



In Memory of
Florrie Armstrong

Educate Together Official Statement - In Memory of Florrie Armstrong

We are very sad to have to announce the death of Florrie Armstrong, the first principal teacher of an Educate Together school. Florrie was an inspirational teacher and educationalist, a native of Cavan and a life-long champion of child-centred and multi-denominational education in Ireland and abroad.

She played a leading part in the development of the 'New' Curriculum for National Schools in the 1960s which led to its adoption in 1971. This curriculum - which was piloted in her school - introduced an integrated child-centred approach to Irish education for the first time.

She was an inspirational leader of St. Patrick's Church of Ireland National School in Dalkey and after a short period in which she advised the Nigerian government on teacher education, she took up the post of principal of Ireland's first Educate Together school - the Dalkey School Project National School - which opened in Dun Laoghaire in 1978. During this period of her professional life she played a leading role in developing the pedagogy, curriculum, policy base and general approach that now typify the Educate

Together model. In particular, she laid the foundations for what is now known as the "Learn Together" ethical education curriculum. This is a core curriculum that is taught in all our schools and which has been internationally recognised as an example of best practice in inter-cultural education.

Florrie led the Dalkey School Project N.S. until her retirement in 1990. She saw the school into its permanent building in Glenageary and the educational movement it established strongly based with eight member schools.

Florrie was widely respected for her passionate commitment to the education of children and the pivotal role she played in establishing the Educate Together movement. After her retirement she again played an important role advising the Zambian government on its system of teacher education.

Florrie was awarded the inaugural 'Seed Award' for the founders of Educate Together in May 2006 and was honoured by the President of Ireland for her role in September 2008. She is greatly missed and our sympathies go out to all who loved her, her family, friends and colleagues where ever they are.

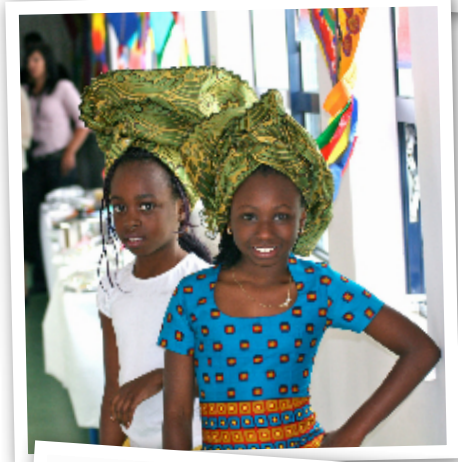


Photo Memories



Florrie was a pioneer in exploratory learning and the use of the full range of arts in primary education - Above she is dressing up with the children at Vesey Place in the 1970s



The first classes in an Educate Together school - Vesey Place Dun Laoghaire: Florrie with all the staff and children, September 1978



Florrie with Gemma Hussey T.D., Minister for Education and Micheal Johnston, Chairperson of the Dalkey School Project at the official opening of the Dalkey School Project new building.





"I saw no good reason why children of different religions should be educated apart. I saw no good reason why parents should be kept outside the school gate."

Florence Armstrong, 2003



Tributes at Memorial Service - Christ Church Bray, January 10th 2010

Paul Rowe, CEO, Educate Together

In the history of Irish education in the latter half of the 20th Century, Florence Armstrong made an impressive contribution. She also made a significant contribution to the development of teacher education in Nigeria and East Africa.

Florence Armstrong, or “Florrie” as she was known to all in Educate Together, was a dedicated, talented and forward-thinking teacher. During the 1960s she played an important role advocating for and piloting new curriculum approaches. She caught the attention of the Department of Education as a pioneer of the “child-centred” approach to teaching, which took at its starting point the developmental needs of the individual child and organised a learning experience around that. All the stories about Florrie’s teaching emphasise that this approach was to her a fundamental and heart-felt belief.

She was one of those pioneering and powerful women of the last century who had the courage and inner confidence to break moulds and quietly but firmly insist on progress. Her teaching was all about empowering the individual, providing a rich learning environment and making an decisive break from the old ‘chalk and authority’ of the past. She

famously stated her position publicly on RTE television in 1974 when she declared “I do not approve of conditioning of children - indoctrination - in any situation whatsoever.” She “saw no reason why children of different religions should be not be educated together” and she “saw no reason why parents should be kept outside the school gate.”

