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## Addressing conflict and tolerance through the curriculum

Gallagher, A. (2017). Addressing conflict and tolerance through the curriculum. In M. Bellino, & J. Williams (Eds.), *(Re)Constructing Memory: School Textbooks, Identity, and the Pedagogies and Politics of Imagining Community: Vol III: (Re)Constructing Memory: Education, Identity, and Conflict* (1 ed., Vol. 3, pp. 191-208). Article 9 Sense Publishers.

**Published in:**

(Re)Constructing Memory: School Textbooks, Identity, and the Pedagogies and Politics of Imagining Community

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Queen's University Belfast - Research Portal:**

[Link to publication record in Queen's University Belfast Research Portal](#)

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## **ADDRESSING CONFLICT AND TOLERANCE THROUGH THE CURRICULUM**

### INTRODUCTION

In the Irish Times, October 25, 2005, leading Irish journalist and political commentator, Fintan O'Toole, noted that Sinn Féin has called on its supporters to celebrate the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of their party, and prepare for the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Hunger-strikes and the 90<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the death of Labour leader James Connolly<sup>i</sup>. And all of this was but a foretaste of the looming 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the 1916 Dublin Rising that was to lead to Irish independence. O'Toole wryly commented that 'Sinn Féin's cup of anniversaries is in fact brimming over', while at the same time suggesting that a host of other political parties in Ireland - Fianna Fáil, Fine Gael, the Progressive Democrats, the Workers' Party and the Irish Republican Socialist Party – had at least as valid a claim to the 'apostolic succession' from the party founded in 1905. Northern Ireland is currently embroiled in a 'decade of anniversaries', which have included the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the launch of the ill-fated Titanic and the signing of the Ulster Covenant against Home Rule in Ireland. And whereas 2016 marks the centenary of the Dublin Rising, Unionists will commemorate the centenary of the Battle of the Somme in which 5,500 Ulster men were killed, wounded or went missing in the first two days of fighting<sup>ii</sup>.

For an outside observer this struggle over memory and commemoration merely serves to illustrate the apparent fixation with history that characterizes, perhaps bedevils, politics in Ireland and Northern Ireland. This can be seen through the celebration of past battles from the 17<sup>th</sup> century onwards, the claim to territory marked by the parading tradition, the iconography associated with historical leaders, the wall murals used to highlight political and paramilitary themes in different communities (Darby, 1997) and the difficulty in finding ways to commemorate those who died in the conflict from the late 1960s to 1994 (Bloomfield, 1998; HTR, 2002; Eames and Bradley, 2009). In addition, there is not one history, but many: Northern Ireland is a divided society and this is reflected in the way people engage with history, as each of the two main communities weave their own, distinctive historic narrative. Given this context, how is history taught in schools and what other factors influence the way young people come to develop historical consciousness? Given that schools in Northern Ireland are organized on a largely denominational basis, and hence the institution of schooling itself reflects wider community divisions, is it possible to develop an approach to the teaching of history which transcends partisan narratives and helps young people reflect critically on the impact of history of contemporary politics and society? Finally, how was the teaching of history affected by the period of political violence from the late 1960s to 1994, and how has it developed in the years of relative peace that have occurred since?

This chapter will examine these questions by outlining the evolution of the teaching of history in schools in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and reviewing published evidence on the delivery and impact of the teaching

of history in more recent periods. The chapter begins with a brief outline of the development of schooling in Ireland from the 1830s onwards, through the partition of the island in 1922/23 and the formation of Northern Ireland: the main theme to emerge from this period lies in the way schools developed as denominational institutions. The next section of the chapter outlines the way history was taught in schools up to the late 1960s and the outbreak of political violence. Following this we look at the general educational response to political violence in Northern Ireland and highlight the main interventions adopted in schools to promote reconciliation. Throughout this period the formal organization of the curriculum changed: initially the curriculum was largely left in the hands of teachers; in 1989 a statutory, and much more prescriptive, curriculum was introduced; and by 2007 this statutory curriculum had been revised to restore a greater degree of flexibility to teachers. In this section of the chapter we also outline the considerable corpus of research on the impact of the teaching of history as the formal curricular framework evolved.

