UISCE

Understanding Ireland – Socially Culturally Economically

EXPLORING RESISTANCES TO PEACEBUILDING
IN SECONDARY EDUCATION IN NORTHERN IRELAND

A DISCUSSION DOCUMENT

<u>AN UISCE ACADEMIC ENRICHMENT WORKSHOP</u>
SUMMER 2022

Contents

1. Workshop Overview

2. PQ – Positive Intelligence Approach

3. Peacebuilding Education: UISCE Research

4. Historical, Cultural, and Political Context

5. Policy Perspectives and Other Contemporary Understandings

6. Concluding Takeaways: Themes and Resistances

Compiled by UISCE Scholar, Neha Middela [Yale University] in consultation with Keith McNair [UISCE's Director].

Neha was an UISCE Volunteer in 2022. Previously she was a research assistant for Tom Andrews, UN Special Rapporteur on the situation in Myanmar, through the Yale Law School's Schell Center for International Human Rights. She has performed research for the Yale Center for Climate Change Communication; interned at the World Food Prize Foundation; and written for various publications, including the Yale Daily News, the Yale Politic, the Yale Globalist, The Ballot 2020, and the World Food Prize.

1. Workshop Overview

For one week in July 2022, UISCE hosted an Academic Enrichment Workshop for teachers, researchers, and others engaged with secondary education in Northern Ireland [NI]. The aim of the workshop was:
To provide participants with opportunity to:

  i. *Identify key resistances to peacebuilding in secondary education that have potential to transform peacebuilding; and*

  ii. *Explore how a PQ / Positive Intelligence approach might aid engagement with this process.*

The workshop consisted of a series of working group sessions, presentations, facilitated discussions, visits to a variety of historically significant sites, and meetings with some leaders from across the political spectrum. The final day included consultation with local teachers from secondary schools, which was most valuable in helping to identify what might apply specifically to the Fermanagh Omagh area. Representatives from local grammar schools had to cancel due to other commitments, and another leading grammar school, from outside the area, which was invited to engage advised it had no staff assigned to peacebuilding.

The Academic Enrichment Workshop is in preparation of a larger event that UISCE is planning for November 2022, by which stage UISCE will have consulted further with local educators from all school backgrounds and will look to the November event to further define strategies to advance peacebuilding in secondary education, particularly in the Fermanagh Omagh area.

2. PQ – Positive Intelligence Approach

Harvard University political scientist, Erica Chenoweth, contends that engaging just 3.5% of a population can be effective in achieving nonviolent political and societal change. UISCE's, undoubtedly ambitious, ten-year objective is to secure the engagement of 3.5% of the population in NI in creatively and sensitively exploring resistances to peacebuilding as resources of transformation, with the hope that the entire society prioritizes peacebuilding and continues to purposefully move away from the passive and active endorsement of violence. UISCE recognises how critically important it is, and how difficult it can be, that such engagement is both creative and sensitive. For this reason, UISCE availed of opportunity to explore how use of PQ / Positive Intelligence might nurture the necessary creative and sensitive approach.

PQ, or Positive Intelligence, developed by Shirzad Chamine, CEO of the world's largest coaching organization, is a form of coaching that enhances the mental fitness of individuals to engage with persistent barriers in their personal and professional lives to nurture optimum creativity and sensitivity. It works with an individual's neuroplasticity to develop what is referred to as "sage" awareness and strengthen pathways

in the brain that enhance positive response habits, whilst diminishing "saboteur" responses which undermine an individual's effectiveness.

During the workshop, participants had opportunity to explore how the application of PQ might help engagement with key resistances to peacebuilding. These sessions were led by Dr. Jim Robey and Dr. Rod Miller, both experienced PQ coaches. Participants undertook the initial PQ assessments to identify their personal "saboteurs". They then explored how saboteurs might reflect strengths, and discussed practices and strategies, referred to as PQ "sage powers," that help people move from saboteur reaction to positive engagement to develop strategies that increase empathy along with practices that build up one's positive intelligence "muscles".

