LEADING SCHOOLS IN TIMES OF CONFLICT

BETWEEN A ROCK AND A HARD PLACE: A CASE STUDY FROM THE BORDERLANDS OF IRELAND

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Introduction

Schools along the Irish border operate on the cusp of two national education systems, two conflicting political affiliations, two opposing religious ideologies, and during the worst of the Troubles, two warring factions. While individual secondary schools have not formally operated in more than one national jurisdiction, their pupils frequently attend schools on one side of the border while living on the other, and in any case have been affected on a daily basis by the socio-economic decline and political conflict going on around them. This chapter is essentially a case study of how school leadership is understood in this context: the *internal* dimension of how the conflict impacts on students and on the curriculum; and the *external* dimension of how it influences parents and the local community. Some of the issues and challenges are distinctive, if sometimes subliminal, but generally the challenge is one of capability: a headship can only occur at a particular place at a particular time - we cannot choose when to live - and in conflict societies like Northern Ireland, schools deal on behalf of innocents with events that are outside their control.

The fashion in recent decades, particularly in the UK, has been for more leadership, so that the word itself has become imbued with a type of mysticism; as if the mere fact of having the commodity was enough to ensure its desired effect.

Actually, in many cases, and particularly in conflicted societies, what is needed is not *more leadership*, but *better management*. The two are not mutually exclusive, but in practice there are probably as many typologies of leadership as there are actual management roles, and most have been constructed by 'consultants' with little practical experience and no demonstrable skill in the field, so that the academic study of leadership has become little more than a compendium of anecdote and folk wisdom designed to promote a marketable idea for lecture tours. There can be very few adjectives remaining that have not at some stage prefixed the word 'leadership', but there is little research evidence to quantify the effect on student or societal outcomes of all these so-called ground-breaking understandings. Certainly, we can reasonably assume that purposive leadership is probably better than distracted management, in the same way as an organised learning environment is probably better than a chaotic one, but it is difficult to find consistent evidence for the size of the effect on student learning or for the mechanisms by which its influence is exerted. Yet things are not all bleak for practitioners acting on the fault lines of society: several leadership models, like the Social Change model from the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA, promote leadership as a social responsibility and as an activity which can enhance student self-awareness and citizenship (Dugan, 2006).

The Education Context: Northern Ireland[1]

The Northern Ireland (NI) state was created in 1921 following the partition of Ireland. Its first prime minister, James Craig, later Lord Craigavon, declared it 'a Protestant parliament and a Protestant state', although nearly half the population at the time was

[1] Some of this description is taken from Kelly (2012).

Roman Catholic (RC). NI had its own autonomous parliament and government until 1973 when it was abolished because the Conservative government in London, traditonally well-disposed towards the Unionist view, did not trust it to act impartially on behalf of all its citizens. NI remained under 'direct rule' from London until devolved government in the form of the NI Assembly and Executive returned in 1998 under the terms of the Good Friday (Belfast) Agreement. Today, the NI Executive has the power to legislate in areas, like education, not explicitly reserved for the UK parliament in London. It operates on a consociational / power-sharing principle whereby consensus among the parties is required to confirm decisions, and ministerial portfolios are allocated to the different political parties using the d'Hondt method.[2]

The Good Friday Agreement, so called because it was signed in Belfast on the Friday before Easter 1998, and the Northern Ireland (St Andrews' Agreement) Act of 2006, ended some four decades of civil war in NI (known as 'The Troubles') between 'nationalists' who are almost exclusively Roman Catholic, and 'unionists' who are almost exclusively Protestant. In the tribal nomenclature of NI, ultra-nationalists are known as 'republicans' and ultra-unionists as 'loyalists'. Historically, the middle-class unionist community was represented by the Ulster Unionist Party (UUP), the working class loyalist community was represented mainly by the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), middle-class nationalist voters by the Social Democratic and Labour Party (SDLP), and the working-class / small farming republican community by Sinn Fein (SF). Figure 1 shows how the more extreme political parties (DUP and SF) have

[2] The D'Hondt method (mathematically, but not operationally, equivalent to the Jefferson method) is a method for allocating seats in party-list proportional representation. It is also used in the London Assembly and in the European Parliament. There are two forms depending on whether the parties use their own pre-election ordering of candidates or whether they use a post-election ordering. Proportional Representation allocates seats to parties in proportion to the number of votes won, but exact proportionality is not possible because that would produce fractions of seats. The D'Hondt method is designed to overcome this: it preserves proportionality while allocating seats to parties in whole numbers that sum to the correct total, though in comparison with other methods like Hare-Clark, it is slightly biased in favour of larger parties.

squeezed out the more moderate centre-ground parties (UUP and SDLP) in NI since 1997, and Figure 2 shows how SF has prospered in the Republic of Ireland, especially in the border counties, so that the end of the conflict in NI has actually led to a more polarized political landscape. For comparison, Figure 3 shows the religious distribution within NI.

