



The Changing Landscape – State Policy-Making: Public service and teacher education in Ireland 1950-1980

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Radical economic policy change from the 1950s had major implications for Irish education which had traditionally drawn its values and orientation from Catholicism and cultural nationalism. While change to the economically-related administrative structures were bold and innovative, responses in the sphere of education were less so. This article outlines the change and forms of administrative response in teacher education and the implications for the administration of teacher in-service professional development.

Introduction

Economic recovery in post-war western Europe was based on national rebuilding that also encompassed social and welfare developments and educational expansion. Newly established international organisations fostered cooperation, extended credit and encouraged planning for development. Science-based technologically oriented institutions disseminated the necessary training and investment for social, economic and educational development (Murray, 2007; Papadopoulos, 1994). Ireland, for the first post-war decade preferred its traditional economic protectionism, and had remained aloof. However, the mid-1950s witnessed an economic crisis that affected many aspects of Ireland's

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political, social and economic development and resulted in Ireland's significant policy reversal (Girvin, 2010).

The sources of the crisis were in large part the result of policies adopted in pursuit of a nation-building agenda adopted on independence in 1922. The strategies to address this crisis had been foreshadowed in journals and forums (Fanning, 2008) and were aggregated and published in the first *Programme for Economic Expansion* in 1958. The planning procedure adopted in that plan had an impact not only on the economy, employment and emigration, the concerns dominating contemporary debate in Ireland, but on almost all aspects of life: politics and administration, social and cultural life and the various public services, including education (Lee, 1989). The impact on policy-making and public administration at this critical juncture presaged changes to traditional administrative procedures. This article examines what changes took place in administration and policy-making and the impact on education and specifically on teacher education and in-service training and continuous professional development.

The political and socio-economic context

The economic crisis of the 1950s has been attributed to several causes. The immediate crisis in the Irish state's finances and the balance of payments led to increased taxation and cuts in public spending on services and infrastructure. However, many authorities identified other systemic sources of the crisis and saw the economic, employment and emigration crises as a result of policies adopted and pursued since independence in 1922 (Garvin, 2004). The Irish state had relied on the existing political, economic and social policies into the 1950s. These policies were interdependent and were rooted in the pre-independence nationalist political ideology in an Ireland then under British rule. The ideology was one of self-sufficiency though based on *laissez faire* free market economics. Ireland's economy post-independence was based on agriculture and, from the 1930s onwards, an emergent small, tariff-protected

import-substitution industries. The use of state-owned commercial enterprises in key strategic areas [e.g. electricity supply] was also characteristic of the state's activity throughout the early decades (Keogh, 1994). This isolationist orientation was buttressed by a cultural nationalism that strove to maintain a rural-centred Gaelic language and culture within the embrace of a 'mother' Catholic church making the Irish Free State identifiably different to its colonial neighbour, Britain (Lee, 2008; O'Donoghue, 1999).

Ireland had remained neutral throughout World War II with the result that it avoided the human and material damage and dislocation and as a result the necessity for major post-war reconstruction. It failed, however, to participate fully in the political, economic, social and intellectual developments and reassessments that took place within and among nations that had endured traumatic experiences during and after the conflict (Murray, 2007). The increases in Ireland's perennial social problems of high unemployment and emigration in the 1950s aggravated a sense of failure when in Britain and Europe there were very obvious signs of economic, social, educational and cultural development.

