

**FINAL REPORT**

**MARCH 2022**



# **CONTESTED CHILDHOODS**

## Across Borders & Boundaries

### A North–South Comparative Study

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## Part One – Final Report

### *Introduction*

This unique cross-border study, generously funded by the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS), examines the conceptualisation of children and of childhood in curricular documentation in the decade following the partition of Ireland in 1921, looking at developments in both the Irish Free State (the south) and also Northern Ireland (the north). In both cases education systems were deliberately used to help create and establish a particular national identity. The authors were particularly concerned to explore, first, the historical and educational context of Ireland north and south in the formative and often turbulent decade following partition, and, second, to critically examine the changing constructions of children and childhood, noting convergences and divergences through careful examination of original historical material including key curricular documentation but also archive material including original letters and minutes of meetings accessed historical archives. The study adopts the conceptual and analytical framework of Sorin and Galloway's (2006) constructions of childhood, and it is this framework which is subsequently employed throughout the study to facilitate a detailed, critical examination of the key curricular documents of the period north and south. The study also acknowledges that there were dissenting outliers to the dominant models of curricular provision, and two such examples are interrogated, one from each jurisdiction, highlighting in each case alternative provision and differing underpinning philosophies to the official conceptualisation of children at the time. The study then draws on both the official guidance (in the form of programmes of instruction) and the example of the outliers to present a series of concluding reflections.

### *Societal and Educational Context*

#### *Irish Free State*

For the newly formed Irish Free State, the decade following the partition of Ireland was marked by political and social friction. The new government was quick to revive the Irish language and Irish games and traditions, key elements of the strong cultural nationalism that had marked the struggle for independence from British sovereignty. Although not uncommon in other post-colonial settings, the decade saw what Akenson (1975, p. 107) refers to as a 'cultural implosion' as the new state sought to create a strong sense of national identity, largely through a withdrawal from international relations and an embrace of an idealised, mythological past.

Within such a determination to establish nationhood, the school was seen as an appropriate and readily available vehicle to help achieve the new government's aims. By 1922 the critical role of children in the revival of the Irish language and culture had been enshrined in educational policy. This was most clearly demonstrated by Pádraig Ó Brocháin, Chief Officer to the Minister, who declared 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 the government's aspirations can be seen in the revisions to the primary school curriculum, as first undertaken in 1922 (National Programme Conference, 1922) and subsequently revised in 1926 (National Programme Conference, 1926).

The Catholic Church occupied a central role within education and the state more generally. Following partition, the Catholic Church expressed their commitment to controlling the education system, asserting 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 relationship between church and state was at once pragmatic and symbiotic. Without doubt the new Free State was able to benefit from the financial and reputational strength of the Catholic Church in terms of educational provision (Whyte, 1990). Indeed, the Department of Education was to describe the education system as 'semi-state', since power was effectively shared between local (predominantly clerical) school managers and the State, and this symbiotic relationship, characterised by the natural fit of the two ideologies (church and state) was to dominate the conceptualisation of children throughout the first decade of the Free State.

### *Northern Ireland*

In the newly formed six-county Northern Ireland, the history of the decade following partition was dominated by the efforts of the Protestant, Unionist majority population to assert their control over the new jurisdiction and to thwart any efforts to undermine the Britishness of the new Northern Ireland by any means, including education. As McGrath (2000, p.1) notes, the history of education during the 1920s in Northern Ireland is 'a tale of one of the most profound forms of power; the power to fashion fundamental values and beliefs in schools'. The early part of the decade is characterised in particular by the ill-fated efforts of the aristocratic first Education Minister, Lord Londonderry, to create a new non-partisan education system, largely free of clerical influence, thus mirroring the work of his father (the 6<sup>th</sup> Marquess of Londonderry) who had been President of England's Board of Education at the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and whose reforms had largely succeeded in shifting control over education from the churches to newly formed local education authorities in England. Despite Lord Londonderry's English aristocratic credentials (he was a cousin of Winston Churchill, on

first name terms with the King and was a descendant of Viscount Castlereagh of Congress of Vienna fame), he sought to create a new education system in Northern Ireland where control over schools would be given over by the churches to the state.

