

Title	Presidential address of Dr. Áine Hyland, University College Dublin, 26 March 1992
Authors	Hyland, Áine
Publication date	1993
Original Citation	Hyland, Á. (1993) 'Presidential address of Dr. Áine Hyland, University College Dublin, 26 March 1992', 1992 Annual Conference of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland, University College Dublin, 26 March 1992. Irish Educational Studies, 12(1), pp. 1-14. https://doi.org/10.1080/0332331930120104
Type of publication	Article (peer-reviewed);Conference item
Link to publisher's version	10.1080/0332331930120104
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Download date	2026-10-28 23:07:02
Item downloaded from	https://hdl.handle.net/10468/18062



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University College Cork, Ireland
Coláiste na hOllscoile Corcaigh



Áine Hyland

"Presidential Address at the 1992 Annual Conference of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland"

published in

Irish Educational Studies, Vol. 12, 1993.

Abstract:

This address provides an overview of the focus of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland since its founding in 1977. It outlines the links with other educational organisations in Ireland and internationally and emphasised the importance of the north-south dimension of the ESAI. The late 1980s and early 1990s had witnessed significant debate about Irish education and this Presidential address reflects the contemporary issues in education, north and south.

Address given by Dr. Aine Hyland, President of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland at the opening of the 17th annual conference of the Association at U.C.D.
- 26 March 1992.

I would like to welcome you here this evening to the opening of the 17th annual conference of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland and to thank Professor Swan who has formally opened the conference and John Hayden, secretary of the Higher Education Authority who has launched the 11th number of *Irish Educational Studies*. I add my voice to the previous speakers in thanking the editor of the journal - Dr. Padraig Hogan, whose work in preparing and editing the journal for publication has been phenomenal. I think it is important to put on record that the work undertaken by Padraig - the endless hours of editing, proof-reading, liaising with the printers - has been done voluntarily and for this we are all very grateful. I would also like to thank Monica Dowdall, who is with us this evening, for her work in preparing the typescript of the journal within a very tight time schedule and for being part of the team which has enabled the Association to produce a high quality publication of which we have every cause to be proud.

I regret that the Minister, Seamus Brennan and the Secretary of the Dept. of Education, Noel Lindsay, were not in a position to accept the invitation to be here - the preparation of the Green Paper continues to be a priority with them. We are very pleased to have with us the Chairperson and Vice-chairperson of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment - Dr. Tom Murphy and Sr. Pat Murray; Dr. Brendan O'Regan, chairman of Co-Operation North and of the Irish Peace Institute. We are also very pleased to have with us this evening Professor McClelland of the University of Hull; Dr. Peter Murphy from British Columbia, Ms. Sutherland from the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Research and other distinguished guests and members.

The Educational Studies Association of Ireland was set up in 1977 as a result of an initiative taken by a working party of Irish educationalists who believed that there was a need, within Ireland as a whole, for a formal association of Irish educators concerned with educational studies and research. The purpose of the association is

(i) to provide a context in which those with a research or scholarly interest in education can contribute to the critical discussion of educational issues and the development of acceptable procedures for both basic and applied research in education;

(ii) to disseminate research findings within the educational system and the community at large;

(iii) to offer consultancy services whenever possible.

The association organises an annual conference and a number of theme conferences every year. Since the early 1980s, a selection of the papers of the annual conference have been published in the association's annual journal - *Irish Educational Studies*. The association has also issued a number of other publications as well as a Register of all theses carried out in Irish universities, north and south, since 1911. A supplement to this register is published annually to ensure that the information is kept fully up to date. An index to this Register is almost completed and will be available shortly.

