

## DEVOLUTION AND EDUCATION POLICY IN NORTHERN IRELAND 2013-2015

**RAFFAELLA SANTI\***

**Abstract:** After the so-called “Troubles”, since 1998, Northern Ireland is experiencing a complicated but lasting peace process (or “conflict transformation” process). Despite this, the society remains divided along ethnopolitical and religious lines, with a polarized politics. The education system is mainly separated, with more than 90% of school population attending schools which are either Catholic or Protestant, and only 7% attending integrated schools of a mixed nature. The policy of “shared education” tries to connect different schools with several projects and activities. Following the integrated-shared education debate, the article reconstructs the education policy of the Northern Irish executive and of the Assembly of Northern Ireland under devolution, in the period 2013-2015.

**Keywords:** Northern Ireland, social identity, devolution, integrated education, shared education

### INTRODUCTION

Researching Northern Ireland<sup>1</sup> is a powerfully emotional experience, challenging one’s opinions, views and prejudices. There is no other place in the world such as this, where the historically-based ethnic division between the two sections of the community, the Protestant/Unionist and the Catholic/Nationalist, is embodied in a multiplicity of cultural objects, placed in the sites of everyday life (flags, emblems, murals) and is even physically performed year after

---

\* Raffaella Santi (✉)

Department of Human Sciences, University of Urbino Carlo Bo, Italy

e-mail: raffaella.santi@uniurb.it

*AGATHOS*, Volume 6, Issue 2, 2015

<sup>1</sup> This article constitutes the latest of a series of publications emerged during a six year research project focused on Northern Ireland: “Socialization, identity and education in European societies divided by ethnic conflicts” (2009-2015). The research – carried out at the University of Urbino Carlo Bo, with several visits to Northern Ireland – was supervised by Dr. Emanuela Susca. It was financed by the Fondazione Cassa di Risparmio di Pesaro.

year through a series of impressive public rituals (parades and commemorations)<sup>2</sup>.

All these symbols and symbolic rituals, fixed as cultural traditions but with their meanings evolving over time on the basis of current events and issues, contribute to shaping *cultural memory*, and to defining and redefining the identities of the two major groups, and their polarization<sup>3</sup>. As Henri Tajfel pointed out, *social identity* is how one sees oneself in a social context and how one interprets the world around him/her; the status of the social group(s) one belongs to, in comparison with other significant groups, may become an important aspect of an individual self image<sup>4</sup>.

In Northern Ireland, the Catholics are *Nationalists*, in the sense that they would like “the North” to be re-united to “the South” of the island: the Republic of Ireland (Belfast with Dublin); while the Protestants are *Unionists* because they wish Northern Ireland to remain part of the United Kingdom (Belfast with London)<sup>5</sup>.

---

<sup>2</sup> On these aspects, I refer the reader to: R. Santi (2009). “Cultural Memory, Identity and Conflict in Northern Ireland”, in I. Pastor, M. Castrillo, M.R. Garcia, I. Olejua, J. Vázquez and M. Villela (eds.), *Actas del VIII Congreso “Cultura Europea”*, Editorial Aranzadi, Cizur Menor (Spain), pp. 947-964 (with bibliography).

<sup>3</sup> “Differences of opinion and more [...] among and between members of the same community are normal, even inevitable. They are masked by a semblance of agreement and convergence generated by shared communal symbols, and participation in a common symbolic discourse of community membership that constructs and emphasises the boundary between members and non-members”, R. Jenkins (2008). *Social Identity*. London-New York: Routledge: (third edition), p. 137.

<sup>4</sup> See H. Tajfel (1981). *Human Groups and Social Categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

<sup>5</sup> The religious labels are to some extent inappropriate, since the religious identification does not encompass all the meanings associated with belonging to one section of the community or the other – not to mention the fact that there are atheists and agnostics in both groups – but are still being used in society, as well as by researchers and scholars. Moreover, it is true that “some social groups, in particular Catholics, are becoming more individualised in their expression of faith. But, for many, the Catholic Church is still a focal point for the imagination of identity, the practice of community and for socialization. Nationalist politicians are still reluctant to offend the Church, which remains a powerful social actor. [...] Religious ideas also continue to be a significant resource for the construction of identity, even for some non-churchgoing Protestants. The Democratic Unionist Party now dominates unionist politics and retains a distinctive religious ethos. [...] What has remained constant is the continuing identification of Catholics by Protestants and of Protestants by Catholics, as the primary social ‘other’ to define themselves against. This is perpetuated by entrenched religious segregation in all stages of the life cycle, as well

The so-called “Troubles” – a real (though unconventional) civil war with nearly 3.600 deaths, involving paramilitary groups, the local police, the British army, and also many civilians who were implicated at many levels – lasted thirty years until the signing of the peace truce, the Good Friday Agreement, in Belfast (1998)<sup>6</sup>. With the peace process, the society has experienced many changes, most of which positive and constructive, but it still remains a *structurally* divided society, characterized as it is by endogamy, separated schools and segregated housing. As Smithey has pointed out: “This is not a post-conflict process but rather a continuation of conflict by other means. [...] The conflict is in a state of transition”<sup>7</sup>. The consequence is that: “For a sustainable peace to emerge, emotions, identities, and ideologies, as well as the rituals and cultural expressions that sustain them, must begin to accommodate one another. The process of replacing a culture of mistrust and fear with one of cooperation is a slow tenuous process, and contention across the ethnopolitical divide will continue. However, we can say that a conflict is in a state of transformation when fundamentally polarized in-group and out-group perceptions have begun to change, albeit slowly and incrementally”<sup>8</sup>.

