LITERACY AND SOCIETY IN IRELAND 1900-1980

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ABSTRACT

This thesis focuses critical attention on the long-standing claim that the Irish population was fully literate in the twentieth century. Unquestioned assertions that marginalize the illiterate Irish person are supported by a limited set of documents. This claim is revisited using a wider range of written materials, located in publicly-accessible archives. A thematic analysis moves beyond the surface semantic level of the data to explore the shared assumptions, conceptualizations, and discursive resources that contribute to the social construction of literacy, illiteracy, and the illiterate person.

The thesis adopts the position that literacy and society are entwined in a complex and dynamic relationship. It explores one dimension of this relationship by asking: How does Irish society construct the *illiterate person*? A chronological approach spanning the years 1900-1980 describes how several discourses of literacy operate to produce different constructions of the illiterate person. The documentary evidence provides access to a range of shared discursive resources and their influence on material conditions for a significant minority in twentieth-century Ireland.

Three key findings are presented. One is the presence of the illiterate person within mainstream Irish society, in contrast to prevailing accounts that locates those with literacy difficulty at the margins. A second key finding is that a continuum of literacy is evident in the data. Stratified forms of literacy, a hierarchy of readers, and multiple subject positions for the illiterate person provide alternative ways to conceptualise literacy proficiency, moving beyond a simple dichotomy of literate and illiterate. The third key finding is that silences in relation to literacy in these documents are not innocent omissions, but instead provide strategic support for claims to full literacy. The study ultimately produces a challenge to existing accounts that reify literacy proficiency as a key distinguishing feature of the Irish nation-state.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis arises from a sociological study of literacy in twentieth-century Ireland. Although temporally distant, many twentieth-century events still resonate in the twenty-first century. This applies in relation to literacy, defined here as the skills required for reading and writing. The expanding use of written documentation during the twentieth century led to a greater need for literacy in the everyday world. Ever-changing demands on literacy continue into the present-day, where technological advances require new forms of literacy to gain access to information, to progress within employment, and to engage with digital communication platforms. The twentieth century also saw transformations in perceptions regarding the benefits of literacy. Conceptualised in previous times as a catalyst for individual personal progress, literacy was increasingly considered a necessary adjunct to collective social progress and as a factor of national economic success. The focus on 'functional literacy' for economic development, first evident in the mid-twentieth century, is a pervasive feature of present-day Ireland.

A *narrative of full literacy* provides the backdrop to retrospective representations of twentieth-century Ireland. It depicts an Irish population that are homogenously fully literate. The narrative contains components already existing in the twentieth-century social world. These overlapping elements include Census returns showing high levels of literacy, legislation enforcing compulsory schooling until aged 14 years, and founding myths that present literacy as a distinguishing characteristic of Irish ancestry. Succinctly captured in the phrase *Island of Saints and Scholars*, this narrative underpins a tacit assumption that literacy is the norm for all Irish adults. In consequence, the illiterate adult is constructed as a marginalized Other in Irish society, one who either will not or cannot learn literacy within the Irish education system. This prevailing narrative shapes discussions on literacy, effectively marginalizing those with literacy difficulties in the twentieth century and extending a long reach into the present day.

Findings from international literacy surveys offer a contrast to the *narrative of full literacy*. The 1998 *International Adult Literacy Survey* (IALS) finds that 25% of the Irish population aged 16-64 years have very poor literacy, scoring at Level 1 in a five-level scale (Morgan, Hickey and Kellaghan 1997:vii; Morgan 2014). On this scale, Level 3 is considered the minimum standard for coping with the demands of everyday life in a complex advanced society (OECD 2000:xi). Irish respondents in the IALS survey are selected from the 1995 electoral register (OECD 2000:112), suggesting they are sufficiently integrated into Irish society to register to vote. Fifteen years later, the 2013 *Programme for International Assessment of Adult Competencies Survey* (PIAAC) uses the 2011 Geodirectory database of dwellings as a sampling frame, and explicitly excludes mobile dwellings such as Traveller caravans (OECD 2013:52-53). The PIAAC results rank Ireland 17th lowest from 24 participating countries, with 18% of Irish respondents between 16-65 years demonstrating literacy at or below Level 1. A comparison of adjusted mean literacy scores for Ireland finds that the difference between IALS and PIAAC is statistically insignificant (Central Statistics Office 2013:8; Morgan 2014). The PIAAC results show that 45% of Irish respondents score at Level 3 or higher, compared to an average of 50% across all participating countries (Central Statistics Office 2013:4). Birth dates for IALS and PIAAC survey respondents span the years 1934-1997, suggesting that poor literacy may have been a larger feature of twentieth-century Ireland than the *narrative of full literacy* allows. This discrepancy between perception and measurement offers an invitation for further research. The prevailing claim to full literacy denies the presence of illiteracy in twentieth-century Ireland, despite international evidence that suggests otherwise. The gulf between these two positions provides an impetus for my research study, prompting a search for evidence of illiteracy in twentieth-century Ireland.

Successive Census returns provide documentary support to the claim that the Irish population was fully and homogenously literate by the early twentieth century. The core hypothesis for this study is that a wider set of

documents has the potential to produce a more nuanced account of literacy. Accordingly, the research data comprises forty historical documents. Published books, newspaper articles, conference proceedings, and Government reports, as well as privately-published pamphlets and unpublished archived reports, are included among them. Their unifying element is that all contain statements on the topic of 'literacy in Ireland'.

Previous ethnographic studies of literacy in Ireland recount how those with poor literacy view their position in relation to the wider society (e.g. Bailey and Coleman 1998; Feeley 2014). A social constructionist approach motivates interest in the other side of the literacy /society relationship, that is, how the wider society views those with poor literacy. My study focuses attention on how Irish society constructs the *illiterate person*, the term used here to mean adults whose literacy skills do not meet their society's norms for literacy. It also examines the tendency to position the illiterate person at the margins.

The study spans the first eighty years of the twentieth century, from 1900 to the launch of the National Adult Literacy Agency in 1980. This timeframe encompasses several cusps of change, such as the emergence of an independent Irish nation-state, the development of new education structures, and an increasing orientation to economic imperatives. The documents used as data were created and circulated within the Irish social world during this time, forming part of the tangible historical fabric of Irish society. I encountered these documents in physical locations such as the Irish Military Archives and in online archives like Columbia University's *Teachers College Record.* Many of them have lain undisturbed by sociological interest until now.

A theoretical framework derived from Foucault's conceptualisations of discourse, power, knowledge, and silence underpins a thematic analysis of the data, which identifies statements about literacy and the accompanying silences. The analysis explores how these statements and silences produce a range of discourses about literacy. The analytic findings are

used to address the research question, which focuses on the construction of the *illiterate person* within these discourses.

Whereas the prevailing *narrative of full literacy* remains relatively stable and enduring into the present day, everyday discourses relating to literacy and illiteracy are more mutable. Their transmission and exchange through social interaction allows them to be continuously remade. The written documents facilitate access to 'fixed' versions of these discourses, allowing analysis of a set of discourses relating to the *illiterate person*. This analysis brings forward other elements of everyday Irish life for examination. These include the significance of literacy as a distinguishing feature of the new Irish nation-state, the role of schooling as a vector for literacy, and the complex interplay between inclusion and exclusion in relation to Irish citizens who have literacy difficulties. Those without literacy cannot read the accounts of others and cannot write their own accounts, allowing written representations to continue unchallenged. The analysis explores how this form of silence and other silences play a strategic role in the process of constructing positions for the *illiterate person*. A variety of procedures contribute to moving the analytic findings from the 'context of discovery' to the 'context of presentation' (Mills [1959] 2000:222). These include selecting illustrative extracts from individual documents, collating information across series of documents, and rearranging this information to highlight pertinent features.

The research objective is to explore the complex relationship between literacy and society in twentieth-century Ireland, and to produce an alternative account that moves beyond the *narrative of full literacy*. This alternative account is developed over eight chapters. Chapter 1 examines academic support for the prevailing *narrative of full literacy* and focuses critical attention on three aspects of the narrative, comprising the evidence from Census returns, the presence of widespread nationalist support, and the conceptualization of literacy as an inert entity. The prime role played by the Census is addressed in the context of present-day reservations about accepting Census returns as evidence of a population's literacy. The

chapter then evaluates the role accorded to literacy as a factor of nationalism. Widespread nationalist support in twentieth-century Ireland is considered an indicator of widespread literacy. This study argues that the proliferation of non-literate forms of nationalist activism allowed nationalist ideas to spread regardless of literacy level. The final part of the chapter draws from a set of canonical studies that identify literacy as a socially constructed object. This counters the implicit assumption within the *narrative of full literacy* that literacy is an inert artefact, which is transmitted and reproduced intact through the education system. These studies discuss the dynamic interaction of literacy and social context (Graff 1979; Street 1984), the role of literacy within the public sphere (Habermas 1989), cultural and political aspects of literacy (Freire 1970; Scribner and Cole 1981; Anderson 1983; De Castell and Luke 1987), literacy in relation to legitimacy and prestige (Bourdieu 1991), and the role of literacy in facilitating regulation and control (Foucault 1977a). These diverse literatures, produced during the twentieth century, provide an entry point to the argument developed within this study. They also lead to the research question, which asks: *How is the illiterate person constructed in twentieth-century Ireland?*

The social constructionist approach and the role of written documents as evidence of social interaction are discussed in Chapter 2. This chapter outlines the methodological and analytical frameworks developed for the study and justifies the use of a thematic analysis as a complementary analytic method. The chapter also describes the data searching process and the selection criteria for the documents used as data. The final part of the chapter outlines how the thematic analysis focuses on explicating the discourses and silences evident within the data, facilitating access to *ways of speaking* and *ways of not speaking* about the illiterate person.

The next five chapters present a chronological account of the analytic findings. The years 1900-1980 are divided into five distinct eras, with the divisions reflecting elements of wider social change, from the anticipation of Independence in 1900, the achievement of Independence in 1921, a

focus on social progress in the 1930s, an orientation to economic development in the 1940s, and engagement in individualized literacy measurements in the 1960s. Each chapter addresses a facet of the research question using documents produced in that era.

Chapter 3 examines two discourses of educational ability circulating in the years prior to Independence, evident in documents that discuss the future education system of Ireland. Both discourses offer solutions to the poor literacy levels observed in National Schools. These solutions map onto the political landscape of Unionism and Nationalism. The political distinctions are accompanied by a distinct stratification that differentiates between the literacy of state-funded National Schools and fee-paying Secondary Schools. The chapter argues that the differentiation between literacies underpins the self-appointed entitlement of the privately-educated to make judgements on the literacy of the state-educated. This differentiation and hierarchisation of literacy is consistently evident throughout the data in all five eras.

Activities of censorship and Irish-language revival in the first decades of the independent Irish nation-state are addressed in Chapter 4. This chapter uses data from Irish and online archives to argue that political and religious interests co-incide in regulating and displacing English-language literacy. The *illiterate person* is constructed as a valued asset in the context of religious and political activities that favour a docile and uncritical population.

The World Conference on Education held in Dublin in 1933 provides a starting point to consider national engagement with external *ways of speaking* about illiteracy in Chapter 5. The widely circulating *discourse of disruption,* which associates illiteracy with socially disruptive tendencies, is examined in the context of compulsory education provisions in the 1930s and 1940s. The severe penalties associated with School Attendance legislation co-exist with a widespread tolerance of early school leaving and non-school-attendance, proxy indicators of poor literacy. Irish-language revival policies increasingly focus on oral expression at the expense of

writing skills, thereby downgrading literacy proficiency in the schools. The *discourse of disruption* remains a dominant discourse throughout the twentieth century, providing justification for excluding and marginalizing those with literacy difficulty. The chapter examines the use of literacy tests as exclusionary mechanisms and goes on to argue that founding myths celebrating the literacy capacity of the ancient Irish people provide a way to exclude the illiterate Irish citizen from membership of the Irish nation.

