

FROM MINUS-MINUS TO PLUS-PLUS

Conflict Resolution in Northern Ireland : The Role of Research and Education

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&

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Good Friday/Belfast Agreement, April 1998

This agreement points to the following objectives for the education service:

- **The development of policies, strategies and funding mechanisms which embody the concepts of fairness, justice, human rights and responsibilities, respect for diversity;**
- **That educationists develop and deliver programmes which reflect these concepts;**
- **That parents and young people are offered opportunities to practise inclusiveness in the life of their schools.**

NORTHERN IRELAND

Population: 1.66 million

Unionist-Protestant = links with UK (60%)

Nationalist-Catholic = united Ireland (40%)

Neither large enough to impose its will on the other

Without agreement of both a zero sum or minus-minus situation exists

Both must agree to create a win-win/plus-plus situation

SCHOOL SYSTEM

- 1. Public and Voluntary Schools – Protestant (48% of school-going population)**

- 2. Voluntary Schools – Catholic
(47% of school-going population)**

- 3. Voluntary Integrated – Catholic & Protestant (5% of school-going population)**

Addressing Division through Education

- 1. Integrate *all* publicly funded schools.**

- 2. Develop curricular and inter-school programmes to promote:**
 - Knowledge, understanding and respect for different traditions;**
 - Knowledge, understanding and application of human and civil rights;**
 - Knowledge, understanding and application of democratic principles in ethnically/culturally and politically divided societies;**
 - Contact between schools of different traditions to enable staff and students engage in common activities.**

In Northern Ireland *both* options pursued:

1. Integrated school movement - voluntary and parent led:

- **Today 40 plus schools – primary and secondary – designated ‘integrated’;**
- **Student and staff mix: 60-40;**
- **Popular choice but only c. 5% of school going population;**
- **Schools do receive considerable amounts of public funding for capital and running costs.**

Curricular and Contact Programmes

1. Experimental approach through action-research:

- **Social Studies – *History and Geography***
- **Political Studies – *Democracy and Human Rights***
- **Literary Studies – *English and Irish***
- **Religious Studies – *Inter-faith***

Schools from different traditions co-operate in such programmes both within Northern Ireland and between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland

Curricular Reform – (Compulsory)

1989 Education legislation:

Two *required* cross-curricular themes:

- **Education for Mutual Understanding;**
- **Cultural Heritage.**

Outcomes ?

Research findings

- 1. More positive community relations ?**
- 2. More positive appreciation and respect?**
- 3. More positive political relations?**
- 4. More positive inter-church/faith relations?**

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