After developing a foundational understanding of how PQ approaches function at an individual level, participants discussed how PQ approaches could be applied to transform group dynamics. Participants who already had PQ experience related how they found it effective in engaging with conflict situations.

UISCE is seeking to expand PQ approaches and combine it with our understanding of present-day historical memory and attitudes towards the conflict; and specifically, following this workshop, UISCE wants to utilize PQ approaches to help form, maintain, and strengthen connections with teachers and young people engaged with peacebuilding.

3. Peacebuilding Education: UISCE Research

UISCE is building on the research work of two UISCE Scholars. Jason Gappa, a teacher from Berkshire School MA, US, conducted research in Ireland and Northern Ireland in 2017. Melissa Clement, an Anthropology Masters graduate at Leipzig University, conducted research in Enniskillen in 2021.

Jason

Jason's work provides a broad overview of peacebuilding education possibilities in NI and Ireland, where he conducted interviews with heads of schools and teachers. Jason outlined the differences in the NI and Irish educational systems. Key divergences include the organization of subjects, particularly at the latter part of the secondary level, with the Irish educational system emphasizing a breadth of c. eight subjects, compared to three or four A-Levels undertaken by students in NI. Jason found that educational efforts addressing peace and conflict studies were most prominent in schools in NI and within integrated schools, compared to schools in the Republic and within segregated schools. He identified certain resistances to effective peace-building education, which existed in the following areas.

(1) The political realm, particularly related to the Irish Language Act and legacy issues.

(2) The religious realm, due to the influence of religious institutions on curriculum,

(3) The educational realm due to the role of schools during the Troubles and funding and access restrictions; and

(4) The social realm, due to the correlation between income and degree of neighborhood integration.

Melissa

Melissa's work provides insight into the specific dynamics of Enniskillen and surrounding areas, prioritizing identification of the resistances. In 2021, Melissa's research consisted of

(1) An extensive literature review in which she outlines the key stakeholders involved in NI educational initiatives and the history of integrated and shared education initiatives.

(2) An analysis of broader government initiatives designed to create an environment conducive to shared educational initiatives.

(3) An analysis of psychological, sociological, and historical frameworks relevant to peacebuilding, peace and conflict studies, and youth civic engagement; and

(4) Anthropological fieldwork consisting of qualitative interviews with both teachers and students and participant observation of Peace Studies programs at the Enniskillen Castle Museum.

Her research underscores several key resistances and points of further inquiry for future UISCE initiatives. These include the following.

(1) The role of curriculum structure and inclusion of subjects, particularly history and religious education, on teaching of peace and conflict studies at the secondary education level.

(2) The role of bureaucratic measures such as funding, resource allocation, and timetable cohesion in preventing or incentivizing shared education and inter-group initiatives.

(3) Diverging outcomes and attitudes among students from different groups following Peace Studies programming; and

(4) The dynamics and processes of identity formation among youth, particularly in the Fermanagh area.

During the workshop, Melissa expanded on her research and presented on two key topics: NI Education in Context and Charting Recent Changes in Education. This provided an overview of the different types of NI schools, the various governing bodies which shape school curricula, and chronologies of sector-wide developments in shared education, both during and after the period of conflict. Melissa's analysis pointed to resistances to peacebuilding and shared education initiatives, existing solutions developed by students, parents, and teachers, and opportunities for collaborative solutions to address this.

There are no less than eleven secondary school options in NI. The two largest sectors of schools are Maintained Schools, administered by the Council for Catholic Maintained Schools [Roman Catholic], and Controlled Schools, which are administered by the Board of Governors, by default mostly Protestant. These schools are then separated into Grammar and Non-Grammar schools. Grammar Schools are subdivided into Voluntary A Grammar Schools, and Voluntary B Grammar Schools, where the former are fully State-funded and with the latter, staff costs are State-funded.