#### SCHOOLING IN IRELAND AND NORTHERN IRELAND FROM THE 1830S TO THE 1960S

Mass schooling in Ireland has its origins in the 1830s, long before partition, when the decision was made to establish a national education system of schools throughout the island of Ireland (Akenson, 1970). The intention was that a common school system would operate across the island and that pupils from all denominations could and should attend all schools. Religious instruction was not to be part of the normal school curriculum, but clergy would have guaranteed access to all schools to provide instruction for children of their faith community. However, despite these official aspirations, the system very quickly developed a sectarian character as first the Presbyterians and later the Catholic Church moved to establish control over their own schools. By century's end the national system was, for all practical purposes, denominational and contained separate schools for Catholics, Anglicans, Presbyterians and Methodists. By simple virtue of numbers this meant that the Catholic Church was the most powerful player in the politics of education.

When Ireland was partitioned in 1922/3 separate parliaments were established in Dublin and Belfast and each was given the right to stay in or leave the United Kingdom – the Dublin parliament opted to leave, but the Belfast parliament opted to stay and so Northern Ireland became a self-governing region within the United Kingdom. In newly independent Ireland, the Catholic Church moved quickly to confirm its position as the leading organization of civil society and cemented its control of education which is only now beginning to reduce significantly.

In Northern Ireland the new Unionist controlled parliament was determined to put distance between itself and the rest of the island. In education this led to a reform process which moved the educational structures away from those inherited from the national school system to one more akin to the model which had developed in England in the latter part of the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Akenson, 1973). Essentially this involved schools coming under the control of local authorities and a diminution in the role of denominational interests. The first Minister of Education in Northern Ireland saw such a path as a possible route to a future common school

system which might, eventually, include the participation of Catholics and win their loyalty to the new political arrangements.

In the short-term this ambition was not achieved. The Catholic Church wanted as little as possible to do with the new Ministry in Northern Ireland and sought to maintain control over its schools. A statement at the time from the Catholic Bishops made their opposition very clear:

... an education measure has been passed under which Catholic schools are starved unless indeed they go under a control which is animated by the dominant spirit towards Catholics ... It is doubtful whether in modern times any parallel can be found for the way in which the Catholic minority in the North of Ireland is being systematically wronged under the laws of the Northern Parliament. The ever advancing aggression on Catholics is a grave menace to the peace of the whole community. (Cited by Farren, 1995: 86)

The main focus of concern for the Church lay in the size of public grant it would receive, and while the Ministry offered terms which it saw as advantageous since it involved a higher level of grant-aid as compared with the situation in England, the Catholic authorities looked back to the national school system and complained that they were being unfairly short-changed.

More surprisingly the Protestant Churches also eschewed the initial plans and sought changes in educational legislation that would give them effective control over the new public authority schools. They were successful in their aim, so that by the mid-1930s Northern Ireland had two parallel school systems, one for Protestants and one for Catholics, the former fully-funded by the state, the latter only partially so: The Catholic authorities refused to hand their schools over to state control, and therefore were obliged to accept some of the financial cost of running the schools (Buckland, 1979; Dunn, 1990).

Although the denominational divide largely remains in place today, in 1981 the first religiously Integrated school was opened, largely as a consequence of the efforts of parents, and it was joined by a dozen more new schools over the next decade (Moffat, 1993). Legislation in 1989 committed government to supporting further growth of integrated schools and the rate of increase quickened, so that by 2010/11 there were 42 Integrated primary schools and 20 Integrated post-primary schools, comprising about seven per cent of the school age population (AUTHOR; McGlynn, Niens, Cairns, & Hewstone, 2004; McGonigle, Smith, & Gallagher, 2003; Montgomery, Fraser, McGlynn, Smith, & Gallagher, 2003). In addition there are about 40 schools – only ten of which are Catholic schools - which have a significant minority presence on their enrolment and so can be described as ‘mixed’ schools, that is, schools with 10 per cent or more of their pupils from the other community. There are an additional 41 Special schools which cater for pupils with special educational needs and have always had mixed enrolments. In all the remaining schools the vast majority of pupils are either Protestant or Catholic and, although no official figures exist on this, it is likely that this situation is reflected among the teachers as well: a report from the Equal Opportunities Commission in 1994 suggested that 85 per

cent of teachers in Protestant schools were from the Protestant Community, while only 5 per cent of teachers were from the Catholic community; by contrast, 98% of teachers in Catholic schools were from the Catholic community and only one per cent of teachers were from the Protestant community (ECNI, 2005).

