



Exploring Concepts of Children and Childhood in Ireland (1900-1940) from an Historical Educational Policy Perspective

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“...the same factors constantly recur with minor differences and in different combinations so that a knowledge of past problems is relevant to those who have to solve present problems.” (Wardle, 1976:39)

Overview of Presentation

- Context and research questions
- Methodology
- *Revised Programme of Instruction* (1900)
 - Context
 - Conceptualisation of childhood 1900-1922
- Programmes of Instruction (1922 and 1926)
 - Context
 - Conceptualisation of childhood 1922-1940
- Learning for policymakers
- Questions and discussion

Conceptualisation of Childhood in Ireland 1900-1940

Revised Programme
(1900)

Primary School
Curricula (1922
and 1926)

Political
Independence
(1921)

Research Questions

1. What conceptualisation of children and childhood was inherent in the two curricula introduced in Ireland between 1900 and 1940?
2. What were the key national and international influences that informed these conceptualisations?
3. What was the effect of these conceptualisations on the educational experiences of children from this era?
4. What can contemporary policymakers learn from this historical experience?

Childhood as a Construction

- Time-specific and contextual
 - Social, economic, religious, cultural, political, international factors
 - Childhood experienced differently by each individual
 - Political independence in Ireland impacted on conceptualisation
- Schools as arenas for power struggles between Churches and State
 - State – Schools as agents of socialisation, assimilation, politicisation and reproduction
 - Churches –Conduits of the faith and instillers of religious loyalty
- Impact of Catholic Church on schooling and conceptualisation in wider society
- Effects of schools as institutions on conceptualisation
 - Curriculum as key artefact encapsulating this conceptualisation (philosophy, content, methodology)

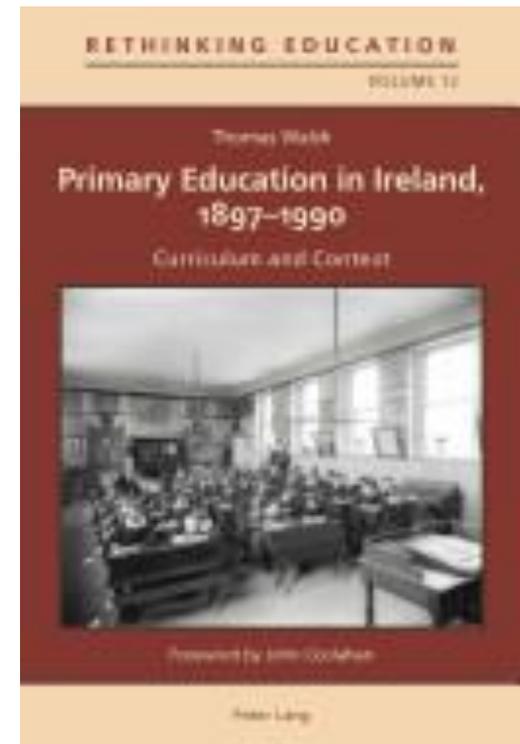
Methodology – Document Analysis

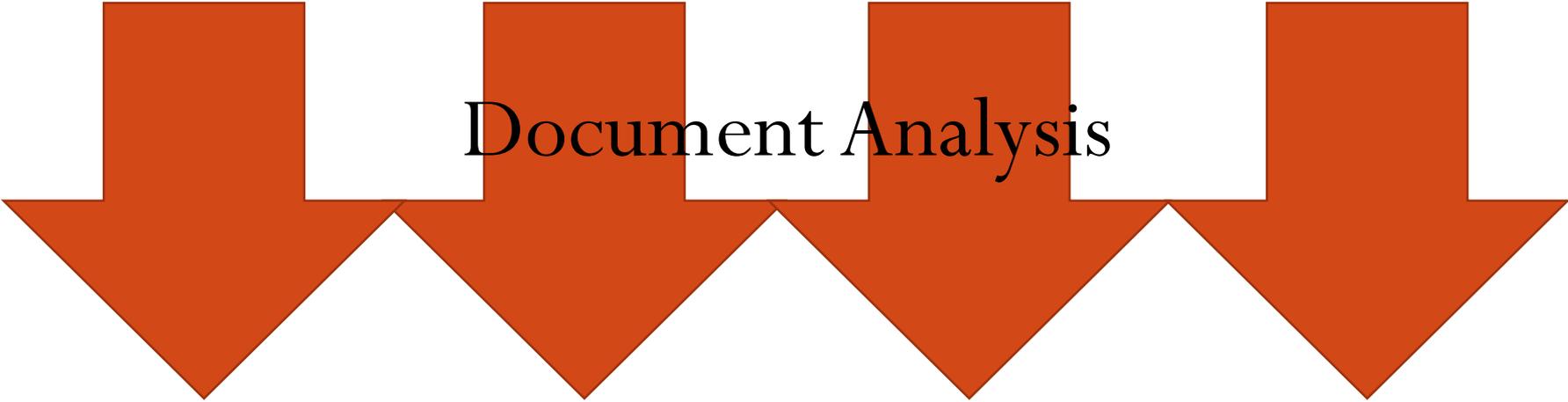
- Use of document analysis to examine critically sources relating to the conceptualisation of childhood in Ireland 1900-1940

