THE ROLE OF EDUCATION IN A DIVIDED SOCIETY: THE CASE OF NORTHERN IRELAND
The context

Deaths in Northern Ireland, 1969-2012

Catholic pupils (%) by school type, 2014/15

- Integrated: 37
- Maintained/Catholic Voluntary: 97
- Controlled/Voluntary: 7
- Overall: 51
The political agreement

- all major parties entitled to a place in government
- ‘unionist’ and ‘nationalist’ designation for key votes
- coalition government to promote cooperation
Key education questions

• Should minorities be entitled to institutional recognition?

Structural dimension

• Is pursuit of tolerance a core goal?

Affective dimension
## Separate or common schools?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recognition accepted: separate schools</th>
<th>Pursuit of tolerance important</th>
<th>Pursuit of tolerance not important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Box A: Pluralism</td>
<td>Box C: Apartheid</td>
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<th>Recognition not accepted: common schools</th>
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<td>Box B: Multiculturalism</td>
<td>Box D: Assimilation</td>
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Separate schools have separate curriculums and promote a sense of difference.

Mere fact of separate schools promotes sense of difference.

Problem lies in injustice & inequality and separate schools irrelevant.
Common textbooks & curriculums

Religiously integrated schools

Contact programs to bring children together

Equal treatment of separate schools
## Impact of interventions

<table>
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<tr>
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<th>Positive potential</th>
<th>Limited impact</th>
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<tr>
<td>Common curriculum</td>
<td>Language of a common good; capacity to deal with difference</td>
<td>Received curriculum not the same as intended curriculum</td>
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<tr>
<td>Contact programmes</td>
<td>Promoting mutual understanding &amp; tolerance; breaking down barriers</td>
<td>Ephemeral; weak theoretical understanding of contact</td>
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<tr>
<td>Common schools</td>
<td>Promoting sense of a common good; dealing with diversity</td>
<td>Assimilation; inconsistent practice; weakly connected sector; 7%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Equal treatment of</td>
<td>Recognising different identities; promoting equal opportunity</td>
<td>Institutionalising difference; promoting silo society</td>
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<td>separate schools</td>
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Why they failed

Ideas-good; implementation-mixed; sustainability-poor

Too dependent on inspirational, individual teachers

Social goals important ... but never important enough

Risk-averse culture throughout education system
Post millennial developments

Shared Education

- Locally tailored solutions
- Educational, economic & social benefits
- Empowered teachers

Curriculum

- Revised NI Curriculum
- History
- Local and Global Citizenship
The history of History teaching

19th century
• 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

Pre-1960s
• shockingly low standards of instruction and class boredom saved most pupils from effective indoctrination within school hours

Censorship?
• all textbooks had to be approved, but only one was ever banned
Teaching History in a time of history

1970s/80s
- Textbooks improved, but still not great
- Little evidence on classroom practice
- Teacher avoidance of difficult issues

1989 Reform Order
- History compulsory only to age 14
- ‘Too academic’ in order to avoid contention
- Limited engagement between past and present

2007 Revised NI Curriculum
- Focus on skills rather than content
- Teachers given flexibility in addressing themes
- Opportunity to address affective dimension
Lessons learned

**Prescribed curriculum**
- legitimises engagement with difficult issues
- only effective if it directly engages with these issues

**Classroom & beyond**
- history is not just learned in the classroom
- it has to engage more critically and effectively with what is taught outside the classroom

**Teaching of History**
- can help young people better understand influences that shaped contemporary society
- has to be subject to a process of continuous improvement
Citizenship education in NI

Citizenship curriculum
- diversity and inclusion
- equality and justice
- human rights and social responsibilities
- democracy and active participation

Expected challenges
- Curriculum
  - Content-based, subject-dominated
  - Needs focus on skills and process
- Pedagogy
  - Focused on delivery
  - Needs innovation to deal with controversy
- Political
  - Will we face a shared future or managed difference?
Implementation problems

- Balancing cultural identities and the common good
- Achieving the appropriate focus on rights
- Avoidance of controversial issues
- Connections: within communities, not between them
- Connections: local and global operating in parallel
• Direct engagement with controversial issues
• Problematising notions of justice
• Hearing the perspective of ‘ex-combatants’

‘... developed from the stories of political ex-prisoners involved in the ‘Troubles’. ... why they got involved, what prison was like, and what they do now to promote peace.’

• The limits of ‘political generosity’
• The weight of ‘unsolved murders’
• Hearing other silenced voices
Impact of the citizenship curriculum

- Too many ineffective classes
  - 1 in 3 primary
  - 1 in 4 post primary

Inspection of schools

- Young people less likely to vote
  - Young people becoming less likely to vote

Political participation

Teachers
- More connections through critical learning communities

Politicians
- Better engagement with and by politicians

Comparative
- Learning lessons from abroad
Promote critical learning communities

Support engagement with difficult issues

Learn from other contexts, but develop our own solutions