Documents located in the National Library and the Military Archives underpin Chapter 6, which considers literacy in relation to economic development in the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. These documents discuss how the Vocational Schools and the Defence Forces address the literacy needs of large numbers of young adults seeking employment. The presence of this tuition is cloaked in a muffled form of silence that reflects the peripheral position of the Vocational Schools and Defence Forces in Irish society. The chapter contends that this silence provides tacit support to the prevailing belief that the state-funded education system produces a high level of literacy.

Chapter 7 discusses Irish responses to international perceptions of literacy during the 1960s and 1970s. This era sees the wide dissemination of Freire's work promoting literacy as a catalyst for participation in social change (1970, 1974). Freire's critical perspective is adopted by organisations campaigning for adult literacy provisions. The chapter argues that Ireland's engagement with transnational organisations such as the OECD leads to a concern to measure and to improve literacy proficiency as an aspect of human capital management, located within an increasing focus on literacy for economic participation rather than social participation.

The chronological account provided by these five chapters is revisited in the thesis conclusion Chapter 8. This chapter explicates the different discourses and silences about literacy encountered in the data and describes how they operate together. It expands on three major themes of Nation, Schooling, and Inclusion arising from the analysis and then

discusses the findings in terms of the conceptual framework. The final part of the chapter outlines the overall research findings and identifies their implications and limitations.

The *narrative of full literacy* overlooks the presence of the *illiterate person* in twentieth-century Ireland. This narrative suggests that those who struggle with literacy are located at the margins of Irish society. My critical appraisal of empirical data argues that the *illiterate person* resides in the mainstream Irish social world. A range of documents from the twentieth century are interrogated using conceptualisations of literacy developed during the same century. These documents provide evidence of variations in literacy that challenge representations of a homogenously literate population. Stratified and hierarchical differentiations of literacy indicate a broad continuum of literacy proficiency instead of a simple dichotomy of literate and illiterate. The existence of two language and two literacies provides an additional layer of intricacy. Processes of silence and exclusion that attempt to push the *illiterate person* to the periphery co-exist with a range of discourses that construct the *illiterate person* as part of the everyday social world. The thesis explores this complex dynamic interaction between literacy and society in Ireland, and in doing so it produces a challenge to long-standing comfortable assumptions that have remained unquestioned until now.

CHAPTER 1: LITERACY AND SOCIETY

1.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces key conceptual elements relevant to a study of literacy and society in twentieth-century Ireland. These concepts arise from a variety of studies and reflect a range of temporal contexts. Rather than attempting all-encompassing definitions of literacy and illiteracy, *literacy* is used here to mean reading and writing skills, recognising that such skills vary in relation to social context. The *illiterate person* holds reading and writing skills that are under the thresholds required to be considered *literate* in their society, with these thresholds also relating to social context.

The chapter first focuses attention on literacy in Ireland. before looking at studies of literacy in other parts of the world. Section 1.2 outlines retrospective accounts of literacy in twentieth-century Ireland and examines the central role of Census data as reliable evidence of literacy levels. The literacy rate of a population is considered an important factor in the penetration of nationalist ideals. The long-standing popular support for Irish nationalism thus provides further evidence of widespread literacy. Section 1.3 accordingly addresses the relationship between literacy and nationalist activism. Section 1.4 outlines some critical approaches to the relationship between literacy and the society it is embedded in, arising from research studies carried out in Canada, Brazil, Chile, Iran, North America and Australia. These studies also relay an understanding of literacy in terms of social stratification, with earlier work drawing on Marx and more recent work reflecting the impact of Foucault and Bourdieu. Section 1.5 concludes the chapter by identifying the research question arising from this selection of historical accounts, concepts and models.

1.2 LITERACY IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY IRELAND

Historical studies of twentieth-century Ireland display a notable consensus about the presence of high literacy levels. They generally incorporate statements about literacy within factual descriptions of demographic characteristics. Retrospective accounts of pre-Independence Ireland tend to describe a trajectory towards full literacy that begins in the mid-nineteenth century and reaches a successful conclusion early in the twentieth century. According to these retrospective accounts, the introduction of state-funded mass education by the British administration in 1831 facilitated the spread of literacy, while the collection of literacy data in the decennial Censuses from 1841 provides evidence of improved literacy levels.

Literacy returns from successive Censuses occupy a central role in these accounts. Demonstrating the conflation between education and literacy in this era, Census forms contained a question entitled 'Education' that asked respondents to state whether they could "Read and Write," "Read Only," or "Cannot Read". Responses to this question provide the data on literacy level. In the following extract, Lyons (1971) identifies the correspondence between rising school attendance rates and increasing literacy rates recorded in Census returns up to 1911:

> Nevertheless, compulsion or no compulsion, regular school attendance improved fairly steadily over the years until by the 1890's it had passed the sixty per cent mark, rising to just above seventy five per cent in 1908. And on this basis was built the virtual elimination of illiteracy. The figures may be left to speak for themselves. In 1851 the proportion of persons five years old and upwards who could neither read nor write was forty seven per cent (to the nearest round number); in 1911 this had dropped to twelve percent.* Correspondingly, the proportion of those who could read only had fallen from twenty to four per cent, and the proportion of those who could both read and write had risen from 33% to 84%.

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Without this revolution, the foundations of a modern Irish state could not have been laid.

*Footnote: 'The 1911 Census, though continuing to use five years of age as the point of departure for measuring illiteracy for purposes of comparison with earlier censuses, accepted the contention of educationalists that nine years was a more realistic age. The effect, of course, was to lower the illiteracy rate still further. In 1911, by that measurement, 87.6% of the population of nine years and over could read and write, 3.2% could read only, and 9.2% were completely illiterate.
(Lyons 1971:75-76)

Other statements about literacy draw from the same sources as Lyons, but often present a condensed interpretation that focuses on headline rates. Coolahan refers to 'the virtual elimination of illiteracy in the nineteenth century', citing official Census returns that show a decline in the numbers of people over five years of age unable to read or write, falling from 53% in 1841 to 14% by 1901 (2005:7). Ó Buachalla expresses this conjunction between schooling and Census succinctly in his survey of Irish education policy: 'The growth of the system, especially the geographical spread of the national schools after 1831, is clearly reflected in the reduction in the rates of reported illiteracy evident in the decennial Census for the period from 1841 to 1901' (1988:19). In his outline of Irish social and political culture, Coakley refers to the 'dramatic' impact of the state primary schools, attended by 'the great bulk of children of schoolgoing age' by the end of the nineteenth century (1993:28). A 2008 study of Irish fiction novels cites Lyons' 1971 analysis when stating that 'by 1911 only 12% of the Irish population could not read or write' (Foster 2008:27).

Those writing about literacy in Ireland after Independence in 1921 cannot rely on Census returns, as the Census of the Irish nation-state does not seek information on literacy. Post-Independence accounts tend to follow Lyons in highlighting the presence of an existing literacy capacity that provided a solid foundation for the new nation-state to build upon. Lyons

asserts that 'the battle against illiteracy had been virtually won before the time came for the British authorities to hand over their responsibilities to a native administration' (1971:87). Lee (1989) compares literacy rates in other newly independent small states to highlight the higher rate in Ireland during the years 1922-1932:

> This was no ordinary 'new nation.' This strength in depth partly reflected educational levels. Educational attainment was generally higher, and more widely dispersed, geographically and socially, than in the new Eastern European states. Irish literacy levels, verging on 100 per cent, compared favourably with literacy rates of 70 per cent in Bulgaria and Poland, 60 per cent in Romania, 50 per cent in Yugoslavia, and 20 per cent in Albania.
> (Lee 1989:76).

Girvin's account of vocational education policy asserts that 'Irish literacy rates were high by European standards' with a 'relatively strong' educational infrastructure by 1927, allowing the educational system to provide the basic educational requirements for an agricultural economy (1999:64). Like Girvin, Fahey (1992) describes literacy in relation to the economic context of the early twentieth century. His analysis of compulsory schooling outlines how literacy levels in Ireland were 'already high' at the end of the nineteenth century, despite low school attendance rates. He refers to the 'useful educational outcomes' produced despite irregular attendance, enabling those who participated in education up to the age of '10 years or so' to gain enough literacy for the requirements of a semi-subsistence society (1992:388). This capacity of the Irish people to reap large benefits from a small amount of education is also evident in the late twentieth century, according to Denny, Harmon, McMahon and Redmond (1999). Writing from an economic perspective, their study explicitly acknowledges the link between educational attainment and literacy levels. In a comparison with Great Britain and Northern Ireland, they find that the

Republic of Ireland is 'more effective' in converting periods of formal schooling into changes in the literacy skills of individuals (1999:223).

Lee's (2008) description of the Irish population at the dawn of the twentieth century emphasises their use of literacy to engage with a modern progressive world:

> Ireland was already a remarkably literate society by 1841, when forty-seven per cent of the population aged over five claimed to be able to read. This proportion rose to fifty-three per cent in 1851 and eighty-eight per cent in 1911. Real literacy fell below these rates, for people exaggerated their reading ability. Nevertheless, the spread of literacy allowed more people to understand advertisements and mail order catalogues, use the parcel post, shop more ambitiously, and generally become more receptive to new consumption patterns.
> (Lee 2008:13)

Malesevic cites Lee (2008) in his contention that a literacy rate of 'almost 90%' by 1911 contributed to the wide dissemination of nationalism in pre-Independence Ireland (Malesevic 2014:135). A subsequent reference to 'full literacy' in present-day Ireland (2014:140) is presented as an uncontroversial fact.

These authoritative statements on literacy appear to confirm the existence of a highly literate society in twentieth-century Ireland. The statements build cumulatively on previous statements, becoming briefer over time as the store of knowledge becomes more canonical. Their brevity and the lack of any conflicting views are strong indicators of a fixed and uncontested truth. However, this firmly entrenched truth contains ambiguities and gaps. References to *high literacy*, the *virtual elimination of illiteracy*, *a battle virtually won*, *the great bulk of children* and *a relatively strong education system* use equivocal terminology that facilitates latitude in readers' interpretations. Lyons' discussion of the 1911 Census data concludes that 87.6% of the population over 9 years old were literate in 1911 (1971:76).

Later accounts round this rate up to 90% or 'verging on 100%', introducing another degree of latitude.

The school attendance rates in the extract from Lyons (1971) report the attendance of enrolled children, but it must be borne in mind that not all children were enrolled in a school. There was an uneven distribution of schools in nineteenth-century Ireland, with a variable quality of tuition provided within them (McManus 2004). School attendance legislation introduced by the *Irish Education Act 1892* allowed many exemptions from attendance, including employment, living a distance from a school, or where no school was provided. This legislation remained in force until the introduction of the *School Attendance Act 1926*, which contained similar exemptions (Oireachtas 1926).

The focus on upward trends minimises the rate for *illiteracy*, enabling reference to illiteracy rates of 'only 12%'. This figure is constructed as a small and insignificant number. In contrast, the 12.6% of the US population giving 'Black or African American' as their origin in 2010 (US Census Bureau 2011:3) is considered a significant minority group. Those deemed *illiterate* in 1911 are a significant minority in Irish society, one submerged under the *narrative of full literacy*. Mills' advice about addressing the private troubles of many as an object of sociological concern ([1959] 2000:226), provides a basis to focus attention on this overlooked minority. The value Mills places on the sociological use of historical materials offers further support in this endeavour (2000:146)

The Census literacy returns are a key shared documentary source in the retrospective accounts discussed here. They are presented as an unproblematic representation of the population's literacy capacity. Graff, writing in 1979, extols the value of Census data in his study of literacy in nineteenth-century Canada (1979:329). He uses the 1861 Canadian Census returns, which like the 1861 Irish Census contains a question on literacy, a reminder of the common demographic tools used across the British Empire. Graff finds that Census data offers a relatively reliable

reflection of the society it arises from. He states that Census answers are likely to contain a high degree of accuracy, due to the risk of fines for inaccurate information, the use of enumerators in urban areas to record responses, the presence of signatures that verify literacy, and returns that show wealthy people designating themselves as illiterate (1979:330). He does advise that 'some under-enumeration' exists, and the need to treat figures as approximate rates (1979:331).

