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Becoming women teachers: gender and primary teacher training in Ireland, 1922–1974

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ABSTRACT

Drawing on archival material and oral testimony of former students, this paper examines the lives and experiences of women in Catholic primary teacher training colleges in Ireland in the period 1922–1974. It commences with a brief overview of the historical context in which these colleges emerged, situating their development within the socio-political and cultural context of the emerging Free State and the changing primary school curriculum. Residential and single-sex, the paper argues that the colleges promoted a gendered ideology and culture of femininity which mirrored the conservative, nationalistic and ultramontane agenda of post-Independence Ireland. Paradoxically, while this often led to a limited, anti-intellectual experience and a hegemonic framing of women teachers' professionalism, many graduates used their new-found professional status as teachers to embrace high-profile leadership roles in twentieth-century Ireland, often in male-dominated fields.

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Introduction

Historically, women's relationship with teaching has been a complex one. Teaching was one of the first occupations considered respectable for middle-class women, perceived as an extension of the maternal role. Much of the rhetoric surrounding women's admission to education in the nineteenth century emphasised the idealised and romanticised role women would play as teachers.¹ Tamboukou contends that, during the nineteenth century, 'teaching was seen as a communication channel, joining the private and public spheres of life'.² At various intervals, single women teachers were valued over married

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¹Alison Prentice and Marjorie Theobald, *Women who Taught: Perspectives on the History of Women and Teaching* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991); Alison Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900–1939* (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1996); Judith Harford, *The Opening of University Education to Women in Ireland* (Dublin: Irish Academic Press, 2008); Janina Trotman, *Girls Becoming Teachers: An Historical Analysis of Western Australian Women Teachers, 1911–1940* (Amherst, NY: Cambria Press, 2008).

²Maria Tamboukou, 'The Paradox of Being a Woman Teacher', *Gender and Education* 12, no. 4 (2000): 463–78.

and vice versa.³ While sexual stereotyping and gendered occupational structures significantly shaped women's experience of teaching, teaching also provided a platform from which women could extend the reach of their social and cultural capital, assuming key leadership roles in education and in wider public life.⁴ Shining a spotlight on the lives and experiences of women in Catholic primary teacher training colleges in Ireland in the period 1922–1974, this article begins by situating these colleges in their socio-historical context and examining their role in the mission of the Irish Free State. It then moves to an examination of the ways in which these colleges reinforced a gendered ideology that afforded women subordinate status within a deeply hierarchical social fabric and church structure. Focusing on two colleges, Carysfort College Dublin and Mary Immaculate Limerick, it examines the curriculum, ethos and mission of these colleges, drawing on oral testimony of former students.⁵ It concludes by looking at the complexity of the fact that while the culture of these colleges was gendered and often repressive, many graduates went on to fulfil key leadership roles across Irish society, harnessing their education and their qualification as a teacher as a fulcrum of social, political, cultural and economic exchange.

As Coolahan notes, 'teacher education in Ireland was, for long, established on the lines commonly found in many European countries'.⁶ Primary teacher education, which dates from the 1830s, was located within teacher training colleges, while secondary teacher education, located within the universities from its inception, dates from 1912.⁷ From the 1830s to 1921, the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland managed and funded a multi-denominational training college for males and females in Marlborough Street, Dublin. However, the Catholic church objected to Catholics being trained in a multi-denominational college and by the late nineteenth century they had established separate Catholic training for males and females. Some state funding was made available for these colleges – St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin and De La Salle College in Waterford for Catholic males; Our Lady of Mercy College, Carysfort, Blackrock, Dublin and Mary

³ Jackie Blount, 'Spinsters, Bachelors, and Other Gender Transgressors in School Employment, 1850–1990', *Review of Educational Research* 70, no. 1 (2000): 83–101; Kay Whitehead, 'Postwar Headteachers' Perspectives of "Good" Teachers', *Journal of Educational Administration and History* 35, no. 1 (2003): 23–35; Jennifer Redmond and Judith Harford, 'One Man One Job: The Marriage Ban and the Employment of Women Teachers in Irish Primary Schools', *Paedagogica Historica* 46, no. 5 (2010): 639–54; Judith Harford and Jennifer Redmond, "'I am Amazed at how Easily we Accepted it': The Marriage Ban, Teaching and Ideologies of Womanhood in Post-Independence Ireland', *Gender and Education* 33, no. 2 (2021): 186–201. See also Úna Ní Bhroiméil, "'Sending Gossoons to be Made Oul' Mollies Of': Rule 127(b) and the Feminisation of Teaching in Ireland', *Irish Educational Studies* 25, no. 1 (2006): 35–51.

⁴ Judith Harford, 'The Gendering of Diaspora: Irish American Women Teachers and Political Activism', *Gender and Education* 32, no. 1 (2022): 112–28; Jane Martin, *Gender and Education in England since 1770: A Social and Cultural History* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2022).

⁵ The oral testimony of the women teachers is drawn from four sources. The first is a study of 14 women on the marriage ban and teaching in Ireland published as Harford and Redmond, "'I am Amazed at how Easily we Accepted it'". Participants were aged between 74 and 84 at the time of interview and drawn from 10 counties from the island of Ireland. The second source is *Carysfort College Remembered*, ed. Séamus MacGabhann (Dublin: Carysfort College Commemoration Committee, 2018), which is a collection of essays penned by graduates and staff on their experience of the college. The recollections of four women who provide essays in this collection are drawn on for this article. The third source is a typescript memoir of Catherine Daly, a student at Mary Immaculate College in the period 1919–1921 published in Brian Hughes, Úna Ní Bhroiméil and Benjamin Ragan, eds., *Studying Revolution: Accounts of Mary Immaculate College, 1918–1923* (Limerick: Limerick City and County Council, 2022). The final source is the testimony of the second author of this article, who was a student at Carysfort College in 1959 and Admissions Officer and senior lecturer in the College from 1980 to 1987.

⁶ John Coolahan, 'The Republic of Ireland', *European Journal of Teacher Education* 14, no. 3 (1991): 287.

⁷ Judith Harford, 'Teacher Education Policy in Ireland and the Challenges of the Twenty-First Century', *European Journal of Teacher Education* 33, no. 4 (2010): 349–60.