Figure 1 here

Figure 2 here

Figure 3 here

Primary schooling and secondary schooling are the responsibility of the Department of Education Northern Ireland (DENI), but at local level is administered by five Education and Library Boards (see Figure 4) covering different geographical areas and therefore different political allegiances, as a comparison between Figures 1, 3 and 4 reveals. To date, all education ministers in the NI Executive have come from Sinn Fein.

Figure 4 here

NI schools outperform their counterparts in England and Wales (DENI 2007, p.7) and are disproportionately ranked among the top performers in UK state examination league tables, and although PISA[3] 2009 showed that its scores were similar to those of England and Scotland (Bradshaw *et al*., 2010, p. xi), this

[3] The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a survey of the educational achievement of 15-year-olds organised by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). The 2009 results were published in 2010.

represented a decline for NI, which was noted by policy-makers and politicians (DENI, 2007, p.8).

Primary education lasts from age 4 to age 11 (Primary Year 7) when primary school pupils transfer to either 'Grammar' or 'Secondary' schools. The associated 'entrance examinations' are very high-stakes as the results determine whether pupils attend one of the (approximately) 70 high-performing selective Grammar schools (a disproportionately high number compared to England) or one of the (approximately) 170 Secondary schools. Until recently, the transfer test used by all schools was the 'Eleven Plus' (11+), but this was abolished in 2008[4] except for the border region of Craigavon and Armagh, where the so-called Dickson Plan remains in operation (SELB, 2011).[5] There is no coresponding 'selection' in the Republic of Ireland.

There is widespread agreement in NI that selection at age 11 puts too much pressure on pupils, but this is balanced by a general feeling that those who go to non-selective Secondary schools in NI still receive a first class education (Gallagher & Smith, 2003), and successive education ministers, all of whom have been SF, have chosen not to turn the system into a Comprehensive one, although that is SF party policy.

It has recently become apparent that the new 'education poor' in NI are working-class Protestants / loyalists. Less than 20 per cent of low-socio-economic-status loyalist 16 year-olds obtain 5+ GCSE passes, which is 57 per cent lower than the top-scoring group, Roman Catholic girls! As the Irish Times[6] pointed out, the old system that discriminated against Catholics induced a reliance on a 'jobs for the boys'

[4] To replace the abolished 11+, the majority of Grammar schools now set their own entrance exams, of which there are two versions. It has been reported that the majority of people in NI would prefer the 11+ to be reinstated because the new system involves children taking multiple entrance exams as opposed to a single test.
[5] The Dickson Plan is a two-tier transfer system in which pupils can sit transfer tests at age 11 or age 14.
[6] Monday 7th July 2014.

culture among Protestant working class school-leavers. As a result, the RC community, which was forced to rely on educational achievement in order to progress, finds itself better prepared to benefit now from schooling in what is (wrongly) perceived as a zero-sum game where one group can win only at the expense of the other.

The percentage of pupils in selective education in NI is very high compared to England and Wales, which according to its supporters is a factor in the province's success, though PISA 2009 reveals that NI has the largest achievement gap in the UK between those from well-off and those from poor backgrounds (Bradshaw et al., 2010, p.xi). This, as the OECD (2004, p.5) notes, probably means that "students from disadvantaged backgrounds do not achieve their full potential". In NI, 17 per cent of school pupils are entitled to free school meals (FSM) - 26 per cent in Secondary and six per cent in Grammar schools (DENI, 2011a; b) - and as in the rest of the UK, FSM entitlement is concentrated among lower-attaining pupils.

In addition to the division of schools by academic selection, there are divisions in the extent to which they are controlled by the state, which itself was established along ethno-religious lines. State or 'Controlled' schools are in practice attended overwhelmingly by those from the Protestant community, and there is a separate publicly funded 'Maintained' system for Roman Catholics. 'Integrated' schools, which attempt a balanced enrolment of pupils from both traditions, are becoming increasingly popular, notwithstanding the falling demographics, but the sector remains very small.

Controlled schools

Controlled schools are under the management of Boards of Governors, though staff are employed by the local Education and Library Board (see Figure 4). Although open to those of all faiths and none, most Controlled schools were originally church schools whose control was transferred to the NI state in the first few decades of its existence. Since that state was explicitly Protestant in both outlook and intent, the 'transferors' were naturally the main Protestant churches, which today still maintain links with their former schools through statutory representation on their governing bodies.

