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Student Voice in Integrated Schools: Advising Leaders in a Transitional Society

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*Student Voice in Integrated Schools:
Advising Leaders in a Transitional Society*

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SIT Ireland, Spring 2012
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Abstract

This report is the outcome of a month-long exploratory study on student voice in the integrated educational sector in Northern Ireland, particularly through an examination of student leadership initiatives and the advisors of such programs. Data was obtained by way of qualitative methods using semi-formal interviews and written responses to open-ended questions on the topic. Although the work is hardly comprehensive, it can be inferred from the research – as it is situated within the framework of scholarly literature – that student leaders in the integrated school setting are given definite opportunities to express their voice, despite the presence of some limitations. Advisors for student leadership programs generally work to promote student voice and consider the skills learned by their pupils to be important for future political participation in the larger Northern Irish society. The agency of advisors in the school setting also impacts student empowerment in the integrated schools. More research is definitely needed to expand my conclusions. Considering student perspectives would be important. An examination of student voice cannot be considered complete without the perspective of pupils. Moreover, I did not seek to evaluate different integrated schools in Northern Ireland. Schools may benefit from intensive case study designed to constructively critique their student leadership programming and the ability of advisors to promote student voice in the integrated school.

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Introduction

Throughout my high school and college careers I have been incredibly passionate about my extracurricular leadership experiences. An active member of student council and President of National Honor Society in high school, I dedicated much of my time to the development of my skills as a student leader. My commitment to leadership has continued in college as a mentor for first-year students, academic tutor, and executive board member of our campus programming organization. Undoubtedly, I value student leadership opportunities and consider them to be important in the development of life skills in young people. This passion for leadership organizations dictated the development of my independent study project (ISP). I was fascinated with the formally integrated educational sector in Northern Ireland – governed by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE) – because I believe the education of young people is significant in any society and even more salient in a transitional one.

Considering student leadership in the integrated schools, therefore, seemed like a logical translation of my interests. Student leaders may be responsible for creating a new Northern Ireland in the future. Examining scholarly literature shaped my understanding of the present status of integrated education and the schools' ethos and the challenges associated with enabling student leadership. I explored: discourse on student leaders' tendency to be politically active adults; the role of the advisor in enabling student voice; and the impact of the agency of teachers on the empowerment of student leaders. These materials provided a framework for my qualitative exploration of student voice in integrated schools, particularly through the perspective of individuals advising pupil leadership in the backdrop of a transitional society. My experience in American student council and impressions of my fellow members support the research on their being politically inclined and was important in

the shaping of my ISP topic. The nature of this study, however, is to focus on the specifics of Northern Ireland so a cross-cultural analysis was not germane.

My ISP process reveals three valuable lessons: time, access, and positioning at the periphery. The challenges I faced while completing my fieldwork reveal the unpredictable nature of the process of qualitative information gathering. Field study – particularly when facing a narrow time frame – does not allow for a comprehensive examination of any situation. Even a few interviews, however, can provide valuable insight into the possibility of a better understanding of a greater situation. Therefore, I sought interviews with individuals advising student leaders, particularly in the integrated school sector, and how their work impacts student voice in the transitional society in Northern Ireland. To strengthen my examination I created a framework of scholarly articles to shape my understanding into the backdrop of former discourse.

I think one of the greatest lessons I have learned while working on my ISP is that field study is incredibly time consuming. Establishing contacts and then coordinating interviews, especially in an institutional setting, is a long process. I think the fact that I sought to work with integrated schools was advantageous because they are used to being studied in Northern Ireland. It is also probable, however, that working in the integrated sector was an added challenge as the schools regularly receive requests to study their environment. Therefore, they may be more likely to ignore contacts from outside researchers because they are frequent. I was fortunate to receive initial guidance from a NICIE Development Officer. The Officer directed me to the schools that would be the best to contact – based on their geographical location and willingness to potentially work with me – which possibly sped up the process of engaging in fieldwork. It also was probably beneficial that I was comfortable working in the field as an outsider. Trying to force relationships in the field would not have been possible and possibly off-putting to the people with whom I was working based on my time constraints.

I was lucky to get two in-person interviews, one phone interview and one written response interview. Accessing schools is always a challenge, but my process was especially hindered by the Easter holiday. Many of the schools closed by April 4, 2012 and did not reopen until the week of April 16. This holiday break severely cut into my time for scheduling interviews. It is also important to note that to speak to students at schools requires police clearance – a legal process that takes much longer to complete than the ISP period allows. Therefore, with the help of my advisor, Dr. Ulrike Niens, I refocused the concept for my ISP on examining student voice through the role of the advisor.

Shortly after my first meeting with Dr. Niens, I had written and edited my letter for each of the school principals, requesting permission to interview staff members in the school. I was not able to hand-deliver those letters, however, until Monday, April 16, 2012. Therefore, I lost valuable work time while the schools were not in session. Ultimately, after persistent contact with each of the six integrated schools I initially contacted I was left with the following results:

“A” Integrated Primary School (IPS): meeting with the teacher in charge of the student council on Friday, April 20, 2012

“B” IPS: Advisor for pupil council unable to meet, but willing to answer questions via email. I received typed responses to my questions.

“C” IPS: Called repeatedly, but essentially implied that I should stop calling because my information was passed on to the principal.

“D” Integrated College (IC): meeting scheduled with the teacher involved with the extra-curricular activities on Tuesday, April 24, 2012. Meeting cancelled due to a family emergency taking place over the weekend. Also, sent an email to schedule an interview with another teacher who the principal suggested I contact, after receiving a phone call from this teacher about emailing her to schedule an interview. I did not receive another reply.

“E” IC: Information was passed on to the appropriate teacher; there was bereavement in his family, so he was taking time off work.

“F” IC: Not willing to participate

Unfortunately, my interview scheduled with an advisor at “D” IC was cancelled the morning of the meeting due to a family emergency. The teacher was incredibly apologetic and willing to answer the questions via email. I sent the appropriate consent form and questions, but

emphasized the voluntary nature of the interview, especially in light of his present difficulty. I did not receive an email with answers to those questions – though I did not particularly expect one. This situation and the information that a teacher at “E” IC was given my contact information but was off work due to a family bereavement was a healthy reminder of what working with people entails.

Human subjects are not only individuals taking their time to work with you, but also people with real, daily lives. They face struggles and triumphs associated with life, like me. This perspective was particularly valuable considering my position as a constant outsider. The sharp restrictions for working with schools and the extremely narrow time frame prevented me from being able to develop strong relationships with the individuals I was interviewing. Rather, I continually remained on the periphery, entering their work space as an alien hoping to gain further understanding. While forming relationships can be incredibly valuable in order to develop a deeper understanding of a situation, my role as an outsider allows me to look critically at the answers to the questions I asked.

I not only spoke to advisors in the school setting, but I was also able to secure an interview with a gentleman working with a group that does leadership development programs both inside and outside of the schools in Northern Ireland. His perspective was definitely valuable in aiding my understanding and ability to think critically about the advisor’s role in student empowerment. Unfortunately, other contacts I pursued did not lead to interviews. Two SIT contacts are parents of school-aged children, but neither sent their children to formally integrated schools. Additionally, I was given the name and contact information of a woman whose daughter is a prefect at one of the integrated colleges in Northern Ireland. The mother told me to contact her daughter directly via Facebook. Despite sending two messages – as well as a second message to her mother – I received no reply. Therefore, my selectivity for interviews was mostly determined/limited by access.

I was relatively comfortable in both of my in-person interviews because I enjoy interpersonal contact and communication. My experience in journalism on my campus in America – television, newspaper, and radio – has made me confident in the interview setting. Moreover, Dr. Niens’ guidance for how to begin the logistical part of the conversation (i.e. consent form and informational letter) made me even more at ease. I was concerned at the beginning of the process that following the proper ethical procedures would cause the interview to begin awkwardly, but I did not find this to be the case. I chose not to provide the actual names of the schools at which I sought interviews nor the individuals I met for questions. My project is not an evaluation of any specific individual or institution, but rather an inquiry into the present status of student leadership, the advisors for such programs, and the role of student voice in the integrated educational sector in Northern Ireland. The process is designed to be a research-training exercise, so I did not feel I have the authority or expertise to judge any specific organization, school, or person.

I believe an understanding of pre-existing literature is valuable when considering field work. By looking for scholarly articles on my topic, I was able to feel proactive during the part of the research period when I could not get in touch with the schools. My main source for scholarly reading was the online database JSTOR, which I was able to access through a membership from my university in America. Dr. Niens was also an incredibly valuable source. She provided me with a copy of a chapter in the book, Fostering Change in Institutions, Environments, and People: A festschrift in Honor of Gavriel Salomon, she wrote with Dr. Ed Cairns. This resource provided me with important information on the present state of the integrated educational sector in Northern Ireland. Dr. Niens' expertise in the field of education was an important factor guiding my research. I felt a desire to do ample reading on the fields of integrated education and student leadership to prove that I am capable of examining these disciplines through qualitative methods.

No literature apparently exists evaluating the effect of student leadership in integrated schools in Northern Ireland. Nevertheless, the role of student leaders in a transitional society is seemingly valuable to consider. Moreover, the impact of advisors for student leadership organizations is monumental. Therefore, my research could arguably begin filling a hole in the critical discourse of integrated education. By considering pre-existing literature on the integrated school system and Northern Ireland and student councils, I was able to formulate a framework in which to place my own primary research. The material I found on integrated education, student voice, and advisor capacity are compiled to situate my primary research into a larger understanding of these topics. My interviews are small pieces of evidence designed to confirm, challenge, and supplement the scholarly discourse that already exists. Student leadership in the integrated sector is important when considering the transitional status of Northern Irish society. Subsequently, teachers' roles in advising student leaders are equally significant as they shape the potential of students to affect change. A consideration of the present state of integrated education in Northern Ireland and the importance of student voice and the advisors who enable or hinder that voice provide a foundational understanding for my primary research.

Currently, the formal integrated school system in Northern Ireland, which is governed by the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education (NICIE), makes up approximately five percent of the school population in Northern Ireland (Hayes, McAllistar, and Dowds 459). Rather significantly, opinion polls indicated that the large majority of the population in Northern Ireland would endorse the expansion of the integrated school sector, as the current demand for enrollment in integrated schools exceeds the number of spots available (476).

The integrated educational sector developed because of the extreme segregation dominating the school system in Northern Ireland (Niens and Cairns 2; ch. 11). Integrated education in Northern Ireland focuses on mixing students from Protestant and Catholic communities; schools are required by the government to have at least 30 percent of the student enrollment to be from the religious community that is the minority within in that school (Hayes, McAllistar, and Dowds 459). Notably, integrated schools attract students from all socioeconomic backgrounds (458-459) and from areas where children would have had no prior contact with peers in the other religious community (465). Additionally, integrated schools include gender integration and multiple levels of academic ability (Niens and Cairns 2; ch. 11). Integrated schools are regularly situated in communities that experienced sectarian altercations according to a report compiled in 2003 that examined 91 percent of the integrated schools existing at that time (7; ch. 11). Integrated education allows for students from differing religious communities to come together, providing the opportunity to learn about other religious backgrounds. According to Hayes, McAllistar, and Dowds, "...both parents and educators hope that children educated within a religiously integrated setting will feel less threatened by the cultures and traditions of the other community, and be more likely to respect them, as well as form enduring cross-community relations" (458). Furthermore,

integrated schools focus on developing an understanding of local history to foster a shared understanding of community between pupils (458).