The child-centred approach was piloted in her school and was finally introduced nationally as “The New Curriculum” of 1971. This approach is the foundation of all curriculum and methodology in Irish primary education today and hopefully will soon be adopted in our second-level schools.

For this work, Florrie was held in high esteem by the Inspectorate of the Department of Education. In 1974, they approved her selection as a curriculum expert to be sent on secondment to assist the Nigerian government in establishing colleges of teacher education. This was a programme run by APSO (Agency for Personal Service Overseas). She worked to develop curriculum approaches to address tribal and gender differences. She ended up running a large college for girls. She extended her stay working in Bida, in the Niger province of Nigeria until 1978 when she applied for and accepted the post of principal of Ireland’s first Educate Together school. The letter of offer arrived by diplomatic courier. Without

hesitation, she accepted the role in a school that had no premises or permanency. In her quiet and indomitable fashion, she gave up a secure post for a pioneering role that most of her colleagues told her was fraught with danger and controversy.

It is for this role that Florrie earned herself a unique and lasting place in the history of Irish education.

It was Florrie Armstrong who first made the Educate Together approach work in the classroom and in the daily life of an Irish school. At the time of the foundation of the Dalkey School Project, she was surrounded by a passionate and purposeful group of parents - radicals and reformers, politicians, lawyers, officials, theorists and activists. A quite extraordinary group of people. The principles agreed on were radical and a complete departure from previous models of education in Ireland. The patron was no longer to be a bishop, but a democratic and corporate body. The school was to be legally committed to gender equity, to the child-centred approach and to be “Multi-denominational and multi-cultural, having an ethos where every child is equally respected and has equal rights of access to the school regardless of social, cultural or religious background or personal creed, and where all children are educated together in an atmosphere of respect”.

Tributes at Memorial Service - Christ Church Bray, January 10th 2010 (Continued...)

Paul Rowe, CEO, Educate Together (Continued...)

With her close colleagues Síle Harrington and Jayne Doran, Florrie tackled and solved the problems of putting these principles into practice. She expertly handled the challenges of difference and expectation, lack of resources and buildings and all the time, delivered an exceptional quality of teaching and learning for children.

In particular, Florrie and her colleagues set out the foundations for what we now know as the Learn Together ethical education curriculum that is a core programme in all Educate Together schools and has been internationally recognised as an example of best practice in the inter-cultural education.

All the stories we hear about her from children in school show an exceptional warmth and dedication to young people and their learning.

When the DSP was firmly established, safe in its permanent building and the Educate Together movement was growing all over the country, Florrie took her well-earned retirement. Assessing her work in the DSP, it is important to state today that without Florrie's contribution, professionalism and high educational reputation, the Educate Together movement would not have been built on such firm foundations and would not have been able to play the role it has in recent years.

In Florrie's case, retirement is a very poor description, because there then started a third career as an educational consultant. Working for APSO and Irish Aid, she again worked in teacher education in Africa and played a key role in a flagship educational project in Kasama in the Northern Province of Zambia. Working with regional and national officials she built capacity to train primary teachers. Officials refer to her courage to undertake 'horrendous rural journeys' to talk to teachers and to address attitudes to girls education, her work to develop curriculum resources, to address gender issues and her warmth and gentleness.

In 2006, Florrie was the first recipient of the 'seed' award for founders of Educate Together. The presentation was made by one of her first pupils Siobán O'Brien Green, who was then a Director of Educate Together, and Mary Hanafin T.D., then Minister of Education and Science. The seed award was also designed and made by a former pupil, Debbie Paul. She was also honoured by Mary McAleese, President of Ireland, at a ceremony in 2008 which marked the 30th Anniversary of the opening of the first Educate Together school.