“Document analysis is a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents—both printed and electronic (computer-based and Internet-transmitted) material. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, document analysis requires that data be examined and interpreted in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge.” (Bowen, 2009:27)

Document Analysis - Sources

- Interrogation of primary and secondary sources:
 - **Programmes/ curricula 1900-1930**
 - State papers and reports
 - Legislation
 - Official parliament records and debates
 - Annual reports
 - Ecclesiastical documents
 - Memoirs and biographies
 - Newspapers and journals
 - Department of Education Circulars
 - Manuscripts and unpublished documents
 - Book chapters
 - Journal articles
 - Conference proceedings
 - Reports and pamphlets
 - Unpublished theses





Document Analysis



Narrative Policy Analysis

Narrative Policy Analysis

- Interest in narrative policy analysis as a cross-disciplinary approach to bring coherence to individual narratives/ stories over a longer period of time and to create a metanarrative from all of the individual narratives
 - Examining the totality of the evidence and its interrelationship to create the new narrative
 - Reframing of the perspectives in a more coherent narrative
- Useful where there is complexity, uncertainty and differing views
 - Messiness of policy development process
- Capacity to include wide variety of perspectives and to include wider societal context/ circumstances in which they were developed

(Roe, 1994)

Revised Programme of Instruction (1900)



Revised Programme of Instruction 1900-1922

- Context and content
 - Irish political affairs determined at Westminster
 - *Revised Programme* replaced a system of Payment by Results
 - Commission on Manual and Practical Instruction (1898)
 - International influences
 - New Education Movement/ Rousseau/ Froebel/ Pestalozzi
 - Broadened the curriculum
 - Introduction of manual and practical subjects
 - Schools to be interesting and humane places
 - Advanced heuristic as opposed to didactic approaches

Commissioners of National Education (1901:Appendix D)

Revised Programme of Instruction (1900)

- Focus on the agency of the child:

“...by which children are enabled to find out things for themselves, by being placed, so to speak, in the position of discoverers...” (P. 21)

- Focus on differentiation:

It provided an adequate education for an ‘average child’ while “...giving a child whose intelligence is above the average opportunities of developing it to the best advantage” (P. 17)

- Focus on application:

“...the Teachers should endeavour to make clear to the pupils the utility of the arithmetical processes by their application to concrete objects and the ordinary affairs of business” (P. 21)

- Focus on enjoyment:

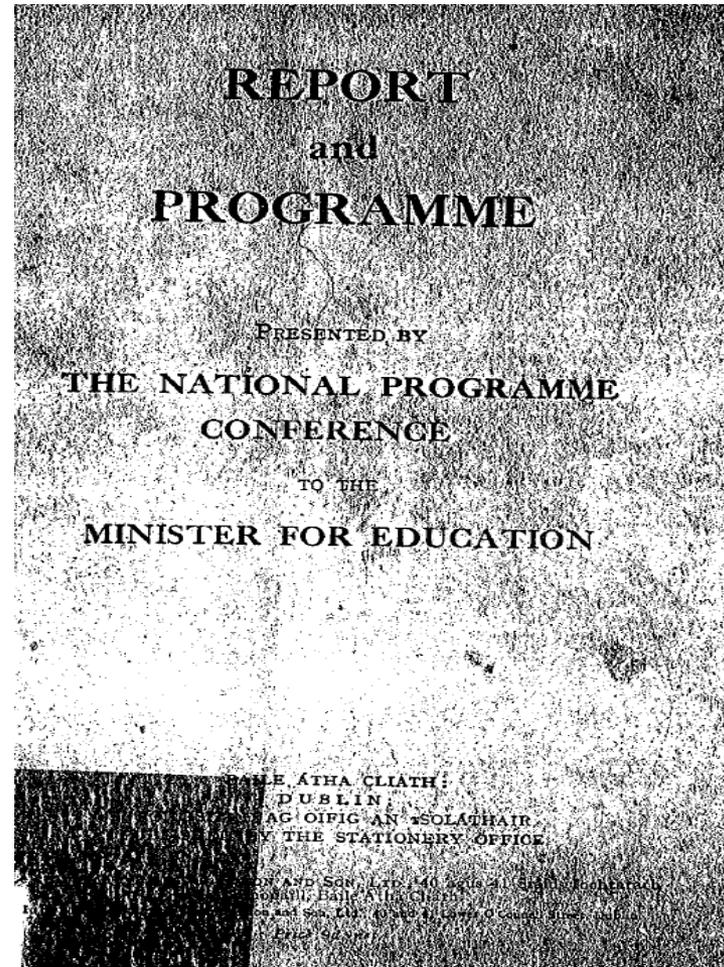
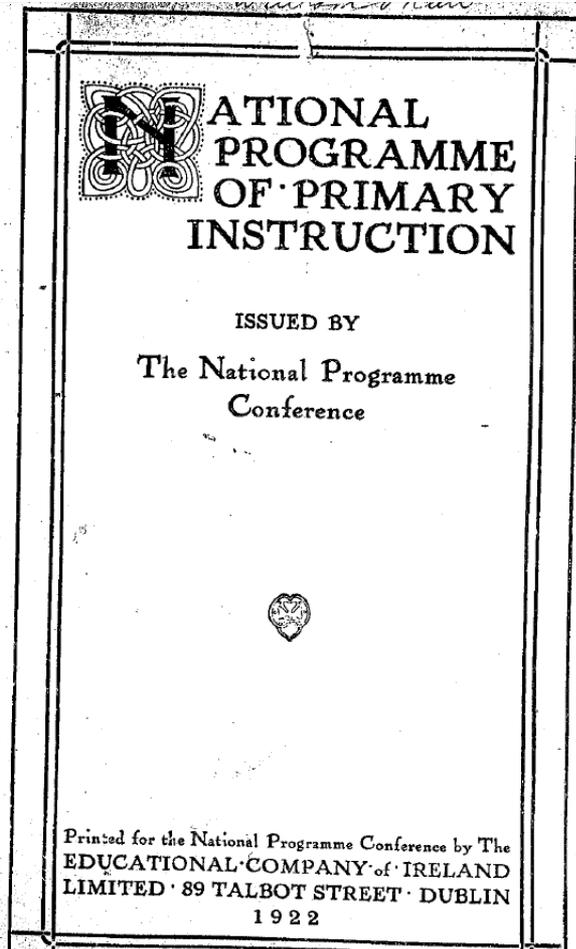
The “...school should be made a pleasant place in every possible way, and the lessons should be suited to the capacities and the opportunities for acquiring knowledge possessed by the children.” (P. 29)