Lord Londonderry's efforts to create a non-denominational education system in Northern Ireland failed however as he in turn incurred the opposition of the Catholic Church and subsequently the leaders of the main Protestant churches too. Initially, Londonderry set up 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). The refusal of the Catholic primate, Cardinal Logue, however to nominate Catholic representatives resulted in a Protestant dominated committee which (perhaps inevitably) produced a series of recommendations favouring the majority community. Commentators disagree as to the significance of Cardinal Logue's refusal to participate, with some arguing that this was a misguided move representing the surrendering of the 'last shred of influence' over the nascent education system (Akenson, 1973, p. 52), while others interpret this as an understandable and indeed well justified refusal to participate in a committee which seemed determined to eradicate the influence of the Catholic church and cultural Irishness (Farren, 1995).

The Protestant churches too became incensed by the suggestion in the 1923 Education Act that religious instruction would have no place in state-funded schools. As protests grew from the Protestant churches, Lord Londonderry was forced into making a series of concessions, guaranteeing 'simple Bible instruction' and permitting tighter control of the appointment of Protestant teachers to state-funded schools. By the end of the decade the Catholic church, while still refusing to give over control of their schools to the state, did secure a major concession by persuading the government to part-fund capital projects in their school sector, though equal funding would not be granted until more than half a century later (McGrath, 2000).

### ***Methodological Approach and Analytical Framework***

Our study is unique in its methodological approach, employing first a process of detailed document analysis of the key sources relating to curricula north and south of the Irish border throughout the 1920s. In particular, the project involved close analysis of the reports of the National Programme Conference (1922, 1926) in the Free State, as well as the *Final Report of the Departmental (Lynn) Committee on the Educational Services in Northern Ireland* (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1923) and the *Programmes of Instruction* of 1924 and 1928

(Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1924, 1928) in Northern Ireland. As Bowen (2009, p.37) notes,

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.

Narrative policy analysis (Roe, 1994) was also employed to complement the document analysis and to create a metanarrative, bringing additional coherence to the analysis emerging from the individual documents. This narrative policy analysis also allowed the incorporation of a wider range of primary and secondary sources, permitting the inclusion of wider influences on curricular provision and conceptualisations of childhood.

Sorin and Galloway's (2006) analytical framework was also adopted to provide a lens through which to examine the rich and varied ways in which children were represented through this formative decade in Irish history. In particular, five of the ten conceptualisations of childhood were explored in more detail through the examination of the historical educational documents: the child as innocent, the child as evil, the child as adult in training, the commodified child and the agentic child.

## ***Findings***

### ***(1) Constructions of Childhood in Education Policy Documents***

The 1900 National Curriculum was an important and interesting common starting point for this analysis as it was the last curriculum that applied to both North and South before partition. While some elements of a construction of 'the child as evil' were briefly evident in the 1900 National Curriculum, it is more accurately characterised by a view of 'the child as adult in training', and interestingly for its time, 'the agentic child'. This stands in stark contrast to the curricula developed North and South post-partition which were dominated by the construction of the 'child as evil', 'the child as commodity' and 'the child as adult in training' whose role was to meet adult goals for the creation of a British or Gaelic state respectively.

#### ***Curriculum in the 'Free State'.***

The Nationalists south of the border, desperate to separate themselves from the colonial past and re-invent a pre-colonial Irish identity, turned to the National Curriculum (1922; 1926) as



a means of doing so. Schools were arenas for power struggles over nationality, religion and language, a struggle in which the child was often the unwitting subject (Walsh, 2018). The twin pillars of Catholicism and Nationalism impacted significantly on the conceptualisation of children in the curriculum documents, and children were viewed as 'adults in training' for strictly gendered futures. 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 a future engendered role of domesticity.