#### A DIVIDED SOCIETY – A POLARIZED POLITICS

The societal division is symbolized, at the highest political level, by the presence of a First Minister, who is today the Protestant Peter Robinson and a Deputy First Minister, today the Catholic Martin McGuinness<sup>9</sup>, ruling the country in a power-sharing system under devolution<sup>10</sup>.

---

as continuing political conflict and low-level violence that fuel suspicion of the other group and make social stereotypes difficult to transform. For these reasons, religion is likely to form an important dimension of social relations in northern Ireland for the foreseeable future”, C. Mitchell (2008). “Religious change and persistence”, in C. Coulter and M. Murray (eds.). *Northern Ireland after the troubles. A society in transition*. Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 135- 151, at pp. 150-151.

<sup>6</sup> See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement).

<sup>7</sup> L.A. Smithey (2011). “Introduction” in his *Unionists, Loyalists, & Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-24, p. 7.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 9.

<sup>9</sup> See [www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk).

<sup>10</sup> See C. Knox (2010). *Devolution and the Governance of Northern Ireland*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.

The laws are written by the local Parliament (the Northern Ireland Assembly, located in Stormont, near Belfast) but they must have the royal assent and seal as the final stage in the *iter legis*. There is a British Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, based in London, whose functions are linked above all to the implementation of the Belfast Agreement, and to the preserving of national security and well-being – this office is currently held by Teresa Villiers, MP<sup>11</sup>.

The Northern Ireland Assembly<sup>12</sup> has 80 members, bearing the title MLA, elected mainly within the four major parties: the Protestant Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Ulster Unionist Party (UUP) and the Catholic Sinn Fein (SF) and Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP); while the cross-community Alliance Party of Northern Ireland (APNI) and Green Party in Northern Ireland (GPNI) remain minority parties. Northern Ireland elects also 18 members of Parliament (MPs) in the House of Commons in London. The latest elections were held on 7<sup>th</sup> of May 2015 (turnout 57.1%) and the results were the following: DUP 25.7% (8 seats); SF 24.5% (4 seats); UUP 16.0% (2 seats); SDLP 13.9% (3 seats) (others: 1 seat; APNI and GPNI no seats)<sup>13</sup>.

It is the ethnoreligious distinction that dictates political allegiance and, consequently, the bi-polarization of politics: “Elections in Northern Ireland remain contests marked by almost total correlation between religious affiliation and political preference”<sup>14</sup> and (with the exception of the APNI) “there is little incentive for parties in Northern Ireland to appeal beyond their ethno-religious community”<sup>15</sup>. In this context: “Benign apartheid and a two-community suspicious coexistence, rather than the emergence of consensual one-community politics, remain the more likely short-term scenarios”<sup>16</sup>.

Thus, in Northern Ireland today, common politics is not dictated by an intercommunity political system<sup>17</sup>, but by a type of political co-

---

<sup>11</sup> See [www.gov.uk/government/ministers/secretary-of-state-for-northern-ireland](http://www.gov.uk/government/ministers/secretary-of-state-for-northern-ireland).

<sup>12</sup> See [www.niassembly.gov.uk](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk).

<sup>13</sup> Election results are published on CAIN - Conflict Archive on the Internet: <https://cain.ulst.ac.uk>.

<sup>14</sup> J. Tonge (2008). “From conflict to communal politics: the politics of peace”, Chapter 3 in Colin Coulter and Michael Murray (eds.). *Northern Ireland after the troubles. A society in transition, cit.*, pp. 49-72, p. 59.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 61.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 69.

<sup>17</sup> “Despite the cessation of most paramilitary violence we are left with a situation within which the creation of territorial division and rigidified ethno-sectarian

habitation (some describe it as a “consociational” model) of two political axes with members elected by the two communities.

The challenge is to elaborate and perform a policy for the common good of the whole Northern Irish society. This is not easy in a society emerging from the conflict, where the very notion of “common good” is hard to define, being often composed by conflicting interests, originating from a complex dialectic of social, political and cultural issues that are opposed to each other.

The task of an elected politician becomes more difficult than in most contemporary democratic societies, since he or she has to respond to a specific electorate. In order to vote again for the same party, this electorate must perceive that the elected has worked for the specific interests of the group. How can we reconcile this (practical) need with the (moral) necessity to work for the common good of the entire society? This is no easy task.

Moreover, the members of the Assembly are themselves the product of a divided society, and carry with them their social identities. Are they able to overcome the divisions, and to repress their own prejudices, in order to co-operate in effective ways? In fact, the members of the parties belonging to the Catholic and the Protestant political areas are driven by everyday politics, and by decision-making necessities, to find ways to co-operate. A clear example is the work of the *mixed* Assembly Committees.