#### TEACHING HISTORY FROM THE 1830S TO THE 1960S

In the 19<sup>th</sup> century the national board of education approved textbooks, or produced its own textbooks, to be used at each of the grade levels in schools. However, as Smith (2005) has pointed out, the primary characteristic of history teaching was in its absence: the national board did not approve a history textbook for use in schools until 1897 and there was no extensive history material in other textbooks (p. 111), suggesting to Smith that there had been no explicit attempt to promote British history as an integrating force. Fitzpatrick (1991) added that while some groups, such as the (Catholic) Christian Brothers or the (Protestant) Church Society published their own history texts aimed at promoting their own perspective, the predominant official view was that, in a divided society, teaching history in a non-partisan way was not possible, and may even be divisive, so it was preferable not to teach history at all (Fitzpatrick, 1991, p. 171).

Smith echoed this view when she suggested that the absence of history was an attempt to avoid opening up space within which versions of Irish history that were antagonistic to British interests might flow (Smith, 2005, p. 118). On the other hand imperial systems require political loyalty, but do not require the level of national or cultural homogeneity that nation-states both assume and work hard to maintain – nation-states promote fictive and unitary versions of a nation's past and hence place more importance on the history that is taught in schools (Anderson, 1983). In 1908 an official history curriculum was recognised and focused on Irish history, and while this provoked some criticism, Fitzpatrick (1991, pp. 174-175) suggested that this only became significant after the 1916 Rising as British loyalists accused teachers of fostering rebellion, while Republicans criticised them for not fostering rebellion enough (Fitzpatrick, 1991, pp. 174-175).

After Ireland was partitioned in 1922/3 the Irish dimension to the history curriculum was reinforced in the now independent Southern Irish state and was based on the promotion of national pride and patriotism (Farren, 1995, p. 147). This basic scheme was to remain largely in place until 1971. According to Fitzpatrick (1991) in Northern Ireland the official view seemed to revert to the 19<sup>th</sup> perspective of the National Commissioners:

‘... the Northern Ministry of Education reverted to the nineteenth century precept that impartial history was unfeasible whereas compulsory partisan history was divisive. Northerners remained as uninstructed in the identity of their ‘native country’ as ever.’ (Fitzpatrick, 1991, p. 176)

Indeed, rather than focus on any potential bias in the teaching of history, Fitzpatrick was more concerned with the consequences of teaching history, and in this his assessment of inspection reports on the teaching of history suggest that, when it was taught, it was one of the worst taught subjects:

‘Shockingly low standards of instruction and class boredom saved most pupils from effective indoctrination within school hours. The would-be manipulators of the Irish school-child’s mind left a hasty scrawl rather than indelible imprint on that tabula rasa.’ (Fitzpatrick, 1991, p. 183)

Thus, while the Ministry of Education in Northern Ireland had to approve textbooks to be used in schools, only one book was ever denied approval and this was an Irish language book which contained an image of a child holding an Irish tricolor, the flag of the Republic of Ireland. During the same period the government in Northern Ireland resisted attempts by back-bench supporters to restrict the teaching of the history of Ireland by focusing only on the history of Ulster (Smith, 2005, p. 117). More generally, of course, there was no statutory curriculum in schools in Northern Ireland before 1989 and teachers had a high degree of autonomy on what they taught, subject only to the syllabi of public examinations and procedures for the approval of textbooks. This followed practice in the UK as a whole (even though England/Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland all operated their own separate education systems) in which the curriculum was sometimes described as the ‘secret garden’, that is, what was taught, and how it was taught, was seen to be the prerogative of the teacher .

Teachers in Primary (or Elementary) schools, which teach children aged between 5 and 11 years, had the option to teach history, but there is little evidence that many did. A few history textbooks were available, but there is little robust evidence on their pattern of use, apart from the occasional argument in the Northern Ireland parliament. The best analysis of this period concludes that the Ministry tried to encourage a British worldview by virtually excluding Irish history from public examinations (Smith, 2005, p. 116). The Catholic schools resisted this, to some extent, by providing an alternative Irish historical narrative, although the evidence suggests that the Catholic Church placed higher priority on the issues of school financing, religious instruction and Irish language teaching (Smith, 2005, p. 118). That said, there was some evidence that pressure for greater recognition of Irish history developed in the 1960s, in parallel with the growth of civil rights agitation and the emergence of new, young, political leaders in the Catholic community (Smith, 2005, pp. 112-121).