There are over 200 individual members in the association at present. These include academic staff in education departments in third-level institutions and research institutions; academic staff in disciplines allied to education; teachers and others interested in educational studies or educational research; professional staff connected with education in government and training services. In addition there are about 30 corporate members, i.e. organisations such as university departments of education, colleges of education, teacher unions and other organisations involved in activities of an educational nature. We also have a number of associate members, i.e. post-graduate students of education. We have links with other organisations including the Association of Teacher Education in Europe, the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, the Irish Association for Curriculum and Development, the Psychological Association of Ireland, the Association of Teacher Centres of Ireland, the Association of Education Officers of the Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland, NICER, Co-Operation North and the Irish Peace Institute.

The ESAI sets a high value on its north / south dimension. Our members come from both north and south of the border and it is the policy of the association to hold annual and theme conferences in the north as well as in the south. We are particularly pleased this year to have a number of papers from members in Stranmillis College and in the University of Ulster and I would like to take this opportunity to thank Dr. George Boyd of Stranmillis College for his long-standing and sterling service to the association not to mention Dr. John Wilson, my predecessor as President of the ESAI.

When Prof. Coolahan was President of the Association ten years ago, he expressed concern that education was not high on the political agenda in Ireland. The situation has changed significantly in the past decade. Since I

took up office as President of the ESAI two years ago educational issues have been actively debated, both north and south. The Education Act in Northern Ireland in 1989 introduced major changes there and teachers and teacher educators have been faced with the daunting challenge of introducing the new National Curriculum and new assessment procedures at primary and secondary levels. A new Northern Ireland Curriculum Council has been set up to supersede the Northern Ireland Council for Educational Development. The review and revision of teacher education has created exceptional demands on academic staff in Colleges of Education and Education Departments of Universities.

Here in the south, there has also been considerable debate in the area of education, although the agenda has been somewhat different to that in the north. The past two years have seen the publication of a number of major reports - the Report of the Primary Curriculum Review Body; the Report of the Primary Education Review Body; the OECD review of educational policy in Ireland; reports from the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment on the Junior Certificate and on Assessment and position papers on a Junior Certificate framework and on the structure and format of Senior Cycle. The Programme for Economic and Social Progress in 1991 and the recently published Culliton Review of Industrial Policy in Ireland have important implications for education. The unpublished but available CHL report, which recommended new structures and approaches to in-service teacher education was also significant. Also during the period, the new Junior Certificate courses got under way in all post-primary schools and over 60,000 young people will be sitting this exam for the first time in June of this year. The N.U.I Matriculation examination, which has a long history, will be held for the last time this year. A new grading system for the Leaving Certificate will be introduced this summer. The universities have agreed on a common points system. The Colleges Bill - giving greater autonomy to the Regional Technical Colleges and the Dublin Institute of Technology is being debated.. Thomond College has been integrated into the University of Limerick. The twenty year old link between the NUI and the two biggest Colleges of Education seems to be coming to an end with the signing of a memorandum of Agreement between Mary Immaculate College in Limerick and the University of Limerick and with negotiations between St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra and Dublin City University apparently at an advanced stage. A question mark hangs over the future of the Education Departments of the "old" universities. The National Council for Vocational Awards has been set up to validate and certify courses such as Post-Leaving Cert courses and Vocational Preparation and Training courses. A special committee to investigate and report on the education of children with special needs is sitting. The three major teacher unions have set up a Council of Teachers' Unions through which they will take a united stance on issues of mutual concern.

No doubt there have been other changes and developments during the period but this litany alone indicates the state of flux in which our education system finds itself. The publication of the forthcoming Green Paper will open up a whole new area of debate in the months ahead and I have no doubt that the Educational Studies Association will play a full part in this debate as it has done in relation to key educational issues in the past.

In 1991 the ESAI was involved in four major theme conferences. In January we held a theme conference on the reports of the Primary Curriculum Review Body and the Primary Education Review Body and I would like to thank committee members Don Herron and Pam O Siorain for organising and contributing to these conferences. In May, the association ventured into new ground by running a conference in UCC on Early Childhood Education. Our thanks to Francis Douglas for taking the initiative on this and for running the conference so efficiently and successfully.

