

The Dimensions of Gender in Nineteenth-Century Schooling

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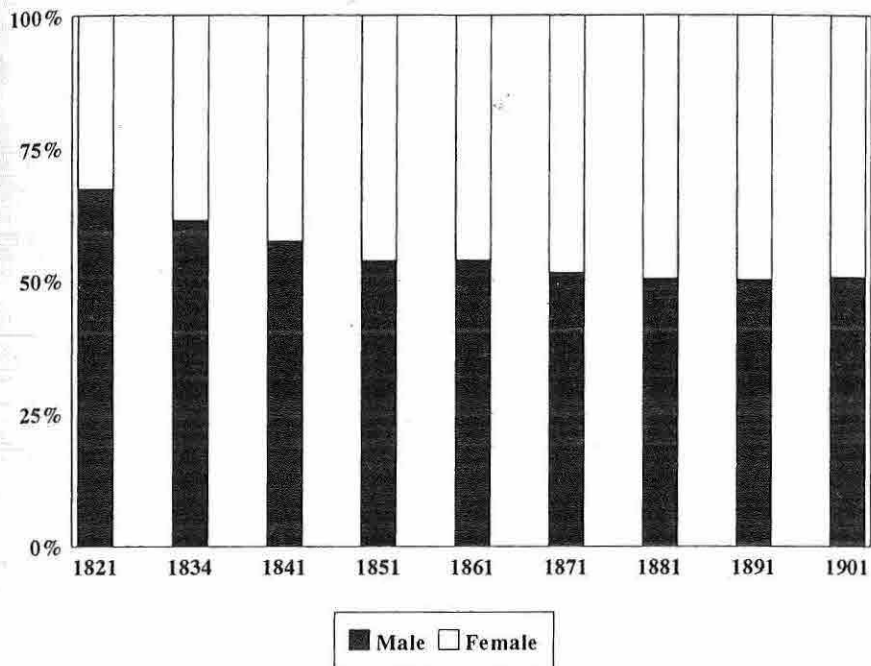
At the beginning of the nineteenth century only a small minority of children attended school. In the course of the century the demand for instruction increased, a diverse group of individuals and agencies established schools and a period of schooling became part of the upbringing of most people. Rates of enrolment and attendance varied widely, however, and prior to the compulsory attendance legislation of the 1890s and 1920s, those differences may be accounted for by the belief held by both the suppliers of schooling and by those who sought to avail of it, that a population differentiated by social and economic circumstances, by age, by religion, by ability and by sex, required appropriate and diverse forms of upbringing and instruction. Depending on the characteristics of the pupil, a desired curriculum would be conveyed through an appropriate pedagogy whether in the pupil's own home or in a school. From the 1830s onwards the state sought to formalise instruction within a national school system with the aim of ensuring that, whatever the differences in the pupil population, each child would follow a standardised curriculum and emerge bearing the marks of a common culture.

In the earlier part of the century the difference in participation accounted for by sex was stark: in the 1820s and 1830s, as Figure 1 shows, the number of female pupils was less than half that of male pupils.¹ From the 1840s onwards the gap narrowed rapidly, though, by the end of the century, it still remained open, with the number of male pupils generally higher than that of females. Over the course of the century the number of young women in the population was always less than the number of young men and when that variation is controlled for, as in Figure 2, it reveals that the difference in school participation by boys and by girls was less than the raw numbers might suggest. The gap between male and female participation had closed by the 1870s and thereafter the proportion of girls at school generally equalled that of boys.

One of the most appropriate ways to observe the disparity in educational participation is through regional, in this case, county variations. They reveal that in the earlier part of the century the counties experiencing the lowest levels of participation were in the poorer and non-urbanised north and west where low female participation accounted for much of the low level of schooling. In 1824,

¹ Pupil data derived from the decennial *Census of Ireland, 1821–1901*; *Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry*, H.C. 1826–7 [12], xii; *Second report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland*, (47), H.C. 1835, xxxiv.

