

Digital Commons
@ LMU and LLS

Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School
Digital Commons at Loyola Marymount
University and Loyola Law School

Honors Thesis

Honors Program

5-3-2018

To Separate or Not to Separate: A Comparative Look at Education in Northern Ireland and the Special Education System in the United States

Annie Strugatsky

Loyola Marymount University, astrugat@lion.lmu.edu

Victoria Graf

Loyola Marymount University, victoria.graf@lmu.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/honors-thesis>

Recommended Citation

Strugatsky, Annie and Graf, Victoria, "To Separate or Not to Separate: A Comparative Look at Education in Northern Ireland and the Special Education System in the United States" (2018). *Honors Thesis*. 215.

<https://digitalcommons.lmu.edu/honors-thesis/215>

This Honors Thesis is brought to you for free and open access by the Honors Program at Digital Commons @ Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Thesis by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@Loyola Marymount University and Loyola Law School. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@lmu.edu.



**To Separate or Not to Separate: A Comparative Look at the Education System in Northern
Ireland and the Special Education System in the United States**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements of the University Honors Program
of Loyola Marymount University

by

Annie Strugatsky

May 2, 2018

Advisor: Dr. Victoria Graf

Abstract

This paper explores the current debate around the education system in Northern Ireland as part of the peace process in its post-conflict society. It discusses the advantages and disadvantages of integrated and shared education through anecdotes, reflections, observations, and discussions based on experiences in Northern Ireland. This paper also sets out to compare these systems to the debate around full and partial inclusion of students with disabilities in the United States, also discussing the advantages and disadvantages through scholarly articles, observations, and analysis. Finally, it examines the relationship between the two countries and the necessary next steps in terms of policy and action.

To Separate or Not to Separate: A Comparative Look at the Education System in Northern Ireland and the Special Education System in the United States

The conflict in Northern Ireland has been marked by extreme violence, division, and hatred between Catholics and Protestants, especially until the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, which marked the beginning of the peace process. It “prompted considerable optimism for a brighter future for Northern Ireland and in many respects it has delivered, albeit with a few false-starts” (Gardner, 2016, p. 358). This conflict is not necessarily a religious one, but rather a political one. Besides being divided by a border between the “Catholic side” and the “Protestant side,” divisions have also run through almost all institutions and systems in Northern Ireland.

The division between Catholics and Protestants has been especially clear in the education system, which calls for separate schooling of Catholic and Protestant youth. John Gardner states that “in education... the wider Northern Ireland society remains unreconciled on a system segregated by religion and by academic selection” (p. 358). Being a constant in almost every child’s life, students develop their knowledge of themselves and the world around them in school, but the education system in Northern Ireland portrays a less than ideal view of their community. In many cases, as discovered from several testimonies and experiences of people growing up in Northern Ireland, students do not meet someone from a different religious background until they are at university level or in the workforce. This system has called for the need for change, because it only perpetuates conflict and division. Thus, policymakers and peacemakers have striven to implement new programs, such as shared and integrated education.

In relationship to Northern Ireland, shared and integrated education play a unique role. Each of these programs strives to create a more unified Northern Ireland, and each one comes

with its advantages and disadvantages. Integrated education is arguably the most ideal system, yet most unlikely to be implemented. It calls for the complete integration of the education system, meaning that Catholics and Protestants attend school together starting at an early age. However, as of the 2014/2015 school year, only seven percent of pupils attended integrated schools. In fact, the system is mostly segregated: there are Protestant and Catholic schools, Irish-speaking schools, single-sex schools, and “special schools” (schools for students with disabilities). Shared education, on the other hand, is a less ideal system but is most likely to be accepted and implemented at the current state Northern Ireland is in. It seems to be the solution for now, and calls for separate schools to come together to work on certain projects, play sports together, and/or learn certain subjects together, later returning to their separate classrooms. This system encourages collaboration and contact between two divided sides that may not be in contact otherwise. There are multiple examples of this system already in place, making it much easier to implement at the current moment. Even though an integrated system would make the most sense for the purpose of a unified Northern Ireland, many scholars and advocates of the peace process believe it is unrealistic at the moment.

