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Contested childhoods across borders and boundaries: Insights from curriculum provisions in Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in the 1920s

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Conceptualisations and constructs of children and childhood are temporally and contextually grounded. Historical documents are rich sources of insight and understanding regarding how children were understood, valued and treated at various times by particular societies. This article explores the conceptualisation of children and childhood in the 26-county Irish Free State (South) and the 6-county Northern Ireland (North) in the 1920s following the partition of Ireland, through the lens of educational documentation, primarily national primary school curricula. The focus on both jurisdictions is interesting in the context of partition, exploring the sometimes divergent and often convergent ways in which children were conceptualised across borders and boundaries. This article reveals, using Sorin and Galloway's framework as a conceptual and analytical tool, that conceptualisations of children were broadly similar in the North and South but differed in their focus and enactment in both fledgling states. These disparities are largely attributable to the very different political, social and religious orientations of both jurisdictions and the use of education as a vehicle for nation-building, as well as identity and gender formation. The article also explores alternative conceptualisations of children in education policy in the North and South by presenting case study 'outliers' of educational provision. A century since partition, conclusions and implications are noted that resonate with contemporary elements of convergence and divergence on educational policy and the conceptualisation of children across the island of Ireland.

Keywords: constructions of childhood; curriculum; Irish Free State; Northern Ireland; philosophy of education

Introduction

This article explores the conceptualisation of children, and of childhood more broadly, in educational documentation, particularly primary school curricula, in the 26-county Irish Free State (South) and the 6-county Northern Ireland (North) in the 1920s following the partition of Ireland. Both North and South employed their

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respective education systems, and the children within each jurisdiction, to build a desired national identity and nationhood. The consequences of such actions incite a particularly interesting context of educational inquiry, which has stimulated the authors of this article to further explore the context of the island of Ireland in the 1920s. A central concern of this article relates to the changing constructions and discourses on children and childhood across space and time that are in evidence from the early days following partition, and how these may or may not have converged on either side of the border. In particular, we identify citizenship, nationalism, religion and gender as key elements influencing educational policy and practice.

The article will bring into sharp focus the impact of past conceptualisations on our current understanding of childhood in providing for children's needs and rights from a societal and educational viewpoint. It begins by delineating the wider societal context in the North and South, including a specific focus on the educational context of both jurisdictions. It then presents the conceptual and analytical framework of Sorin and Galloway's (2006) constructions of childhood, which is used to provide a critical analysis of the key curriculum policy documents that underpinned education policy and provision in both jurisdictions, distilling insights relating to the conceptualisation of children. While these national curriculum documents represent the State vision, the article also reveals tensions and dissent within each by presenting alternative provisions in the form of one 'outlier' in both the North and South. The Discussion section synthesises and distils the key insights from both jurisdictions, drawing conclusions for contemporary policy and practice.

Societal and educational context

Irish Free State

In the Free State, the 1920s represented a decade of political and social friction that emanated in response to the local particularities of the newly formed Irish Free State. This is evident in the revival of the Irish language and the promotion of Irish games and traditions, both priorities of the Free State government in recognition of a militant and cultural nationalism that had become intertwined in the quest for political independence. Akenson (1975, p. 107) asserts that this period in the Free State was characterised by a 'cultural implosion', whereby the Free State removed itself from wider spheres of international influence, including Northern Ireland. Such an isolationist stance, creating an island of authenticity 'surrounded by an alien world' (White, 2010, p. 7) is not unusual in post-colonial contexts, as the Free State sought to build a national identity and nationhood by retreating to a mythological and idealised past. The emerging political context created many impedances in response to the desire to secure political legitimacy.

Running parallel to this was the reorientation of the primary school curriculum towards an essential Irishness as cultivated, orderly and pure. The school, and more specifically children, were considered suitable vehicles to place specific parameters on the formation of a newfound Irish identity. While in the earlier visionary Democratic Programme of 1919 (Dáil Éireann, 1919) children were centred as a key focus and priority in the national imagination within an independent Ireland, following political

independence the framing and positioning of children shifted again. Thereafter, their critical role in the revival of the Irish language and culture, and indeed the legitimacy of the State, was embedded within national education policy. The thrust of education policy was best articulated in 1922 by Pádraig Ó Brolcháin, Chief Officer to the Minister, when he stated that the new government would 'work with all its might for the strengthening of the national fibre by giving the language, history, music and tradition of Ireland their natural place in the life of Irish schools' (Department of Education, 1925, p. 6). The realisation of this governmental aspiration required a fundamental reappraisal of the primary school curriculum, undertaken in 1922 (National Programme Conference, 1922) and revised in 1926 (National Programme Conference, 1926).