(1) Catholic Maintained Schools Grammar Schools, Voluntary A.
(2) Catholic Maintained Schools Grammar Schools, Voluntary B.
(3) Catholic Maintained High Schools.
(4) Controlled Grammar Schools, Voluntary A.
(5) Controlled Grammar Schools, Voluntary B.
(6) Controlled High Schools.
(7) Integrated Schools, which are required by law to have certain percentages of students affiliating with Catholic, Protestant, and other identities.
(8) Irish Medium Schools.
(9) Fully private schools, of which there is currently only one fully private school.
(10) Small denominational schools.
(11) Homeschooling.

Melissa highlighted two challenges with the model for integrated schooling. The first is that integrated schools do not have a grammar school option, so parents must choose between engaging in academic selection or prioritizing integrated schools. The second is that there are not enough places in integrated schools for all interested students, with integrated schools having to turn away students and needing to extend facilities to accept more students.

Within history education, key barriers identified include the scope of the curriculum and the fact that history is only required for students until the end of their Key Stage 3 [KS3], completed around age 16. Additionally, within Fermanagh, Melissa noted that some schools face a dearth of students who take GCSE History covering the Troubles. Solutions might be found in shared education initiatives, such as the Fermanagh Learning Community, where students can take courses not offered at their school at other Fermanagh schools. Classes such as Religious Education, required for all until Sixth Form, and Learning for Life and Work, provide more opportunities for students to engage with topics of peacebuilding and reconciliation.

Alvin Mullan, Religious Education teacher at Devenish College noted that the RE curriculum provides extensive flexibility for teachers to introduce topics of interest or importance, pointing to class units on racial injustice in the United States, and a field trip to a local tractor Showroom, based on class interest, linked to

an in-class unit on the Parable of the Sower. Melissa also noted that local schools often covered these topics in Geography or Art classes.

Another area of resistance identified by Melissa was the vagueness in directives given to teachers from the government, which is considered a systemic issue. This lack of guidance meant that educators, administrators, and individual schools felt unsupported in executing peacebuilding programmes, creating stress and feelings of isolation and lack of support, having to complete programming on their own. Brenda Kerrin, the head of the history department at Omagh Integrated School, had created 'how-to' documents for teachers about dealing with these issues. Melissa also found that these challenges were often coupled with a lack of funding, where schools which had previously engaged in educational field trips to L'Derry had been unable to offer such trips due to lack of funding in recent years.

Melissa's work identified the role of social class, location and gender in creating contexts for peacebuilding education. Creating effective peacebuilding programming requires different approaches in rural areas in Fermanagh compared to the urban centers of Belfast and L'Derry. Melissa also noted that male students face different pressures, in terms of adopting sectarian attitudes, even joining paramilitaries, compared to female students. Taking these local factors into account can provide opportunities for peacebuilding and shared education programming. For example, Melissa described how organisations in rural areas have used agricultural education as a shared education activity to bridge community gaps. In the immediate aftermath of a conflict, significant time may be necessary before a society can collectively synthesize the realities of the conflict, understand its effects, and collectively create programs such as shared educational programming that address the conflict aftermath and work towards reconciliation and societal healing.

As of 2022, twenty-four years have passed since the Belfast Agreement. What has changed since then in terms of the views, interests, and attitudes of young people? How salient are the events of the conflict to young people today? How have their social spheres changed since 1998? After the workshop, UISCE aims to explore these questions with a wider group of people, as it works towards fulfilling its 3.5% strategy.

David Baxter
Melissa's presentation was followed by a presentation by David Baxter, educational columnist for the Impartial Reporter and an educator with over 30 years of experience, primarily in music. His presentation centered around structural and economic policy factors of the NI educational system. In particular, he contended that the funding structures of the system created perverse economic incentives, preventing substantive changes. David outlined the "market-based" nature of the educational system, marked by provisions such as head teacher pay being linked to numbers of students within the school and school funding being largely linked to other quantitative metrics. This system largely disincentivizes cooperation between schools and creates barriers to meaningful connection across the different sectors of schools.