There seems to be a similar and relatable discussion when it comes to the education of children in the United States. The question often discussed is whether or not there should be more of an integrated or shared curriculum; essentially, should there be full inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom or should there be partial inclusion of students with disabilities? In general, the United States has recently pushed more towards full inclusion for children with disabilities. This is ideal, as it would allow all students to be united and share in their education while learning from each other. This also does not allow for a

separation that would cause many to view students with disabilities as the “other” and lesser. However, there are clearly advantages to a system of partial inclusion or an excluded program, especially because the success of each program is largely dependent on multiple factors, especially the students involved. The same reasoning can apply for why one may wish for integrated education in Northern Ireland, as well as the possibility that some may favor shared education. While the United States continues to create more models of full inclusion and more advocacy for this system, Northern Ireland continues to make greater strides with shared education rather than integrated education.

Upon visiting Northern Ireland, it became more clear that integrated education would be an ideal system based on the models seen. At M. Integrated College*, direct observations and testimonies from students, teachers, and the principal of the school, demonstrated that this was a more conducive system. At this school, students were not required to pass an exam in order to attend, which is far more desired, as a test taken at eleven years old basically determines their social mobility, leading to a system in favor of more affluent students who have access to better education. Schools in Northern Ireland generally require the successful passage of a test in order for students to attend, but M. Integrated College strives to welcome students without focusing on their test scores. The principal shared that the school recognized that its purpose was more than just about sharing a cultural identity, but that it was also about being able to learn from each other’s sectors and about becoming global citizens and more accepting students. She shared that the goal was to celebrate each other’s cultures and learn from each other and that the faculty and staff were dedicated to serving underprivileged communities and going above and beyond their

*This paper uses pseudonyms for the names of schools and people mentioned. An asterisk indicates a pseudonym.

job descriptions in order to do so. For example, some of the staff members had used their own money to buy uniforms for some students while the principal had visited ostracized communities in order to understand the people and their background and be able to integrate them into the school as effectively as possible. The faculty and staff at this school were clearly dedicated to the students and thoroughly believed that integrated education was extremely beneficial.

The students also shared that they never felt a religious division amongst each other and that they were consistently accepted by the people around them. However, they did share that there was more of a discrimination against them if they were a racial minority, but they still found that their experience in the integrated school was much more positive than their experience at the Catholic or Protestant school they had attended previously. In Catholic and Protestant schools, many students from minority backgrounds in terms of race are discriminated against, and this integrated school seems to be the lesser of these evils. Instead of feeling isolated from each other, the students feel accepted and are more prepared for the workforce as meeting someone from a different background is not taboo, but rather a customary experience for them. The unification of students from different religious backgrounds is revolutionary in several respects, and is a huge stepping stone in students becoming more accepting of each other.

At B. Primary School*, a generally Protestant school, the school is as welcoming and bright as M. Integrated College, but clearly less accepting of people from different backgrounds and cultures. This is mainly due to the parents' perspective, which was largely discussed by the principal of the school. She explained that she believes that integrated education would be effective in the peacemaking process, but there is a large pushback from parents when students from different backgrounds arrive at the school. This particular school identified as more

progressive than other Protestant schools, given that students from minority backgrounds had recently begun at the school, but still far from what one may consider integrated. One of the teachers also discussed her view that an integrated system would be more effective. However, she felt that the label was unnecessary and that the integrated system should have been implemented from the start. This way, students would not have had to ever be in a divided system that perpetuates more division in society. She identified that this view came from her personal experience in a mixed school, due to her having grown up in a rural area where the division between Catholics and Protestants was not necessarily prominent.

Although it would be ideal to have had an integrated system from the beginning and to not have had the need to label it as such, this cannot be the case due to Northern Ireland's complex and divided history. Through observations at M. Integrated College and discussions with people who play significant roles in the peace process, it is clear that an integrated system will form safe spaces from the start and will allow for more unity amongst people. It will ensure that students have contact with each other no matter where they are from, thus making it seem as though this is the norm, while living in a divided community is and should be far from it, especially after the two "sides" are working towards a more peaceful and unified society. In the integrated system, students are given autonomy over their own opinions about people and are also given the opportunity to function in the same spaces without any forced intentionality around it. Yet, despite this, there are certainly many models and arguments for the shared education system that were prevalent in Northern Ireland.