Alongside nationalism, Catholicism represented the other aspect of identity for the majority of the Free State population, with 93% of the population pledging allegiance to the Catholic Church in the 1920s. Following independence, the Catholic Church further concretised its control over the education system, articulating in 1921 that 'the only satisfactory system of education for Catholics is one wherein Catholic children are taught in Catholic schools by Catholic teachers under Catholic control' (Irish Catholic Directory, 1921, pp. 577–578). The State–Church alliance in education was largely a pragmatic and symbiotic relationship, with the Free State benefitting from the financial resources and reputational legitimacy of the Catholic Church in the provision of education and other social services (Whyte, 1990). The education system was described by the Department of Education in 1926 as being 'semi-state', with power shared between the State and the local (largely clerical) school managers (Department of Education, 1926, p. 7). The Catholic Church's vision for education as a process to shape the child and to save his/her mortal soul formed a natural fit with cultural national ideology, and collectively these two ideologies dominated the conceptualisation of children in the Free State in the 1920s.

Northern Ireland

North of the new border, the 1920s were characterised by the political supremacy of Protestant Unionism, and, in terms of education, by the unsuccessful efforts of the first Minister of Education, Lord Londonderry, to create a new education system under local education authority control (in line with reforms led 20 years earlier in England by his father as President of the Board of Education) and with greatly reduced church influence. The vast majority of Protestants in the new Northern Ireland were political unionists, supportive of the union with Great Britain. By contrast, most Catholics (who were in the minority in Northern Ireland) were political nationalists, resentful of their separation from the rest of Ireland, loyal to the educational policies of the Catholic Church and supportive of the promotion of Gaelic–Irish culture, including history, language, music and traditions (Farren, 1986, 1995). The early 1920s in particular were thus marked in the North by considerable mutual antagonism, suspicion and hostility between the two communities.

The history of education during the first decade of Northern Ireland's existence is, as McGrath (2000, p. 1) notes, 'a tale of one of the most profound forms of power; the power to fashion fundamental values and beliefs in schools'. As such, there is little

doubt that the partition of Ireland offered an opportunity for the Protestant–Unionist majority in particular to find ideological expression in a way that had not been possible hitherto in the unified 32 counties (Farren, 1995).

Before making any reforms, the newly appointed Minister of Education, Lord Londonderry, established a Departmental Committee of Enquiry in September 1921 to 'enquire and report on the existing organisation and administration of the Educational Services' (Ministry for Education of Northern Ireland, 1922, p. 7). However, the subsequent refusal of the Catholic Primate, Cardinal Logue, to nominate four Catholic representatives to the Lynn Committee in 1921 inevitably led to a set of recommendations which were without doubt heavily influenced by Protestant–Unionist educational assumptions. The refusal of the Catholic Primate, Cardinal Logue, to nominate four representatives to the Lynn Committee in 1921—or even send along observers—has been variously interpreted as, on the one hand, a pivotal error on the part of the Catholic Church and a surrendering of their 'last shred of influence' (Akenson, 1973, p. 52) over the creation of a new education system in the North (Buckland, 1986) and, on the other hand, a justifiable refusal to cooperate in a deliberate and largely predetermined process to reduce Catholic clerical influence over schools (Farren, 1995), a legitimate refusal to cooperate with the government of the North, implicated in the frequent abuse of Catholics (McGrath, 2000), and a rejection of its partisan chairperson, R. J. Lynn, who would later refer to Catholics in a parliamentary debate as 'a race of murderers' (NI Commons, 1923).

The ensuing 1923 Education Act, based largely on the Lynn Committee's recommendations, but with an amendment by Lord Londonderry to eliminate religious instruction in fully funded schools, led to a prolonged period of political and religious agitation which would dominate the remainder of the decade. The period demonstrates the power of the Protestant clergy (albeit a small group of influential church leaders) to galvanise public and eventually political support to repeal the contested elements of Lord Londonderry's original 1923 Education Act in the later 1925 and 1930 Education Acts, securing 'simple Bible instruction' and ensuring tighter control over the appointment of Protestant teachers to state-funded schools. By 1930 the Catholic Church had also secured a major concession in respect of partial government funding of capital building projects in Catholic schools. Despite the short-term benefits of political and religious compromise, it is clear that at the end of a decade of wrangling, the 1930 Education Act in reality only served to copper-fasten a religiously divided and unequally funded education system, which was a reflection of Unionist political dominance and Protestant clerical influence.

Methodological approach and analytical framework

This article employs document analysis on the key 'deliberate' and advertent sources relating to curriculum provision in the North and South in the 1920s. These include the *Final Report of the Departmental (Lynn) Committee on the Educational Services in Northern Ireland* (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1923) and the subsequent *Programmes of Instruction* of 1924 and 1928 (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1924, 1928) in the North and the reports of the National Programme Conference (1922, 1926) in the South. Bowen (2009, p. 37) asserts that:

> Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge.

The focus on these key national curriculum documents and other relevant sources developed and published in the 1920s provides for a rich interrogation of their key discourses and silences. Complementing document analysis, narrative policy analysis (Roe, 1994) is employed to create a metanarrative and to bring coherence to the analysis emanating from the individual documents. Narrative policy analysis also facilitates the introduction of wider primary and secondary sources, including the contextualisation of wider influences on curricular developments and the conceptualisations of childhood.

Sorin and Galloway (2006) have identified ten constructions of childhood that capture the rich and varied ways in which children and childhood have been understood and represented over time. For the purpose of this article, five of these conceptualisations are explored in detail as they are used in the critique and analysis of the historical educational documents in the subsequent sections.