Maintained schools and Irish-language schools

There are more than 500 Catholic-managed schools in NI educating approximately 51 per cent of all pupils. Like Controlled schools, these 'Maintained schools' are under the management of Boards of Governors, but the employing authority is the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools (CCMS), the largest employer of (8,500) teachers in NI. Established under the 1989 Education Reform (NI) Order, its primary aims are to provide an upper tier of management for schools, improve standards and plan effective delivery. Education through the medium of Irish takes place within this sector. The Education (NI) Order 1998 obliges DENI to encourage and facilitate the development of Irish-medium education in the same way as the 1989 Education Reform Order obliged DENI to support Integrated Education (see below). Irish-language schools can apply for stand-alone Maintained status, or (where a free-standing school is not viable) for support as self-contained units within existing schools operating on the same site and under the management of the host (English-medium) school. There are 27 stand-alone 'Gaelscoileanna' (as Irish language schools are known), 12 Irish-medium units attached to English-medium host schools, and two independent Gaelscoileanna. 'Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta' (CnaG) is the

representative body for Irish-medium Education in both parts of Ireland.

Some researchers like Wright and Scullion (2007) regard education through the medium of Irish as cross-cultural, but given that Gaelscoileanna are almost completely supported by parents from the nationalist tradition, they are not 'integrated' in any meaningful sense, though they do represent an accommodation within the NI state of 'the other' tradition, and testify to the growing cultural confidence of NI's Roman Catholic population.

Integrated schools

Although Integrated education is expanding – there are approximately 40 primary and 20 second-level schools in the sector - NI remains a religiously segregated system, with in excess of 90 per cent of pupils attending either a Maintained (Catholic) or a Controlled (Protestant) school with their co-religionists (DENI, 2007). Fresh-start Integrated schools - sometimes called 'grant maintained integrated schools' - were established by the voluntary efforts of parents (unsupported by the churches) under the 1989 Education Reform (NI) Order, which obliged DENI to facilitate and encourage the development of integrated education where there was parental demand (HMSO, 1989). Other Integrated schools, which were originally Controlled (and therefore Protestant), but which opted through parental ballot to switch to the Integrated sector, have since come on stream, and are called 'transformed' Integrated schools.

The voluntary Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) develops and supports integrated education in Northern Ireland, but only through the medium of English. The Integrated Education Fund (IEF), the financial foundation for the development of integrated education established in 1992 by the EU Structural

Fund, DENI, and the Nuffield and Joseph Rowntree foundations, offers bridging finance for start-up integrated schools before they secure full government funding, as well as supporting existing schools and those seeking to become integrated through 'transformation'. In some ways integrated schools were a forerunner of Charter schools in the US and Free schools in England, and the absence of politico-religious support in the early days was not necessarily a bad thing since many advocates were in any case anxious not to be identified with any one particular political perspective.

School holidays in NI

School holidays in NI differ considerably from those of Great Britain (GB), but are similar to those in the Republic of Ireland (RoI), though they generally do not have full-week mid-term breaks. Summer vacation is longer than GB at 9-10 weeks, but shorter than the RoI's 12-13 weeks.

The Education Context: the Republic of Ireland

The Republic of Ireland (RoI) occupies about 80 per cent of the island of Ireland and has a population of 4.6 million. The RoI gained independence from the UK in 1922 while NI exercised its option to remain within the UK. RoI and NI had no formal relations until 1999 when the North-South Ministerial Council was created by the Good Friday Agreement. Ireland joined the European Union in 1973, along with the UK and Denmark, and remains one of the wealthiest countries in the world in terms of GDP per capita. The country underwent huge economic growth in the period 1995-2007 (the 'Celtic Tiger' era), but suffered a financial and banking crisis in 2008 as part of the global economic crash. Although the economy has not yet recovered to

pre-crash levels, Ireland is still the seventh most developed country in the world according to the United Nations and performs well in terms of economic freedom and civil liberties. Ireland is a founding member of the Council of Europe and the OECD. Education is compulsory[7] in the Republic of Ireland from age six to sixteen, but in practice it lasts from age 4 to age 17 or 18. The general rule is that children start primary school in the September following their fourth birthday. Education is free at all levels (including university, through student service fees - currently €2500 - have recently been introduced following the financial crisis of 2008), and the RoI, like NI, has 100 per cent literacy. RoI has the youngest population in Europe with more than one-fifth of people under 14. The schooling system has 900,000 pupils across all phases.

Primary education

The primary education sector includes state-funded 'National' schools, state-funded Special schools and private schools. All of these may be denominational, non-denominational, multi-denominational or Gaelscoileanna. For historical reasons, most primary schools are state-aided religious schools, of various denominations, and though state-funded, are owned by religious orders and parishes. All teachers' salaries are paid by the state; more specifically, by the Department of Education and Skills (DES), which is also responsible for their inspection.