Last autumn we were involved in two exceptionally successful conferences in conjunction with Co-Operation North and the Irish Peace Institute. The first of these was a joint conference with Co-Operation North and the editors of Irish Education Decision-Maker on the theme *Vocational and Further Education and Training, North and South*. This conference was held in Newry. We were very pleased with the response to this conference. The speakers included senior professional staff of the Departments of Education, north and south; heads of further education colleges in the north and of Regional Technical Colleges in the south; the Director General of FAS from Dublin and the Chief Executive of the Training and Employment Agency from Belfast. David Coyne from the Task Force for Human Resources, Education and Training of the European Commission in Brussels also contributed to the conference and he emphasised the common problems and issues confronting educators and trainers both north and south, in the context of the Europe of the 1990s. I would like to record my thanks to Barney O'Reilly, editor of Irish Education Decision-Maker and to Ian White of Co-operation North who helped me to organise that conference.

The conference on Education for Peace which was jointly run by the Irish Peace Institute and the Educational Studies Association of Ireland in the University of Limerick last October was possibly the most successful conference with which we were ever associated. I would like to pay a special tribute here this evening to Kieran Byrne, Vice-President of the Association and to Tom O'Donnell, Director of the Irish Peace Institute for planning and organising this conference. I would also like to thank Peadar Cremin from Mary Immaculate College who was the conference co-ordinator, for the considerable work which he did on the ground in running the conference. Thanks largely to our involvement in this

conference, the year 1991 saw almost 1,000 people participating in conferences under the aegis of ESAI - an unprecedented figure.

At this point I think it is appropriate to single out Dr. Brendan O'Regan, founding member and chairman of both Co-Operation North and the Irish Peace Institute for his dedication and commitment to the cause of peace and co-operation on this island. Since his retirement from "real" work some years ago, Brendan has committed himself single-mindedly to this mission and continues to work - probably even more relentlessly than he ever worked before his so-called retirement, to this end. I was personally very pleased that the Educational Studies Association had the opportunity of working so closely with Dr. O'Regan and his team during my term of office as President and I am confident that now that we have forged a close link with Co-Operation North and the IPI, we will continue to work together to further achieve our mutual aims.

1992 is a historic year from many perspectives. It is the quatercentenary of the foundation of Trinity College - the Charter of the College was signed 400 years ago this month. The contribution made by Trinity College to Irish education has been documented elsewhere - I would simply like to pay tribute to the contribution made by Trinity College to educational studies and research in more recent years, particularly since the initiation of the Masters Degree in Education - the first of its kind in the south - about 20 years ago. Many of us might not be here this evening if it were not for the opportunity afforded to us by the Education Department of Trinity College, and specifically by Professor Rice - to undertake post-graduate studies in education, at a time when the opportunity was not available in such a flexible way in other universities in the south. We had originally hoped to hold our conference this year in Trinity College and thus to participate in some small way in the quatercentenary celebrations, but unfortunately this did not prove possible.

1992 is also the quatercentenary of the birth of John Comenius, a Czech philosopher, political reformer, and educator. As I speak, many of our educational colleagues throughout the world are gathered in Prague for a major world conference to honour Comenius' contribution to education. On behalf of the ESAI I have sent a telemessage of collegial greeting and warmest wishes for the success of the Comenius conference to Madame Capcova who is one of its organisers and is known to some of us through the International Standing Committee for the History of Education.

Comenius' writings on education are at least as relevant to the world of today as they were 400 years ago. He was a European in the best sense of that word. He spent most of his life in exile and was recognised and honored for his scholarly achievements by the House of Commons in England and by the Royal Houses of Sweden, Poland and Hungary. In his

lifetime his books were translated into most European languages as well as Arabic, Turkish, Persian and Mongolian.