In the last extract above, Lee refers to exaggeration in self-reported claims to literacy ability in the Irish Census (2008:13). The US National Education Association raises the possibility that Census literacy data may overstate literacy in a 1922 journal article. This recounts the discrepancy between the literacy rates recorded in the 1920 US Census and the results of literacy testing among US Army conscripts during World War One. The Census shows a self-reported *illiteracy rate* of 6%. However, literacy testing of 1,552,256 adult males conscripted from the mainstream population finds that 24.9% are illiterate (National Education Association 1922:344).

The possibility that the Census may provide unreliable information in certain contexts also features in Ó Gráda's account of the Old Age Pension in Ireland. Newspaper reports of the first pension payment day in January 1909 refer to the numbers of illiterate claimants, in that they cannot sign for the payment. These reports also remark on the youthfulness of many claimants (Ó Gráda 2002:129). The Old Age Pension was provided to those aged 70 years and over. Residents of Ireland, comprising 10% of the United Kingdom population, accounted for 28% of those claiming the pension (2002:126). An official concern to prevent fraud generated stricter pension entitlement procedures, including consulting the manuscript returns of previous Censuses, particularly those of 1841 and 1851. Parliamentary disputes ensued, where nationalist Irish MPs dismissed the Censuses of 1841 and 1851 as 'notoriously inaccurate', because they were collated by 'certain illiterate policemen' (2002:135). Ó Gráda's comparison of 1901 and 1911 Census returns regarding recorded age finds evidence of 'age-misreporting' in the 1911 Census (2002:133). He suggests that this

misreporting exaggerated age to qualify for Old Age Pension payments, or matched age in 1911 to the age details given in pension applications. He finds similar deliberate age-misreporting 'on a significant scale' in the first Census of the Irish Free State in 1926 (2002:138). Akenson refers to another form of Census misreporting, relating to the estimation of Irish-language speakers before and after Independence. He cites the director of the Central Statistics Office who doubted if the rates for Irish-language speakers recorded in the 1961 Census had any value (Akenson 1975:175). He also mentions a partial census of Irish-speaking areas in 1956, where 'police census-takers' over-counted Irish speakers by thirty percent. Akenson suggests that such exaggeration may be related to the £5 annual bonus for Irish-speaking children (1975:175).

Concerns about the veracity of self-reporting raise the need to consider aspects such as *response bias* and *social desirability* in relation to the Census. The literacy rates in the Irish Census rely on self-reporting to an enumerator, a situation where the interaction between respondent and enumerator has the potential to lead to misreporting and response bias. Respondents may be hostile or uncooperative (Sapsford 1999:157). There may be missing or uncounted respondents (1999:236). Krumpal highlights the general directional tendency to misreport and over-report socially desirable activities, to conform with prevailing cultural norms (Krumpal 2013:2018). Respondents may present themselves in a positive light, independent of actual behaviour or beliefs. Socially desirable answers may be strategic reactions to different situational factors, such as the nature of the topic, a wish to gain the interviewer's approval, and the presence of bystander third parties. The most relevant aspect of social desirability is not the sensitivity of the topic, but the sensitivity of the answer (2013:2028).

However, the use of Census data at face value to estimate the literacy level of a population was an internationally accepted practice throughout the twentieth century, and it formed the basis of comparative studies conducted by UNESCO until recently (UNESCO 2005:163). Self-reporting, third-party estimates, and number of years of schooling were the main methods used

to determine literacy levels within populations, with the results usually collapsed into a *literate* and *illiterate* dichotomy. Concerns about the credibility and comparability of these methods gained momentum in the 1980s (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2008:18). As well as concerns over response bias, present-day issues relating to the use of Census data include operational definitions of the terms 'adult' and 'literacy', and whether the measurement of literacy is *direct* through some form of testing, or *indirect* through self-assessment or a third-party estimate by others such as head of household or enumerator (UNESCO 2005:164). Indirect assessments of literacy tend to give higher ratings than direct measurements (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2008:29). Social and demographic disparities exist within a country's literacy rates, relating to gender, age, geographical location, urban/rural aspects, household wealth and poverty (UNESCO 2005:170). Direct assessments, such as those used in the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (OECD 2000), are the preferred way to measure national literacy level, but are beyond the financial resources of most countries. UNESCO estimates of national literacy level continue to use national Census data for pragmatic reasons, but with reservations about definitions and measurement. Present-day UNESCO estimates based on Census returns will use only data based on direct questions about literacy, and they rely on UN population data for international comparisons (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2008:19).

Although Census literacy returns are subject to critical scrutiny in the present-day, the acceptance of literacy statistics from the 1911 Irish Census at face value accorded with existing international practice until recently. However, many retrospective accounts extrapolate from the 1911 statistics to make authoritative pronouncements about literacy rates in subsequent decades. They contain a tacit assumption that literacy levels move consistently upwards, and use the trend seen in the Censuses prior to 1911 to project further gains in the following decades. These projections assume that the relatively stable social conditions prior to 1911 continued afterwards, overlooking the succession of disruptions to everyday Irish life

that occurred in the years after 1911. These include the Great Labour Unrest throughout the United Kingdom from 1911-1914, whose 'most remarkable episodes' were the 1911 Liverpool transport strike and 1913 Dublin Lockout (Béliard 2014:1). The Irish War of Independence from 1919-1921 and the Irish Civil War from 1922-1923 occurred in an era of high unemployment and widespread poverty. The prevailing assumption of consistent improvement does not consider the negative impact of such activities on schooling and literacy. Authoritative statements confirming the high literacy level of literacy of the twentieth-century Irish population continue to be made, despite the issues raised here about using and extrapolating from self-reported Census literacy returns.

There are no national-level literacy statistics after the 1911 Census, until the *International Adult Literacy Survey* in 1998. The absence of any national literacy statistics from 1911 to 1998 means that other indicators for literacy are required for a study of literacy in this period. According to UNESCO, a very strong relationship exists between educational attainment and literacy, in developed as well as developing countries (UNESCO 2005:173). In the past, *years of schooling* was considered a direct proxy for literacy, with four to five years of schooling deemed sufficient to confer minimal literacy. Even today, a common approach is to use completion of Grade 5 (equivalent to Fifth Class in Ireland) as evidence of literacy, and to classify those who did not reach this threshold as *illiterate* (Smith-Greenaway 2015:1018). However, there are reservations in relation to using a specified cut-off point such as Grade 5. Children who attend school when older and are placed in the higher grades will only receive a short amount of schooling. Others who never attended school can become literate through family tuition or adult learning programmes (Smith-Greenaway 2015:1017). UNESCO remarks that the quality of schooling matters more than a uniform threshold of years at school (UNESCO 2005:173).

The Irish *Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports* (abbreviated here to DEASR) include information on school attendance and examination pass rates from 1921 onwards. Although these Reports were generally

four or more years behind on publication during the twentieth century (Akenson 1975:207), they are now available in the National Library and are also accessible online. The use of a national syllabus that remained relatively unchanged from 1922 to 1971 (T. Walsh 2012:202) allows details of schooling to be cross-referenced with the 1922 National School literacy syllabus. Figure 4.A in Chapter 4 outlines the expected literacy outcomes for each class given in this syllabus. While reservations on the use of educational attainment identify it as an imprecise measurement of literacy, the absence of national literacy statistics means that educational attainment offers a viable alternative way to explore literacy levels in twentieth-century Ireland.

In *Imagined Communities,* Anderson ([1983] 2006) contends that the spread of nationalism relies on a literate adult population who engage with nationalist literature. The twentieth century saw the emergence of Ireland as an independent nation-state, supported by a nationalism that permeated Irish society. The *narrative of full literacy* gains another layer of support from claims that a high penetration of nationalist ideas is further evidence of high literacy levels in the Irish population. The popular support for Irish independence in the twentieth century reflects the wide reach of nationalist activism. The next section considers the relationship between nationalist activity and literacy

1.3 LITERACY AND NATIONALISM

The ability to read print is accorded a key role in transmitting nationalism by Anderson (2006:134). The spread of nationalist ideas in nineteenth-century Europe coincides with the spread of literacy, providing a basis to link both together. In his study of *Social Conditions of National Revival in Europe*, Hroch similarly states that a national consciousness is hardly conceivable without literacy (Hroch 2000:168). These statements imply an even distribution of nationalism within a population that shares a homogenous literacy. However, Hroch also refers to 'increasing' literacy levels

(2000:xv), and a context of dynamic social change (2000:3), qualifying this view of literacy as a straightforward vector of nationalism. A more nuanced picture emerges from his examination of the social origins of nationalist activists across eight small European countries. Hroch differentiates between four groups: the rich, the middle class located between rich and poor, the poor, and the peasants. The richest of the oppressed minority do not generally participate in nationalist movements, as they are usually already assimilated into the ruling state by shared educational and professional opportunities (2000:161). The poor do not figure among the nationalist activists in any country he studied. Hroch remarks that the marginalized poor have other concerns besides an interest in nationalist ideas (2000:160). The middle class, below the assimilated rich and above the marginalized poor, participate most in nationalist movements. The organisational and ideological leaderships are most likely to come from the urban middle class. Hroch finds that urban nationalist activists generally identify themselves more enthusiastically with the peasants and the peasant lifestyle than the peasants do with the activists and their nationalist programmes (2000:154). The middle-class standard of living facilitates participation in nationalist activities, and it provides the required financial support for promoting nationalist ideas (2000:161). Nationalist agitation is located within groups who possess the densest social communication links, usually in regions with the greatest degree of horizontal social mobility (2000:174). The most active nationalists are educated professionals, those members of the oppressed minority who can make most use of opportunities for social mobility (2000:181).

The production and consumption of nationalist publications relies on the existence of an educated middle class. The role ascribed to literacy in nationalism is more properly applicable to this sector of society, who have the interest, affluence and leisure to pursue nationalist activities. The literacy capacity of the urban middle class is taken for granted, with Anderson contending that 'an illiterate bourgeoisie is scarcely imaginable' (2006:77). Anderson finds that the expansion of the bourgeoisie during the

nineteenth century increases the consumption and circulation of popular literature, leading to the emergence of 'new vernacularly imagined communities' (2006:79). Written expressions of nationalism in the form of drama, art, poetry, and literature usually circulate within the urban educated middle classes first before gaining broader resonance (Habermas 2012:283).