Primary schooling has an eight-year cycle ('junior infants', 'senior infants' and Classes 1 through 6) after which pupils transfer to post-primary / secondary school, typically at the age of twelve. The State's objectives for primary education are not typical of European countries in that they include the aim to 'enable the child to

[7] Unlike NI, RoI has a written constitution, which allows education to be provided in the home, though the constitution does not explicitly require the State to define minimum standards for that provision.

realise his or her potential as a unique individual', and to 'prepare for a continuum of learning'. The 1999 review of the primary curriculum was the first revision of the curriculum since 1971, so unlike the UK, which is seemingly in a constant state of policy hysteria, the system is very stable. It is divided into the following key areas: Irish and English languages; Mathematics; Science and the Environment; Arts, Music and Drama; Physical Education; and Social, Personal and Health Education. Church authorities - usually the RC Church, but not always - oversee the formulation and implementation of the religious curriculum in the schools they control. Unlike NI, there is no terminal examination at the end of primary schooling.[8]

'National' schools – the dominant type of primary school - date back to the introduction of state primary education under British rule in 1831. They are controlled by Boards of Management under diocesan (usually RC) patronage and typically include the local parish priest or clergyman as chairperson. Gaelscoileanna (the plural of Gaelscoil; literally 'Irish School') date from the 1980s as the Irish language increased in popularity among the middle classes. Approximately 10 per cent of pupils are educated in one of these (approx. 350) Gaelscoileanna wherein Irish is the working language. They are not under diocesan patronage and are not classified as religious / denominational, unlike Irish-language 'national' schools in Irish-language districts. Additionally, there are Irish language *pre-schools* called 'Naionrai'.

Multidenominational schools are a more recent innovation. Generally they have been founded following parental demand and are under the nationwide patronage of a not-for-profit voluntary organisation, 'Educate Together'. They attract - and indeed their raison d'etre is to attract - students from all religious and non-religious backgrounds. In total, there are more than 3,000 primary schools in the Republic of

[8] The terminal 'Primary Certificate Examination' was abolished in 1967.

Ireland. 90 per cent are under RC church patronage, 6 per cent are under Church of Ireland (Anglican) patronage, 2 per cent are multidenominational, and the remaining 2 per cent are under Presbyterian, Quaker or non-Christian control.

Post-primary education

The post-primary sector comprises: secondary schools and community schools,[9] which are privately owned and managed by trustees from various religious communities; vocational schools and community colleges,[10] which are state-established and administered by one of sixteen local Education and Training Boards (ETB);[11] and a small number of comprehensive schools, which are managed by stand-alone Boards of Management.[12]

Gaelcholáistí (literally, 'Irish Colleges') are second-level schools outside Irish-speaking districts. Like Gaelscoileanna in the primary phase, the medium of instruction is Irish (and pupils progress to them from the Gaelscoileanna), with approximately three per cent of all second-level students attending these schools. So-called 'Grind Schools' are fee-paying commercial 'crammer' schools, the equivalent of private sixth form colleges in Britain. They operate outside the state sector and only run two-year Leaving Certificate or one-year repeat Leaving Certificate

[9] Secondary schools educate nearly 60% of all pupils, but this has fallen dramatically since its heyday in the 1970s. The state pays 90% of teacher salary costs and 95 per cent of other (non-pay) costs in these schools.

[10] Vocational schools educate approximately 30 per cent of all second-level pupils, with 93 per cent of all costs met by the state.

[11] The Education and Training Boards (2013) Act replaced the existing 33 local Vocational Education Committees (VEC) through a process of county-to-county mergers. Community Schools and Community Colleges are both managed by Boards of Management with various membership permutations, but essentially the former are types of Secondary School and the latter come under the aegis of the local ETB.

[12] Comprehensive schools were established in the 1960s in mimicry of what was happening in Britain and were founded by amalgamating secondary and vocational schools. Comprehensive schools are 100% funded by the state and are run by boards of management at school level, rather than on a district level as with Vocational schools. Nearly 15 per cent of all second-level pupils attend Comprehensive schools.

programmes for those who did not perform well enough first time round.