Figure 1 The pupil population, by sex, 1821–1901

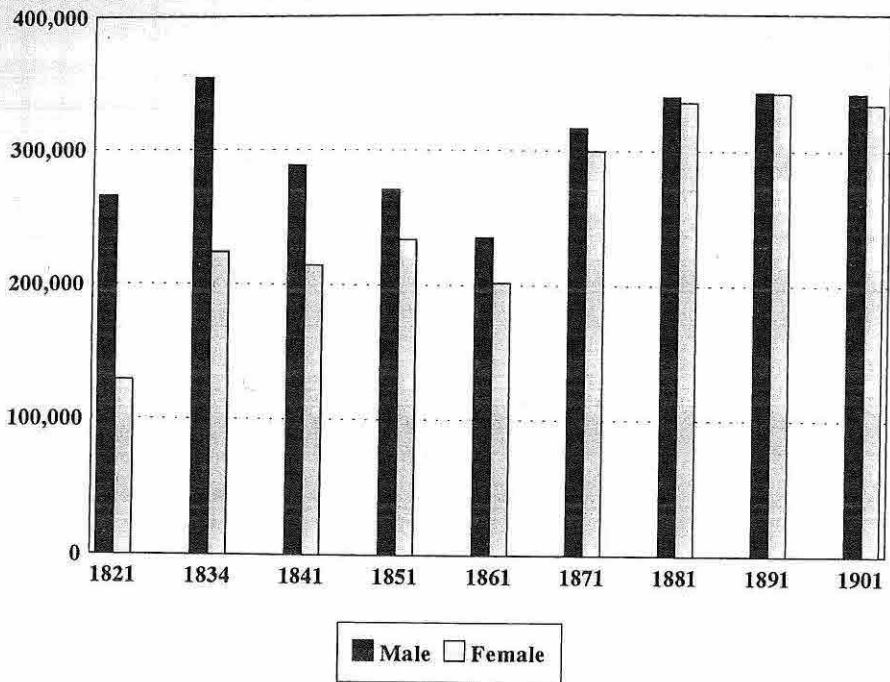


Sources: *Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry*, H.C. 1826–7 [12], xii; *Second report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland*, (47), H.C. 1835 xxxiv; *Census of Ireland, 1821–1901*.

The pupil population was measured at ten points between 1821 and 1901. The instruments used and the conditions of enumeration varied significantly, particularly in the period 1821–51. The inconsistencies in the data make long term comparisons difficult but the data may be used to indicate the relative number of female and male pupils at various points in the century.

as Map 1 shows, counties where the participation of women was frequently half that of boys included those in the west stretching from Leitrim to Kerry. Though rates of participation soon improved, that east-west pattern of male-female disparity was substantially intact in 1841 but, as Map 2 indicates, was showing signs that it might alter: two eastern counties – Wexford and Down – were among those where female participation was lowest. During the second half of the century the gap between male and female participation rates lessened and the counties where female participation had been lowest began to record rates similar to those in the highest – scoring counties less than a generation before. By the 1860s, such divergence as did exist, plotted here in Map 3, reveals a reversal of earlier patterns. In some of the north-Leinster counties the proportion of females

Figure 2 The pupil population, by sex, controlled for size of male and female population, 1821-1901