During the suspension of devolution in 2006 (then re-established in 2007, and still operating to date) two advisors to the education committees interestingly wrote: “Devolution was accompanied by a much more participatory and accountable process of policy making. The committees of the Assembly played an important role in this. Important issues were raised under devolution which would not have

---

communities means that fear and mistrust are still framed by a desire to create communal separation. Residential segregation still regulates ethno-sectarian animosity through complex special devices. More importantly, the capacity to reconstruct identity and political meaning is obviated by political actors who mobilise fear in order to strengthen unidimensional classifications of political belonging. Community-based self representation assumes the form of a mythic reiteration of purity and self-preservation. As such, the potential to create intercommunity understandings of fear is, in terms of politics, marginalised by wider ethno-sectarian readings. Despite significant and important changes, it is evident that wider senses of powerlessness are responsible for the failure of intercommunity politics to emerge”, P. Shirlow and B. Murtagh (2006). *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*. London-Dublin-Ann Arbor: Pluto Press, p. 181.

been under Direct Rule, and devolution made a considerable difference to the processes which shaped and steered the nature and parameters of these debates: the debates were given legitimacy, status, a comprehensive remit and resources necessary to conduct them. There were more opportunities to raise educational issues because of the extent of media coverage; [...] There was a growing importance for local accountability throughout the processes of policy making. [...] The operation of devolved institutions also obliged MLAs of completely opposed principles to work together politically, especially in committees. This seems to have been difficult over some key issues, such as the capital funding of schools. However, our experience of daily working of these groups showed that, in practice, members managed to develop productive relationships in many areas so as to move issues forward. It appears that the style and role of the committee chair was crucial to this process”<sup>18</sup>.

Some major social surveys have highlighted that there was an improvement in inter-community relationships at the beginning of the peace process and even more with the consolidation of devolution in most recent years<sup>19</sup>. In this political and social context, the main challenge is the construction of an inclusive society, in which everyone can live safely and build a comfortable life.

#### EDUCATION: A CONTRIBUTOR TO COMMUNITY COHESION

In contemporary Western societies, schooling has three major purposes that “underlie” the familiar activities of schools: the transmission of knowledge of course, but also a function of social selection (“the sorting of people for higher- and lower-level jobs in society”) and of *socialization*: “the training of values, attitude, and habits of conduct”<sup>20</sup>. Socialization in schools is above all a process of instructing the students in behavioural, moral and cultural conformity, the teaching and administrative staff being the principal agent of socialization. In fact, “it is best to think of socialization as involving

---

<sup>18</sup> P. McKeown and B. Osborne (2006). “Making education policy under devolution: the role of Northern Ireland Assembly committees”, in C. Donnelly, P. McKeown and B. Osborne (eds.). *Devolution and pluralism in education in Northern Ireland*, Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 127-138, p 136.

<sup>19</sup> See D. Morrow, G. Robinson and L. Dowds (2013). *The Long View of Community Relations in Northern Ireland: 1989-2012*. Derry/Londonderry-Belfast: ARK.

<sup>20</sup> S. Brint (2006). *Schools and Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, p. 97.

three dimensions: (1) efforts to shape behaviour, (2) efforts to shape moral values, and (3) efforts to shape cultural styles”<sup>21</sup>.

Education can contribute significantly to the positive post-conflict transformation in divided societies. As was recently emphasized by a group of researchers, in order to reinforce enduring and sustainable peace, education policies should experience a process of revision that brings them to actively promote the four Rs: 1. *redistribution* (equality of opportunities); 2. *recognition* (space for cultural/ethnic diversity); 3. *representation* (involvement in decision-making at multiple scales); 4. *reconciliation* (transitional justice, dealing with the past, building positive relations)<sup>22</sup>.

In Northern Ireland, this spirit has been embraced by the Department of Education through the policy of *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education* (CRED policy): “The aim of the policy is to: Contribute to improving relations between communities by educating children and young people to develop self respect and respect for others, promote equality and work to eliminate discrimination by providing children and young people, in formal and non-formal education settings, with opportunities to build relationships with those of different backgrounds and traditions within the resources available”<sup>23</sup>.

Before the beginning of the peace process, many efforts in this direction were made above all by the integrated education sector, that (since 1981) educates children of both sections of the community together<sup>24</sup>. However, currently only a minority of pupils (about 7%) attends the so-called integrated (mixed) schools. In the Statement of Principles of NICIE (Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education) we read: “The integrated school provides a learning environment where children and young people from Catholic and Protestant backgrounds, as well as those of other faiths or none, can

---

<sup>21</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 133.

<sup>22</sup> Unicef Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding – M. Novelli, M. Lopes Cardozo and A. Smith (2015). *A Theoretical Framework for Analysing the Contribution of Education to Sustainable Peacebuilding: 4Rs in Conflict-Affected Contexts*. Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.

<sup>23</sup> Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2011). *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education*, Ministerial Foreword by C. Ruane, Belfast: DENI, p. 20.