All students must complete at least three years of secondary education, and more than 90 per cent stay on for the full period (5 or 6 years) to sit the terminal Leaving Certificate examination, the equivalent of A-levels in the UK. Post-primary education consists of a three-year Junior Cycle (aged 12-15 typically) followed by a two-year Senior Cycle. In addition, most schools offer a Transition Year (TY) - optional in most schools, but compulsory in others - intercalated between Junior and Senior Cycles, so that secondary schooling typically lasts six years (aged 12-18). Transition Year, it is claimed, provides an opportunity for students to experience a wide range of educational inputs, including work experience, during a year free from formal examinations, but opinion is divided about how effective and desirable this intercalated year is for subsequent senior cycle study. The content of Transition Year is determined by the school itself to suit its resources, the local availability of work-experience and the wider intellectual interests of staff. Schools are not permitted to teach the formal Leaving Certificate curriculum, so as not to disadvantage those students *not* doing TY, but this rule is frequently (perhaps even generally) flouted. Students follow courses such as Law, Philosophy, creative writing, and public speaking, and do projects that under normal circumstances they would not have time to do. TY is intended to help students mature academically, to give them a more informed basis for making their Leaving Certificate subject choices and to develop them into better and more self-directed learners, but critics - and there are many - believe that TY breaks the study habit established in the first three years of post-primary education and that students 'return' to Leaving Certificate study more distracted.

The Junior Certificate examination marks the end of the Junior Cycle. Students usually take ten or eleven subjects in addition to non-examination subjects like Physical Education (PE) and Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE). It is more generalist and broad than in NI or England. It aims to prepare students for the Senior Cycle and as such, it is not a school-leaving examination like its UK counterpart, the GCSE.

During the Senior Cycle, whether via TY or directly from Junior Cycle, students follow one of three programmes, each leading to a terminal state examination: the traditional Leaving Certificate (LC); the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme (LCVP); and the Leaving Certificate Applied Programme (LCAP). The traditional LC examination is typically taken when students are 17 or 18 years of age. Students must take at least five subjects, which must normally include Irish, but most study six or seven, and the best six grades are used for university entrance. The LCVP is similar to the traditional LC, but has a concentration on technical subjects and modules with a vocational focus. And finally, the LCAP is a self-contained two-year course designed to meet the needs of students who are not academically inclined to either of the other two programmes. It is person-centred and involves a cross-curricular rather than a subject based approach, but it is not recognised for entry to higher education.

The post-primary curriculum is generalist like its Scottish counterpart but unlike the NI and English systems. The emphasis is on breadth rather than depth. Students typically study seven subjects at either Higher (Honours) or Ordinary (Pass) level, as opposed to three (at a common level) in the A-level system of NI and England. Approximately 88 per cent of pupils stay on in school to study for the LC, which is a much higher participation rate than in other EU countries at the equivalent stage. Typically, a pupil entering the RoI system at age 4 will do 8 years at primary and 5 or

6 at second level school,[13] leaving at age 17 or 18, whereas in NI a typical pupil will do 7 years in primary phase and 5 in the secondary phase (or 7 for those who stay on to study A levels).

Education remains a high-value commodity in Ireland, and teaching is a highly esteemed profession. The RoI also ranks above average in academic attainment / examination performance in both OECD and EU comparisons, with the second best reading literacy for teenagers in the EU, after Finland.

School holidays in RoI

Holidays in the RoI system vary from school to school, or in the case of Vocational schools, from region to region, though there is widespread coordination locally to minimise transport costs and family disruption. Primary and post-primary schools have similar school years: beginning at the start of September; a mid-term week off at the end of October; a two-week vacation over Christmas; a mid-term week off in February; a two-week vacation at Easter; and a long summer vacation (June, July and August for post-primary students,[14] and July and August for primary pupils). There are historical reasons for this structure and for the widespread uniformity. It is not, as some have suggested, religious, but rather for agricultural reasons: historically, children were needed to help with farm work in a country that was, and still is, largely rural and non-industrial.

School Leadership on the Fault-line of Conflict

[13] Six years if they do a transition year; five if they do not.
[14] Post-primary students doing public examinations sit them for three weeks in June, at the start of the summer vacation.

Schools along the political border between NI and the RoI, and therefore on the educational fault-line of two different schooling systems, cater for communities and students for whom the border is (in an everyday sense) a meaningless political construct: they might live in NI, come from a farming family whose fields are divided comically by a line on the map, go to primary school in one jurisdiction and secondary school in the other. Families typically shop and attend church in different jurisdictions, and often have political allegiances at odds with the dominant view where they are resident: Protestant and unionist on the RoI side; Roman Catholic and republican on the NI side. However, for those who believe that all children are entitled to, and need, education in a supportive environment free from terror of whatever sort and from whatever source, institutional or political, this presents some challenging professional imperatives.