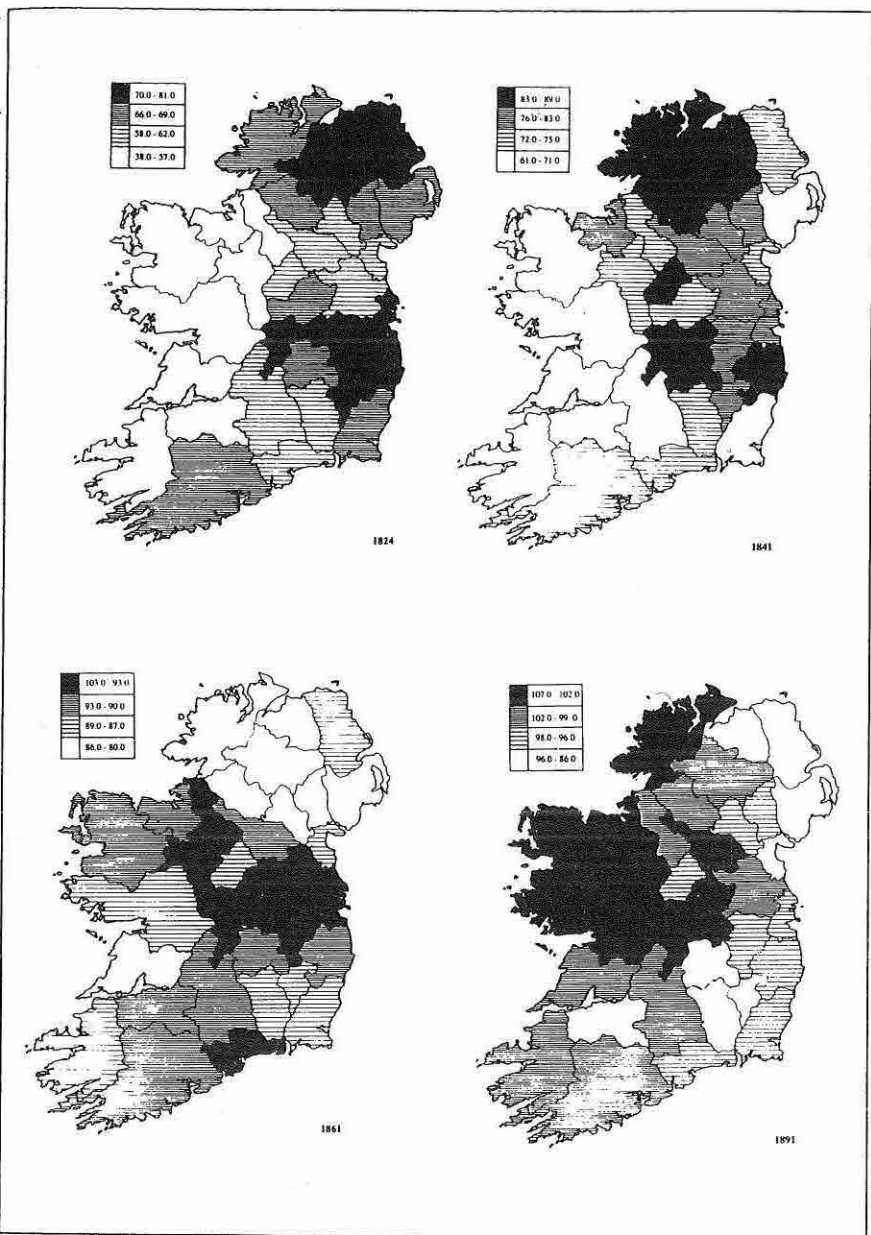


Sources: *Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry*, H.C. 1826-7 [12], xii; *Second report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland*, (47), H.C. 1835 xxxiv; *Census of Ireland, 1821-1901*.

Through the century the average male female ratio was 95.9 : 100. For each decennial census from 1841 to 1901 the commissioners tabulated the population by age-cohort and sex, thus facilitating a computation of the male female ratio in the youth population. The population under 17 was used for 1841-51 and the population under 15 for 1861-1901. Age specific tabulations of population are not available for 1821, 1824 or 1834, for which years the mean for the period 1841-1901 was used.

attending frequently exceeded that of males, and the Ulster counties, where previously female participation had been relatively strong, now began to display relative disadvantage. By the end of the century, as shown in Map 4, the western counties, where during the earlier part of the century females had shown the lowest participation rates, now recorded the highest. Conversely, some Ulster counties - Antrim, Derry, Tyrone - and the Leinster counties of Carlow and Queen's, which during the earlier part of the century had the highest female

Maps 1-4 Female pupils as a percentage of male pupils, by county, 1824-1891



Source: *Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry*, H.C. 1826-7 [12], xii; *Second report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction, Ireland*, (47), H.C. 1835; xxxiv, *Census of Ireland, 1821-1901*.

participation, recorded some of the lowest. As a consequence of their initial low level of female participation, the counties of Connaught and west Munster experienced the largest growth.

In the early nineteenth century the demand for schooling may have been strongly influenced by the extent to which a region's economy reflected higher levels of commercial and administrative activities.² These were concentrated in the urban centres and their hinterlands and it may be that in those regions the sluggish demand for female instruction can be accounted for by the relatively low level of female participation in occupations and social activities dependent on an ability to read and write. As the supply of schooling improved, as its costs decreased and as powerful political and religious forces combined to promote increased enrolment, instruction became much less associated with urban areas and their hinterlands. Thus in the late 1830s in Ballymartin, midway between Carrickfergus and the northern shores of Lough Neagh, an ordnance survey officer reported that the supply of schools had increased recently and that more attention was being given to the education of girls, an activity that previously had been 'very limited'.³

The accounts of educational development given by contemporary observers and by state officials all reveal a preoccupation with the factors considered to inhibit regular attendance. Many concluded that while overall enrolment continued to increase, children left school as soon as they were of use at home or able to earn.⁴ That notion has been statistically tested by David Fitzpatrick who has shown how, in the second half of the century, variations in levels of participation can be explained by the extent to which children continued to participate in the labour market: schooling had a low value in regions where child labour could still be profitable.⁵ This proved to be especially so in the case of girls, and counties such as Donegal and Derry where female labour was valued had low levels of female schooling. In the post-famine decades, however, most employment opportunity lay outside the country and this was particularly so for women. Until the 1880s the illiterates in the population had been among those most likely to emigrate, but from then onwards, the reverse was the case. A period of schooling, now more widespread and cheaply available than ever before, became part of the preparation that an increasing number of girls – particularly in the western counties – made for a life in America, Britain or elsewhere.⁶

2 John Logan, 'Schooling and the Promotion of Literacy in Nineteenth-Century Ireland' (Ph.D. thesis, National University of Ireland, 1992), pp. 161–209. 3 Royal Irish Academy, Ordnance Survey Memoirs, box 3, VI. 4 For example, John McEvoy, *Statistical Survey of the County of Tyrone with observations on the means of improvement drawn up in the years 1801 and 1802* (Dublin, 1802), pp. 163–6; and James M'Parlan, *Statistical survey of the county of Donegal with observations on the means of improvement: drawn up in the year 1801* (Dublin, 1802), p. 77. 5 David Fitzpatrick, "'A share of the honeycomb': education, emigration and Irishwomen" in David Dickson and Mary Daly (eds), *The Origins of Popular Literacy in Ireland: Language Change and Educational Development 1700–1920* (Dublin, 1990), p. 172. 6 *Ibid.*, pp. 180–83.