He had great faith in humanity and believed that education should be available "not only to one man or a few or even many men; but to all people together as well as to each separately, young and old, rich and poor, irrespective of birth, men and women - in short, everyone whose fate it is to have been born a human being so that in the end the entire human race would become educated, regardless of age, rank, sex, or nationality". He was a man before his time in advocating a state-sponsored free education for all.

He was a committed pacifist who hated war and violence. He had a vision of a world without divisions. He wrote "We are all fellow citizens of one world. What prevents us from forming one state with one set of laws for all?" He believed that politicians should guard society against dictators, violence of all kinds, unlawful imprisonment, execution and wars. He proposed that the citizens of the world accept for themselves the jurisdiction of three institutions: an International Court of Peace which would deal with the causes of war; an International Council of Light that would handle universal education and schools; and a World Consistory which would instal peace among churches and guard against attempts to manipulate people's minds. The tragic divisions among Christians taught Comenius an important lesson: "The obstinacy of Christians one to another and the hitherto vain efforts of various men to reconcile them caused me to consider and to hope that it would be easier to heal the whole rather than the part; to give the whole body one medicine, than to apply a plaster only to the head or the foot or the side. That is I began to concentrate my design upon an endeavour to reconcile the whole human race".

One wonders how Comenius would respond to current developments towards a united Europe. I believe that the initialling of the Treaty on Political Union in Maastricht in December by the 12 countries of the European Community could well herald a new era in education in Europe.. The wording of Article 126 of the Maastricht agreement which relates to education is, on the face of it, rather bland:

"The Community shall contribute to the development of quality education by encouraging co-operation between member states and if necessary by supporting and supplementing their action, while fully respecting the responsibility of the Member States for the content of teaching and the organisation of education systems and their cultural and linguistic diversity.

The article goes on to elaborate more specifically on the areas at which Community action shall be aimed. These include developing the European dimension in education, particularly through the teaching and dissemination

of the languages of the Member States and the encouraging of mobility of students and teachers. To achieve these aims, the Maastricht agreement commits the Council to adopting "incentive measures, excluding any harmonisation of the laws and regulations of the Member States".

When we bear in mind that the Treaty of Rome gave no competence to the Community to intervene in the area of education - and yet affected so many areas of education here in Ireland during the past decade (for example, Transition to Work programmes, VPTProgrammes, specified courses in Regional Technical College and some professional courses in universities, not to mention programmes supported by projects such as ERASMUS, TENET, PETRA, HELIOS and more recently TEMPUS) - it would be naive to think that the Maastricht Treaty, if ratified, will not have a significant effect on education in the decade ahead.

At a personal level, I believe that we have nothing to fear from a closer European involvement and I would like to see our education system addressing more determinedly the issue of competence in modern European languages, not only by our young people at second and third level but also at primary school level. I cannot agree with those who argue against the introduction of another language at primary level. There is no evidence to suggest for example, that the introduction of another language at this level would lower the status of the Irish language. I am not denying that there are serious problems of standards in Irish among our young people but these problems have not been caused by the inclusion on the curriculum of other languages nor is there any reason to believe that they will be exacerbated if another language is introduced. A recent survey carried out on behalf of the INTO indicates that children in at least 436 national schools (out of a total of 3,300) pupils are taught a European language other than English either within school or as an extra-curricular subject. As a first step, I would suggest that the Department recognise the reality of this situation by officially allowing a modern language to be taught in primary schools. This might be followed by a strategy of encouraging schools which are in a position to do so to offer the option. In-service courses could be provided to support teachers to develop the necessary skills and competence for this purpose. I estimate that about three-quarters of our national teachers have studied a modern European language to Leaving Certificate level and many of these might welcome the opportunity to update their knowledge and fluency in that language. When we bear in mind that in 1922, less than 40% of the national teachers in the country had even a minimum competence in Irish and that by the end of the decade Irish was being taught to every school-child in the country, we realise that if a policy decision was taken to introduce a modern European language to older pupils in national schools, it would by no means be an impossibility.

