



Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland



Learning from the Primary Integration / Enriching Education (PIEE) Project

School of Education,
University of Ulster

Dr Aideen Hunter; Dr Alan McCully;
Dr Una O'Connor-Bones
and Dr Jessica Bates

Research

The research objectives were to:

- Gather perceptions of the PIEE project from a range of stakeholders including principals, teachers, members of the board of governors, parents and pupils;
- Explore staff understandings of the partnership model;
- Highlight examples of best practice and evolving practice with a view to transferability to other school settings/partnerships;
- Assess the extent to which staff feel that they have created a 'shared space' with their rural community partnership; and
- Consider the sustainability of the project beyond the lifespan of the PIEE project.



Methodology

- The Research was conducted over three academic years
- Data was collected at three points in time: March-May 2011; April-June 2012 and April-June 2013.

•2011 data collection

- Two case-study partnerships (2 & 3 school)
- interview with 5 principals,
- interviews with 12 teachers across the five schools
- interviews with 5 school governors (one from each school)
- focus groups with P6 & P7 children in each of the five schools



2012 data collection

- Same 5 schools a year later, interviews repeated with principals, teachers, and a sample of school governors.
- 5 focus groups with pupils.
- questionnaires to parents of P6 and P7 pupils in the five schools – 48 returned, response rate of 57%.
- questionnaires to all principals and teachers across **all** P1EE schools. Overall 60 responses from one hundred and twenty-seven questionnaires sent out, a response rate of 47%.



2013 data collection

- Individual interviews with all of the shared teachers;
- Survey of teachers in all the PIEE schools that had a shared teacher;
- Survey of principals in all the PIEE schools that had a shared teacher

Conclusions: Perceptions of the PIEE project

- Strong support from principals, teachers, governors, pupils and parents
- The PIEE model seen as a way of keeping small rural schools viable and contributing to improved community relations
- Teaching staff valued collegiality and professional development
- Enhanced pupils' educational experiences and helped them build normal positive social relationships with pupils from their partner school(s).



- Pupils enjoyed the activities, valued making new friends and developing new skills - but were also able to articulate the deeper value of the project in understanding and living with difference, and how this would benefit them in later life
- Parents and school governors were supportive and keen to see the work continue
- Wider political change and the decrease in community tension were perceived to be an important backdrop to the success of the PIEE initiative.



Understandings of the Aims

- The concept of 'sharing' was interpreted flexibly to facilitate partnership work without posing a threat, real or perceived, to each school's sense of identity.
- A passport for survival?
- Implicit, and occasionally explicit, view that 'sharing' was desirable but not a step to integration
- Some indications that teachers were more aware than previously of the need to tackle sensitive issues, even if they still felt inadequate in terms of confidence and skills.



Best practice

- School leadership, the commitment of principals and calculated risk-taking were important factors in strong partnerships
- Investing in building strong staff links between the schools was key to developing successful school partnerships.
- The concept of the Shared Teacher appeared to be a significant catalyst in consolidating the partnership at all levels and demonstrating its value in a tangible way
- Conversely, the termination of the Shared Teacher post after a year raised the possibility of creating a sense of deficit which may impact negatively on future work.