Children were viewed not as active agents in control of their own learning, but rather as passive recipients who could be shaped and moulded to serve the ultimate goal of achieving Nationalism within a Catholic Irish State. The construction of 'the child as commodity' is evidenced in these curricula whereby the main aim of education, rather than being child-centred, was to meet adult goals for the creation of a Gaelic state. Nationalists viewed the curriculum as a means of sculpting and moulding children to fit the ideal of Nationalism:

'One of the chief aims of history should be to develop the best traits of the national character and to inculcate national pride and self-respect. This will not be attained by the cramming of dates and details but rather by showing that the Irish race has fulfilled a great mission in the advancement of civilization and that, on the whole, the Irish national has amply justified its existence' (The National Curriculum 1922, p. 5).

The Irish language was centre-stage and each child was to receive a minimum of one hour per day instruction in Irish, with no time allocation given to any other subject area. The instruction of History, Geography, Singing and Physical Training was to be given through the sole medium of Irish. Infants were to be taught solely through the medium of Irish, irrespective of what their mother tongue was. Irish step dancing and figure dancing were introduced to the curriculum to further embed nationalism and ensure children strive towards political freedom for the nation.

Informed by the doctrine of 'original sin', the construction of the 'child as evil' was also reflected. The role of teachers was that of "moulding to perfect form of his pupils' character... to 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).

It is quite astonishing that there was little reference made to the child and how they experienced learning, especially the infant child whose mother tongue was English and who went straight into an Irish medium school. There was, so to speak, no need to attend to the

child's own interests, and 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 lack of the 'child's voice' or even the lack of a perspective for the child's learning further entrenches the notion of curricula devoid of child-centredness.

### *Curriculum in Northern Ireland.*

Key documents considered in our analysis of developments north of the border include 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), the revised *Programmes of Instruction* of 1924 and 1928 (Ministry of Education for Northern Ireland, 1924, 1928) and the *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). Throughout these documents, children were most commonly viewed as 'adults in training' or as 'commodities' with the aim of inculcating civic values to suit 'societal imperatives' (Sorin & Galloway, 2006, p. 17). Political, civic and religious leaders on both sides of the divide sought to preserve and 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.

There was a clear determination to create a system which would ensure allegiance to the Empire and protect against the Gaelicisation evident south of the border (e.g. the explicit promotion of elements of the Irish culture, history and language). In all state-funded schools it was demanded that '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). The teaching of history focused on the history of 'Great Britain, and of Ireland and especially Ulster as part of the United Kingdom' (p. 197). As a result, the Catholic community refused 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'.

The conceptualisation of the child as 'adult in training', similar to the situation south of the border, was also strictly gendered. 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', 'laundrywork' and



‘household management’ and for boys to be taught ‘woodwork’. As in the Free State, assumptions were 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).

As a result, while on the surface the jurisdictions North and South had completely opposing aims for curriculum, our analysis uncovered very similar dynamics at play whereby children were conceptualised as adults in training and commodities for nation-building.

## *(2) Alternative Provisions/Outliers*

Despite the dominant curricular provisions in the North and South of Ireland highlighted above, it is important to note the presence of dissenting voices or outliers, representing alternative perspectives on education in general and early childhood in particular. In this study we highlight one example from each jurisdiction: one in the North and one in the South. As unconventional examples of educational practice at the time, these stood in sharp contrast to the otherwise one-dimensional conceptualisation of the child seen through the official curricula / programmes of instruction North and South.

### *Irish Free State - Montessori and Mason Methods*

In 1927 Maria Montessori visited County Waterford where there were three schools aligned to her principles of education, the most prominent of which was St Otteran’s National School. This school had been funded by the Mercy Sisters since 1920 under the leadership of Rev Mother de Sales Lowry who herself had been educated by the famous Irish-Belgian educator, the Abbot Marmion. Rev Mother De Sales Lowry introduced the Montessori method to the teaching of 4-7 year olds in the Junior Section of St Otteran’s school. Through this she promoted spontaneity, self-discipline and training of the senses, significantly also espousing a humanist approach to education, affirming that education was for the whole person and the child had value in their own right. As such, the practices bore greater resemblance to the *Revised Programme of Instruction* (1900) and with Sorin and Galloway’s concept of the ‘agentic child’ than with the official curricular documentation of the Free State during the 1920s. Nobel laureate and Senator W.B. Yeats, who had been given the task of advising the new Irish government on educational matters, strongly endorsed the practice at St Otteran’s, affirming that ‘I have seen a school lately in the South of Ireland managed by the Sisters of

