



Queen's University
Belfast

The Centre for
Effective Education

SCHOOL OF
Education

A photograph of several students in a classroom setting, looking towards the right. One student in the foreground is wearing a black headscarf and a plaid shirt. Another student behind them is wearing a blue headscarf. The background is slightly blurred, showing other students and a classroom environment.

TRANSFORMING EDUCATION THROUGH EVIDENCE.

Education For Transformation

Executive Summary

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the 'prison to peace: learning from the experience of political ex-prisoners' educational programme

Lesley Emerson
Karen Orr
Paul Connolly

We are exceptional



An Agency within the Office of the

**First Minister and
Deputy First Minister**

www.ofmdfmi.gov.uk

Executive Summary

Evaluation of the effectiveness of the 'prison to peace: learning from the experience of political ex-prisoners' educational programme

Lesley Emerson, Karen Orr and Paul Connolly

Centre for Effective Education, School of Education, Queen's University Belfast

September 2014

Additional Contributors

The research team would like to acknowledge the contribution from the young people in the Young People's Advisory Group who worked alongside the adult researchers as co-researchers throughout the project. We would also like to thank Dr. Katrina Lloyd for initial advice on relevant measures at the outset of the project.

How to Cite this Report

Any citation of this report should use the following reference:

Emerson, L., Orr, K. and Connolly, P. (2014) *Evaluation of the Effectiveness of the 'Prison to Peace: learning from the experience of political ex-prisoners' educational programme*. Belfast: Centre for Effective Education, Queen's University Belfast.

© Centre for Effective Education

School of Education, Queen's University Belfast, 69-71 University Street, Belfast BT7 1HL, Northern Ireland
Ph: +44 (0)28 9097 5051| Fax: +44 (0)28 9097 5066| Email: cee@qub.ac.uk| Web: www.qub.ac.uk

Executive Summary

Introduction

- This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the ‘From Prison to Peace: learning from the experience of political ex-prisoners’ educational programme conducted by the Centre for Effective Education, School of Education, Queen’s University Belfast. The eighteen month research project was funded by the Office of the First and deputy First Minister, Northern Ireland.
- ‘From Prison to Peace: learning from the experience of political ex-prisoners’ (hereafter, ‘Prison to Peace’) is an educational programme developed as part of a wider initiative, the Prison to Peace Partnership. This initiative is administered by the Community Foundation for Northern Ireland (CFNI) and part financed by the European Union’s (EU) European Regional Development Fund through the EU Programme for Peace and Reconciliation (Peace III), managed by the Special EU Programmes body. It combines the political ex-prisoner support groups from loyalist (UVF and UDA) and republican (IRA, INLA and Official IRA) constituencies. The Citizenship Working Group within this initiative was established to explore ways in which political ex-prisoners could use their narratives to engage with young people in order to de-mythologize the conflict and the prison experience and to encourage them to make a positive contribution to their communities. As a result, members of the Citizenship Working Group developed the school-based educational programme, targeted for use primarily as part of the Key Stage Four (age 14-16) curriculum for citizenship education.
- The overall aims of the ‘Prison to Peace’ programme are to: prevent young people from becoming involved in and/or returning to violence through presenting the realities of the conflict and the prison experience from the point of view of those directly involved in the conflict; demonstrate to young people alternative ways of dealing with conflict which do not necessarily require individuals to give up their political aspirations or cultural identity; present young people with alternative ‘bottom-up’ perspectives on the conflict through a comprehensive and complex picture of the political ex-prisoner experience; and provide young people with an opportunity to engage directly with those who were involved in the conflict in panel discussions with ex-prisoners.

Methods

- The study involved a cluster randomised controlled trial to measure the effects of the programme on young people’s knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. The trial involved 864 young people (with 497 young people matched across pre- and post- test) aged 14-17 years, from 14 post-primary school settings across Northern Ireland.
- The programme’s impact on young people was evaluated in relation to the following outcomes: increased awareness of the complexity of conflict in Northern Ireland; increased knowledge of

the conflict, processes of transition and conflict transformation; reduction in sectarian prejudice (exploratory only); increase in respect for political diversity and, more specifically, acceptance that other political positions/opinions are legitimate; reduction in intention to use/support the use of violence to deal with divisions and conflict; increase in intention to be politically engaged.

- Alongside the analysis of the main effects, a series of exploratory analyses were also undertaken to assess whether the programme was having differential effects for different subgroups of young people. Specifically the exploratory analysis considered: the young person's gender, religion, political identity, Free School Meal Entitlement, and Northern Ireland Multiple Deprivation Measure for their home post code.
- The study also involved in depth qualitative studies of the programme's implementation in a range of settings (including intervention schools, a youth sector context, and a school experienced in delivering the programme over a number of years). This involved lesson observations, focus groups with participating young people, interviews with teachers delivering the programme, interviews with school leaders and one parent focus group.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with nine educational stakeholders, drawn from the Curriculum Council for Examinations and Assessment, Department of Education, Education and Library Boards, a victims' organization and non-governmental organizations implementing programmes in schools relating to the conflict and its legacy. The primary purpose of these interviews were to ascertain how the 'Prison to Peace' programme addressed curriculum and policy imperatives and how it could best be coordinated with other educational initiatives.
- The study included a group of young people in a Young People's Advisory Group (YPAG), who worked as co-researchers with the adult research team throughout the project. The remit of the YPAG was to contribute to the research design and to assist in the analysis and interpretation of findings.