Additionally, in recent years, reduction in teacher pay and educational funding have dramatically increased the pressures faced by individuals within the educational system. David argued that the transfer tests for students to apply and enroll in grammar school have also increased educational pressures for students, teachers, administrators, and parents, and have reduced possibilities for collaboration between schools and teachers. Due to these increased pressures, David argued, schools have little room for engaging in peacebuilding and shared educational programming, as time and energy are largely spent subject to economic pressures. David's presentation raised several questions among the group. How can the input of teachers, students, and parents be more effectively integrated into educational decision-making? How can actors with different political agendas cooperate to craft effective educational policy? How can we push for long-term structural changes while also working to overcome barriers in the short-term?

Tony Gallagher

The presentation by Dr. Tony Gallagher, Professor in the School of Social Sciences, Education, and Social Work of Queen's University Belfast, provided several answers and starting points directly relating to these questions. Dr. Gallagher provided an overview of how educational systems in different conflict contexts have grappled with questions of identity, division, and peacebuilding. Through providing an historical overview of both the integrated sector and shared education in NI, Dr. Gallagher outlined the creation of these sectors, the relationship between religious institutions and the educational sector, the demographic makeup of students enrolled in the different sectors, and the pros and cons of different approaches to shared and integrated education. The key points raised by Professor Gallagher mirrored takeaways from Melissa's and David's presentations. Dr. Gallagher noted that when reconciliation and peacebuilding education are not important priorities, due to ancillary pressures inherent within the NI educational system, shared education initiatives have a limited impact. Similarly, Melissa's research showed that one-off shared education initiatives, particularly during primary education, that were not supported by other system-wide programming, were not impactful or memorable for the secondary students that she interviewed.

Dr. Gallagher outlined three salient possibilities for peacebuilding education in the future: Integrated Education, Shared Education, and no change in the education system. He argued that while integrated education has garnered new legislative support recently and has high potential for growth in the coming years, parents tend to choose by school reputation instead of by sector, which could hinder engagement and support on the part of parents and students, which is integral to sustained growth for the sector. While shared education initiatives present the possibility for sectoral overhaul, he argues, top-down instruction and directives from the national government inhibit local actors and teachers from offering their input and being truly engaged in the peacebuilding education process.

Similar to David Baxter, Professor Gallagher argued that the "market-based" nature of the educational system has hindered outcomes for youth as well as presented resistances to the effective provision of

peacebuilding education. Professor Gallagher contended that because of the cutthroat nature of the educational system, in which schools are incentivized to shift admissions requirements instead of more effectively engaging with students and improving their overall outcomes, the youth of Northern Ireland face diminished educational and career outcomes.

While acknowledging that systemic change is necessary to comprehensively address these issues, Professor Gallagher introduced how he and other researchers and educators are working to create effective mechanisms for shared education in Northern Ireland. The model outlined by Professor Gallagher involved a three-step approach emphasizing local solutions, teacher empowerment, programs with both social and educational benefits, and programs that are visibly apparent to the surrounding community and which emphasize repeated contact. Referencing social network theory, Professor Gallagher recommended that schools should create "positive interdependencies" in order to develop a shared base of tools and strategies to engage in shared education initiatives. He emphasized that such partnerships take time, must meaningfully address concerns related to equity, discrimination and historical tensions, and community identity, and they must value, trust, and uphold the opinions and expertise of teachers.