I would like to finish by referring to Florrie's special personality. I only met Florrie on a few occasions, late in her life. However all the stories I have gathered to prepare for this tribute point to a person of quite exceptional quality. A quiet

and private person, unassuming, kind and gentle. A person of great warmth, especially to children. A person with the very highest order of inter-personal skills and an innate sensitivity to people no matter their age, station, class or creed. A superb communicator with precise economy of word and suggestion. An outstanding champion of the rights of women in education and society. Above all else, a real and practical contributor. Able to maintain excellent relationships with all manners of people whether high officials or unruly children. A woman of principle with great inner strength and confidence combined with courage, elegance and tact. She was, and remains, an inspirational figure for the principals and teachers of Educate Together schools.

Lastly, she had a wonderful saying for children that encouraged them to have the confidence in themselves to explore and manage a complicated and sometimes dangerous world. "Ships are safe in harbour, but that's not what ships are for."

Florrie demonstrated a special ability to sail difficult and challenging seas, to bring many cargoes safely back to port for the great benefit of many.

Now that she has returned to harbour for the last time, her place as one of the key pioneers in Irish education who laid out the agenda of most of what we aspire to in Irish education today and one of the women who made a real

Honouring the Contribution of Florrie Armstrong at the AGM of Educate Together in 2006



Pictures above and right show David Denny, Chairperson, Mary Hanafin T.D. Minister for Education and Science, Paul Rowe CEO, Florrie Armstrong, Debbie Paul, past pupil and designer of the award and Siobán O'Brien-Green, past pupil and Director of Educate Together, at the presentation of the first "Seed Award" for founders of Educate Together at the AGM of Educate Together held at the North Dublin National School Project in May 2006.



Florrie takes centre stage at the awards ceremony in September 2008, above.

Micheal Johnston, Professor Áine Hyland, President MacAlesse, Florrie Armstrong, Pat Johnston and Desmond Green.



Tributes at Memorial Service - Christ Church Bray, January 10th 2010 (Continued...)

An appreciation by Micheal Johnston

My wife Pat and I met Florrie Armstrong in September 1965, when we enrolled our eldest daughter, Brigid, in St Patrick's National School, Dalkey, where she was Principal. We had been trawling round the National Schools of the area looking for a school, and like many parents of that time we were almost totally ignorant of how education worked in Ireland. Our trawl had not been very productive to that moment, as we visited several schools and as we came to realise that all primary schools in Ireland were Church Schools — that was how the National School system worked.

Until, that was, we met Desmond Murray, the Rector of Dalkey and and Manager of St Patrick's School, Dalkey, or to give it its official name, Dalkey No. 2 National School, and its Principal Florrie Armstrong. They had been running that school for about ten years — Florrie had been appointed Principal in 1953 of a one-teacher school with an enrolment of 16 pupils. Desmond became Rector and Manager two years later. The small school had opened as a Church School in 1870, and became a National School 1894. For more than 50 years from then it ran as a one teacher school providing primary education for the less well-off members of the Church of Ireland parish of Dalkey. There were 16 children on the rolls when Florrie arrived there first, and as she

arrived she met a family removing their children from the school to go to a private primary school. When we were enquiring about a place Mr Murray told Pat that there was no problem about her being a Presbyterian, nor of me being unaffiliated: "It is a National School," he said, "there to serve the whole community". We were delighted, and Brigid was enrolled. By then enrolment stood at 69, and there were three teachers on the staff, Florrie, Hazel Smith and Violet Wilson.

The School continued to grow — 93 on the Rolls in 1967, and this doubled to 189 by 1973. It grew because many new parents wanted the sort of education that the school was providing. Florrie was an inspirational leader of her teachers; she believed that parents were a potential resource for the school, and used their talents both outside and where appropriate within the class room. She worked carefully with the Department of Education's Inspectorate, who were then moving towards the New Curriculum for Primary Schools, which would become a modern child-centred programme. St Patrick's was selected with other schools to pilot various elements of this new programme. As the school grew the parent body changed, more Church of Ireland parishioners, more parents from the professions, more from outside the Parish, Non-Conformists, who hadn't previously seen the school as theirs, then a growing number of

liberal Catholics and parents with no religious affiliation. Without being planned the school was becoming a multi-denominational school, and parents liked what was happening. But the rapid growth brought problems and tensions too; a feeling from some within the parish that the Parish was carrying the burden of all these outsiders. A Parents Teacher Association had been set up to help with local financing, hoping particularly to support and protect something that was good and timely in the development of the school.

