History of Education Quarterly (2025), **65**, 91–110
doi:10.1017/heq.2024.60

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

ARTICLE

Transnational Knowledge Circulation and the Closing of Minds to Progressive Education Influences on Schooling in the First Decade of Independence in Ireland

Thomas Walsh[1] and Tom O'Donoghue[2]

[1]Maynooth University, Ireland and [2]University of Western Australia
Corresponding authors: thomas.walsh@mu.ie; tom.odonoghue@uwa.edu.au

Abstract
For decades, transnational knowledge circulation in relation to schooling in Ireland has been a neglected area of study among historians. This paper provides new insights through a transnational lens on primary, secondary, and vocational curriculum developments in the first decade following the advent of national independence in the country in 1922. During this period, key policy-makers largely rejected progressive educational ideas circulating internationally and promoted curricula and pedagogy in primary and secondary schools that reflected the new nation's deeply conservative Catholic nature and nationalist ethos. While initial signs indicated that developments in vocational education might head in a different direction, ultimately, more progressive educational ideas circulating internationally were excluded from that sector as well. At all levels of the education system, the hegemony of the Catholic Church and other contextual factors resulted in traditional and conservative curricula that underpinned policy and practice until the 1960s.

Keywords: Catholic Church; curriculum; Ireland; transnational knowledge circulation

Historians have, over the past twenty years, found the concept of "knowledge circulation" as used by comparativists to be helpful for identifying, characterizing, and accounting for the nature of ideas and practices operating in one constituency that had their origins elsewhere.[1] They include historians of education, some of whom point to the importance of not necessarily confining one's investigations to national boundaries

[1]Hartmut Kaelble and Jurgen Schriewer, *Vergleich und Transfer: Komparatistik in den Sozial-, Geschichts- und Kulturwissenschaften* (Frankfurt: Campus, 2003); Tony Ballantyne, *Orientalism and Race: Aryanism in the British Empire* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001); Christopher Alan Bayly, *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914: Global Connections and Comparisons* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2004); Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake, *Connected Worlds: History in Transnational Perspective* (Canberra, Australia: ANU Press, 2005); Catherine Hall and Sonya O. Rose, eds., *At Home with the Empire: Metropolitan Culture and*

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when examining the transnational transfer of knowledge on education.[2] Others, however, argue that it can be helpful sometimes to focus squarely on knowledge transfer from certain countries to others, asserting that from early in the nineteenth century, individuals and groups working within "nation state" structures played a very important relational role in knowledge circulation.[3] Vick's questioning of the works of some historians in countries that were once overseas members of the British Empire, who have portrayed education developments that took place within them as dependent, is also instructive on that matter.[4] In addition, there are countries, such as Ireland, regarding which the matter of transnational knowledge transfer in education has hardly been addressed at all.

One reason for the deficit of investigations in the field in relation to Ireland is that, for decades, most of those who wrote the history of Irish education tended to present their expositions as part of a narrative detailing the onwards and upwards march of a Catholic-nationalist state.[5] Indeed, the authors of a comprehensive review undertaken in 2017 demonstrated that it was only over the previous twenty-five years that clear signs had emerged of researchers casting off the introspective insularity that had defined the historiography of Irish education for a century.[6] And even then, very few among the new group of scholars in question have paid attention to the history of transnational knowledge circulation, including on how contexts of politics, economics, technological change, popular culture, and intellectual ideas interacted to produce education policies and practices within the country.[7]

the Imperial World (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Alan Lester, "Imperial Circuits and Networks: Geographies of the British Empire," *History Compass* 4, no. 1 (Jan. 2006), 124–41.

[2] Christine Mayer, "The Transnational and Transcultural: Approaches to Studying the Circulation and Transfer of Educational Knowledge," in *The Transnational in the History of Education*, ed. Eckhardt Fuchs and Eugenia Rolán Vera (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 49–68; Jane Weiß and Ingrid Thea Miethe, eds., *Socialist Educational Cooperation and the Global South* (New York: Peter Lang, 2020); David Phillips and Kimberly Ochs, "Processes of Policy Borrowing in Education: Some Explanatory and Analytical Devices," *Comparative Education* 39, no. 4 (Nov. 2003), 451–61; Gita Steiner-Khamsi, *The Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending* (New York: Teachers' College Press, 2004); Jürgen Schriewer and Carlos Martinez Valle, "Constructions of Internationality in Education," in *Global Politics of Educational Borrowing and Lending*, 29–53.

[3] From the late eighteenth century to the early twentieth century, nation states became a new political and national construct within Europe. Within these, education systems became central in shaping the national identity of populations. See Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso Books, 1991).

[4] Malcolm Vick, "Australian Teacher Education 1900-1950: Conspicuous and Inconspicuous International Networks," *Paedagogica Historica* 43, no. 2 (April 2007), 245–55.

[5] James Kelly and Susan Hegarty, "Introduction: Writing the History of Irish Education," in *Schools and Schooling, 1650-2000: New Perspectives on the History of Education; the Eighth Seamus Heaney Lectures*, ed. James Kelly and Susan Hegarty (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2017), 13–33.

[6] Kelly and Hegarty, "Introduction," 13-33.

[7] Amongst the very few are David Limond, "[An] Historic Culture … Rapidly, Universally, and Thoroughly Restored? British Influence on Irish Education since 1922,"*Comparative Education* 46, no. 4 (Nov. 2010), 449–62; Thomas O'Donoghue and Judith Harford, "Contesting the Limond Thesis on British Influence in Irish Education since 1922: A Comparative Perspective," *Comparative Education* 48, no. 3 (August 2012), 337–46; Ciaran O'Neill, *Catholics of Consequence: Transnational Education, Social Mobility, and the Irish Catholic Elite 1850-1900* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

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An exception in the latter regard is the attention that has been given to developments in curriculum and pedagogy in primary schools in Ireland during the first two decades of the twentieth century that resulted in knowledge from somewhere other than Britain having, for the first time, a substantial impact across all of Ireland.[8] What evolved was an approach to elementary schooling that, while focused largely on the development of students' literacy and numeracy skills, emphasized "new education" ideas circulating transnationally at the time. Those included child-centered pedagogy and the promotion in schools of manual instruction and engagement in practical activities.[9]

The tide changed, however, when those in government in Ireland in the immediate years following the advent of national independence set out to create a nation-state superior, in their view, to that which had existed under British rule. What quickly followed was the passing of laws and the promotion of public and private practices that were in harmony with conservative Catholic doctrine. Moreover, in support of that effort, the Catholic bishops in the country regularly emphasized devotion to "Faith and Fatherland."[10] Education was one sphere in which associated policies were implemented with great zeal. In particular, political and church leaders rejected the ideas underpinning the existing student-focused primary school curriculum that operated under the previous administration, while steps were also taken to ensure that those same ideas did not take hold within the nation's secondary and vocational school sectors.

