



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



Engaging young people with the conflict and its legacy: findings from an evaluation of the 'Prison to Peace' educational programme

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EDUCATION IN TRANSITIONAL CONTEXTS

- **Relationship between education and transition**

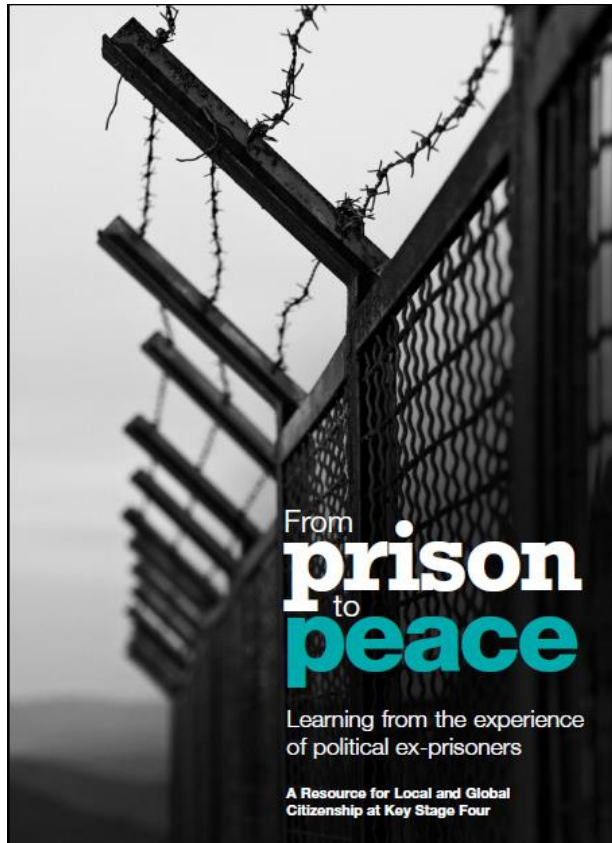
Potential for closer links between the processes of transition and educational policy in developing a systemic approach to addressing the past and its legacy.

- **Need for ‘polyvocal histories’**

Lived experiences of individuals and communities to augment (and challenge) ‘official’ narratives.



‘FROM PRISON TO PEACE’: PROGRAMME



- Complexity of conflict
- Intricacies of conflict transformation and transition
- ‘Political generosity’

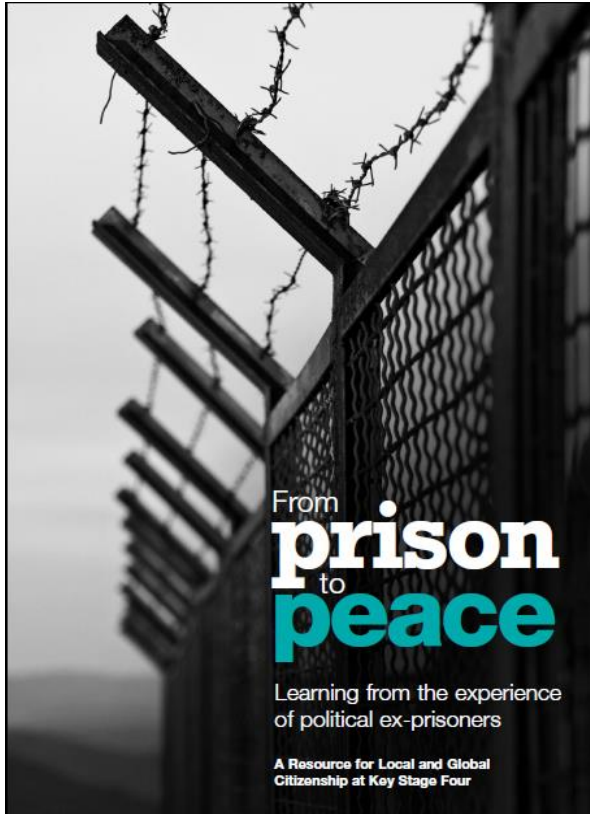
(Emerson, 2012)

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The study had the following objectives:

- To ascertain the experiences of key stakeholders involved in the development and delivery of the programme, including the challenges it presents and issues it raises in schools;
- To determine the impact of the programme on young peoples' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours;
- To determine the implications of the research findings for the future development of the 'Prison to Peace' programme;
- To develop recommendations on how best to co-ordinate the 'Prison to Peace' programme regarding its relationship to other educational initiatives in the curriculum

‘FROM PRISON TO PEACE’: RESEARCH



- Cluster randomized controlled trial
 - Impact of programme
 - Outcomes related to knowledge, attitudes and behaviours
- Case studies
 - Process(es) of teaching controversial issues
 - Features of school ‘readiness’
- Stakeholder interviews
 - Role of curriculum in addressing conflict and its legacy
 - Statutory and non-statutory initiatives

	OUTCOMES
Knowledge	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Increase in awareness of the complexity of conflict in Northern Ireland 2. Increased knowledge of the conflict, processes of transition and conflict transformation
Attitudes	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. Reduction in sectarian prejudice (exploratory only) 4. Increase in respect for political diversity and, more specifically, acceptance that other political positions/opinions are legitimate
Intended behaviours	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. Reduction in intention to use/support the use of violence to deal with divisions and conflict; 6. Increase in intention to be politically engaged.