The path chosen and policies adopted from the late 1950s would lead to the opening up of the Irish economy and to its dependence on international free trade. It also necessitated the adoption of policies to enhance that trajectory: expanding and adapting education and training for industry-based employment at home, the adoption of legislative and regulatory decisions arising from various international memberships including those of the European Community from 1973, the intensification of planning for foreign investment and configuring the state and its agencies to maximise international advantage (Lee 2008). The state increased its capacity to attract, coordinate, facilitate and service new and existing industries through the development of various agencies linked to but operating to norms and values more flexible than those of the civil service (MacCarthaigh, 2012). Administrative innovation was initially centred on government departments most exposed to the

processes of economic development. The civil service's administrative capacity to match the dynamism of economic development was subject to scrutiny (Institute of Public Administration [IPA], 1959; Ireland, 1969; Lee, 1989). In this process the role of the state was significantly enhanced, especially when compared to its previous supportive and ancillary role (Breen, Hannan, Rottman, & Whelan, 1990). It could draw on the energies and commitment of a new generation of both public servants and politicians. Despite the strategic role played by the state in economic and social development, social scientists and historians paid "little scholarly attention to the Irish state" up until the advent of the 1990s (Kirby, 2009; MacCarthaigh, 2013). What did this increasing attention to structures and policy-making highlight?

State policy-making

Analysing state policy in Ireland has raised theoretical challenges and has resulted in a number of perspectives being adopted based on a consideration of Ireland's pre-independence colonial status, its revolutionary birth or its developmental modernisation stage (Kirby 2009, Murphy 1997). The colonial bureaucracy's social and economic norms and values remained embedded within the bequeathed institutional machinery of the new state in 1922 (Lee, 1989). The re-organisation which occurred following independence fashioned a centralised and hierarchical structure answerable to politicians (Maguire, 2008). The prominent position given to the UK Treasury's successor, the Department of Finance, had implications for policy initiatives and implementation (Fanning, 1978; Ó Buachalla, 1988). Ireland's colonial status had ensured the separation of policy formulation, under a Westminster-based Chief Secretary, from implementation by the local Irish administration (McDowell, 1964). This separation continued until the 1950s. The Catholic Church, during the course of the nineteenth century, gained considerable influence and control over many aspects of life including health, education and welfare establishing an institutional framework, financially supported and supervised by the British state which used a range of indirect controls congruent with the

laissez faire ideology of the period (Fahey, 1992; O'Donoghue & Harford, 2011). The continuing provision of these services maintained the church's embeddedness in the new independent state with less acrimony than heretofore. The model of state-supported and supervised voluntary provision of key health, welfare and education services fitted the political and economic milieu of the new state and resulted in "mutually reinforcing political and episcopal visions" (Breen *et al* 1990: 29), a vision reflecting corporatist tendencies within church and state organisations (Inglis 1998, Lee 1989). The awareness of the institutional limits to state policy-making made for cautious approaches in areas perceived as sensitive, that is, within the Catholic church sphere of interest. This caution was to inhibit responses to social, health and education change which in Britain, Northern Ireland and Europe were modernising and expanding at an accelerating rate (Whyte, 1980). There was, in the absence of state initiatives, an expansion of voluntary organisations to fill social, educational and cultural gaps (Conroy, 1998).

The 1960s, however, witnessed a decade of transformation, following a period of inertia and insularity in Irish society. During this period, the state increased its capacity to pursue its economic policy agendas through the means of new departments, establishing agencies and setting up collaborative structures. An openness to new ideas through membership of international institutions exposed policy-makers to other ideological frameworks and to a larger repertoire of policies for consideration. The policy choices made were critical for economic development as free trade, competition and membership of the European Economic Community directly affected industry, trade unions and government (Roche 1982). In the 1960s the external impact on social development, i.e., health, education and welfare, was important insofar as economic development was contingent on their development. The economic and social development rationale drove changes in policy and practice and, given the prominent role of the Catholic church, provided the political argument for implementing changes in these

contentious areas. The education changes, for instance, proceeded in a determined though less assertive manner as in the economic sphere and with less dramatic institutional innovation (O'Reilly, 2012; Walsh 2009; White, 2001). As the social reforms became established in the 1970s and 1980s, policy considerations in health, education and welfare were more on their own merits and more as church *managed* public services than church *controlled* services. The increased participation of the various economic and social interests in the processes of policy-making both enhanced and restricted the state's capacity to set the agenda. Its capacity was enhanced in that the wider participation in the policy processes reduced or diluted the formidable power of the few historically dominant interests and facilitated mobilisation for change (Roche 1982). The relative restriction on the state was that the setting of the policy agenda was increasingly a shared process which was shaped in the corporatist-leaning economic and industrial structures of the 1960s and became the overarching policy, as social partnership, from the later 1980s (Roche & Cradden, 2003).