In the period prior to the widespread dissemination of the school, the household was the principal source of instruction for most children. In poorer families, tuition, if it occurred, had to be integrated into a working routine that made demands on all but the very young. Inevitably, informative accounts of home instruction are infrequent but that by Peadar Ó Laoghaire, growing up near Macroom in the 1840s, reveals some of its critical dimensions:

During the day we worked on the little farm, such of us as were able to do any work at all. When night fell my mother lit a candle on the table, put us sitting round it, handed us the books and taught us our lessons. The teaching she gave us was much better than that given to the children who were going to school. But it was thought, naturally enough, that the teaching in the schools was better.⁷

If family circumstances permitted, a teacher might be employed and the low cost of doing so – sometimes not much more than that of board and bed – meant that many less-well-off families could employ one.⁸ Generally, if a man was employed, it was for the tuition of older boys, while women taught girls and younger boys. Consequently the wealthiest households drew simultaneously on the services of a tutor and a governess and extended that sex-based division of labour, employing maids and nurses to look after younger children. At Parsonstown in 1840, for example, a nurse was caring for the infant in the family of the earl of Rosse, a governess taught a girl aged five and three boys aged seven, nine and eleven, while a tutor was responsible for a fourteen-year-old boy.⁹ In a Meath rectory in the 1850s, a governess taught Alice Stopford Green and her three sisters while a tutor taught her five brothers.¹⁰ A similar sex-based distinction applied where a teacher was employed to supplement the work of family members. For example, in the first decade of the century Gerald Griffin and his brothers were taught by a tutor in their county Limerick home, their two older sisters were taught reading by their mother, and they in turn helped with the tuition of two younger sisters. The girls, however, joined their brothers for French lessons by the tutor.¹¹ The use of tutors, principally for older boys and the practice of sending boys to a school, even from an early age, made household tutoring a predominately female occupation: the 1861 census – the only occasion when separate tabulations were made – recorded almost ten times as many tutors as governesses.¹² Eventually each would be replaced and in the last decades of the century an increasing

⁷ Peadar Ó Laoghaire, *My Own Story*. A translation by Sheile O' Sullivan of *Mo Scéal Féin* (Dublin, 1973), p. 17. ⁸ Louis Cullen, 'Patrons, teachers and literacy in Irish: 1700–1850' in Dickson and Daly, *Popular Literacy*, pp. 16–19. ⁹ Randal Parsons, *Reminiscences* (privately printed, n.d.), p. 8; (copy in Muniments Room, Birr Castle). ¹⁰ R.B. McDowell, *Alice Stopford Greene: A Passionate Historian* (Dublin, 1967), p. 14. ¹¹ Ethel Mannin, *Two Studies in Integrity* (London, 1954), p. 24. ¹² *The Census of Ireland for the year 1861, part v: General Report, with appendix, county tables, summary of Ireland and index to names of places* (3204–IV), H.C. 1863, lxi, i, pp. lxii–lxix.

number of boarding and day schools offered well-off families what was variously described as 'superior', 'secondary' or 'intermediate' education as an alternative to household-based instruction.¹³ They developed largely from the need to prepare for entry to higher education and to the expanding ranks of the professions, a world in which women had, as yet, a confined space. Nonetheless an increase in the numbers being employed in emerging and expanding occupations where women would attain prominence, such as nursing, teaching, and retailing, ensured that more and more women would prepare themselves by remaining in school long after the completion of elementary instruction. Such occupations became even more attractive as opportunity within post-famine agriculture diminished.¹⁴

As schooling became more widely available, a family would look to it to reinforce the skills and values that it wished to transmit, or in the case of new skills such a literacy or the English language, for the acquisition of knowledge absent at home. Data collected by the two great official surveys of the early nineteenth century curriculum, carried out in 1824 and 1834 respectively, corroborate the literary accounts and show that reading instruction formed its core.¹⁵ Writing was almost as widely available, and absent only from the scriptural Sunday schools, from some of the weekday schools funded by evangelical societies and from a small number of the schools of the teacher proprietors, that is the schools officially classified as 'pay' or 'hedge' schools. For example, out of the 262 schools in Kildare and Leighlin for which there are curricular details in 1824, all but one of 183 male teachers taught writing, and of seventy-nine female teachers, all but seven taught writing.¹⁶ Writing was thus available in most schools save for a few attended exclusively by girls. At an earlier period there may have been less emphasis on the teaching of writing to girls but by the second or third decade of the century, the tendency had lessened. Thus the largest of the philanthropic education societies, the Society for the Education of the Poor in Ireland, generally known as the Kildare Place Society, made no distinction in the time allocated to the teaching of writing for either boys or girls. In practice, however, the tendency for the girls' manual curriculum – usually needlework and household skills – to take a large portion of time and its timetabling against book-keeping for boys, meant that some girls continued to receive less writing practice.¹⁷ The distinction remained strongest in the case of poorer girls, especially those in custodial institutions or those who were dependent on charity for their schooling. In the Killaloe parochial schools in the 1810s and 1820s, for example, boys learned