The child as innocent

Through this lens, childhood is seen as a distinct time of innocence, with children in a natural state of goodness to be tended by protective adults, who mould them into appropriately behaving adults and help them reach their potential. Criticisms of this approach highlight the lack of agency identified for children within it.

The child as evil

Notions of the child as evil are strongly linked with the concept of 'original sin'. In this concept, the role of the adult is to prevent children from giving in to their inherently evil urges and instincts. Again, children are seen as lacking agency, and society must be maintained through transmission of morality from adults to children.

The child as the adult-in-training

Children are portrayed in this construction as a 'defective form of adult, social only in their future potential, but not in their present being' (Corsaro, 1997, p. 6). Childhood is a time of practice for adulthood, whereby indoctrination imbues children with appropriate skills, abilities and attitudes to maintain the social order (Sorin, 2005).

The commodified child

In this construction, the child is used by adults to achieve goals that are held by adults and are not necessarily in the child's interests. The child is essentially powerless in the face of a potentially abusive adult world that commodifies him or her for its own benefit and profit.

The agentic child

Children are seen as capable and competent, guiding the course of their own learning through interaction with their cultures and with other human beings.

Constructions of childhood in education policy documents

Before moving on to the analysis and critique of the most pertinent curricular and education policy documents from the North and South in the 1920s, it is important to contextualise curricular provision in Ireland prior to partition, in order to establish a joint baseline from which developments post-partition can be tracked. The *Revised Programme of Instruction* (1900) (Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, 1902) underpinned curricular provision on the entire island of Ireland for more than two decades prior to partition. Its introduction marked an important shift in education policy away from a system of payment by results, transferring significant powers to inspectors for the payment and promotion of teachers (Coolahan & O'Donovan, 2009). Such a radical shift in both administrative and pedagogical terms engendered much resistance among stakeholders and resulted in uneven enactment of the curriculum and a wide disparity in pupil experiences in the era (Walsh, 2012, pp. 59–84). The 1900 curriculum introduced a strong focus on the holistic development of the child, placing a greater emphasis on his/her physical and kinaesthetic learning. Three of Sorin and Galloway's constructions are strikingly evident within the 1900 programme, namely 'the child as the adult in training', 'the child as evil' to a lesser extent and, surprisingly for the context and time, 'the agentic child'. In terms of the agentic child, the programme envisaged the child as a discoverer, placed a focus on the development of positive attitudes and dispositions, and hands-on learning and the application of learning in the school environment. While these first two conceptualisations continued to be prevalent in the North and South in the 1920s, the construction of the child as agentic is much less evident following partition.

Curricular provision in the Free State in the 1920s

The focus of this section is a simultaneous analysis of the two curricula developed in the Free State in the 1920s by the National Programme Conference (1922, 1926). Given the wider societal context, Catholic and nationalist discourses underscored curriculum provision in the South in the 1920s. These twin pillars of Catholicism and nationalism impacted significantly on the conceptualisation of children in the curriculum documents. Indeed, wider Vatican thinking on the role of the State and the Church in education, as articulated through Encyclicals such as *Divinii Illius Magistri* (1929) and *Quadragesima Anno* (1931), is embedded within these curriculum documents (Glendenning, 1999). As Coolahan (2009) notes, there is little articulation in these programmes of a theoretical framework or curricular philosophy, but much can be gleaned regarding their theoretical and philosophical orientation from their language. Unsurprisingly, the 1922 and 1926 curricula were dominated by the constructions of the 'child as evil', in need of strict discipline and control, 'the commodified child', whose role was to meet adult goals for the creation of a Catholic and Gaelic

state, and the 'child as the adult in training', aiming to imbue the child with the skills needed for a strictly gendered future.

Informed by the doctrine of 'original sin', the curricula in the 1920s were underpinned by a belief that children were imperfect, born with sin and in need of rescue and salvation. This construction is evident within the 1922 curriculum, which indicates that children 'should be trained to habits of prompt obedience' (National Programme Conference, 1922, p. 15). The implicit message appears to be that without adult guidance to ensure 'obedience', children would not be capable of self-directed good behaviour. Methodologies and pedagogies advocated in the 1922 and 1926 curricula were authoritarian and didactic in nature, focusing on memorisation, rote learning and transcription, with few opportunities for the exploration and discovery that were so inherent in the more agentic 1900 curriculum (Walsh, 2007). This construction became further embedded within the 1926 curriculum, where children were again viewed through the lens of the 'child as evil'. There was an expectation that the teacher would 'constantly inculcate, in connection with secular subjects, the practice of charity, justice, truth, purity, patience, temperance and obedience to lawful authority and to all other moral virtues' (National Programme Conference, 1926, p. 21). This conceptualisation promoted the position of the Catholic Church in Ireland, creating generations of loyal adherents to the faith (Inglis, 1998).