FINDINGS

Clear evidence of the positive effects of Prison to Peace on young peoples' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours.

Specifically, the programme had the following statistically significant effects:

- increased knowledge of the conflict, processes of transition and conflict transformation;
- increased support for using non-violent means to deal with conflict;
- reduction in sectarian prejudice;
- increased likeliness of young people becoming politically engaged.

(Effect sizes were sizeable, with effects ranging from .17-.42.)

- Measures for direct participation in politics and respect for political increased but the increase was not statistically significant



FINDINGS

In addition to the impact of the programme on the outcomes identified, results indicate:

- increased awareness of the complexity of the conflict;
- increased optimism in relation to 'permanent peace';
- increased trust in civic and political institutions;
- no change in relation to the young people's strength of cultural identity;
- high levels of enjoyment of all aspects of the programme.

FINDINGS – YOUNG PEOPLE’S VIEWS

The young people enjoyed engaging with the narratives of the ex-prisoners, valuing these first-hand accounts which they saw as grounded in reality.

They also appreciated learning about the **impact of being involved in violence**, in terms of imprisonment and the effect it had on families.

‘It brings sort of like, reality to it...because they’re (referring to ex-prisoners) telling us about it from their views.’

‘You get to find out what it’s really like in prison.’

‘It makes you recognise about what actually happened and what happened to the families and stuff like that, the aftermath of it.’



FINDINGS – YOUNG PEOPLE’S VIEWS

They also acknowledged the benefits it holds, for example, in relation to how the programme increased their knowledge and awareness of the **reality and complexity of the conflict**, helped them make sense of their current socio-political context and helped them see how society could ‘move forward’.

‘You can’t really move on unless you know about it [the ‘Troubles’]. Because if you’re just going into it like not knowing about it and just being like blind from it, then how do you expect to move on if you don’t know what happened and how to change it.’

‘I think it’s [the programme] important because it gets rid of the prejudices we have against certain groups of people and the stories that we’ve heard from the Troubles, but with the Prison to Peace, that programme, you were able to see both sides of the story so you could see what actually happened’.



FINDINGS – TEACHERS' VIEWS

School leaders and teachers in the intervention schools recognized the educational benefits of engaging with 'Prison to Peace'.

They saw the programme as providing opportunities to:

- challenge the myths associated with the conflict
- help young people make sense of their socio-political context
- assist young people in developing their own perspectives.

However, it is important to note that the schools involved in this study were clearly '**ready**' to engage with controversial and sensitive issues related to the conflict.



FINDINGS – PARENTS' VIEWS

The parents interviewed, though to a certain extent apprehensive initially about the programme, were supportive of their school engaging with the programme.

'Well I, I signed [the permission form for her son to attend the panel]...I had no issue signing it because I have great faith that the school knows what it's at and I thought 'No, that's fine' even though part of me thought 'Oh God'.' (Parent)

In particular they:

- recognized the value of their children learning about their socio-historical context from engaging with ex-prisoners;
- welcomed the dialogue it created between them and their children about the 'Troubles' and the current nature of Northern Irish society.



CONCLUSION

The evaluation of the 'Prison to Peace' programme demonstrates that young people are not only *interested* in learning about the past, but are *ready* to engage with its controversies.

Moreover, they value how addressing the past through educational programmes assists them in making sense of their current socio-political context.

The 'Prison to Peace' programme has had a significant positive impact on the young people involved, specifically in terms of their knowledge of the complexity of conflict, their attitudes towards those from the 'other' community, and on their intended behaviours in relation to support for violence and intention to be politically engaged.

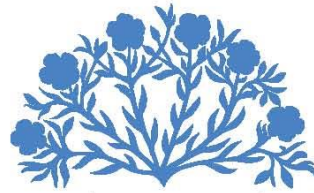


CONCLUSION

In relation to the contribution of 'Prison to Peace' to policy priorities, consideration should be given to ensuring that:

- anti-sectarianism programmes not only address issues of diversity within society, but also attend to the past conflict, its impact and legacy;
- schools are encouraged to work through the CRED policy and CRED enhancement scheme to seek resources to deliver the 'Prison to Peace' programme on a single identity or shared/cross-community basis;
- existing training for teachers (in pre-service and in continual professional development) not only addresses the teaching of controversial issues in general but provides teachers with specific practical support in addressing the controversies associated with the conflict and processes of transition;
- structured support mechanisms, such as a dedicated educational support officer and resource 'hub', are provided to assist schools in selecting from and coordinating the range of available initiatives which seek to address the conflict and its legacy;
- such coordination needs to ensure joint up approaches within and between schools and within and between the formal education and youth sector.





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