¹³ Anne V. O'Connor, 'Influences Affecting Girls' Secondary Education in Ireland, 1860–1910' in *Archivium Hibernicum*, 141 (1986), pp. 83–98. ¹⁴ Mary E. Daly, 'Women in the Irish Workforce from Pre-Industrial to Modern Times' in *Saothar*, 7 (1981), pp. 74–6. ¹⁵ *Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry* H.C. 1826–7 [12], xii Appendix 22, and *Second Report of the Commissioners of Public Instruction* H.C. 1835 [47], xxxiv. ¹⁶ Martin Brenan, *Schools of Kildare and Leighlin, A.D. 1775–1835* (Dublin, 1935), pp. 177–612. ¹⁷ Society for the Education of the Poor of Ireland, *The Schoolmasters' Manual* (Dublin, 1825), p. 54.

catechism, reading, writing and arithmetic while girls learned catechism, reading and needlework.¹⁸ The schools operated by the Presentation sisters at the same period also gave priority to religious instruction, needlework and reading; writing was taught in a separate class by a special teacher and only to advanced pupils.¹⁹

Elementary numeracy – variously described as ‘ciphering’, ‘numbers’, ‘arithmetic’ or ‘reckoning’ – was less widely available than reading and writing, and here a sex distinction was more discernible: in the early 1820s all but five of the 262 men teachers in Kildare and Leighlin taught some form of numeracy, but of seventy-nine women teachers, thirty-six did not teach it. Consequently, perhaps as many as half of the girl pupils who attended a school operated by a woman did not have arithmetic available to them. It is unclear whether the choice of school and curriculum reflected a family’s capacity to pay the higher fees that numeracy tuition commanded, or the assumption that girls would not benefit greatly from it. In either instance there was a sufficient demand to ensure the continuing operation of such schools. It is also the case that, from the 1810s onwards, progressive educational agencies were providing for the numeracy instruction of girls equally with boys, though for some time it would still be regarded as a subject for older and abler minds. In the Kildare Place schools, for example, its initial lessons – the learning of numbers and simple calculation – did not begin until the upper division of the second class, by which stage many pupils would have completed their time at school.²⁰

Neither class nor sex precluded the need for religious instruction and educational reformers who were part of a wider evangelical movement sought to ensure its provision for all girls and boys. As a result the supply of educational institutions increased rapidly in the 1810s and 1820s and the contributions of the urban élite who funded organisations such as the London Hibernian Society (1806), the Sunday School Society for Ireland (1809), the Kildare Place Society (1811), the Baptist Irish Society (1814) and the Irish Society (1818) did much to drive down fee levels or remove them altogether. The societies employed local teachers who in return for a salary spliced a scriptural component into a utilitarian curriculum in schools open to girls equally with boys. Many were established in regions that had previously been unable to support a teacher and it is likely that some of the poorest households owed their first educational opportunity to these mission schools. Similarly motivated, the teaching religious did much to ease the educational bottleneck in the towns and by adopting a quasi-monastic rule, female congregations such as the Presentation sisters (1775), Brigidine sisters (1807), Irish Sisters of Charity (1816) and Mercy sisters (1827), as well as male congregations such as the Christian brothers (1802), Patrician brothers (1808), Franciscan brothers (1818) and Presentation brothers (1827), established schools whose regulations and curriculum reinforced a sexual division.²¹

¹⁸ ‘An account of parochial schools in the diocese of Killaloe (National Library of Ireland, MS 17, 947). ¹⁹ [Presentation Sisters], *A Directory for the Religious of the Presentation Order According to the Practices of the Parent House Founded in the Year 1775* (Cork, n.d.), p. 34.

²⁰ *Schoolmasters’ Manual*, p. 10. ²¹ For examples, see [Christian Brothers], *A Manual of*

By the 1820s the state had adopted the project of universal schooling, believing that citizenship – something that might be exercised differently by men or women, rich or poor, but which demanded obligations from all – could be effectively promoted through a centrally regulated school system. As a consequence it increased its subsidy for approved local educational initiatives and in 1831 appointed a commission to oversee the process. The prospect of a state dominated by an Anglican élite regulating the education of their flocks may have dismayed many Catholic clergymen, but those fears were allayed when it became clear that the government wished instruction in a child's own religion to be part of the compulsory curriculum.²² For their part, Anglican clergymen were hostile towards a school system that would no longer allow them, as ministers in the established church, a supervisory and controlling role and they were opposed to a curriculum where religion would be taught separately from other subjects. However, for the vast majority of the Catholic clergy – and eventually for their Protestant counterparts – national schools would not only prove to be acceptable, they would also be necessary, for it had become clear that the spiralling demand for schooling would create a burden beyond the resources of most parishes.²³ Thus the national school became part of the pastoral apparatus of the Catholic church, and the mission of the parochial clergyman operated 'with close support from what more and more was his school'.²⁴ The national school was quickly adopted as the principal conduit for the catechesis of the young, girls equally with boys. Religious instruction became an important reason for attending – in some cases the only reason – and it was frequently the case that schooling began only when the need to prepare for communion arose and ended with the completion of instruction for confirmation.²⁵ It may be one of the deeper ironies of nineteenth-century education that it was the abundant funding of the national school system by the state that allowed the church to construct an apparatus with which it would successfully complete its devotional revolution.