Revised Programme of Instruction

1900-1922

- Conceptualisation of childhood
 - Childhood as a distinct phase of life – not an apprenticeship for adulthood (James and Prout, 1997)
 - Needs and interests of the child emphasised
 - Focused on developing agency and reasoning skills of child
 - Raised status of younger children in society
 - ‘Apollonian’ concept of the child evident (Jenks, 1996)
 - Focus on innocence and inherent goodness of the child
 - Child revealed through sensory engagement and experience
- Challenges introducing such a radically different concept of children into schools and society

Curriculum Developments in the 1920s



Primary School Curricula 1922-1940

- Context
 - Cultural and militant nationalism
 - Achievement of political independence
 - Dominant influence of Catholic Church
 - Ownership and management of schools
 - Delivery of other social services
 - Constitution of Ireland (1937)
 - Isolation and insulation from international influences
 - Building identity and nationhood through schools
 - Revival of Irish language
 - Reduced breadth of the curriculum
 - Centrality of religion in school life

National Programme Conference (1922)

National Programme Conference (1926)

National Programme Conference (1926)

- “...of all parts of a school curriculum, Religious Instruction is by far the most important, as its subject-matter, God’s honour and service, includes the proper use of all man’s faculties, and affords the most powerful inducements to their proper use”
- The programme also provided that “...a religious spirit should inform and vivify the whole work of the school”
- Role of the teacher in “...moulding to perfect form of his pupil’s character...” in line with God’s laws

National Programme Conference (1926:21)

Primary School Curricula 1922-1940

- Conceptualisation of childhood
 - Child as passive recipient of education – Focus on teacher/ content
 - Pedagogical concerns and interests of children subservient to political, religious and nationalist aims
 - Focus on child dependency and protection
 - Closed, defined curriculum and direct methods advocated
 - Lack of focus on the individual child
 - Emphasis on discipline, rules and regulations
 - Child to be ‘moulded’ by teacher
 - ‘Dionysian’ concept of the child evident (Jenks, 1996)
 - Focus on stain of Original Sin
 - Suppression of natural instincts of the child

Learning for Contemporary Policymakers

- Significance of exploring multiple sources to develop a metanarrative in history of education
- Importance of context in the development of education policy
 - Political, social, economic, cultural, religious, international
- Potential for policy to move too far ahead of popular thinking and belief
 - Power of teacher and parental belief systems to temper educational policy/ policies 'borrowed' from abroad
- The vulnerability of children as subjects/ objects of education policy
 - Subservience of pedagogical goals over other competing goals
- Potential critical impact individuals and organisations can have on the direction of educational philosophy and policy
 - No significant curriculum policy change until 1971
 - Still tensions between 'Apollonian' and 'Dionysian' concepts of the child in education (OECD, 1991; 2004)

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Thank You!

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