A Changing Educational Landscape

The economic policy reorientation that took place from the 1950s onwards was gradually translated into education policy in the 1960s under a series of younger ministers born or raised after independence (Fleming and Harford, 2014; Walsh, 2009). Their policy interventions were informed by their awareness of the economic implications of educational investment particularly in the area of technical education. They, and a number of key state Department of Education officials, identified several linked policy issues that both supported the government's programme for economic expansion and, politically, addressed the aspirations of the electorate. Increasing student retention to a higher school leaving age addressed both the increasing parental demand for post-primary education and the technical skill needs of the economy. The focus on a comprehensive curriculum would increase the pool for higher technician training, aid industrialisation and promote expanded tertiary education (Coolahan, 1981; Walsh, 2009; White,

2001). A rational approach to planning, integrating policy related to access and participation, structures and content, stimulated by the OECD *Investment in Education* report and supported by the newly established Development Branch in the Department of Education, had considerable influence during its decade of operation (Department of Education, 1965; Ó Buachalla, 1988). It resulted in new post-primary and tertiary technological structures in parallel with existing secondary schools and universities, an increased concern for access and considerable curriculum content developments (O'Connor, 1986; O'Reilly, 2012). Agencies for the coordination of higher education and awarding of non-university tertiary qualifications were established by the state by the early 1970s but several others planned for teacher regulation, curriculum and examinations and for regional education administration failed to materialise (Coolahan, 1981; Mulcahy and O'Sullivan, 1989; O'Reilly, 2012). School boards from the mid-1970s facilitated the gradual democratisation of church school management.

The turbulence created by ministerial and department officials' policy interventions manifested tenacity in the face of opposition and also a new willingness to encourage and engage in public discussion of policy proposals (Ferriter, 2012). One result was that groups were brought into the policy discussion arena where previously the Catholic hierarchy only were entertained (Barry, 1989; Logan, 1999; McCarthy, 1973). Teachers, who had been traditionally excluded from consultation procedures, were gradually involved from the early 1960s on syllabus and other committees (Coolahan, 1984b). Greater participation in policy-making led to the gradual professionalisation of participants' functioning in the process (Doyle, 2000). This enhanced the teacher education reforms being implemented (O'Connor, 1968). This period [1960s to 1970s] saw the emergence of professional and specialist associations and publications among educators and university research-based higher degrees in education (Coolahan, 1984a). University degrees for all teachers from the mid-1970s facilitated convergence of the state's and the profession's policy aspiration for a united teaching profession with a common salary

scale, based on equivalence of qualifications and with potential transferability among sectors.

Teacher training and education policy development

Initial primary teacher training remained substantially unchanged since the reform effected on independence to incorporate Irish language policies into the programmes and activities, academic, administrative and social of the residential, denominational training colleges (Harford, 2008). Training was, by this time, restricted to recognised training colleges or university education departments. The primary training institutions' religious ethos and the Irish cultural environment maintained traditional conservatism. The training undertaken reflected the narrow, technical perception of teaching at the time: the two-year course was onerous in its timetable, supervision, personal restrictions and limited time for reflection or independent reading (Coolahan, 2004). As the colleges pursued a state determined and examined programme and were isolated from the universities, understaffed and under resourced, there was no incentive towards research, innovation or additional course provision. Secondary teacher training, which was not mandatory, was based in university education departments, and operated in challenging circumstances: the course was part-time, with meagre staffing and resources and a marginal status within the institution (Coolahan, 2004). Training for technical and vocational subjects was more *ad hoc*, and conducted directly under the Technical Instruction branch of the Department of Education. In the context of unchanging curricula, and where what was taught was subject to regular, rigorous examination, which was the situation to the 1960s, there was little impetus for change in teacher training.