Despite the emphasis on literacy, those without literacy can absorb and consider nationalist ideologies. The *national consciousness* (Hroch 2000:12) that Smith terms *national feeling* (2010:6) and Habermas terms *nationalist propaganda* (2012:283) is transmitted through a range of communications media, in the context of existing social and cultural conditions (Hroch 2012:79). Written publications form one channel of communication, ideally suited to the educated middle class. Oral and visual means are also used to promote nationalist ideas. Anderson refers to the 'unisonality' and the 'echoed physical realization of the imagined community' provided by national anthems (2006:145). Spoken language can transmit nationalist ideas, using poetry, songs and dramatic reconstructions that are readily understood whether literate or illiterate. Hroch uses subscription lists for nationalist organisations and journals as a basis to identify the nationalist activists he studies, leading him to focus attention on the publication and dissemination of written materials. However, he also refers to other non-literate activities of nationalist activists. He notes that reading aloud to others is a recurring patriotic activity in Bohemia (2000:50). Choirs and singing clubs are a feature of Estonian nationalism, operating within a national network of parish choirs (2000:85). Darnton describes how activists in colonial India use songs, storytelling and dramatic performances to transmit nationalist narratives to illiterate populations (2014:132-142). These groups absorb the same imagery and ideals as the nationalist middle classes, originating within the same printed sources but transmitted in a different way. As literacy rates in India increase, nationalist reconstructions of the past are incorporated into popular printed materials in the vernacular languages, transmitted by

shared public reading as well as private reading (2014:95). During the twentieth century, large-scale 'vicarious spectacles' are used to stimulate populist nationalist responses in Nazi Germany and in apartheid South Africa (McClintock 1995:373). Public acts of remembrance, such as commemoration ceremonies, speeches and exhibitions, provide a basis to construct specific histories of the nation (Strath 2008:629). These accounts of nationalist activism demonstrate that the presence of nationalist ideologies within a given population depends on the ingenuity and energy of nationalist activists in finding and funding modes of transmission. The transfer of nationalism across a population is not fully dependant on literacy alone, as it can circulate successfully among illiterate populations. However, the presence of an affluent literate middle class is a strong factor in promoting its successful circulation.

Anderson identifies how nineteenth-century nationalists, in the process of imagining and constructing a new nation, made deliberate choices about the most appropriate languages and print-languages for use in nationalist activities and nationalist literature. The colonial authorities were also concerned with aspects of language and literacy. The introduction of European-style education systems brought access to printed material about European 'national histories' as well as the French and American Revolutions, generating an inevitable consciousness of how European nationalisms co-existed with an imperialism that denied nationhood to others (Anderson 2006:118). The need for a literate colonial workforce was therefore tempered by the need to restrict access to material considered inappropriately revolutionary. Solutions to this dilemma included limiting the provision of literacy to only the most loyal groups, introducing new print-languages that put seditious literature out of reach, and imposing specific forms of literacy in relation to schooling, publication and print-media. Anderson describes the origins of *quoc ngu* script in Vietnam as a mechanism to control seditious literature. This script, introduced by the French colonial rulers, uses a Roman script to depict the vernacular Vietnamese language. The introduction of this script had two effects. On

one hand, it broke links with Siam and China, who had shared Chinese script and Confucian traditions with Vietnam. On the other hand, it also broke links with France as it reduced the capacity to read French in the original. The French administration controlled the transcription of French texts into *quoc ngu*, thus regulating access to French revolutionary and nationalist ideas (Anderson 2006:126).

Actions designed to suppress nationalist literature became more prominent as literacy spread in colonial India. Although formal press censorship was unacceptable to British liberalism in Britain, the British authorities in India instituted new legislative measures that allowed prosecution for activities deemed to incite sedition and anti-British sentiment (2014:128). Printed materials about Irish and Italian nationalism were considered seditious literature in India during this era (Darnton 2014:125). Irish nationalists were long familiar with such controls, as the British authorities in Ireland engaged in the physical destruction of printing presses and the prosecution of publishers for sedition from the eighteenth century (Corcoran 2011:18).

Nationalist publications offer tangible evidence of the ideologies and activities of nationalist movements. Such publications are artefacts that historians can use in the same way as archaeologists use physical objects to make reconstructions of the past. The link between nationalism and literacy is tenable in relation to the quantity of literature that nationalist movements produced. However, just as the archaeological fragment is only one part of a bigger entity, nationalist publications are one part of a wider range of nationalist activities. McClintock, Hroch and Darnton describe forms of nationalist activism that leave little written traces, such as singing clubs, storytelling, and dramatic reconstructions. Evidence of these non-literate activities do not survive in the same way that published material does. Nationalist activists use the transmission methods that respond best to the social and cultural contexts. While Irish nationalist literature addresses literate audiences, other forms of nationalist agitation address non-literate groups, using existing and new forms of communication. In October 1899, the *Irish Daily Independent* nationalist newspaper uses a

'magic lantern' to project images of the Boer War in Dublin, leading to police intervention (Condon 2011:94).   Irish nationalist activist Alice Milligan also uses magic lanterns and other visual and oral modes of transmission in the pre-Independence years. An editor of nationalist literary journal *Shan Van Vocht,* Milligan is also a playwright in the amateur theatre movement, and a producer of nationalist pageants and public celebrations. Her post as a Travelling Lecturer for the Gaelic League from 1904 -1909 involves staging plays, magic lantern shows and *tableaux vivants* across Ireland (Morris 2009).

As Street (1984) and Luke (2012) emphasise, literacy must be addressed within its social context. A convergence of nationalist ideas within the mass population may reflect the literature that circulates among the educated middle class, but it is not a simple transparent indicator of literacy. The penetration of nationalist ideologies within the Irish population tells of a long process of nationalist agitation aimed at generating mass support, often in the face of severe penalties. It also reflects the level of effort exerted by nationalist agitators to reach all parts of the population by every means available. The sustained and inventive efforts of Irish nationalist activists produced a wide variety of nationalist literature, and they also generated a range of non-literate activities such as sporting organisations, cultural organisations, pageants, musical events, poetry recitals, dramas, and public spectacles. Organisations such as the Irish Volunteers combined military drilling with political instruction. These could give emotive and practical expression to nationalist ideals without any need for literacy proficiency.   After Independence in 1921, the state harnessed a similar variety of cultural resources and public acts of remembrance to promote officially sanctioned nationalist ideas to the wider population.

The capacity of nationalist activists to disseminate their preferred *national consciousness* must also address the willingness of the population to engage with them.   Hroch applies his findings on nineteenth-century nationalist movements to consider nationalisms in the later twentieth century (Hroch 2012). He finds that a low level of political culture among

the mass population is a feature of both nineteenth-century *classic nationalism* and the *new nationalisms* of the post-Soviet states (2012:96). This reminder of dis-engagement and dis-interest in nationalism, and his earlier remark on the lack of engagement by the marginalized, are a counterpoint to the assumption that 'the mass population' are a unitary blank canvas willing and able to absorb nationalist rhetoric. The high penetration of nationalism in Ireland is not a direct reflection of high literacy levels. Literacy, although an important element, is only one factor in nationalist activism. The zeal of Irish nationalist activists, their use of a wide range of literate and non-literate transmission methods, and the willing engagement of the population must also be considered in relation to the spread of Irish nationalism.

As well as transmitting nationalism, literacy is often considered a catalyst to instil political, religious, and moral ideologies. Like other human technologies, literacy occupies multiple roles on a spectrum ranging from simple tool to powerful instrument. It can be used for social control purposes, while simultaneously being subject to control, often by the same authorities. These many facets of literacy inevitably raise issues of power and regulation. The following section outlines some of these aspects, drawing from studies of literacy that examine it in its social context.

1.4 LITERACY IN SOCIETY

Literacy is a human technology. The activities of reading and writing have been used for at least five thousand years (Scribner and Cole 1981:3). The presence of literacy marks a watershed between *prehistorical time* where no written accounts exist, and *historical time* where written accounts can record a society's experiences and meanings. Written materials may be stored and retrieved as required, allowing a society to preserve its knowledge in a tangible physical format instead of relying on human memory alone. According to Derrida, the Greek roots of the word *archive* reflect the pivotal role accorded to written documents in the governance of

a society (Derrida 1995:10). The emergence of print technology in medieval times marks another watershed. Printed materials can be copied and transported across time and space, enabling ideas to be shared and debated among a wider audience. Habermas in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* describes how print-capitalism, in the form of printing and publishing enterprises, develops along trade routes and in urban centres of administration (1989:16). The spread of literacy and print-capitalism within Western populations occurs in the same timeframe as the transformation of feudal monarchical societies to democratic capitalist nation-states.

The perception that literacy rates increase as societies move along the path of 'progress' leads to the conceptualisation of literacy as a catalyst for social change. In his account of literacy in nineteenth-century Canada, Graff engages with the set of assumptions that he calls the *Literacy Myth*, the widely accepted belief that the presence of literacy is critical to the evolution of a modern rational society (Graff 1979:52). Viewed through the lens of the *Literacy Myth,* the condition of *illiteracy* restricts social progress and condemns people to poverty. It is a threat to the democratic and social order, and it leads to abuse and denigration (1979:53). Those who are *illiterate* within progressive nineteenth-century Canadian society are considered inferior and potentially dangerous. The failure to achieve literacy is considered a product of individual weakness, unrelated to the social structures (1979: 54). The illiterate individual is characterised as an alien within a literate society, an outcast who could precipitate social disintegration, disorganisation and disruption (1979:53). Literacy is considered a force for cohesion, while illiteracy incites aberrant destructive tendencies.

Graff contends that deterministic normative assumptions about the role of literacy rely primarily on anecdotal evidence (1979:xvi). Using archival documents for three cities in the Ontario region, he examines empirical evidence to see whether the possession of literacy leads to the economic improvements and increased social prestige promised within the *Literacy*

Myth. His quantitative examination of Census returns, taxation assessment rolls, employment contracts and jail registers finds that the social reality they depict confounds these assumptions (Graff 1979:56). Contrary to such expectations, the statistical data shows that the greater proportion of the poor and unskilled are *literate* (Graff 1979:88). Graff finds that 'existing social ascription' is the dominant factor in social progress, and that literacy plays a limited role in social mobility.

The Canadian cities in Graff's study contain large immigrant populations, with the highest proportion originating in Ireland. This group has migrated from one part of the British Empire to another. Indeed, Graff notes that the *Readers* produced by the Irish National Board of Education provide the English textbooks in Ontario schools from 1847 (1979:43), just as they are widely used in Britain and other British colonies (P. Lyons 2006). The 1861 Canadian Census returns for the three cities show that approximately 20% of Irish immigrants are illiterate. Graff notes that the Census taken in Ireland in 1841 found 54% of the Irish population were illiterate, with similar illiteracy rates among the Irish in an 1837 educational survey in London, indicating that Irish immigrants to Canada are not representative of the Irish population in Ireland or England (Graff 1979:66). Graff finds that English immigrants to Canada also show higher literacy rates than the home population in England, leading him to suggest that long-distance migrants have higher levels of literacy in contrast to those migrating shorter distances (1979:67).

Instead of the isolation and disruption predicted by the *Literacy Myth*, Graff finds resourcefulness, adaptation and strategic adjustment to urban conditions among those with no literacy. Some of those deemed *illiterate* gain financial success (1979:88). The tax assessment rolls for 1861 show forty people without education whose occupations rank higher than 'skilled' or 'manual' levels. Of these, English Protestants rank the highest, reflecting for Graff the impact of ethnic origin (1979:80). He finds ten wealthy illiterate men in the Hamilton City tax assessment rolls, indicating that illiteracy did not prevent the acquisition of capital or business interests (1979:93). Those

who were illiterate were not socially segregated but were instead integrated in shared work places and social spaces. They could rely on the oral transmission of information. Graff remarks on the communal practice of reading newspapers aloud, integrating the hearing public with the reading public (Graff 1979:102). Overlapping modes of communication exist in most societies, allowing oral and visual methods of acquiring information to remain hidden under claims to literacy (Street 1984:110)

Although the illiterate people in these Canadian cities are not segregated within their own ethnic groups, they are subject to functions of stratification (Graff 1979:76). Graff finds that the achievement of literacy does not cancel existing structures of inequality in nineteenth-century Ontario, as educational achievement does not counter social inheritance (1979:91). In overtly Protestant Ontario, Irish Catholics and Black populations are disadvantaged. Both groups have limited employment opportunities and limited opportunities for social advancement, whether literate or not (1979:80).

A simple linear correlation between literacy and social progress is not evident within the three cities, challenging the assumptions of the *Literacy Myth.* The role of literacy in relation to social progress is more complex than the *Literacy Myth* depicts. Graff finds that systematic patterns of stratification and inequality remain deep, pervasive, and relatively unaltered by the presence or absence of literacy. The social hierarchy is ordered more by 'social ascription' than by the acquisition of literacy skills. The impact of ethnic origin, class, gender, race and age are often of greater consequence than the presence of literacy. As Graff remarks in later work, literacy must be regarded as historically founded and grounded, a product of the histories it is entangled in (Graff 2011:56).