Defining the mission

Prime among these imperatives is the need for school leaders – heads, principals, curriculum leaders, boards of management, governors and the wider school community - to define explicitly the purpose of their school. Mission Statements have had bad press in recent years, with good reason. Too often they have been a substitute for good management. Children seldom come home from school enthusing (or complaining) about the latest version of the Mission Statement framed on the wall beside reception. Instead they talk about particular teachers, subject difficulties, class relationships and the like. However, in conflict and post-conflict contexts, a Mission Statement is an opportunity to set the ethos of the school in a way that differentiates it from, rather than reflects, the context in which the school is situated. It can determine the pupil catchment of the school, its staffing (recruitment, retention and promotion)

policies, its curriculum and examination policy, its funding streams and ultimately its chances of survival. Perhaps the term Statement of Intent is a better moniker than Mission Statement; for example, 'To cherish all children equally, irrespective of political or religious background' is a powerful statement of intent for a community that has suffered decades of sectarian violence, and to aspire to parity of esteem between opposing political aspirations is an educative, as much as a political, purpose.

Recruitment, retention and promotion of staff

It is axiomatic that the communities which suffer most from violence and disruption, whether political or otherwise, are those that are the most deprived. Those who can move out do so, and these are the people who can forge a living elsewhere: the middle classes; the families whose parents have already benefited from education; those with in-demand skills. Those who are left behind or those who choose not to leave find themselves living in an increasingly impoverished context; perhaps not in a cultural sense or in the sense of lacking community spirit, but in an economic and educative sense. For schools, this dynamic establishes a spiral of decline for staff recruitment and retention. How do heads entice the best staff to stay in the most deprived and challenging schools - young, motivated, dynamic, missionary types, intent on 'making a difference' - and having lured them to what often turns out to be the most satisfying context in which any teacher can work, how can schools keep them from moving to other schools for promotion; or while staying at the same school, moving to live in more prosperous 'satellite' towns away from the community in which the school is situated? Effective leadership in such a context is about having strong personal values, a set of skills that includes systems thinking and conflict management, and a

desire to engage positively and sustainably with the local community. The goal in the Irish borderlands is to create a teaching staff *in* the community and *of* the community.

Recruitment and retention of pupils

The potential spiral of decline described above also applies to the recruitment and retention *of pupils*. Those who move out – high socio-economic status (SES) children and those whose parents themselves have high levels of education – are disproportionately those children with high attainment. Sometimes they move at a certain age for educational reasons – say to a bigger school with a broader curriculum – but more often, they move at the primary-secondary transfer point to a more selective school simply because they can. For the headteacher, the most sensitive manifestation of this issue is when the children of teachers also make that choice! Clearly and incontrovertibly it raises the question in the minds of other parents with similar SES: "If the school isn't good enough for the teachers who work there, why should it be good enough for my children?" And they have a point. In Ireland as elsewhere, teachers' children do very well from the education system, and other parents look to, and follow, their decisions in relation to school choice. Sociologists will construct all this as middle-class hegemony – the 'chattering classes' perpetuating their economic advantage - but there is a better way to conceptualise it: as simple risk management. Parents can choose a school - in Ireland, they do so with no restriction - but they cannot choose the other parents who make the same choice! They can pick the school with all its attendant baggage - uniform, ethos, curriculum, history, facilities, sporting prowess and geographical location - but they cannot pick their child's classmates, and thus they cannot control their child's learning environment for the coming three-to-five years. It is a non-trivial consideration. So in

choosing ‘another’ school, perhaps a fee-paying or more academically selective one rather than their stand-alone community school, they are reducing the risk of having the same choice made by parents who do not share their aspirations.

This theorisation has the same result as the alternative sociological theorisation, but the motivation is different. It is not a case of the middle classes consciously perpetuating their advantage, but rather of them reducing the risk of having their ethos diluted or eroded, as they would see it, through lack of effort on their part. It is more a *guilt* trip than a *power* trip: understand this and one is well on the way to tackling the issue, which for a head is about reassurance and celebrating engagement in such a way that achievement is extended beyond the narrow confines of examination success (to the sporting, artistic and cultural arena) so that all pupils get their fair share of time and resources, and all are valued for what they can achieve. Frequent school-stakeholder engagement is critical: parent-staff evenings; board of management meetings; one-to-one governor and parent meetings; attendance at community events; and having student representatives. Visibility is reassurance. Parents who care need to know that their caring is appreciated. Those who do not yet care need to be encouraged to do so. Absentee landlordism has a long and unhappy history on the island of Ireland; absentee headship is not the way forward!