<sup>24</sup> See R. Santi (2013). “Pluralismo, inclusione, educazione alla pace in Irlanda del Nord”, *Pedagogia più Didattica. Teorie e pratiche educative*, 1, pp. 27-32 (with bibliography on integrated education).

learn with, from and about each other”<sup>25</sup>. An emphasis is given to the anti-bias curriculum. In the words of a practitioner: “[...] the proliferation of fear in Northern Irish Society, underlying and reinforced by years of conflict, emanates from and is reinforced by a distrust and wariness about difference and being different, and is often manifested as fear of being in a minority group or as fear of expressing personal opinion that go against the grain. [...] Rather, integrated education embraces the concept that education should be about exploring differences (as well as similarities) through engaging in dialogue as a means of contributing toward the healing of societal wounds. It involves consciously and carefully creating environments and conditions in which all those involved in integrated education can be liberated from fear and allowed to shine”<sup>26</sup>. Moreover: “In terms of the delivery of the lessons, within the curriculum, encouragement is given to the planned, conscious exploration of differing perspectives (political, religious, and cultural) in history, Religious Education (RE), and English. Consideration is also given to the appropriate use of “discomforting pedagogies”<sup>27</sup>.

Although integrated schools have been growing in number year after year, to date more than 90% of students is still attending separated schools, where it is possible to interact *daily* only with members of the same “in-group”. Both in integrated and separated schools, there is an effort to promote peace and dialogue. Teachers and staff are trained to do so in the local Universities: Queen’s University Belfast and the University of Ulster. In general, there is an improvement in education and training, but challenges remain<sup>28</sup>.

---

<sup>25</sup> See Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (2008), *Statement of Principles*, Belfast: NICIE. For the enrolments until 2013, see Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (2013), *Me, We, Our World. Nicie Annual Report 2012-2013*, Belfast: NICIE, pp. 43-44. Other documents and reports are available online: [www.nicie.org](http://www.nicie.org).

<sup>26</sup> P. McIlwaine (2013). “Embedding Integration through the Antibias Curriculum”, in C. McGlynn, M. Zembylas and Z. Bekerman, *Integrated Education in Conflicted Societies*. Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 213-22, p. 214.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 220; see M. Zembylas and C. McGlynn (2012). “Discomforting pedagogies: Emotional tensions, ethical dilemmas and transformative possibilities”, *British Educational Research Journal*, 38, 1, pp. 41-60.

<sup>28</sup> Education and Training Inspectorate (2014), *Chief Inspector’s Report 2012-2014*, Foreword by N. Buick, Bangor: ETI. For the strategic objectives, see Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2013), *Review of Corporate Plan for Education 2012-2015 and Department of Education 2013-2014 Annual Business Plan*, Bangor: DENI.



The transformation of separated schools into integrated schools continues: the latest being the formerly “controlled” (Protestant) primary school “Loughries” in Newtownards<sup>29</sup>. There is some evidence that the people of Northern Ireland are happy with this process. In fact, “the survey evidence continues to favour integrated education” but, in spite of this, “policy is very clearly drifting from integrated schooling towards ‘shared’ schooling”<sup>30</sup> – shared schooling<sup>31</sup> presupposes a series of mutual encounters and shared projects among schools, while these retain their nature, remaining either Catholic or Protestant or integrated.

Sometimes monitoring is carried out by researchers also with the aim “to provide evidence for the policy cycle”<sup>32</sup>. This appears to be the case with the education issue. For instance, in the important and very well researched study *The Long View of Community Relations in Northern Ireland: 1989-2012* – based on an analysis of data collected over more than two decades through the Northern Ireland Life and Time (NILT) survey – we read the following interpretation: “The evidence of the Life and Times Survey is of sustained majority support for integrated education. However there is some evidence that this has softened in recent years among Catholics and that support for ‘more sharing’ among young people is considerably greater among both Protestant and Catholic respondents is significantly greater. This may suggest that greater consensus could be achieved through a combined

---

<sup>29</sup> Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (2015), *Integrated Education: Newsletter Summer 2015*, Belfast: NICIE. As far as the school area planning is concerned, in a *Position Paper* agreed on 13<sup>th</sup> of May and published on 15<sup>th</sup> of June 2015, the Committee for Education of the Northern Ireland Assembly recommends that DENI gives the Education Authority enough powers to plan on an area basis (not on the basis of single schools) and with “policy development pre-consultations”, and “linkages to community planning activities”, Committee for Education of the Northern Ireland Assembly (2015), *Position Paper: Area Planning. Together with Committee papers relating to the Position Paper*, Belfast: NIA.

<sup>30</sup> P. Nolan (2014). *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report. Number Three*. Belfast: Community Relations Council, pp. 120-121.

<sup>31</sup> See the forthcoming R. Santi (2015). “Scuola e società. Educare alla cittadinanza in Irlanda del Nord”, *Pedagogia più Didattica. Teorie e pratiche educative*, 2 (with bibliography on shared education).

<sup>32</sup> C. McCartney and P. Nolan (2014). “Tracking Progress in Building Peaceful and Shared Societies”, *Shared Space. A research journal on peace, conflict and community relations in Northern Ireland*, Issue 18, pp. 4-12, p. 11.

approach to shared education in coming years”<sup>33</sup>. This interpretation clearly forces the data to tell another truth.