But Desmond Murray became ill, and retired from the Parish in 1970; over the next three and a half years there were many problems for Florrie, trying to protect the school that she had inspired and created. The Parent body was deeply committed to the whole concept of Florrie's school, child-centred, multi-denominational, with parents, teachers working together with the local community. The Church of Ireland General Synod agreed a motion recommending that it should support such developments within the Church of Ireland sector, where viable numbers would favour. But obviously this could only happen with general agreement which seemed to be difficult to achieve in the period that followed.

Florrie then took a secondment to Nigeria, where she did marvellous work training teachers for a great new development of the education system there.

Tributes at Memorial Service - Christ Church Bray, January 10th 2010 (Continued...)

An appreciation by Micheal Johnston (continued...)

It would be four years more before she returned to work in Ireland. That would be to become the first Principal of a Multi-denominational National School in Ireland for over a hundred years, the Dalkey School Project NS.

When Florrie went away a large group of her parents and others of a similar mindset set up the Dalkey School Project — to make a Florrie-type school happen on purpose, rather than by accident, and to provide the structures necessary to sustain it. Two meetings were held in 1974, and the DSP was formally established in 1975. Three more years followed, looking for and finally achieving recognition from the Minister for schools of this type. Almost all the main ideas had been piloted in St Patrick's, and are still the guiding principles of the new Educate Together sector of the National School system. It was tough going, but there again was Florrie, principal of a new school, inspiring a new group of teachers, all like Florrie bravely taking the step of taking employment in this brand-new sector — which might succeed, or might fail. And a brand-new set of parents — well, some old friends and many new ones.

The school opened in a private house in Vesey Place in Monkstown in September 1978, with three teachers, Florrie, Síle Harrington and Jayne Doran; Pat

and I were delighted to enrol our third daughter, Anna, into 4th class and our second son, Josh, into Junior Infants among the first of 89 pupils in the new school on that first day, and planning to grow to a school with eight class teachers, one for each year of the NS cycle. By-Law approval was refused by the Dun Laoghaire Corporation, a week before the opening, and all the potential parents were notified: but not one child was withdrawn.

The school grew year by year, adding three more elements to its temporary premises in Vesey Place — the Presbyterian Hall in York Road, the Church of Ireland Church Hall in Mounttown, and finally in the Dun Laoghaire VEC School in Sallynoggin — some task for a Principal to manage. The school finally moved into its new premises in Glenageary, designed by Danuta Wejchert, after much consultation between the teachers, the DSP and the architects. The school was officially opened by the Minister for Education on 24th May 1984.

It was tough work, over a long period of time; there were ups and downs along the way; but Florrie had produced the formula, and then she gave the real thing a wonderful start. Children were the core of it, and Florrie and her teachers showed respect to all their pupils, and introduced them to the idea of responsibility. When discipline was needed, Florrie could very clearly express her disappointment to a child who had fallen short, and this was more

effective than older methods of discipline. Those children have now grown up to be the next generation of parents, looking for more of the same for their own children.

There are now more than fifty schools in the new Educate Together sector, and it's growing; many of Florrie's ideas have spread into the traditional denominational schools as well. And Florrie's old school St Patrick's is happily still flourishing with over a hundred pupils on its rolls. Educate Together is now looking for recognition at secondary level too, still plenty of work to be done, and challenges to be met.

The Dalkey School Project NS, its sister school Monkstown Educate Together NS, and some 59 national schools all over Ireland are monuments to Florrie's ideas and the committed work of her and her colleagues. And there are more in the pipeline.

It was a terrific experience, privilege and adventure to work with Florrie, and the many others involved in this historic development in Irish education.

Tributes sent to the Educate Together Office



Florence Armstrong was the principal of the girls grammar school at Bida in Central Nigeria when we were moved there in 1976 to start a College of Technology after a coup had made yet another state which had no third level education. Sites for educational buildings were situated some miles from town and students lived in hostels. It really was a two-fold position, living on campus with hundreds of teenagers.