In Northern Ireland, much of the funding in the education system has been allotted towards implementing the shared education model. The Strule Shared Education Campus is an

example of the way that these funds have been used in Omagh. Although it has not yet been completed, the goal of it is to create a campus upon which six different schools exist by 2020. The schools will still be separated, but they will share a campus and there will be certain subjects and activities that will be shared amongst the students. The six schools involved are Baron School* (a “special school;” a school for people with disabilities), Christian Brothers Grammar School (a boys’ Catholic school), Loreto Grammar School (a girls’ Catholic school), Omagh Academy Grammar School (a co-ed Protestant school), Omagh High School (a co-ed Protestant school), and Sacred Heart College (a co-ed Catholic school) (“Strule: Schools). The goal is for each school to “retain their individuality and ethos whilst maximising the opportunities provided through collaboration and sharing” (“Strule:” Shared Vision). The schools will also “be able to deliver a 21st century curriculum in progressive, modern and flexible facilities, all of which will be enhanced significantly through sharing resources” (“Strule:” Shared Vision). Generally, the goal for this shared campus is to connect young people through education and allow that to affect the wider community as well, thus enhancing relationships amongst all people.

The only school currently on the campus is Baron School. The principal of this school, Jacob Smith*, though an advocate for integrated education, has his own philosophy about shared education, especially when it comes to his students with disabilities. The school itself is incredibly well-resourced and there are amazing opportunities for students based on their needs. Students in the school have a variety of aides, teachers, occupational therapists, and psychologists that are there to help them. The environment of the school is bright and welcoming, and it includes opportunities for sensory experiences as well as innovative learning opportunities for students who may need to deviate from the “traditional” form of learning. The

students seemed happy and engaged upon observation. In a discussion with Jacob Smith, he stated that shared education is important because it gives students with disabilities the opportunity for a much-needed safe and comfortable space. The separate campus allows the students a space where they can learn the skills they need before being integrated into the community; this support is necessary before giving them outlets and opportunities to participate in the wider community. His approach to inclusion and integration is more fluid, as he strongly believes that there are opportunities for students in his school that the students would only feel comfortable taking in that safe space. In order for them to feel comfortable in the community, it needs to be inclusive. In order for the school to be inclusive, the community must be inclusive as well. Thus, with the current state of Northern Ireland, the principal of Baron School cited many reasons for the importance of shared education, especially when it came to his students.

There are many people and scholars who would agree with Jacob Smith. These scholars include Tony Gallagher, Gavin Duffy, and Gareth Robinson, all people who work extensively in educational policy and advocate for the implementation of shared education. Their reasoning may be slightly different from Jacob Smith's in that the main belief regarding shared education is that it is the most likely system to be implemented at the current moment, and that it essentially holds the same benefits as integrated education, but is more plausible. They believe integrated education to be valuable, but are working on taking smaller steps to eventually achieve that end goal of integration. In a presentation by the three scholars, they discussed how shared education is a bridge between segregated and integrated schools. Northern Ireland does not seem to be completely ready for a fully integrated system, so the shared system is a solution that bypasses certain problems and still protects minority identities. Essentially, the intention of this system is

to create opportunities for dialogue between the two main identities (Catholic and Protestant).

They acknowledged that there is the criticism that, when implemented, shared education means that students sit in separate classrooms on the same campus, without other entities holding them accountable. Also acknowledging that this likely does happen in some places, they emphasized the ways that this system does not necessarily have to be implemented in such a manner if done with intentionality and care.

In the shared education system, the goal is for people to collaborate effectively and begin the path to a more integrated system. The collaboration that comes with the shared system leads to more contact and builds relationships of trust that can be pivotal in the development of inclusive communities. The scholars listed the many benefits of shared education, which include that teachers plan and teach together, thus sharing resources and working together in order to overcome obstacles. The students study certain subject areas together instead of merely participating in peripheral activities together, thus collaborating in something of value. Furthermore, this system creates interdependence between previously divided sectors and challenges institutional separation by providing a solution that no party would object to, essentially addressing the question of what one can do for the 93% of students who do not go to integrated schools. Although this truly does seem to be the only solution for now, the question should remain regarding how Northern Ireland can move towards a more integrated education system and create and develop a society more accepting of that system.