It is also worth noting that, as in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, not all history is learned at school, a theme we shall return to later. And even in school, historical knowledge is not only received through the history curriculum. When young people attend religiously separate schools then a whole panoply of activities - songs, games, sports, language and cultural activity more generally - all can provide a basis for promoting a distinctive sense of identity, and reinforce wide community narratives on the historical traditions and identify of the communities.

This is evident from the biographies of some key figures in the emergent civil rights movement of the 1960s (Devlin, 1969; McCann, 1974) and has been reinforced more recently by evidence from surveys of young people in Northern Ireland which suggested that the three main sources of young people's knowledge and understanding of the past were their parents, school and their relatives; furthermore, films and television, and the internet was being cited as young people as increasingly important sources of information on historical events (Bell, Hansson, & McCaffery, 2010).

#### THE IMPACT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE AND THE DEBATE OVER SEPARATE RELIGIOUS SCHOOLS

Once political violence broke out at the end of the 1960s many commentators looked to the separate schools both as possible incubators of conflict or as potential mechanisms for ameliorating community division (Fraser, 1974; Heskin, 1980). The debate over the effect of separate schools for Protestant and Catholics revolved around three main positions. First were those who argued that the problem lay in distinctive and potentially antagonistic curriculums offered in the separate schools (Malone, 1973). Second were those who argued that the mere fact of separation, allied with the hidden curriculum of schools, promoted a sense of difference (Spencer, 1987). And finally, there were those who argued that the problem in Northern Ireland was more fundamentally political, including Protestant perceptions that they would be forced into a united Ireland against their will, and Catholic perceptions that they suffered unfair and unjust discrimination and inequality within Northern Ireland, and that addressing these political dimensions was the appropriate course of action; from this perspective the issue of separate schools was, to a large extent, irrelevant (Conway, 1970).

No consensus developed around any one of these positions, either as the diagnosis of the effect of separate schools, or as providing the most appropriate basis for educational interventions. Educationalists who felt something should be done pursued three distinctive strategies: (1) working at the level of the curriculum, (2) the development of contact programs to bring young Protestants and Catholics together, or (3) attempts to establish joint Integrated schools (Darby & Dunn, 1987; Gallagher, 2004). More generally, the 1970s was a decade in which schools sought to insulate themselves and cast schools as 'oases of peace and calm' as society collapsed into widespread violence. This antipathy towards pro-actively addressing these issues was partly also because many teachers felt unable or unwilling to deal with difficult, seemingly intractable, issues. By the 1980s a wider range of activities focused on three areas identified above, ie curriculum, contact and integration, had become more widespread. By the 1990s most of this work had been given statutory weight through the 1989 Education Reform Order. The primary purpose of this legislation was to promote neo-liberal reforms involving parental choice, a statutory curriculum for students aged 4 to 16 years and competition between schools, but it also incorporated significant measures aimed at promoting improved community relations. These included placing 'Education for Mutual Understanding' and 'Cultural Heritage' as compulsory themes on the statutory curriculum; requiring government to support the development of Integrated schools; and allowing parents in an existing Protestant or Catholic school to vote to change its

status to Integrated (Phillips, Goalen, McCully, & Wood, 1999). These measures provided enhanced systemic support for efforts to address division and promote reconciliation through education, but whether it produced significant systemic change has been questioned: Gallagher (2004), for example, highlighted evidence on the limited impact of short-term contact initiatives, the growth of Integrated schools had stalled at around seven per cent in the early 2000s, while the themes of 'Education for Mutual Understanding' and 'Cultural Heritage' were abandoned in favour of the new subject of 'Learning for Life and Work' in the Revised NI Curriculum introduced in 2007.