Mercy, and it should be a model to all schools' (Pearse, 2001, p. 98). A minority within the new Irish Free State aligned to Yeats' views, however, by contrast the censorship laws of 1929, 1946 and 1967 evidenced the anti-intellectual views of the Irish government which stood in stark contrast to Montessori's advocacy of self-directed, collaborative play and unity. To be Irish was associated stereotypically with Catholic and Gaelic descriptors, and those who dissented were treated with suspicion and ultimately disempowered. The Montessori method rejected any suggestion of children being 'adults in training' and instead promoted agentic approaches promoting cooperation and appreciation for diversity and opposing gender-specific activities.

The educational principles espoused by Mother De Sales Lowry met with, at best, little support and, at worst, outright aggression. Even though St Otteran's was under the auspices of the Department of Education, the school was given 'meagre financial support' (Cummins and Phelin, 1996, p.2). It was also noted that although proponents of the Montessori method were invited to speak at the Annual Congress of the INTO in 1924, they failed to exert any influence on the wider education system at the time. They were also viewed with some suspicion as they were largely female in contrast to the male dominated Catholic structures within education and society as a whole. Rev Timothy Corcoran (Professor of Education at the Catholic University College Dublin) was particularly vitriolic in his criticism of the Montessori method because it was not Catholic but also due to its affirmation of child freedom and learning by self-direction which he believed to be diametrically opposed to the teaching of the Catholic church. He advocated rigid adult control of education within the new Gaelic, Catholic state and affirmed that 'folly is bound up in the heart of the child, and the rod of correction shall drive it away' (Corcoran, 1930, p.206). As 'the watchdog of the church on educational developments' (Titley, 1983a, p.137) Corcoran's views rather than Montessori's prevailed to influence education at the inception of the new Irish Free State. Despite these challenges, Montessori methods remained in St Otteran's until the 1970s when the school came under more established Department of Education practices. Education at this time was therefore largely insular and 'adult shaped' (Coolahan, 1996), influencing generations to come with largely unquestioned beliefs and values.

### *Northern Ireland – The Arellian Nursery*

Similarly, in Northern Ireland, we present the case study of an educational approach at odds with the dominant pedagogical discourse of the time. A mere seven years after partition, the first nursery in Ireland, north or south came into being. The Arellian Nursery opened its doors for the first time on 5<sup>th</sup> November, 1928 in Elmwood Presbyterian Church Halls, Belfast. Founded by the Past Pupils' Association of Richmond Lodge School, their desire was to support local communities, in particular serving the children of working mothers in disadvantaged areas of the city. In contrast to primary schooling of the day, the founders of the Arellian Nursery aligned to agentic conceptualisations of the child, with Dorothy Moore,

the first Superintendent of the nursery affirming, 'The little child has to be himself (sic) in relation to others' (Moore, 1930, p.8). She added that '...he will have the freedom and the possibilities for playing and developing through his play at his own rate, which is every child's right' (Moore, 1930, p.4).

Arellian Nursery espoused the importance of exercise, free play, fresh air, healthy eating and medical and dental care (McCavera, 1988). The founders looked east to the British mainland (rather than south to the Free State) and leading English figures such as Margaret McMillan, who pioneered the nursery movement and believed that the play-based nursery school approach developed children physically, emotionally and mentally, improving and transforming their lives for the better.