Employment conditions did not prompt significant continuing education. The labour market for most teachers was one of decentralised, denominational schools, each responsible for selection and employment of qualified, lay personnel after the positions reserved for the members of the religious community

owning the school were allocated. Local primary clerical managers prized 'fitting in' with the school's religious ethos over the appropriate teacher qualification. The qualified lay secondary teacher competed in a market for registered teaching positions in privately owned schools where religious members had an inbuilt advantage (Coolahan, 1984b). The number of promoted positions for lay teachers in the system was limited: in most larger primary and all secondary schools, principalship was in the hands of religious. Only the smaller vocational school sector differed from these procedures which continued into the 1960s.

The educational expansion of the 1960s put strains on the existing teacher training arrangements. In changes to primary teacher training in the early 1960s the major disciplines of educational studies had become foregrounded. The changes also included use of tertiary approaches in teaching, greater use of reading and independent study and an emphasis on varied teaching practice [practicum] opportunities; these were accompanied by a major relaxation of student social control (Coolahan, 2004). A number of reports which had major implications for teacher education were published during this decade and resulted in significant improvements in the 1970s to primary and secondary teacher training: prioritising research-based educational studies facilitated through enhanced and specialised staffing, investment in resources, full-time [secondary] and three-year courses [primary] and a recommended all graduate profession (Harford, 2008: 83-4). Specialised staffing facilitated limited training college in-service training from the later 1960s and enabled higher, university research-based post-graduate degrees to be offered. Differentiation in teaching roles and the related demand for in-service training occurred as the system expanded and developed: the increase in specialised school staffing and, combined with the reduction in the number of religious in education, promoted more senior administrative positions.

The institutional changes to accommodate these major changes were, however, modest. The training colleges, now called colleges

of education, remained institutionally separate while becoming recognised colleges of the National University of Ireland, “a device calculated to cause the least dislocation” (Dunne, 1975: 23). Integration into university structures in the manner recommended in the *Report of the Commission on Higher Education* came at a later stage (Harford, 2008: 84). New colleges to address specialised post-primary teacher training in religious, physical and technical education became similarly associated, recognised or affiliated and only at a later date becoming part of the university system. In such a fragmented environment where was the opportunity and incentive to consider teachers’ professional development?

In-service education and professional development

The changes to in-service education, training and refresher courses from the 1950s to the late 1960s had been evolutionary, remained institutionally separate and were isolated from initial teacher training and post-graduate education. Earlier, following independence, the implementation of the Irish language education policy necessitated, through the 1920s, an extensive in-service language training programme to ensure adequate primary teacher competence (Kelly, 2002). Political commitment and administrative urgency drove the free, compulsory, graded, multi-year, vacation courses for the majority of primary teachers. The courses were delivered externally through specialist Gaelic League summer colleges, but under the state Department of Education’s regulations, inspection and assessment (Kelly, 2002; Walsh, 2012). Continuing incentives and sanctions encouraged compliance. The Department of Education had, on independence, incorporated three education branches, primary, secondary and technical instruction, and this structure resulted in separately organised in-service provision until the 1970s (Coolahan & O’Donovan, 2009). Later Departmental primary branch in-service initiatives, commencing in 1940, were characterised by brevity and being voluntary, one-off, free and functional. The provision, based on a pre-existing direct Departmental specialist peripatetic trainer [or organiser] model, was limited to two newly-revised curriculum areas, music and