The debate around integrated vs. shared vs. separate education is one that has been especially prominent in Northern Ireland, as many believe that the foundation to the peace process lies in the education system. Those who argue for the shared education system seem to

be complacent and believe that shared education will be the only system to work for the time being. Yet, since the integrated system seems to be the one that will encourage and foster unity, it is crucial to set a more specific and directed pathway towards integrated education. This system would encourage a feeling of normality around it instead of implementing a shared education system, which suggests that people can only be unified if it is done intentionally, and it is safest to be separated. Thus, shared education encourages the feeling of abnormality around collaborating with the people from whom one is separated. Instead of simply adding support and services in the way that the shared education system does, something must be done on a systemic level, similar to the way that advocates for people with disabilities have been striving to change education on a systemic level to better suit the needs of all people.

In both Northern Ireland and the United States, the concept of including and integrating people in the community is at the forefront of the discussion about the education system. In the United States, the concept of inclusion is geared more towards including people with disabilities in the “mainstream” classroom. This debate is also prevalent in Northern Ireland, though the country has only made small steps towards inclusion as opposed to the strides that the United States has made. Ron Smith, a scholar of education for students with disabilities implores policymakers to encourage inclusion in the mainstream classroom in Northern Ireland. He states that the vision of inclusion at the moment is still more traditional, and that educating students with disabilities separately is the current status quo (Smith, 2014, p. 396). He reviews the problematic and exclusive language involved in documents such as the ‘Fundamental Review of Special Educational Needs and Inclusion’ and calls for the need for more work to be done in the area. He states that “there continues to be great scope to transform current policies and practices

through a clearer conceptual and strategic vision about what teachers need to know and be able to do, the role of specialist facilities, and the ways in which mainstream education could be improved in order to educate all children” (Smith, 2014, p. 398). Thus, the inclusion of students with disabilities in the general education classroom is lacking, just as the integration of all students is lacking. Despite the clear benefits of inclusion anywhere, especially in Northern Ireland, policy continues to be convoluted and to shift away from increased inclusion. In the United States, however, the debate about inclusion vs. exclusion vs. partial inclusion can be related to the integration vs. shared vs. separate education debate in Northern Ireland, though the United States is moving more rapidly and more efficiently towards the inclusion of students with disabilities than is the case in Northern Ireland.

The argument for inclusion and for an integrated system can be applied to any community. Jacob Smith, the principal of Baron School expressed how inclusion could be applied anywhere, and that it was important for all marginalized people to be included in the classroom. In the United States, though, the focus has more recently been on students with disabilities. This topic has been researched and, in general, scholars have discovered that inclusion leads to significant achievement, both academic and social, and among students with and without disabilities. According to the TASH Inclusive Education National Committee, “there has been significant increase in students with disabilities served in the Least Restrictive Environment” (Morningstar et al, 2016, p. 210). The amount of students with high-incidence disabilities in the general education classroom has increased from 34% to 65% between 1990 and 2007, and has remained this way at least until 2012. This is not the case for students with severe disabilities, however. In 2015, researchers “found that 93% of students taking the alternate

assessment were predominately served in self-contained special education classes, separate schools, or homebound instruction” (Morningstar et al, 2016, p. 210). A national study on inclusion showed that “placement in inclusion programs led to academic gains for students with disabilities, including improved performance on standardized tests, mastery of Individualized Education Program (IEP) goals, grades, on-task behavior, and motivation to learn” (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p. 115). Furthermore, “students who were educated in inclusion classrooms had a greater number of interactions and social contacts with students without disabilities, were the recipients of and provided greater levels of social support behaviors, had larger friendship networks that mostly included classmates without disabilities, and had more lasting social relationships with students without disabilities” (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p.116). The results do vary, but for the most part, studies have found that the impact of inclusion on students with disabilities is generally positive. It is important to recognize, though, that this is a more generalized view of it, and that the process for deciding which program best fits the needs of a particular student is largely dependent on that students’ individual personality and plan.