In general, those at the center of the education policy-making process had, like their Catholic political masters for reasons that will be explained later, zero interest in pursuing either a student-centered education agenda or promoting an economic and social revolution.[11] Instead, during the first ten years of the new Irish state, they worked actively to suppress contemporary progressive educational ideas circulating transnationally, and extolled what they claimed were the virtues of a group of earlier traditional European Catholic thinkers to justify the establishment of curricula that were content-centered, along with a pedagogy that was almost totally didactic. The rest of this paper presents an exposition on that situation, in relation to the primary, secondary, and vocational school sectors in Ireland up until the 1960s.

Education Knowledge Circulation in the Primary and Secondary School Sectors in Ireland, 1922-32

The primary school system that existed in Ireland on the eve of national independence originated with the Stanley Letter of 1831 issued by the Chief Secretary for

[8] Maura O'Connor, *The Development of Infant Education in Ireland, 1838-1948: Epochs and Eras* (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang, 2010); Teresa O'Doherty and Thomas O'Donoghue, *Radical Reform in Irish Schools, 1900-1922: The "New Education" Turn* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2021).

[9] Richard W. J. Selleck, *The New Education, 1870-1914* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, 1968).

[10] Barry M. Coldrey, *Faith and Fatherland. The Catholic Bishops and the Development of Irish Nationalism, 1838-1921* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1988).

[11] Patrick Lynch, "The Social Revolution That Never Was," in *The Irish Struggle, 1916-1926*, ed. Desmond Williams (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1966), 41–54. See also Olivier Coquelin, "Class Struggle in the 1916-23 Irish Revolution: A Reappraisal," *Etudés Irlandaises* 42, no. 2 (2017), 23–36.

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Ireland.[12] In the absence of any legislative provisions, that letter presented a vision of a state-aided, nondenominational schooling system overseen by a National Board within which children of all faiths would receive secular education together and separate religious instruction in their various denominational groups.[13] Forty-seven years later, the Intermediate Education (Ireland) Act of 1878[14] allowed, through a "payment by results" mechanism, for indirect state involvement in the secondary school sector (attended by students aged 12 to 18 years of age), which existed for a very small number of students in denominationally run schools and were almost totally a middle-class preserve.

By the early 1920s, when a new Department of Education in the new state was assigned responsibility for all schooling in the country, the vision of a nondenominational primary school system had long been dismantled due to the influence of the Catholic Church and the (Anglican) Church of Ireland. During the previous half century of British rule, the Churches succeeded also in obtaining and maintaining a great degree of control in secondary or intermediate schooling. Moreover, leaders in the new political administration made it clear they did not intend to interfere with the existing system of ownership of primary and secondary schools, whereby control and management rested largely with the various Christian Churches in the country.[15]

The curriculum taught in the primary schools up until the early decades of the second half of the nineteenth century had been underpinned largely by a somewhat benign imperialist outlook, as evidenced by the nature of the school readers prepared and sanctioned by the National Board from the 1830s.[16] Those readers enjoyed not only a national but also an international reputation, so much so that by the 1850s they were regarded as "the best set of schoolbooks in the British Isles."[17] By 1873, however, against a background of rising cultural nationalism in Ireland, and an associated growth in enthusiasm for the study of Gaelic culture and the Irish language, chapters on Irish antiquities and Irish scenic areas were included.[18] So also were sections on mineral resources in Ireland and poems relating to the country.

Even more significant change took place in 1900, following the introduction of what was termed the Revised Programme of Instruction, which was the curriculum in operation at the advent of political independence. The architects of that innovation had been influenced greatly by progressive and child-centered educational ideas circulating transnationally in the 1890s. Yet on the eve of national independence,

[12]Patrick F. O'Donovan, *Stanley's Letter: The National School System and Inspectors in Ireland, 1831-1922* (Galway: Galway Education Center, 2017).

[13]Judith Harford, "Teacher Education Policy in Ireland and the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century," *European Journal of Teacher Education* 33, no. 4 (Nov. 2010), 349–60; O'Donovan, *Stanley's Letter*.

[14]Thomas J. McElligott, *Secondary Education in Ireland, 1870-1921* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 1981).

[15]Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education for the School Year 1924-25 and the Financial and Administrative Years 1924-25-26* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1926), 7.

[16]Tony Lyons and Noel Moloney, *Educational Resources in the British Empire: Examining Nineteenth Century Ireland and Literacy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[17]Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment. The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge and Keegan Paul, 1970), 88.

[18]Commissioners of National Education, *Fourth Reading Book of the Commissioners of National Education* (Dublin: Alexander Thom, 1875).

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nationalists perceived the curriculum to be seriously deficient due to its lack of emphasis on the teaching of the Irish language and Gaelic culture and the cultivation of nation building.

Given the political turbulence and the ongoing waging of the War of Independence in Ireland between 1919 and 1921, it was the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (the primary schoolteachers' union) rather than a state or political entity that took the initiative to review the primary school curriculum and propose reforms to be implemented in an independent nation.[19] That was not surprising, as members of the organization had a history of such involvement since 1876, when they were active in the newly established Society for the Preservation of the Irish Language, including through canvassing the Commissioners of National Education for the inclusion of the teaching of Irish in the primary school curriculum. Moreover, their enthusiasm regarding that matter persisted because of success in 1879, the year the Commissioners of National Education granted permission for the Irish language to be taught outside of school hours as an extra subject for which teachers received additional fees. Other achievements following lobbying by members of the organization, by the Gaelic League (the organization committed to the revival of the Irish language), and by various members of the House of Commons included persuading the Commissioners to permit teachers, beginning in 1883, to employ Irish as an instructional aid in teaching English to Irish-speaking pupils, permitting Irish to be taught as an "optional subject" during school hours to all children (although no fees were payable in that case), and establishing in 1904 the Bilingual Programme of Instruction for use in Irish-speaking districts.[20]

The initiative taken by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation resulted in the establishment in January 1921 of what was termed the First National Programme Conference. (The term *conference* as used in political circles in Ireland at the time was equivalent to the current term *committee*.) The conference members were charged with framing "a programme, or series of programmes, in accordance with Irish ideals and conditions—due regard being given to local needs and views."[21] Its eleven members, all of whom were Irish, included six teachers and two members of the Gaelic League.

Because of the nature of the terms of reference given to them, it is not surprising that the focus of all members of the conference was on looking backwards and inwards on a perceived glorious Gaelic past rather than seeking inspiration and insights internationally. The symbolic value of the Irish language and culture in supporting a notion that Ireland should be returned to being "an island of authenticity" was central to that mission.[22] In alignment with that mission was a proposal for the compulsory teaching of Irish and instruction through the Irish language in the infant classes (the first two years of primary schooling). That position, in turn, was again embraced by the

[19] Seamus Ó Buachalla, "Education As an Issue in the First and Second Dáil," *Administration* 25, no. 1 (1977), 57–75.

[20] Thomas O'Donoghue and Teresa O'Doherty, *Irish Speakers and Schooling in the Gaeltacht, 1900 to the Present* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019).

[21] National Programme Conference, *National Programme of Primary Instruction* (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1922), 3.