From their inauguration the commissioners for national education were conscious of a popular demand for a continuing availability of the curriculum that had been offered by the teacher proprietors. As a result, the national schools followed the practice of their precursors and set reading and writing at the centre of the curriculum. However, by introducing numbers in the first days of schooling, they gave arithmetic a priority that it may not have had previously. The commissioners also argued that if literacy and numeracy had been taught in the schools

School Government: – Being a Complete Analysis of the System of Education Pursued in the Christian Schools, Designed for the Junior Members of the Society (Dublin, 1845); [Irish Sisters of Charity], *School Government Book* (Dublin, n.d.). ²² Donald H. Akenson, *The Irish Education Experiment: The National System of Education in the Nineteenth Century* (London and Toronto, 1970), pp. 160 and 225–74. ²³ Mary Daly, 'The Development of the National School System, 1831–40' in Art Cosgrove and Donal McCartney (eds), *Studies in Irish History Presented to R. Dudley Edwards* (Dublin, 1979), pp. 150–63. ²⁴ Patrick Corish, *The Irish Catholic Experience: A Historical Survey* (Dublin, 1985), p. 178. ²⁵ For example, see Cork Archives Council, MS U. 60.4.

of the teacher proprietors primarily as a set of simple psycho-motor skills, such would not be the practice in their schools. They proposed that in the 'new system' reading lessons would be used 'to convey information', that writing lessons would be used for 'fixing instruction on the memory' and that arithmetic, instead of being taught by unexplained rules, would be the means of training the mind 'to accuracy of thinking and reasoning'.²⁶ Thus the commissioners drew a sharp distinction between defining characteristics of the old and the new and sought to exclude what they regarded as the most objectionable aspect of past practice, an unregulated flow of ideas and information. The national school would instead be used to promote a stipulated body of knowledge and the commissioners believed that a carefully designed set of readers in the hands of good teachers, constantly supervised, would ensure its transmission.

The first reader was published in 1831 and almost every year thereafter the commissioners added to a list which by 1850 had forty-one titles. The readers maintained the didactic tradition of the voluntary societies and the religious congregations and conveyed a world view that emphasised respectful deference to hierarchy, the justness of a divinely sanctioned social structure and the appropriateness of the modest rewards that accrued to honest labour.²⁷ That view was typically illustrated with domestically situated tales from the everyday life of a hard-working and honest labouring man, supported by a thrifty and inventive wife, and the message was reinforced by the regular appearance of their opposites: a squalid, complaining cottier whose downfall is hastened by the extravagances of a slovenly spouse.²⁸ The message in those homely tales was made explicit and given a rationale in advance by texts of domestic and political economy, history and scripture. In that regard a reader published in 1846 calmly rendered the assumption of a separate and subordinate female sphere by declaring that it would teach her 'to know her place and her functions; to make her content with the one and willing to fulfil the other ... to render her more useful, more humble, and more happy'.²⁹

The notion of separate though complementary spheres had a powerful manifestation in a curriculum of manual instruction. The commissioners had granted aid to two agricultural schools in 1832 and in 1838 established a model farm at Glasnevin for the training of agriculturists and for the teachers attending the central training institute. Soon after they established a number of model agricultural schools and they funded farms attached to ordinary national schools. During the 1830s needlework became a subject in the training of women teachers and it was expected that they would teach it to their girl pupils. It was made

²⁶ *Second Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, for the Year Ending 31st March 1835*, H.C. 1835 [300], xxxv, p. 7. ²⁷ J. M. Goldstrom, *The Social Content of Education 1808-1870: A Study of the Working Class School Reader in England and Ireland* (Shannon, 1972), pp. 52-90. ²⁸ Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, *Agricultural Class Book; or, How Best to Cultivate a Small Farm and Garden: Together with Hints on Domestic Economy* (Dublin, 1848), p. 113; and *Third Book of Lessons for the Use of Irish National Schools* (Dublin, 1835), pp. 215-20. ²⁹ Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, *A Reading Book for the Use of Female Schools* (Dublin, 1846), p. 7.