#### TEACHING HISTORY IN A CONTEXT OF POLITICAL VIOLENCE

In the 1960s the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association launched a campaign alleging discrimination against minority Catholics in employment, housing and voting rights. The campaign was closely modelled on the US Civil Rights campaign and adopted many of the same songs and slogans. By the late 1960s rioting broke out following Civil Rights marches and associated counter-demonstrations, with particularly serious riots in Belfast and Derry which prompted the British government to send in the British Army to attempt to restore order. Once British troops appeared on the ground, IRA paramilitaries started to attack them, and not long after, various Protestant paramilitary organizations began to appear and started to engage in violence. By 1972 the era of marches, protests and civil rights campaigns was largely over, and Northern Ireland spiralled downwards into political violence that was to last for another quarter century. After the outbreak of violence the very earliest educational work had revolved around the curriculum and the quality of work in history came under critical scrutiny (Magee, 1970; Darby, 1974), and much of this scrutiny focused on the merits, or otherwise, of textbooks. In truth, however, there was little concrete information available on what was actually taught in history classrooms. Smith's (2005) review of the years of the political violence from the 1970s onwards suggests a general reluctance to go too deeply into the problem of what was being taught, its consequences, or what should or could be done to change the situation. An academic debate over historical revisionism, which mainly served to challenge shibboleths in nationalist history, might have affected the history curriculum, but Smith concludes that its increasingly specialized focus merely served to distance it from 'ordinary' readers, including teachers (Brady, 1994; Boyce & O'Day, 1996; McBride, 2001). In fact, it was not until 1991, Smith concludes, that the first satisfactory history of Northern Ireland for use in schools was produced.

By this point the history curriculum had become embroiled in other debates. In the post World War Two period history teaching in England had been characterized by a grand narrative promoting a common sense of citizenship, but this was questioned in the 1970s. The Schools History project was established in Britain in 1972 to develop a new approach to the teaching of the subject and offered an approach based on the use of evidence and analysis to interpret and understand the past<sup>iii</sup>). This approach was also adopted in Northern Ireland where it sought to encourage young people to recognize different interpretations and perspectives on



historical events and processes, and to seek out evidence that could be used to adjudicate between these positions (Barton et al., 2004). Bell et al. (2010) suggest that this was the approach being used in the teaching of history at the time the UK moved towards a statutory curriculum with more direct prescription on what should be taught.

Margaret Thatcher's Conservative government had not focused on education as a key policy area in its first two terms, but in 1988 it introduced major reforms, largely based on promoting competition between schools. The Education Reform Act (1988) for England and Wales also included a National Curriculum, marking a significant break with the tradition of the 'secret garden' and teacher autonomy. The reform measures were introduced in Northern Ireland through the 1989 Education Order, but the measures were mediated a little to reflect local circumstances. A statutory curriculum to prescribe the offering to pupils up to age 16 years was included and, originally, the intention had been that history would be a compulsory subject up to age 16, but complaints from teachers and others that the proposed curriculum was too prescriptive and over-loaded led to changes, including the downgrading of history to become an optional subject from age 14 years onwards.

For pupils in Northern Ireland aged 11-14 the history curriculum covered a range of topics including the Normans in Ireland in the Medieval period, European rivalries in the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Ireland from the Union in 1801 to Partition in 1922/3, the impact of world war in the 20<sup>th</sup> century and a local study (Kitson, 2007). In other words, explicit engagement with issues in Ireland ended in the early twentieth century, just after partition, thereby allowing teachers to avoid discussion of contemporary controversies. Since the teaching of history was not compulsory for pupils aged 14 years or older it meant that most pupils would receive little opportunity to explore recent events or connections between past and present (Barton & McCully, 2005).

More bizarrely, for students aged 14-16 years who opted to study history, the curriculum for Northern Ireland history comprised two options which involved the study of Northern Ireland from 1939 to 1965, or the period from 1965 to 1985. This was bizarre to the extent that the options played directly into the community narratives and there is anecdotal evidence that choices followed: the 1939-65 period offered a positive image of Northern Ireland's wartime role and post-war economic growth, which might be considered more attractive to a Protestant narrative, whereas the period 1965-85 includes the growth of the Civil Rights Movement, the outbreak of violence and the collapse of the old parliamentary arrangements which had sustained Protestant power for generations, all of which might be seen as more conducive to a Catholic reading of history. It was also possible for schools to opt to teach history through an examination syllabus provided by one of the English Examination Boards, rather than the Northern Ireland examination board, and thereby avoid dealing with Irish history of any kind.

Added to these weaknesses there is evidence of some reluctance on the part of teachers to engage with difficult and controversial issues in the history curriculum. Smith's (2005) seminal study of the teaching of

history over the past century includes evidence from interviews with history teachers in Northern Ireland and highlights their sense of caution. These findings were reinforced by an unpublished Masters dissertation (Thompson, 2005) which reported interviews with specially selected (and innovative) history teachers: many of these teachers were reluctant to embrace a social purpose to the teaching of history and seemed to be unaware of the connections that were drawn between the subject and the wider policy on promoting more positive community relations. This echoed a theme found in school inspection reports on the teaching of history where it was suggested that in many schools 'understanding was sacrificed to a presentation of factual information with the subject being viewed as purely academic so it could not be viewed as contentious' (Bell et al., 2010, p. 25). Many of Thompson's interviewees seemed to believe that schools in general, and the history curriculum in particular, were virtually powerless in the face of popular histories promoted within families and by political activists. Far rather, they seemed to imply, they focus on the traditional academic aspects of history and leave the social issues to someone else.

