Bias ingrained early, study says

By SHAWN POAGATCHIK

BELFAST, Northern Ireland — Roman Catholic and Protestant children start learning to fear and loathe one another’s communities when they are as young as 3 years old, a study published today found. It blamed parents and Northern Ireland’s religiously divided school system.

“The surprising thing is how quickly these attitudes start to be expressed, almost as soon as they can talk,” said Paul Connolly, lead author of the report, which was based on questioning 352 children ages 3 to 6. “You could imagine children drawing some of these distinctions at age 10, not 3.”

Meanwhile, Catholic-Protestant violence continued in parts of Belfast. Protestants damaged several Catholic homes, and youths from both sides hurled stones at police Sunday. Three officers were reported injured.

Protestant extremists on