Although Graff (1979) and other subsequent studies have attempted to dislodge the *Literacy Myth,* it remains a strong presence throughout the twentieth century and into the twenty-first century. In 2017, a belief in the capacity of literacy to deliver social change underpins the rhetoric of Nepal's

national literacy programmes. Literacy is represented as a catalyst for social and economic change, by providing access to employment (UNESCO 2017), evidence of an enduring faith in the *Literacy Myth*. The persistent belief that improved literacy in the classroom will improve educational, occupational and income outcomes is supported by data that shows statistical links between low literacy, low wages, and the likelihood of unemployment (e.g. O'Connell, McGuinness, Kelly and Walsh 2009:24; Kelly, McGuinness and O'Connell 2012:21). Luke argues that such studies support the potentially misleading assumption that poor literacy by itself plays a significant part in sustaining poverty and promoting economic and social disenfranchisement (Luke 2012:353). The assumption that the provision of literacy can redress social and economic problems fails to acknowledge that these problems relate to complex structural inequalities (Luke 2012:347).

Compulsory mass education programmes became the main vector for literacy in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, leading to the rapid spread of literacy in developed societies. Mass schooling also brought age-segregation, so that adults no longer learned alongside children. Children were taught literacy by trained professionals in dedicated premises, while adults learned literacy elsewhere. Mass schooling funded by the state was often mediated by concepts of efficiency and effectiveness. Vincent suggests that the first literacy researchers were the nineteenth-century education administrators who visited other countries to study cost-efficient ways of instilling literacy (Vincent 2000:2).

Literacy tuition offers a vehicle for transmitting more than physical skills. The Bible was the key text for literacy tuition in homes and schools in Protestant societies, providing a means to instil religious indoctrination. Such literacy could be at a low level, as it was not considered necessary to understand the words that were read aloud (Graff 1979:24). Debate regarding the use of the Bible in Irish primary education features throughout the *First Report of the Education Commissioners in Ireland* (HMSO 1825), reflecting the tension between Protestant traditions of personal

engagement with the Bible and Catholic rules that expressly forbade reading the Bible without the mediation of clergy.

Documents pertaining to state-funded elementary schooling in nineteenth-century Ontario depict how morality and literacy are intertwined in this era, where literacy facilitates moral instruction, and this morality in turn guides and restrains the 'dangerous' uses of literacy (Graff 1979:26). Literacy gained outside of schooling is considered potentially subversive, as are 'undirected' reading and writing (1979:48). The education system focuses on controlling the provision and uses of literacy, requiring the control of reading materials (Graff 1979: 39). The moral development of the child is prized over intellectual development (1979:37). This use of literacy for social control centres on neutralising any capacity for critical appraisal.

Public schooling in Ontario was funded and supported by 'men of liberal education', educated prosperous men whose notions of social obligations to the lower classes coincided with their self-interest as employers (Graff 1979:36). Citing Gramsci's contention that education adapts the masses to fit the economic apparatus, Graff characterises the impetus to mass education in 1830s Ontario as a means to cultivate useful workers who will not rise above their allotted station (1979:31). The rules of the school condition young workers to the rules of the factory (1979:229). Graff remarks that a morally-controlled literacy transmitted through the schools provides the most effective vehicle to transmit the hegemonic culture of a capitalist hierarchical society (1979:35).

In addition to its purported role as a catalyst for social progress, morality, and economic utility, literacy also provides a means to estimate intelligence. The development of intelligence quotient (IQ) testing in the early twentieth century was predicated on having sufficient literacy to complete written IQ tests This implicit link between literacy and intelligence creates a new meaning for literacy as more than a display of manual dexterity. Literacy becomes a proxy for intelligence, with low literacy an indicator of low intelligence. Scribner and Cole (1981) examine the widely-accepted claim

that literacy confers a significant cognitive benefit. Reviewing previous research findings that substantiate this claim, they contend that previous researchers measured the impact of schooling on cognitive functioning rather than the impact of literacy (1981:11). Their study, located in Liberia, presents a rigorous examination of the claim. Having applied cognitive tests that focus specifically on literacy skills to literate and illiterate participants, they are unable to identify any mediating mechanism linking literacy to cognitive consequences (1981:159). Nisbett acknowledges that no single test can capture the complexity of human intelligence (2013:11). Teaching children concepts that are measured in IQ tests will raise their IQ scores, but disagreement exists on whether this indicates a gain in intelligence (2013:13). The survival of humans in the many millennia prior to literacy demonstrates that humans can display intelligent reasoning whether literate or not. The capacity for critical analysis is seen in the cultural understandings expressed by illiterate adults in Latin America, recounted in Freire's work (e.g. [1974] 2013:50).

By the late twentieth century, compulsory schooling has replaced the family as the prime transmitter of literacy, allowing the state to intervene into what was previously a private transaction. The tendency of mass education to inhibit the development of any critical capacity, noted by Graff, is a key concern for Freire. Paulo Freire, a Brazilian secondary school teacher, social services director and community activist, considers the relationship between the state and the school in terms of concepts from Marx, Mao, Fidel Castro, and Catholic social teaching in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed,* first published in English in 1970. Freire views mass education as a mechanism for inculcating the ideological aspirations of an oppressive ruling elite. In what he calls the *banking model of education*, the teacher deposits information into the uncritical empty vessels that are students (Freire [1970] 1996:53). This critical stance leads him to develop an alternative *problem-posing model,* where educators and students work together to develop critical consciousness. Freire uses this form of education with illiterate populations throughout Latin America in the 1960s

and 1970s. In this model, literacy tuition provides a springboard to facilitate critical and political awareness among adults, demonstrating another use of literacy for ideological purposes.

Vincent (2000) examines the spread of literacy in modern Europe from the eighteenth to the twentieth centuries, using evidence of literacy provided by activities such as postal flows and marriage register signatures. He describes the transmission of literacy within families, households and peers long before the introduction of compulsory mass education. Such informal transmission practices are observed by Scribner and Cole among the Vai people of Liberia, a distinct ethnic group who continue to use peer-to-peer tuition to teach literacy in adulthood in the late twentieth century (Scribner and Cole 1981:67). This literacy is limited to the exchange of letters and other personal uses, and has no published materials, leading Scribner and Cole to characterise it as a *restricted literacy* (1981:238), compared to more complex literacy practices among other Liberians.

Scribner and Cole contend that literacy practices are related to social context, and their *practice account of literacy* is developed further by Street (1984) in his anthropological study of village merchants in Persia (now Iran). Street contests the popular assumption that literacy is a neutral mechanical skill that is positively associated with cognitive capacity and economic progress, an extended version of the *Literacy Myth* that he calls the *autonomous model* of literacy (1984:2). Graff contends that literacy must be understood in the context of social structures and schooling (Graff 1979:52). Street cites Graff in stating that literacy must be understood in its wider context, because it is not uniform for all members of a given population (Street 1984:43). Street's *ideological model* treats literacy skills as social practices that are ideologically and culturally embedded within social institutions (1984:8). These institutional, political and ideological aspects have an impact on literacy practices, generating multiple literacies that reflect social stratifications (1984:8). Within the *ideological model*, the literacy gained through schooling reflects the techniques and assessment procedures used in the classroom, as well as the literacy purposes

considered most useful for the society. Literacy, instead of being a single homogeneous entity, responds to different social conditions (1984:13). Like Freire and Graff before them, De Castell and Luke (1987) consider that the primary intent of institutionally transmitted literacy is to inculcate a hegemonic national ideology. A shared national outlook is transmitted through the schools, instilling the desired language, values and political ideology while instilling literacy (1987:427). They contend that reading and writing become 'secondary concerns' in such an endeavour (1987:414).

Bourdieu (1991) offers a theoretical perspective on the social and cultural value of literacy. He argues that language, including written language, is invested with symbolic power. Bourdieu adopts the position that language has an infinite capacity to generate recognized representations of existence, thereby giving language the power to produce existence (1991:42). The socially constructed elements of language use form a *language habitus*, where the capacity to use a language is allied with the social capacity to determine its correct usage. These elements interact with the structures of a linguistic market that contains sanctions and censorship (1991:37). Different styles of language use are organised to reflect social class (1991:54). The school provides an important arena for language. The educational system imposes the officially preferred form of written language, designated as the *legitimate language*, and disqualifies other forms, such as those deemed 'slang' (1991:49). Competence in the use of legitimate language functions as *linguistic capital*, conferring a *profit of distinction* on each social exchange (1991:55).

In his account of literacy programmes among Australian Aboriginal and Torres Straits Island students, Luke (2012) draws from Bourdieu's treatment of language to develop a complex description of literacy within a society. From this perspective, literacy is 'a form of habitus/capital/ disposition' that must align with other forms of capital to realise its potential for transformation into social and economic capital (Luke 2012:349). Literacy teachers try to enable the equitable conversion of *embodied capital* (e.g. skill) into *material capital* (e.g. cognitive artefacts) for translation into

institutional capital (e.g. accreditation) (Luke 2012:349). The fair exchange of such capital provides a basis for teaching literacy, but literacy skills alone are of little consequence unless there are other mediating conditions and forms of capital available to the student. Literacy in these terms is a school-acquired cultural capital that interacts with other forms of capital. Structural, social and material forces outside of the school can enhance or devalue this form of capital (2012:349). The value of the embodied capital depends upon economic and social policies, and Luke suggests that such policies must be orientated to supporting marginalized students. He contends that social, economic and literacy policies must work synergistically, encompassing classroom, communities and institutions (2012:360). Those with poor literacy have a negative cultural capital and are removed from contention within the field, leading to negative distinction. They are more likely to be the recipient of symbolic violence, leading to personal distress. Within this perspective, the alternative *problem-posing* literacy education developed by Freire risks being considered an inferior form of cultural capital unless it can be transformed into valuable material and institutional capital.

Freire, Street, De Castell and Luke are educators, who agree on the need to increase the quantity and quality of literacy in the world, particularly among the disaffected and disadvantaged. Their work makes recommendations for more equitable and more meaningful literacy teaching practices and policies within state-funded mass education systems. Their recommendations to improve literacy provisions suggest an underlying belief that literacy offers the potential for emancipation. Foucault offers an alternative view that perceives literacy in terms of increasing forms of discipline within society. He accords with Freire in claiming that the teaching of literacy in primary schools permits the transmission of a bourgeois system of values (Foucault 1980a:20). Where Luke considers literacy skills as forms of embodied capital, Foucault describes them as techniques inscribed upon the body through schooling, in a more painful form of embodiment (Foucault 1977a:152). The drills and exercises taught

en-masse in the classroom reflect the way repetitive drills are instilled within military recruits. These disciplinary mechanisms promote one uniform way to march and bear arms, one correct way to read and write, instances of the 'material, physical, corporal' exercise of power (Foucault 1980c:57). The body becomes an 'inscribed surface of events' (Foucault 1977b:148), displaying physical drills passed down from previous generations. The inspection of writing samples and the use of written examinations in schools are regulatory mechanisms that determine acceptable and unacceptable forms of literacy. Literacy also provides techniques of regulation used in other non-educational settings. Observations recorded in 'the card-index' can contribute to the knowledge required to develop regulatory mechanisms (1977a: 281). Written reports on human behaviour can justify continuous surveillance. Foucault characterises this process of 'turning real lives into writing' as a method of objectification and subjection (1977a:192). Literacy is not merely reflective of and responsive to society as Street and Luke contend. For Foucault, the acquisition and uses of literacy reflect practices of domination. Like Bourdieu, Foucault posits a dynamic and interactive relationship between literacy and society, with no guarantee that the outcomes are wholly beneficial.