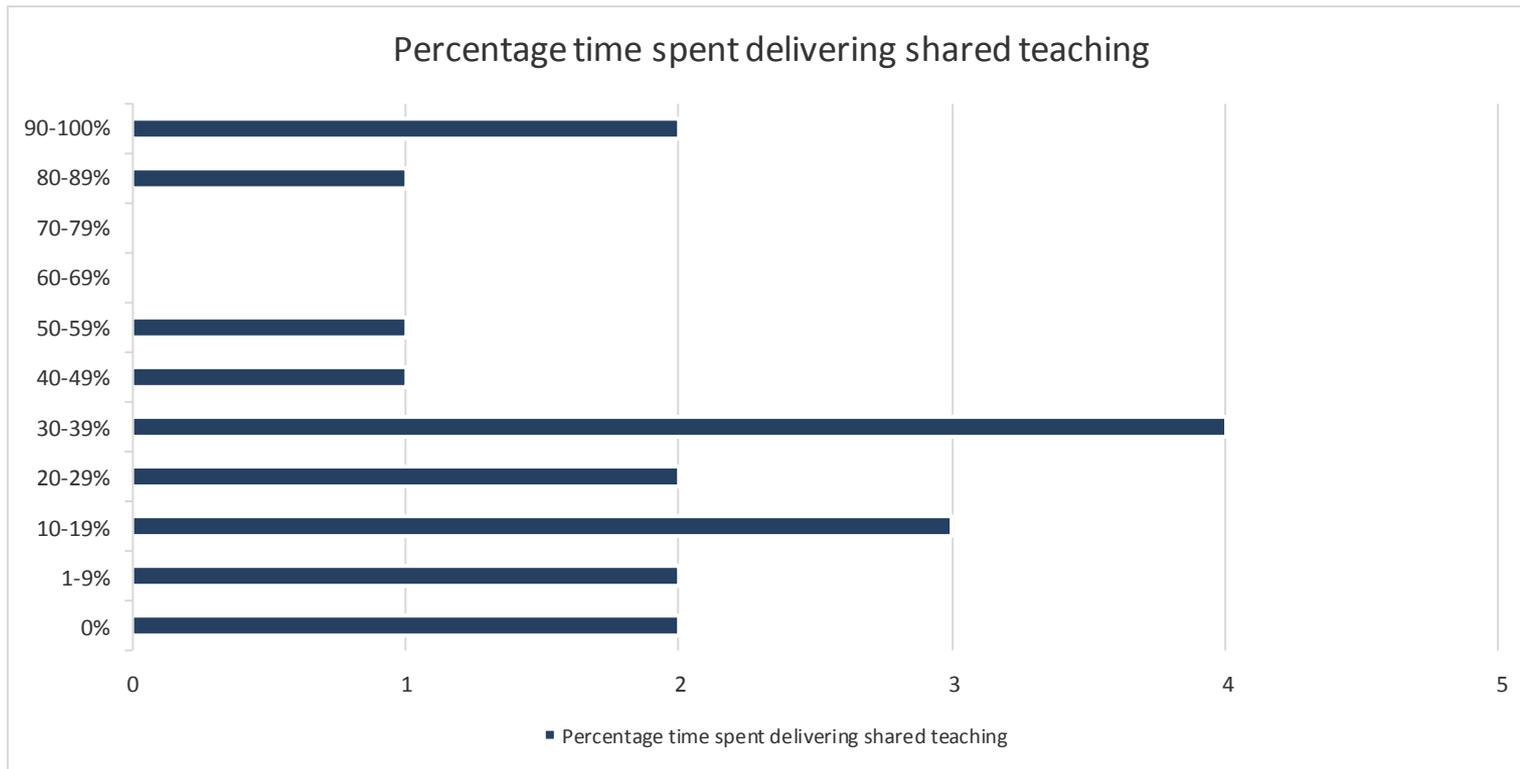


Impact on the community

- Schools developing genuine and meaningful relationships which were rippling out into the wider community
- A positive impact on wider interaction within the community
- The case-study schools strengthened their community links and jointly had a stronger community presence.
- Geographically demarcated space was becoming more 'open' as cross-community events were held by the schools.



Shared Teacher Findings, 2013



Shared Teacher Findings, 2013

Other Teachers' Perceptions of the Shared Teacher Role

- Linking partnership schools, building relationships between pupils, teachers, parents
- Delivering /enabling shared teaching and shared activities
- Delivering on specific curriculum areas (e.g. ICT, PDMU, numerical skills)
- Supporting the class teacher
- Sharing their time among the partnership schools
- Sharing expertise and best practice, enhancing teaching and learning

Emerging Issues

- Shared teacher approached flexibly by schools
- Emphasis on the shared dimension varied
- Evidence of partnership best practice
- Demonstrated potential for enhanced educational experiences and cross-community engagement

Sustainability

- Sustainability in the face of the removal of funding in the future is a major concern for partnership schools with fears that the removal of support for transport, planning time and resources will erode current provision.
- Some players are stoically determined to maintain at least some of the gains, even by finding money from other sources, while others indicated that the work was likely to diminish through time.
- Is the shared teacher model a solution for resourcing primary schools in rural 'interface' communities?

Recommendations

The success of the PIEE project should be factored into DE policy with regard to its rural schools and CRED policies

Funding allocated to rural schools should take account of the financial needs and savings associated with partnership.

Funding should be sought to pursue the Shared Teacher on a larger scale to enable it to be properly evaluated.

Continued funding for transport is necessary if partnerships are to be successful.



Recommendations

- Rural schools should be given priority in the allocation of interactive technologies to support existing relationships and to help overcome the potential impact of isolation.
- Resources for staff planning meetings are critical.
- Opportunities for governors and parents to meet and co-operate.

The final word

☀ *it's just opened up so many avenues, between the schools* ☀ *the level of integration that we have going had never been tried before* ☀ *we're working towards common goals* ☀ *we just brainstorm together* ☀ *the essence of it is that it's not just within the school walls the children are building relationships* ☀ *we don't really care about the different religions or anything, we just like to be friends* ☀ *parents are totally in support of it* ☀ *It's integration in the community, of all different religious backgrounds, ethical backgrounds, everything, and community spirit, getting them all together* ☀ *we live among families from other communities and my children's only chance of meeting them is through this programme* ☀ *this is a way forward for all children* ☀ *there's a legacy for partnering now within these schools* ☀





Northern Ireland
Assembly



The Open University



Knowledge Exchange Seminar Series (KESS)

...is a forum that encourages debate on a wide range of research findings, with the overall aim of promoting evidence-based policy and law-making within Northern Ireland