Many scholars have also researched the impact of inclusion programs on students without disabilities, in order to determine their overall effectiveness. Although the authors in *Exceptional Lives: Special Education in Today’s Schools* (Turnbull, 2014) state that the impact of inclusion on students without disabilities is positive and that academic achievement levels and social skills improve, the studies in *The Impact of Inclusion on Students With and Without Disabilities and Their Educators* indicate that “findings revealed that the reading and mathematics performance of the students without disabilities in the inclusion program was significantly better than that of their peers who were educated in the traditional GE program,” but there was no notable

difference in writing performance (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p. 116). When it came to social outcomes, however, the studies discussed in this article determined that “students without disabilities possess positive views of inclusion and believe that inclusion benefits them in terms of an increased acceptance, understanding, and tolerance of individual differences; a greater awareness and sensitivity to the needs of others; greater opportunities to have friendships with students with disabilities; and an improved ability to deal with disability in their own lives” (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p.120). Thus, it is clear that inclusion does not interfere with academic performance and has a positive impact on students without disabilities, socially and academically. Similarly, as demonstrated by discussions and observations at Malone Integrated College, the integrated system in Northern Ireland seemed to have a positive impact on all students, no matter their background, both socially and academically.

The aforementioned study also examined the outcomes for general education and special education teachers when it came to implementing inclusion models. The positive outcomes for general education teachers included “increasing skill at meeting the needs of students with and without disabilities, being more aware of the impact of teachers as positive role models for all students, developing an increased confidence in their teaching ability, and feeling good about their ability to change” (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p.123). However, educators were also worried about their ability and range of knowledge about students with disabilities along with the lack of resources provided in order to be able to work with students with disabilities. Special educators felt as if they were more of an “important part of the school community” and felt they had “an enhanced perspective on education and knowledge of the GE system, and a greater enjoyment of teaching related to working with students without disabilities and observing the successful

functioning of their students with disabilities in inclusive settings” (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p.123). However, many also felt that they were less involved in the students’ learning processes and that they were unable to provide the specialized services they were able to provide before. Most importantly, though, when participating in cooperative teaching arrangements, the educators felt that this “enriched their professional and personal lives” (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p.123). This type of cooperative teaching arrangement is a prevalent characteristic of the full inclusion model at WCS* in Los Angeles, CA. In each classroom, the general and special education teacher work together to plan and debrief lessons and co-teach many of these lessons. In discussions with some of the general education teachers and the special education teacher at the elementary school, it was clear that the educators found this model to be beneficial and impactful on the students with and without disabilities. This model does not single anyone out and allows for the students with disabilities to remain in the classroom at all times, thus never losing time in the general education classroom. This also calls for more collaboration and discussion among the general and special education teachers, which allows for them to be on the same page and for them to work together in order to provide the best education possible for their students. They can each bring their own areas of expertise to the planning, teaching, and reflecting process, which leads to more well-rounded and cohesive lessons that address the facets of a universal design for learning. Overall, the cooperative teaching method seems to be the most effective when looking at implementations of inclusion.

The parents at WCS have also been delighted with the attention and care given to their students with disabilities at the school. In discussions with the parents, it is clear that this type of atmosphere is one that they prefer for their child. In *Exceptional Lives: Special Education in*

Today's School, Turnbull et al (2012) discuss Jack's, a child attending WCS, experience at the school. His parents are extremely satisfied with the attention he has received as well as the way he has been fully integrated into the classroom and cared for by the other students with and without disabilities. In Northern Ireland, however, parent attitudes towards full inclusion are not necessarily the same. It is likely that some parents of students without disabilities in the United States might be worried about having students with disabilities included in the classroom as they may unknowingly assume that this may have negative effects on their own student, but this does not happen often. At B. Primary School in Northern Ireland, many of the parents were opposed to accepting children from different backgrounds to the school because of their preconceived notions. Growing up in a divided society and around intense violence from the "other side," it is not surprising that parents may have inaccurate ideas about people from different backgrounds and thus be less willing to accept that their children participate in integrated or shared atmospheres. However, it is crucial to continue to consider how Northern Ireland can work towards improving parent attitudes in order to create a society that is more willing to change and more open to an inclusive education system. As more models of shared education and integrated education continue to develop, parent attitudes are more likely to change in the future, as they will likely be students who participated in these types of programs.