The second conceptualisation highly evident in the 1920s Free State curricula was that of 'the commodified child'. Here, children are viewed as a means of achieving the adult goals for the creation of a Gaelic, Catholic state. It is clear that the first Democratic Programme (Dáil Éireann, 1919) of the new Irish State saw the aim of education as to produce 'citizens of a free and Gaelic Ireland'. This language is culturally and socially loaded and consequently, so too was the curriculum children were exposed to. Organisations such as the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), the Gaelic League and Aireacht na Gaeilge were represented at the first National Programme Conference, which had a remit to 'frame a program, or series of programs, in accordance with the Irish ideals and condition…' (National Programme Conference, 1922, p. 3). The curriculum itself was founded on reimagining an identity for the Irish people. The 1922 curriculum stated that the previous 1900 curriculum 'generally speaking, was felt to be out of harmony with national ideals and requirements' (p. 3).

In this context, schools were arenas for power struggles over nationality, religion and language, a struggle in which the child was often the unwitting subject (Walsh, 2018, p. 27). There was, so to speak, no need to attend to the child's own interests, no need for the child's subjectivity as such, since the child was reduced to becoming an object of projection of the desires of a new Irish Free State. The teaching of history was viewed, for example, as a means 'to develop the best traits of the national character and to inculcate national pride and self-respect', thus proving that 'the Irish nation has amply justified its existence' (National Programme Conference, 1922, p. 5).

The Irish language was placed centre-stage in these curricula, as evidenced by the fact that each child was to receive a minimum of 1 hour per day instruction in Irish, while there was no time allocation given to any other subject area. The instruction of History, Geography, Singing and Physical Training was to be given through the medium of Irish. Infants were to be taught solely through the medium of Irish, regardless

of what their mother tongue was. It was also of prime importance within the 1926 document that 'teachers impart to children (4–8) a vernacular power over the language' (p. 10) at all costs. The very fact that the curriculum was serving this purpose meant that children were viewed as a 'commodity', a means to achieving the adult goals of a Catholic, Gaelicised and nationalist Ireland.

Lastly, the construction of the child as 'the adult in training' is evident in the 1922 and 1926 curricula, mirroring the 1900 curriculum with regards to the gendered division of curricular subjects. For example, the 1900 curriculum stated that 'the average primary school girl, when she assumes the position of housewife' should be able 'to perform the ordinary culinary and washing operations that may appertain to her position' and part of this role involved 'the preservation of the "sweetness" of the house' (Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, 1902, p. 27). This construction of girls as mini-wives ('adults in training') persisted in the 1922 and 1926 curricula. Cookery and needlework instruction were placed centre-stage in the curriculum for 'girls only'. Every girl was to receive 3 hours of needlework instruction each week. Cookery and Laundry Work, again for girls only, involved the teaching of girls in domestic tasks such as 'doing up collars and cuffs', starching and ironing and preparing household meals. Thus, it is evident that girls were regarded as 'adults in training', progressing through the stages of development to reach mature adulthood—or rather a future engendered role of domesticity. The ideal of female domesticity was synonymous with care, dependency, passivity and self-sacrifice, which informed gendered curriculum objectives of this time. The word 'woman' meant domesticity, nurturing and dependency and was closely linked to the image of the Virgin Mary in Irish Catholicism (Ramblado-Minero and Pérez-Vides, 2006). The mother was perceived as the core of the family, which was an idealised structure in Irish nationalist and unionist discourse at this time (Allison, 2013). Boys and girls were often educated in separate buildings as the Catholic Church long regarded the co-education of children as a violation of the proper and appropriate separation of the sexes (Tyack & Hansot, 1990). The gendered division of curricular subjects can be read in relation to the Church's teaching that the sexes are meant by divine design to be different and complementary, each having equal dignity and made in the image of God. It could also be seen to function as a mechanism through which to reproduce a highly patriarchal society. This was also evident in the roles ascribed to men and women in education. Female teachers were referred to as 'mistress' while male teachers were termed 'master'.

While children were ascribed a low social status, with little evidence of the 'agentic child' post-partition, their criticality in the revival of the Irish language, and indeed in the legitimacy of the new Free State, came to the fore in education policy in the 1920s. In this context, the child tends to be objectified through an elitist order, an aristocratic principle in education (Säfström, 2019), which says that the destiny of the child is already given, and is reliant on an aristocratic, hierarchical order in which a (nationalistic) elite (jointly political and religious) reproduces itself by a constant subordination of others, and through controlling change. Teaching in such a context is to lure out that which the aristocratic child already has inside; the authentic self needs to be brought out through schooling and perfected. The perfection of such self means to perfect the nation itself and shield it; isolating the child, the nation, from the

influences of other forces not in agreement with the nationalist and profoundly religious world view. The new child to be created through schooling within the new state is thus shaped by a divine order, confirmed by history, religion as well as political power.

Curricular provision in Northern Ireland in the 1920s

The decade following partition and the establishment of Northern Ireland's new education system also reveals much about how adults there constructed children and childhood. This is reflected in particular through a series of key curriculum-related documents which have also been analysed using Sorin and Galloway's (2006) typology of childhood.