If we briefly analyze the 2015 Westminster election manifestos, published by the main political parties in Northern Ireland<sup>34</sup>, we see that the theme of education is always present. It is a sign that, at a political level, it is perceived as a quite important issue. The main parties in the region, the Protestant DUP<sup>35</sup> and the Catholic SF<sup>36</sup> – as well as the other Catholic party: the SDLP<sup>37</sup> – focus only on the economic aspects of education, and do not mention integrated or shared education at all; whereas the philosophy of integrated education is strongly embraced by the cross-community parties, APNI<sup>38</sup> e GPNI<sup>39</sup>, and above all by the Protestant UUP: “The Ulster Unionist Party believes now is the time to start commencing the transition to a single education system where children of all faiths and none learn together. There would be no more sectors, no more enforced social segregation”<sup>40</sup>.

---

<sup>33</sup> D. Morrow, G. Robinson G. and L. Dowds (2013). *The Long View of Community Relations in Northern Ireland: 1989-2012*, cit., p. 164.

<sup>34</sup> For an analysis of the manifestos of previous elections, see U. Hansson, U. O’Connor Bones and J. McCord (2013). *Integrated education: a review of policy and research evidence 1999-2012*. Belfast: Integrated Education Fund / UNESCO Centre - University of Ulster.

<sup>35</sup> “Locally we will: [...] Prioritise spending on health, education and growing economy”, Democratic Unionist Party (2015), *Standing up for Northern Ireland. Westminster Manifesto. Including the Northern Ireland Plan*, Belfast: DUP, p. 25.

<sup>36</sup> Education, welfare and economy: Sinn Féin (2015), *Equality Not Austerity. 2015 Westminster Election Manifesto*, Belfast: SF, p. 8 and p. 13.

<sup>37</sup> Education as a key factor to obtain jobs: Social Democratic and Labour Party (2015), *Prosperity Not Austerity. Westminster Manifesto 2015*, Belfast: SDLP, p. 6.

<sup>38</sup> “Alliance will Promote Integration and a Shared Future We will develop a comprehensive approach to promoting a shared future and reducing the cost of division, prioritising integrated education, shared neighbourhoods and promoting community relations”; “Achieving 20% of children in integrated schools by 2020 and a plan to significantly increase sharing in other schools”, Alliance Party (2015), *Step Forward. Not Back. Manifesto for 2015 Westminster Election*, Belfast: APNI, p. 2 and p. 6.

<sup>39</sup> “The Green Party in Northern Ireland will fight for an expansion of integrated education”, Green Party in Northern Ireland (2015), *For the Common Good. Manifesto 2015*, Belfast: GPNI, p. 5.

<sup>40</sup> Ulster Unionist Party (2015), *One Day, One Vote. One Chance for Change. Westminster Manifesto 2015*, Belfast: UUP, p. 12.

## THE DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION AND THE SHARED EDUCATION POLICY

The Department of Education for Northern Ireland (DENI)<sup>41</sup> uses the definition provided by the Ministerial Advisory Group: “Shared education involves two or more schools or other educational institutions from different sectors working in collaboration with the aim of delivering educational benefits to learners, promoting equality of opportunity, good relations, equality of identity, respect for diversity and community cohesion”<sup>42</sup>.

In particular, the “Sharing in Education” programme refers to 19 projects funded by the International Fund for Ireland and delivered through DENI; while the “Shared Education” programme refers to three programmes co-funded by the International Fund for Ireland and Atlantic Philanthropies, involving Queen’s University Belfast<sup>43</sup>. In general, “the new approach, termed shared education, highlighted the idea of promoting positive interdependence between schools as a means of transforming the relationship between otherwise divided institutions and, more important, pupils, teachers, parents and the wider community. More specifically, SEP was based on the idea that rather than challenging institutional boundaries, these boundaries should be left in place, but made less important: in other words, the project sought to challenge the potentially divisive effects of silos by finding practical ways of making institutional boundaries more porous and developing interactive bridges between otherwise separate institutions”<sup>44</sup>.

---

<sup>41</sup> See [www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk).

<sup>42</sup> Ministerial Advisory Group: P. Connolly, D. Purvis and P.J. O’Grady (2013), *Advancing Shared Education*, Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast. The Ministry John O’Dowd accepted nearly all the recommendations of the advisory group; see Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2013), *Shared Education: MAG’s Recommendations - Departmental Positions*, Belfast: DENI.

<sup>43</sup> Committee for Education of the Northern Ireland Assembly (2014), *Official Report (Hansard). Sharing in Education and Shared Education Programmes: International Fund for Ireland, Education and Training Inspectorate and University of Ulster*, Belfast. See also: Sharing Education Programme (2012), *Sharing Education Learning Forum Conference 2012 - Supporting the Programme for Government Commitments on Shared Education*, Enniskillen-Antrim-Belfast: SEP.

<sup>44</sup> G. Duffy and T. Gallagher (2012). *Sustaining Cross-Sector Collaboration: An examination of schools involved in the first cohort of the Sharing Education Programme*. Belfast: Queen’s University Belfast, pp. 6-7.