A later study by Kitson (2007), also based on interviews with a sample of history teachers in Northern Ireland, identified a number of external and internal constraints that affected the way they addressed their teaching in the classroom. Among the external constraints were the role of the local community and, in particular, teacher reticence in addressing difficult issues in areas where violence had been widespread and the lack of availability of resources and good textbooks. Internal factors cited by the teachers included the character of the school intake, both in relation to ability (secondary schools in Northern Ireland continue to operate on the basis of academic selection, with academically selective grammar schools and non-selective secondary schools) and the religious composition of the students. A second factor was the concern of some teachers to puncture some of the more blatant historical myths held by students (and, it often has to be said, the wider communities), while a third was the desire to make history more popular as a subject in order to encourage more students to choose it at the post 14 years stage.

Some of the consequences of this can be seen in a series of empirical studies that have sought to examine the impact of history teaching on the perceptions of students in Northern Ireland. Barton (2001) highlighted some important emerging trends in research into the teaching of history of primary students, in particular, that even young children know something about the past, but that they evaluate it in ways different from professional historians. He argued that this had important pedagogical implications as it made it possible to construct curriculums which either built on what children already knew or provided a basis for addressing their misconceptions about the past: children, in other words, were not 'blank slates', when it came to historical understanding, but had some notion of historical narratives with which teachers could engage. 'What children already know', however, is heavily contextualized, and this also has to be taken into account: popular accounts of history which they may have acquired in their community are not simply 'stories' of the past, but in a context of a divided society they resonate with political priorities.

Barton (2001) reported a comparative study of children's historical understanding in two primary schools in the US and four in Northern Ireland. While there were many similarities in the sources of information on history and their interest in the topic, there was an important difference in terms of the students' views on the purpose of history: in the US the students described history as providing them with a sense of identity and helping to locate them within their family, community and nation. By contrast, for students in Northern Ireland 'telling others about history meant providing information that would allow them to move beyond themselves and see what life was like for other people in other times and places' (Barton, 2001, p. 98). Barton put the difference even more succinctly: '... those in the USA think the purpose of history is to learn about themselves and their own background, while those in Northern Ireland think it is to learn about the lives of people in other times and places' (Barton, 2001, p. 90).

He argued that this could be used for advantage, to the extent that learning about the importance of taking into account perspectives of people who are different from you may be an important way in which history teaching can contribute to improved community relations. In a later paper he explicitly identified this as an advantage of the history curriculum in primary schools, but suggested that this exploration of diversity was perhaps only possible because there was an almost complete lack of engagement with present, and more difficult, realities (Barton, 2005). By the post-primary stage the history curriculum had started to address some of these issues, to some degree, but, he argued, neither engaged with the consequences of diverse perspectives, nor provided any encouragement towards the construction of new commonalities. Further, the history curriculum by this time had become more traditionally academic and, he suggests, without such an explicit social purpose it may also appear to become less relevant or engaging for students. Certainly the evidence is that fewer and fewer students are opting to continue taking history as a subject beyond the point at which it is compulsory.

Ironically, the evidence we have on the historical understanding of young people both confirms the teachers' concerns and highlights the value of history teaching in schools. Based on interviews with 253 young people aged 11 to 14 years from schools across Northern Ireland, Barton and McCully (2005) found that young people were not simply passive recipients of historical knowledge, but were 'actively constructing their historical identifications from a range of sources' (p. 107). However, they go on to suggest that:

'In many classrooms, history is presented in a chronological format that addresses events relevant to the current political situation, but students have little opportunity to engage directly the relationship between past and present. Our interviews suggest that students do make such connections on their own; and without teacher mediation those connections are likely to be highly selective and uncritical. As students study elements of the national past, many of them incorporate those elements into an increasingly politicized historical perspective. Their experiences with the required curriculum, then, may actually supply raw material for the partisan narratives that their study of history is meant to counteract. More directly addressing connections between past and present might help students develop the alternative,

contextualized, and evidence-based views that form the rationale for history education' (Barton and McCully, 2005, p108).