kindergarten methodology and involved about 1,000 teachers annually (O'Connor, 2010; T. Walsh, 2012).¹ Despite reported deficiencies and teacher demand, no additional in-service initiatives took place under the Department of Education until the late 1960s when significant curriculum change was introduced. The new 1971 curriculum, drawn up by the primary inspectorate, included new subjects, pedagogy and was based on child-centred principles. A 1970 Departmental steering committee on in-service education deliberated on various strategies to meet the urgent need for systematic in-service training and its recommended national network of voluntary, Department-sponsored teachers centres was expected to draw on local resources, available expertise and teachers drawn from the primary inspectorate's training-of-trainers scheme (Walsh, 2012). Walsh notes "while some provision for in-service education at a local level may have existed, there was a vacuum at policy level in relation to planning, co-ordination, resource allocations, evaluation, certification and continuity" (p 222). The mid-1970s economic crisis halted further developments (Hyland, 1986). The Department's separate Technical Instruction inspectorate was traditionally more active in in-service provision for vocational, and selectively, secondary, teachers. It collaborated with commercial and state-owned industry, specialist institutions as well as direct provision and also organised regular specialised teacher and administrator conferences. The secondary inspectorate, following the appointment of subject specialist inspectors from the 1960s, was to be an adjunct to the various teacher organised subject associations from the 1960s onwards.

State in-service training policy inertia in the 1940s to 1960s facilitated single-issue teacher interest and teacher focused groups, often embedded within larger parent organisations, to initiate and provide vacation in-service training programmes and activities for their peers.² These skills training courses aimed to extend an existing curriculum area or to introduce new elements to content or pedagogy (Hector, 2006; Ó Súilleabháin, 1986). As voluntary, *ad hoc* groupings, however, the limited resources and the absence of structures constrained provision and restricted development of these

minor in-service initiatives. The combination of expanding secondary education, increased teacher specialisation and the external stimulus of curriculum change led to the establishment of voluntary subject associations from the early 1960s onwards, a development stimulated by teachers' inclusion on Department syllabus committees. Their in-service provision was supported by occasional Departmental grants but mainly sustained by member enthusiasm (Coolahan, 1984b).

The primary teachers' union, the Irish National Teacher Organisation [INTO], had regularly pointed up the continuing Department of Education's neglect of 'refresher courses' and the dissemination of relevant educational research (INTO, 1947). To highlight this omission and to pursue its own research-informed educational agenda, the INTO planned for members' summer courses, using the existing Departmental model. These courses commenced in 1955 following the success of the INTO sponsored lecture tours in 1953 and 1954 in the key areas of educational psychology and bilingual research-based language teaching (*An Muinteoir Náisiúnta*, 1956: 5). By combining a focus on the educational implications of these areas with prominent personalities as chairs, notable expertise, focused lecture topics with concrete application and centrally located, well-attended courses, the Organisation achieved several aims over a number of years: it mobilised its own membership, informed key policy-makers, raised public awareness and led to identifiable state policy changes³ (*An Muinteoir Náisiúnta*, 1961: 4; INTO, 1960: 30-31). Moreover, it obtained precious newspaper publicity. In time, the summer courses became less an advocacy platform and, by the mid-1960s, when the organisation of in-service courses was increasingly in the hands of local INTO branches, it became more responsive to teachers' practical classroom concerns and was delivered by lecturers more in tune with new methods and content. A more localised, teacher-driven infrastructure was thus in place for advent of the new primary curriculum and the setting up of teachers' centres in the early 1970s.

Independently of the state Department of Education and the INTO, the Catholic church also became extensively involved in teacher in-service training from the late 1950s. By mid-century, religious instruction [or 'catechism' as it was colloquially known] was undergoing a radical revision with major implications for teachers (Ó Briain, 1956). The religious instruction syllabus was separate from that of the state, was examined by a separate diocesan inspectorate and so intensified the scrutiny of pupils' and teachers' performance (McConville, 1966). The shift from a rigorously examined rote-learning approach to child friendly methods, books, activities and advisory support was accompanied during the 1960s, and especially in largest urban areas, by separate church organised summer courses (Dublin Diocesan Archives).⁴ The initial content laden and clerically [Catholic priests] delivered courses shifted, through the 1960s, to ones more methodologically focused, accommodating greater teacher participation. By the 1970s, church in-service interventions had evolved towards a school and cluster-based model centred around a transformed advisory diocesan advisory service. This separate trajectory did not envisage alignment with the Department's envisaged national network of teachers' centres.