The presentation by Professor Gallagher provoked thought among workshop participants and presented opportunities for UISCE action in the near future. By focusing locally in the Fermanagh area, UISCE might be able to identify the educational culture of the local area, existing partnerships and shared strategies between local schools, such as the Fermanagh Learning Community and Fermanagh Trust, and local political and cultural norms that inhibit or promote shared and integrated education initiatives. How can UISCE build upon these existing partnerships and understand local educational imperatives to augment the pre-existing Fermanagh-area "positive interdependencies" and create additional strategies? How can UISCE's resources, tangible, in terms of its facilities, as well as intangible, in terms of its capacity for community connection, be best employed in this effort? In the coming months, UISCE will seek to answer these questions, through assessing its current capacities and garnering input from local teachers and young people about their needs, ideas, and proposals related to shared education and peacebuilding.

4. Historical, Cultural, and Political Context

During the Workshop, and throughout our endeavors to identify resistances to peacebuilding, workshop participants sought to stay grounded in the historical and cultural context of the island. Through meeting with individuals from a variety of sectors and visiting culturally significant sites, AEW participants understood the present-day NI educational landscape as being tied to broader, longer histories of culture, social relations, and policymaking. A variety of sites visited included Newgrange, the Battle of the Boyne Site, Strokestown House & Famine Museum, Devenish Island, the Peace Walls in Belfast, a visit to the Falls

Road Republican Felons Club and a talk on resistances to reconciliation by a retired RUC Officer, an emerging historic author. These visits helped participants understand key points and events within Irish history as well as how individuals, communities, and institutions engage with historical memory and how historical events inform contemporary attitudes regarding identity, conflict, and community relations.

The talk by the retired RUC officer emphasized how individuals and communities grapple with historical memory and strategies for reconciliation. He shared his experiences as a police officer during the conflict and how in the decades following the conflict, individuals in a variety of roles and communities as a whole have had to face the aftermath of trauma. Through sharing his experiences of becoming a police officer at a young age and facing several threats to his life, he gave a firsthand personal perspective on the toll and long-standing aftermath of sectarian conflict. This led into his process of healing and reconciliation, grounded in developing relationships and his faith journey. How can peacebuilding and reconciliation initiatives acknowledge, respect, and engage with the full extent of trauma experienced by individuals, families, and communities during the conflict? How can these initiatives create generative spaces for peacebuilding while taking care to not minimize the traumatic experiences associated with conflict?

The post-presentation discussion among participants centered around these questions. Participants split into two groups and each group then came up with five takeaway words or phrases to describe their discussions.

Group 1 came up with the words: *Bias. Commonality. Self/Group Awareness. Empathy. Cyclical Patterns.*

Group 2 came up with the words/phrases: *Recognize wounds. Implicit resistances (creative/sensitive). Youth perspectives. Social consequences. Painful.*

Throughout the rest of the day, particularly during and after the Devenish Island Tour, the group reflected on how to create an organizational environment that is conducive to answering these questions. Drawing from the example of the Devenish Island Monastic Site and its 6th century founding, Alberto, a participant teacher, presented on how the tenets of routine, community, continuous practices, study and research, and creative work could be applied to UISCE's future work as well.

5. Policy Perspectives & Other Contemporary Understandings

Siege Museum and the Museum of Free Derry

The Siege Museum and the Museum of Free Derry provided extensive material for discussion. Both approach topics of historical memory that are important to external groups. While the events of the Siege Museum date from 1600s, the events chronicled in the Museum of Free Derry are more recent, dating to

the Second Bloody Sunday Inquiry of 1998 and the present-day aftermath of the conflict. Of particular interest were existing educational programs such as the NI Schools Outreach Project, involving a partnership between the Siege Museum, the Museum of Free Derry, Bloody Sunday Trust, and Together: Building A United Community [T:BUC], a programme by the Educational Authority. Such shared education partnerships allow students to meaningfully engage with both the implications and aftermath of specific historical events as well as longer narratives that ground present-day identity and division.