Throughout the decade, which began with the deliberations of the *Departmental Committee on the Educational Services in Northern Ireland* (the Lynn Committee) and the publication of its *Interim Report* (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1922) and *Final Report* (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1923), continued through the revised *Programmes of Instruction* of 1924 and 1928 (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1924, 1928) and concluded with the substantial *Report of the Departmental Committee of Enquiry on the Programme of Instruction in Public Elementary Schools* in 1931 (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1931), children were most commonly viewed as 'adults in training' or as 'commodities' (Sorin & Galloway, 2006, p. 17). Repeatedly, the content of the *Programmes of Instruction* was interpreted by its authors (as well as by its critics) as a vehicle to deliver curricular content but also, crucially, to inculcate civic values to suit their own 'societal imperatives' (Sorin & Galloway, 2006, p. 17). Given the particular historical context of the 1920s, it is clear that it was not a case of the social order being *reproduced*, as Woodrow (1999) suggests, so much as *produced* for the first time and then resolutely defended in the newly formed jurisdiction. Within the socio-politically deterministic models of childhood thus created, power can be seen to reside exclusively with adults.

The often bitter wrangling of the 1920s arose precisely because of this realisation and because political, civic and religious leaders on both sides of the divide were determined to preserve and indeed extend their own power, and limit the power of their opponents to shape these 'commodified' children or 'adults in training' through the processes of schooling. As such, it could be argued that the conceptualisation of childhood through the 1920s in Northern Ireland goes further than in Sorin and Galloway's typology, so that children are conceived of not simply as 'adults in training' but as '*citizens* in training'. While there are multiple instances of this conceptualisation throughout the decade, two examples have been selected below which help to illustrate this: the first describing the earliest efforts of the Ministry of Education to establish an education system to promote loyalty to the British Empire, and the second in relation to gender-specific curricular considerations.

First, and notwithstanding the confirmation in the Lynn Committee's *Final Report* (June 1923) that the new Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland would follow 'as nearly as possible' (p. 168) the aforementioned 1900 programme set by the Commissioners of National Education (for the entire island of Ireland), there was

nevertheless a very clear determination to create a system which would ensure allegiance to the Empire and protect against dissension (e.g. the explicit promotion of elements of the Irish culture, history and language). In a subsection entitled 'Loyalty', the report affirms that in all state-funded schools 'the children shall be trained in habits of loyalty to the Constitution of Northern Ireland and to the British Empire'. In addition, teachers were required to take an oath of allegiance; the flying of the Union Jack flag was encouraged 'on suitable occasions'; and no books were to be used in the classroom 'to which reasonable objection might be entertained on political grounds' (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1923, p. 208). In relation to the teaching of history in particular, the report adds that there should be a focus on the history of 'Great Britain, and of Ireland and especially Ulster as part of the United Kingdom' (p. 197). Similarly, the 'sketch' of a syllabus of instruction in Civics specifically includes 'The Empire – its extent and importance to civilisation; privileges and responsibilities of its citizens' (p. 204). Meanwhile, despite (or indeed perhaps because of) the all-Ireland resurgence of Irish language since the 1880s, Northern Ireland's (Protestant-dominated) Lynn Committee stated that there was no justification for its special status and decided to treat it like any other language, precluding its teaching henceforth below standard five (11 years old) in line with the practice of other 'foreign' languages. Unsurprisingly, therefore, the decade is marked by the determined resistance of the Catholic community to transfer its schools over to state control, which would have brought much more generous funding but which would have threatened the cultural identity of the child as a 'commodity' and an 'adult in training'. McGrath (2000) concludes that Cardinal Logue and his colleagues chose the right option in refusing to transfer their schools to the State in the 1920s and in retaining firm control over Catholic schools, a decision which, it is argued, proved crucial in sustaining the identity of a coherent Catholic minority community in Northern Ireland through to the present day.

Second, it is clear that curricular documents in Northern Ireland in the 1920s reflect an unquestioning extension of the gendered approach to practical subjects already apparent in the 1900 *Revised Programme of Instruction in National Schools* (e.g. needlework, cookery, laundry work for girls). Mirroring the situation south of the border (though without any reference to Catholicism or indeed Protestantism), the Lynn Committee's *Final Report* (June 1923) includes a discussion of the desirability of extending provision across both rural and urban primary schools for girls (only) to be taught practical subjects such as 'cookery', 'laundry-work' and 'household management' and for boys to be taught 'woodwork'. The concept of the child as 'the adult in training' is further exemplified by the discussion of the desirability of developing Higher Schools of Domestic Economy where, as in the Free State, assumptions are made regarding the future occupation of most girls:

> . . . it is rightly claimed by all social reformers that on good housewifery depends largely the success of the home. Seeing that the majority of women are likely to be engaged in household management it can hardly be denied that technical training in the domestic arts is as needful as a literary education. (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1923, p. 35)

Alternative provisions/outliers

While the sections above have delineated the core curricular provisions in the North and South, it is important to avoid simplistic, one-dimensional images of any society or education system. There was of course dissent in both jurisdictions to such constructions of education, children and childhood, and exploring alternative viewpoints can crystallise understanding of the dominant discourse through bringing into relief its key elements against the backdrop of opposing perspectives. As Walsh and Lalor (2015) point out, since the work of early writers like Durkheim, Marx and Oakeshott, we have been aware that education generally functions as a mechanism by which to reproduce the morals, norms and expectations of the dominant culture, but occasionally education can be used as a form of dissent from these, with a view to the transformation of society. This may particularly be the case when individuals reject the vision of schooling articulated by government and seek to create unconventional approaches to education. Below is a profile of two alternative provisions, or outliers, one from each jurisdiction, which conceptualised the child in a different way to the dominant national curriculum, and by their very difference help to illustrate the context in which they existed.