In the 1970s, while UNESCO and other international agencies focused on increasing the quantity of literacy in developing nations, the 'discovery' of illiteracy among UK and US adults led to national adult literacy campaigns in those countries (Charnley and Jones 1979; Street 1984:15). In Ireland, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was established as a voluntary organisation at the end of the 1970s. Like its US and UK counterparts, NALA took Freire's work as a philosophical base and applied his problem-posing model to develop adult literacy programmes in partnership with adult learners (National Adult Literacy Agency 2012). Educators in 1970s North America also raised concerns about a 'literacy crisis' among the school-going population. Estimates suggested that up to 20% of students were *functionally illiterate,* lacking the literacy to cope with everyday situations. At the same time, a decline of standards was perceived in educational and

university assessments of those termed *functionally literate*, students able to meet the literacy demands placed on them (De Castell and Luke 1987:415). Assessment trends showed improvement in the fundamentals of literacy among the functionally literate, but an apparent decline in the *higher-order skills* of interpretation, critique, analysis and composition (1987:416).

In their critical examination of this 'literacy crisis', De Castell and Luke find that the literacy programmes used in state-funded schools equate literacy with the reading skills thought necessary for minimum functional social participation, and they consider writing skills less important (1987:423). These 'technocratic skills-based approaches' (1987:413) produce a 'literal, uncritical and mechanical approach' to reading, writing and the interpretation of texts, described as a *lower-order literacy* (1987:424). The students learn what the curriculum teaches, which are the mechanical skills of contending with text (1987:429). De Castell and Luke conclude that the dilution of *higher-order skills* is not symptomatic of a 'crisis' but is instead a response that matches the limited range and scope of what is written and read in North America, producing a literacy that is well-suited to the requirements of North American labour and culture (1987:430).

The focus on literal decoding and mechanical responses to texts evident in the state-funded system leads to uniform conventional responses. De Castell and Luke view this as a limited and disempowered form of competency (1987:430). They hold that participation in a literate cultural tradition requires reading, listening, writing, and speaking skills that provide the capacity to transform and transmit cultural aspects (1987:429). In their view, a literate cultural tradition offers scope for multiple meanings and responses to be shared and debated, but this remains an unattainable ideal in the context of school literacy programmes that produce passive recipients.

The literate cultural tradition idealized by De Castell and Luke reflects Habermas' description of the *rational-critical public debate* of private

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individuals in the eighteenth century (1989:51). Habermas acknowledges that this *reading public* is composed of male educated property-owners, a class-based elite not representative of the wider population (1989:85; 109). By the late twentieth century, this critically engaged public sphere has been transformed into an arena for populist public acclaim, where citizens are addressed as consumers (Habermas 1989:195), just as the active *agora* has been transformed from a site of public negotiation into a hollow passive echo-chamber (Bauman 2001:107). Habermas contends that an increasing orientation towards culture-consuming activities has curtailed the 'private reading' required for political debate (1989:163). At the same time, rational public debate has been transformed into a stage-managed consumer item, produced as a form of entertainment that he describes as a 'tranquilizing substitute for action' (1989:164). More recently, Giroux ascribes the American public's lack of critical capacity to a social context of pervasive anti-intellectualism and a political focus on depoliticising the American population. The outcome of this deliberately manufactured 'civic illiteracy' is to eliminate the language required to engage with public life, citizenship and social responsibility (Giroux 2016). Giroux's argument highlights the role of social context in producing both literacy and illiteracy. For De Castell and Luke, an uncritical form of literacy reflects prevailing cultural requirements, while for Giroux it highlights the political benefits of *illiteracy*.

Freire, De Castell and Luke focus critical attention on the literacy skills transmitted through state-funded compulsory mass education provisions. The role of state-funded education in spreading literacy is so pervasive that the literacy of the privately-educated elite is often overlooked. At the same time, the literacy of the elite often provides the hidden yardstick underpinning judgements on literacy quality, such as the university entrance assessments referred to by De Castell and Luke (1987:415). The provision of access to state-funded schools facilitates literacy research within that sector, while elite groups ensure that their lived educational experiences are less open to scrutiny. In consequence, the literacy

practices of the privately-educated tend to be under-researched. Those who describe elite literacy practices include Habermas, who explicitly focuses on the literate and educated bourgeoisie from the Middle Ages to the present (1989: Preface). He describes this group as a public sphere whose decisive mark is the published word (1989:16). O'Neill discusses how the classics-orientated curriculum of Irish and British elite schools in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries provides a foundation for the literacy practices of those destined to enter the professions and to take on managerial roles (O'Neill 2014). Kramsch, writing of her own literacy practices within an elite French university in the twentieth century, refers to Bourdieu's experience of the enhanced social capital, habitus and exalted levels of distinction pertaining to the elite education he received in similar institutions (Kramsch 2012:34). A study of literacy in Irish society should be aware of such differentiations.

The uses of literacy, like other human technologies, are shifting in the twenty-first century. New fields of use and new technological applications have an impact on education policies (Luke 2012:351). Luke, who utilises Bourdieu in his definition of literacy as social capital, also draws from Foucault when describing the increased density of testing and 'panoptic surveillance' as features of schooling within present day neoliberal approaches (Luke 2012:351). Similar shifts are occurring within the international agencies. UNESCO's original approach to 'eradicating' illiteracy is now re-orientated to meeting the basic learning needs of all children and adults (UNESCO 2005:163). The *Incheon Declaration on Education* setting education goals to 2030 was agreed at the UNESCO World Education Forum 2015. This Declaration is subtitled *Towards inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning for all.* It aligns with the UN *2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* also adopted in 2015*,* with Sustainable Development Goal 4 of the Agenda (SDG 4) focusing on actions to ensure equitable and equal access to educational provisions (UNESCO 2016). Literacy for UNESCO is thus constructed as an element of inclusive, equitable and sustainable education.

In present-day Ireland, the national strategy on literacy and numeracy outlines a set of goals to improve the quality and quantity of literacy in Irish primary and post-primary schools (Department of Education and Skills 2011). This policy document contains no reference to any national or international research studies on literacy. The strategy considers the school in isolation from the wider society. It promotes improvements in school-acquired literacy without addressing the social barriers to obtaining or benefitting from this literacy. This reflects the dearth of research that examines aspects of Irish education in relation to the community and society they are embedded within (Share, Corcoran and Conway 2012:161).

The literacy research examined in this section argues that the social context of literacy is of paramount importance. Literacy is not a unitary practical skill, but one that is differentiated to match the social divisions within a society. Literacy provisions interact with education provisions, and in turn respond to political, social and economic imperatives. These aspects shape how literacy is transmitted and the forms of literacy that are sanctioned. Foucault's perspective tempers optimistic assumptions that literacy is a neutral beneficial technology. It introduces consideration of how a society uses its literacy capacity and how it imposes norms relating to literacy.

1.5 CONCLUSION

Graff argues that any understanding of literacy in the present requires an awareness of historical aspects, in terms of the past concepts, arrangements, and expectations about literacy (2011:65). The Irish national self-image is bound up with the enduring *narrative of full literacy*. Ancient literary achievements are exalted, to the extent that the international success of an Irish writer is often celebrated as an expression of shared literary heritage, rather than the product of a uniquely individual talent. There is a general expectation that the Irish population will rank

highly on international measures of literacy. Positive outcomes are publicly celebrated, and they provide further support for longstanding claims to full literacy, already underpinned by verifiable Census data and the evident pervasiveness of Irish nationalism. This pleasing *narrative of full literacy* engages with the assumption that literacy levels indicate social progress, reflecting uncritical adherence to the *Literacy Myth* and the *autonomous model of literacy*. The high level of literacy provides a transparent indicator of sophistication and intelligence, suggesting the existence of a critical literate reading public within the modern developed Irish nation-state.

Two official languages co-exist in Ireland, but this two-fold literacy requirement appears to have little impact on the *narrative of full literacy*. The regulatory role of the state in relation to literacy remains similarly unexplored. Schooling provides the main vector for transmitting a state-sanctioned literacy, but the emancipatory and critical capacities of this literacy are seldom debated. The homogeneous nature of the Irish nation-state for much of its existence has valued collective acquiescence, leaving those who do not conform to be pushed to the margins or excluded. However, while those without literacy have a marginal presence in retrospective accounts of the twentieth century, they did not reside at the margins. The Census forms of 1901 and 1911 show the existence of significant numbers who self-declared as illiterate. According to Lyons, 9.2% of the population over 9 years old were completely illiterate and 3.2% were unable to write in 1911, a total of 12.4% who self-declared as unable to write (1971:76). The fact that this group were interviewed for the Census indicates their integration within the mainstream society, and the returns often show their co-location with literate respondents. The 1998 IALS survey used the electoral register as a sampling frame, underlining that respondents with poor literacy were part of mainstream Irish society, not outside it. The retrospective accounts of Ireland discussed earlier tend to focus on confirming the existence of the literate person, while eliding any detailed discussion of the *illiterate person*. The number of illiterate adults in the 1911 Irish Census and the later IALS/ PIAAC findings, relating to

adults born between 1934 and 1997, suggest that significant percentages of the Irish population may not have been fully literate during the twentieth century. This provides an invitation to develop a new account of literacy in twentieth-century Ireland that incorporates the *illiterate person*.

A large body of research on literacy in Latin America, South East Asia, North America, Europe and Australia, some of which has been discussed here, promotes a range of critical views on literacy and its relationship to society. They share an understanding of literacy as a human technology that is bound up with society. The capacity of these literacy researchers to build on studies from different contexts suggests that their findings are equally relevant for a study of Irish society. The work of Graff and Foucault offers a critical perspective that examines literacy within the wider social world rather than in schools alone, recognising that schooling is just one element of a society's engagement with literacy. Foucault suggests that literacy and society are entwined in a complex and dynamic ever-changing non-linear relationship. This study explores one dimension of this multilateral relationship, by examining how Irish society interacts with the illiterate person. My study also addresses a lacuna in studies of Irish society, where the high regard given to literary prowess overshadows critical considerations of literacy. The dominance of literary theory and literary criticism is remarked upon by Inglis, who notes the preference for 'soft hermeneutical understandings rather than positive empirical truth' in such studies (Inglis 2014:222). This 'taken-for-granted orthodoxy' tends to exclude social scientific approaches (2014:223).

Both Graff and Foucault use historical documents to develop their analyses, identifying the value of using Irish historical documents as a basis for this study. Foucault's discussion of literacy is situated within a wider analysis of the discourses pertaining to those who transgress social norms. *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977a) explores how the prevailing discourses construct the subject positions occupied by such individuals, and the material consequences that ensue. The norm of full literacy is firmly entrenched in Irish life. This study examines how Irish society

'speaks about' those who do not conform to the norm of being a fully literate adult. It suggests that multiple discourses pertaining to the topic of literacy circulate within Irish society, providing multiple subject positions for the illiterate person, and supporting a range of material expressions.

The research question asks: How is the *illiterate person* constructed in twentieth-century Ireland? The research is located within a social constructionist stance that examines everyday aspects of Irish society. The studies considered here offer guidance on possible avenues to pursue in seeking historical documents. References to school attendance rates allow the extrapolation of non-attendance rates, so that the attendance rate of 75% for 1908 (Lyons 1971) gives a non-attendance rate of 25%. The strong positive relationship between schooling and literacy suggests that the *illiterate person* may be found among the non-attenders, and those who were never-enrolled. Fahey (1992) draws attention to schooling that ends at '10 years or so', identifying early school leaving as another possible site for the illiterate person. Department of Education records of educational attainment in terms of school attendance and early school leaving offer a potentially fruitful research resource. Other education-related documents that pertain to literacy include the state's official literacy syllabus. Educators such as Freire, De Castell, Luke, and Street developed their analytic responses through engagement with literacy learners, identifying the educators of Ireland as a group whose views on literacy are of interest. This in turn suggests an examination of how literacy is discussed within publications such as teacher journals. The National Education Association 1922 article on literacy among US Army recruits (1922:344) points to the value of seeking documents about literacy within the Irish Defence Forces. Newspaper archives offer a possible further source of articles that consider literacy in everyday Irish life.