Felons Club

Conversations with Gerry, a Republican leader, at the Felons' Club in Belfast, and later, Gary in L'Derry, an independent Republican leader and Derry and Strabane city councilor, provided extensive insight into contemporary Republican identities and mobilization mechanisms. The discussion with Gerry on July 11th provided insight into tensions inherent to modern day Nationalism and Republicanism. According to Gerry, the modern-day Republican movement is not about religion. In fact, he believed that the [Roman] Catholic Church should minimize its involvement in education and health issues, such as reproductive rights. While emphasizing the importance of parental choice and curriculum considerations, particularly in history and citizenship education, and the need to maintain the option for Irish Medium education, Gerry argued that academic selection should be abolished, and that "all schools should be good schools."

Cromore Community Collective

On Thursday, July 14th, the group met with Gary in L'Derry. While disagreeing with Gerry on some larger-scale policy issues, Gary espoused similar views regarding education, arguing for education that is responsive to the needs of local communities. The meeting with Gary took place in the Cromore Community Collective, a center with facilities for community meetings, a greenhouse for food production, and space for recreational activities, operating without government support. The setting of the meeting also promoted thought and reflection among workshop participants. How can UISCE, as an organization, best respond to the local needs of Enniskillen or the Fermanagh area? How can responding to these ancillary needs in a tangential manner work to alleviate localized division? Through garnering extensive input from Fermanagh-area teachers, young people, and community members, UISCE hopes to build upon lessons learned during the workshop and develop programming, [such as shared GCSE or A-Level Revision classes in the Intec Centre or after-school social spaces that respond to the needs of local students].

Sinn Fein

Education policy and partisan attitudes towards peacebuilding education and integrated and shared education have remained contentious topics in recent election cycles. While Sinn Fein and DUP have discussed shared education and integrated education initiatives in various policy proposals, they offer diverging approaches regarding timelines, funding mechanisms, and stakeholder support. During the workshop, we met with Pat Sheehan, Education Spokesperson for Sinn Fein and Pat Gaffney, a Sinn Fein

policy spokesperson and activist, in an hour-long Zoom meeting. They maintained that while Sinn Fein supports Integrated Education programmes and would support the Alliance Party Bill regarding Integrated Education, they are also in favor of parental choice, particularly relating to Irish Medium schools. Pat Sheehan stated that Sinn Fein's primary policy imperative was to reduce inequity between schools and in educational outcomes within Northern Ireland, through measures such as removing Academic Selection and ensuring that schools include students of different socioeconomic backgrounds, so that children from disadvantaged backgrounds are not disadvantaged within the educational system.

DUP

Due to a sudden family illness, John Robinson, the Director of Communications for the DUP, was unable to meet with us, but participants were able to read the DUP official education platform. The platform emphasizes equitable funding for all school sectors, improvement of school facilities, and changes to curriculum, particularly in primary education. Although unable to join the workshop, John emphasized that the DUP was very willing to participate and engage with UISCE's future events.

The Alliance Party and the Ulster Unionist Party did not revert with a spokesperson and therefore there was no input from their parties. The SDLP was not approached.

6. Concluding Takeaways: Themes and Resistances

During the final day of the workshop, the participants, including Omagh Integrated School teacher, Brenda Kerrin, and Devenish College teacher, Alvin Mullan, shared with the workshop participants their perspectives. The following key resistances to peacebuilding in secondary education were identified and are listed in no particular order.

- Urban [Belfast, L'Derry]/Rural Divide
    - Strategies must apply to local area
- Limited effectiveness of one-off shared education measures
- Divided education systems hindering youth partnerships
    - E.g. divisions in social and sectarian groups, students sitting apart on buses
    - Possibility of UISCE offering local shared revision classes
- Young people's fear of being judged (fear of social media repercussions or social consequences, or of appearing non-PC)
- A greater capacity to articulate social and sectarian division among students in grammar schools
- Parents may decide against integrated schools due to lack of integrated grammar school options. Alternatively, parents may opt for integrated schooling as "second-best" option over high schools, instead of engaging with integrated schooling ethos