As far as the Education Bill is concerned<sup>45</sup>, the Minister for Education, John O’Dowd MLA, informed Executive colleagues on 9 September 2014 that he would not be moving the Education Bill (NIA Bill 14/11-15) to Consideration Stage. On that date the Executive agreed to withdraw the commitment in its 2011-15 Programme for Government<sup>46</sup> to establish an Education and Skills Authority (ESA). The Executive also agreed that a new Bill should be drafted which would provide for the establishment of a single body to replace the education and library boards (ELBs) and their Staff Commission. On 25 September 2014 the Executive agreed to the introduction of the new Bill and its progress via the accelerated passage procedure. The Education Bill (NIA Bill 38/11-16) was introduced in the Assembly on 6 October 2014 and completed its final stage on 17 November 2014. The Education Bill received Royal Assent and became the Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014 (on 11 December 2014). The Education Authority was formally established as a body corporate the following day and became fully operational on 1 April 2015 following the transfer to it of the assets, liabilities, duties, functions and staff of the ELBs and the Staff Commission. The Minister is on record during the passage of the Bill as saying that the long-term way forward is for a future Education Minister and Executive to return to an ESA Bill.

The Education Act contemplates the dissolution of Education and Library Boards and Staff Commission, with the creation of a single “Education Authority”: a corporate body, consisting in a Chair appointed by the Department of Education through a public competition; eight “political” members and twelve members “appointed” by DENI. On page one, paragraph 2 (3) we read: “It is the duty of the Authority (so far as its power extend) to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education”<sup>47</sup>.

Following the Education Act, the latest document released by the DENI is *Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education*, where we read: “The level of sharing across schools at different levels along a continuum where integrated education, which has already embraced a culture of diversity, is at the upper end of that continuum. The Department is conscious of its duty under the Education Reform Order

---

<sup>45</sup> The following information was kindly provided by Karen Taylor, EA PMO, DENI.

<sup>46</sup> See Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2011), *Draft Programme for Government 2011-15: Building a better future*, Belfast: OFM&DFM.

<sup>47</sup> See Elisabeth II, Queen (2014), *Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014*, Norwich: TSO.

1989 (Article 6) to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education and will continue to do so alongside the advancement of Shared Education. Indeed, by supporting Shared Education, it is envisaged that a portion of schools will move along the continuum to a more fully integrated model”<sup>48</sup>.

This policy is strictly related to the governmental strategy *Together: Building a United Community*, entailing also a Shared Education Campuses Programme – among the “essential criteria” that the school project must have in order to participate in this Programme, we find the “societal benefits”: “the proposal must demonstrate how it will enhance/develop a shared future for the local community”<sup>49</sup>. The *T:BUC* strategy develops the following “Vision”: “A united community, based on equality of opportunity, the desirability of good relations and reconciliation - one which is strengthened by its diversity, where cultural expression is celebrated and embraced and where everyone can live, learn, work and socialise together, free from prejudice, hate and intolerance”. To achieve this aim, and improving community relations, education is considered fundamental: “Education undoubtedly plays a crucial role in shaping our children’s lives in the present and equipping them for the future. While there is already a significant level of collaboration and sharing within and between education sectors, the segregated nature of our education provision means that the majority of our children and young people of school age continue to be educated within a single-identity setting thus limiting meaningful exposure to other traditions or identities within the school environment. [...] We believe that creating more opportunities for

---

<sup>48</sup> Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2015), *Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education*, Ministerial Foreword by J. O’Dowd, Belfast: DENI. The reference is to Part VI of the Education Reform Order (Northern Ireland) of 1989. See especially the Article 64: “General functions of Department and boards in relation to integrated education”: “(1) It shall be the duty of the Department to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education, that is to say the education together at school of Protestant and Roman Catholic pupils. (2) The Department may, subject to such conditions as it thinks fit, pay grants to anybody appearing to the Department to have as an objective the encouragement or promotion of integrated education. (3) It shall be the duty of a board to provide free of charge to any person seeking it advice and information about: (a) the procedures for acquisition by a school of controlled integrated status; (b) the implications for a school of the acquisition of that status”.

<sup>49</sup> Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2014), *The Shared Education Campuses Programme: Second Call for Expressions of Interest. Protocol Document*, Belfast: OFM&DFM.

socially-mixed, shared education, with a view to achieving a full shared education system in Northern Ireland, is a crucial part of breaking the cycle of inter-generational educational underachievement unemployment, and sectarianism; and improving good relations amongst and for our young people”<sup>50</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

Today, the number of shared education initiatives is increasing. At the theoretical level, the operation seems to be a transportation of the ideas and values of integrated education (collaboration and inclusion) into shared education. Even if sporadic co-operation cannot be the same thing as daily co-operation, and inter-school collaboration cannot lead to the same social outcomes as integrated education, it is a step forward with regards to a rigidly separated school system.

Education can play an important role in promoting peace, through the construction of an inclusive and democratic post-conflict society. “Would that not be easier under the one roof?” (Trevor Lunn, Member of the Committee for Education)<sup>51</sup>. Certainly yes...

The latest NILT data (released on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June 2015)<sup>52</sup> indicate that, in 2014, 84% of the population thought that the Northern Ireland Assembly had not achieved much, and that the support for political parties was decreasing. However, the recent Westminster election results show that the traditional allegiances remain sufficiently stable. The general election, that will be held in 2016, will reveal what the latest political attitudes really are.