Teachers, they suggest, are reluctant to address these connections both because of the emotional issues it is likely to raise and because of a perception that the views of their pupils are rigid and fixed – Barton and McCully (2005) acknowledge the reality of the emotional content of historical understanding in Northern Ireland, but claim their evidence rejects the notion that young people's views on history are unshakeable.

Barton and McCully (2005) also showed, however, that as pupils get older their articulation of historical issues becomes more partisan, suggesting that external influences become more important in informing their sense of the past. This occurs, they argue, for a number of reasons: first, community conflict has a strong influence on historical understanding, and while it is not the only source of influence it appears to become more influential as the young people got older. Second, the extent to which young people identify with partisan historical themes is mediated by location, gender and religion: young people who live in areas which experienced higher degrees of violence, boys and Protestant students were all more likely to identify more closely with partisan themes. These findings are broadly echoed in the more recent analysis provided by Bell et al. (2010).

Despite all these various limitations it is possible to identify some significant gains that were achieved as a consequence of the teaching of history being given a statutory basis: in particular, students were being offered different perspectives on historical events and were encouraged to engage critically with evidence in order to better understand the basis for these perspectives (Barton, 2007; Barton & McCully, 2005, 2010). In addition there was evidence that young people valued the potential role of history in helping them better to understand their society and, notwithstanding the reluctance of teachers noted above, also expressed the view that the teaching of history should engage with difficult issues (Bell et al., 2010). McCully (2006) identified a remaining gap in that the teaching of history in school largely focused on cognitive aspects of historical understanding, but failed to engage with the emotional aspects of conflict.

By the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a formal review of the statutory curriculum was undertaken leading to the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum (RNIC) which was implemented in 2007. The RNIC was intended to be less prescriptive and accord teachers somewhat more autonomy in deciding how identified themes can be carried forward, and involve a greater focus on skills rather than content. An innovation in the RNIC was the creation of a new program called 'Local and Global Citizenship' which was intended to bear the main weight of engaging young people with diversity and conflict. This program seeks to develop young people's knowledge, understanding and skills and, more specifically, to encourage young people to see themselves as individuals, contributors to society and contributors to the economy and environment. The history curriculum is organized around the same over-arching themes: thus, young people are encouraged to explore how history has influenced their own personal identity, the historical use and justification of stereotypes, and the motives

and legacy of individuals who have taken a stand. Under the society strand they explore the notion of citizenship, examine how key events or ideas have impacted on the way of life of culture of communities, and consider situations in which ethical (or unethical) decisions have been made. In all of this work they are encouraged to identify issues in history which are contested and learn about the use of evidence to explore different understandings and perspectives.

The flexibility encouraged by the RNIC provided an opportunity to move beyond the cognitive approach to learning, with its emphasis on objectivity, to begin to explore the affective impact of learning as it engaged with community loyalties and identity politics (Barton & McCully, 2010; McCully & Waldron, 2013). By asking teachers to make the teaching of history more relevant to contemporary society, and giving them more control over the material they used to make those connections, the RNIC provided an opportunity to 'foster the values and dispositions conducive to conflict transformation' (McCully, 2012, p. 150). Barton and McCully (2012) offered some insight into the way young people struggled to reconcile diverse sources of influence on their historical consciousness and argued that schools should use pedagogies which provoked greater curiosity, empathy and understanding of others' past as well as their own.

McCully (2010) offered one possible approach involving students collecting local oral histories on the experiences of their communities during the conflict and working with students from other schools to share experiences and accounts: this proposal had its roots in a number of previous projects in which teachers and youth workers had collaborated to engage young people with emotional aspects of conflict and community difference (see McCully, 2006; McCully & Waldron, 2013). The aim would be 'to gain insight into ordinary people's experience through telling their stories' (McCully, 2010, p. 172). Teachers and students would need to be prepared for the likelihood of coming across sensitive accounts and having to deal with the emotional consequences. Sharing of accounts and experiences would be encouraged across schools with the possibility of the projects concluding with public presentations on the findings of these oral histories. The key elements here are the way it was proposed to combine the criticality and multiperspectivity of the curriculum, with the contemporary resonances and emotional impact of the issues on people. This has also prompted considers on pedagogies for engaging young people with controversial issues in ways that are safe, or in ways of drawing lessons from history for contemporary society (Barton, McCully, & Marks, 2004; Barton & McCully, 2007; Murphy & Gallagher, 2009; Emerson, 2012; Smith & McCully, 2013; McCully & Emerson, 2014). The Corrymeela Community in Northern Ireland is a faith-based community which has worked to promote reconciliation since the 1960s. It has developed a project ('Facing our History, Shaping the Future') which adapted the pedagogy developed by a US based organization, Facing History and Ourselves (Strom, 1994), in order to implement some aspects of the approach advocated by McCully and was commended in an evaluation by the Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI, 2013). Clearly there is merit in the idea of encouraging students to engage with older generations to reflect on people's experience of the conflict in their local areas, and in the idea of schools working together to share their accounts and understanding.