Adapting the curriculum

Leaving aside the challenge for stand-alone community schools in small Irish border communities providing the full range of academic subjects, the teaching of History within the formal / provided curriculum is often a challenge in this context. The most successful schools have faced this challenge and have turned the challenge into a strength. History can achieve, in a way that mathematics for example cannot, an

engagement with current and recent political upheaval, explaining its origins in a balanced way that is usually absent from the media (for example, were Protestant fears justified about the creation of the Irish Free State?), challenging preconceptions (for example, are all Catholics anti-Union?), questioning the assumptions (for example, is a united Ireland or a United Kingdom still a meaningful notion in the context of EU and global economic imperatives?) and presenting the complexities (for example, why were 200,000 Irishmen fighting as part of the British Army in World War I, and how best should the sacrifice of the 50,000 who were killed be commemorated?). Done well, the teaching of what I call 'history-for-tolerance' can transform a school in a conflict setting; done badly, it can effectively make a nonsense of the entire school mission.

Allied to this challenge in post-conflict schools is the question of dispassionate service and impassioned teaching. The teaching of English and Irish Literature is a case in point. Inspectors and watchful heads have seen teaching of the very finest order, but there have been times when it has been imbued with inappropriate 'emotionalism'. There is a tyranny to this type of delivery that can too easily spill over. Post-conflict schools are, by definition, schools with a recent history of, and proximity to, civil unrest, as a result of which they are inherently unstable and have unknowable tipping points that can easily turn them from post-conflict schools into conflicted schools. So above all else, headship in this context needs to be watchful. Successful heads know that good teaching serves both the subject and the whole school.

Funding, buildings and infrastructure

Conflict takes its toll on human life, on social mobility and on economic well-being. Money flees from conflict, and jobs with it, so it is always a challenge to maintain a good built environment for schools operating in such a milieu. In the Ireland borderlands context, the European Union was, and is, a backstop to economic deprivation, and in a wider context, a reason for antagonistic groups to work together as part of a 'cross community movement'. The fact that both Ireland and the UK are friendly and cooperating members of the EU helps in a significant way. The EU does not fund school-building programmes, but for those headteachers willing to invest the time in circumventing bureaucracy and exploiting opportunities, there is plenty of financial support for educational programmes. Educational leadership in this context - and the same would apply to regions like the former Yugoslavia, for example - is about putting in the time and effort to access all possible sources of financial support on behalf of the school community; whether that is from the US, the EU or other sovereign stakeholders.

On a day-to-day basis, schools that serve diverse communities and which seek to accommodate that diversity have greater costs than ordinary schools: there are more sporting and cultural activities to attend[15] with smaller groups so that transport costs are relatively large; there are more frequent disruptions to the delivery of the formal curriculum so there are more significant staff-cover costs; and there are huge capital estate costs. Essentially, the task for the head is to 'play the system' on behalf of stakeholders, so that alongside 'watchfulness', 'pragmatism' is the watchword,

[15] According to Veronesi and Gunderman (2012), extracurricular activities in schools and colleges can foster the development of leadership abilities and can move students from passive to active roles. Evidence also suggests that extracurricular student organisations serve as catalysts for the development of student leadership skills by helping students work more closely and more effectively with one another.

notwithstanding long-standing ingrained affiliations which must be dealt with on a daily basis.

Buffering staff

Another feature of headship in post-conflict and conflict schools is the need, unlike anything in normal schooling contexts, to buffer staff and students from external turmoil and from those who would seek to drag the school back into divisiveness. Anecdotal evidence suggests that this is exhausting and requires no small degree of diplomacy. The irony is that if it is done right, it goes unnoticed. There will be conflicts with local political and religious leaders, often over relatively trivial matters such as where to hold Christmas carol services (say), who to invite to assemblies, and who to choose for the guest-list at prize-giving. All are laden with a perceived importance out of all proportion to the real problems facing the school. At other times the task is to buffer parents and children from internal *staff* conflict, but at least here the 'combatants' are professionals and employees, so if one cannot appeal to their professional ethic, one has recourse in law.

Involving students

Traditionally, schools have offered little to students in terms of their own leadership development, but nowhere is it more needed than in post-conflict communities. School leavers must be prepared simultaneously to compete globally in economic terms and domestically to contribute to forming a just society, and experience suggests that students with no opportunity to shape their own educational experience will adopt a passive attitude towards these broader issues. Research suggests that students who are involved in leadership activities also improve their academic

outcomes (Patterson, 2012) and become more confident and engaged members of society. These positive effects are not limited to students, but happily also accrue to their schools as institutions in helping them construct good relationships with their local communities. Schools are key to enhancing social responsibility among young people through the development of skills, like their ability to work with others, being aware of the beliefs and emotions that motivate action, understanding and being consistent with one's own values, commitment and collaboration, and the ability to deal with conflicting opinions and people. These values function at individual, group and societal level, but students first need to cultivate an understanding of their own leadership roles in the community, and themselves in relation to it, before they can be part of any solution.