[22] Timothy J. White, "The Impact of British Colonialism on Irish Catholicism and National Identity: Repression, Reemergence, and Divergence," *Études Irlandaises* 35, no. 1 (2010), 21–37, 27.

members of the follow-up Second National Programme Conference, established three years later by the Minister for Education.[23]

Notwithstanding the absence of international members and of witnesses involved in the proceedings of the Second National Conference in 1925-26, various ideas and practices said to be influential in education circles beyond Britain were highlighted in documentation gathered and in witness testimony. For example, outlines of the subjects that were obligatory in schools in Belgium, Italy, Switzerland, France, Holland, and the city of Copenhagen were collated by the conference. So also were "annotated timetables of primary schools in the chief countries of [continental] Europe."[24] One recommendation that followed was that "the Swedish or other approved system" of physical training be adopted in Irish schools.[25]

None of the testimony that was gathered came from witnesses located outside Ireland, even though some offered assistance. One of those was Edwin M. Standing, who stated in a letter to the conference that he had curriculum knowledge and expertise from his work in England, Scotland, Germany, Italy, and other parts of the world.[26] That, he added, included particular expertise in Montessori education, history, nature study, and geography, and he submitted testimonials supporting his claim from a wide range of educationists, including Maria Montessori herself. For reasons mentioned later, however, the members of the conference did not avail themselves of his services.

The outcome of the deliberations of the national curriculum conferences was the introduction of a primary school curriculum that differed greatly in philosophy, tone, and content from its child-centered and inquiry-based predecessor. It was centered on transmission and memorization, with the teacher viewed as the conveyor of unquestionable knowledge to the passive child. By contrast with its predecessor, manual and practical subjects were largely removed. Moreover, the overall breadth and content of the pre-independence program were also reduced in the interest of placing a major and inward-looking focus on the Irish language, culture, and traditions while restricting the promotion of an international perspective.

A similar development took place in relation to secondary schooling at the beginning of 1921, the final year of British rule. At that time, Dáil Éireann (the abstentionist Irish Parliament in Dublin)[27] established the Dáil Commission on Secondary

[23]The conference was composed of twenty-four members, all of whom, once again, were Irish. Of those, eleven were politicians, schools' inspectors, and university professors nominated by the Minister for Education, and the remainder represented the County Councils, the Gaelic League, teachers, and school managers. Letters containing specific questions were sent to individuals and organizations within the country deemed to be interested, and knowledgeable parties and nineteen Irish witnesses were also selected to give oral evidence. For the most part, the latter comprised principals, teachers, and schools' inspectors, as well as school managers, and teacher training college and university personnel.

[24]National Programme Conference, *Report and Programme Presented by the National Programme Conference to the Minister for Education* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1926), 8.

[25]National Programme Conference, *Report and Programme*, 52.

[26]Correspondence from Mr. E. Standing, National Archives of Ireland, National Programme Conference, File ED/12/12842, n.p.

[27]Seamus Ó Buachalla, "Education As an Issue in the First and Second Dáil." The Dáil was the abstentionist unicameral parliament established in Dublin in 1918 and again in 1921 by the Sinn Féin Party members who had been elected to the British House of Commons. Of the 101 members of Parliament elected by constituencies in Ireland at the 1918 United Kingdom general election, 69 were from Sinn Féin.

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

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Education to draft a program "which would meet the national requirements" while also expressing a determination to "revive the ancient life of Ireland, as a Gaelic State, Gaelic in language, and Gaelic and Christian in its ideals."[28] To address the task, a thirty-member committee representing a large segment of the country's educational interest groups was established. The committee proposed the introduction of a narrow academic secondary school curriculum akin to a grammar school. That was justified not only on the grounds that it was suited to promoting one's religious development and to the national Gaelicization process, but also because it would lead to the "development of the mind." To further that claim, advocates appealed to certain bodies of European thought, including those whose roots can be traced back to Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Ignatius of Loyola, and which in the late modern period came to form the distinct school of thought known as *faculty psychology*, whose supporters drew upon the writings of certain German philosophers, including Immanuel Kant.[29]

Faculty psychology had "traveled" to Ireland in the latter half of the nineteenth century and appealed to individuals working in various scholarly quarters there. Owing to the Thomistic roots of associated ideas and the related assumption that the mind consists of a number of faculties, among which are quickness, observation, and memory, it was of particular interest to some within the National University of Ireland, where Catholic clerics were dominant in various academic departments.[30] At a national level, Professor Eoin MacNeill, Minister for Education (1922-25), spoke in the Lower House of the National Parliament (Dáil Éireann) of the importance of education for the development of "habits of order," "habits of observation,"[31] and "the actual teaching of the faculties."[32] In a similar vein, his successor, Professor John Marcus O'Sullivan, as Minister for Education (1926-32), stated that certain subjects on the secondary school curriculum were important for promoting the "mental training, mental ability and the agility of pupils."[33]

One outcome of the recommendations of the Dáil Commission on Secondary Education was the abolition shortly after independence of the payment-by results' scheme and its replacement by one whereby money was paid to schools as capitation grants. Also, teachers' salaries, as with those of primary schoolteachers, were state funded. Again, too, the curriculum greatly emphasized the older Gaelic world, even if

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[28] *Times Educational Supplement*, Oct. 1, 1921, p. 434. Following the publication of its first issue on September 6, 1910, as part of *The Times* of *London*, this weekly newspaper became the leading publication on public policy and pedagogical practice over the decades, not only in the United Kingdom but worldwide. The issue in question was perused by the present authors in the National Library of Ireland on February 1, 2024.

[29] Jennifer Radden, "Lumps and Bumps: Kantian Faculty Psychology, Phrenology, and Twentieth-Century Psychiatric Classification," *Philosophy, Psychiatry and Psychology* 3, no. 1 (March 1966), 1–14.

[30] William James, *Principles of Psychology* (New York: Henry Holt and Co., 1890).

[31] Eoin MacNeill, "Committee on Finance - Estimates for Public Services. Vote 48. - Public Education," Dáil Éireann Debates 8, no. 4, July 3, 1924, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1924-07-03/14/.

[32] Eoin MacNeill, "Committee on Finance. - Estimates for Public Services. Vote 49. - Intermediate Education," Dáil Éireann Debates 8, no. 7, July 8, 1924, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1924-07-08/.

[33] John Marcus O'Sullivan, "Public Business. - Vote No. 45 - Office of the Minister for Education," Dáil Éireann Debates 29, no. 2, April 11, 1929, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1929-04-11/.

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not quite to the same extent as for primary schools. Equally, the requirement that the Irish language had to be taught in secondary schools was a radical departure from what had prevailed up until then. New, too, was the requirement that history and geography would be compulsory subjects in the early years of secondary schooling, and that they should focus strongly on Ireland. Department of Education officials also established the Intermediate and the Leaving Certificate examinations.[34] To succeed in the former, pupils had to pass in Irish or English, in a second language, in history and geography, in mathematics, and in one other subject from an approved list. To obtain a Leaving Certificate, students had to obtain a pass in five approved subjects, one of which had to be Irish or English.

