

**Response from Dr D. A. Wilson, Emeritus Reader in Education (Restorative Practices and Community Relations), Ulster University.**

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I am happy to give oral evidence if asked.

In responding to the Shared Education Bill proposal currently out for consultation, I write as the first teacher / youth worker appointed to the first Schools Community Relations Programme from 1970-73. The model developed prefigured the model on which a number of the current 'Shared Education' approaches have taken, albeit in a 1970 style. I also chaired the Youth Committee for Northern Ireland from 1986-88, in an unpaid capacity.

The then Schools Community Relations Project, directed by Mr John Malone, the former Head of Orangefield School, was an innovative partnership between a visionary Ministry of Education, the local providers of education (Belfast Education & Library Board and the Diocesan School system), the Northern Ireland Community Relations Commission, core philanthropic funding from the KGVI Trust and the local Northern Ireland Council of Social Service, and residential 'in kind' support from the Corrymeela Community.

Four schools serving Sandy Row / the Village and Roden Street; The Markets and Short Strand; The Shankill; and Ardoyne were eventually developed as an interdependent shared education programme of intervention with young school leavers and given additional staff and programme resources. The project was independently and positively researched for the three year period and this was published by Queens University- S. Jenvey. (1973), *To Be Called Stupid*, QUB Institute of Education.

Whilst successful as an intervention, it had limits that are relevant to the current proposals.

- a) There was only a tacit, not formal, engagement between the Principals of the different schools to support this work.
- b) The school staff bodies were not, as groups, bought into the programme and committed to seek new opportunities to expand co-operation.
- c) The main teaching / youth work was undertaken by relatively recent qualified professionals
- d) There was no back up from the Ministry or dedicated training support from the Universities and Teacher Training Colleges to assist professionals work in a shared manner.
- e) There was no requirement that professional teachers or youth workers undertook a Mutual Understanding Module as part of their basic or professional development.

***Specifically referring to the "Shared Education" Bill Draft section para 1.***

The focus of the first Schools Community Relations Programme was explicit on both:

- building trust and ease with different others across the religious, political and cultural backgrounds of the diverse areas;
- as well as being focused on offering the young people, and their extended families and carers, improved home support, enhanced school links, pupil support and motivation.

The intervention used improved curriculum materials, informal youth and community work methods, residential learning programmes and challenging and diverse and shared 'community service experiences' in city wide civil society agencies, hospitals and caring facilities.

**1. While welcoming the Shared Education Proposals as an additional, and long due, approach in our differentiated education system, little will be gained if the schemes envisaged as becoming possible are not explicit about linking the growth of mutual understanding and promoting higher attainment levels as mutually interweaving themes.**

I do not consider this is stated strongly in the documentation available.

Lessening antagonism and fear between pupils and their families and the adults responsible for their education, can create new space, beyond antagonism and distrust.

In such a new atmosphere all can imagine more opportunities, a greater landscape on which to support young people grow their motivation and talents. In the other direction, when people gain more confidence through being able to access wider opportunities, they can develop new understandings about what may have been limiting ways of living separately and decide to opt for living in a more open and shared manner.

It is essential that the dual goals of enhancing wider community understanding between adults as educators and parents / carers and young people are explicit and linked to approaches that address pupil attainment.

**2. Where relevant, tackling poverty and issues of social inequality that impact on pupils and their families is an important strategic goal.**

Such approaches are evidenced through best practice and educational research.

**3. It is important that shared education models are promoted across pupils of all social backgrounds.**

**Drawing from this experience and applying it to the current Draft Bill.**

*Specifically referring to: Power to encourage and facilitate shared education 2.—(1) The bodies listed in subsection (2) may encourage and facilitate shared education etc.*

**4. The creative synergy between a Central Ministry; the school providers; and the charitable and philanthropic interests with a commitment to promote new ways of addressing community distrust and community disadvantage was central to the success of the programme.**

The creative relationships established between the statutory, voluntary and community, and philanthropic support appears to be distinctly ruled out in the current drafting. I urge the political parties to re-consider this narrowing of the partnership envisaged.

**5. Additional Governance and Management Issues not mentioned in the proposed Bill**

**There is a need to formally stitch the Governance, Management and Staff of all schools together in a common enterprise in order that the full potential of such a shared education approach might gain its full potential.**

It is important that Senior Staff are integrated into overseeing such Shared Education models.

**In conclusion,**

It is important that these schemes are supported by dedicated staff training resources that explicitly assist staff undertake this imaginary work at initial, post qualifying, Headship and Senior management levels as well as with Governance Boards.

Such a 'shared education' scheme needs welcomed.

Within the underpinning statements, or in section 1 of the proposed Bill, I suggest a statement is required that explicitly locates and links the proposed programmes to the wider raft of educational initiatives such as the 'integrated education approaches' mandated in the Belfast Agreement and re-asserted in the various agreements since including the most recent on 17 November 2015; 'mixed school developments' and 'Irish medium developments'.

Whilst I believe that such 'shared education' approaches have their limits, it is important that such developments are more actively supported now, until a time when a wider political and social momentum might develop and permit even more innovative approaches.