Findings

Programme effects

- There is clear evidence of the positive effects of Prison to Peace on young peoples' knowledge, attitudes and behaviours. The main analysis demonstrates that there is a statistically significant difference between the intervention and control groups (controlling for any pre-test differences) across several of the outcomes (with sizeable effects ranging from .17-.42). The intervention group, compared to the control group: knew more about the conflict, processes of transitional and conflict transformation; demonstrated more support for using non-violent means to deal with conflict; and demonstrated less blatant and subtle prejudice. Additionally, the programme has increased young people's likeliness to be engaged politically, as measured by several indicators: talking to others more about politics; showing more interest in participating in school related activities; seeking more information related to politics (via newspapers, the internet etc.). No significant differences were found between the intervention and control groups across the measures for participation in politics and respect for political differences.

- Young people who participated in the programme developed a more nuanced understanding of the conflict. Following the programme, participants were more likely to locate the ‘Troubles’ within socio-political historical contexts and were less likely to simply blame the ‘other side’ for its origin.
- The programme has potential to maintain trust in social, civic and political institutions and to encourage young people’s optimism in relation to permanent peace.
- Exploratory analyses revealed no consistent pattern of differences in terms of gender, religion, deprivation, or political background. The programme therefore works equally well for all groups of young people.

Programme implementation

- Successful implementation of the programme relies on teachers being committed to, and confident in, delivering the material and pupils being engaged through active and participatory approaches in the classroom. Panel discussions with political ex-prisoners are successful when pupils were well prepared, chairing was efficient and reflective, and when political ex-prisoners remained focused on age-appropriate, concise answers.

Young people’s perspectives

- Pupil responses to the ‘Prison to Peace’ programme indicate that young people are ready to learn about issues relating to the past and its legacy and see value in doing so. In particular young people enjoyed the programme and engaging with the narratives of the ex-prisoners, valuing these first-hand accounts which they saw as grounded in reality. Aspects of the programme enjoyed most included learning about the prison experience and asking the ex-prisoners questions during the panel discussion.
- Young people also indicate that the programme increases their knowledge and awareness of the reality and complexity of the conflict, in particular its impact and its legacy. Addressing the conflict helped the young people to make sense of their current socio-political context. They also suggest that the programme challenged some of their previous stereotypical views of ex-prisoners and also of the ‘other’ community. They indicate further that it provided them with opportunities to explore a range of perspectives and has assisted them in forming their own views.
- Overall, it appears that the programme provides a broad framework of perspectives in which the young people could locate, and understand, the perspectives they encountered in their own communities. Crucial to this however is that the young people trusted their teachers to present balanced views.
- Young people are acutely aware of the sensitivities surrounding the programme, particularly in relation to the impact it might have on people who had lost family members and in relation to

the potential tension it might create between views at home and views they were being exposed to in school. Further, they are aware of the emotional impact of dealing with sensitive issues.

School leader, teacher and parent perspectives

- Adult stakeholders in intervention schools recognize the educational benefits of engaging with 'Prison to Peace'. They see the programme as providing opportunities to challenge myths and help young people make sense of their socio-political context, which in turn assist them in developing their own perspectives.
- The schools involved in this study were clearly 'ready' to engage with controversial and sensitive issues related to the conflict. Features of this readiness include: a school ethos focused (both in policy and practice) on the holistic development of the child and on the preparation of young people to live and work in a diverse society; knowledge of and sensitivity to the perspectives of parents and of the community schools serve; leadership trust in the teachers delivering the programme; teacher confidence to deliver the programme in the knowledge that they were supported by the school; awareness of the sensitivities surrounding this type of programme, in particular in relation to parental responses and the readiness of pupils to deal with issues raised; commitment to a whole school approach which ensures that all staff are aware of the programme's aims and objectives.
- The parents interviewed, though to a certain extent apprehensive initially about the programme, were supportive of their school engaging with the programme and associated issues. They recognize the value of their children learning about their socio-historical context from engaging with ex-prisoners and trusted their school to do this sensitively. Further, they reported that the programme had encouraged dialogue between them and their children about the 'Troubles' and the current nature of Northern Irish society and they were also able to point towards key aspects of their children's learning that had been enhanced through engagement with the programme in class.

Developing and adapting the programme

- The programme can be adapted to non-formal settings. However, if the programme is to be delivered in a cross-community or cross-border context additional time needs to be given to ensuring the young people involved get to know one another and build relationships. Also, in youth sector settings there is a need for additional material that is not dependent on high levels of literacy, such as more audio-visual material. Non-formal settings also provide an opportunity for young people to engage with the programme in communities where schools are not ready to address issues relating to the conflict and its legacy. This indicates that a coordinated, joint-up approach is required at a community level to ascertain where best to deliver the programme and to support its delivery in youth sector contexts.
- There is value in developing the programme to incorporate a range of voices and perspectives. This requires careful co-ordination of parties willing to share their stories together. It is also

important that schools build relationships with the political ex-prisoners involved in the programme in order to ensure that they are confident in its delivery.