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FIGURES

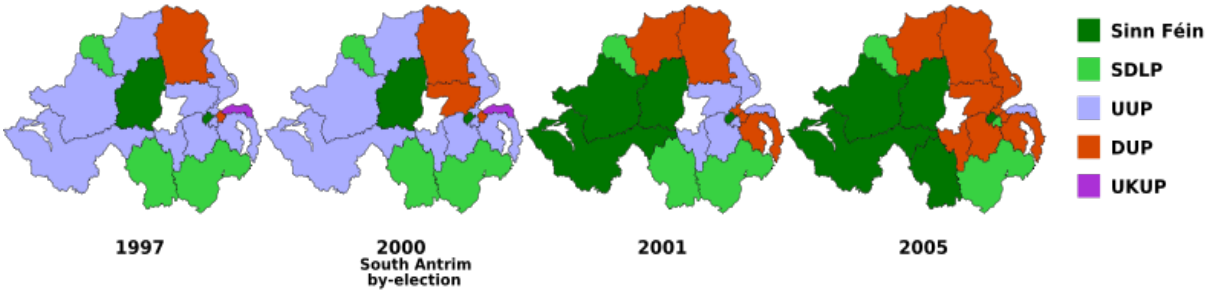

Figure 1. Voting patterns in general elections to the UK (London) parliament

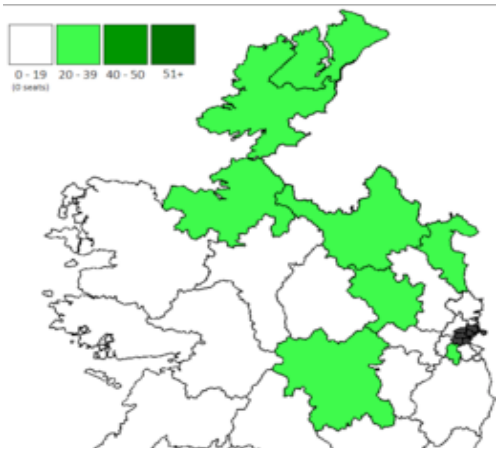

Figure 2. Sinn Fein electoral performance in the Republic of Ireland.

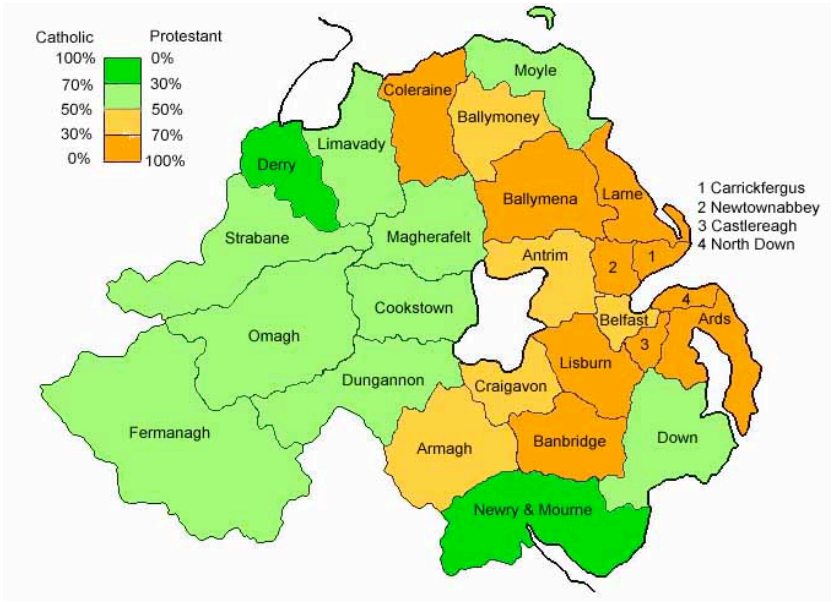

Figure 3. Religious division in Northern Ireland by district council area.

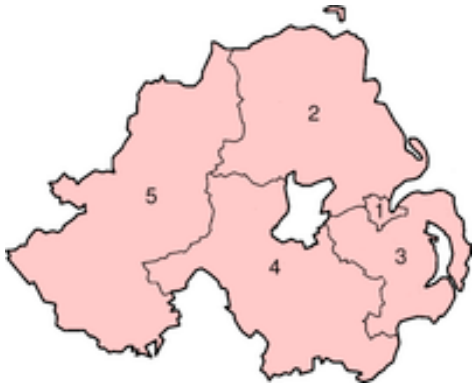

Figure 4. The five Education and Library Boards (1. Belfast; 2. North Eastern; 3. South Eastern; 4. Southern; 5. Western)