Concluding Thoughts

The impact of Ireland's economic expansion from the 1960s was most visible in its effects on the economy: increased levels of employment, reduced emigration, a level of optimism and a general modernisation in people's lives. Underpinning this was the effect of the major change in state economic policy which brought consequential changes to electoral politics, membership of international networks and an orientation towards economic planning. Public administration, particularly in the general economic spheres, responded to the various challenges. The legacies from the decades of state consolidation up to the 1960s, in particular the Gaelic language and cultural revival, idealisation of rural life and the centrality of the Catholic Church, gradually lost their ability to significantly influence policy. The economy centred

government departments, particularly those dealing with finance, trade, agriculture and industry, and those, from 1973 onwards, coordinating policies through European Economic Community structures, developed an administrative architecture and procedures with modern internal and foreign networks to develop and pursue strategic policies. This was illustrated domestically through the development of state agencies, departmental reconfiguration and regionalisation (Coolahan, 1986).

The findings of the *Investment in Education* report underpinned the changes to education policies from the 1960s and were co-ordinated by the Development Branch set up within the state Department of Education. The reforms were promoted politically by a series of reform-minded politicians and officials in tune with the need for education changes to accompany and contribute to economic development. The result was a period of significant post-primary structural change, expansion of the technical dimension and curriculum modernisation at all levels of the education system. In this field, the legacy effects were more apparent and resistance more visible: some teachers' unions and the religious management authorities vigorously contested these changes (Walsh, 2009). The field of planning for human-capital development was the underlying policy priority and was based on a market oriented understanding of education and training policy to complement this change in direction (O'Sullivan, 2005). It was in this technological dimension that significant administrative change occurred (Coolahan, 1986; Ó Laoghaire, 1991). As a result, the majority, mainstream parts of the educational system administrative change were more incremental.

The institutional fragmentation among the education interest groups eventually resolved itself in rationalisations, strategic coalitions and increased participation with the state in consultative processes. This process gradually brought them into more collaborative relationships with the state in the emerging forums of the 1980s and the subsequent policy-formulation structures and agency establishment. The transformation of these hierarchically structured

organisations led to greater appreciation of the efficacy of consultative policy discussion and the contribution the process made towards legitimacy, managing conflict, member mobilisation and the ease of implementation. There were limits to the consensus achieved among the parties and this increased the number of veto points and neglected or deferred policy areas.

Pre- and in-service education and training were peripheral to the tensions and being played out on the central stage of mainstream education. An important opportunity to re-configure initial teacher education, and the regulation of the profession generally, as recommended in various reports in the 1960s existed. However, the existing negotiating environment was not conducive to radical change and alternative, less disruptive and costly approaches were adopted to facilitate the colleges of education's connection to the universities. There was an emerging need for planning and co-ordinating in-service education which by the early 1970s had established its space in Irish education. The intensification of curriculum revision, methodological diversification, role specialisation and lay teacher promotion to administrative positions in schools were to add to the demand. The absence of an integrated teacher education structure was to inhibit development which the Department of Education, at the time, was reluctant to propose.

Notes

¹ Through the 1950-1960 decades there were, 13,000 to 14,500 primary teachers, increasing incrementally over the 20 years.

² Examples include teachers' vacation courses on film in education under the National Film Institute, theatrical and dramatic training by *Cumann Drámaíochta na Scol* [The schools' dramatic association], athletics under the National Athletics and Cultural Association of Ireland and seminars organised by the Teachers' Study Group.

³ A conservative estimate of numbers attending the two to three annual courses based on newspaper and the INTO's journal's incomplete figures would be approximately 500.

⁴ By the mid-1960s, when new religious education textbooks came on stream, attendances well exceeded 1,000 primary teachers annually when other dioceses' in-service is added to the known Dublin archdiocesan figures.

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