Th Influence of Rev. Professor T. J. Corcoran

From considerations so far, it is clear in relation to primary and secondary schooling in Ireland in the immediate post-independence years that there was very little enthusiasm for progressive educational ideas circulating internationally. Instead, the teacher-centered and traditional subject curricula found favor among the powerful upholders of conservative Catholic views in the country. Moreover, senior state personnel went along with that development, as they required Church support for the new nation-building program to be carried out through the schools. Key to the success of the complementary curricular aims of both groups was the influence of Rev. Professor Timothy Corcoran, a Jesuit priest who had worked with the members of the various program conferences and commissions since 1921. Throughout the period of their deliberations and later, he made crystal clear that he opposed progressive educational ideas, promoting instead the authority of the teacher and the inculcation of received knowledge by memorization.[35]

By the 1920s, Corcoran was a well-established figure in Irish education and was seen as the leading authority in the field. He had been appointed in 1909 as the first professor of education at University College Dublin, the largest university institution in the country and where the majority of secondary schoolteachers were trained each year. His esteem among those guiding the British administration in Ireland became evident when they sought his advice as a member of the Vice-Regal Committee on Intermediate Education (1918-19), chaired by Thomas Molony.[36] He also won favor among those who would later become leaders in independent Ireland and were drawn to the Catholic-nationalist narrative that infused his major works on the history of education in Ireland, including *Studies in the History of Classical Teaching, Irish and*

[34] The Intermediate Certificate examination was taken by students after three years of study in a secondary school. The Leaving Certificate examination is the final examination of the secondary school system.

[35] At the Second National Conference on primary schooling, for example, he greatly impressed members with his claim that he was "very thoroughly conversant with primary schools in Belgium, Switzerland, France and Germany." See Evidence of Rev. Corcoran, National Archives of Ireland, box 130, file 8536, part 2, National Programme Conference 1925: Evidence, Sept. 22, 1925, p. 3.

[36] Report of the Vice-Regal Committee on the Conditions of Service and Remuneration of Teachers in Intermediate Schools and on the Distribution of Grants from Public Funds for Intermediate Education in Ireland, H.C. 1919 (Cmd.66 XXI), 645.

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Continental, 1500-1700 and *State Policy in Irish Education, A.D. 1536 to 1816.*[37] Indeed, his influence in the immediate post-independence years was so strong that Joseph O'Neill, the first Secretary of the Department of Education, later claimed that Corcoran was "the master builder" in relation to both primary and secondary schooling.[38]

In arguing for a back-to-basics primary school curriculum based on direct instruction, Corcoran made a significant number of references to education practices and philosophies internationally that could have been, yet were not, contested. For example, in arguing for an increased and deeper focus on mathematics, which he felt had been relegated and neglected from 1900 to make room for what he termed "fad' subjects," he stated, almost in fanciful fashion, that the United States, England, and France had been "left behind in the technical production race" due to the neglect of the teaching of mathematics in those nations' schools.[39] Also, in a recommendation that the availability of practical subjects should be limited, he argued that their use in Germany, Lancashire, and Liverpool had put a strain on the eyesight of young children. He concluded by saying: "I am relying on European medical works on that issue as a very serious point."[40]

Corcoran also argued specifically against the teaching of manual work and gardening in schools on the grounds that they would, as he put it, take away from "more essential matters," the latter, no doubt, being a reference to the teaching of Irish and of Gaelic culture. He further asserted regarding rural science:

> If there is one people that would have such a subject in their primary courses it would be the Danes. They have not the subject in the primary school courses; nor is it in those parts of Germany that made tremendous progress in culture of the soil."[41]

Nobody, it appears, pointed out that he may well not have been as informed as he claimed to be on such matters. After all, they had at their disposal, as mentioned already, the timetable relating to primary schooling in Copenhagen showing that there was provision for the study of nature and science for those enrolled in the middle and senior classes in primary schools in that city.[42]

Corcoran's objections to students engaging in hands-on learning in school, while possibly genuine, were also strongly influenced by his desire to ensure that as much curriculum time as possible would be available for the teaching of Gaelic culture and the Irish language at a time when English had replaced it as the vernacular of the great majority of the population. Specifically on the use of Irish for imparting instruction

[37] Timothy J. Corcoran, *Studies in the History of Classical Teaching, Irish and Continental, 1500-1700* (Dublin: Educational Company of Ireland, 1911); Timothy J. Corcoran, *State Policy in Irish Education, A.D. 1536 to 1816* (Dublin: Fallon Brothers, 1916).

[38] Joseph O'Neill, "Father T. J. Corcoran: An Appreciation," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 32 (1943), 153–62.

[39] Evidence of Rev. Corcoran, National Archives of Ireland, 17.

[40] Evidence of Rev. Corcoran, National Archives of Ireland, 13.

[41] Evidence of Rev. Corcoran, National Archives of Ireland, 17.

[42] National Archives of Ireland, National Programme Conference, ED/12/12847, National Archives of Ireland, National Programme Conference 1925-26: Switzerland/France/Belgium/Holland/Copenhagen, ED/12/12847.

across all subjects, he claimed that he was familiar with the results of research of "students of educational science," which evidenced that the acquisition of a second or third vernacular was possible between the ages of four and eight. He cited cases involving children of royal and princely families who, with only a few hours of instruction per day, acquired a few languages with no difficulty.[43] Again, the veracity of that sweeping generalization does not appear to have even been questioned, not to mention contested, by any member of the National Programme Conference. Also, at no point did Corcoran broadcast the fact that he had practically no competence whatsoever himself in the Irish language.[44]

With very little evidence, Corcoran also advocated the adoption of the Direct Method of second-language teaching for the teaching of Irish in primary schools on the grounds, he claimed, that it was used successfully for the teaching of English in the US to immigrants from Poland, Hungary, and the Ukraine.[45] Similarly, he detailed what he said was the language experience in the Alsace-Lorraine region, where first-language speakers of German in infant classes were taught French using the Direct Method.[46] Support for the use of this method came also from the Celtic Congress, held in July 1925. Composed of academics from Wales, Scotland, Brittany, Cornwall, and Ireland, these individuals' actions indicated that they were more concerned about saving the Celtic languages through schooling than they were with advancing children's educational interests.[47] Also, neither they nor any other individuals or groups had critically examined the conclusiveness of the assertion that the use of the Direct Method would be appropriate in Ireland just because it might have been successful in countries with large numbers of immigrants.

Because of the senior academic position he held, because of his commitment to the Gaelicization policy favored by the vast majority of the members of the conferences, and because it was deemed inappropriate to question the authority of Catholic clerics during this era, Corcoran was regularly able to draw selectively and in an unquestioned manner on various international educationalists' works on education to justify his agenda. Moreover, he did so in a tone and tenor that was confident, assertive, and authoritative. Additionally, he was not beyond re-interpreting bodies of scholarship, focusing on and accentuating particular aspects of them, and even of engaging in criticism and mockery, all in the interest of strengthening his arguments.[48]

Progressive approaches to pedagogy came in for particular criticism by Corcoran. His position was that they undermined the authority of the teacher, placed too much emphasis on the hand and heart to the neglect of the linguistic and cognitive dimensions of learning, and under-emphasized the need for strict discipline, control, and

[43] Evidence of Rev. Corcoran, National Archives of Ireland, 29.

[44] Patrick Maume, "Corcoran, Timothy," Dictionary of Irish Biography, Oct. 2009, https://www.dib.ie/biography/corcoran-timothy-a2044.