Integrated education efforts are fundamentally established on the concept that bringing two communities together in the formal educational sphere would lessen sectarian tensions between Catholic and Protestant pupils (Hayes, McAllistar, and Dowds 459). The “Contact Hypothesis” is a theory that assumes adverse groups can lessen hostility by coming together in a shared space. Therefore, the Contact Hypothesis is arguably the core model for integrated education in Northern Ireland (Niens and Cairns 4; ch. 11). The formal educational setting is possibly the best location for integration, as research examining interracial schools show that contact between different racial and ethnic groups at school effectively weakened negative labels more than interactions in other settings, like the home or workplace (Hayes, McAllistar, and Dowds 462). This evidence could translate to Northern Ireland integrated education.

Understanding the impact of integrated education in Northern Ireland on adults who were pupils of integrated schools is valuable. Research validating the contact theory does exist. According to Niens and Cairns, analysis of “...random sample survey data of the Northern Ireland adult population provided by the Northern Ireland Life & Times Survey (NILT)... [show] that respondents attending integrated schools were significantly less likely to adopt social and political identities that are traditionally associated with sectarianism in Northern Ireland” (20). Therefore, the influence of contact in the integrated school setting is seemingly positive. Further supporting this research is evidence suggesting that formal pupils of integrated schools develop attitudes about integration that extend after school life – i.e. cohabitation or marriage with an individual from the other religious community. The contact theory in the integrated educational setting does, however, have limitations.

Coeducation may increase cross-community relationships, but there is no evidence that

religious or political identities in adulthood are changed because of education in an integrated setting (Hayes, McAllistar, and Dowds 460).

Other challenges exist surrounding the impact of integrated schools, specifically through the tackling of sectarian issues. The influence of the contact theory in integrated schools does not ensure that the schools actively address religious tensions. One problem highlighted by research in Northern Ireland is that integrated school teachers and pupils “...mix at a superficial level by avoiding meaningful conversations about politics, religion and community issues,” therefore, Niens and Cairns suggests that “schools, teachers and curricular initiatives need to tackle this avoidance culture in order to promote contact successfully” (5; ch. 11). Integration is more meaningful when schools emphasize coexistence and conversation. Former pupils of integrated schools indicated in a survey that the schools did not actively address issues of sectarian identity and discord (16; ch. 11). Therefore, it can be assumed that integrated schools may be relying too heavily on the power of a shared educational space to affect change when active discourse surrounding religious and political issues is needed. Moreover, even in schools where integration is addressed through specific curricula and educational platforms, schools face challenges with staff, both in terms of continuity and the lack of available training for teachers working in the integrated setting.

Ethos in the Integrated Educational Sector

Another important element of integrated education is the development of a defined school ethos. Although the term is co-opted by a range of theorists, Caitlin Donnelly generally defines ethos – in her article for the *British Journal of Educational Studies* – as a word used “to describe the distinctive range of values and beliefs, which define the philosophy or atmosphere of an organisation” (134). Both a positivist and anti-positivist view of ethos can be used when examining integrated schools in Northern Ireland. Ethos can

be identified as the formal declarations of an organization; the ultimate objective sought by the group (135). Considering this definition, NICIE has a clearly prescribed positivist ethos for the integrated educational sector. In its most recent statement of principles, NICIE unabashedly writes a “Declaration of Ethos.” There are four defined principles guiding formally integrated schools: equality, faith and values, parental involvement, and social responsibility (“Statement of Principles” 2-5). These specified goals differ slightly from the original foundational principle outlined by NICIE in 1998. According to Donnelly, the founders of the integrated education movement in Northern Ireland wanted “[r]eligiously, balanced enrolment,” “[e]stablishment of a distinctive ethos in which different religious and cultural traditions are equally valued,” and “[m]anagement structures which encourage the active involvement of parents” (145-146). From the beginning of the integrated school movement, outlining the ethos of NICIE from a positivist perspective has been an important part of the organization. The ethos of integrated education in Northern Ireland, however, can be examined from an anti-positivist point-of-view, as well. Anti-positivist theory suggests that ethos is not defined by the formal discourse of an organization, but rather develops out of the interactions of the specific group (136). Therefore, the actual experience within the schools can shape the ethos of integrated education, as equally as the formal statements released by NICIE. Donnelly recognizes that both perspectives on ethos are valuable, explaining that “[s]chool ethos refers to formal and informal expressions of school members and these expressions tend to reflect the prevailing cultural norms, assumptions and beliefs” (136-137). In Northern Ireland, the transitional society undoubtedly affects both the positivist and anti-positivist definitions of ethos in integrated schools. Donnelly’s examination of integrated schools and NICIE literature indicates that the formal ethos of schools is acceptance and open-mindedness, objectives that are defined regardless of the actual experience at the schools. Considering an anti-positivist perspective of ethos,

integrated schools in Northern Ireland are focused on the process of defining roles and guidelines that will help individuals within the school community lead the school, according to Donnelly (149). The examination of the ethos of integrated schools is not only valuable when situating their role in present society, but also for considering the role of student leaders and advisors for such groups in the school setting.

Student Council: Future Leaders?

Literature evaluating student council provides broad perspectives on the organization's impact in schools and beyond. Research examining the impact of student council involvement for future political participation, the role of the student council advisor, enabling student voice, and power dynamics between teachers and students are all valuable when considering the importance of student council.

Framing my analysis of student leadership in Northern Ireland is literature evaluating the influence of student involvement in leadership extracurricular activities and political participation. In "Bowling Young," McFarland and Thomas examine the impact of extracurricular participation on adult political involvement. Student councils make the list of organizations in schools that are the most likely to encourage political participation in adulthood. McFarland and Thomas consider student council to be an extracurricular activity that requires the socialization of young people and the development of competency, sense of purpose, and relationship-building – skills that are directly applicable in adult political life (403). Labeling student council as a "politically salient" club for young people, McFarland and Thomas explain the process of growth associated with such an organization:

[Student councils]...entail a variety of activities that develop civic and political skills...which in turn heighten the individual's sense of interpersonal competence and self-esteem...For instance, members of these youth organizations are asked to work together, run meetings, marshal resources, mobilize participants through tasks, listen to others' concerns, find common ground across different viewpoints, publicly speak and argue viewpoints...and manage collaborative "drives" or larger efforts at community service (403-404).

Arguably, all of these tasks and skill sets could be used in political activism as an adult. Furthermore, McFarland and Thomas argue that working on activities associated with student council helps participants develop a sense of pride in their school and community, which transcends their time as pupils and matures into passion for political engagement as adults (404). Strikingly, participation in extracurricular activities deemed “politically salient” promotes sustained political involvement seven to twelve years later, according to statistical evidence (420). Additionally, sustained membership in politically salient youth organizations – like student council – compounds the effect of continued political participation as an adult (418). This evidence has major implications for Northern Ireland. Suggesting that students involved in student council are likely to be politically active adults indicates that the development of student leaders in integrated schools can actually affect the transitional society in Northern Ireland. The ability of student council participation to encourage future political activity is seemingly monumental in the context of Northern Ireland. The development of skills such as, “leadership, organization, presentation, and negotiation,” as well as self-confidence, makes the political process in adulthood less intimidating (405). Therefore, student council members in integrated schools in Northern Ireland are prepared for political activism and have the confidence to affect change through political participation in the transitional society.

Moreover, McFarland and Thomas suggest that student council membership also creates a strong sense of community in pupils (405). Student leaders in integrated schools would thus develop an integrated communal identity, potentially moving Northern Irish society forward in the process of peace. It is important to consider that the constructive impact of student council participation on future political activity is modest (418).

McFarland and Thomas, however, make the argument that enough positive evidence exists in support of politically salient extracurricular activities, like student council, that schools

should provide pupils with these opportunities and give them the necessary resources and time to thrive as organizations (421). This statement affirming the role of student councils in schools and encouraging the school dedication of time and funds to this extracurricular involvement is validated through publications by *The Clearing House* in support of student council and the role of the advisor.

Effectively Advising Student Leaders

Traditionally, student leadership requires the assistance of teachers in the advisor role in the formal school setting. Robert P. Hanrahan's argument that faculty are responsible for providing effective leadership in order for a student council to perform well is straightforward and widely-accepted. He furthers his discourse on the importance of an advisor by explaining that the teacher is responsible for continually making student council participants aware of the council's objectives and role in the school as representatives of the student population (371). The general philosophy of student council members is outlined by Gerald M. Van Pool when he references a female, student council member who explains the organization's responsibility is to reach all members of the study body and to develop citizenship skills -- tasks that require faculty support (196). None of these arguments are seemingly controversial, so it would likely be natural that Hanrahan would further explain his expectation of faculty advisors for pupil councils by stating: "[o]f course, leadership must come from all quarters but the most important leadership must be exerted by the faculty adviser of the student council. The nature of student leadership hinges upon this key individual" (372). Undoubtedly, the teacher advising student council members is fundamental in the process of advocating and supporting the voice of student leaders in the school setting. Yet, the argument may go too far in its emphasis on the advisor. If students are constantly required to funnel their efforts through the advisor, their voice as leaders is vetted and shaped by the teacher working with them.

Therefore, Van Pool's list of guidelines for teachers in order to support student councils in schools is worth consideration. Firstly, Van pool argues that "...student council is a forum of public opinion, an agency through which students learn to be good citizens by practicing good citizenship" (196-197). This argument is basic, but it is easily supported by McFarland and Thomas' conclusions about the impact of student council on adult political activity and acts as Van Pool's framework for advising teachers. Van Pool develops his guidelines further by explaining that teacher interest in student growth as citizens needs to be regularly shown through actions that support students. Moreover, Van Pool considers it essential for student council members to be comfortable asking for help from teachers – and students should expect to receive the requested support. Perhaps surprisingly, Van Pool also suggests that student council members should not be overly chastised for making a mistake, but rather teachers should use mistakes as an opportunity to constructively criticize young leaders in an effort to improve their work in the future (197). All of these proposals for effective advising seemingly allow for the development of a strong student voice in pupil council members. While Van Pool's ideas are not revolutionary, they make a case for the importance of supporting student leadership.

Continuing his outline, Van Pool condemns the practice of some teachers to speak poorly about student council. It is incredibly challenging for an organization to earn legitimacy in the school when teachers' negative words are undermining it. Van Pool concludes that such ill-words show that "[i]t is quite obvious that teachers of this type are convinced that what is important in school is the subject, not the child!" (198). In the context of Northern Ireland integrated education, a student-centered ethos is often championed by the schools. Therefore, it would apparently be natural for pupil council advisors to maintain a child-centered attitude in their work with student council members. Van Pool's next point is simple: patience is necessary when advising student council members, especially because the

organization is designed to be a teaching mechanism (198). Members of student council ought to develop new skills and competencies as a result of their time on the council; advisors need to allow space for that growth.