Florence too had just been moved to this state and needless to say there already were problems, like the results of the untrustworthy storekeeper for which she had to appear in court even though she never knew him and when she was desperately ill, her driver was diagnosed with leprosy and the only doctor in the area was from Poland and described her illness as jaundice. She stayed with us until we could get her ticket, etc. to return home. A first class ticket from Kano, a difficult days drive was terminated by "no seat on the plane as first class has been filled with freight". Luckily, a big man in education was at the airport and promptly put her in someone else's seat. You could do that there.

I taught English at her school - classrooms had dirt floors and the bare necessities. I wonder if the buildings were ever finished. One piece of chalk per day was the ration and soft chalk that ran down quickly. We packed up her office, finding mice nests in drawers. Her Irish friends Bid and John were stationed at a boys school outside of town too with no transport, water and electricity that almost never appeared - at least ours did sometimes. So they were picked up on Saturday and Florence came too for an overnight in town where we had a four-bedroom house as our college as yet had no students nor campus.

She never complained and you can know that she was duly admired and loved by her colleagues and students. **"Na Gode"** which translated to **We thank you Florence**

Shirley, Jan 11

Tributes sent to the Educate Together Office

Hello,

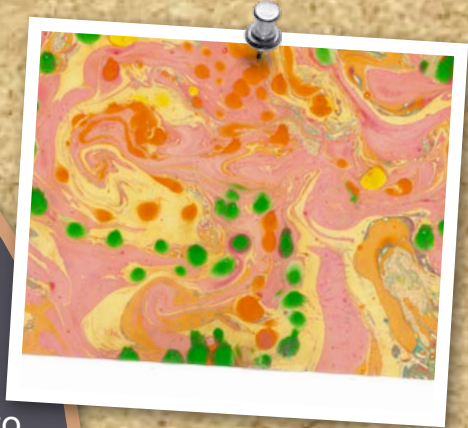
Florence was my father's cousin and I had the pleasure of meeting her when she came over to England to visit another of my father's cousins Luc Dunne.

It was Luc that passed on the sad news to me of Florence's death. I would like to offer my sympathies to all Florence's friends and family as I am sure she will be sadly missed. Florence wrote to me at the beginning of 2009 and invited me to visit her, unfortunately she was taken ill before the visit could take place but I am please that she was kind enough to offer such hospitality.

I understand from Luc that he is organizing a memorial service on January 10th. Unfortunately I will not be able to make this but I will be thinking of Florence.

Very best regards,

Irene Horwood, Jan 3





Tributes sent to the Educate Together Office

Who would have guessed that a lifetime bond with a lady and a country would begin with a workmate and boss Jim Armstrong in HM Customs, Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea saying 'Could you drop off two photos to my sister?' - 'Sure'.

Husband John being an airline employee, we were on standby, it took two days to get to Dublin from London. Invited by Florrie to join her and Marie Kerr on a visit to Galway and beyond, in seven days we got as far as Clifton. On the eighth dropped back at the airport. To this day it was the most incredible, wonderful fun time, we still talk about it today. Over the years we have been able to visit Florrie as our family grew, sons Quinton and Michael. One such trip we met a lady and her seagulls, (there is an Irish postcard of her) - sent Florrie and us to a church yard to find the hidden Leprechauns, our boys were over the moon. Always remember the rock wall went through the churchyard, John was sitting observing, we ended up with an audience of teenagers, we all had a great time, our sons talked about the little people for days. We loved having Florrie visit us in Brisbane, Queensland, Australia, it was never long or frequent enough. One visit we realised we had a spoilt addition a dog called Chainsaw (named after Aust. prized bull) brought home by our boys. He has the run of the house. With Florrie arriving we did not know if she liked dogs etc. well they were the best of mates, once again won over by Florrie. When she was leaving, we mentioned we had hoped the dog was not too much of a bother, 'Oh no we are old friends' He used to wait in the morning for her to leave the bedroom door ajar, then he would nudge the door open and sit and wait for movement of eyes and he would sit and wait with his paw on the side of the bed for handshakes. When he exhausted his stay he would wonder off. She always asked how Chainsaw was getting along. Our Australian friends found Florrie a gentle and wonderful lady.