Irish Free State—Montessori and Mason methods in Waterford

When Maria Montessori visited Co. Waterford in 1927, there were three Montessori schools informed by her educational principles (Montessori, 1912), the first of which was St. Otteran's National School which was a recognised school of the national system (Cummins & Phelan, 1996). This school had been founded by the Mercy Sisters in 1920 led by Rev. Mother de Sales Lowry, who in turn was educated by a sister of the renowned Irish-Belgian educator, the Abbot Marmion. She introduced the Montessori method for teaching 4- to 7-year-olds to the Junior Section of St. Otteran's school, and in this setting she sought to rejuvenate education for Irish children by using the humanistic approach, placing great emphasis on spontaneity, self-discipline and a training of the senses. This was informed by both Montessori and the Mason methods of teaching, which were of the viewpoint that education was for the whole person, that the child was a subject rather than an object for the desires of the State, and that the child had value in him or herself. These views resonated strongly with those of the *Revised Programme of Instruction* (1900) and indeed with Sorin and Galloway's conceptualisation of 'the agentic child', but stood in sharp contrast to the deeply held beliefs of the wider educational system after partition that children should be controlled and moulded by adults for the benefit of the State ('the commodified child') and in order to purge 'original sin' ('the child as evil').

The Montessori method greatly impressed Senator and Nobel laureate W. B. Yeats, who, consumed by his desire after the Treaty to educate the new Ireland artistically, was given the task of advising the Irish government on educational matters. Yeats made three Senate speeches on education, the most important one comparing the primitive condition of many Irish schools to that of the Montessori ideal at St. Otteran's: 'I have seen a school lately in a South of Ireland town managed by the Sisters of Mercy, and it should be a model to all schools' (Pearse, 2001, p. 98). Yeats'

views echoed the growing debate and desire of a minority to readdress the philosophical compass guiding the structure and provision of Irish education at this time. This was reflected in the introduction to the 1922 curriculum (National Programme Conference, 1922, p. 3), which stated that '... a new and awakening interest in educational matters was evident among public representative bodies'. The anti-intellectualism stance adopted by the Irish government, most notably manifested by the censorship laws of 1929, 1946 and 1967, was immediately at odds with Montessori's method, which encouraged self-directed play, collaborative play and unity. Irish identity was equated with the stereotypical Catholic and Gaelic descriptors, and those who did not fit within these two narrow categories were marginalised. Montessori and Yeats refused to accept that children should be sacrificed to the ideologies of their governments and nations, an attitude diametrically opposed to the educational policy of the day, which envisioned education as a vehicle for nation-building. Equally radical for the time, the Montessori classroom was and continues to be built upon the ideals of inclusivity and diversity (Powell, 2008). Organised in a way that naturally promotes cooperation and an appreciation for diversity, the Montessori method did not support gender-specific activities or sport, encompassing a view of the child as 'agentic' and opposing the strictly gendered approach to the child as 'the adult in training' within the mainstream curricula of the day.

Perhaps it is little wonder therefore that the educational approaches espoused in Waterford met with little support, and in some cases outright aggression, in the post-partition Free State. Cummins and Phelan (1996, p. 2) describe Mother de Sales Lowry operating with 'meagre financial support', although St. Otteran's did fall under the auspices of the Department of Education. These authors also note that the proponents of the Montessori method had little success in influencing the wider educational system. Although they were afforded the opportunity to speak at the 1924 Annual Congress of the INTO on the Montessori method, 'the Department of Education, however, did not see fit to make any innovation in early infant education in Irish primary schools at that period in the new state's history' (Cummins & Phelan, 1996, p. 4). Proponents of the Montessori method were also treated with some suspicion as they failed to mirror the male, Catholic hegemonic educational structures of the time: the Montessori educators were largely female and were supported by Professor Edward P. Culverwell of the (Anglican) Trinity College Dublin, and the poet Yeats was known for his spiritualism and mysticism. The Montessori method was particularly vigorously attacked by the influential Rev. Timothy Corcoran, Professor of Education at the Catholic University College Dublin. According to Titley (1983a), Corcoran was critical of any form of education that was not thoroughly Catholic, but child-centred approaches like those of Montessori were the subject of particularly uncompromising and even vitriolic attacks. His criticisms were based on Montessori's emphasis on children's freedom to learn and flourish in self-directed ways, whereas he believed in contrast that 'folly is bound up in the heart of a child, and the rod of correction shall drive it away' (Corcoran, 1930, p. 206). He also advocated rigid control by adults to ensure the construction of a new Gaelic, Catholic state. Here we see the personification of the opposing constructions of the 'agentic child' on the one hand and the 'child as evil' and 'the commodified child'/'child as adult in training' on the other hand. There is little doubt that it was Corcoran's rather than

Montessori's conceptualisation that held the upper hand in education in the Free State in the period following partition, and Titley (1983a, p. 137) refers to Corcoran as 'the watchdog of the church on educational developments'.