The final point in Van Pool's list is perhaps both supportive of and detracting from student voice progress. Van Pool reminds advisors that they should not be afraid to ask for help from students (a victory for the strength of student voice), but he also implies that student councils are only effective when given a project on which to work from their advisor (198). Although the possibility of unmotivated students exist, generating work for the council to complete empowers the advisor more than the students – who ought to be developing plans for the endeavors they want to see completed. Van Pool concludes with a reminder that student council members are individuals deserving respect and that the teacher is essential in creating a positive working environment in which the council can thrive (198). Van Pool's guidelines for advising student council are important when examining the role actual council advisors play in the school. Van Pool – like actual advisors – struggles to maintain a balance between student-centered action and necessary guidance.

Enabling Student Voice: Speaking For or Speaking With?

Michael Fielding explores the challenges of enabling student voice in his article “Transformative Approaches to Student Voice.” Fielding highlights the concerns that can be drawn from Van Pool's article, by explaining that student voice is jeopardized – even in a nurturing environment – by the viewpoint of teachers working with pupils. Can teachers develop an acute understanding of what students actually mean? (303-304). Fielding situates this specific example in the larger context of the inherently political nature of understanding. Language is shaped by how it is spoken and by who said it, as well as how it is received (300-301). Fielding sets up an outline of the challenges faced by student voice facilitation, explaining that most basically, the problems lie in “speaking about others,” “speaking for

others,” and being heard (296). These simple issues extend to incorporate the challenges of reshaping conversation to not speak “about/for” students, but instead in a manner that is supportive or by “speaking With rather than for” students, allowing for a more equal relationship to develop between students and faculty (296). Overall, Fielding suggests that student opinions can be lost in translation, even when having a supportive dialogue with teachers. As a result, this unintentional confusion leads to the reduction of student voice; teachers are left speaking in place of their students. Fielding refers to Linda Alcoff’s theory that speaking in place of others and talking about others intersect. Fielding asserts the significance of her premise:

... in speaking about others, even in the sense of describing what you take to be the case, you may, in effect, be speaking in their place, that is, speaking for them. The very language you use in your description is likely to be saturated with values, frequently your own. No descriptive discourse is, or can be, value-free; advocacy or interpretation is thus, to some degree and inevitably, part of your account (297).

The connection between speaking about and for others implies that almost always, teachers are imposing their values and judgments on statements they hear from students. Student voice is diminished through their conversations with teachers who in turn miscommunicate student needs.

One study Fielding sites gives a concrete example of the challenge of translation and its impact on student voice. In a focus group, student interpretations were very different from the conclusions drawn by staff members. Teachers were prone to transform student language into more sophisticated rhetoric that did not necessarily hold the same meaning as what the students said (303-304). When student council advisors help council members develop projects, they may be misinterpreting what students would really like to see accomplished. Fielding suggests that student councils ought to become spaces of true equality so that staff members and student council participants work together in an environment where the interpretation of conversation is not misguided (309). An awareness of these concerns are

important for student councils advisors. Admittedly, identifying these limits on student voice is easier than implementing this new form of dialogue in practice. Fielding challenges staff and students to redefine their roles in the formal school setting, as a necessary way to transform discourse to effectively enable student voice (296). This redefinition is an element for consideration when evaluating the role of student empowerment as well – possibly the final element for consideration in relation to student leadership and voice.

Student and Teacher Empowerment

Patrick J. McQuillan argues that student empowerment is fundamentally based on the ability of students to politically engage and assert authority in the school setting (642). The development of a strong relationship between staff and students is crucial for student influence in schools, stemming from established support and direction (643). The key element of this relationship, however, is earnestness. McQuillan suggests that:

...there must be trust on both sides of the empowerment dynamic. That is, if students are to become empowered, adults must trust them with real power... Without access to real power, there can be no empowerment. On the other side of this dynamic, students must trust that any new-found power is genuine... If students perceive adults as insincere, as lacking commitment to their empowerment, why would they become involved? If power is not genuine, by definition, such endeavors have failed (642-643).

Not only must the power given to students be significant, but also the relationship between students and staff must be one of mutual trust. The students cannot feel empowered if they do not believe teachers are invested in developing their voice as students.

Interestingly, this teacher-driven student empowerment can be translated into peer empowerment. Students who are empowered are likely to spread that empowerment to their fellow students, compiling the effects of student influence, giving young people a voice in the schools. School councils are one environment where such sanction is perpetuated (643).

This argument gives further evidence for teachers to support students. There is, however, an additional element to this theory that is important to consider when examining student

influence. Teachers' who feel as though they have the capacity to affect change in their school are more likely to empower others – i.e. students (664). Therefore, a cycle of perpetuating authority begins with the empowerment of teachers and extends through to the entire student body. For student leaders to be influential in the school setting, they need enabled staff members to support them.

Primary Sources

It is important to acknowledge that the scope of my interviews is narrow, therefore, in no way can my conclusions be considered comprehensive. Rather, my inferences are drawn to contribute to the rhetoric on advising student leadership and developing student voice in the integrated educational sector through my limited understanding.

Ethos: Advisor Understanding and School Realities

Through my interviews, it was clear that an understanding of the prescribed school ethos was important to the advisors. The written response I received from a teacher at “B” IPS, Mary¹, included rhetoric paralleling the official descriptions of integrated educational ethos. The language of the answers includes multiple statements about developing student voice for decision making, and even includes the sentence: “[w]e constantly through our ethos, positive behavior management and culture of the school promote and encourage our children to take on leadership responsibilities” (Interview 2). This reference to the formal ethos of the integrated school could imply that teachers advising student leaders have a strong commitment to the stated goals of the school. What is more challenging to analyze, however, is how effective teachers are at actually implementing this ethos. The culture of the school may reflect the defined, positivist ethos of NICIE, but in practice, discrepancies may exist. A teacher’s awareness of these policies, however, can be assumed to be an important factor in actually promoting a specific ethos.

Perhaps validating Mary’s perspective is an interview with a mother, Colleen², who sent her two sons to integrated primary school, but only one son continued in the integrated educational system. According to Colleen, the integrated school her son attended did encourage independent thinking and foster self-esteem. The son who attended the

¹ Name has been changed.

² Name has been changed.

independent school has mild Asperger's Syndrome. She believed the integrated school was the right place for her son because he developed confidence (Interview 4).

Allison³, the student council advisor at "A" IPS, also seemed to think the student council and school as a whole had a commitment to the ethos of the integrated system. When prompted about student's ability to affect the ethos of the school, Allison replied, "...we pride ourselves on being...[an] integrated, child-friendly, practical...hands on school." Her immediate answer reflected the formal declaration of ethos in the NICIE literature, demonstrating her definite knowledge of the system's stated goals. Her answer, however, did not give any evidence of students making decisions that affected the development of ethos. Instead, she explained some of the daily interactions of students with the adventure playground and other outdoor activities that she believes gives students more chances to enjoy a hands-on learning community and gain practical skills (Interview 1). The exploration of the natural environment is clearly a large part of the student life at "A" IPS, therefore her answers centered on children's experience in that space. It did not, however, show student ability to impact the development of this exploration-learning ethos. Overall, it is evident that teachers are potentially well versed in the formal ethos of the school. What is not clear is how well they are using their understanding of ethos to empower student voice and leadership.

My interview with the Director of an organization working on the development of student leadership and participation explained that integrated schools have not been as involved in some of his organization's projects as much as he would have expected. The Director, Tom⁴, explained that much of his organization's programming would be focused on the integration of people in a variety of ways – Protestant and Catholic, gender, socioeconomic background – to encourage interactions from a variety of communities.

³ Name has been changed.

⁴ Name has been changed.

Therefore, it is possible that integrated schools do not view the leadership-building programs for schools to be designed for them because they already have an integrated population (Interview 3). Although it may seem unnecessary for integrated schools to engage with initiatives for capacity-building and mixing of populations that lie outside of the school, it seems counter-productive for the schools to ignore such programs. If the development of a strong integrated ethos promoting equality and social responsibility are important NICIE tenets, it would seem that more integrated schools would seek assistance from an organization promoting the development of these skills and qualities, rather than the few doing work with the fund. The seemingly desirable ethos of the NICIE system may be compromised if teachers and advisors in integrated schools see their job as complete just through the daily encounters integration facilitates. Challenging the success of a school in fostering the environment it formally promotes ensures the highest standards will be upheld. Undoubtedly, the schools I learned about through interviews are potentially achieving high levels of integration and student empowerment through a commitment to integrated values, but interviews with students in the school would have given more concrete evidence of the schools' successes.

Encouraging Future Political Participation of Student Leaders in Integrated Schools

One benefit of student council involvement is evident in both the scholarly research and my interviews. Future political participation is more likely for students active in pupil council or leadership organizations, and the individuals I interviewed agreed that these opportunities build leadership capacity in students that could have great political and social impact. Allison noted numerous times that student council is a huge confidence-building exercise for students – an element of the opportunity she found particularly important.

Allison explained that the students do not go through any formal training, but they develop skills through the experiences of being a member of student council. She cited that the

responsibilities are explained to the students at the beginning of the year, so there is an appeal to students who think they have the communication skills needed to do the job. Even so, Allison says the kids will oftentimes start out being very shy or hesitant in meetings. This uneasiness is totally gone by the time they have been on the council for a couple of months, according to Allison. Programs like eco schools that exist at “A” IPS also give students the opportunity to prove their development as outside assessors come into the schools and students are given the responsibility to show and explain what has been done in the schools – a job they have excelled at says Allison:

So I can't say we've done this and we've done that, the kids do it and they talk so much that these assessors...just don't get a word in edgewise and...they've said it to us before...your kids are great. They know what they are doing and they are so confident and they are really good with...people from outside the school...they know themselves why they've done it and...they are proud of their achievements I think...[To be] able to say we did that and that's ours...sort of boosts their confidence and their self-esteem and their communication...it brings them out of their shell (Interview 1).

Allison certainly considers the student council to be a strong mechanism for building leadership qualities in the students with whom she works. These leadership skills would be seemingly transferable to commitment to political participation in society as adults, potentially positively impacting the political system in Northern Ireland. If students with a shared experience of leadership come out of the integrated educational sector equipped to understand leadership and political choice, they can possibly be instrumental in the peace process.

Later in the interview, Allison also explained that working with the primary school student council helps prepare the pupils for leadership responsibilities in secondary school. Teamwork and the ability to work well with others are strengths Allison identifies in the student council members. She asserts that these skills are useful in the next school setting and as young adults (Interview 1). Arguably, these skill sets are relevant in any environment, especially in an integrated society. Allison finds her work with student council members to

be important because she believes young people need to "...know how to work with others and develop...inter-communication skills and personal skills, and...self-esteem and confidence and...team-working ... setting goals and achieving them..." (Interview 1). Her belief that the student council can foster the growth of young people to incorporate these skills into their character potentially reflects the ability of these students to make an impact in Northern Ireland beyond their school setting later in life. Allison also mentioned the importance of the council for developing an understanding of citizenship, undoubtedly an element of the council that bodes well for future political participation.