[45] Timothy Corcoran, "How the Irish Language Can Be Revived," *Irish Monthly* 51 (Jan. 1923), 26–30.

[46] Timothy Corcoran, "The Language Campaigns in Alsace-Lorraine," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 13, no. 50 (June 1924), 201–13.

[47] National Archives of Ireland, National Programme Conference, ED/12/12847, Extracts from National Programme Conference Discussion, 4.

[48] James G. Deegan, "An Assessment of Rev. Professor Timothy J. Corcoran's Major Works in the Field of Irish Educational Historiography," *Irish Educational Studies* 4, no. 1 (1984), 88–97.

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

memorization. In various articles, he castigated the child-centered and activity-based foundations of the Revised Programme of Instruction (1900), holding that it had led to "diverting the teachers' attention from what is vital and substantial at the primary period, to what is accidental and subordinate."[49] In a similar vein, he criticized what he audaciously and unashamedly claimed was the "miserable system of individual instruction in elementary schools, the special weakness of Protestant Germany, England, Holland, and New England" in comparison to the tradition of the "historic class system" of Catholic schools "in all ages."[50.]

The rejection of the services offered to the members of the First National Programme Conference by Edwin M. Standing, who, it will be recalled, was recommended by Maria Montessori, can also be attributed to Corcoran's opposition. Notwithstanding Montessori's credentials, Corcoran was openly critical of the emphasis she placed on sensorial learning and on pupils handling and engaging with educative materials.[51] In a similar vein, he accused Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi of propagating an "almost inconceivably absurd"[52] philosophy of education regarding manual instruction, asserting that his system was "the very antithesis of all true education."[53] Rousseau's writings also came in for severe rebuke, the spurious argument being that he had attempted "to banish all reading, writing, intellectual action itself, from the educative process" and replace them with an exclusive focus on the sense of touch.[54]

Corcoran gave as much attention to decrying the use of non-traditional approaches to education in secondary schools as he did to their use in primary schools.[55] And, in doing so, he drew selectively once again upon educational ideas circulating internationally, including those from previous eras, and interpreted them in a manner designed to justify his opposition to progressive educational ideas for secondary schooling. Among those were the positions promoted in the US by John Dewey and William Kilpatrick, who placed great emphasis on students' personal initiative and progress and on restricting the direct role of the teacher in the classroom. In a series of articles, Corcoran poured scorn on related innovations.[56] In their stead, he argued, "large masses of facts must be known [by the student]… . Further, they must at certain times be so worked

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[49]Timothy Corcoran, "Education for the Land in Ireland," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 4, no. 15 (1915), 351–66, 356.

[50.]Timothy Corcoran, "Individualism in Modern Education," *Irish Monthly* 54, no. 637 (July 1926), 342–45, 342.

[51]Timothy Corcoran, "The Montessori System: A Reply," *Irish Monthly* 52, no. 616 (Oct. 1924), 512–22; T. Corcoran, "Is the Montessori Method to Be Introduced into Our Schools? IV: Sensory Processes; The Language Age," *Irish Monthly* 52, no. 612 (June 1924), 290-97.

[52]Timothy Corcoran, "Some Lessons from the Age of Pestalozzi," *Irish Monthly* 55, no. 646 (April 1927), 173–77, 173.

[53]Timothy Corcoran, "The Centenary of Pestalozzi," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 16, no. 61 (March 1927), 134–42, 142.

[54]Timothy Corcoran, "Early Training of the Senses," *Irish Monthly* 53, no. 625 (July 1925), 343–47, 344.

[55]Timothy J. Corcoran, "The New Secondary School Programme in Ireland: The Teaching of History," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 12, no. 46 (June 1923),249–60; Timothy J. Corcoran, "The Place of the Sciences in General Education," *Studies: An Irish Quarterly Review* 12, no. 47 (Sept. 1923), 406–17.

[56]E. Brian Titley, "Rejecting the Modern World: The Educational Ideas of Timothy Corcoran," *Oxford Review of Education* 9, no. 2 (1983), 137–45.

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over that they are known all at one time, and are expedite, ready for production and testing."[57]

Corcoran also promoted developments that had taken place in the field of Catholic education in Italy and France during the seventeenth, eighteenth, and nineteenth centuries. Those included initiatives taken by John Bosco, Jean-Baptiste de La Salle, Pierre Fournier, and Abbe Charles Demia, all of which were characterized by a rigid and mechanical pedagogy and a notion that the authority of the teacher was supreme.[58] Simultaneously, he chose to ignore the views of other significant Catholic positions on schooling, including the Franciscan tradition of emphasizing gentleness and the beholding of the beauty of God in nature, and the Ursuline Sisters' pedagogical theory founded on the promotion of the child's intrinsic interest.[59]

Consistent with his central position of a narrow academic secondary school curriculum in the mode of a grammar school, introduced in the early years of independent Ireland—as opposed to one that gave a central place to the needs and interests of the student—Corcoran also advised against allowing schools to conduct any examinations of their own that could lead to national certification. This is not to suggest that he opposed any notion that teachers should regularly test their students. Indeed, to have maintained otherwise would have been to act in opposition to the official position of the Jesuit order to which he belonged; its *Ratio Studiorum* stressed mental training to teach logical argument, a curriculum organized by class and grade levels and a program of regular in-house examinations, often weekly.[60] Corcoran did, however, strongly oppose the position promoted by a small number of other educationists, like that of fellow Jesuit priest Rev. L. McKenna, who, drawing on examples of practices overseas, argued that the final certification of students' performance in school could be based on a system of continuous assessment accompanied by a school statement on character.[61] Corcoran countered that what was required were national state examinations, partly because they would serve to minimize the impact of favoritism and privilege. And that is exactly what happened with the establishment in 1924 of the Intermediate and the Leaving Certificate examinations, which have a great influence on present-day curriculum and pedagogy in Irish second-level schools.

Knowledge Circulation and Vocational Education in Ireland, 1922-32

In the early years after national independence in Ireland, the one sphere within the education system where it appeared there might be significant change informed by knowledge and practices circulating outside the country at the time was that of vocational education. In 1930, vocational education was officially defined as including both

[57]Timothy Corcoran, "Class Examinations," *Irish Monthly* 53 (June 1925), 286–89, 287.

[58]Titley, "Rejecting the Modern World."

[59]George Ferzoco and Carolyn Muessig, eds., *Medieval Monastic Education* (Leicester, UK: Leicester University Press, 2000); Peter Waters, "The Origins, Development and Influence of Ursuline Pedagogy" (master of education thesis, University of Melbourne, 1985).

[60]C. J. Fuerst, "A Few Principles and Characteristics of the *Ratio Studiorum*," *Classical Journal* 21, no. 3 (Dec. 1925), 204–10.

[61]Lambert McKenna, "Secondary Leaving Examinations in Ireland and Elsewhere," *Irish Monthly* 55, no. 653 (Nov. 1927), 569–85.