I can thank my involvement as a Director of the Queensland Irish Association and Convenor of the Queensland Rose of Tralee and a husband in the airline game for the past fifteen years being able to visit Florrie in Ireland. Florrie has been a staunch supporter of the Queensland Centre, many times I have told her that she is an honorary Queenslander. Would you believe it turns out that she is related to the 2009 Queensland Rose Kelly O'Shae.

We will miss Florrie so much, I could always pick up the phone and have a chat, talk about anything, she was always interested in anything that you had to say, she is what we call in Australia a 'Quiet Acheiver'. To me she is family and friend, would have been a good ambassador for Ireland she was one smart Irish lady. We will miss feeding the swans and the chats. Visits to Johnny Foxes will never be the same, drives with Florrie with her beloved Sugarloaf in the distance. We will just miss you.

My favourite Irish saying is THANKS A MILLION FLORRIE! **Noela McCormick, Dec 31**

Tributes sent to the Educate Together Office



The Board of Management, parents, pupils and staff of Monkstown Educate Together NS offer their deepest sympathy to the family, relatives and friends of Florrie Armstrong. She was a truly inspirational leader and a wonderful lady. It was our privilege to have Florrie officially open our school in 1997. We will always remember her here in METNS.

Rosario

Rosario Kealy, Principal, Monkstown Educate Together National School, Dec 30

Tributes sent to the Educate Together Office

I was a pupil in DSP from 2nd class (in late September 1982) until 6th class (June 1987). We had just moved back to Ireland and my parents were keen for me to attend a multi-denominational school. We are Baha'is and there were very few schools at that time that were enthusiastic about religious diversity. I remember going to see the school and Miss Armstrong making me feel incredibly welcome. I think she pulled a lot of strings to make a space for me. In fact at the start of the term there wasn't space – but somehow one was created and I could start a few weeks into term. I will always be grateful for that. From then on she always made school a welcoming, happy place to me.

One memory of Miss Armstrong that sums her up to me was day I arrived late for school. I was in 2nd class. My class had gone from Vesey Place up to the church hall on York Road for PE. I arrived to my classroom to find it empty and had no idea why. I ran up the stairs to Ms. Armstrong's office and walked straight in (I don't think I even knocked) and burst into tears! She immediately came around her desk, calmed me down and got to the bottom of the problem. She reunited me with my class and never once asked why I was late – she just looked after me! She always had a smile, always knew our names, always had something encouraging to say. She was a true inspiration and I feel privileged to have been one of her pupils.

Sheena Odongo (Neé Wortley) Dec 23



Tributes sent to the Educate Together Office



Dear Paul,

It was really great chatting to you recently, your stories and memories of Florence lifted my spirits. To you she was a pioneer and friend, to me she was a loving cousin and a very private person at times. She never boasted about her achievements. I remember watching TV with her when a lively political debate was taking place on RTE. I made some comment about the conversation taking place, her reply to me was; "Well Luc those guys are really quite well informed and able to hold their own, I should know because they were my pupils." Recently on a visit to Áras an Uachtaráin and after having tea with a certain friend there, we were walking through the state rooms and I made a comment "What a great room this is Florence", "Yes it is Luc, I often had meetings here."

If I hadn't made the remark then I would have never have known that Florence had ever been to Aras an Uachtaráin in the first place.

She has left us all enriched with great memories.

Luc Dunne. Florrie's cousin, Dec 23



Notes from an interview with Florrie in March 2003

Paul Rowe, CEO, Educate Together

I interviewed Florrie Armstrong in her house in March 2003.

It was a tidy, bright house in Bray and one was struck immediately by the artwork displayed the moment you entered. On one side of the house, all the pictures and momentos were of the Dalkey School Project, on the other, of Africa. Florrie was full of energy and I believe then still playing golf on a weekly basis.

I was preparing for a paper to be presented to the 2003 Educate Together Ethos Conference and her input played a very large part in the presentation I made. A section of the paper was on the origin of the Dalkey School Project so the interview concentrated on the period before the school opened. The office had taken delivery of a new mini-disc recorder the day before, but my inexperience with the machine meant that I was not confident that anything was being recorded. My fears were well-founded. The following are from the notes I took on the day.