Significantly, Tom thinks students can impact the Northern Ireland political and social culture now. Tom asks students how they can affect change in their community, explaining, "...one of the things we ask young people about is what would be their one moment, what would they want to achieve..." if they had a moment to make a difference as an ordinary individual (Interview 3). Tom sees students as individuals who can make a difference and therefore, student leaders need a model of leadership that empowers them to take a chance and have a moment of impact. Tom even goes further to directly address the issue of Northern Ireland politics by explaining that his organization wants student leaders to help move Northern Ireland to a healthier and joint society. The organization he works for challenges young people to address the conflict as young leaders, presumably preparing them further for political involvement as an adult. Perhaps most appropriately, Tom says that the organization emphasizes to students "...that they are not responsible for...the Northern Ireland conflict, but they are responsible for their own contribution to moving away from that [history]" (Interview 3). By actively addressing the issue of Northern Ireland sectarianism and violence, it is possible that student leaders will be even more likely to be politically active as adults.

Interestingly, when asked about student leadership extending beyond the school setting, Tom gave two anecdotal stories from the Republic of Ireland. He continued by saying that he was not aware of any specific projects where students in Northern Ireland were engaging with individuals in the wider society. Tom noted that examples where students may get that broader exposure usually come from special teacher commitment, and is therefore very singular (Interview 3). With student leaders impacting mostly their own smaller communities, it is important to address sectarian issues if they are ever going to be able to extend their voice into a wider public sphere.

Comparatively, Allison mentioned the importance of Northern Ireland's political history in her school, as well. Allison shared that particularly the students in P6 and P7 know about the history of the Troubles from their parents and other family members. She sees the student council as a way to address issues that might arise because of the different communities in integrated schools. Allison also implied that the students know that the council is a place to address such issues: "...we said [to] the student council, it's them and it's their voice and they can create change within the school...if there are already problems linked to religious differences or anything like that, the student council gives them the opportunity to discuss that and try and find a solution...[to be] brought back into practice" (Interview 1). By acknowledging the issues in Northern Ireland history, "A" IPS allows student leaders a space to confront the past. Still, Allison believes her students are more innocent because they are not witnessing the conflict in the present the way she did in the 1980s. She explains how that heightened sense of a unified identity and lack of direct experience with the conflict is helpful for the members of the student council in the integrated environment:

...they don't understand why it was like that, it's not in their nature now because they've been taught to play and learn and interact together...they just see each other as other kids, not Catholics and Protestants – the way we would have maybe been brought up...because of the conflict to do. And the student

council have been very involved in that. They would be involved in saying what they think we should do for integrated week and ideas and explaining if there are any issues and how we can work...to fix things (Interview 1).

Allison's confidence in the ability of the school and student leaders to address sectarian issues seemingly represents the integrated sector well. Allison actually acknowledges the role students will have as adults, and she hopes she is equipping her leaders to be politically active in adulthood: "[my students will be]...turning into adults and they're going to bring that [awareness] forward into the community and hopefully things in Northern Ireland will improve because of that..." (Interview 1). Allison has hope that her students' leadership experiences in the educational sector will help them make positive changes toward a peaceful society in Northern Ireland.

Both the initiatives of Tom's organization and the work done with the student council at "A" IPS suggest that present student leaders will be instrumental in changing Northern Ireland's society as politically active adults intending to move away from highlighting dangerous divisions. Colleen's reflection on her son's experience seems to recognize the attention placed on diversity in the integrated school system. Colleen said that the integrated school system seems to "cater for differences," and continued by stating that it even "celebrates those differences" (Interview 4). By supporting diverse student populations, Colleen believes the integrated schools are more accepting. Arguably, Colleen's view of the integrated school as a model of tolerance could mean that student leaders leaving the integrated schools really do have an understanding of a peaceful society – the desired future for Northern Ireland.

All of these answers seemingly support the idea of the positivist perspective of ethos of integrated schools and the ability of students to affect change as adults in the political sphere. The interview answers received by "B" IPS, however, reflect a different attitude. The response largely ignores the sectarian issues other interviewees identified. When asked

if the legacy of conflict in Northern Ireland affected student voice in the formal educational setting and if student leaders in integrated schools faced any unique challenges in a divided society, the answer was a resounding no. Mary wrote: “[i]n the past, children would have been more affected by a divided society. But the children in today’s society, even if they come from a predominantly sectarian area, do not have any issues that children in the last 15 years may have had. We are not affected by any circumstances in the present day of a divided society” (Interview 2). Her answer does not recognize the legitimacy of the tension still existing in Northern Ireland. Mary’s dismissal of the sectarian issues is problematic in her role as an advisor for student council. If students working in the pupil council are likely to be politically active adults, they cannot move Northern Irish society forward if awareness of those challenges in the formal school setting was downplayed or even denied – especially in an integrated environment that supposedly celebrates differences.

Interestingly, religion is considered in elections for the pupil council at “B” IPS. According to Mary, a Catholic, Protestant, and another religion or non-denominational pupil are elected to guarantee a balance (Interview 2). The recognition that there needs to be balanced religious opinions complicates her response that the history of sectarianism does not impact school leadership. She also explains that she believes the “Pupil and Class Council...allows them [students] to develop as independent citizens for the future, who have the ability to give opinions, express their point of views, as well as being able to give reasons and make informed choices about their future” (Interview 2). This skill set for future political involvement is important enough for Mary to include in her answers. There is a seemingly underlying recognition of the importance of political activism and knowledge of the transitional status of Northern Ireland in her statement. Therefore, it is hard to evaluate the impact these students’ may have in the future when there are varied experiences. It could be argued, however, that the advisors acknowledging diversity are better equipping their

students for a future of political impact in adulthood. Overwhelmingly, the development of student leadership seems to show increased communication skills and the ability to work well with others – from the advisor’s perspective – so the inclusion of sectarian conversations would only capitalize on those skills to move toward an improved social and political future in Northern Ireland.

Role of the Advisor in Integrated Schools

Examining the role of the advisor is important when considering student voice. Advising leadership requires an understanding of the needs of students and the ability of students to make a difference in their environment. Allison seemingly had a straightforward understanding of her responsibilities. She explained that at the start of every school year, she meets with all of the students at an informative assembly during which she explains the responsibilities of the student council. Allison says she highlights the qualities of a strong student council member and tries to generate interest by showing students pictures of past student council endeavors. Allison thinks the students perceive the pupil council to be an important and major opportunity, especially because the secondary schools have similar programs (Interview 1).

Allison believes that since she has become involved in the student council – she took over the advisor role four years ago – the council has focused on making the school more “child friendly.” She thinks the council members have been more eager than in the past to make changes that positively impact the students directly. This self-perception may suggest that Allison has been appropriately supportive and effective in meeting student needs as the council advisor. But, her short stint as the staff person in charge of the council raises another question – the issue of continuity. Allison was relatively young – I would estimate she was in her mid-thirties at the oldest – therefore it is possible that her time as the advisor is limited. Perhaps she will need to go on maternity leave or the school will move the responsibility to

another, younger teacher as Allison earns more seniority in the school. If student councils are constantly experiencing a turnover in faculty leadership, in addition to the natural turnover of student leaders, the ability of the organization could be compromised. Allison's work with the council is seemingly positive and reflective of a supportive staff member, but her position in that role is always tentative.

Allison acknowledges that her role as advisor is not something with which she is always confident – advising young leaders is not easy. Therefore, continuity is important for an advisor to learn the best ways to organize and enable the students. She especially feels like additional support from NICIE or similar organizations would be valuable to validate the work of the student council. Allison would appreciate advice or initiatives to develop the council from outside the school, explaining, "...sometimes you can feel like...you're doing it pretty much on your own and you're just hoping that you're doing it right" (Interview 1). For Allison, advising the student council is important, so she wants the organization to be successful; and she thinks that her council is doing a good job. Even so, "coming in line and being...standard with other schools might be an idea" she would consider for her role as an advisor in the future (Interview 1). This standardization process requires a sustainable advisory from a singular individual.

Allison is not the only advisor wanting definite direction for her student leaders. Tom expressed his concerns for his organization, as well, explaining that he is challenging his team to define what they would like to see students do and grow to become: "[i]t's one of the things I really want to challenge our organization. What is our model of leadership? What are we going to move people towards?" (Interview 3). This process of defining the role of the advisor is important for understanding the ability of students to have a voice in their leadership positions. Tom also explained that he would like to see teachers become enabled to handle the facilitation of leadership development his organization does in the school

setting. Ideally, Tom's organization could instruct teachers to take over the capacity-building process, rather than the school relying on one-time initiatives. Interestingly, Tom has only been working with the organization for about year, suggesting that continuity in his role may be an issue as well (Interview 3). The task of working with student leaders is not easy; therefore, teachers in the integrated educational sector need not only personal initiative, but also guidance to excel.

Whose Voice is Being Heard: Advisor's Role in Promoting Student Voice

Learning how to listen to student needs to help them achieve their goals without speaking for them is a major challenges for advisors seeking to enable student voice.

Students undoubtedly need assistance from staff members to achieve their goals for a school, but if student council members are required to funnel their creativity through advisors, their voice could be lost in translation. Allison's model of advising is seemingly strong – her students have achieved a lot while she has been their advisor and she maintains regular communication with all of her students. Some of her strengths in enabling student voice in the pupil council come from her ability to set up students for conversations about meeting their goals. She describes the process here:

If they want to make a decision on how something is done – like maybe less queues in the dinner lines or maybe something about uniform or behavior on the playgrounds or any kind of wee changes – they would come to me with suggestions and we would decide...together whether that is feasible. And they would try and put that in place...we would have a student council meeting every month and if there is anything the kids have picked up that needs to be done, for example last month...the kids said themselves that the coatrooms are a mess...can we do something about this. So we brainstormed what we could do and they came up with a solution...And they lead it.

It involves the whole school but they can come to us and decide what they want to implement in the school...(Interview 1).

Allowing the students to approach her with concerns, rather than telling them what she thinks they need to be addressing, allows Allison to enable the students' voices as the leaders of the pupil council. Allison promotes open lines of communication, explaining the students know

she is the student council advisor, and thus the person they can come to with ideas. Allison's apparent promotion of regular communication with the council is seemingly positive.

She also explained that since she began advising the council, there have been major improvements to the school's campus like the creation of an adventure playground, sensory garden, and activities on the blacktop that were student council led projects brought to her by her council members. Therefore, she would seem to be a true advocate for student voice in the integrated school setting. It is hard, however, to measure the satisfaction of students with these projects. Although she may think these are the initiatives students want, she could be speaking for students. One element to consider is the fact that Allison does much of the preparatory work to allow the students to take the project over on their own. She explains her efforts to make the projects feasible:

[S]ometimes they're big tasks that we decide to undertake...getting the adventure playground or getting a sensory garden...cost an awful lot of money so...you have to be able to brainstorm and work with your colleagues and outside agencies to try and...get the best for the school. So it takes an awful lot of time from phone calls and paperwork and that kind of thing for you to be able to adapt [and] then to bring it towards the kids...[so] they can take charge of it, so it's not just something that's led by me (Interview 1).

In this explanation lies the possibility of the loss of student voice, despite the fact that Allison is working to make the project doable for the students. Allison feels she needs to do much of the leg work, so the relatively young students can then successfully take charge of their ideas. But this model hinges on Allison's understanding of what the students would like to accomplish. They may express an idea and she may translate it to mean something else, based on what she thinks is feasible or would like to see. This translation does not even have to be conscious. Allison's inherent bias will affect the way she hears what students want to do; so the current model allows her to speak for the students, limiting their capacity and voice. Nevertheless, the effectiveness of her model for completing projects can hardly be

questioned, so perhaps the best process to instill would be a post-project conversation to hear student feedback about their satisfaction with the outcome of a plan.