- ○ Opportunity for UISCE to create an after-school student hub at the Intec and Clinton Centres, and liaise with schools, head students, and educators to create hub
- Role of Transfer Test in furthering grammar school/non-grammar school divide
- Lack of awareness among teachers or community leaders, deficit of data about current status quo ("Where are we coming from?")
- Lack of opportunities for teachers from local area to meet; even teachers teaching similar subjects within Enniskillen do not necessarily know their peers.
    - ○ Opportunity for UISCE to create a music hub for teachers to bring educators together
- Barriers to Professional Development opportunities
    - ○ Opportunities are tightly controlled by schools, must tick certain boxes
    - ○ Results focus/market-based incentives in schools means there is little space for peacebuilding education to become a higher priority.
    - ○ Most Professional Development opportunities are based in Belfast
- How to make peacebuilding a priority in schools – ontological vs. results focus

Overall, the workshop group reached a consensus that the apparent fragmented nature of secondary education in Northern Ireland, coupled with historic patterns of recurring violence and current societal apathy and inertia, has created or perpetuated resistances to peacebuilding. However, what is apparent is that fragmentation may also be the foundation for diversity and vital difference.

Despite the relative peace of the present-day, society, educators and organizations like UISCE hold both the responsibility and opportunity to imagine, create, and deliver a new style of secondary education that moves beyond the current apparent impasse. Might the resistances contain resources that can benefit the whole?

The following Wolfe Tone quote is displayed in the Felons' Club.

> *"To subvert the tyranny of our execrable government, to break the connection with England, the never-failing source of all our political evils and to assert the independence of my country - these were my objectives. To unite the whole people of Ireland, to abolish the memory of all past dissensions, and to substitute the common name of Irishman in place of the denominations of Protestant, Catholic and Dissenter - these were my means."*

The last sentence of this quote, if applied to education in Ireland and NI, could suggest an aspiration or intention to abolish the extant eleven forms of secondary education, and replace them with a State unitary policy of secondary education. Whilst recognising that there certainly are problems with the current system, is the core problem with NI secondary education that there are eleven types of school? Is it also necessary,

indeed wise to "abolish memory of all past dissensions"? As in anything, dissent ought to be expected and accepted. Dissent flows from diversity. Dissent is not the problem, but rather our reaction to dissent and our attitude to include diversity. Therefore, ought we view dissent as a liability or a resource? Dissent points to diversity, and diversity ought to be cherished. Would a State unitary educational identity and policy be a healthy reality? Or might it point to what could become a form of totalitarianism in education?

Tone's aspirations were heavily influenced by the French Revolution, often thought of as foundational to liberal democracy. At the heart of democracy, however, is respect for freedom of choice and recognition of individual responsibility. With regard to education, primarily options for students, then parental choice and then community opportunity are essential; and community includes those whose preferred language is not English, and this goes beyond Irish medium, given that for more people in NI Polish is their main language, compared to Irish; and soon in Ireland there might be more Ukrainians than Protestants, never mind there already being more Muslims than Methodists.

If a State unitary secondary educational policy was introduced it may be akin to monoculture, more prone to dis-ease, evacuated of corporate variety and, in fact, intolerant of diversity. Irish history is clear that State imposition of a unitary education system proves intolerant, discriminatory, and oppressive. Imposition of a unitary approach denies diversity and invites dissent, but dissent is not, of itself, a problem. One of the problems is more often our response to dissent. This probable adverse effect of Tone's aspiration, if revered as a driving mission for education, ought to be reflected on with regard to its impact on diversity and how ensuring diversity, options and freedom of choice, can be for the benefit of primarily the student and also wider society. Maybe therefore the eleven forms of secondary school in NI are a great resource!

In short, maybe our educational policy instead of abolishing the memory of all past dissensions ought to be grounded on "Vive La Difference" – but not only this. It must also include what we must do to make "all schools good schools" in Northern Ireland today.