Educational stakeholder perspectives

- Educational stakeholders see a strong connection between the 'Prison to Peace' programme and both the history and citizenship curricula. While they suggest that the Key Stage 3 curriculum provided more scope for delivering the programme, Key Stage 4 or possibly post- 16 is seen to be more age-appropriate in terms of the content covered.
- All the educational stakeholders agree that regardless of where programmes such as 'Prison to Peace' are located in the curriculum, there is need for specific teacher training on dealing with the conflict, its legacy and associated controversies in the classroom.
- Educational stakeholders agree that there is a need for a coordinated approach to addressing the past in the curriculum, to ensure that the range of educational initiatives dealing with related issues can work together to maximise impact. Some favoured a centralised co-ordination; others suggested that co-ordination was primarily an issue for the principal of a school to consider in relation to engagement with external programmes. All interviewees agree however that the Department of Education's 'Community Relation Equality and Diversity' (CRED) policy provided the most appropriate framework in which to locate this type of curriculum initiative.

Conclusions and recommendations

- Young people are not only *interested* in learning about the past, but are *ready* to engage with its controversies. Moreover, they value how addressing the past through educational programmes assists them in making sense of their current socio-political context.
- While there are many ways in which the 'Troubles' and its legacy could be addressed in the curriculum 'Prison to Peace' provides young people with a unique perspective on conflict, its impact and on the processes of conflict transformation. In doing so it has a significant positive impact on their knowledge of the complexity of conflict, attitudes towards those from the 'other' community, and on their intended behaviours in relation to support for violence and intention to be politically engaged.
- The 'Prison to Peace' programme's *strengths* lie in the way in which skilled teachers present and engage with the personal narratives of political ex-prisoners, and in doing so offer multiple perspectives on the nature and impact of the conflict. This in turn assists young people in developing their own perspectives, challenging pre-conceived ideas and partial narratives of the 'Troubles'. This is particularly effective when young people engage directly with ex-prisoners through the panel discussions. Its *weaknesses* lie in the text rich resources, which can be challenging for those with literacy problems, and in aspects of the panel discussions which are not sufficiently well chaired and/or when answers from ex-prisoners are over-long.

- The 'Prison to Peace' programme's *challenges* lie in ensuring that teachers feel equipped to deal with its sensitivities and that schools and other institutions commit sufficient time to its delivery. Its *opportunities* lie in its adaptability to a range of contexts and in its potential incorporation with other similar initiatives to present a full and comprehensive overview of the conflict and its legacy to young people.
- In relation to the 'Prison to Peace' programme's future development, by the Prison to Peace Partnership, consideration should be given to: providing more visual and audio-visual stimulus materials to augment the text rich resources; providing additional support materials on conflict transformation, transitional process and community development to ensure teachers maximize the potential of this aspect of the programme; providing guidelines for effective chairing of panels for teachers and additional advice to political ex-prisoners on how to ensure all answers are age appropriate and accessible; disseminating the outcomes of this evaluation to support political ex-prisoners in the process of transformational change, in particular their efforts towards moving into more mainstream conflict transformation activity and peace building work.
- In relation to schools implementing the programme, good practice suggests that the programme will be most successful when schools ensure that: the programme is located within a whole-school approach to dealing with the conflict and its legacy; all staff are briefed fully on the its aims and objectives; parents/guardians are fully aware of the nature of the programme and reassured of its educational value; sufficient curriculum time is given to its implementation; teachers are provided with support and opportunities to attend (and disseminate) training; careful consideration is given in relation to the best 'curriculum home' for the programme that takes in to account pupil maturity as well as available curriculum space.
- In relation to the contribution of 'Prison to Peace' to policy priorities, consideration should be given to ensuring that: support is provided for capacity building of former prisoners to continue to develop their involvement in conflict transformation work with young people and the mainstreaming of their organisations' peacebuilding work; anti-sectarianism modules for young people (to be developed as part of the 'Together Building a United Community' strategy) not only address issues of diversity within society but also attend to the past conflict, its impact and legacy; 'Prison to Peace' is considered as an exemplar of such modules; schools are encouraged to work through the CRED policy and CRED enhancement scheme to seek resources to support the delivery of the 'Prison to Peace' programme either in single identity or in shared/cross-community contexts; existing training for teachers (in pre-service and in continual professional development) addresses not only the teaching of controversial issues in general, but also provides teachers with specific practical support in addressing the controversies associated with the conflict and processes of transition; programmes are developed to encourage inter-generational understanding of the conflict and its legacy; structured support mechanisms, such as a dedicated educational support officer and resource 'hub', are provided to assist schools in selecting from and coordinating the range of available initiatives which seek to address the conflict and its legacy; such coordination needs to ensure joint up approaches within and between schools and between the formal education and youth sector.