Many Arellian staff were also Froebel trained and had spent time developing their knowledge and experience in nurseries in England, most notably in Margaret McMillan's school at Deptford (McNeill, 1949). Despite Arellian's early success, the Ministry of Education was reluctant to offer financial support, not least since there was no statutory provision for nursery education. Consequently, when the nursery had outgrown its initial premises, Arellian had to self-fund the purchase of a new site. A new era dawned in early childhood education with the opening on 16 February 1931 of the first purpose-built nursery on the island of Ireland (McNeill, 1949).

'...our lovely big school room, with its one complete side of doors opening on to the verandah, the cloakroom, bathroom, kitchen and storeroom, all seemed to be flawless, and the sunlight, the open air and the garden, were as Paradise.' (McNeill, 1949, p.6)

A new Froebel-trained assistant teacher, Mrs Margaret Crawford, was appointed in September 1931. Following attendance at a Nursery School Association conference in London '...it was urged that all nursery schools should try to provide adequate opportunity for all forms of water play...' The Superintendent noted 'We are very proud of the pond in our garden.' (Moore, 1931, p.4.). They also provided a Jungle Gym affirming '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).

The continued success of Arellian led to a shift in thinking for the Ministry of Education in Northern Ireland, and eventually in 1937 the Belfast Education Committee agreed to provide some financial assistance to nursery schools which were (finally) recognised by the Ministry of Education. This also highlighted a shift in society's attitude with regard to nursery education whose agentic ideals contrasted with the more rigid elementary education of the time.

The *Board of Education Report on the Consultative Committee on Infant and Nursery Education* (Hadow Report, 1933) highlighted nursery provision as a positive addition to the education system, and important for a child's holistic development. The example of Arellian

is important: as a small but significant outlier, influenced by Froebel, McMillan and Owen, Arellian's contribution to nursery education and to agentic conceptualisations of childhood in Northern Ireland cannot be overestimated.

## *Discussion*

This unique cross-border exploration of the conceptualisation of children and childhood through curricular documentation in the decade following the partition of Ireland in 1921 has highlighted how partition effectively reinforced mono-cultural societies on both sides of the Irish border, evidenced through the use of education and curricular programmes in particular to nurture distinct national identities.

Closer examination employing Sorin and Galloway's (2016) analytical framework has revealed that despite significant social, political and religious differences, both jurisdictions shared the dominant conceptualisation of the child as 'commodified', whereby the child is exploited by adults to achieve their adult goals even if these goals are not necessarily in the child's own interests. In such a context, Sorin and Galloway argue that the child is powerless against the process of commodification.

The study has also highlighted how the pre- and post-partition socio-cultural contexts differed and changed radically in terms of the content and focus of the respective school curricula as well as the organisation and structure of teacher education on both sides of the border. While there is similarity in terms of the conceptualisation of the child as 'commodified', the particular nature of the commodification was evidently significantly different in the Free State and Northern Ireland.

In the South, the child was viewed as embodying hope and purity, and a return to a pre-colonial, mythical, Catholic and Gaelic past. With the exception of schools like the Montessori school in Waterford (see above) there was a relatively homogenous identity framed by nationalism and Catholicism. In the search for an original, authentic Irish identity, schooling and children were the vehicles of progress, supported by Catholicism and nationalism at the expense of agentic considerations. It could therefore be argued that the curriculum was teacher-focused rather than child-centred, and there was active discouragement of pupil voice and agency. Also significant was the highly gendered approach to education, with the conceptualisation of the 'adult in training' made visible in preparation for gendered adult roles within an unquestionably patriarchal society in which women and children remained disenfranchised.

In Northern Ireland, the focus of the Lynn Committee was very clearly on the transmission and consolidation of British civic values, as written into the early programmes of instruction. While it has been argued that the Free State turned its gaze inwards, Northern Ireland looked east to the rest of the United Kingdom and actively discouraged any sense of Irishness or Gaelic culture and identity, which were perceived to threaten the new Unionist-dominated six-county jurisdiction. Schools became not just places of learning but a battleground of rival communities determined to maintain their respective identities against perceived threats. This resulted in a curriculum which was heavily weighted towards the Protestant/Unionist majority and a school management system which provided limited capital funding to the Catholic maintained sector for over 70 years until the Education and Libraries NI Order 1993. As in the South there was an unquestioningly gendered approach to education within a similarly patriarchal society.