I welcome the publication this week of a new history of Europe written from a European perspective for pupils at senior cycle level, with the 18th century chapter contributed by Kenneth Milne who is with us this evening. This history is not yet available in English but when it becomes available I hope it will be used in our schools. There is scope for many other such collaborative efforts. If collaboration at a cross-European level can occur in such a sensitive and culturally bound subject as history, surely there must be scope for pilot studies on agreed European syllabuses in subjects such as Science, Mathematics, Geography, Economics - the list could go on.

It is appropriate at this point to make some reference to the debate on senior cycle education which has been opened up by the recent publication of the Culliton Review of Industrial Policy and which will no doubt become more lively following the publication of the forthcoming Green Paper. The Culliton report maintains that "the contribution of productive enterprise to our social and economic objectives should be an issue of primary importance at all educational levels to de-emphasise the bias towards the liberal arts and the traditional professions." The report recommends that "a high quality and respected stream of technical and vocational education with a new curriculum and close involvement by industry should be developed." It goes on to state that "the need now is to concentrate on the efficiency of the education and training system in meeting the manpower needs for industrial enterprise and development". The report maintains that there is not enough emphasis in Irish second-level education on technical and vocational training and that over the years the prestige of the academic Leaving Certificate programme has diverted students who would be much better adapted to a technical training. It argues that it is essential to redress this imbalance by improving the incentives and the facilities for second level students opting for technical and vocational courses.

As an educational historian, I read the Culliton report with interest. Many of the points made in the report have echoes in our past. How many of us remember an interview given by Dr. Hillery when as Minister for Education in 1964 he stated: "Secondary education with us is only one stream. What we really need in this country is the other stream, the technical, the scientific. We need to develop these if you were to give secondary grammar, academic style education to everybody you would be wasting your money in two ways; you would be getting too many people taking a course which is no use to most of them. And these people who are so trained and cannot get employment have lost the chance of being trained in skills, whereas we need people with skills and we need them very much".

The Culliton report reminds us that nations like Germany and Switzerland have benefitted from apprenticeship and vocational programmes that provide a highly skilled and adaptable workforce. As far back as 1926, the

new Irish Free State recognised that we might have something to learn from countries like Switzerland in this regard and invited the President of the Federal Polytechnicum in Zurich, Profesor Rohn to be a member of the Commission on Technical Instruction which was chaired by John Ingram. It was the report of this commission which led to the Vocational Education Act of 1930 - an act which addressed many of the issues raised in the present report.

The Culliton report highlights in particular the need for a close liaison between industry and technical education. It states: "The most successful training and education systems, in terms of enhancing competitiveness, are those where companies play an active role in the development of programmes of curricula with particular attention to practical needs and which combine on the job training with a strong back-up from vocational and technical schools." This same focus on an industry-training tandem was evident at the time the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction was set up in 1899 and is articulated in Horace Plunkett's book *Ireland in the New Century*. He criticised the Irish system of education as "calculated to turn our youth into a generation of second-rate clerks, with a distinct distaste for any industrial or productive occupation in which such qualities as initiative, self-reliance or judgment were called for". He feared that "There is little hope of any real solution unless and until those in direct contact with the specific industries succeed in bringing to the notice of those engaged in the framing of our education system the kind and degree of the defects in the industrial character of our people which debar then from successful competition with other countries. Education in Ireland has been for too long a thing apart from the economic realities of the country..." These statements were made in 1904 and the new century was of course the 20th century - not the 21st century.