It is true that “Polarized ethno-political identities remain among the most significant obstacles to building a healthy multicultural civil society in Northern Ireland [...]. A sustainable peace depends on the ability of even the most ideologically committed organizations and individuals to develop new interpretations of themselves and adversaries that make space for dialogue, cooperation, and coexistence”<sup>53</sup>.

---

<sup>50</sup> Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2013), *Together: Building a united community*, Belfast: OFM&DFM, p.47. See also: Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2011), *Draft Programme for Government 2011-15: Building a better future*, Belfast: OFM&DFM.

<sup>51</sup> See Committee for Education of the Northern Ireland Assembly (2014), *Official Report (Hansard)*, *cit.*

<sup>52</sup> See [www.ark.ac.uk/nilt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt).

<sup>53</sup> L.A. Smithey (2011). “Introduction”, *cit.*, p. 10. For more literature on Northern Ireland, see the catalogue of the Linen Hall Library Belfast: [www.linenhall.com](http://www.linenhall.com).

## ADDITION

A few days after this article was completed, the political instability – following the non implementation of the Stormont House Agreement<sup>54</sup>, as well as some episodes linked to supposed paramilitary activities – became political crisis. On the 10<sup>th</sup> of September 2015 the Prime Minister Peter Robinson resigned. The future of the Northern Ireland Assembly is now unclear<sup>55</sup>. Devolution or back to Direct Rule?

## REFERENCES:

### Literature:

- Brint S. (2006). *Schools and Societies*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Duffy G. and Gallagher T. (2012). *Sustaining Cross-Sector Collaboration: An examination of schools involved in the first cohort of the Sharing Education Programme*. Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.
- Hansson U., O'Connor Bones U. and McCord J. (2013). *Integrated education: a review of policy and research evidence 1999-2012*. Belfast: Integrated Education Fund / UNESCO Centre - University of Ulster.
- Jenkins R. (2008). *Social Identity*. London-New York: Routledge (third edition).
- Knox C. (2010). *Devolution and the Governance of Northern Ireland*. Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press.
- McCartney C. and Nolan P. (2014). "Tracking Progress in Building Peaceful and Shared Societies". *Shared Space. A research journal on peace, conflict and community relations in Northern Ireland*, Issue 18, pp. 4-12.
- McIlwaine P. (2013). "Embedding Integration through the Antibias Curriculum", in C. McGlynn, M. Zembylas and Z. Bekerman, *Integrated Education in Conflicted Societies*. Basingstoke-New York: Palgrave Macmillan, pp. 213-22.
- McKeown P. and Osborne B. (2006). "Making education policy under devolution: the role of Northern Ireland Assembly committees", in C. Donnelly, P. McKeown and B. Osborne (eds.), *Devolution and pluralism in education in Northern Ireland*. Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 127-138.
- Mitchell C. (2008). "Religious change and persistence", in C. Coulter and M. Murray (eds.), *Northern Ireland after the troubles. A society in transition*. Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 135- 151.
- Morrow D., Robinson G. and Dowds L. (2013). *The Long View of Community Relations in Northern Ireland: 1989-2012*. Derry/Londonderry-Belfast: ARK.
- Santi R. (2009). "Cultural Memory, Identity and Conflict in Northern Ireland", in I. Pastor, M. Castrillo, M.R. García, I. Olejua, J. Vázquez and M. Villela (eds.), *Actas del VIII Congreso "Cultura Europea"*, Editorial Aranzadi, Cizur Menor (Spain), pp. 947-964.
- Santi R. (2013). "Pluralismo, inclusione, educazione alla pace in Irlanda del Nord", *Pedagogia più Didattica. Teorie e pratiche educative*, 1, pp. 27-32.

---

<sup>54</sup> See [www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stormont-house-agreement](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stormont-house-agreement).

<sup>55</sup> To keep updated, see the website of the Belfast Telegraph: [www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk).

- Santi R. (2015). "Scuola e società. Educare alla cittadinanza in Irlanda del Nord", *Pedagogia più Didattica. Teorie e pratiche educative*, 2 (forthcoming).
- Shirlow P. and Murtagh B. (2006). *Belfast: Segregation, Violence and the City*. London-Dublin-Ann Arbor: Pluto Press.
- Smithey L.A. (2011). "Introduction" in his *Unionists, Loyalists, & Conflict Transformation in Northern Ireland*. Oxford-New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 3-24.
- Tajfel H. (1981). *Human Groups and Social Categories*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tonge J. (2008). "From conflict to communal politics: the politics of peace", C. Coulter and M. Murray (eds.), *Northern Ireland after the troubles. A society in transition*. Manchester-New York: Manchester University Press, pp. 49-72.
- Unicef Research Consortium on Education and Peacebuilding – M. Novelli, M. Lopes Cardozo and A. Smith (2015). *A Theoretical Framework for Analysing the Contribution of Education to Sustainable Peacebuilding: 4Rs in Conflict-Affected Contexts*, Amsterdam: University of Amsterdam.
- Zembylas M. and McGlynn C. (2012). "Discomforting pedagogies: Emotional tensions, ethical dilemmas and transformative possibilities", *British Educational Research Journal*, 38, 1, pp. 41-60.

