

Whatever happened to Integrated Education?

Ulf Hansson, Una O'Connor-Bones and John McCord

Introduction

This article is based on a report commissioned by the Integrated Education Fund (IEF).¹ Its purpose was to review policy and research evidence related to integrated education in Northern Ireland (1999-2012). The review, carried out by The Children and Youth Programme (CYP) at the University of Ulster, analysed existing documentation in five main areas: political party manifestos; key education policy documents; social surveys; academic research on the educational, societal and economic benefits of integrated education; and lessons from other international contexts. The focus of this article is threefold. Firstly, it provides a background and context for integrated education. Secondly, it considers changes in education policy in Northern Ireland towards the provision of integrated education. Finally, it analyses the education policy positions of political parties which have representation in the current Northern Ireland Assembly mandate (2011-2015), with emphasis on the policy statements from each party's election manifesto (Assembly, Westminster and European) in relation to integrated education. The article highlights the shift in political and policy discourse towards the concept of 'shared education' and away from integrated education.

Background

It is just over 30 years since the establishment of the first planned, integrated school in Northern Ireland. The overarching goal of integrated schools is to foster an understanding of the two dominant traditions and to overcome negative stereotypes as children from diverse backgrounds are educated together on a daily basis in the same classrooms.² There are currently 62 grant-aided integrated schools in Northern Ireland, including 61 with full approval and one with conditional approval from the Department of Education (DE). The total enrolment, including pupils at pre-school facilities, and pupils with statements of special educational needs (SEN), is over 23,000, accounting for

circa 7% of the school population.³ In addition, there are 42 ‘mixed’ schools (7 under Catholic management and 35 under other management), each with at least a 10% enrolment of ‘the other community’. However, more recent DE figures show that almost half of Northern Ireland’s school children are still being taught in schools where 95% or more of the pupils are of the same religion.

Initial resistance to sending children to integrated schools has been replaced by more accommodating attitudes and increasing parental preference.⁴ Various research⁵ has pointed to a significant unmet need for places, with children who are turned away from integrated schools each year unlikely to find a place in another. McAleavy, Donegan and O’Hagan (2009) have confirmed the popularity of integrated schools and associated over-subscription, citing a 22% increase in enrolments between 1999 and 2002. Social attitudes and public opinion data in Northern Ireland has further revealed that public support for formally integrated schools remains very high in terms of its contribution to peace and reconciliation, promoting a shared future, and promoting mutual respect and understanding. Temporal comparisons of survey findings between 1999 and 2011 indicated that the majority of people believe the Northern Ireland Executive should encourage more integration, mixed schooling as well as greater sharing, partnering and collaboration between schools.⁶ Attitudinal data indicated that support and preference for integrated schools has remained consistently high, rising from 82% in 2003 to 88% in 2011.⁷ In addition, approximately two thirds of respondents viewed integrated education as ‘*very important to peace and reconciliation in Northern Ireland*’ (increasing from 60% in 2003 to 69% in 2011) and over one third would like to send their children to an integrated school if there was one in the vicinity. Research has also highlighted pupils’ reported positive attitudes to their integrated school experience as well as evidence on the benefits of intergroup contact suggesting that integrated schooling has a significant and positive social influence on the lives of those who experience it, most notably in terms of fostering cross-community friendships, reducing prejudicial attitudes and promoting a sense of security in religious, racial, or ethnically diverse environments⁸, although the extent to which it has impacted on individuals’ religious or political identities is less clear.⁹