The work discussed in this chapter contributes to the store of conceptual knowledge underpinning my research question, which examines literacy in Irish society. The next chapter describes the methodological aspects of a thematic analysis informed by Foucault's work and located within a social

constructionist perspective. It presents the theoretical and conceptual framework underpinning the study, explains the choice of research methods, and provides a basis for the empirical and analytical discussions contained in later chapters.

CHAPTER 2: RESEARCH PERSPECTIVE AND METHODS

2.1 INTRODUCTION

My research question, asking "How is the illiterate person constructed in twentieth-century Ireland?", is located within a social constructionist approach to the social world. This chapter discusses key aspects of social constructionism as they relate to the research topic and outlines the theoretical framework underpinning the data collection and analytic process.

Section 2.2 discusses the ontological dimensions of social constructionism, in terms of the central role ascribed to social interaction in constructing knowledge, determining truth, and producing social reality. The dual role of documents as written forms of social interaction and as material records of these interactions justifies their use as research data. This section also considers points of congruence between social constructionism and conceptualisations of discourse, power, knowledge and silence derived from Foucault's work, to show how they are compatible.

Section 2.3 outlines the theoretical framework devised for this study. It describes how the four key analytic elements of *discourse*, *power*, *knowledge* and *silence* are understood and used within the research process. Section 2.4 outlines the research design used in the study. It considers possible templates in terms of previous research studies on literacy and studies that apply Foucault's concepts to documentary sources. Section 2.5 describes the data collection methods. Section 2.6 discusses the choice of a thematic analysis as the analytic method and describes the analytic process.

2.2 SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIONISM AND DOCUMENTS IN SOCIAL INTERACTION

This study is located within a *social constructionist* approach to understanding and researching the social world. This approach adopts Berger and Luckmann's contention that human reality is a socially constructed reality, where everyday common-sense knowledge contributes to the 'fabric of meanings' in a society (1966:27).

Sociologists Berger and Luckmann (1966) promote social constructionism as a critical response to the functional and structural sociological theories of the mid-twentieth century. They contend that these approaches fail to address the relationships between institutional processes and everyday social interactions. Everyday social interactions warrant sociological interest because they operate dialectically with 'structural realities' to produce reality (Berger and Luckmann 1966:208). Their social constructionist approach reaches back to earlier sociologists, drawing on Durkheim's advice to '*consider social facts as things'*, and citing Weber's contention that *'the object of cognition is the subjective meaning-complex of action'* (Berger and Luckmann 1966:30). As well as Durkheim and Weber, they identify Mannheim and the phenomenology of Schutz as their sociological forebears, and acknowledge Marx, Nietzsche and historicism as the 'intellectual antecedents' to this focus on everyday social interaction (1966:17-27).

The dynamic nature of social interaction continuously produces and reproduces knowledge and truth, containing the potential to construct multiple 'truths' and their attendant realities (Gergen 2009:6). Knowledge, truth and reality are thus interdependent and interlinked. They are produced within social interaction, rather than operating independently of the everyday world.

The social constructionist perspective focuses attention on the operation and construction of everyday reality. It reflects an interpretive focus on the production of reality (Harris 2008:234). Holstein and Gubrium identify how

social constructionist research moves beyond the material effects of 'social problems', allowing researchers to examine the constitutive role played by elements such as 'rhetoric', 'power' and 'influence' (2008:8). The concern is to address *what* is constructed and *how* this is done, rather than *why* (Holstein and Gubrium 2008:6).

Hacking (2001), a philosopher who shares an interest in analysing the taken-for-granted everyday social world, offers a critical interrogation of social constructionism. He finds that the core metaphor of constructing as *assembling* is often overlooked (2001:49), as is the 'social matrix' consisting of the social, institutional, material and historical contexts (2001:31). In his view, social constructionist research requires analysis of the actual, historically situated, social interactions that produce a 'social fact' (2001:48). Hacking is wary of research that uses 'social construction' as an explanatory device, finding that the concept of 'social construction' has been extended to facilitate all-encompassing claims that the entire human society, social and material, is a social construct (2001:25). He sees the need to distinguish carefully between the construction of meanings and the construction of objects (2001:28), as does Harris (2008). Writing about social constructionist research in sociology, Harris describes an 'interpretive-objective continuum' that recognises inter-relationships between meanings and objects (Harris 2008:235). This encompasses an 'interpretivist' analytic focus on 'who we are' and how we create meanings (2008:232), and an 'objective' focus on how we create social objects (2008:234). My research study, addressing how the illiterate person is socially constructed, engages with this 'interpretive-objective continuum'. Responding to Hacking and Harris, I recognise the need to address ambiguity within the different modes relating to meanings, objects, processes and products.

Although Foucault makes no reference to social constructionism, much of his work interrogates how we create social meanings and social objects within complex dynamic relationships. Hacking, an admirer of Foucault, sees 'strains of constructionism' in this work (2001:41). He suggests that

Foucault's concern is to investigate how 'we' construct ourselves (Hacking 2002:4). For his part, Foucault consistently refuses to be associated with any specific theoretical stance. In *The Archaeology of Knowledge*, he writes 'Do not ask who I am and do not ask me to remain the same: leave it to our bureaucrats and our police to see that our papers are in order' (Foucault 1972a:17). He reiterates this in a 1982 interview when asked about his academic affiliations: 'I don't feel it is necessary to know exactly what I am' (Foucault, in Martin 1988:9). He describes himself as 'an intellectual', one who can encourage people to change their minds about things formerly accepted as 'truth' and 'evidence' (Martin 1988:10).

Although philosophers may view Foucault's work as 'unrigorous and too literary' (Prado 2000:2), and historians can point to errors in historical dates (Hacking 2002:76), his 'intellectual' stance appeals across many disciplinary boundaries. Several points of congruence facilitate my use of Foucault's work within a social constructionist viewpoint. Foucault engages with the construction of knowledge and the production of truth, which are central concerns of social constructionism. He also shares the social constructionist tenet that humans actively construct their own social world and its constituent elements (Miller 2008:268). Like Berger and Luckmann, he contends that the practices of a society arise from multiple intersecting social interactions, describing our world as 'a profusion of entangled events' (Foucault 1977b:155). These everyday interactions are in turn governed by social institutions, prescribed by ideologies, and guided by pragmatic circumstances, among other elements (Foucault 2000a:225). Berger and Luckmann cite Nietzsche as an influence, and Foucault's essay *Nietzsche, Genealogy, History* (Foucault 1977b) draws on Nietzsche in a similar way to underpin his critical analytic focus on the local, the everyday, and the overlooked.

Social constructionism focuses attention on how knowledge is socially constructed within a community (Hruby 2001:58). It draws attention to the processes whereby a body of knowledge becomes established as 'truth' and 'reality'. The capacity of knowledge to appear neutral masks that it is

always 'knowledge from a certain position' (Berger and Luckmann 1966:22). Categories and concepts that appear 'objective' turn out to be historically and culturally specific (Burr 2015:3). Constructions of the 'real' and the 'good' are always made from within a tradition that excludes alternatives and suppresses what lies outside the tradition (Gergen 2009:12). Foucault, too, represents knowledge as a constructed and malleable entity, with each body of knowledge containing limitations, prohibitions, exclusions, values, transgressions, concepts and strategies that are specific to itself (1972a:193). Gergen refers to the 'truth-telling' status accorded to certain words, with the term 'truth' affirming that something is the case according to the shared rules or conventions of the participants within groups such as religious orders or dominant elites (2009:11). This relativist position on 'reality' and 'truth' within the social world leads to a focus on critical reflexivity, requiring researchers to examine the implications of their own historical and cultural situations (Gergen 2009:12). The role of overlooked *everyday knowledge* is of critical interest within social constructionism (Burr 2015:2). Berger and Luckmann argue that long-standing academic traditions privileged scientific and expert knowledge while overlooking the equal importance of everyday knowledge. This form of knowledge circulates more widely than the elite forms and plays a key part in the 'dialectic' between the individual and society (Berger and Luckmann (1966:209).

Gergen points out that the social constructionist approach, originally promoted by Berger and Luckmann as a response to modernist perspectives, has reacted to and absorbed later postmodern perspectives (Gergen 2009:14). This is evident in the treatment of written language. A key social constructionist tenet is that everyday meanings are constructed through language (Berger and Luckmann 1966:36; Gergen 2009:33; Burr 2015:4). Berger and Luckmann define language as 'a system of vocal signs,' with writing constituting 'a sign system of the second degree' (1966:51-52). Reflecting postmodern views of communication, Gergen remarks on the capacity of the author-reader relationship to create new

interpersonal meanings and constructions of the social world through the medium of text (2009:ix). Foucault describes his books as transformative experiences for himself as writer and for the reader, leading both to re-evaluate their relationship with their own knowledge (2000b:243-246). These views provide a place for written language in the construction of knowledge and truth, identifying the role of written documents as important elements in constructing social reality.

Foucault devotes critical attention to products of social interaction, such as *bodies of knowledge* and *discourses* (Miller 2008: 269). Miller suggests that this work contributes to social constructionism by highlighting the role of discourse in providing the frameworks and meanings that shape social interaction (Miller 2008:268). Foucault's conceptualisation of power has also been incorporated into recent reformulations of the social constructionist approach (Miller 2008:269; Gergen 2009:48). Berger and Luckmann refer to the 'social distribution' of knowledge (1966:60). They contend that differential access to knowledge and different ways of sharing knowledge have consequences for the social objectification of reality (1966:193). Foucault's focus on the material effects of interaction between power and knowledge provides an alternative way to consider the implications of social distribution and differential access. Gergen's social constructionist approach adopts Foucault's contention that power is insinuated into ordinary life, that people willingly subjugate themselves to subtle forms of power, and that claims to ownership of 'knowledge' and 'truth' contribute to activities of subjugation (Gergen 2009:48). This view of power is also reflected in Burr's formulation of social constructionism as a perspective that considers how knowledge and social action are bound up with power relations of exclusion and inclusion (Burr 2015:5). A concern with power, knowledge, exclusion, and inclusion, integrated within a social constructionist standpoint, provides the frame for my study.

Gergen, whose psychological research uses a social constructionist approach, describes social constructionism as 'ontologically mute' because it does not offer a foundational philosophy or a declaration of what is 'true'

(1998:416). He contends that this relativist position offers an opportunity for dialogue, a space for reflecting on and exploring alternative understandings (1998:415). Foucault declares a similar lack of concern with discovering a foundational truth. He does not seek to discover origins or transcendental foundations and he does not wish to decide on rationality or teleology (1972a:125). Foucault's predominant interest in the processes of constructing truth and knowledge leads Burr to state that he 'brackets off' the question of reality to some extent (Burr 2015:103). Foucault dissociates himself from a realist approach and describes himself as producing a nominalist critique of historical knowledge derived from an historical analysis (2000a:238). He is not interested in 'digging down' to hidden layers, as he prefers to account for phenomena at the surface level by seeking the conditions that make the phenomena possible (Foucault 2000a:226). He examines social phenomena in their context as historical events, and seeks their implications for truth, instead of grasping a 'whole society' in its 'living reality' (2000a:233).