While integrated education is most comparable to full inclusion in the United States, shared education is likely most comparable to partial inclusion of students with disabilities in the classroom. This is to say that students spend some time in the general education classroom, and then are pulled out and separated from the general education classroom for a certain percentage of the day. In a study in which 240 elementary level students with learning disabilities were

evaluated based on their participation in either an inclusion-only classroom, a combined services classroom (both pull-out and inclusion), and pull-out-only classroom, it was determined that “the students in the combined services program had significantly greater gains in their reading performance than the students who received instruction in either the inclusion-only classroom or the pull-out-only program” (Salend & Duhaney, 1999, p.115). This demonstrated that the partial inclusion system seemed to be preferred in this particular study. Refice (2006) also declared that “partial inclusion is the best method for having students of various abilities in a general education classroom” because many students with disabilities believe that the special services offered by specific special education programs offer more support “in receiving a proper education” (p.30). Furthermore, this allows students with disabilities to work with both a general and special education teacher during the school day and gives them the option of “learning with the rest of the class or receiving the special assistance they will need from a special education teacher inside or outside of the classroom” (Refice, 2006, p.30). This scholar also believes that students with disabilities would benefit most from partial inclusion, but also emphasizes the idea of collaborative teaching and views it as a characteristic of partial inclusion. With the full inclusion model, it seems that there should not be many disadvantages to the system. This is what can be said for an integrated system as well. However, personal observations at WCS have shown both advantages and disadvantages to this model. Sometimes, students with moderate to severe disabilities sit in the classroom and hardly participate. Although they are supported by a paraprofessional, the lesson has not been developed in such a way that the student can participate. Yet, when the special education teacher and general education teacher worked together, this process was made more simple and clear, and the students with disabilities were

able to participate as much as possible. The model requires that teachers work diligently to include all students and develop lessons that access students' preferences and needs. Although this is difficult, full inclusion would not be successful in any other way.

At PV* in Los Angeles, CA, students with disabilities spend most of their time in the general education classroom, but spend roughly one hour per day with the special education teacher. When speaking to some of the students involved in this program, the students expressed that they felt embarrassed at times when they had to leave the classroom. They did, however, mention that they felt that they were better able to understand certain concepts after they spent time with the special education teacher, and that their ability to perform better in the general education classroom was enhanced. This was also evidenced by the students' performance on assessments. When comparing the results when they were not working with the special education teacher to the results when they were, it was clear that the students were benefitting from this model. The general education teachers expressed similar thoughts, and felt that the program was benefitting students and that they simply did not have enough time to work one-on-one with the student in the way that the special education teacher could. However, if the school were to implement a collaborative model, the teachers felt that it, too, would be beneficial. They expressed concern about the extra work this might call for, though. Overall, the partial inclusion model seems to work efficiently at the elementary school and allows students to succeed academically. Yet, its effectiveness in comparison to a full inclusion model could only be determined if that model were implemented *at* that same school. Although there are no major concerns about a partial inclusion model, it still drives forth the idea that some students are part

of the “other,” and may lead to low self-esteem among students who are pulled out of the classroom.

This idea of partial inclusion seems to mirror the idea of the shared education system in Northern Ireland, in which students spend most of their time in an “excluded” classroom with people from similar backgrounds, and come together with people from different backgrounds for certain activities and subjects. If this idea of partial inclusion were directly comparable to the system of shared education, it may seem as though shared education could be the more effective route in Northern Ireland. However, these two are not directly comparable, though the advantages and disadvantages can be quite similar. In general, partial inclusion seems to be the easiest solution, because general education teachers do not need to spend significant time planning lessons under a universal design for learning in order to address all students’ needs and many special education teachers and students may feel more comfortable being excluded from the classroom at times and being supported through certain aspects of schooling. In Northern Ireland, the shared education system also seems to be the easiest solution. Yet, it is crucial to not settle for the easiest solution, but rather continue to find ways to promote a more integrated system in Northern Ireland and a more fully inclusive system in the United States.

Overall, the integrated system in Northern Ireland seems to be the most ideal system, as it encourages collaboration, acceptance, and tolerance from the beginning of a young person’s life and ensures the students’ abilities to form their own opinions and be part of the unifying process. This system would provide more benefits to students and would pave the pathway towards a more unified society, as education is often the foundation to the way that society functions. However, at the current moment, shared education seems to be the bridge between integrated

education and completely separate education. Catholics and Protestants often do not connect with each other until they are at a university or in the workforce, and the shared education system would ensure that this is not the case. It would also encourage collaboration and dialogue between people of different backgrounds, thus slowly working up to a more unified society. However, this system also makes it seem as though interaction between people of different backgrounds can and should only be done intentionally, and that it is, in fact, abnormal to do so. Yet, an integrated system establishes a relationship from the beginning and normalizes interactions among students from different backgrounds, because it provides an environment in which constant contact and interaction between usually divided groups of people is accepted and normal.

Yet, it is also true that many students need a safe and comfortable space in which they can function and learn before joining and participating in a different community, such as the students at Baron School. This is an important concept to keep in mind when looking at inclusion in the United States. For the most part, studies show that students with and without disabilities, educators, and parents benefit from full inclusion. Yet, it seems that full inclusion can only be completely successful if careful planning amongst teachers, the parents, and the community is involved. Its effective implementation is a process. Thus, the importance of providing a safe space along with the general difficulty of implementation, leads to the call for partial inclusion instead of full inclusion.

Overall, it is clear that many steps must be taken towards policy reform in the education systems in Northern Ireland and in the United States in order to create a more cohesive and integrated education system, which would likely lead to a more integrated and inclusive society.

However, it is up to policymakers, teachers, parents, and students to advocate and take the time to create an atmosphere that is more willing to include students from all backgrounds, whether they be Catholic, Protestant, disabled, or of other marginalized populations. A more just education system will likely lead to a more just society, and an analysis of the advantages and disadvantages of the current and possible future systems is a stepping stone to policy reform and implementation.

References

- Strule: Shared Education Campus Omagh . (n.d.). Retrieved May 02, 2017, from <https://strule.org/>
- Gallagher, T., Robinson, G., & Duffy, G. (2017, March 9). *Shared Education in Northern Ireland*. Lecture presented in Queen's University, Belfast.
- Gardner, J. (2016). Education in Northern Ireland since the Good Friday Agreement: Kabuki theatre meets danse macabre. *Oxford Review of Education*, 42(3), 346-361.
doi:10.1080/03054985.2016.1184869
- Loader, R. (2016). Exploring the influences on classroom-based contact via shared education in Northern Ireland. *Educational Studies*, 43(1), 90-109. doi:10.1080/03055698.2016.1245603
- Morningstar, M. E., Allcock, H. C., White, J. M., Taub, D., Kurth, J. A., Gonsier-Gerdin, J., . . . Jorgensen, C. M. (2016). Inclusive education national research advocacy agenda: a call to action. *Research and Practice for Persons with Severe Disabilities*, 41(3), 209-215.
doi:10.1177/1540796916650975
- Refice, A. (2006). Inclusion in the classroom: finding what works for general education teachers. *Law & Disorder Undergraduate Journal*, (1), 25-31. Retrieved May 2, 2017, from <http://hdl.handle.net/2022/196>
- Salend, S. J., & Duhaney, L. M. (1999). The impact of inclusion on students with and without disabilities and their educators. *Remedial and Special Education*, 20(2), 114-126.
doi:10.1177/074193259902000209
- Smith, R. (2014). Changing policy and legislation in special and inclusive education: a perspective from Northern Ireland. *British Journal of Special Education*, 41(4), 382-402.

doi:10.1111/1467-8578.12081

Turnbull, A. P. (2016). *Exceptional lives: special education in today's schools* (7th ed.). Boston: Pearson.