This study has however highlighted the power of the outlier, exemplified through the Montessori School in Waterford and the Arellian nursery in Belfast. At variance with the dominant and all-powerful nation-building ideologies and conceptualisations of 'commodified' childhood in both states, these agentic outliers never posed a serious threat to the dominant discourse, and yet both served as the hope-filled embodiment of utopian educational ideals, adopting progressive, pioneering principles, and underpinned by a genuine sense of social justice.

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## Part Two – An account of the collaboration (so far)

This project addressed a significant void in the literature on the under-researched topic of the history of early childhood education and care (ECEC) on the island of Ireland, coinciding with the centenary of partition in 1921.

The research aimed to map out and critically analyse the similarities and variations in the pathways taken by ECEC north and south of the border post-partition in Ireland. Using curriculum documents and other primary sources, it traced the journey from the early 1900's up to the 1930's, exploring the child-state relationship North and South.

Using Sorin and Galloway's (2006) framework, the conceptualisations and constructions of childhood evident in the documents were investigated, particularly exploring issues of children's voice and agency, gender and patriarchy, the influences of the Churches North and South, and other societal and cultural influences on how children were viewed at the time. We were particularly interested in the shift in thinking from the very progressive ideals evident in the Programme for Government of the first Dáil in the Free State, and we discovered that a process of nation-building both North and South strongly impacted on the education systems that subsequently emerged either side of the border.

Acknowledging the nuanced and contested nature of education, the research also explored examples of 'outliers' from the established approaches, namely the Montessori schools in Waterford and the Arellian nursery in the North.

### *Participants and teamwork*

This project was a collaboration between Stranmillis University College, Belfast and Maynooth University (Education Department, Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education and Centre for Public Education and Pedagogy). Participating colleagues are shown in Table 1.

*Table 1: Participating colleagues*

Name	Institution
<b>Deirdre Forde</b>	Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University
<b>Diane McClelland</b>	Stranmillis University College, Belfast
<b>Suzanne O'Keeffe</b>	Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University
<b>Leah O'Toole</b>	Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University

<b>Noel Purdy</b>	Stranmillis University College, Belfast
<b>Carl Anders Säfstrom</b>	Centre for Public Education and Pedagogy, Maynooth University
<b>Tom Walsh</b>	Education Department, Maynooth University

While the *outcomes* of the project (shown below) represent a significant achievement, an equally important element has been the *process* involved in developing these outcomes. One of the most extensive research projects on team functioning in recent years, Project Aristotle (see Duhig, 2016; Schneider, 2017), identified five elements common to successful teams:

1. Dependability (team members getting things done on time and meeting expectations)
2. Structure and clarity (clear goals and well-defined roles)
3. Meaning (personal significance of the work)
4. Impact (belief that the work is purposeful)
5. Psychological safety (sense of safety to take risks and express opinions free of negative judgement)

All of these elements were clearly visible within the CCaBB team, contributing to its success. However, our teamwork supported the findings of Project Aristotle that the most important of these is psychological safety. From the earliest days of the project until its end, team members mindfully invested time in creating and building trusting, respectful relationships in which ideas could be explored, and conceptual or cross-disciplinary tensions could be teased out within a psychologically safe environment. Considering SCoTENS' stated aim<sup>1</sup> to "create a safe space for teacher educators – North and South– to come together and discuss issues of common interest, and explore ways of co-operating closely together", the cross-border relationships built and nurtured through this project may be of equal importance to its more visible outcomes.

## Outcomes

### *Collaborative partnership*

It must be noted at the outset that none of the team members had previously collaborated on a funded project. The project was initiated pre-Covid and this allowed two joint planning meetings in 2019, the first held in Maynooth and the second in Belfast. These meetings allowed for detailed planning of the nature and scope of the project, refining objectives, setting timelines and updating on progress. Equally important were the opportunities offered

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<sup>1</sup> <https://scotens.org/about/>

for the teams to build relationships face-to-face, something which we have come to value much more since the start of Covid-19 restrictions in March 2020.