A similar model for completing projects exists in “B” IPS. The written response from Mary shows an effort to appease students and to keep lines of communication between student leaders and staff strong. Mary explained the role of her student leadership organizations: “[o]ur Class and Pupil Council were designed to give children a voice to express themselves and to shape school life. Children’s voices are important to be heard and being allowed the opportunity to make decisions, voice concerns and to help shape school life is a fundamental part of their social, emotional and physical well being as well as their development” (Interview 1). Mary seemingly has a commitment to the development of the council members to become strong leaders, but her process may be flawed. Mary wrote about the process for the council affecting change in the school:

Our children...[have an] understanding that they can...[bring] forward ideas that may change things within the school but that not all of their ideas will be passed. If the ideas are feasible and will benefit school life in a positive way, the principal and staff work hard to allow that change to take place. Children can discuss matters relating to the playground, special events, school policies to the dinner menu or the choice of After School Clubs in the school.

The changes students in the council can make are specific, and Mary is honest about the screening process that exists for suggested ideas. Not only does she (as an advisor) have a role in determining whether student ideas are doable, the principal and other staff members are a part of the decision-making process as well. Suggesting that students understand that not all of their ideas will be completed implies that students know their voice is limited. To be fair, Mary says that she and the other staff are committed to making changes students would like to see happen a possibility, but it is also clear that not all projects are completed.

This denial of some proposals may not be all bad, however. Tom asserted that students may actually benefit from not always being able to complete the projects they wish to see done. Leadership initiatives for young people in schools should be educational

exercises in democracy, according to Tom. Students should not expect to always get what they want – not every need is met or satisfied in a democratic system; negotiation is required.

Tom argues then that students may actually work harder when they face no's from staff at their school:

One of the things you always experience in a democracy is that democratic failure...you don't always get what you want. So the teachers have to be smart about that and not always say yes. There has to be "no's" quite a lot...and we find that when there are no's that that often motivates and encourages the students to push harder and to be more creative and energetic and to exercise democratic skills much more effectively than if they get, "yes, yes, yes"....you're trying to teach young people how to get what they need out of society (Interview 3).

Tom argues that student leaders must face challenges to their ideas for educational development. Arguably, his logic makes sense. Students will be forced to work harder if they know their ideas will not be guaranteed to be implemented. But turning down some suggestions does not mean that teachers have to limit student voice. If teachers are ignoring student requests because they misunderstand their students or think the idea is not feasible, they are diminishing student empowerment. Advisors are perhaps better suited to give students the opportunity to kick start projects on their own or to come back with a revised proposal – combining a reality check and student empowerment.

Picking the Right People: Who are Northern Ireland's Student Leaders?

Tom emphasized the importance of picking the right students when enabling student voice in leadership roles. Students need to have the proper energy, according Tom, to be able to grow as leaders. A student cannot develop her/his voice if s/he does not want to be a leader. Tom admitted that his organization can be more selective than the schools when it comes to choosing students to be in their capacity-building programs, but he also says his organization selects students that might not be given leadership opportunities in the school setting. Tom explained that in the school setting, certain students are picked for all of the major leadership opportunities because they are particularly charismatic and seemingly

responsible and well behaved. His organization, however, looks for students “who listen...[and] are prepared to take leadership...but also to facilitate others taking on leadership roles, so it’s a facilitative model that you [students] don’t lead at the expense of other people, but you [students] bring them with you and give them opportunities to lead as well” (Interview 3). Tom’s explanation of the qualified student leader is important because it suggests, albeit indirectly, that student voice is considered in the selection process. Students need to be able to engage and motivate their peers and be leaders themselves. This qualifying factor shows a commitment to the process of enabling student voice.

Students who have the ability to speak effectively and are able to find leadership abilities in their fellow pupils can be assumed to have a voice because they are not relying on teachers to motivate the entire student body. They are identifying strengths in others, giving their peers a sense of empowerment. Interestingly, Tom explains that teachers often comment that the students selected for his organization’s programming are not the students the teachers would have picked. These students do, however, excel and impress their teachers. This evidence is important because the organization is empowering students whose voices may have been limited – especially in a leadership capacity – because teachers did not readily see the same potential in those students (Interview 3). Tom believes this discrepancy in student selection exists because teachers are forced to focus on discipline and good behavior.

Time constraints limit teachers’ ability to foster the passion that exists in the students that Tom’s organization identifies. Tom thinks his organization equips students with the skills to listen and lead others, while facilitating the development of others’ leadership capacities. This process, however, is time consuming. Tom noted that part of the development of student voice work done by his organization requires assessing students and helping them grow as leaders. Teachers, however, do not have “time to invest in moving

students up the ranks,” leaving them limited in their ability to develop student voice. It is interesting to consider, however, that the assistance provided by the volunteers and employees of Tom’s organization in one sense expands student voice by giving students greater responsibility, but on the other hand their voice is still vetted by the process of determining when students are ready for that move. Despite evidence given by Tom that students consider their time spent with the programs of his organization as time spent in a second home, especially as students are given the responsibility to learn about and develop their own leadership and volunteer opportunities, students are not choosing their path upward.

Tom made one poignant statement that could be used to summarize the experience of student leaders in Northern Ireland. When asked how the history of conflict in Northern Ireland has affected student voice, Tom pointed out a unique paradox: “I think it’s funny when you put it in the Northern Ireland context in that on the one level all of the work that has gone into cross-community educational initiatives has opened up more opportunities for student voice to be heard and listened to in school, but it is also limited as well” (Interview 3). Enabling student voice is undoubtedly a commitment of the integrated educational sector’s leadership advisors. For Tom’s organization, however, the extent to which student voice can actually be illuminated is narrower.

Empowerment: The Ability of Teachers and Students to Affect Change

The power dynamic between student and faculty also contributes to student voice. Arguably, students need empowerment through positive relationships with faculty to feel as though they have a voice. Allison finds that by offering constant support for her student leaders, she is able to empower them. She notices how many ideas the students have to change the school and thinks this excitement is directly linked to the commitment of teachers to give the students a voice – a commitment that extends beyond the leadership sector because it affects a pupil’s entire school experience. More importantly, Allison explains that

her work for student leadership development has actually empowered her as a teacher. She feels a great sense of pride in her school and student leaders as she sees them learn to express themselves in mature and effective ways, knowing her role as an advisor has helped this development. Furthermore, Allison believes the process of student empowerment is a learning process for both the pupils and the staff:

...we are trying to be more child centered and to get the kids more involved and they know that there's adults... in the school to help them and that gives them a sense of security...because they spend most of their day with us...and to know that there's someone there to...hear their opinions and ideas...is important and I think that makes me feel very...grateful and...understanding with the kids... and their needs. And it sort of empowers us to become better teachers and to...[be] better adults and community [members] as well (Interview 1).

Allison values the inspiration she gets from advising young leaders, while the students would assumedly appreciate the support received from their teachers. Allison also directly addresses the issue of student empowerment as it relates to Northern Ireland. She considers her role as an advisor for leaders in a transitional society to be especially significant, "I think...for me the big thing is their self-esteem and their ability to...talk to adults and other children and be able to...express themselves clearly and fluently and understand that they do need to listen to others because obviously that has a big impact on our history in Northern Ireland – being able to listen to other's ideas and opinions and...take those on board and act on those...helps them" (Interview 1). Allison's appreciation of her ability to empower her students to be leaders in a transitional society is important for students to feel like they can affect change and express themselves.

Empowerment for students to have a strong voice in schools requires the individual motivation of a teacher, according to Tom. Tom explained what he terms "the softer side" of education (including student voice) is not given the attention in schools that he would like to see. Curriculum is based heavily on achieving prescribed academic standards put forward by the state to evaluate students and teachers. Teacher-driven initiative is the key for student

empowerment in the current transitional educational system (even in the integrated sector): “where teachers do have the capacity – where they are good at it – it will be because of a personal commitment, where they have gone out of their way to find support, information, and knowledge in these kind of areas” (Interview 3). Tom explains that teachers are not given formal training on empowering student voice and many teachers would not have models of their own experiences in schools for this type of youth leadership. Thus, it is easy for teachers to be caught up in the curriculum because that is what they are trained to do.

Tom deeply values the role of student leadership, however, and thinks effective teachers see a connection between academic achievement and pastoral care – as it relates to student voice development. Yet, according to Tom, the state does not consider student voice to be a factor in strong academic achievement, so teachers trained in the traditional mindset might in fact feel threatened by student voice (Interview 1). Mary suggests that “B” IPS staff have definite mechanisms for enabling student voice and leadership:

We advise, support and facilitate our children’s thinking and learning. We provide opportunities to allow our children to express themselves fairly and in a just way, allowing opportunities for them...[to] explain and give reasons for what they are saying. Children are given time in class, in Circle Time and through our PDMU programme. We shape our children’s thinking but we never enforce our own preferences on them. We allow them to come to their own perspectives, with some guidance if needed (Interview 2).

Mary highlights the importance of not projecting her opinions on her students, an important quality when enabling student voice. Yet, her admission that she will direct students when necessary shows that there is a distinct difference in power between pupil and teacher. This power imbalance is not necessarily bad, but it is important to be conscious of its existence if student voice is going to be heard.

Colleen added an interesting perspective by explaining that she believes most student councils in the integrated school system would feel comfortable addressing problems and bringing forward questions with the staff, but that students do not develop real leadership

responsibilities until they are 16 years old (Interview 4). This is an interesting view when considering my two interviews with staff members were advisors for student councils in primary schools. It is hard to distinguish if Colleen believes students are not truly empowered until later in their teenage years because of natural impositions like maturity level or because advisors in the school do not feel they are equipped for actual responsibilities until this age. Either way, it is interesting to consider when evaluating student leadership development.

While the empowerment of students is fundamental in the process of fostering student voice, teachers need to be empowered before they can help students. Teacher capacity in schools is an important final element to consider when examining student voice in integrated schools. Tom thinks teachers are often undermined by the structural challenges they face when trying to make positive changes in schools and empower student voice: "...I think the way a teacher's day is structured in a very practical way where there is a great deal of pressure...with a lot more bureaucracy and a lot more focus on grades and achieving targets [limits their capacity]" (Interview 3). The procedures and specific guidelines teachers are expected to follow complicate their ability to make changes, and in turn limit their ability to empower students. Tom also recognizes that all of the work of advisors and organizations like his is challenging, despite the rewards of enabling student voice.

Teachers in the integrated sector face even more challenges because they cannot ignore the sectarian issues as easily as the Protestant or Catholic schools in Northern Ireland (Interview 3). Colleen's perspective on the integrated schools counters some of the challenges Tom expressed. Colleen compared the educational experiences of her two sons – one at a Christian Brothers school, the other at an integrated school. Colleen noted that the integrated school seemingly encouraged "...independent thinking and realizing of goals for yourself...[the agenda felt] less programmed...[and] not about fast-forwarding to excellence"

(Interview 4). Colleen's perception that integrated schools were more effective in allowing students to develop their voice and opinions is positive. It is possible to infer that integrated schools – while facing challenges of promoting student voice due to rigidity of the curriculum – may still be more effective at empowering students than the Catholic or Protestant schools. Therefore, students with an integrated experience may have the best opportunity for expressing themselves as young leaders.