Integrated education and education policies

The concept of integrated education was endorsed in the Belfast (Good Friday) Agreement (1998), which acknowledged that ‘*An essential aspect of the reconciliation process is the promotion of a culture of tolerance at every level of society, including initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education*

and mixed housing'. The subsequent introduction of a Policy and Strategic Framework for Good Relations in Northern Ireland, A Shared Future¹⁰, was intended to provide direction to address community segregation and sectarianism. Overall, the framework advocated for '*sharing over separation*' and '*cultural variety*' rather than the existence of a range of separated cultures. In relation to education, the framework referred to the promotion of '*shared*' **and** '*inter-cultural education*' at all levels and for schools to ensure, '*...through their policies, structures and curricula, that pupils are consciously prepared for life in a diverse and inter-cultural society and world*'.¹¹ Although A Shared Future recognised the potential of integrated education it also referred to the need for '*greater sharing in education*'. While parental choice is acknowledged, there is a cautionary caveat of the need to strike a balance between, '*...the exercise of this choice and the significant additional costs and potential diseconomies that this diversity of provision generates, particularly in a period of demographic downturn and falling rolls*'¹².

The subsequent publication of the Programme for Cohesion, Sharing and Integration (CSI) Consultation Document¹³ represented the development of a new strategy which would replace A Shared Future. It is noteworthy that the document, while acknowledging that integrated schools provide '*... equal recognition to, and promotes equal expression of, the two main traditions and other cultures*'¹⁴, is almost devoid of any additional references to integrated education. Reflecting a shift in emphasis away from integrated education, the strategy instead advocated the duty of schools to promote good relations, regardless of sector, highlighting the responsibility of the DE to better promote the wider use of school premises. In this regard, acknowledgement is given to the International Fund for Ireland's (IFI) Sharing in Education Programme (2009), for which the DE was the managing agent. Most recently, the Northern Ireland Draft Programme for Government (2011-2015) contains no reference to integrated education; instead it states a commitment to develop the Lisanelly Shared Education campus in Omagh as a key regeneration project. The document also identifies the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Group tasked with exploring and bringing forward recommendations to the Minister of Education to advance shared education so that by 2015 all children would have the opportunity to participate in shared education programmes.¹⁵

The shift in wider policy has been similarly reflected within education. In 1989, the Education (Northern Ireland) Order provided for two new categories of integrated school – Grant Maintained Integrated (GMI) and Controlled Integrated (CI), the latter also known as transformed integrated schools. In both school types, the religious balance of pupils, staff and governors was to be a key consideration. This meant that those schools seeking to transform to

integrated status should enrol at least 10% of pupils from the minority religion in year one whilst working towards an overall balance in the school of at least 70:30; all GMI schools should have a pupil balance of at least 70:30 from the outset (DE, 2005). Under the 1989 Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order, the government has a duty to meet the needs of parents requesting the establishment of integrated schools where it is feasible; as such, the Order placed a statutory duty on the DE to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education. The Independent Strategic Review of Education (The Bain Review)¹⁶ made a series of arguments for a more inclusive education system by adopting a broad perspective, making clear that its particular focus was not solely on limiting integration to ‘...*the different ethos that parents and others want to see in schools, but to focus attention on developing thinking about new ways of working together, and of envisaging approaches to schooling that share resources*’¹⁷. However, it is of interest to note that a distinction is made between integrated education and integrated schools and the Review advocated ‘... *a more pervasive and inclusive approach, focused on the dynamic process of integrating education across the school system, in which sharing and collaboration are key features*’¹⁸. A role is also identified for the DE to explore ways in which it could better facilitate and encourage ‘... *an inclusive strategy with a variety of approaches to integrating education within a framework of sustainable schools*’¹⁹. In contrast with the original expectations of DE in the Good Friday Agreement, this implies that the Department should not only support existing integrated schools, but should also find alternative ways of integrating education.

A statistic frequently cited from the Bain Review was the large number of surplus places (53,000) which existed in schools. This led to recurrent calls for rationalisation of the schools estate, increased sharing and area-based planning. In light of this, the DE made a number of recommendations in *Schools for the Future: A Policy for Sustainable Schools*²⁰, by referring to, amongst other things, the role played by the DE in ‘...*encouraging a variety of approaches to integrating education within a framework of sustainable schools*’²¹. Referencing the Bain Review, it reiterated the recommendation that the DE should discharge its legislative duty to integrated education and that it ‘... *should explain that it is committed to facilitating and encouraging a variety of approaches to integrating education within a framework of sustainable schools*’²². On 16th November 2011, the First Minister and Deputy First Minister announced that the Executive had agreed the establishment of the Education and Skills Authority (ESA) to replace the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs), the Staff Commission for Education and Library Boards, the CCMS and the Youth Council for Northern Ireland.²³ The creation of ESA was identified as a priority within the Executive’s Programme for Government (2011–2015) and intended