Nevertheless, the Montessori method survived in St. Otteran's (albeit in another location after 1961 when the building was demolished) until the 1970s, when the school gradually moved towards the more established Department of Education approaches. Critical appraisal of education during this time highlights an 'insularity of perspective' (Coolahan, 1996, p. 302) among those with power and influence in educational policy development. Childhood was, as Coolahan (1996) points out, 'adult-shaped' and inculcated future generations with largely unquestioned values, prejudices and aspirations.

Northern Ireland—the Arellian Nursery

In Northern Ireland too there was an important outlying example of a more progressive approach to education than that advocated in Ministry of Education *Programmes of Instruction* for elementary schools of the time: the Arellian Nursery (the first nursery in Ireland north or south) which opened its doors on 5 November 1928 in Belfast. The nursery was founded by the Past Pupils' Association of Richmond Lodge School, whose philanthropic intentions were to facilitate nursery provision for children of working mothers supported by volunteer professional medical practitioners and helpers; at its inception, the participant children were almost exclusively from socially disadvantaged backgrounds.

In contrast to the prevailing traditional approach evident in the Ministry of Education's *Programmes of Instruction* with their focus on the gender-specific 'training' of adults and, more specifically, loyal citizens of the British Empire, the founders of the Arellian Nursery espoused a much more agentic conceptualisation of the child, with childhood viewed as a place of being in its own right and the adult's role as a co-constructor of being (Sorin & Galloway, 2006). Such a position was highlighted by Dorothy Moore, the First Superintendent of Arellian, in her first Annual Report, where she affirmed: 'The little child has to be himself (sic) in relation to others' (Moore, 1930, p. 8). As detailed in its Annual Reports, the Arellian Nursery aimed to provide a healthy diet, exercise and fresh air, regular medical and dental checks, free play and engagement in purposeful activities (McCavera, 1988). The aims and provision of a multitude of independent non-gendered play activities also clearly reinforced the idea of 'the agentic child', who was to be offered 'the freedom and the possibilities for playing and developing through his (sic) play at his (sic) own rate, which is every child's right' (Moore, 1930, p. 4).

As the concept of a nursery school began to cultivate, rather than drawing from the education system in Northern Ireland (or indeed in the Free State), the founders looked to England for inspiration. A significant impact on the founders of Arellian was the pioneer of the English nursery movement, Margaret McMillan. A member of the Froebel Society, McMillan affirmed that the nursery school was a means of developing physical, emotional and mental well-being and gave an unprecedented opportunity to transform the early lives of children. Her mantra was 'We must try to educate every child as if he (sic) were our own' (McMillan, cited in Jarvis &

Liebovich, 2015, p. 924). This view of childhood again represented 'agentic' principles, wishing to create superior opportunities for the child, facilitating decision-making and independent thinking within a stimulating environment.

By 1928 Arellian had moved to a larger site closer to the working-class community it served. Evidence of agentic principles were seen in the employment of a new assistant teacher, Mrs Margaret Crawford, in September 1931, who was Froebel trained, and in the provision for play in their new premises, which boasted a garden pond and a jungle gym: 'We must certainly have had the first climbing frame in the country, and no contraption has so gladdened the hearts of children' (McNeill, 1949, p. 6).

Privately funded until 1937, and thus without ministerial constraints, Arellian enjoyed the freedom to explore non-traditional pedagogical approaches, where the child-centred focus was on providing opportunities for learning through play, discovery, freedom, exploration and independent thinking, in sharp contrast to the restrictions of the contemporary Ministry of Education *Programmes of Instruction*. Following initial informal support, the Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland under the Nursery School Regulations, signed by A. N. Bonaparte Wyse, stated that 'The Ministry may grant aid to Nursery Schools' (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1937, p. 109). This included paying the salary of the superintendent, as long as certain conditions were met. This highlighted a shift by the Ministry of Education in giving formal approval to the provision of nursery schools, even if full funding was not provided.

Discussion and conclusion

This article has explored and analysed the complex ways in which children were understood and conceptualised in educational documentation across the borders and boundaries of a newly partitioned Ireland in the 1920s. The effect of partition was to reinforce monocultural societies, both North and South, allowing the creation of separate states through the enactment of majority cultural policies in societal structures such as education. Despite the substantive social, political and religious differences in the North and South and the use of the education system to nurture distinct national identities, the dominant conceptualisation of the child in both jurisdictions was that of 'the commodified child' (Sorin & Galloway, 2006). While there were differing actors in the North and South, the dynamics were in some ways very similar. Policy debates continued on similar trajectories to those before partition: the dynamics of education policy post-partition were affected in many ways by struggles between the Churches and the two new States, and this was arguably a continuation of the main dynamic of education policy debates pre-partition, albeit between the Churches and the National Commission.