Allison, however, feels like she has support in her school in her work to build student capacity. She finds inspiration in seeing the growth of her students, but she also feels as though she is supported by her principal:

...our boss would be very...keen on student council and making sure that...there's time given for it. And that we have everything, as adults, that we need to facilitate those meetings. And she would often bring us training from organizations...on how to lead student council and give us opportunities to...go...to other schools and other teachers and adults who would maybe be involved with eco schools and forest schools and just try and share good practice...(Interview 1).

Allison values the ability to improve her skills as an adult facilitator of leadership, and her empowerment hinges on her principal's support. Allison recognizes the benefits of student empowerment for her own capacity-building. This appreciation for the positive impact enabling student voice can have on her career could suggest that Allison is an even better facilitator. She is aware that she is a more experienced teacher because of her work with the student council and that empowerment would seemingly be translated into the improvement of students' skills as leaders. Allison explains the benefits she finds in working with the student council in her life: "...definitely it has helped me...to develop my skills and make me more aware of what the kids need in their education...and how to sort of facilitate that...And me professionally, it's helped to develop me and my expertise and...my CV. What I've been involved in...it's huge and it's really an important part of the school I think..." (Interview 1). Allison takes pride in working with student leaders and therefore is empowered in her role.

It can be inferred then that her students are empowered by her investment and capacity to express their voices as leaders. Even with her passion for her role as an advisor, Allison admits that she always faces challenges with time. Committing herself as a teacher and an advisor adds extra responsibilities in her day, although she values the things she has learned from such responsibilities.

Mary explained that at “B” IPS, she works with her peers in the faculty to help affect change and empower students, “...we as a staff work together to share our thinking, professional judgment and knowledge. We try to work collectively, so that we are using a shared voice and working together for the best learning opportunities for our school. As team leaders or subject co-coordinators, we have more say...” (Interview 2). Mary explains that as an advisor for student council she is more empowered to bring forward ideas to shape the school than other staff members. She also explains, however, that ultimate decisions are made by the principal: “[a]s a staff, our views are taken on most of the time, however, there are other times, when the principal has the final say on something and we have to accept it” (Interview 2). The principal’s discretion on teacher initiatives limits the ability of teachers like Mary to feel empowered in the school setting, potentially negatively affecting Mary’s ability to empower her student leaders’ voices. Teacher empowerment complicates the ability of students to have a strong voice in school. The integrated educational setting seemingly has a relatively strong commitment to teacher agency, however, limitations exist – subsequently restricting students’ empowerment, as well.

Conclusion

Student voice initiatives and commitment to student empowerment undoubtedly exist in the Northern Ireland integrated schools. Student leaders are given seemingly exciting opportunities to impact their school environment to make changes that benefit the student body. Despite the existence of effective leadership opportunities, the possibility of the diminishment of student voice and empowerment still readily exists. Nevertheless, the leadership programs that are available to students are arguably valuable, in spite of their limitations. Student leaders are likely to be politically engaged adults, which perpetuates the possibility of student leaders in the integrated schools to translate their unique experience to the wider political and social atmosphere of Northern Ireland -- moving the transitional society toward peace. Undoubtedly, my exploration barely addresses the impact of student leadership, student voice, and the role of advisors in Northern Ireland. My qualitative material was narrow, but important for tackling these issues. My topic was relatively new territory for exploration in Northern Ireland so my attempt to address this topic is significant, though limited. More research is definitely needed to expand my research. Considering student perspectives as well as additional advisors' perspectives would be important. An examination of student voice cannot be considered complete without the perspective of students, therefore my work needs to be expanded. Moreover, I did not seek to evaluate different integrated schools in Northern Ireland – my work is a preliminary examination as a part of a research training exercise. Schools may actually benefit from intensive case study designed to constructively critique their student leadership programming and the ability of advisors to promote student voice in the integrated school.

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Appendix A – Master Questions

1. I've read a little bit about the pupil council on the [insert school name] webpage (it just gives a quick blurb), but I'd love to hear about the organization from your perspective. What is the organization designed to do? How are the pupils elected?
2. How responsible are student leaders for negotiating challenges in peer to peer interactions? Are students responsible for negotiating challenges or are school staff members, like you, required to mediate conversations?
3. How equipped are student leaders to handle challenges in the schools? Have there been any initiatives in the past focused on the development of student leadership and building capacity in (integrated) schools?
4. What are the issues for which students can affect change? What about ethos?
5. Does student voice extend beyond the school setting? In what way?
6. Has a legacy of conflict affected student voice in the formal educational setting? Are there any unique challenges student leaders face working in integrated schools in a divided society – i.e. challenges a student in a sectarian school would not face?
7. How does the capacity/agency of teachers, especially in the advisor role, impact student voice?
8. And more generally, in your view, how much of a voice do, you, as a teacher and advisor, have in your school?
9. Just to finish off, in your view, what are the benefits of enabling student voice?
10. What are the challenges?
11. Anything else you would like to add or to ask me?

1. Basically, we every year we, I, would take an assembly at the start of term and talk to the Key Stage 2 children particularly about what student council is, what makes a good student council representative, and the qualities we are looking for, and what kinds of things the student council will be asked to do. And basically, we are an eco school which maybe you've seen the big green flag at the bottom of the gate and it's linked very much with the student council and I'm in charge of it so that's why I would be in charge of student council as well. And so we would do a lot of work and the student council would lead that. So the kids are familiar with student council from that, you know. So I would talk to them about the work we would do for publicity things for eco schools and they would also do lots of things about improving the school grounds, as well. And so I would kind of do you know show them pictures of previous years of things the council have been involved in and try to get their interest, you know, and they really love it when their involved in it and they know it's a big opportunity and it's something that most secondary schools have now so it's preparing them really for you know, the next school and that kind of citizenship aspect, you know.

So we'll do an assembly and I'll explain to them and I tell them that they're going back to class and they will have to give an informal, mini, sort of like speech almost. And they arrange with their teacher when do it and they just say you know I should be student council because I am great at this and all that kind of thing. And whoever is interested in going for it will do a wee speech and basically then their peers in the class will vote for them and normally it is a girl and a boy from each class but, I'm not really I don't mind if it's two boys or two girls, you know and P4 to P7 and we'll have two representatives from each class. So we have about, let me see, well about 16 children in the student council from P4 to P7.

And then what we do is I have another teacher who does student council for Key Stage 1, so that would be the P1s through the P3s. And she will do a similar type assembly about what a student council rep is but they don't become student council reps until their P4 onwards. They know about it and so once the representatives are picked, they are assigned a buddy class for Key Stage 1. So the P7s will have the P1s and the P6s will go to the P2s and P5s to the P3s and P4s just look after their own classes cause they are still a bit young and we have posters of them then, pictures of their two representatives so they know if they have any ideas or anything they want to work on or they think the school needs to do they can tell their buddy classes or any big information we would do for the student council meetings that needs fed back they would go and tell their buddy class, so then we have a board there and part of it is the student council reps so they know who their council buddy is in the big class and basically it would be, a lot of it would be eco schools, so we would have a student council meeting every month and if there is anything the kids have picked up that needs to be done, for example last month they were saying, the kids said themselves that the coatrooms are a mess and they're tripping over and their coats are being stood on and can we do something about this. So we brainstormed what we could do and they came up with a solution. So they brought it back to the Key Stage 1 classes and now we've got a rewards system and the best kept classes coatrooms get a night off homework or something, like that. And they lead it. It involves the whole school but they can come to us and decide what they want to implement in the school, you know.

So do you think there is that communication between sort of the P1s and the P7s, that there's definitely a relationship there?

Yeah, there definitely is. I mean the P7s are great with the P1s and we would have other wee systems in place like playground buddies at lunchtime. Some of them would go out and play with the P1s as well and wear colored baseball caps so if they have a red cap on they're a playground friend or a yellow cap on and they're a P1 Buddy or something like that and so there is, they always have a chance to play with the older children and we do have a good buddy system between, especially between, the P7s and P1s. And the staff themselves know who their Key Stage 1 teacher is so we make sure that we give Key Stage Two kids a chance to go down and speak to the P1 classes. But it's a good experience for the kids as well because they have to stand in front of a class and tell them what we're doing and that's very hard for them. They get a bit nervous, the first couple of meetings the staff will say, you know, it was really hard to get them to talk, but towards the end of the year like now they're brilliant. And they go around and they are very clear, so it helps their communication skills as well.

2. Well they would have to, if there was a problem or something that someone came to them, they would have to find a way of dealing with that in a you know, they know that there's a route they would have to take to fix this problem you know. There's a protocol that they would make a wee note of it and at the next student council they would come and speak to me about it and then we would speak as a group and if necessary they would go back to their class and ask their class for advice and then we'd come together again and try and solve it that way. So, if there were problems like, something in dinner hall people were being silly then they would, sort of, they would be quite mature and they know themselves that that's an issue and it's causing problems for other children and they will attempt to you know solve it as they work together and then they all involve the rest of the school, you know. So yes, and they are aware that there are adults around the school to help them and they can ask for assistance. And we have a classroom assistant representative as well, who would be out on duty during lunch time so they know that they can go to her and that they know that I am in charge of student council. And some of the children will say we had an idea in class about this, you know, and they will come tell me, you know. So they do know there is open lines of communication there and as you said a protocol, so if there are any problems, we generally we do find out about it and we can solve it together, you know.
3. I think, you know, just being a part a student council has really sort of developed the kids, you know. They don't go through any really training or anything like that, it's just we would say to them at the start of the year if you feel that you can communicate well with others and that you can work well with a team and that you want to improve the school then you know, put yourself forward for student council. And every year as I say if you don't get picked, they have other opportunities and some of them work really hard to be elected, you know.

And they, you know, they develop their skills. As they say, they might be quite quiet at the start, but towards the end of the year because have initiatives like eco schools, where there's an assessor from outside the school who will come in and asses the work that the school is done, they would come round with me and I'm not allowed to talk really. So I can't say we've done this and we've done that, the kids do it and they talk so much that these assessors, you know, just don't get a word in edgewise and they say to us, we have an assessment on Wednesday, and they've said it to us before and they say, you know, your kids are great. They know what they are doing and they are so confident and they are really good, with you know, people from outside the school, you know, who come in and they're really buzzed about what we've done and they'll explain why and so it's not like they're prompted, they know themselves why they've done it and they're proud of it and they are proud of their achievements I think. You know programs like eco schools

and forest schools and things that we've done and the student council had the playground markings done, you know, got the pitch painted on the playground and hopscotch and things and they raise the money for that themselves. And they got that done and so each playground got something and they were able to say we did that and that's ours and that sort of boosts their confidence and their self-esteem and their communication because they are able to explain, you know, why they did it, and you know they can, their quite, you know, good verbally that way, you know and it brings them out of their shell.