### *Historical analysis*

A second important outcome from the project was the gaining of skills of historical analysis by the team members, who, with the notable exception of Dr Tom Walsh, were not historians. This proved to be both challenging and empowering and allowed team members to gain much greater understanding of the history of the first decade of Ireland's history following partition in 1921. In the case of the northern team, for instance, team members gained access to many original historical sources (letters, minutes of meetings, programmes of instructions, photographs etc.) through regular visits to the Public Records Office of Northern Ireland (PRONI), the archives of the Presbyterian Church in Ireland, and the Ulster Collection of the College Library at Stranmillis University College.

### *Co-authored journal article*

One of the most visible achievements of the CCaBB project was the co-authorship and publication of a peer reviewed journal article in the prestigious *British Educational Research Journal*. The article was published Open Source to increase accessibility, and this was a significant source of spending for the project – with the permission of the SCoTENS committee we reallocated funding that had initially been budgeted for travel and face-to-face team meetings that could not go ahead due to COVID. Successful co-authorship of a journal article of this calibre by as many as seven contributors from different departments and institutions is highly unusual and is evidence of the outstanding collaboration and teamwork described above. As per our funding contract, we have acknowledged the funding source on our article (see p.1036).

The citation reference for the article is as follows:

O'Toole, L., McClelland, D., Forde, D., O'Keefe, S., Purdy, N., Säfström, CA, Walsh, T.  
(2021) 'Contested childhoods across borders and boundaries: Insights from curriculum provisions in Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in the 1920s'.  
*British Educational Research Journal*, 47 (4), pp.1021-1038.  
<https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3708>

The full article (open access) is attached to this report and is to be made available on the SCoTENS website.



### *Co-hosted webinar*

On 21st April 2021, the team co-hosted a webinar on the topic of contested childhoods. The webinar was facilitated by Prof Nóirín Hayes (Trinity College, Dublin) and Dr Seán Farren (Ulster University), and was attended by 66 participants from Ireland north and south and from the US. The core CCaBB team would like to thank Graeme Watson and Jonathan Harris (Stranmillis University College) for their support with the logistics of the webinar.

### *Budget report*

The CCaBB project has completed its work within budget, although as noted above, some reallocation of budgetary allowances was required due to COVID restrictions on travel and in-person meeting. We are grateful to SCoTENS for their flexibility in allowing some adjustment to the original proposed spend. A separate financial report has been submitted to SCoTENS.

### *Continued collaboration and partnership*

Since the completion of the project, there have been several subsequent examples of the continued partnership between the research teams at Maynooth and Stranmillis. These include the following:

- A funding application to the ESRC/IRC in July 2021
- A funding application to the north south HEA/Shared Island funding stream in October 2021
- A joint symposium at the Australian Educational Research Association Annual Conference in November 2021 with colleagues from Maynooth and Stranmillis co-presenting several papers
- The invitation to Diane McClelland and Noel Purdy to co-author a chapter on the history of ECEC in Northern Ireland since partition for a history of ECEC in Ireland edited by Prof Nóirín Hayes and Dr Tom Walsh
- The invitation to Dr Leah O'Toole to deliver a lunchtime research presentation to staff at Stranmillis University College in November 2021

In summary this has been an exceptionally successful project and the CCaBB team would like to express our sincere thanks to the SCoTENS committee for funding our work.

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## Part Three – Published Article

**Please see separate PDF of our (open access) published article:**

O'Toole, L., McClelland, D., Forde, D., O'Keefe, S., Purdy, N., Säfström, CA, Walsh, T. (2021) 'Contested childhoods across borders and boundaries: Insights from curriculum provisions in Northern Ireland and the Irish Free State in the 1920s'. *British Educational Research Journal*, 47 (4), pp.1021-1038. <https://doi.org/10.1002/berj.3708>