to be operational in 2013. More recently, whilst the passing of the Education Bill (2012) will further progress the establishment of ESA, there is no direct reference to integrated education in the Bill and the duty of the DE to ‘... *encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education*’ is not replicated in the document. In July 2012, in fulfilment of a commitment in the Northern Ireland Draft Programme for Government (2011-2015), the Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education was established with a mandate to further investigate shared education.²⁴ The Advisory Group’s terms of reference outlined the need to take into account issues such as ‘... *preferences of learners and parents in relation to shared education*’ but also ‘*the effectiveness and value for money of existing approaches, and of best practice, locally and internationally*’. The mandate also tasked the group to look at ‘*how the advancement of shared education might address issues such as ethos and identity*’ as well as ‘*barriers to the advancement of shared education*’.

Although the concept of integrated education was advocated in the Good Friday Agreement and in A Shared Future it has received little, if any, direct references in subsequent broad policy and specific education documents. Instead, it would seem to have been superseded by sharing in education, with the emphasis on ‘integrating education’ rather than integrated schools.

Election Manifestos and Integrated Education

The main political parties in Northern Ireland have, to various degrees, individually outlined their approach to integrated education in successive manifestos which highlight a shift in policies over the last decade.²⁵ Collectively, it can be argued that the manifestos reflect a wider trend to promote the idea of shared education whilst putting less emphasis on the concept of integrated education. This can be seen in a number of cases. For example, in earlier manifestos, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) were critical of integrated education, perceiving that these schools were ‘*treated differently*’²⁶ with regards to funding²⁷ which was discriminatory against state sector schools²⁸. However, in its 2011 Assembly Election manifesto, a marked difference in approach towards education policy can be ascertained. Under the heading ‘SHARING’, the DUP referred to the need to establish a ‘... *Commission harnessing international expertise to advise on a strategy for enhancing sharing and integration within our education system*’²⁹. The party also advocated that school development proposals should ‘...*demonstrate that options for sharing have been fully explored*’.³⁰ Sinn Fein does not explicitly refer to integrated education but to ‘*choice*’, whilst maintaining that integrated schools should be properly resourced.³¹ In 2011, the party referred to the

promotion of *'collaborative schools'*. Similarly, the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) in 2007 referred to the need for *'flexible, local programmes to facilitate shared educational initiatives'*³². In the 2011 Assembly Election manifesto, the UUP advocated Area Based Planning and Area Learning Communities but also *'...organic collaboration, sharing of facilities and/or the merging of schools into Community Schools'*³³. References were also made to the development of shared campuses in order to better utilise resources and to promote *'...shared education as a contributing factor to a shared future'*³⁴. The Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP) stated in 2003 that *'Greater co-operation is required between schools'* and in the 2011 Assembly Election manifesto, the SDLP refers to the need for *'maximum sharing possible'*³⁵. The Alliance Party has been the strongest advocate of integrated education in Northern Ireland, and has recurrently placed integrated education at the centre of its policy platform, not just as a driver in education policy, but also as a means of promoting social and cultural cohesion in Northern Ireland. In the party's 2003 Assembly Election manifesto, for example, Alliance supported a target of *'...10% of children being educated in integrated schools by 2010'*³⁶. The party referred to the Bain Review and while recognising the role of integrated education *'...as the optimal approach to sharing in schools'*³⁷, the 2007 manifesto called for increased sharing within education, including facilities and *'ultimately campuses'*³⁸. In the 2010 UK General Election manifesto, it acknowledged that *'...there can be a number of different models of sharing between sectors that are all of considerable value'*³⁹. The party still however, refers to integrated education as *'...the most economically and financially sustainable form of education, as well as delivering educationally and socially'*⁴⁰. The 2011 Assembly Election manifesto referred to the party promoting *'...a full spectrum of models for integrating education, including the integrated education model itself'*⁴¹. While integrated education is acknowledged, references are also made to the development of shared education and the better use of resources. Of the two smallest parties in the Assembly, the Green Party referred in 2011 to the promotion of *'... a cooperative education system through the sharing of resources between schools in all sectors, such as teachers, teaching materials'* whilst the Traditional Unionist Voice (TUV) did not raise the issue of integrated education