The Culliton report is careful to point out that a refocusing of curriculum emphasis at senior cycle is only one of a number of strategies that should be adopted by government. They do not put this forward as the only solution although some commentators have focussed almost exclusively on the education system as if somehow it was the panacea for Ireland's economic and employment problems. If we have learned anything from the relative failure of government policies in the past in relation for example to the revival of the Irish language, surely it is that over-reliance on the school system to achieve social goals does not make sense. Other societal agencies must row in and provide the necessary support for such goals. As regards introducing a high quality, high esteem, vocational track at senior cycle the Culliton report recognises that this will only work if it is seen as effective and if completing it confers prestige. Prestige is of course closely related to job availability and to financial reward. Twenty years ago demand for places in the Commerce faculties of universities was low and commercial subjects in post-primary schools were among the

cinderella subjects of the curriculum. The situation changed very rapidly when high prestige and highly paid jobs in Business became available for Commerce graduates. We are in a chicken and egg situation as regards vocational / technical courses - if our young people could see that such courses would lead to employment (either self-created or otherwise), I believe they would be quick to respond and attitudes of academic elitism would not be a major barrier. Young people are astute enough not to be wooed by rhetoric - they want to see real jobs in the pipeline and most of them are sufficiently realistic to follow educational courses and programmes which will lead to such jobs.

Before finishing this evening, I would like to advert briefly to suggestions that seem to have been gaining force over the past few years that Colleges of Education and University Departments of Education are not engaged in relevant educational research and development. We would like to think that the publications of the ESAI might help to dispel this myth. The papers published in our journals during the past few years attest to the wide range of educational research and studies engaged in by our members. Much of this work seems to us to be of relevance to policy-makers but we are aware that there is an awareness gap to be bridged between our members who are involved, often at their own expense, in research and development work and the policy and decision makers at national level. One might also mention that there are obstacles in the way of effective analysis of educational policy since the foundation of the state. In spite of the passing of the National Archives Act a few years ago which formally opened up access to official papers up to 30 year embargo, virtually none of the files of the Department of Education since the foundation of the Free State have been lodged in the impressive new National Archives. Without access to official papers it is very difficult to carry out the kind of research which provides a comprehensive picture for policy analysis.

It has been a source of satisfaction to us that the professional staff of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment have played an active role in our association during the past few years. Both the Chief Executive, Albert O Ceallaigh and an Assistant Chief Executive, Breda Naughton will be attending the conference to-morrow and Saturday and Gary Granville contributed to last year's symposium on educational research. It is important to bear in mind that until this year, no government money has been available for the activities of the ESAI or for the production of its publications. The organisation runs on the subscriptions of its members and on conference registration fees. We are pleased to announce that this year the Department of Education has sanctioned the sum of £2,000 towards the cost of the composite Register of Theses which was referred to earlier.

We welcome the recent suggestion that educational research and development projects might in future be put out for tender by the Department of Education and we are confident that if this happens our members will be active in responding to these tenders. The Culliton report expressed concern at the small proportion of expenditure on R & D in industry generally in Ireland as a proportion of GDP (we spend only about 0.8% as against Germany's 3%). If however, we look at expenditure on R&D in education as a percentage of government expenditure on education, the situation is considerably worse. According to the 1992 Book of Estimates, a sum of £410,000 out of a total of almost £1.4 billion pounds is allocated to Research and Development - if my calculations are accurate, this accounts for less than .0003 % of the education budget. It is hardly fair to lay the blame for alleged inadequate research at the door of Education Departments and Colleges of Education if there is such an inadequate national budget for this area.

Ba mhaith liom a rá gur bhain mé an-taitneamh as mo théarma mar Uachtarán Cumann Léann Oideachais na hEireann. Gabhaim buíochas le baill an choiste a thug tacaíocht dom i rith an dá bhliain. Taim buíoch do Kevin Williams a rinne an-chuid oibre mar Rúnaí agus do Francis Douglas abhí mar chisteoir. Ba mhaith liom go mór-mhór mo bhuíochas a ghabháil le Kieran Byrne, a bhí mar leas-Uachtarán go dtí seo agus a bheidh mar Uachtarán againn ar feadh an dá bhliain ata ós ár gcomhar amach. Tá súil agam go mbainfidh sibh go leir taitneamh agus tairbhe as an gComhdháil amarach and Dé Sathairn.