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

continuation education and technical education. Prior to 1924, responsibility for the latter had, since 1899, resided largely with Ireland's Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction, and its provision was underpinned by the principle of local and democratic control.[62] That situation contrasted with the primary school education sphere, which was characterized as having semi-state status, and with the secondary education sphere, which was largely private but state-aided.[63]

In 1924, the new Department of Education, which had now assumed responsibility for technical education under its Technical Instruction Branch, gave grants to sixty-five technical schools. Those institutions were involved mainly in providing instruction at evening time in domestic economy, manual instruction, home-spinning (converting textile fibres into yarns to create various fabrics and materials), lace-sprigging (the embroidery of lace to manufacture clothing), knitting, commerce, and Irish language instruction.[64] Spread over a number of towns were also ten schools for the preparation of students for trades. Provision overall across the country, however, was very small relative to the provision of primary and secondary schooling. Given that situation and given that no consideration had been given to expansion in the sphere either in the immediate pre- or post-independence years, it is hardly surprising that it came in for hardly any comment from Catholic clerics. Even when, in 1925, senior personnel in the Department of Education claimed that technical education was in need of reform, it seemed the Church was very little concerned, probably because very little was expected to happen.[65]

Matters turned out differently than expected, however. On September 30, 1926, a Commission on Technical Education was established by the Minister for Education, John Marcus O'Sullivan. Members were instructed to "enquire into and advise upon the system of technical education" in the new state "in relation to the requirements of trade and industry."[66] In all, the commission comprised nine members, of whom two—Professor Dr. A. Rohn, President of the Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich, Switzerland; and Mr. Nils Fredriksson, member of the Swedish Board of Education and of the Board of Governors of the Royal Technical School in Stockholm—were deemed to be international experts with a deep knowledge and wide experience in various forms of technical education and of associated training and certification requirements in trade and industry.[67]

[62]Patrick O'Leary, "The Development of Post-primary Education in Éire since 1922, with Special Reference to Vocational Education" (PhD dissertation, Queens University Belfast, 1962).

[63]Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education for the School Year 1924-25 and the Financial and Administrative Years 1924-25-26*, 8.

[64]Seamus Dunn, "Education, Religion and Cultural Change in the Republic of Ireland," in *Christianity and Educational Provision in International Perspective*, ed. Witold Tulasiewicz and Colin Brock (London: Routledge, 1988), 86–116.

[65]Department of Education, *Education in the Irish Free State; Foreign Education Leaflet No. 1* (Dublin: Department of Education, 1925).

[66]Commission on Technical Education, *Report of the Commission on Technical Education* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1927), vii.

[67]Department of Education, *Report of the Department of Education for the School Year 1925-26-27 and the Financial and Administrative Years 1926-27* (Dublin: The Stationery Office, 1928), 69.

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The decision to include two international members on the commission, to consult educationists located outside the country, and to take evidence from others located overseas was a departure from the situation that had prevailed since the advent of independence at both the primary and secondary level. The dominant view up to then was summarized in 1925 by Eoin MacNeill as follows, shortly after he had ceased to be Minister for Education:

> Deputies would, I think, if they made enquiry, find that the Department of Education is not badly informed with regard to the conditions of education in other countries … but I think we shall have to solve our own educational problems… . If we were to bring educational experts from other countries with experience of well-developed systems of education in those countries, I am quite sure that the first main conclusion they would come to, and it is one that has not been touched on in any remarks made on this particular measure up to the present, would be that in order to reach anything like the right degree of efficiency in our education we should have to double, if not treble, our present expenditure on education.[68]

The perceived lack of technical education and the negative effect it was deemed to have for the Irish economy, however, appears to have outweighed the type of conservative thinking indicated above, which was driven by an obsession at the time that the state should not be in debt in any societal sphere at the end of each financial year.

Fredriksson was interviewed and, like Rohn, also submitted a report to the commission in which he provided a comprehensive account of the provision of education in Sweden's sixteen different types of schools. In addition, he included a visual graphic delineating the landscape of provision and the interface of its various components. Emphasis, he stressed, was placed on providing technical education in a wide range of school types, catering for the needs of various areas and sectors of industry and commerce. He also provided detail on a variety of other aspects of technical education, including on the financing of schools and on state and municipality responsibilities, rural and urban provision, variations in delivery for men and women, teacher qualifications and salaries, school subjects and curricula, attendance requirements, examinations and certification, links between schools/institutions and industry, and opportunities available for progression within and across trades and industrial training.[69]

The members of the commission held seventy-five meetings between October 1926 and October 1927. They also gathered evidence at forty-seven sites, including some associated with various Irish government departments, chambers of commerce, local technical instruction committees, and committees on agriculture, as well as from employers, workers, and teachers.[70] In total, 129 witnesses provided testimony, while

[68]Eoin MacNeill, "School Attendance Bill, 1925 - Second Stage," Dáil Éireann Debates 13, no. 13, Dec 3, 1925, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1925-12-03/12/.

[69]Commission on Technical Education, *Transcripts of Evidence: 1st Instalment* (Dublin: Commission on Technical Education, 1927).

[70]Commission on Technical Education, *Report*, ix.

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

a further sixty-six informants "supplied written evidence and other data."[71] Rev. Br. Young, principal of Christian Brothers' Junior Technical School, Belfast, was called as a witness and invited to supply written evidence by the commission, the only other witness alongside Fredriksson to be based fully outside the Irish Free State.

It is likely that Br. Young was consulted because of his clerical credentials and the fact that Irish was taught in his school. Moreover, the type of institution he oversaw was a new type of school established by the fledgling Northern Ireland state and under the control of local authorities.[72] Young pointed out that it, like all the new junior technical schools, had no counterpart throughout all of Ireland in the pre-independence era. He also stressed that these were not trade schools. Rather, they had been set up to provide those who would later go on to be apprentices in various trades with an initial trades-oriented general education.[73]

Other witnesses based either partially or fully in Ireland at the time also gave evidence based on their experience of overseas developments. They included Colonel E. O'Brien, retired Deputy Chief Mechanical Engineer of the Lancashire and Yorkshire Railway;[74] Mr. J. Sibthorpe of Sibthorpe and Sons, Painters and Decorators, who wrote a report on the training of painters in England and Scotland;[75] and Mr. T. Mason, president of the Irish Optical Association, who detailed his observations on how botany was taught in schools in Sweden.[76] Also, Mr. Edward Richards-Orpen, late Inspector of the Rural Industries Bureau under the Board of Agriculture, London, gave evidence based on his experience visiting and inspecting schools in both Ireland and England.[77]

Of the sixty-six aforementioned informants who supplied written evidence and other data, six had transnational linkages. Information on technical education in Belgium was submitted by the Belgian Consul-General in Dublin. Five other individuals based outside Ireland also provided written advice: Dr. U. Bosch, based in Berlin; Mr. Vaughan Dempsey, Commercial Representative for An Saorstát (the Irish Free State) in Paris; Mr. G. A. Jenkin, South Africa House, Trafalgar Square, London; Mr. J. C. Smail, Chief Organizer of Trade Schools, Education Officers' Department, London County Council; and Mr. W. H. Loewe Watson, Ministry of Labour, Montagu House, London.