Collectively, the manifestos reflect a wider trend among Northern Ireland's political parties to promote the idea of shared education whilst putting less emphasis on the notion of structural reform and integrated education. Although it is difficult to be certain how this change occurred, the evidence suggests that it has accelerated since the end of direct rule, the establishment of local devolved institutions and the publication of the Bain Review. More recently, the stringencies of the economic climate have lent weight to the view that

increased sharing of resources among and between schools in Northern Ireland will save money, ensuring that shared and integrated education has acquired greater educational, political and social impetus.

Conclusions

Although the concept of integrated education was advocated in the Good Friday Agreement and in *A Shared Future* it receives little, if any, direct references in subsequent broad policy and specific education documents. Although the Bain Review acknowledged integrated education, it seems to have been superseded by an emphasis on sharing in education despite a statutory responsibility on DE to support and facilitate integrated education. Further, there is no reference to integrated education in the Programme for Government (2011-15) and the establishment of a Ministerial Advisory Group for Advancing Shared Education has no reference to integrated education in its remit. The language used by political parties in their manifestos has shifted from reference to integrated education (either positively or negatively) to that of shared education. The evidence suggests that discourse on shared education represents a movement by political parties towards education policies that plan for separate development rather than structural change and a unified system of common schools.

For policy implementation to be effective a much clearer distinction between integrated, mixed, and shared schooling needs to be drawn; this is important along several lines. Firstly, the current initiatives on shared education are supported by more than £10 million funding from philanthropy and reaches a limited number of pupils so that extending arrangements to the whole system would cost significantly more.⁴² The challenge is whether there will subsequently be sufficient commitment of statutory funding to sustain sharing policies once charitable sources disappear – the experience of previous cross-community schemes suggest that school involvement falls away without sustained, additional funding.⁴³ It is also clear that issues relating to finance and sustainability need to be considered within a constrained economic climate.

Secondly, it would also help determine whether limited resources will be concentrated mainly on supporting integrated education (common schools attended daily by children from diverse tradition); mixed schools (separate schools with a significant minority from other traditions); or shared education (separate schools with some shared resources, pupil contact and collaboration between them). It may not be possible to pursue these simultaneously since prioritisation of one will have an impact on the others given that there are finite resources available. Moreover, the possible financial savings which an

integrated education system could provide have not yet been fully researched. Whilst there is agreement that shared education would have economic benefits, arguably greater savings could be made through the rationalisation of schools rather than sharing existing resources.

Finally, the current definition of shared education seems to conflate any activity which involves collaboration between schools whether the purpose is educational, societal or economic; the terminology is vague about the extent to which shared education is envisaged as a policy that will lead to structural reform of the education system or whether it is premised on maintaining the existing system of separate schools. In terms of pupil contact, there is limited detail on the nature and extent of sustained contact and how many pupils out of the total school population are offered this opportunity. Community relations goals are not made explicit and it is not clear what change theory is being applied – for example, will contact lead to attitudinal or behavioural change, or will it involve incremental change in trust to the extent that schools might eventually merge, as suggested in the Bain Review. This article therefore suggests a need for greater clarity between the concepts of integrated, mixed and shared education, how these concepts are understood by political representatives and, importantly, what each might mean in terms of more explicit education policy goals and concrete targets for implementation. Undoubtedly, there is a need for much deeper public engagement in these issues, for clearer thinking about the long term implications of distinctions between integration, mixed and shared education and for informed debate on where current education policies are leading us and what our ultimate destination as a society might be.