**Governmental documents:**

- Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2011), *Community Relations, Equality and Diversity in Education*, Ministerial Foreword by C. Ruane, Belfast: DENI.
- Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2013a), *Review of Corporate Plan for Education 2012-2015 and Department of Education 2013-2014 Annual Business Plan*, Bangor: DENI.
- Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2013b), *Shared Education: MAG's Recommendations - Departmental Positions*, Belfast: DENI.
- Department of Education for Northern Ireland (2015), *Sharing Works: A Policy for Shared Education*, Ministerial Foreword by J. O'Dowd, Belfast: DENI.
- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2011), *Draft Programme for Government 2011-15: Building a better future*, Belfast: OFM&DFM.
- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2013), *Together: Building a united community*, Belfast: OFM&DFM.
- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2014), *The Shared Education Campuses Programme: Second Call for Expressions of Interest. Protocol Document*, Belfast: OFM&DFM.

**Official and institutional reports and statements:**

- Committee for Education of the Northern Ireland Assembly (2014), *Official Report (Hansard). Sharing in Education and Shared Education Programmes: International Fund for Ireland, Education and Training Inspectorate and University of Ulster*, Belfast: NIA.
- Committee for Education of the Northern Ireland Assembly (2015), *Position Paper: Area Planning. Together with Committee papers relating to the Position Paper*, Belfast: NIA.



- Education and Training Inspectorate (2014), *Chief Inspector's Report 2012-2014*, Foreword by N. Buick, Bangor: ETI.
- Ministerial Advisory Group: P. Connolly, D. Purvis and P.J. O'Grady (2013), *Advancing Shared Education*, Belfast: Queen's University Belfast.
- Nolan P. (2014), *Northern Ireland Peace Monitoring Report. Number Three*, Belfast: Community Relations Council.
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (2008), *Statement of Principles*, Belfast: NICIE.
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (2013), *Me, We, Our World. Nicie Annual Report 2012-2013*, Belfast: NICIE.
- Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (2015), *Integrated Education: Newsletter Summer 2015*, Belfast: NICIE.
- Sharing Education Programme (2012), *Sharing Education Learning Forum Conference 2012 - Supporting the Programme for Government Commitments on Shared Education*, Enniskillen-Antrim-Belfast: SEP.

**Westminster Election Manifestos:**

- Alliance Party (2015), *Step Forward. Not Back. Manifesto for 2015 Westminster Election*, Belfast: APNI.
- Democratic Unionist Party (2015), *Standing Up for Northern Ireland. Westminster Manifesto. Including the Northern Ireland Plan*, Belfast: DUP.
- Green Party in Northern Ireland (2015), *For the Common Good. Manifesto 2015*, Belfast: GPNI.
- Sinn Féin (2015), *Equality Not Austerity. 2015 Westminster Election Manifesto*, Belfast: SF.
- Social Democratic and Labour Party (2015), *Prosperity Not Austerity. Westminster Manifesto 2015*, Belfast: SDLP.
- Ulster Unionist Party (2015), *One Day, One Vote. One Chance for Change. Westminster Manifesto 2015*, Belfast: UUP.

**Agreements:**

- The Belfast Agreement (1998):  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-belfast-agreement)
- The Stormont House Agreement (2014):  
[www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stormont-house-agreement](http://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-stormont-house-agreement)

**Legislation:**

- The Education Reform Order (Northern Ireland) (1989):  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/2406/contents/made](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nisi/1989/2406/contents/made)
- The Education Act (Northern Ireland) (2014):  
Elisabeth II, Queen (2014), *Education Act (Northern Ireland) 2014*, Norwich: TSO (printed)  
[www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/12/contents/enacted](http://www.legislation.gov.uk/nia/2014/12/contents/enacted)

**Websites:**

- Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister:  
[www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk](http://www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk)
- Department of Education for Northern Ireland:  
[www.deni.gov.uk](http://www.deni.gov.uk)

Northern Ireland Assembly:

[www.niassembly.gov.uk](http://www.niassembly.gov.uk)

Secretary of State for Northern Ireland:

[www.gov.uk/government/ministers/secretary-of-state-for-northern-ireland](http://www.gov.uk/government/ministers/secretary-of-state-for-northern-ireland)

Northern Ireland Community Relations Council:

[www.community-relations.org.uk](http://www.community-relations.org.uk)

Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education:

[www.nicie.org](http://www.nicie.org)

UNESCO Centre at the University of Ulster:

[www.unescocentre.ulster.ac.uk](http://www.unescocentre.ulster.ac.uk)

Centre for Shared Education at Queen's University Belfast:

[www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforSharedEducation](http://www.qub.ac.uk/research-centres/CentreforSharedEducation)

Northern Ireland Life and Time Survey:

[www.ark.ac.uk/nilt](http://www.ark.ac.uk/nilt)

Conflict Archive on the Internet:

<https://cain.ulst.ac.uk>

The Linen Hall Library Belfast:

[www.linenhall.com](http://www.linenhall.com)

The Belfast Telegraph:

[www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk](http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk)