**The Importance of Integrated Learning in Northern Ireland: By Thomas Irvine,** St. Killian’s College, Garron Tower, Carnlough.

Hello, my name is Thomas Irvine and today I’m here to put across my point, which is that I think that integrated education should play a much more significant role, especially in a primary school setting, the continuing effect “The Troubles” have on the current generation and how flippant comments by political leaders need to be rectified and ultimately stopped. And how we need to be brought together both emotionally and physically, rather than pushed farther apart.

 I personally think this is a very important issue as I am from a rural countryside village and growing up, I never had any contact in school with anyone of a different religious background, and being honest, didn’t outside of school either.

Although I did go to a primary school that catered for one certain religion, we never so much as spoke about different cultures and how they live their lives in **our** country. Though I don’t believe this should be forced upon one though heavily advised.

The ongoing affect of “The Troubles” had on this subject also increases the divide in which it has become somewhat “bad” for e.g. a Catholic and a Protestant to be friends. Why does society continue to segregate us according to our beliefs? We **need** integrated education- friends or groups with ‘opposing views’ should be seen as opportunities to broaden our horizons, not narrow our tolerance.

I want people with different beliefs to be able to speak and not be judged for doing so. I want people to feel comfortable with forging relationships with whomever they see fit. Integrated education can only be progressive; everyone learning in the same environment collaboratively. Our Politian’s need to look to the future instead of arguing about the past.

I chose to present this issue as it hits close to home, I had family members living in Belfast during the worst of the troubles and we remain in a feud about this seemingly overused subject. It is ghastly to say it should be forgotten about completely, but it also shouldn’t be a part of everyday lives.

We need our education to see past the nonsense; though how is it possible for one to move on when society continues to split and segregate us.

The topic should not be a thing of the past but we need to see past but we need to take vital steps forward to raise awareness that being a Catholic or Protestant or any religion does not qualify for segregation in a first world country, nor any. I too “have a dream”, for not only peace, but for children to live their lives.

Thomas Irvine.