Notes

¹ Hansson et al, 2013.

² NICIE, 2012.

Figures compiled by NICIE indicate that there has been a relatively steady incline between 2004 and 2010, demonstrating an average long-term trajectory of 3% growth annually, although the medium to long-term growth in numbers has been nominal between 2009 and 2011. There has been an increase in the number of cases involving transformation of existing schools and opening of new integrated schools since 1984, most markedly between 1994 and 1998.

³ Forty-two of the schools are primary and 20 are post-primary. In terms of management type, there are 38 GMI schools and 24 CI schools. This figure includes two with conditional approval.

⁴ Ipsos Mori, 2011; Macauley, 2009; Montgomery et al., 2003.

⁵ Gallagher and Lundy, 2006; Russell, 2006; Wardlow, 2006; McGlynn, 2004.

⁶ Millward Brown Ulster (2008, 2003); Ipsos MORI (2011); Young Life and Times Survey (YLTS) (2003-2011); and Northern Ireland Life and Times survey (NILT) (1999-2010)

⁷ Millward Brown Ulster, 2003 and Ipsos Mori, 2011

⁸ Stringer, 2009, 2000; Montgomery et al., 2003; McGlynn, 2003,2001; Irwin, 1991.

⁹ Hayes and McAllister, 2009; Hayes et al., 2006.

¹⁰ OFMDFM, 2005

¹¹ Ibid. p.24.

¹² Ibid., p.25.

¹³ OFMDFM, 2010

¹⁴ Ibid., p.16.

¹⁵ The Ministerial Advisory Group on Advancing Shared Education was established in July 2012 and is chaired by Professor Paul Connolly (QUB) who together with the other members: Dawn Purvis and PJ O’Grady will report their findings to the Minister by February 2013.

¹⁶ DE, 2006.

¹⁷ Ibid., p.3.

¹⁸ Ibid., p.147.

¹⁹ Ibid., p.160.

²⁰ DE, 2009. http://www.deni.gov.uk/a_policy_for_sustainable_schools-2.pdf

²¹ Ibid., p.17.

²² Ibid., p.17.

²³ The Bill requires ESA to appoint school governors who are committed to the ethos of the school (and in the case of Irish-medium education, to the viability of the school) along with enhanced functions and powers for inspectors.

²⁴ Terms of Reference of the Ministerial Advisory Group on Shared Education.pdf Available at: http://www.deni.gov.uk/index/schools-and-infrastructure-2/shared_education/shared-education-ministerial-advisory-group.htm Accessed 12/12/2012.

²⁵ Note that this review was limited to analysis of manifestos of political parties – these are printed in the lead up to elections and may therefore not always reflect broader views or policy statements made, for example, in response to Assembly questions or as part of political debates.

²⁶ DUP, 2001, p.10.

²⁷ DUP, 2003, p.19, and 2007, p.45.

²⁸ DUP, 2003, p.19.

²⁹ DUP, 2011, p.12.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Sinn Fein, 2007, p.9.

³² UUP, 2007, p.10.

³³ UUP, 2011, p.17.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ SDLP, 2011, p.13.

³⁶ Alliance Party, 2003, p.7.

³⁷ Alliance Party, 2011, p.19.

³⁸ Ibid., p.20.

³⁹ Alliance Party, 2010, p.17.

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Alliance Party, 2011, p.26.

⁴² The Sharing Education Programme (SEP) at QUB and co-funded by the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies commenced in September 2007 and supports schools in the formation of cross-sectoral partnerships

⁴³ Similar ideas were funded by DE in the 1980s, see for example The Inter School Links project (1986-1990) which created area partnerships based on curriculum cooperation in Enniskillen, Limavady and Strabane over a four-year period. An evaluation highlighted the importance of sustained contact, but questioned whether schools would sustain the collaborations once funding ended. Further details can be found at: <http://cain.ulst.ac.uk/csc/reports/extend.htm>

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