compulsory for older girls and in schools employing only male teachers the regulations allowed for the employment of a female 'work mistress'. In 1847 the female manual curriculum was extended to include instruction in cookery and cottage economy, and the following year the commissioners published *The Agricultural Class Book*, a theoretical introduction to farming for boys with sections on kitchen management for girls. In 1867 they published a new agricultural textbook as a reader for ordinary literary classes, thereby introducing the study of agriculture and domestic economy to pupils who otherwise might not have been inclined to study it. At the same time the commissioners decided that all male teachers in training would be examined in agriculture and that the weighting of the marks allocated to it in their grading examinations should be increased.³⁰

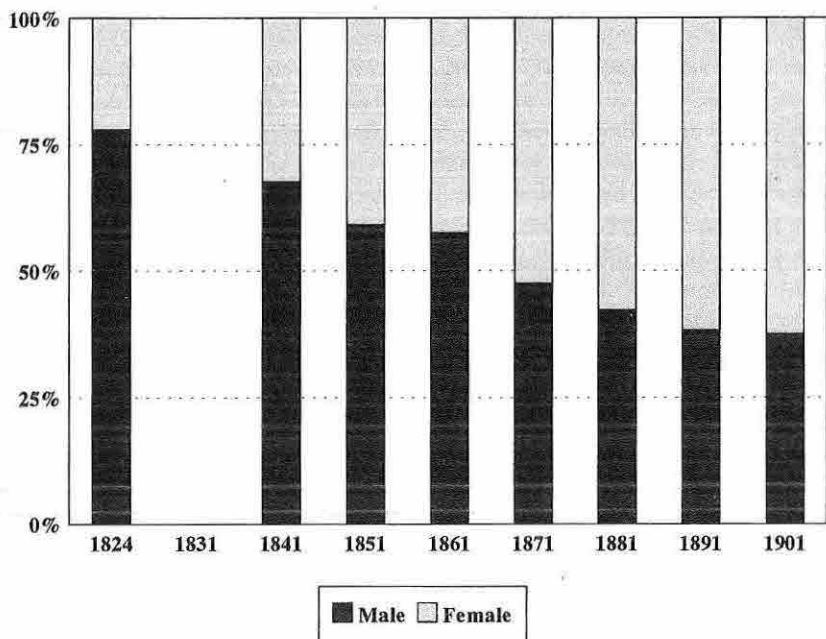
In addition to the provision of agriculture and needlework, the manual curriculum was promoted through a number of special subjects. For example, the argument that drawing would promote industrial skills prompted the commissioners to appoint a drawing teacher at the central model school in 1847 and from then on all male teachers in training took a drawing course.³¹ Navigation and commercial fishing were introduced in 1858 in the model schools of the port towns and shortly afterwards navigation became an optional subject, eligible for a special grant when taught by a teacher who had passed a special examination. In 1883 handicraft was introduced as a subject for male teachers at the central model school and two years later the commissioners sanctioned it as an extra subject for boys in fifth and sixth standard. A vigorous burst of innovation and specialisation in the 1880s and 1890s led to further demarcation of new subject areas in technical and manual instruction. For example, needlework and domestic economy – between them the basis of the female manual instruction curriculum – now spawned sewing, dressmaking, cookery, poultry management, laundry work, dairy management and spinning. In such ways did the commissioners set out to achieve the aim that their schools would have a central role in the development of the country's resources: its youth would be systematically initiated into appropriate and consequently separate occupations.

In the early decades of the century the predominately male profile of the pupil population may account for the pervasiveness of male teachers. In any case the low levels of participation by females in schooling would have confined the pool from which female teachers might be drawn. Though data are incomplete they reveal an occupation which at that time was overwhelmingly male: in the mid 1820s women constituted approximately 22 per cent of teachers.³² While men often taught boys and girls of all ages, women did so less frequently though they were the favoured teachers of infants, whether boys or girls. The educational reformers in the voluntary societies believed that a school segregated on the basis of sex

³⁰ *Thirty-sixth Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the Year 1870*, [C 360] xxxiii (1871), pp. 25–6, and *Fifty-eight Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the Year 1891*, [C 6788] lviii (1892), p. 37. ³¹ *Fourteenth report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the Year 1847*, [832] H.C. 1847–8 xxix, p. 226. ³² See note to Figure 3.

was the ideal but readily accepted that it might not be attainable where the demand for schooling was low and the provision of a separate male and female teacher costly.³³ It may be then that the increasing number of girls in the pupil population accounts, in part, for the feminisation of the teaching force. By the 1840s, from which time the decennial census reports tabulate teachers by sex, one third of the total, as Figure 3 indicates, was female. The proportion continued to increase and by the 1870s the almost equal participation of boys and girls in schooling is reflected in a similarly balanced teaching force. That profile might

Figure 3 The teacher population, by sex, 1824–1901



Sources *Second Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education Inquiry*, H.C. 1826–7 [12], xii appendix 22 pp. 230–1331 and *Census of Ireland, 1841–1901*

Totals of teachers were not tabulated in the reports of the 1821 or 1831 census. Neither were they tabulated in the reports of the 1824 and 1834 enquiries, though each attempted a listing of teachers by name. These data were not collected in a standard form nor were they complete, though the most satisfactory, that for 1824, allow an estimate that indicates that women teachers were then 22 per cent of the total.

