means of softening (not eradicating) the lines between the religious communities of Northern Ireland allowing greater inter-religious co-operation, fewer barriers in a number of social situations, and a reduction of disorder.

This present contribution to the debate on integrated schooling in Northern Ireland is mainly concerned with the possible social and political effects of the friendship patterns of some four thousand schoolboys and one thousand adults. The research is also concerned with the possible effects of limited integrated education, the demand for integrated education, and whether or not friendship between religions among schoolboys can be used as a surrogate for integrated schooling. *Only the very briefest indication of new research findings can be presented in this article.*

The extraction of knowledge on topics other than those which were the focus of the original surveys is the aim of the secondary analysis of the four surveys in this article. These surveys were gathered between 1971 and 1975 in many different parts of Northern Ireland. The first two schoolboy surveys could be regarded as Province wide samples. (Secondary Schoolboys 1971: N=2,000). (Primary schoolboys 1972: N = 1,000). The third schoolboy survey was gathered in Greater Craigavon only. (Secondary schoolboys 1975: N = 1,000). The adult sample (tenants of the Northern Ireland Housing Executive) was collected in every town of Northern Ireland having a population of 5,000 or more. (1975: N = 1,000). All three schoolboy samples contained approximately correct proportions by religion and social class. The adult sample, whilst being mainly a working class sample, contained approximately correct proportions by

Northern Ireland (Census 1971).

Distributions of friendships between religions in Northern Ireland show that, taking all the four samples together, approximately three-fifths of the population probably have one or more friends in the other religious group. Protestants in Northern Ireland are almost as friendly with Catholics as Catholics are with

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"Among schoolboys there seems to be a distinct tendency for friendships between religions to diminish between 1971 and 1975. That seventy per cent of adults can report having friends in the other religion is some indication that political discord and disorder can proceed at the same time as much social friendship between the religions of Northern Ireland." — (Irish Times photograph.)

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