## CONCLUSION

This chapter has provided a review of the way history has been taught in schools in a society where historical claims have always carried significant political resonances. In nation-states the teaching of history has been part of the process of inculcating young people as members of the national community, but in divided societies the lack of an agreed, common national narrative presents challenges. In pre-partition Ireland, and in Northern Ireland after partition, for many years there seemed to be wariness about the teaching of history altogether: there was a desire to avoid partisan narratives and so an official check was kept on textbooks, but a censorious hand was only rarely administered because there seemed to be a tacit agreement that the difficult issues of historical memory were probably best left alone.

As the studies considered above have highlighted, however, what is taught in schools is not the only source of information that helps to inform historical consciousness and in Northern Ireland family, community and media have all been identified as playing a role. In the period following the outbreak of political violence in Northern Ireland in the late 1960s there was an increased recognition, or expectation, that schools should be doing something to pro-actively promote reconciliation, and a focus on the curriculum was always considered as an important area for intervention. In the early years of the violence a focus on textbooks was the main concern, but it became clear that, when responsibility was left entirely in the hands of teachers, many would continue with the pattern of avoidance because they didn't wish to stir up controversy, or they felt ill-equipped to deal with these difficult issues, or they felt it was not their responsibility as history teachers to solve larger social problems.

The advent of the statutory curriculum in 1989 was a mixed blessing: on the one hand it took responsibility for determining the content of the curriculum away from teachers, which ironically made it easier for them to address difficult issues precisely because they were now prescribed; on the other hand the officially prescribed curriculum could limit the opportunities available to address the difficult or controversial issues that would help young people reflect on the circumstances that had helped create the world around them. Evidence from the implementation of the statutory curriculum suggested that it had been successful in encouraging critical engagement with evidence and multiperspectivity, and had encouraged a more dispassionate approach to the teaching of history. At the same time, the benefits of bringing an 'academic' quality to the teaching of history meant that young people were not engaging with the emotional impact of historical issues – the gains of a cognitive emphasis had led to a loss of the affective dimension. The potential to take the teaching of history onto this new terrain was provided by the Revised Northern Ireland Curriculum introduced in 2007 because of the greater flexibility it allowed teachers and the emphasis it placed on learning lessons from the past for contemporary society.

So the primary lessons from the experience of teaching history in a divided context like Northern Ireland is perhaps three fold: first, the avoidance of direct engagement with difficult historical issues and events in schools does not mean that students will not develop some level of historical consciousness around these issues and events – there are plenty of places other than in school where young people will acquire lessons from history. Second, providing a prescribed curriculum helps remove a burden of responsibility from teachers and legitimises engagement with difficult issues which many might prefer to avoid, but this will only be effective if the prescribed curriculum directly engages with these issues; the downside of a prescribed curriculum is that it might institutionalise avoidance; and third, it is possible to improve the teaching of history so that it does make a positive contribution to helping young people better understand the influences that helped shaped contemporary society, but this is something which has to be worked at constantly, and no matter how good the quality of teaching is at any specific point, it is likely that there will always be the potential for further improvement.

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<sup>ii</sup> Contributions to the decade of anniversaries, or decade of centenaries have been made by the Irish Government (<http://www.decadeofcentenaries.com/> - last accessed January 5, 2016), British Government (<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/first-world-war-commemorations-and-the-decade-of-centenaries> - last accessed January 5, 2016) and the Community Relations Council in Northern Ireland (<http://www.community-relations.org.uk/programmes/marking-anniversaries/> - last accessed January 5, 2016)

<sup>iii</sup> the first book published from this project can be found at:

<http://www.schoolshistoryproject.org.uk/AboutSHP/downloads/NewLookAtHistory.pdf> last accessed May 9, 2015).