The corpus of evidence submitted to the members of the commission by individuals and bodies located overseas was only a small proportion of the total provided. However, it had a significant impact on the deliberations and ultimate recommendations of the members of the commission. In particular, the broad thrust of international developments that had been brought to the attention of the members served to legitimize from the outset the position they adopted that policy-makers in Ireland, in responding to

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[71] Commission on Technical Education, *Report*, ix, 208.

[72] Donald H. Akenson, *Education and Enmity: The Control of Schooling in Northern Ireland, 1920-50* (London: Routledge, 1973).

[73] Commission on Technical Education, *Transcripts of Evidence: 5th Instalment* (Dublin: Commission on Technical Education, 1927).

[74] Commission on Technical Education, *Transcripts of Evidence: 1st Instalment.*

[75] Commission on Technical Education, *Transcripts of Evidence: 1st Instalment.*

[76] Commission on Technical Education, *Transcripts of Evidence: 1st Instalment.*

[77] Commission on Technical Education, *Transcripts of Evidence: 2nd Instalment* (Dublin: Commission on Technical Education, 1927).

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

a perceived requirement to develop its technical education provision, needed to take account of the reality that the "current tendency in all modern industrial countries" was "to make the technical school fulfil a more definite function in the training for industry."[78]

A core proposal in the final report of the commission was that a general education with a technical focus be provided in new schools that, while not described as such, would be along the lines of the new junior technical schools that had been established in Northern Ireland. Equally, transnational experiences relating to apprenticeships, including the functioning of national and state-wide "apprenticeship committees" in Switzerland, Hungary, Finland, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and some parts of the United States, were highlighted.[79] The report also argued that experience in other countries, and especially in Sweden, demonstrated the value of young people age sixteen and older receiving apprenticeship training and being "assisted in varying degrees by education related to their reemployment."[80] An exploration of provisions relating to apprenticeships in Queensland, Australia, and South Africa (detailed in two appendices in the final report) also significantly shaped recommendations relating to apprenticeships in Ireland, with the commission concluding:

> The Commission is of the opinion that the principles underlying the South African and Queensland Acts indicate the best method of dealing with the problem of industrial training and apprenticeship in the Saorstát.[81]

In addition, the report contained proposals based on developments in a wide range of countries regarding the preparation of chefs, cooks, and waiters (the majority of whom were recruited internationally at the time) as well as workers for the fishing industry. Among institutions listed as being worthy of emulation were the Ecole Polytechnique Federale in Switzerland, the Royal Technical School in Stockholm, and the Chalmers Institute of Technology in Gothenburg, which, it was claimed, were university-caliber institutions. For the fishing industry, the report suggested a peripatetic vessel that provided training along the lines of that used in Belgium, while courses for the Royal Navy and Mercantile Marine at the Lancashire and National Sea Training Home for Boys were recommended to address gaps in provision in Ireland.[82]

While the Commission on Technical Education's final report advocating radical policy reforms for the sector was published in 1927, it was another three years before the Vocational Education Act of 1930 was passed.[83] It echoed the general thrust of recommendations made in the 1927 report, making provisions for the establishment of a system of continuation and technical education, grouped together under the title of "vocational education." While technical education for those leaving secondary schools

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[78] Commission on Technical Education, *Report*, 13.
[79] Commission on Technical Education, *Report*, 72.
[80] Commission on Technical Education, *Report*, 55.
[81] Commission on Technical Education, *Report*, 79.
[82] Commission on Technical Education, *Report*, 103–4.
[83] Government of Ireland, *Vocational Education Act, 1930* (Dublin: Government of Ireland), https://www.irishstatutebook.ie/eli/1930/act/29/enacted/en/html.

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

was well established, the decision to create continuation schools was a new development, as was the establishment of Vocational Education Committees whose members were empowered to found them.

The Vocational Education Committees, thirty-eight in total, consisted of "representatives of local authorities and commercial, industrial, educational, and cultural interests."[84] They were empowered to take control of the existing technical schools, establish new ones, maintain all of them, and contribute to the expenses of persons seeking an education defined as "pertaining to trades, manufactures, commerce, and other industrial pursuits."[85] Their remit also meant that the system of local control, and the nondenominational and coeducational character that up to then had marked the technical schools serving older students, was now going to be extended to the level of the continuation schools for graduates straight out of primary school who would not proceed to a secondary school.

The Vocational Education Act of 1930 did not define the curricular limits of the continuation schools. However, the Minister for Education did announce that they would have "a distinctly practical bias"[86] and that rural science, rural arithmetic, domestic economy, handwork, and metalwork would play a definitive part in the programs offered. By implication, then, it was made very clear that the curriculum would be quite different to that offered in secondary schools. Now, it seemed, education in Ireland, informed very much by developments across Western Europe and further afield, was about to take a significant leap forward. As the concluding section of this paper will indicate, however, matters turned out very differently.

Discussion and Conclusion

At the time of independence in Ireland, there was a clear desire to revise substantially the tone and content of the curriculum in order to highlight and promote distinctive aspects of Irish identity. This involved placing the Irish language and subject matter relating to Ireland at the center of national curricula, as well as making a return within the official education sector to various aspects of pre-1900 policy. In particular, emphasis in the case of primary and secondary schooling was placed on a view that teaching should be teacher-centered and that learning through making and doing were not worthy of emphasis. Additionally, the decision to mandate the Irish language as a curriculum subject and as the sole language of instruction in the infant classes in primary schools was not in harmony with the progressive bilingual education policy proposed by educationists during the pre-independence era.[87] To a great extent, those positions were informed much more by homegrown thinking and, to a more limited degree, by the selective review and critique of transnational educational ideas.

[84] Emmet O'Connor, "Dawn Chorus: The Origins of Trade Unionism in Vocational Education 1899-1930," in *Teachers' Union: The TUI and Its Forerunners 1899-1994*, ed. John Logan (Dublin: A. & A. Farmar, 1998), 37–61, 56.

[85] Government of Ireland, *Vocational Education Act, 1930*, part 1, section 4.

[86] John Marcus O'Sullivan, "Vocational Education Bill, 1930 - Second Stage," Dáil Éireann Debates 34, no. 15, May 14, 1930, https://www.oireachtas.ie/en/debates/debate/dail/1930-05-14/28/.

[87] O'Donoghue and O'Doherty, *Irish Speakers and Schooling in the Gaeltacht*.

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

The curriculum mandated for secondary schools, while more broadly based in terms of the subjects it prescribed than that which it replaced, continued to be very conservative and in the grammar school tradition.[88] Unlike the situation with primary schooling, those responsible for designing and promoting the curriculum did turn to a body of ideas circulating internationally to justify their stances. However, they did not do so in any positive sense. Rather, what they sought were positions to legitimize a particular variation of the Jesuit order's *Ratio Studiorum*—namely, one that placed emphasis on the need to develop the individual in only a very narrow academic manner, in which the development of critical thinking was neglected, and in which any engagement in practical activities should only take place in a very restricted sense.[89]

By contrast, the vocational education sector was the one sphere in the post-independence education system that, as has been detailed above, seemed likely to experience developments informed by contemporary education knowledge and practices. Hope in that regard continued following the publication of the Commission on Technical Education's final report and the passing of the Vocational Education Act of 1930. Rather naively, however, the framers of those policy measures appear not to have anticipated the role that the Catholic Church, one of the most influential transnational organizations in the world at the time, was about to play in how the provisions of that act functioned, and especially what kind of new vocational school sector would be established, namely, that of the continuation schools.