However, the socio-cultural context in which these debates took place was significantly different post-partition when compared with pre-partition. For example, teacher education and the curriculum were organised differently, citizenship was fashioned differently and discipline, management and regulation orientated both jurisdictions on very specific paths. It is at the headline point of commodification that the similarities between the jurisdictions end, as this commodification of the child differed greatly in each. While it may appear on the surface that the only difference

between North and South lay in the actors involved, new tensions emerged in the South in response to the local particularities of the newly formed Irish Free State and in the North in response to the new emerging statehood within the British Empire. These tensions were, as they always are in education policy, connected to the 'problem of the population'—population as a resource for the State to manage, with regards to their productivity and docility within the new societies they wished to create. In the South, the child was conceptualised as a symbol of hope and purity for the rebirth and return to a mythical, Gaelic, Catholic, pre-colonial past. In contrast to the North, there was a greater homogeneity of identity framed by Catholicism and nationalism in the Free State, so there was no essential need for opposition between the nationalists' reimagining of a Celtic past and Catholicism, outside of small enclaves like the Montessori schools in Waterford. The resulting Irish identity, as representing both an ethnic Catholicism as well as a Celtic origin and authoritarianism, merges into the authentic self, giving meaning to the search for an Irish original ethnicity and identity. Schooling, and children, were the central mechanisms in this national endeavour, supported by the twin pillars of nationalism and Catholicism, and pedagogical considerations became subservient to wider political and nationalist imperatives. The curriculum was teacher-focused rather than child-centred, to facilitate the achievement of nationalist ideals and the building of Irish identity. The fact that children have their own voice, agency, knowledge, ideas and genetics—amongst other variables—was not just overlooked but actively suppressed. Equally important in the Free State was the drive to inculcate in children the skills for a strictly gendered future ('child as adult in training'), reinforcing the attitudes and requirements of a patriarchal society in which women and children were disenfranchised in order to create and reinforce the social order envisaged by those in power.

North of the border, the education system was mobilised to strengthen loyalty and allegiance to the Empire and looked outwards to Britain for its inspiration. Education policy was framed with the majority Unionist and Protestant population largely in mind, engaging the schools in the transmission and inculcation of (British) civic values. While the Catholic school sector remained influential throughout the period and successfully retained its religious and cultural identity (McGrath, 2000), parity of state funding came only 70 years later in 1993 (Education and Libraries NI Order, 1993). In both jurisdictions, the values of the majority cultures were transmitted in the primary schools with little consideration or respect for the minority traditions, thus accentuating the divisions already inherent in society (Titley, 1983b). Schools and education policy more broadly became a battleground for the fashioning of children into the desired projected adults and loyal citizens of the newly formed states. Equally important in both jurisdictions was the drive to inculcate in children the skills for a strictly gendered future ('the adult in training'), reinforcing the attitudes and requirements of a patriarchal society.

The dominant conceptualisation of the 'commodified child' as articulated in national policy documents in the North and South concealed tensions and alternative perspectives inherent in both jurisdictions. Thus, when considering the broader social contexts in the North and South it can be argued that new possibilities and dynamics of education policy production emerged at this time, although on the surface it may seem as though the only difference lay in the actors involved. In the South,

educational policy provision and the conceptualisation of children were at variance with the progressive views of the child as articulated in the Democratic Programme of 1919 (Dáil Éireann, 1919). This Democratic Programme viewed children as already members of the republic and in this, the State was projecting its wishes onto its children rather than children being a projection of the desire for a future citizen. This construction led to alternative provisions, such as the Montessori schools in Waterford, which sought to continue with the child-centred and progressive educational philosophy of the earlier 1900 curriculum. The pioneering Arellian Nursery in Belfast similarly provided an educational experience at variance with the national offering, valuing the agency and holistic nature of child development and learning.

In both jurisdictions, though, there was suspicion by the State and/or the Churches of such educational provisions that were at variance with national ideology. It may be that the potent mix of politics and religion that underpinned the development of educational policy and practice in the North and South post-partition meant that child-centred approaches, such as those represented by the Montessori schools in Waterford, never really had any strong hope of contesting the dominant discourse. In contrast, despite offering an alternative pathway, the Arellian Nursery gradually gained the respect and support of leading figures in government and within the Ministry of Education and had an impact on wider policy, with funding for nursery schools offered almost a decade later through the Ministry of Education's 1937 Nursery Regulations. In a practical sense, therefore, this outlier did have an impact and while the trajectory of Arellian's influence was slow and erratic, it could be argued that its pioneering founders paved the way for the current funded nursery system of Northern Ireland. Policy-making tends to be utopian. The Montessori schools and the Arellians offered a utopian ideal also; however, this 'ideal' was underpinned by social justice issues, while the policy 'ideal' both North and South post-partition was orientated towards education as nation-building. Policy is in many ways not intended to be 'practical', but rather stems from the enlightenment era and its intent is to propel us away from the inadequacies of the present to the ideals of the future, futures which were envisioned very differently North and South post-partition.

It is evident that childhood at that time was the epicentre of a contested space. Childhood, then, no less than now, occupies a space at the interface of many competing international, national, political, religious, social, cultural and economic agendas, and policies relating to children often exemplify these tensions. Then, as now, the voice of the child is often underrepresented in this contested space. Then, as now, societal power structures may dictate experiences of education far more powerfully than any input from those education serves: children.

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