

Research Summary of Quantitative Research Examining the Impact of Shared Education on Teachers, Schools and Pupils

Two recent quantitative studies led by the Centre for Shared Education at Queen's, undertaken in collaboration with Centre for Identity and Intergroup Relations, Queen's and School of Psychology, University of Oxford, have explored the impact of shared education on teachers and pupils.

Both studies confirm how important regular and sustained contact is amongst pupils and teachers in advancing the objectives of shared education.

Findings are consistent with a body of international evidence that endorses the importance of intergroup contact in improving relations between divided groups and communities.

The teacher analysis is based on a cross-sectional study of 297 respondents, and the school/pupil study is drawn from a 5 wave longitudinal data set of 69 participating schools and 6052 pupils. Key findings from each study are as follows:

Teacher study

Research questions for this study were:

- 1) What is the impact of involvement in shared education on teachers' intergroup relationships, attitudes and behaviours?
- 2) What impact does involvement in shared education have on teachers' identity and practice?
- 3) What mediates/influences the impact of participation in shared education on teachers' perceptions and practices?

These questions were operationalized in a survey instrument, and data were collected via an online link or paper survey distributed to teachers and Principals in the period December 2019-February 2020. Of the 297 respondents, 168 reported being directly involved in shared education activities (n=168), with the remainder reporting very limited or no experience of shared education (n=129). Comparison of these two groups elicited the following findings:

- Teachers involved in shared education had more (and more positive) cross-community friendships, were more likely to engage in approach behaviours towards members of

the other community (e.g., seek them out, find out more about them), and reported greater professional satisfaction than teachers not currently involved in shared education.

- The overwhelming majority of contact experienced by teachers involved in shared education was positive, and this applied both to closest partner teacher and teachers in the partner school more generally. Only 3% reported negative contact experience to occur more than ‘sometimes’.
- Among teachers involved in shared education, those with more positive contact experiences with their shared education partners were more likely to share problems, trust more, report less anxiety, and have greater comfort in discussing issues of identity with their shared education partners. Those who experienced positive partner contact also reported more positive attitudes, greater trust and less intergroup anxiety when considering members of the other community *outside* of their partner schools.
- Teachers with positive contact experiences through shared education also reported greater professional self-efficacy and greater professional satisfaction, whereas the small minority with negative contact experiences through shared education reported less professional self-efficacy and less professional satisfaction. Negative contact experiences were more influential than positive contact experiences when it came to these two outcomes.
- Greater comfort in discussing issues of identity with a shared education partner teacher and greater trust in a shared education partner teacher were mediating factors; underlying processes that could explain the relationship between positive experiences and better relationship outcomes for teachers and their partnerships, as well as attitudes towards the other community in general.

School/ Pupil Study

The aim of the 5 wave longitudinal project from which this study is drawn, was to examine the quality and quantity of school based intergroup contact experienced by pupils in a range of post-primary school settings across Northern Ireland and the impact of cross-group contact on identity, attitudes and behaviour. In total, the sample included 6,052 students from 69 post-primary schools in Northern Ireland (32% of all eligible schools), including a number of schools implementing shared education in Year 11 and Year 12.

For the purposes of the study reported here, which focuses on the impact of shared education as a school based contact experience, we included only participants ($N = 5,159$) from 56 predominantly Catholic or Protestant schools in our analyses. To estimate the effectiveness of shared education in fostering more positive intergroup relations, *schools* involved in Shared education were compared to those that were not (*school-level involvement*), and *students* who participated in Shared education were compared to those who did not (*student-level participation*). Six outcomes relevant to good relations were considered: outgroup attitudes, outgroup trust, intergroup empathy, intergroup anxiety, intergroup contact, and willingness to engage in future contact. Key findings are as follows:

- *School-level* results indicate that while students in schools involved in Shared education reported somewhat more outgroup trust than students in schools not involved in Shared education, there was no evidence that, after adjusting for pre-intervention differences, school-level involvement in Shared education affected any of the other outcomes.
- At the *student-level* however, after adjusting for pre-intervention differences, students participating in Shared education reported more intergroup contact, more favourable outgroup attitudes, more outgroup trust, and more intergroup empathy in Years 11 and 12 than non-participating students. Little evidence was found that, after adjusting for pre-existing differences, participating students differed from non-participating students in terms of their willingness to engage in future contact and intergroup anxiety.
- Further, for outgroup attitudes and outgroup trust the mean difference between students who participated and did not participate in Shared education was biggest for students who reported to *never* have had positive contact experiences and for students who reported to *very often* have had negative contact experiences.
- For intergroup empathy, it is estimated the effect of participating in Shared education to be bigger for students with little prior positive contact, but to not differ much across levels of prior negative contact. For intergroup anxiety, little evidence was found for the moderating effects of prior positive and negative contact at Year 12.

A strength of the longitudinal study design and the multilevel analysis was that it allowed us to adjust the estimated differences between participating and non-participating students, as well as for differences across schools; as such, we can rule out that the estimated student-level effects are the result of differences in the outcome variables that predated students' participation in Shared education.