Teaching in Dalkey

Florrie grew up in Cavan and finished her teacher education in Kildare Street in 1949. She started work in Dalkey in 1954, when she became principal of St. Patrick's National School. It was then a one teacher school, a school for the children of public and private servants of Protestant persuasion in Dalkey. She lived in digs and faced a difficult task stabilising and building up the school. Many children left to go to private primary schools. As she approached the school on her first day, she was met by children saying that it was their last and they were leaving.

Accommodation was a serious problem with the hall run down and often left dirty on Mondays after dances. However, she was strongly supported by the rector and saw the great potential of parents becoming involved. "I saw the potential" they were very friendly and she was very happy working with them. She explained her attitude to education this way.

"I could never image education, especially National education, being based on the categorisation of children, so to do so was an anathema to me".

The school prospered with her approach and became popular with parents. A Parent Teachers Association was set up in 1960s, A significant number of non-Protestant parents were impressed by her educational attitude and began to send their children to the school. The crunch came when a larger building was needed to allow the school to develop to an eight-teacher size with a walking principal. The PTA was behind it but the parish was not.

The ecclesiastical and State authorities wanted the school to 'settle down' and adopt an enrolment policy that restricted intake to children of Protestant families. The new rules would split families and friends. "I just couldn't go along with it, and sent the parents to the Rector". (a new appointment had been made).

Notes from an interview with Florrie in March 2003

Paul Rowe, CEO, Educate Together

Nigeria

Florrie took a secondment and went as an educational advisor to the Nigerian government (then under General Gowon). The programme was called Universal Primary Education. She stayed in Nigeria for an initial two year contract which she extended for another two years. (1974-1978). She was one of five teachers sent to train Nigerian teachers by the Irish government. She loved the experience although some of the educational attitudes were challenging. The system was very competitive and she ended up running a girls college in Bida, Niger province (It had been an integrated college but was turned into a girls college overnight by Gowon's instruction due to Islamic pressure).

Getting the job as Principal of the First Educate Together School

During her time in Nigeria, Florrie kept in touch with friends and parents in the St. Patrick's PTA by letter. She was aware that a board had been set up and that Gemma Hussey

was involved. When she heard that the government had approved the opening of the school, she sent an application for the post of principal. However, she had no real way of knowing if it had arrived and was worried that it had 'got stuck on a desk in Lagos'. She heard nothing until out of the blue a courier arrived having driven from the Irish Embassy in Lagos. He handed her a letter saying it was from the diplomatic bag from Dublin and he had no idea what it was about. It was an offer of the post of principal. She was thrilled.

I asked her if she took any time to consider the offer. After all it was for the principalship of a school that didn't exist and of a type of school that didn't exist.

"Oh no, the man had to get back to Lagos, I simply wrote a note accepting the post and handed it back to him"

She returned to Dublin, by that time two other teachers had been appointed Síle Harrington

and Jayne Doran. Working with this team was also a revelation to her. "In Ireland and that time, it was not just children who were labelled, teachers were labelled as well". It was the first time that Florrie had worked with any teacher who had not been taught in a Church of Ireland teaching college.

I asked what it was that convinced her that the Educate Together approach was the correct one. I expected a lengthy reply. However, this is what I recorded. She replied in two simple quiet sentences.

"I saw no good reason why children of different religions should be educated apart."

"I saw no good reason why parents should be kept outside the school gate."

She was a wonderful person to interview. Her replies were short, to the point and measured. She came over as a person who was confident of the quality of her working life and had a great warmth towards people and children.



"I could never image education, especially National education, being based on the categorisation of children, so to do so was an anathema to me".

Florence Armstrong, 2003

I met her on two other occasions, the first of which was at the AGM of Educate Together in 2006 at the North Dublin National School Project, where she was awarded the inaugural 'seed' award for founders of Educate Together. The presentation was made by one of her first pupils Siobán O'Brien Green, who was then a Director of Educate Together, and Mary Hanafin T.D., then Minister of Education and Science. The seed award was also designed and made by a former pupil Debbie Paul. Florrie spoke movingly in response to the award. The second occasion was at the celebration of the 30th Anniversary of the opening of the first Educate

Together school in September 2008. At this occasion, she was honoured by Mary MacAlesse, President of Ireland.

Paul Rowe, Dec 20

