

YCNI Sharing Works Conference

22 March 2018

Conference Report

Sharing Works: Conference Report

Introduction



Maire Young YCNI Chair, in welcoming everyone to the conference, expressed her delight at the numbers and diversity of attendees. She stated the purposes of the conference were, to provide information, encourage conversation and promote reflection on Shared Education. She noted that when undertaking the Review of Public Administration the government had decided to keep youth work under the Department of Education. It was therefore clear youth work needed to align its goals with wider education policy. This conference was part of that process. She emphasised the Conference was not about new resourcing or new programmes, but about the values and practice required for the effective implementation of the

Shared Education policy in youth work settings. Maire introduced the speakers for the first session: Andrew Bell Department of Education, Dr Paula Devine ARK - QUB Ulster University and Dr Martin McMullan YouthAction.

Opening Plenary



Andrew Bell

Andrew provided the policy context for the conference. As head of CRED and Shared Education policy for the Department, he provided insights into the purpose, vision and implementation of the policy across the education sector. He stated the policy would work across all parts of education, early years, schools and youth service.

Key Takeaways

- The policy is defined as the provision of education for "groups together" of different religious belief & those experiencing socio-economic deprivation
 - "Shared education should be just the way you do things"
 - Youth work has a particular contribution to make



Dr Paula Devine

Paula advised the conference of the latest research into young people's views of Shared Education. Using the broad data from the Kids' & Young Life and Times surveys and specific research papers, she shared the findings of the last 10 years.

Key Takeaways

- There is tentative support from young people for Shared Education & Shared Campuses
 - There are many benefits, but also some concerns
 - 16 year olds perceive more benefits from Shared Education than 10-11 year olds



Dr Martin McMullan

Martin shared his experience of shared education as a practitioner - in particular he focused on the findings of his recent PhD research.

Key Takeaways

- Not all youth workers are convinced Shared Educators
- There is a fear of a hierarchy of young people's needs being developed at the expense of some areas of work

- Dialogue with young people is important and learning the skills of dialogue is crucial for workers to get 'buy in' from young people towards Shared Education activities and processes
- He shared his proposed model of work in this area- **AGENDA** i.e. Acknowledgement of need, Getting the 'buy in', Engagement, New relations, Dissemination, Allies for action

The full presentations and videos of the plenary inputs are available at the YCNI Shared Education website



Marketplace Cafe

To encourage further dialogue the Conference provided four coffee conversation zones including:

- Information
- Organisation Development
- Local partnership
- Specialist work

The information zone featured stalls by the Department of Education & ARK to permit more sharing of research and policy background.

In the Organisation section, The Scout Association and Scouting Ireland shared how they as organisations were creating joint venues to support shared learning. They were joined by the The Duke of Edinburgh's Award/Joint Award Initiative/Gaisce – The President's Award partnership. Their inputs included the needs of leaders and trustees in managing change.

The Local Zone included two Education Authority projects: North West Outdoor Peripatetic Team and Ards Arena youth team. These provided real life illustrations of local groups working in partnership together. The Specialist Zone included Playboard NI sharing approaches to work with the under 10s and the NI Youth Forum's work on using participation as a tool in Shared Education. The YCNI website contains some of the resources used in the Marketplace Cafe.

Discussion Panel



Hugh Campbell from Ulster University and YCNI member led the panel discussion after the marketplace. Hugh opened with some personal illustrations about practice in a divided society but also commented on the problem of 'forced sharing'. The input speakers provided views on various issues raised during the coffee break. The questions included:

- At what age should we be exploring the conflicted nature of Northern Ireland with children, and how?

- Is outdoor learning a valuable tool for CRED work?
- Can you give a clear differentiation between CRED, Shared Education and TBUC?
- Are we moving towards a curriculum of shared education in youth work practice, and if so is that at odds with youth work practice?
- Were the researchers surprised by any of their findings?
- Is any of the data disaggregated against any other section 75 groups - disability in particular?
- Should we move beyond single identity and contact work and focus instead on working towards integrated organisations and services within the youth sector?
- Do we need to recognise and disseminate good practice more effectively? If so, how might we do that?

In response, there was broad comment including support for early intervention, the need for more peace-building and reconciliation work. Some workers expressed their strong commitment to CRED work and training.

Education and Training Inspectorate - Joanne Jones ETI

After lunch Joanne launched the ETI Shared Education framework for youth provision partnerships. She introduced the document by stating that it is a support tool and not a bureaucratic form. She described the four main areas for development:

- Learner Centred programme
- High Quality Youth Work Practice
- Leadership
- Community Connections

Joanne's presentation and a copy of the Framework are available on the YCNI website

Workshop feedback

During the afternoon four workshops reflected on the inputs and conversations of the day. In addition they were invited to suggest areas of support required to see the policy effectively implemented and finally to comment on the Inspectorate's new Framework document.