4. Well in recent years, since I've taken over the kids have been really keen on getting more sort of things for themselves, you know what I mean. They want to have, make the school more child friendly and you know we discuss what we can get with our student council money and what will we do and we had a couple of years back, they decided they wanted an adventure playground in the school, and so we have one built at the back and student council funds raised that and so they were able to decide how they were going to raise money and they went about it and they wrote letters asking for donations from the businesses. They did help with summer fairs and school fair and bun sales and things like that to raise the money and then we had the money a bit like with the playground markings they decided themselves what they wanted, so they wanted a football pitch, that was really important to them and they wanted piggy in the middle for the wee ones and things like that there and just things inside school. If they want to make a decision on how something is done like maybe less queues in the dinner lines or maybe something about uniform or behavior on the playgrounds or any kind of wee changes that they like, they would come to me with suggestions and we would decide, you know, together whether that feasible. And they would try and put that in place.
5. Absolutely. You know, I mean we pride ourselves on being you know on being a sort of integrated child friendly, practical sort of hands on school so the kids come in and they have this woodland behind us and they can go and explore. We're the first forest school and we have Catholics and Protestants and other religions coming together and you know they, they're so, they're young enough that they don't know what The Troubles was like when we were young and we would teach them about that you know every integrated week, you know we just had integrated week past and I talked to my kids about the Northern Irish Troubles and they wouldn't have know what that was like then, you know, in the height of The Troubles but they're fascinated by it and its second nature for them to come together and not care whether they're either Catholic or Protestant or Muslim or whatever religion or whatever their skin color is, they know that just come together and they're Hazelwood pupils. And you know they belong to the school and they're a part of the school and what they have to say and their beliefs and opinions are valued. And we would like the kids, to you know, explore the outdoors and so we have like the eco schools and are very environmentally friendly and we have our own vegetable patch and sensory garden and the adventure playground and it gets them out into, you know, into the air, and you know get them to explore things and learn about the world around us. So it does, it definitely helps because they have been able to adopt those things in place, you know. They have more exercise cause the adventure playground is there and they get to play and that kind of thing. You know we, we try to be, the curriculum wants us to be you know, more practical and exploratory and kids learning those skills and because we have these things now around the school, then the kids, have these opportunities now, you know.
6. No, I think it definitely does because they would go home and they would say, to you know, their moms and dads, "oh we have to turn off the lights" and stuff cause we need to save energy and even the children as young as nursery who are in a separate part of the school would be involved in that kind of thing. And the teachers would say to me, "oh

such and such's parent was in saying how a wee were eco warrior at home and that kind of thing and they would have, we would have links with other schools in the community who aren't as lucky to have a woodland behind and our kids would go up there and maybe it would be another sort of Protestant or another Catholic school and they would go up together and they would just play and explore up in the woodlands and do activities together so sort of cross-community, as well.

And they have the big peace wall, I don't know if you've seen it by the school, they painted that together with, you know, outside agencies like art groups and stuff that would come in and so we do have community links there through extended schools and student council are keen to sort of explore that. But, you know, we've had, they've been down to local businesses and wrote letters to B and Q and Homebase like DIY stores asking for donations and some of those stores invited them down and showed them how, you know, plant flowers and things and they are able to bring that home.

And some of them would say you know my mom's really good at this or my uncle and you know parents come in and start helping out as well and that gives the kids a sense of pride, as well, to know that, you know, their family's making a difference in the school. So it definitely does and the parents and the local community are definitely linked in with the school and student council has definitely helped with that, you know. So no, I think it does develop almost you know a whole child you know and it's developed the community as well, the local community around the school.

7. Yeah, because you know we said the student council it's them and it's their voice and they can create change within the school that if there are already problems linked to religious differences or anything like that, the student council gives them the opportunity to discuss that and try and find a solution. And then brought back into practice. But yeah, the P7s and the P6s would know through talking to their families and their moms and dads and aunts and uncles and grannies and things about what it was like in the '80s and the '70s and how difficult it was. But you know it's actually good to see, for me, you know who've you know been through the '80s and The Troubles, see how innocent they are to that, you know.

We did a sort of a big play last year, a whole school, it was our 25th year as an integrated school so at the end of the year each class got up and did something that was kind of linked to what we believe is an integrated school. And, you know, the P6s and 7s got up and talked about the violence in the past and the sort of sectarian issues in this actual community and the neighborhood cause we do have, we are on a sort of conflict sort of area you know, we've got a very Catholic area and a very Protestant area right beside each other and the school is slap bang in the middle of it. So, you know, we sort of celebrated that in it and the parents and the people who came to see it, they just loved it and it was very meaningful and very apt that we were sort of saying yes we have had problems in the past but our kids now get to learn about that and they know that they don't want to go back to that.

And when we got the P6s to sort of in the play call each other sort of sectarian names and things like that and they almost didn't want to do it because they felt very uncomfortable calling you know these kinds of names to each other because they've been brought up in an integrated school and with a family that appreciates integration that you know, these aren't things that they call each other, we almost sort of had to bully them into calling each other these names because it was very uncomfortable for them. But that made us feel good as well because to know that it's out of their comfort zone and not language which they would use.

And we tackle all kinds of things like that, you know homophobia and racism and sectarian issues and by tackling that and not shying away from it, you know, it makes the

kids more aware of what mistakes they made in the past and their keen to sort of not, you know, they kind of look back at that and they think why, they don't understand why it was like that, it's not in their nature now because they've been taught to play and learn and interact together as, they just see each other as other kids, not Catholics and Protestants they way we would have maybe been brought up to because of the conflict to do and the student council have been very involved in that, they would be involved in saying what they think we should do for integrated week and ideas and explaining if there are any issues and how we can work, you know, to fix things, you know.

8. I think just because they know that we are there to give them that voice, you know, it really sort of gives them a sense of belonging, you know, when you see them coming out and they're chatting so much cause they have so many ideas about how to improve the school and the fact, that you know, we know have that opportunity and there are teachers in place in the schools to give kids a voice, that's something that so fundamentally affects them, their education and their school life. It's you know, it's very important, you know that wouldn't have happened before, now we are trying to be more child centered and to get the kids more involved and they know that there's adults there in the school to help them and that gives them a sense of security as well because they spend most of their day with us, you know and to know that there's someone there to help them and to hear their opinions and ideas and this is important and I think that makes me feel very sort of you know grateful and sort of understanding with the kids, as well, and their needs and it sort of empowers us to become better teachers and to, you know, better adults and community as well. It does help us, you know, and it gives us, it gives us you know, a lot of sense of pride in our school and our pupils because when people come in to see what we've done and these kids can just talk to them about it and they're polite and they're friendly and they're respectful and so good, you know, with their words and can express themselves it just makes you feel, you know, great that, you know, you've had a hand in this and you've been involved in, you know, these people are just turning into adults and they're going to bring that forward into the community and hopefully things in Northern Ireland will improve because of that, you know. And it just makes them sort of more confident and boosts their self-esteem and that's great to see, you know. So I don't know if that answers.
9. Yeah I do, I mean there's been a lot of change since I've taken over student council so and our boss would be very, sort of keen on student council and making sure that it is, that there's time given for it. And that we have everything, as adults, that we need to facilitate those meetings. And she would often bring us training from organizations like you know NICIE who would train us on how to lead student council and give us opportunities to sort of go for to talk to other schools and other teachers and adults who would maybe be involved with eco schools and forest schools and just try and share good practice you know.

But there has been a lot of change in the school grounds, the school grounds have definitely changed since I've come on board student council cause I've had that opportunity to invoke that change and I'd be able to say to the kids, "okay, what do you want to do," okay we want a sensory garden and we want a vegetable patch, you know, and put that in place. So yeah I do, and looking back from the four years that I've been here, you know, I've definitely seen a big change in school grounds and in the kids attitudes towards looking after their environment and their pride in school and that's been because of you know, sort of my involvement in student council and eco schools, you know. So definitely it has helped me as a professional as well, you know to develop my skills and make me more aware of what the kids need in their education, you know, and as well and how to sort of facilitate that.

10. There's so many, I think just developing them as sort of as individuals and for me the big thing is their self-esteem and their ability to sort of talk to adults and other children and be able to sort of, express themselves clearly and fluently and understand that they do need to listen to others because obviously that has a big impact on our history in Northern Ireland – being able to listen to other's ideas and opinions and sort of take those on board and act on those it helps them become you know, more of a team, you know and their more sort of able to work together, which obviously they'll need when they grow up and go on to big school and work, you know they need to know how to work with others and develop those sort of inter-communication skills and personal skills, and sort of self-esteem and confidence and you know team-working and sort of setting goals and achieving them and that kind of thing. But it also sort of gives them ideas of what they can do, you know interests and things that and it sort of develops them and promotes sort of the school as well.

We've done so much and we've had so much PR because of student council and eco schools that it just, it builds up the school, as well. And me professionally, it's helped to develop me and my expertise and sort of my CV. What I've been involved in and all that, I've helped make it, you know, so it's huge and it's really an important part of the school I think, here definitely.

11. Challenges, yes. Time can be a challenge you know, getting the time to get these things done and sometimes they're big tasks that we decide to undertake, you know, getting the adventure playground or getting a sensory garden and these are things that cost an awful lot of money so you know you have to be able to brainstorm and work with your colleagues and outside agencies to try and sort of get the best the school. So it takes an awful lot of time from phone calls and paperwork and that kind of thing for you to be able to adapt then to bring it towards the kids in that they can take charge of it, so it's not just something that's led by me, you know. So that takes time. It can be difficult fitting it in with all the others things of daily school life, but it's trying to find, you know, a balance where the whole school takes it all in as well and they're all doing a part so it eases the pressure on the likes of myself and the school individuals.

But yes, that can be difficult and I think, you know, I would like to see more sort of involvement from organizations like NICIE you know and student council and making sure and giving us advice that we're doing it correctly and that kind of thing and just more, just trying to develop it more. And sometimes you can feel like you know that you're doing it pretty much on your own and you're just hoping that you're doing it right. But it is successful, we know that we are doing it right in that way, you know cause it's working for us , but sort of coming in line and being sort of standard with other schools might be an idea you know for the future.

Note: Not all questions were answered and some were deleted from the initial document I sent to the school. This is how I received the questions with their answers.

1. I've read a little bit about the pupil council on the “B” IPS webpage (it just gives a quick blurb), but I'd love to hear about the organization from your perspective. What is the organization designed to do? How are the pupils elected?

Our Class and Pupil Council were designed to give children a voice to express themselves and to shape school life. Children's voices are important to be heard and being allowed the opportunity to make decisions, voice concerns and to help shape school life is a fundamental part of their social, emotional and physical well being as well as their development. Pupil and Class Council also allows them to develop as independent citizens for the future, who have the ability to give opinions, express their point of views, as well as being able to give reasons and make informed choices about their future.

Children are elected via the class system. The children have to have 3 representatives elected for Class Council and then a further 3 elected also for Pupil Council. With Oakwood being an Integrated school, we ensure we have a broad and balanced representation of religion. Therefore, we vote a Catholic, a Protestant and an Other or Non-denominational child.

Following this, the children then vote through a Chair Person, a Vice Chair Person and a Secretary out of the 3 already selected children.

Pupil Council is elected from four of our classes, children from P.4, P.5, P.6 and P.7. Once all three representatives have been picked, Pupil Council also vote through for the different responsibilities.