³³ See, for example, Lord Farnham, *A Statement of the Management of the Farnham Estates* (Dublin, 1830).

have been maintained, but the enrolment of an increasing number of younger children and the growth of infant classes resulted in relatively fewer men being recruited as teachers.

By the end of the century 49 per cent of national schools had a single-sex profile, where men taught boys and women taught girls or infants. Such schools were almost all in the towns where an abundant child population facilitated not just separate schools for boys and girls, but separate classes for each level of ability or standard. Conversely most of the mixed schools were in the more sparsely populated parts of the countryside and in these, three quarters of the teachers were women.³⁴ While the consensus for segregated education had been promoted enthusiastically by the commissioners and by the clerical patrons, the low density of some rural populations saw economic considerations overrule any social or moral argument for segregation. In those instances a lone teacher would have full responsibility for all of a locality's pupils and while the regulations allowed for pupils as young as four and as old as eighteen, the bulk was clustered between eight and twelve. Just 10 per cent of schools had both a mixed pupil population and a mixed teaching force. In most cases, these were two-teacher schools, often under the care of a husband assisted by his wife. The younger classes were almost always taught by the woman while her male colleague taught the older ones. Groups would be swapped periodically so that the older girls could be taught needlework.³⁵

Though central to the project of universal schooling, the female teacher was not rewarded on a basis similar to that of her male counterpart and from the beginning of national education her pay reflected the traditionally lower status of female education and the generally prevailing difference between male and female incomes. In the 1830s female salary levels were pitched at 75 per cent of those paid to males. Rates of pay were often reviewed and thereafter the scale became increasingly differentiated, but by the end of the century female rates stood at 80 per cent of those paid to male counterparts.³⁶ Nonetheless, for many women teaching had become an attractive occupation that provided, at the very least, a degree of financial independence. That prospect was enhanced by the possibility of promotion to a school principalship, a position that was held by two thirds of all teachers between the 1860s and the end of the century. Here however the notion that a woman was unsuitable as the superior of a male colleague prevailed: while women accounted for 55 per cent of teachers in 1900, they held but 28 per cent of the school principalships, in each case as a sole teacher.³⁷

³⁴ *Sixty-sixth Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland, for the Year 1899-1900*, [Cd 285], H.C. 1900, xxii, p. 20. ³⁵ P.W. Joyce, *A Handbook of School Management and Methods of Teaching* (Dublin, 1872), pp. 44-70. ³⁶ *Seventh Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the Year 1840*, [353], H.C. 1842, xxiii, p. 104; *Sixty-sixth Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the Year 1899-1900*, [Cd 285], H.C. 1900, xxiii, p. 14. ³⁷ *Sixty-sixth Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland for the Year 1899-1900*, [Cd 285], H.C. 1900, xxiii, p. 19.

Until the 1840s the most pervasive type of school was that of the teacher proprietors, who, if they became national teachers, would undergo a significant loss of independence. The national school teacher was subject to immediate and frequent surveillance by a clergyman manager and somewhat less frequently, by a government inspector. Independence in pedagogic style and school organisation had been traded for the security of a regular salary, and from 1882, the assurance of a state pension. In the poorest parishes the teacher might also be the tenant of a comfortable official residence, thereby providing a vivid example of the fruits of education and of the well-ordered domesticity that the curriculum sought to promote. In these and many other ways the role of teachers was being transformed: they were no longer the free-moving entrepreneurs of diverse background and experience who ventured to set up schools in response to popular demand. They had become, instead, paid servants in an expanding state apparatus. There is no doubt that the national school provided occupational opportunity and financial security, especially for many women, but it did so under conditions that required an unquestioning acceptance of an authoritarian and patriarchal structure.

In the space of two generations between the 1830s and the 1890s the state had ceased to view the school as a potentially subversive agency. Instead it began to promote instruction through the national school as a process that, if properly accomplished, would be essential to the formation of each citizen. Whatever the wishes of the children or of their parents, none should remain apart from the undertaking. The state was joined in that project by the churches as they came to regard schooling as a necessary part of the pastoral process. The school thus became the usual way of promoting an individual's inclusion in a national civic and religious culture. Those who looked to the national school for instruction may have imagined it to hold the key to a transformed way of life. This was certainly the case for the women who found it an increasingly accessible means of acquiring skills and knowledge and for those women who went on to become teachers. The paradox of nineteenth-century school reform is that, despite the apparent promise that it would weaken the barriers deriving from class, religion or race, it became instead an instrument that promoted a knowledge of the immutability of those forces. In the case of gender formation it provided equality of access, but to a curriculum that emphasised and reinforced gender difference.