Questions and comments from the groups can be summarised as follows:

- Youth workers expressed a strong **allegiance to the CRED policy and practice** and some were worried the new policy might weaken that area of work. There was a desire for statement, which joins up the various initiatives across TBUC, CRED & Peace IV.
- **Investment of skills** in workers and leaders is required to build sustainable partners, therefore staff need training. Training for partnership and practice was strongly stated as a need, with the needs of part time and volunteers also requiring recognition. They added workers learn best by seeing and sharing others practice
- **Various issues** from youth work practice were highlighted including
 - Need for community & parental engagement, focus on youth needs & youth led work, recognising each local context is different and no one size fits all
 - Some workers feared some young people's needs were being given priority over other needs
 - To integrate Shared Education into youth work at this time of change would take time and careful planning

- Overall it was recognised the conference had given workers a chance **to reflect and understand** the language and purpose of the new policy

Conclusions

From the feedback received from the workshops, evaluation surveys and verbal feedback, four main themes emerged as requirements for future work:

1. Support for practitioners via training and training resources
2. Support for local volunteers who cannot attend events such as the conference
3. Support for organisational change, enabling trustees to understand the policy and actions required
4. The Conference was effective at increasing knowledge of Shared Education for practitioners and agencies. Participants from various backgrounds appreciated the opportunity to discuss and learn together.

YCNI response

The Youth Council for Northern Ireland (YCNI) has a long history of commitment to, and involvement in what was described, in 1989, as cross community activity. Terms such as Community Relations, Peace Building, CRED, Shared Education reflect the 21st century language used in this important aspect of youth work. YCNI believes youth work has a key role to play in developing those personal and social skills which enable children and young people to develop mutual understanding and respect for others, along with recognition of, and respect for, cultural diversity.

To respond to the need for training and training resources, a more thorough assessment of what the training needs of practitioners and trustees actually are, and how they are currently being met is required. YCNI believes that there are already many training resources available for the sector. A mapping exercise to confirm this is desirable and offers the opportunity to update existing materials.

These are preliminary responses to the Conference conclusions. All of this work will require the involvement of the sector as a whole. YCNI intends to host a round table discussion with stakeholders, including those involved in the design and delivery of the conference, to agree how together we can make progress on these support needs. In line with YCNI's statutory responsibilities advice will then be issued.

YCNI would like to thank all those who contributed to the conference debate. In particular the speakers, facilitators and marketplace leaders who helped unpack the issues and benefits of Shared Education for the youth service. The wide variety of participation including practitioners voluntary and statutory and the engagement of managers from EA and RYOs helped create a comprehensive debate which joined the whole service in a common cause of effective practice for young people.

Further resources related to Shared Education will be available from the YCNI website including a list of information and resources websites

Sharing Works: Briefing Paper

For almost two decades, society here has been on a journey from conflict and division to peace and there are many tangible signs of social, political and cultural progress. Whilst our education system reflects historical divisions in society, the benefits of educating children and young people together are increasingly recognised. In recent years, the concept of Shared Education which provides opportunities for children and young people from different community backgrounds to learn together, has developed. Public and political attitudes have evolved to the degree where moving to a more inclusive educational system is a distinct possibility. Provision of shared education is a commitment of the NI Executive and features in successive Programmes for Government and the Together: Building a United Community strategy.

A feature of Shared Education is its cross-community aspect whereby those of different religious belief, in particular those from the two main communities are educated together in a regular and sustained way, whether in pre-school, school or youth work settings. Shared Education involves the sustained provision of opportunities for children and young people from different community, as well as social and economic, backgrounds to learn together. In practical terms, this requires educational settings (whether pre-school-pre-school; school-school; youth-youth or any combination such as school-youth) working together in a way that meet the community and socio-economic pre-requisite to deliver high quality learning experiences.

There is a considerable evidence base indicating that where educational setting collaborate in this way it leads to improved educational outcomes, builds good relations and promotes respect of identity, diversity and community cohesion. High quality shared education aligns with, and complements Priorities for Youth and CRED work.

In 2015, the Department of Education published the *Sharing Works* policy, followed in 2016 by the Assembly agreeing legislation – the Shared Education Act – that includes a legislative definition which sets out the core minimum requirement for shared education and places a duty on the Department and the Education Authority to encourage, facilitate and promote shared education as well as giving power to encourage and facilitate this approach to delivering education to arms-length and sectoral support bodies, including the Youth Council NI. It marks a step-change towards a more inclusive education system, one in which youth work has a key role.

Youth Work has a key role to play in developing those personal and social skills which enable children and young people to develop mutual understanding and respect for others and recognition of and respect for cultural diversity which are referenced in Priorities for Youth. By seeking to improve both educational and community relations outcomes, shared education offer potential to build on effective youth work practice in a way which complements and supports shared education in pre-schools and schools, enabling children and young people to participate as effective contributors to society through on-going and progressive learning at all stages of their development.

Sharing Works Policy and the Shared Education Act as well as other useful background, can be accessed at: <https://youthcouncilni.org/background-reading/>

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