In a sense, the latter is surprising given the nature and extent of the successful opposition the Catholic Church had mounted in 1907 and again in 1919 against attempts by the previous administration to move towards a system of local education committees with provisions to raise funds through the levying of local rates along the lines that had been adopted in England under the Balfour Education Act of 1902.[90] When that same mode of governance, however, was introduced in the establishment of the new Vocational Education Committees under the new administration, the same level of anxiety was not evident, at least publicly. That can be attributed at least partly to the fact that the great majority of the politicians and public servants in newly independent Ireland, including those who would partake in the committees, were themselves loyal middle-class Catholics who were unlikely to act against Church interests.

At the same time, it would be remiss to overlook safeguards put in place within the vocational education sector that were aimed at protecting Church interests in education, and especially in secondary schooling. At least behind the scenes, some concern must have been expressed in Church circles in 1927 regarding the following recommendation in the final report of the Commission on Technical Education:

> We believe that there are many secondary schools, the large majority of whose pupils do not remain in attendance beyond the Intermediate Certificate age. It is

[88] Thomas O'Donoghue and Judith Harford, *Piety and Privilege: Catholic Secondary Schooling in Ireland and the Theocratic State, 1922-1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

[89] Frederick A. Homann, *Church, Culture and Curriculum: Theology and Mathematics in the Jesuit* Ratio Studiorum (Philadelphia: Saint Joseph's University Press, 1999).

[90] John Coolahan, "Church and State in Irish Education, 1900-20," in The Churches and Education, ed. V. A. McClelland (Leicester, UK: History of Education Society Conference Papers, 1983), 559–70.

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

> our view that the curricula of such schools should be designed to meet the needs of the majority and should be influenced to a slight extent only by the needs of a small minority proceeding to university.[91]

The originators of the report also concluded that there should be a tendency towards instruction on practical subjects in the secondary schools and that science, drawing, technical instruction, and domestic economy should be obligatory subjects.

Those positions, to a certain extent influenced by "outsiders," prompted Church personnel to act quickly behind the scenes. Prior to the passing of the Vocational Education Act of 1930, the Minister for Education met a delegation from the hierarchy that outlined its episcopal concerns with certain provisions. In response, Minister O'Sullivan responded in writing with an assurance that the continuation school sector would not be allowed to develop in such a way that it would impinge on the denominationally run secondary schools.[92] The outcome of such a provision was that up until the late 1960s, students enrolled in continuation schools were not prepared to sit for the Intermediate or Leaving Certificate examinations. In 1942, the Catholic hierarchy also succeeded in having religion included as a compulsory subject in the curriculum of the continuation schools under the provisions of Memorandum V40.[93]

By now, too, the members of the Catholic hierarchy were able to police developments carefully within the sector, as they had succeeded in making it customary for Vocational Education Committees not only to co-opt a priest as a member, but also to elect him as a chairperson. Church personnel also acted to perpetuate a notion that continuation schools were inferior institutions.[94] Moreover, the situation strengthened over succeeding decades into the mid-1960s, "the heyday of the Church in Ireland," when:

> there was a priest, nun, and brother in every corner of society. They presided over schools, hospitals, and a wide variety of social welfare institutions. Like all good authority figures, their supervision and control persisted even in their absence. In the most subtle and yet penetrative forms of power, the supervisory eye of the Church was internalized in the minds and hearts of Irish Catholics.[95]

In the case of schooling, Church leaders had achieved such a high level of control and influence that they cooperated with the state in the provision of schooling and, up to a point, its Irish-language revival policy. They were also successfully able to resist attempts to promote developments, including any international developments in education, on the grounds that they could weaken their interest in trying to ensure "the salvation of souls," in producing numerate and literate citizens who would be loyal to

[91] Commission on Technical Education, *Report*, 47–48.

[92] J. M. O'Sullivan, T.D., Minister for Education to Dr. Keane, Bishop of Limerick, Oct. 31, 1930, in Seamus Ó Buachalla, *Education Policy in Twentieth Century Ireland* (Dublin: Wolfhound Press, 1988), 399–403.

[93] Áine Hyland, "The Curriculum of Vocational Education 1930-1966," in *Teachers' Union: The TUI and Its Forerunners 1899-1994*, ed. J. Logan (Dublin: A. & A. Farmar, 1998), 131–56.

[94] Patrick Dolan, "The Origin of a System of Vocational Education in Ireland and Changing Conceptions of the System from 1930 to 1978" (masters thesis, University College Dublin, 1979).

[95] Tom Inglis, *Moral Monopoly: The Catholic Church in Modern Irish Society* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1987), 211.

the institution, and in supporting their efforts aimed at the production of priests, religious brothers, and nuns to ensure the reproduction of the institution. As they saw it, the curricula they had orchestrated during the 1920s in relation to each of the three education sectors were ideal in supporting their institutional aims, should be insulated from thinking and influences outside of the state, and should only be tinkered with around the edges.

The situation, however, began to change in the late 1960s as the state finally committed to much greater investment in productive industry and to incentives encouraging foreign investment. In tandem with that shift was the promotion of the notion that economic progress depended to a considerable extent on a broad scientific education among the population at large.[96] In subsequent related planning, senior Department of Education personnel looked to various overseas models to guide them. At this point in time, they received little opposition from the Irish Catholic Church. That change in approach can be attributed largely to the influence on its clerics of the proceedings of the Second Vatican Council (1961-65) and the subsequent breaking down within the Church of a "strategy of suppression or intransigence which had been ruthlessly followed for over half a century."[97] A consequence was a whole raft of changes in schooling in Ireland at the primary, secondary, and vocational school levels, much of it guided by knowledge circulating transnationally and being embraced enthusiastically.[98]

Thomas Walsh is associate professor of education at Maynooth University, Ireland. He was a visiting Fulbright Scholar at Northwestern University, Chicago, in 2024. **Tom O'Donoghue** is professor emeritus of education at the University of Western Australia. He is an elected fellow of the Academy of the Social Sciences (Australia) and of the Royal Historical Society (UK).

[96] Brian Fleming and Judith Harford, "Irish Education Policy in the 1960s: A Decade of Transformation," *History of Education* 43, no. 5 (2014), 635–56.

[97] Michael P. Hornsby-Smith, "Social and Religious Transformations in Ireland: A Case of Secularisation?," in *The Development of Industrial Society in Ireland*, ed. John H. Goldthorpe and Christopher T. Whelan (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 265–90, 255.

[98] Kevin Williams, "*Plus ca Change*? Recent Curriculum Change in Ireland," *Curriculum* 13, no. 2 (1992), 125–28.

Cite this article: Thomas Walsh and Tom O'Donoghue, "Transnational Knowledge Circulation and the Closing of Minds to Progressive Education Influences on Schooling in the First Decade of Independence in Ireland," *History of Education Quarterly* 65, no. 1, (February 2025), 91–110. https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60

https://doi.org/10.1017/heq.2024.60