We only do Class and Pupil Council with P.4 upwards, as we feel they have a better understanding of the process and for the decision making process.

2. How responsible are student leaders for negotiating challenges in peer to peer interactions? Are students responsible for negotiating challenges or are school staff members, like you, required to mediate conversations?

Through Class and Pupil Council, all children have the opportunity to discuss any challenges. However, we have a Peer Mediation programme, which runs alongside Pupil and Class Council. P.7 children are responsible for being out on the playground. They support the younger children if difficulties arise and allow opportunity to facilitate negotiations. If the problem continues or is deemed to serious, the Classroom assistants will work to solve it. However, if the matter again is much more serious, the class teacher is notified and accountable for resolving the issue. If the matter is more serious, we notify senior management, the principal and if needed parents are notified.

3. How equipped are student leaders to handle challenges in the schools? Have there been any initiatives in the past focused on the development of student leadership and building capacity in (integrated) schools?

Our children have the opportunity to be student leaders through Class and Pupil Council and through Peer Mediation. Children within the normal day to day lessons, have opportunities to be group leaders in subject areas. We constantly through our ethos, positive behavior management and culture of the school promote and encourage our children to take on leadership responsibilities.

4. What are the issues for which students can affect change? What about ethos?

Our children the understanding that they can put forward ideas that may change things within the school but that not all of their ideas will be passed. If the ideas are feasible and will benefit school life in a positive way, the principal and staff work hard to allow that change to take place. Children can discuss matters relating to the playground, special events, school policies to the dinner menu or the choice of After School Clubs in the school.

5. Does student voice extend beyond the school setting? In what way?

If the changes impact the wider school setting, the voice extends beyond. The Class Council were chosen by NICIE to demonstrate to a wide audience how a School council is run and organized.

6. How responsible are student leaders for negotiating challenges in peer to peer interactions? Are students responsible for negotiating challenges or are school staff members, like you, required to mediate conversations?

Mentioned in question 4

7. How equipped are student leaders to handle challenges in the schools? Have there been any initiatives in the past focused on the development of student leadership and building capacity in (integrated) schools?

8. Has a legacy of conflict affected student voice in the formal educational setting? Are there any unique challenges student leaders face working in integrated schools in a divided society – i.e. challenges a student in a sectarian school would not face?

In the past, children would have been more affected by a divided society. But the children in today's society, even if they come from a predominantly sectarian area, do not have any issues that children in the last 15 years may have had. We are not affected by any circumstances in the present day of a divided society.

9. How does the capacity/agency of teachers, especially in the advisor role, impact student voice?

We advise, support and facilitate our children's thinking and learning. We provide opportunities to allow our children to express themselves fairly and in a just way, allowing opportunities for them to justify, explain and give reasons for what they are saying. Children are given time in class, in Circle Time and through our PDMU programme. We shape our children's thinking but we never enforce our own preferences on them. We allow them to come to their own perspectives, with some guidance if needed.

10. And more generally, in your view, how much of a voice do you, as a teacher and advisor, have in your school?

We as a staff work together to share our thinking, professional judgment and knowledge. We try to work collectively, so that we are using a shared voice and working together for the best learning opportunities for our school. As team leaders or subject co-coordinators, we have more say, in that, if need certain things done, they do have to be followed through with. As a staff, our views are taken on most of the time, however, there are other times, when the principal has the final say on something and we have to accept it.

Appendix D – Time Cues for Interview 3

0:00 – Teacher for ten years; youth participation and talk to issues related to curriculum development and responsible for developing the citizenship curriculum in NI for Key Stage 3 and 4; student participation; relationships; youth assembly; youth participation and leadership

1:20 – Explanation of programs: international; schools work with volunteers; future voices for volunteer projects; training of development for school councils, but not particularly popular at the moment

2:35 – Integrated schools not as involved; focus on mixing people in many ways, more dynamic than just Protestant and Catholic and may be why schools see it as something for sectarian schools; some strong integrated schools work with organization

3:55 – Some schools with excellent work developing leadership and decision-making; teacher-pupil partnership; joint decisions can make teachers nervous; establishment of superiority in training; want teachers to step back and facilitate; some just don't get it

5:00 – Need buy-in from senior management; HARD to get; people like idea and language, not reality

5:50 – Allow for democratic failure and no's; push student's farther; educational exercise for democracy

7:05 – How equipped...big challenges for organization; pick right people and give them right opportunities: skilled and mature; schools are not as selective; organization doesn't have those same issues

7:50 – Looking for students to listen, prepared to take leadership and enable others; facilitative model: bring with and give others opportunity to lead

8:10 – Often usual suspects of pupils who get picked for everything

8:30 – Teachers say, I would never have picked them, but now I get it; interest or a passion

9:00 – Caught up in behavior in school setting

9:30 – We equip students for that; teachers don't have time to invest in moving students up the ranks

10:40 – Individuals who came into organization with extreme personalities; either develop self confidence or humility; get robust feedback; build relationships; second home

11:30 – Strong relationship enables being robust; quiet take on leadership roles

12:10 – Speaking for education minister; personal transformation stories in different directions

12:30 – Individual transformations have huge impact of schools; work has been done impacts school and local community

13:00 – Problems can erupt very quickly; continual interventions needed; reflect politics in community

13:31 – Enable teachers to do workshops

14:15 – Asking organization...what is our model of leadership, what do we want to lead people toward?

14:40 – Fundamental inspiration is Gordon Wilson and Enniskillen bomb

15:40 – Gordon bore no ill will to people who did this; golden moment; changed course of conflict to not spiral into retaliation violence

16:15 – One moment; what would be their one moment? What do you want to achieve? Ordinary person with impact.

16:50 – Want people to help toward shared and better society for NI

17:05 – Want more than nice small group; want to debate, but maintain relationships, then have wider impact, model that

17:45 – DUP and Sinn Fein volunteers

18:00 – Not responsible for NI conflict, but are responsible for own contribution for moving away; what do they want to make?

18:20 – In family, in classroom, in community, politics, other organizations

18:45 – Better and shared future; creating skills for cross-cultural dialogue

19:30 – Student voice extending beyond, great examples in Republic

20:00 – Republic example of extending beyond school

21:20 – Another Republic example

22:30 – Reason tell those stories cause good examples of kids reaching beyond community to people wouldn't have contact with at all; learn stories about real life; doing work and making decisions themselves

23:00 – Less aware of projects with that impact in NI; impact of committed teachers who allow this to happen

23:20 – Place like this significant issues still around violence; risks of teachers; afraid to talk about issues in classroom

24: 00 – We're not trained for this; what happens if...huge fear about touching any of that stuff

24:30 – Either pushing things not hard enough, or fear is paranoia; specific things related to conflict that make people more hesitant

25:40 – Fear of student voice in many settings; a lot of teachers recognize that do need to deal with legacy, aren't many opportunities for that to happen

26:20 – No real connection to conflict, but still impact on modes of thinking and attitudes

26:50 – At the one level all the work that has gone into work for cross-community has opened up opportunity for student voice to be heard; but it has also limited as well

27:15 – As long as in safe areas, people are okay with it

27:30 – Bringing ex-combatants into schools

28:00 – Resistance from school management

28:30 – Yes, different challenges in integrated schools

28:50 – Case study of Malone; HR commission of school for students

29:10 – Issues around political symbols or badges; religious not so much, but more political

29:50 – NI assembly, can't bring religion or politics into selection at all

30:20 – Emblems are simply to be provocative; close links to politicians

30:55 – Integrated sector can't ignore those issues

31:15 – Some just try to ignore issues; others discuss and debate, preference would be for the latter; ignoring issues deepens the divide

32:00 – Challenges dealt with to varying degrees of respect

33:05 – Teachers aren't trained for it at all; won't have been part of own experience in school (student voice)

33:45 – Focus on getting results; curriculum and standards; softer side like pupil voice not given the weight

34:00 – Where students have capacity is because of teacher's own initiative

34:10 – Student voice is a part of pastoral care and academic achievement...good teachers understand that

34:50 – Still traditional system

35:00 – Structure of day is pressured, teachers day is full and organized; lot more focus on grades and targets

35:30 – State doesn't recognize student voice can lead to academic achievement; traditional; threatened by idea of pupil voice

35:50 – Good examples of it working; driven process of engaging students

36:15 – Training doesn't address empowerment of teacher

36:50 – Education of NI is threatened by statutory standards

37:15 – Total focus on assessment; no creative initiatives; Republic has transition year

38:00 – Opportunities taken away

38:40 – Clear benefits for enabling student voice; ownership of school community; academic investment; learn huge lessons about participation in society; behavior management less confrontational, stronger relationships between staff and pupils; self-esteem; identify wider opportunities; see own potential; employment

40:10 – All a challenge, young people can also refuse or abuse it; time is important as well

Notes from personal contact about Colleen:

Colleen has been teaching in a secondary school for about 15 years and before that in Dublin so she knows the educational system very well on both sides of the border.

She would also have a very keen interest in the pastoral, personal development side of teaching/education.

Her two sons (now in early twenties) attended the [insert school name] Integrated School from kindergarten when the school was first set up. So she and her husband would have been one of the founder parents of the school.

Her younger son continued at the Integrated school for second level, but the older moved to the Christian Brothers college (an all boys school) for second level/high school.

Below is a general outline of what Colleen said during our phone conversation.

We sent our son with Asperger's syndrome (mild) to the integrated secondary school. He increased opportunity and self esteem. Caters for differences – celebrates those differences.

The IC does offer quite a lot of programs in years 13 and 14 and does encourage a lot of independent thinking and community integration and for the pupils to get involved in the community, both charitable and political. I must say that all schools would really have these schools would have these programs. I suppose that the schools are so segregated in Northern Ireland (sex, religion). Integration reaches out to different populations, gives wider more accepting school.

Academically, the Christian Brothers school is excellent and leadership programs are strong, but I can see from the two of them that certainly the integrated encourages independent thinking and realizing of goals for yourself...less programmed. Not about fast-forwarding to excellence...

Pastoral care and personal development...tend to be teacher led. Focus on the older students taking responsibility for younger ones...pastoral elements were carried out by older students...very helpful...non-bullying policies...difficult to carry those out...bullying is always a problem...verbal or physical.

Helped his confidence...pupils in the integrated school tend to be very successful in later life in nontraditional routes...I'm meeting kids now who would be in my son's year...most are just very well developed people...integrated education has to help...make him more open.

The school I am in at the moment is very small, and because it is very small so the teachers have a tremendous influence on the students and great space for the teachers to develop own interests...the smaller the school, the more it demands of teachers and the more that teachers can show their interests and personalities to the students. Can give students a greater kind of love for subject. Art teacher is into carnivals and community celebrations, huge number of pupils are interested in art for community...doing something for community and gives students nontraditional art forms to work with. Science teacher is trying to develop Gaelic games and foster hurling culture.

I would think that there is still a lot of staff involvement and most of the school student councils would discuss problems and bring forward questions that would go to the staff. I would have to say that certainly Key Stage 3 and 4 (junior school – prior to age 16) a lot of it is staff led...Key Stage 5 and 6, but cutoff point. At 16 maybe they would have confidence.