Immaculate College, Limerick for Catholic females; and Kildare Place Training College, Dublin run by the Church of Ireland. In 1922, when the Free State assumed responsibility for education, Marlborough Street Training College was closed and state funding continued to be provided for denominational training colleges, under the management of the churches. The State set out the conditions for enrolling students and after 1922 the curriculum and examinations were controlled by the state Department of Education.⁸

The year 1922 was a key date in the history of modern Ireland, marking the end of centuries of British imperialist rule and the establishment of the Irish Free State. The policy choice following independence was the promotion of cultural nationalism and the de-anglicisation of Ireland. The spine of this policy was the reversal of the cultural assimilation and socialisation policy of previous centuries, which had resulted in the systematic erosion of the Gaelic language and culture and the reproduction of the norms and values of the imperial power.⁹ Reflecting the heavy emphasis on cultural nationalism that was to shape educational policy in the early decades of independence, Pádraig Ó Brocháin, the new chief executive officer for education in the Cumann na nGaedheal government,¹⁰ outlined the new direction for education policy in 1922 as follows:

In the administration of Irish education, it is the intention of the new government to work with all its might for the strengthening of the national fibre by giving the language, history, music and tradition of Ireland, their natural place in the life of Irish schools.¹¹

This nationalist agenda was to run in parallel with a triumphalist phase in the rise of the Catholic Church in Irish society, the twin pillars of nationalism and Catholicism marking the foundation of a new 'Irish Ireland'.¹² Ó Corráin (2018) notes that during the first 50 years of independence, irrespective of the political party in power, both church and state leaders worked to shape the country 'according to a philosophy of Catholic nationalism'.¹³ Whyte contends that the alliance was natural given that most of the government ministers were Catholic, as was the majority of the population, and hence the implementation of Catholic ideology was only to be expected.¹⁴ Keating goes further:

The church and Ireland's governing political and administrative elite . . . both conceptualized the Free State as a spiritual and national rebirth of a dynamic Christian tradition that was said to have existed in the early medieval period before the English occupation of the country, typified as the land of 'saints and scholars', a beacon of purity in a world otherwise sullied by sin.¹⁵

The first five decades following Independence thus represented the 'apotheosis of this Church-State nexus', with an enactment in law of key features of the Catholic moral code, particularly in the areas of sexual morality and family relations. Central to this

⁸Tom O'Donoghue, Judith Harford and Teresa O' Doherty, *Teacher Preparation in Ireland: History, Policy and Future Directions* (Bingley: Emerald Group, 2017).

⁹John Coolahan, *Irish Education: Its History and Structure* (Dublin: Institute of Public Administration, 1981); Brian Fleming and Judith Harford, 'Irish Educational Policy in the 1960s: A Decade of Transformation', *History of Education* 43, no. 5 (2014): 635–56; Tom O'Donoghue, *Bilingual Education in Pre-independent Irish-Speaking Ireland, 1800–1922* (Ceredigion, Wales: Edwin Mellen Press, 2006).

¹⁰Political party meaning Association of Irish People.

¹¹INTO (Irish National Teachers' Organisation), *Irish School Weekly*, February 11, 1922, 127.

¹²Tom O'Donoghue and Judith Harford, 'A Comparative History of Church-State Relations in Irish Education', *Comparative Education Review* 55, no. 3 (2011): 315–41.

¹³Daithí Ó Corráin, 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880–2015: Rise, Ascendancy and Retreat', in *The Cambridge History of Ireland*, ed. Thomas Bartlett, vol. 4, *1880 to the Present* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 733.

¹⁴J. H. Whyte, *Church and State in Modern Ireland, 1923–1979* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1980).

¹⁵Anthony Keating, 'Censorship: The Cornerstone of Catholic Ireland', *Journal of Church and State* 57, no. 2 (2015): 290–1.

agenda was the propagation of a gendered ideology that afforded women subordinate status within a deeply hierarchical social fabric and church structure.¹⁶ The culmination of this ideology was the introduction of a marriage ban for primary school teachers in 1932, the outcome of ideological assumptions which held that the most appropriate place for women in society was the home. As Harford and Redmond note, 'it was effectively patriarchy as policy'.¹⁷ The ban was also influenced by an economic 'rationale' and linked with high unemployment rates.¹⁸ This conservative ideology is evident across a number of other western nations that promoted a similar conservative ideology, particularly following the First World War, and effectively acted to curtail the number of women working outside the home.

The 1937 Constitution further copper-fastened this dominant ideology, recognising the family as being 'the natural and primary fundamental unit group of Society' and highlighting a special position for women:

In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved. The State shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home. (Article 40.2, 1937 Irish Constitution)

As Beaumont notes, while the Irish Free State Constitution had guaranteed equal rights and opportunities to both men and women, 'by 1937, this guarantee of equal citizenship for women had been transformed into a more gender based definition'.¹⁹ Lee observes 'the social clauses of the (1937) constitution blended prevailing Catholic concepts with popular attitudes rooted in the social structure ... Article 41 emphasised a woman's place within the home. De Valera²⁰ was clear that this was the only proper place for her'.²¹

McClintock argues that 'all nationalisms are gendered, all are invented, and all are dangerous'.²² While women had played a central role in the fight for independence, the promise and potential of Irish independence did not provide the opportunities for women that many had expected. Valiulis attributes the paradigm shift in gender roles in the post-colonial period to an underlying sexism in nationalist thinking and the hegemonic power base of the Catholic Church.²³ Dominant discourses of Irish womanhood in the Irish Free State idealised piety, devotion and selflessness, most powerfully represented through 'married,

¹⁶Harford and Redmond, "I am Amazed at how Easily we Accepted it"; Redmond and Harford, 'One Man One Job'.

¹⁷Harford and Redmond, "I am Amazed at how Easily we Accepted it", 187. See also Nancy Cott, *The Grounding of Modern Feminism* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1987); Penina Migdal Glazer and Miriam Slater, *Unequal Colleagues: The Entrance of Women into the Professions, 1890–1940* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987).

¹⁸Alison Oram, 'Serving Two Masters? The Introduction of a Marriage Ban in Teaching in the 1920s', in *The Sexual Dynamics of History: Men's Power, Women's Resistance*, ed. London Feminist History Group (London: Pluto Press, 1983), 134–48; Alison Oram, *Women Teachers and Feminist Politics, 1900–39* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996).

¹⁹Caitriona Beaumont, 'Women, Citizenship and Catholicism in the Irish Free State, 1922–1948', *Women's History Review* 6, no. 4 (1997): 563–85.

²⁰Éamon de Valera (1882–1975) served several terms as Taoiseach (head of government) and President of Ireland. He played a leading role in the drafting of the 1937 Constitution.

²¹J. J. Lee, *Ireland 1912–1985* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 206.

²²Anne McClintock, "'No Longer in a Future Heaven": Women and Nationalism in South Africa', *Transition* 51 (1991): 105. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2935081>

²³Maryann Gialanella Valiulis, 'The Politics of Gender in the Irish Free State, 1922–1937', *Women's History Review* 20, no. 4 (2011): 569–78.

desexualised, at-home motherhood'²⁴ or, alternatively, the sacrosanct role of the nun.²⁵ Yet, despite their subordinate status, women were nonetheless critical to the machinery of the state. As mothers they were considered to exercise a major responsibility for the spiritual welfare of their families and for encouraging their children to enter religious life. As wives, they were called upon to act as 'God's police' in the home, ensuring that their husbands attended religious gatherings and abstained from gambling and taking alcohol.²⁶ As such they played a pivotal role in copper-fastening the church/state nexus and ensuring its primacy and longevity, advancing the church's agenda and ensuring its hegemony. Addressing the Conference of Convent Secondary Schools in 1952, Deputy Seán Moylan, Minister for Education, observed 'teach a man and you teach an individual; teach a woman and you teach a family'.²⁷

Women's powerful role as an instrument of the state masked but paradoxically guaranteed their submission and thus their service. By the close of the 1960s, Irish women had fewer rights than women in most other European countries: contraception was illegal, as was divorce under the Constitution, and abortion was deemed a criminal act. Single mothers and women separated in marriage were ineligible for welfare payments and gender discrimination operated across the employment and tax systems.²⁸ This regression, while acute in the Irish context, was mirrored internationally by a movement towards authoritarian family models and restrictions on women's employment opportunities and role in public life.²⁹

Significant political and social change was on the horizon, however, and the late 1950s to 1970s witnessed a redefinition of the role and status of women in Irish society as well as the framing of a new public policy paradigm.³⁰ This agenda was significantly shaped by external factors, including Ireland's application for entry to the European Economic Community as well as a 1968 UN directive on the status of women, which contributed to the formation of the Commission on the Status of Women whose 1972 report acted as a clarion call for reform.³¹ As Ó Corráin notes, 'once women were able to access alternative sources of power through the workplace and public life, a central pillar of the Church's ideological control was removed'.³²

Catholic teacher training colleges for women

The Free State inherited two Catholic teacher training colleges for women, Our Lady of Mercy Training College in Dublin (known as Carysfort College) and Mary Immaculate

²⁴Yvonne McKenna, 'Embodied Ideals and Realities: Irish Nuns and Irish Womanhood, 1930s–1960s', *Éire-Ireland* 41, no. 1–2 (2006): 40–63.

²⁵Tom Inglis, *Truth, Power and Lies: Irish Society and the Case of the Kerry Babies* (Dublin: University College Dublin Press, 2003).

²⁶Tom O'Donoghue and Judith Harford, *Secondary School Education in Ireland: Memories and Life Histories, 1922–67* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).

²⁷'Address by Seán Moylan, Minister for Education', *CCSS Report 1952* (Dublin: CCSS, 1952), 24.

²⁸Jenny Beale, *Women in Ireland: Voices of Change* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 1986).

²⁹L. O'Dowd, 'Church, State and Women: The Aftermath of Partition', in *Gender in Irish Society*, ed. C. Curtin, P. Jackson and B. O'Connor (Galway: Galway University Press, 1987), 3–36.

³⁰Eileen Connolly, 'The State, Public Policy and Gender: Ireland in Transition, 1957–1977' (unpublished PhD thesis, Dublin City University, 1998).

³¹Rosemary Cullen Owens, *A Social History of Women in Ireland 1870–1970* (Dublin: Gill & Macmillan, 2005).

³²Ó Corráin, 'Catholicism in Ireland, 1880–2015', 742.

Training College in Limerick. Both colleges were run by the Sisters of Mercy and both were under the management of the Catholic bishop of the respective dioceses, although largely funded by the state. This arrangement appealed to successive governments, in part because the great majority of the nation's politicians and public servants were themselves loyal middle-class Catholics but also because the teacher training colleges played a significant role in the state's project of harnessing education as part of its Gaelic nation-building project.³³ As well as their involvement in teacher training, the Sisters of Mercy, founded by Catherine McAuley in 1831, were also heavily involved in the provision of education for the poorer and middle classes. They soon became the largest religious community of women to provide elementary education for females, McCauley believing education was critical to the formation of women because 'whatever be the station they are destined to fill, their example will always have great influence'.³⁴ The order's involvement in teacher training dates from 1836, its objective in this area being to 'diffuse the blessing of a religious education more extensively'.³⁵

Initially, there were various categories of entrants to both Carysfort and Mary Immaculate College. As well as graduates from secondary schools, entrants included former nuns, pupil teachers and (from the late 1920s to the early 1960s) graduates of Irish-speaking preparatory colleges.³⁶ In addition, female members of religious orders were admitted on a non-competitive basis. Whereas the acceptance of members of religious orders was a matter for the college authorities, the annual intake of lay students was controlled by the state Department of Education and competition for places was significant. Places in primary teacher training colleges were highly prized. At a time when university students in Ireland had to pay fees of approximately £50 per annum, as well as the cost of accommodation in a university city, the full cost of a student in a teacher training college, both tuition and boarding costs, was paid by the state. The only costs that fell to the students were the costs of the uniform and personal expenses.³⁷ During the early decades of independence when university fees and associated accommodation and living costs were beyond the capacity of most Irish families, especially those living outside the university cities, a free place in a training college was considered an attractive alternative to a university education.³⁸

From 1931, shortly after the Leaving Certificate³⁹ was introduced, a student's results in that examination were the main determinant of success. Prospective female students

³³Tom O' Donoghue and Judith Harford, *Piety and Privilege: Catholic Secondary Schooling in Ireland and the Theocratic State, 1922–1967* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021).

³⁴Sisters of Mercy, *The Rule and Constitutions of the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy* (Dublin: James Duffy, 1863).

³⁵*A Guide for the Religious Called Sisters of Mercy*, Parts I and II, p. 20, cited in Ellis O' Sullivan, 'The Training of Women Teachers in Ireland, 1824–1919,' with special reference to Mary Immaculate College and Limerick' (Unpublished M.A. Thesis, University of Limerick, 1998), 36.

³⁶There were three preparatory colleges for Catholic girls aged 13 to 17 that provided free secondary education for girls who wanted to become primary teachers. These colleges were boarding institutions and were located in Tourmakeady, Co. Mayo; Dingle, Co. Kerry; and Falcarragh, Co. Donegal.

³⁷This information was provided by the second author of this paper.

³⁸From the limited information available in relation to university fees in the middle of the twentieth century, e.g. the Report of the Commission on Higher Education (1968) and the Report on University Reorganisation (1972), it is reasonable to conclude that fees for university courses were about £50 per annum.

³⁹The Leaving Certificate was the national examination at the end of senior cycle secondary education. It was introduced by the Free State government to replace the Senior Certificate, which had been administered by the Commissioners of National Education since the passing of the Intermediate Education Act in 1878.

were also required to pass entrance examinations in oral Irish, singing and needlework.⁴⁰ From 1959 until entrance examinations were discontinued in the late 1980s, students were also required to pass an interview designed to assess their suitability for teaching. Males applying for entry to the corresponding teacher training colleges were also chosen on the basis of their Leaving Certificate results and were required to take an oral Irish examination, but they were not required to take examinations in either singing or needlework.

The fact that the numbers of students admitted to all of the primary teaching training colleges nationally⁴¹ was determined annually by the state Department of Education meant that until the early 1970s the Department was able to ensure that there was a balance between the numbers of male and female teachers. In the early 1970s, a number of factors coalesced and led (inadvertently) to an increased feminisation of the profession. The three main Catholic colleges, Carysfort College, Blackrock, Dublin, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and St Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin, became coeducational at that time. In addition, Ireland's membership of the European Economic Community (now the EU) required that Ireland adopt laws and practices that outlawed gender discrimination. In the case of the selection of students for teacher training, this meant that instead of having two separate order of merit lists (male and female) from which successful applicants were chosen, from the mid-1970s onwards, the Department of Education had to choose successful candidates for teaching from one list (male and female combined). Since more highly qualified females applied for places in teacher training colleges than males, the proportion of successful applicants for teacher training from the mid-1970s onwards was predominantly female. This trend was exacerbated by the introduction of grants for university education, which resulted in more male students from lower socio-economic backgrounds attending university and entering professions other than teaching.⁴²

The programme of instruction in the training colleges was of two years' duration and was prescribed by the state Department of Education. The inspectorate of that department set and corrected the annual examinations and also inspected lecturers' work. While this ensured that the programme was in line with the primary school curriculum, it also underscores the emphasis on 'training' rather than education, which was at the heart of the training colleges' mission.⁴³ As such, the emphasis was on teaching rather than on research or reflection, and student teachers attended classes from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays.

Libraries were limited and rarely used and there was no expectation that teaching was research-informed or that lecturers engage in research.⁴⁴ The course of studies comprised

⁴⁰O'Donoghue, Harford and O' Doherty, *Teacher Preparation in Ireland*.

⁴¹In 1922, there were five teacher training colleges in all: Carysfort College; Mary Immaculate College Limerick; St Patrick's College Drumcondra; De la Salle College Waterford; and the Church of Ireland College, Kildare Place, and subsequently located in Rathmines, Dublin.

⁴²Minute books of Carysfort College Governing Body, in the possession of Áine Hyland.

⁴³The Irish school inspectorate, established in 1832, and pre-dating the founding of inspectorates in England and Wales, has had a long and intimate involvement in the development of the school system in Ireland at all levels. See John Coolahan and Patrick F. O' Donovan, *A History of Ireland's School Inspectorate, 1831–2008* (Dublin: Four Courts Press, 2009). See also John Coolahan, 'The Fortunes of Education as a Subject of Study and of Research in Ireland', *Irish Educational Studies* 4, no. 1 (1984): 1–34.

⁴⁴See Deirdre Mathews, 'On the Cusp of Change: My Experience of Carysfort College in the 70s', 173–4, and Áine Hyland, 'The Closure of Carysfort College of Education', 95–146, both in *Carysfort College Remembered*, ed. Séamus MacGabhann (Dublin: Carysfort College Commemoration Committee, 2018),

three interlocking strands: a general education in academic subjects, an optional course, and 'education studies'. The latter consisted of 'principles of teaching' and 'practical teaching' organised in block-release periods each year for every student and typically took place in primary schools usually located adjacent to the colleges. Sr Loreto O'Connor, who was appointed President of Mary Immaculate College in 1959, observed:

While the programme incorporated both academic and professional components, greater emphasis was placed in the professional course. This included general principles of education, infant education and methodology of subjects on the primary school curriculum. It was some years before educational philosophy and sociology with the history of education were added.⁴⁵

From the mid-1920s until the BEd degree was introduced in the mid-1970s, most lectures and examinations were conducted through the medium of the Irish language and senior inspectors from the Department of Education monitored standards of teaching practice. Obligatory subjects included Irish, English, arithmetic, algebra, geometry, drawing, rural science, music, physical training, history and geography, and needlework and domestic economy. These subjects largely mirrored the subjects on the national school curriculum and when changes were made to the programme for national schools, parallel changes ensued in the training college programme.⁴⁶

Our Lady of Mercy College, Carysfort

Our Lady of Mercy College, Carysfort, was founded in 1877 as a single-sex, denominational boarding institution for the preparation of female primary school teachers. Originally located in Baggot Street, Dublin, it relocated in 1903 to the grounds of Carysfort House, Blackrock, Co. Dublin, which was also the site of the headquarters of the Sisters of Mercy of the diocese of Dublin and of their novitiate.

The lifestyle of the students was not unlike that of the nuns, and the residential aspects of the two-year training programme had a lot in common with the training of novice nuns. Indeed, a number of students attending the college in the period from the 1930s to the 1970s compared their notification of acceptance to the College to a 'call to training':

⁴⁵Sr Loreto O'Connor, *Passing on the Torch: A History of Mary Immaculate Training College 1898–1998* (Limerick: Mary Immaculate College), 36.

⁴⁶The 1922 Programme for National Education had laid a heavy emphasis on the Irish language and included a requirement that all work in infant classes should be carried out through the medium of Irish. This very quickly proved unrealistic and the programme was amended in 1926 to reduce to some extent the emphasis on Irish. When the Fianna Fáil government came to power in the early 1930s, the Irish language was again re-emphasised and the 1934 National Programme reflected this. Changes in 1956 presaged what would later (1971) be a significantly more child-centred curriculum and introduced more modern methods to the teaching of infants. These changes were mirrored in the training college programmes and were reflected (for example) by the introduction of a revitalised infant teaching course in the mid-1950s and the provision of a specially equipped 'Seomra na Naíonán' (infant classroom). The Infant Programme for National Schools was revised by the Department of Education between 1948 and 1951 and fundamentally altered the approach to infant teaching in Ireland. Young children were no longer viewed as receptacles of knowledge – they were to be seen as active agents in their own learning. The significance of play and informal learning in infant classes, which had been ignored in the 1922, 1926 and 1932 National Programmes, was emphasised and this had implications for the training of teachers. As happened subsequently when the new Primary Curriculum of 1971 was introduced, it took some time before the underlying philosophy of the new 1951 Infant Programme impacted on the training of teachers. However, by the mid-1950s, in both Carysfort College and Mary Immaculate College, the Infant Education teacher training programme was an enlightened one. In MacGabhann, *Carysfort College Remembered*, former students recall fond memories of the prototype infant education classroom in the college – which was described as 'bright and colourful and a haven of peace and tranquillity' (97).

I wasn't given any choice – it was known as the 'call to training' in those days and you were groomed for that and if I wasn't called this year, I was told I would have to go back and sit the Leaving Certificate again and do it next year so in fact I wasn't given any choice.⁴⁷

Others observed there was little choice but to accept the call:

There was no decision in it – I just got the call to training – saying that I was called and that I'd be going to Carysfort Training College in Blackrock and to send a telegram if I was going. I remember what I said 'call accepted – travelling Friday!' That was just how it was in those days.⁴⁸

Some alluded to societal expectations that a teaching career was a temporary stop-gap before marriage:

There were certain careers that were open to women. You did the civil service or you did nursing or you did teaching, and this was seen as a handy way of amusing yourself until such time as somebody married you.⁴⁹

Silence was imposed in dormitories and at mealtimes, when a nun read from a religious text while meals were being served. Dress (conservative and uniform) represented a disciplinary technology, legitimising and confirming an *appropriate* performance of gender and validating the construction of a religious identity.⁵⁰ Students were required to attend Mass every morning at 7 a.m. and had to line up in regimented format in advance to undergo a uniform inspection. The uniform



Carysfort students in the 1930s. Source: Personal collection, Aine Hyland.

⁴⁷Cited in Harford and Redmond, 'I am Amazed at how Easily we Accepted it,' 191.

⁴⁸Ibid.

⁴⁹Ibid., 192.

⁵⁰See for example Judith Butler, 'Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory', *Theatre Journal* 40, no. 4 (1988): 519–31, on gender as performative.

was a black serge dress measuring at least four inches below the knee with a small V-neck opening under which the student had to wear a 'modesty vest' that covered every visible inch of flesh. For daily Mass, students wore a black veil or mantilla and for Sunday Mass the veil or mantilla was white. Disciplinary power was exercised thus directly on the body, producing 'subjected and practiced bodies, "docile" bodies'.⁵¹ Attendance at classes from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. daily and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturdays was compulsory. Attendance at two Masses on Sunday morning and benediction at 6 p.m. on Sunday evening was also required. Evenings were spent on study and the only free time was on Saturday afternoon and Sundays from 1 p.m. to 6 p.m. Conditions were harsh; dormitories were cold, and silence was imposed from bedtime until after breakfast the following morning. No visitors were permitted, and students were not allowed to go home for any family occasion, not even for a family funeral. The regime was described as follows by a student who attended the college from 1957 to 1959:

College life was dominated by bells and rules. . . . In many ways the life of a student teacher at that time resembled that of a postulant nun. Daily morning Mass at 7 a.m. was compulsory and a black veil had to be worn for this morning worship. . . . Classes ran all day from Monday to Friday and until lunchtime on Saturday. The girls were permitted to leave the college after lunch but they had to be back and in uniform for tea on Saturday by 4.15 p.m. On Sunday the students could leave between 1 p.m. and 1.30 p.m. after two Masses, breakfast, dinner and a priest's lecture but they had to be back in college again and clad in uniform by 7 p.m. . . . The students were expected to observe silence from night prayers until leaving the refectory after breakfast. . . . Daily ablutions were taken in the dorm with cold water and a weekly bath was available with water which was sometimes hot!⁵²

While Edwards has argued in her study of women's training colleges in Britain that women were afforded time and space away from family life to experiment, this freedom does not appear to have applied in the case of Carysfort or Mary Immaculate College.⁵³ The imposition of silence and the separation from family life both represented powerful techniques for disciplining (and, indeed, controlling) the mind and the body.⁵⁴ Recalling her experience as a student at Carysfort in the 1940s, one woman remembers:

We wore a uniform, a black dress with a silver tie and black tights and black shoes. We were like novices. The discipline was so strict. We got out on a Saturday for a few hours from 4–6 and one Sunday a month we got out for a half day. We had to be back by seven at night. A bell was rung and if didn't have your foot inside the door by the last toll you were considered late and you had to report to the head.⁵⁵

The same student observed:

We never saw newspapers or heard the radio in Carysfort. We had a little priest who used to come in and teach us religious instruction. Sometimes he would surreptitiously read a headline out of a newspaper, but he always had one eye on the door in case a nun came

⁵¹ Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. A. Sheridan (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1977), 138–9.

⁵² Memories of Miriam O'Brien, as told to her daughter Ann Creaner, in MacGabhann, *Carysfort College Remembered*, 38. See also Harford and Redmond, "I am Amazed at how Easily we Accepted it"; Fiona Poole, 'Reflections on My Time in Carysfort Training College 1952–54', in MacGabhann, *Carysfort College Remembered*, 273.

⁵³ Elizabeth Edwards, 'The Culture of Femininity in Women's Teacher Training Colleges 1900–50', *History of Education* 22, no. 3 (1993): 277–88.

⁵⁴ Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

⁵⁵ Cited in Harford and Redmond, "I am Amazed at how Easily we Accepted it", 197.

in. I think the nuns saw us almost as novices and hoped that some of us would possibly go on and become novices at some stage. We were entirely cut off and we never had any visitors . . . our letters were all read by the nuns before we could read them.⁵⁶

Echoing the view that the environment was cloistered and controlled, another student recalled:

We weren't allowed newspapers or radio. I remember my sister saying that she was four years in training and the only news that was put up on the bulletin board was that John McCormick [a famous Irish singer] had died. We weren't allowed papers or radio or anything that would connect us with the outside world.⁵⁷

Reflecting on the 'spartan and austere' atmosphere, Fiona Poole, a student at the College from 1952 to 1954, and subsequently President of the Irish National Teachers Organisation, remembered:

Even a four-year-old nowadays would rebel at such a regime. I recoil at the memory of the workhouse-style, unstylish uniform, which was inspected by a nun, as we lined up for Mass each morning, at an ungodly hour. I smile at the memory of a fellow student standing in line one morning, with her uniform on inside out. Did she stay in bed a minute or two too long, or did she fail to see properly in the semi-darkness?⁵⁸

Poole also observed that music was a compulsory subject as there was an expectation that, when employed as teachers, females would provide the music at Mass on Sundays.⁵⁹ Áine Hyland, one of the authors of this paper, and a student at the College for three months from September to December 1959, recalled:

Every student was known by a number – not by name. (My number was TC272.) Conformity was essential. The atmosphere was cold and forbidding – a culture of fear prevailed and I rarely heard a kind word uttered either by staff or students.⁶⁰

Hyland also alluded to the anti-intellectual ethos that prevailed: 'the College library consisted of one large room (afterwards to become the staff room) with a few tables, chairs and glass-fronted, locked cupboards containing a limited number of books covered in brown paper'.⁶¹

Whilst the College uniform was no longer a requirement in the 1970s, the ethos and mission of the College during the early years of the 1970s (before the BEd degree programme was introduced in 1974)⁶² remained strictly authoritarian and regimented. Deirdre Mathews, a student from 1972 to 1974, recalled:

The two years I spent in Carysfort provided an experience that resembled an extension of my convent boarding school post-primary years. The student cohort was all-female and for those living in College accommodation, a strict night-time curfew existed. Many of the lecturers were Sisters of Mercy and rules abounded; the majority of lectures commenced with roll call and a prayer. While students no longer had to wear college uniforms, a strict

⁵⁶Ibid., 196.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Poole, 'Reflections on My Time in Carysfort Training College 1952–54'.

⁵⁹Ibid., 272.

⁶⁰Hyland, 'The Closure of Carysfort College of Education', 97.

⁶¹Ibid.

⁶²The introduction of a three-year BEd programme meant that colleges of education (previously training colleges) were now affiliated with universities, and teaching was now an all-graduate profession.

dress code still existed. . . . Lectures started at 8.40 a.m. and finished at 6.20 p.m. five days a week with little or no free or study periods. I have no memory of studying in the library and can recall only a handful of books borrowed.⁶³

Such was the level of rigidity and conservatism propagated by the college that students organised a strike in November 1973, demanding greater involvement in the nature of the curriculum taught and in the governance of the college.⁶⁴ Influenced by developments at a structural and policy level, not least the emergence of the Irish Women's Labour Movement and the founding of the National Women's Council of Ireland (NWCi) in the early 1970s, the protesters were equally likely buoyed up by a movement of students internationally agitating for change.⁶⁵ Commenting on the significance of this protest, Catherine Byrne, President of the Students' Representative Council at the time of the strike, observes:

The story of the Carysfort College boycott provides an early example of young Irish women rejecting the outdated rules, not just of an authoritarian, denominational teacher training College, but also of a society where the Catholic Church and male domination shaped and restricted the lives of women.⁶⁶

Mary Immaculate College, Limerick

Mary Immaculate College was founded in 1898 with the explicit objective of addressing the shortage of properly trained teachers in national schools. Not surprisingly, given that the curriculum was laid down by the Department of Education from its establishment in 1924 and that the college was run by the Sisters of Mercy, the ethos and student experience was a mirror image of that of Carysfort College. Robust and unequivocal gendered norms were prized and promulgated in line with the dominant mores and values of Irish society. Inspectors' reports of teaching practice at the College in the period under review emphasise the importance of 'refined and lady-like behaviour', 'accent' and 'moral influence'.⁶⁷ Students were similarly cut off from wider society in a repressive, controlled regime. Catherine Daly, a student at Mary Immaculate in the period 1919–1921, recalled:

We were not allowed to speak at breakfast. We were allowed to speak at lunch and at tea but had to keep silent again on our way to bed at 9 o'clock. I envied those with cubicles near windows, especially in summer, as I had a cubicle in a dark corner near a corridor. . . . Our uniform was black with a white collar which was laundered once a week. Our sheets were laundered once a month. . . . Heating in the College was very poor. The central heating was just warm. We had to wear warm underclothing but our hands were always red and cold.⁶⁸

⁶³Mathews, 'On the Cusp of Change: My Experience of Carysfort College in the 70s'.

⁶⁴Judith Harford and Tom O' Donoghue, 'Challenging the Dominant Church Hegemony in Times of Risk and Promise: Carysfort Women Resist', *Gender and Education* 33, no. 3 (2021): 372–84.

⁶⁵André Robert and Jeffrey Tyssens, 'Mapping Teachers' Strikes: A "Professionalist" Approach', *Paedagogica Historica* 44, no. 5 (2008): 501–16.

⁶⁶Catherine Byrne, 'The Inside Story of the Carysfort College Strike', in MacGabhann, *Carysfort College Remembered*, 9.

⁶⁷Teaching Practice Reports of students from Mary Immaculate College, 1915–1924, published in Hughes et al., *Studying Revolution*, 34–7.

⁶⁸Memoir of Catherine Daly, a student at Mary Immaculate College in the period 1919–1921, published in Hughes et al., *Studying Revolution*, 19–21.

A particular emphasis was placed on students' dress at Mary Immaculate College. Ryan notes that while the Catholic Church internationally exercised a watchful eye over women's fashion and lifestyles, in the Irish context this was mediated through the lens of cultural nationalism 'that constructed all evil influences as being imported from abroad and essentially alien to Irishness'.⁶⁹ Students were cautioned against wearing:

Dresses cut in a suggestive style or so loosely about the neck as to allow the collar-bone to appear or cut equally low at the back; dresses with sleeves less than two inches below the elbow for daywear or more than one inch above the elbow for evening wear, or without sleeves to the wrist for church wear; dresses of transparent material, unless a slip complying with the above regulations be worn underneath; not wearing shades in stockings that suggested the nude.⁷⁰

Students were similarly admonished they should never

adopt immodest poses, talk loudly or laugh boisterously in public, utter coarse or irreverent exclamations, drink alcohol at dances or entertainments, attend improper cinema shows, plays or all night dances or partake in immodest or suggestive dances or sea-bathing.⁷¹

The emphasis on students' appearance reflected a preoccupation with women's sexuality, which the state, working in concert with the Catholic Church, sought to control through an 'architecture of containment'.⁷² Specifically, the state tried through legislative means to regulate access to contraception, sexual crime and public morals and the lives and impact of unmarried mothers.⁷³ Conveying 'A stigma that was almost impossible to shake', Luddy notes that unmarried mothers represented 'a symbol of unacceptable sexual activity and a problem that had the potential to blight the reputation not only of the family but of the nation'.⁷⁴ It appears that students themselves internalised this stigma. Scholars have noted the extent to which female sexuality came to be established as an icon of national identity during this period. Leane argues that this identity was given 'symbolic embodiment in the discursive construction of an idealised, feminine subject, a subject who had purity and sexual morality as her defining characteristics'.⁷⁵ The Catholic Church was the key architect in establishing female sexuality as a symbol of national identity and the religious-run teacher training colleges were a central plank of this wider agenda. The extent of Mary Immaculate students' commitment to promoting strict regulation of the body and reforming deviance⁷⁶ was such that they founded the Mary Immaculate Modest Dress and Deportment Crusade in the late 1920s. What began as a code of dress and conduct primarily for student teachers in the College soon became known throughout the country and attracted a range of diverse members. The existence

⁶⁹Louise Ryan, *Gender, Identity and the Irish Press, 1922–1937: Embodying the Nation* (Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen Press, 2001), 43.

⁷⁰Mary Immaculate College Training College Annual, vol. 1, 1927, p. 36, cited in Úna Ní Bhroiméil, 'Images and Icons: Female Teachers' Representations of Self and Self-Control in 1920s Ireland', *History of Education Review* 37, no. 1 (2008): 8.

⁷¹Mary Immaculate College Training College Annual, vol. 1, 1927: 36; vol. 2, 1928: 17–18, cited in Ní Bhroiméil, 'Images and Icons', 9.

⁷²James Smith, *Ireland's Magdalen Laundries and the Nation's Architecture of Containment* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007).

⁷³Sandra Mc Avoy, 'The Regulation of Sexuality in the Irish Free State, 1929–1935', in *Medicine, Disease and the State in Ireland, 1650–1940*, ed. Greta Jones and Elizabeth Malcolm (Cork: Cork University Press, 1999), 253–66.

⁷⁴Maria Luddy, 'Unmarried Mothers in Ireland, 1880–1973', *Women's History Review* 20, no. 1 (2011): 110.

⁷⁵Máire Leane, 'Female Sexuality in Ireland 1920 to 1940: Construction and Regulation' (PhD Thesis, University College Cork, 1999).

⁷⁶Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*.

of the Crusade came to the attention of the Vatican and in May 1928, its promoters received a telegram from Cardinal Gasparri in Rome, Secretary of State to Pope Pius XI, 'conveying papal commendation to all promoters and members of the Crusade'.⁷⁷

Such surveillance and socialisation were not unique to the female training colleges. Male students were also encouraged to acquire particular postures, gestures and gait, along with a restrained, measured, competent and confident disposition. This included the modification and sometimes transformation of the speech and bodily demeanour of those students from rural backgrounds, from the working classes, and from the lower middle classes, in order to build them as refined gentlemanly men.⁷⁸ Comments from practice-teaching supervisors such as 'took some time to get this young man to speak and act in a manly fashion', 'increased manliness desirable', and 'complete lack of manliness' reflect the powerful binary gendered messages propagated.⁷⁹ O' Donoghue notes that the gender regime of the male training colleges was 'profoundly heterosexual, promulgating a celibate heterosexuality, in particular'.⁸⁰ Specific rules were introduced to discourage close relationships between males, such was the level of concern over homosexuality.

Leadership in the training colleges

Paradoxically, while the culture of Catholic women's training colleges in Ireland was always gendered and often repressive, the fact that students lived, were taught and studied in an environment which was dominated by women meant that their role models were usually women, although throughout the period from the 1920s to the 1970s, a small number of male academic staff were employed in the female colleges.⁸¹ The nun's life served to disrupt the wife/mother binary advocated at the time, and provided opportunities for personal fulfilment and professional advancement, which life as a single woman did not.⁸² From the time of their inception, religious orders in Ireland, as elsewhere, both favoured and promoted their own in terms of access to leadership positions and while women religious were taught not to consciously desire to be promoted, they were expected to assume leadership roles, and sometimes at very young ages.⁸³

From their inception, the presidents and the majority of the staff of both Caryfort and Mary Immaculate Colleges were members of the Mercy Congregation. Both colleges had few lay or male staff members during this period. By contrast, this was not the case in the Church of Ireland Training College, Kildare Place, Dublin, where almost all of the students were women, but where successive principals from the

⁷⁷Cited in O'Connor, *Passing on the Torch*, 40.

⁷⁸Dónal O'Donoghue, 'Speak and Act in a Manly Fashion: The Role of the Body in the Construction of Men and Masculinity in Primary Teacher Education in Ireland,' *Irish Journal of Sociology* 14, no. 2 (2005): 231–53.

⁷⁹*Ibid.*

⁸⁰O' Donoghue, 'Speak and Act in a Manly Fashion', 237.

⁸¹For example, Éamonn de Valera lectured in Mathematics in Carysfort in the first and second decades of the twentieth centuries. Vincent O'Brien and subsequently his son, Oliver O'Brien, lectured in Music from the 1920s until the closure of the college in 1988. Tomás Ó Con Cheadainn lectured in the Irish Department in Carysfort in the 1950s before his appointment as Professor of Irish in University College Dublin. Seamus Heaney was a lecturer and subsequently Head of English during the 1970s.

⁸²Rebecca Rogers, 'Retrograde or Modern? Unveiling the Teaching Nun in Nineteenth Century France', *Social History* 23, no. 2 (1998): 147.

⁸³Judith Harford and Tom O' Donoghue, 'Continuity and Change in the Perspectives of Women Religious', *Paedagogica Historica* 47, no. 3 (2011): 399–413.

date of the college's inception (1811) were male.⁸⁴ The women religious who were presidents of Carysfort and Mary Immaculate were formidable women. Mother Teresita McCormack, President of Carysfort from 1936 to 1968, was remembered by many former Carysfort students as authoritative.⁸⁵ She took personal responsibility, 'military style', for inspecting students' uniforms as they lined up for morning Mass at 6.45 a.m. and, while she had no academic role in the college, she regularly lectured the students on behaviour and deportment.⁸⁶

Despite working in a higher education landscape shaped by male voices and agendas, McCormack knew how to leverage her role and status in order to carve out a level of autonomy, power and agency, entering into 'patriarchal bargains' with high-profile males in positions of influence.⁸⁷ A former student recalls:

While her demeanour towards students and staff was stiff and unbending, she could be charming to important visitors such as the then President of Ireland Éamon de Valera (who had taught mathematics in Carysfort in the first two decades of the twentieth century) and his wife Sinéad. She also ingratiated herself with successive Ministers for Education and senior departmental officials.⁸⁸

The same student also recalls the challenges McCormack faced as a female leader working in an androcentric space:

Yes, Sister McCormack was stern and even quite unlikable, however, I think as a woman in a leadership role, she needed to be doubly as strong and formidable as men in equivalent roles. At the time, this was to some degree the expectation of a leader. Looking back on it now, we can see that it wasn't really leadership at all, rather oppression.⁸⁹

Not all nuns who were in leadership roles were so unapproachable. In Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Sr Veronica Cullinan, who was president from 1923 to 1945 and who taught English, was described by a former student as follows: 'Her mind was penetrating and versatile and her heart so warm and loving'.⁹⁰ Her successor, Sr Celsus Barry, president from 1945 to 1952, was described as 'gracious and wise', a woman who during her years as principal, 'endeared herself to both students and staff'.⁹¹ Sr Loreto, appointed president in 1959, was regarded as student-centred and as an academic woman interested in international trends in teacher education.⁹² It would be interesting to reflect on the extent to which the Second Vatican Council (Vatican II) (1962–1965) impacted these women and their leadership styles. A major outcome of the Council was an embrace by the Church of the modern world. This was brought about against the backdrop of a significant exodus of existing male and female religious to return to the world as lay people, a major decline in

⁸⁴Although it was in effect a female college, the Principal of the College was always a male, usually an ordained clergyman, and almost all of the teaching staff were male until the 1960s. See Susan M. Parkes, *Kildare Place: The History of the Church of Ireland Training College and College of Education 1811–2010* (Dublin: Church of Ireland College of Education Publications, 2011).

⁸⁵MacGabhann, *Carysfort College Remembered*.

⁸⁶*Ibid.*

⁸⁷See H. R. Ebaugh, 'Patriarchal Bargains and Latent Avenues of Social Mobility: Nuns in the Roman Catholic Church', *Gender and Society* 7, no. 3 (1993): 400–14.

⁸⁸Recollection of Áine Hyland.

⁸⁹*Ibid.*

⁹⁰Mary Immaculate Annual 1960, 12, excerpt of letter from past student, quoted in O'Connor, *Passing on the Torch*, 13.

⁹¹O'Connor, *Passing on the Torch*, 49.

⁹²One of the authors of this paper, Áine Hyland, was interviewed by Sr Loreto in 1959 and remembers the interviewer as being respectful, interesting and enthusiastic.

the average number of new recruits, and a consequent need to employ ever greater numbers of lay people both as classroom teachers and as school principals.⁹³

What is clear is that, in the period under review, the fact that females held all the senior positions in both colleges sent a strong message that despite Irish society's repressive culture, the students could aspire to leadership positions in their future careers. Graduates of both Carysfort College and Mary Immaculate College, despite their largely restrictive, even anti-intellectual, experience of higher education, went on to play a major role in Irish education and in wider society. Catherine Byrne became an Equality Opportunities Officer for the European Trade Union Confederation and subsequently Deputy General Secretary of the Irish National Teachers Organisation; Fiona Poole was appointed the first woman president of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation; Kathy Hall became Professor and Head of Education at University College Cork; Teresa O' Doherty became President of Marino Institute of Education; Regina Uí Chollatáin was appointed chair of Modern Irish and Literature and subsequently Principal and Dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at University College Dublin; Deirdre Mathews became an assistant chief inspector in the state Department of Education and Skills; and Mary Mitchell O' Connor became a member of parliament with responsibility for a range of portfolios including education. Noted philanthropist Carmel Naughton and author Roisin Meaney are also graduates.

Conclusion

Tamboukou notes that education creates 'paradoxical spaces, where the female self has attempted to surpass closed boundaries and to question the dichotomy of the feminized private and/or the masculine public'.⁹⁴ This article has demonstrated the complex, often contested spaces in which women became teachers, spaces that were overtly gendered, regimental and often repressive, yet provided a platform from which women could gain agency and affect broader social and economic reform. Mirroring international trends, the analysis of the tapestry of sources examined in this article supports the way in which the teaching role evolved over the course of the twentieth century, mirroring and sometimes triggering wider social, political and economic reform for women.⁹⁵

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

⁹³Tom O'Donoghue and Judith Harford, 'Addressing the Apparent Paradox of the Catholic Sister Principal: Insights from an Oral History of Catholic Female Religious', *History of Education* 42, no. 6 (2013): 765–82.

⁹⁴Tamboukou, 'The Paradox of Being a Woman Teacher', 476.

⁹⁵Geraldine Clifford, *Those Good Gertrudes: A Social History of Women Teachers in America* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014); Jane Martin and Joyce Goodman, eds., *Women and Education: Major Themes in Education*, vol. 3 (London: Routledge, 2010); Marjorie Theobald, *Knowing Women: Origins of Women's Education in Nineteenth-Century Australia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press); Kathleen Weiler, *Country Schoolwomen: Teaching in Rural California, 1850–1950* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1998).

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