While Gergen promotes the capacity of social constructionist research to invite dialogue and establish common ground (1998:415; 2009:13), Foucault, in contrast, promotes the disruption of existing knowledge (1977b:147). He advocates undertaking exploration to find new pathways and advance beyond familiar territory (1972a:39). Discussions of literacy in Ireland are characterised by the absence of polemic. Several well-trodden paths construct an agreed narrative of literacy in Ireland, one that favours a flattering perspective. This study accepts Foucault's invitation to seek another vantage point, where unvisited territory and obscured features can come into view. The study aims to disturb the comfortable silence by providing another account of the landscape, one that will initiate dialogue about the settled assumptions underlying the position of the *illiterate person* in present-day Ireland.

Although Foucault promotes disruption (1977b:147), he does not offer advice on negotiating the post-disruption scenario. This research project, designed to 'trouble' existing assumptions, could potentially produce a

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negative narrative that further excludes those who are not fully literate. An ethical concern to minimise such an outcome guides the research process. The perspective adopted for this study de-centres human agency, placing the focus on the operation of the social world rather than the individual. This provides one layer of insulation from any potential to perpetuate negative categorizations of the individual. The use of synecdoche provides a second layer. Foucault uses synecdoche throughout his work, where terms such as the *prisoner* imply a broad social grouping. He considers the condition of being a prisoner rather than the routes to becoming a prisoner, disregarding whether imprisonment results from one innocent mistake, a long history of criminal activity, or a corrupt judicial system. In a similar fashion, I use the term *illiterate person* as a synecdoche for those who are not considered literate within their immediate social contexts. It encompasses all forms of literacy difficulty, without seeking specific causes. It also responds to the unequal position whereby the literate person is generally categorized as *literate*, while there are multiple ever-changing terms for poor literacy, e.g. *total illiteracy*, *functional illiteracy*, *functional literacy*, *improving literacy, literacy learner*. The research explores the construction of the *illiterate person* as a subject-position, providing a third form of distancing. Recognising the popular tendency to associate illiteracy with the marginalized, I adopt Foucault's counterintuitive position by seeking subject-positions for the *illiterate person* in the mainstream social world, such as within schools and employment. These three shields, of de-centring the individual, using synecdoche, and focusing on the construction of subject-positions within mainstream settings, provide some protection against reinforcing existing exclusionary individualized narratives, offering the potential to produce a more emancipatory one.

This study uses a thematic analysis to explore the social construction of particular 'truths' and 'knowledge' about literacy within Irish society. It takes the material presence of an Irish society that exists 'out there' for granted. This leads to an interpretivist epistemological position, focused on understanding phenomena as they are rather than seeking causality. The

research seeks to produce understanding and intelligibility rather than a universalizing 'illumination' (Foucault 2000a:224).

The social constructionist view that truth is constructed within social interaction, particularly within language use, provides a role for written language in the construction of different truths about the *illiterate person.* Documents inscribed with written language provide a tangible means of participating in contemporary social interaction, and when archived they offer 'potent evidence' for social researchers (McCulloch 2004:6). Foucault's own work relies on the detailed study of historical documentation, referred to as a 'documentary model of working' by Elden (2017:83). My research is similarly grounded in documents that originated in twentieth-century Ireland. A thematic analysis informed by Foucault's work produces an alternative view of literacy in Ireland, one that considers elements of power and knowledge in terms of inclusion and exclusion. Any knowledge claims arising from the research process can be checked against the documents that give rise to them.

As Foucault recognizes, a written text is not necessarily indicative of actual practice (Foucault 1977a:32). Documents may record aspirations rather than actions. The use of documents as the prime research resource acknowledges that they provide only limited access to social phenomena, just as a physical artefact provides only limited information about the society that constructed it. Given the large volume of written documents that circulated in twentieth-century Ireland, the selection examined here can only be partial and bounded. The attendant knowledge claims are also similarly tentative, aimed at raising debate rather than offering uniform explanations or prescriptive solutions.

2.3 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The research perspective adopted for this study is located between the two levels of Foucauldian scholarship described by Partner, where one level

uses 'iconic' standalone phrases and concepts as reference points, and the other demonstrates deep 'specialist' academic engagement and analysis of Foucault's oeuvre (Partner 2016:36). My theoretical framework purposively distils from English-language versions of Foucault's work published from 1970 to 1980, which contains reflections and analysis of *discourse*, *power* and *knowledge*. This body of work tends to be described as a distinct phase, e.g. *the genealogical* phase (Prado 2000:4; Ball 2013:24), or *the early period* (Miller 2008:252), to distinguish it from the later focus on concepts such as *governmentality*, *ethics,* and *care of the self*. My research is therefore located beyond the 'iconic' level, but not at the level of 'specialist' engagement with all of Foucault's published work.

The conceptualisations of *discourse*, *power*, *knowledge* and *silence* used to guide the data collection and data analysis are outlined in the following four subsections. This theoretical framework 'fixes' a range of Foucault's fluid and dynamic ideas, fixed at least for the duration of this research project.

DISCOURSE

Although Foucault is sometimes characterised as suggesting that all reality 'out there' is produced from discourse, this study's conceptual approach to discourse draws primarily from *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (1972a), which recognises both discursive and non-discursive components of the social world. 'Non-discursive domains' include institutions, political events and economic processes (1972a:162). In *Discipline and Punish* (Foucault 1977a)*,* the *discourse of criminology* is presented as one element operating in combination with other non-discursive elements that together produce the carceral system of the prison (1977a:271). Discourses exist in plural within Foucault's writing. They interact with one another, they change, reconstitute and reformulate. They may emerge in one era and disappear in another. A discourse often has a 'practical domain', such as the medical clinic that hosts a medical discourse (Miller 2008:252).

Foucault acknowledges that he uses the term *discourse* in many ways (1972a:107). One recurring usage refers to a group of *statements* that share a common system of formation (1972a:107; 117). He also describes a discourse as a 'way of speaking' that constructs what can be talked about and what is forbidden (1972a:193). Adopting these explanations, the term *discourse* used in this study refers to shared systematic ways of speaking about a topic, in word and in print. Discourses arise from shared social interaction, using statements as the 'elementary unit' of a discourse (1972a:80). The term *statement* refers to any fragment that can carry meaning, such as a piece of text, a diagram, or an image (1972a:82). Statements co-exist with and prefigure other statements within a network of statements (1972a:99). When statements refer to each other and demonstrate shared ways of speaking about a topic, they are considered to form a unitary discourse. The discourse arising from these statements can allocate a *subject position* for the individual, and it creates the *objects* of which it speaks (1972a:73). Objects are named, described, defined and differentiated within a discourse (1972a:40-42). Accordingly, a *discourse of illiteracy* contains all the statements that describe 'illiteracy' and offer solutions to the state of being 'illiterate'.

The various statements that cohere into a distinct discourse will share similar assumptions and similar perspectives on the topic, and will formulate distinctive subjects, objects, concepts and strategies (Foucault 1972a:33;73;116). Discourses actively construct reality (Miller 2008:252). As one group of discourse researchers observes: 'Discourses are not innocent explanations of the world' (Diaz-Bone, Buhrmann, Rodriguez, Schneider, Kendall, and Tirado 2007). Each discourse produces a specific perception and representation of social reality, in a 'preferred version' of the world (Miller 2008:252). Discourses are implicated in the production of 'truth', by relating words to objects, by supporting activities directed towards objects and people, and by creating categorisations and evaluations (Diaz-Bone et al 2007). They provide specific positions for the speaker and the subject of the discourse. They share similar *objectives of intervention*. The

statements that form a discourse will exclude incompatible aspects (Foucault 1972a:124).

These theoretical conceptualisations suggest that discourses relevant to the *illiterate person* will provide explanations and solutions to the condition of being illiterate. They will create subject positions and have common objectives of intervention, such as 'instilling literacy'. A widely circulating discourse will demonstrate its shared characteristics across a range of different sites and document genres. This prevalence across many sites, especially if they are powerful sites, can lead to one discourse gaining prominence while alternatives are muted or suppressed. These prominent discourses, circulating through verbal and written social interaction, contain the potential to become taken for granted, objective sources of knowledge. The intersections and convergences of these multi-faceted discourses will in turn have an influence on the formation of new knowledge and new truths about the illiterate person, leading to a continuous dynamic interplay of discourse, knowledge and truth.

A major premise within this study, that a discourse has material effects in the 'real world', requires clarification. This forms one of the underlying premises of *Discipline and Punish* (1977a). The material consequences of a discourse arise when certain 'ways of speaking' are acted upon in the social world, for example, by becoming institutionalised within legislative provisions. Discourse 'fixed' in this way can underpin tangible social structures. Throughout *Discipline and Punish*, Foucault describes the material consequences of *discourses of criminality* in terms of the 'scientific' explanations, judicial activities, forms of torture, types of imprisonment, and rehabilitative measures that different discourses give rise to. Each discourse of criminality positions the human as an object of knowledge for the discourse. It also constructs other objects, such as 'crime', 'the soul', the 'normal' person, and the 'abnormal' criminal, identifying them as objects of penal intervention. The discourse of criminality operates in conjunction with political investments, architectural designs and technologies that produce material impacts on human bodies. In a dual dynamic process,

the discourse of criminality has an impact on the material operation of the prison, while the prison in turn gives rise to other discourses that reinforce, reproduce and reshape the original discourse (1977a:31).

In *Discipline and Punish* (1977a), Foucault considers a wide array of social, institutional and legislative responses to criminality. This study of the *illiterate person* is located within the level of social interaction rather than the 'apparatus level' or 'the institutional level' (Olssen 2003:196). It recognises the existence of formal legislative and institutional discourses, but it is primarily focused on everyday discourses in twentieth-century Ireland. Written materials allow these fluid and dynamic discourses to be suspended for a moment in time and therefore amenable to analysis. The activity of collating documents over a chronological period examines whether the potential of these everyday discourses to generate material effects is realised. It also examines the circulation of such discourses in relation to local operations of power.

POWER

Foucault rejects the argument that he depicts power as a faceless and omnipresent force. He refutes claims that power is an all-encompassing system of domination that controls everything and leaves no room for freedom, stating that this view cannot be attributed to him (Foucault 1997:293). Although Foucault acknowledges the shifting, incomplete nature of his work on power (2000b:284), his analysis of power in terms of multidirectional forces, normalizing tendencies, and transformative capacities underpins the conception of power used in this study.

Foucault contends that power, as well as imposing dominance, can flow in many directions. He describes the operation of power within hierarchical structures such as the Panopticon (1977a:200) and within localized interactive 'micro-physics' of power (1977a:149). One form of power complements the other. He contends that a focus on authoritative State power alone ignores the role of indirect power mechanisms (1980d:73).

Interactive localized processes are a less overt form of power, but they are equally important in promoting shared norms within a society. Power is exercised within the social body by being enfolded into actions, attitudes, discourses and everyday lives (Foucault 1980b:39). Foucault claims that he is less interested in power at the level of ideology, and more interested in the effects of power on the human body (1980c:58) and in the micro-powers exercised in daily life (1980c:59). He declares a preference to examine limited, localized instances rather than a grand global operation of power, seeing all such local examinations as useful contributions to the contemplation of power at the general level (2000b:286). At the same time, he recognises the capacity for techniques of power to transcend national and temporal borders (2000b:293). This study, although it examines local operations of power in relation to the *illiterate person*, must also acknowledge that such local operations continuously intersect with other global manifestations of power.

Foucault identifies *normalization* as a 'great instrument of power' at the local level (1977a: 184). The features of normalization provide tangible evidence of localized power in operation. Norms are the means used to direct behaviour; they are invisible aspects of what is considered 'normal'. Normalizing judgement involves comparison to an agreed norm. Processes of *categorization* and *conformation* construct norms (Foucault 1977a:183). The analytic phase of the study therefore seeks comparisons, differentiations, hierarchizations, exclusions and homogenizations in the data, to establish the norms used to categorize the illiterate person. Conformation is enforced by using humiliation, shaming and correction (1977a:178). A focus on conformation also justifies intervention, enabling a society to condone the application of 'solutions' to those considered abnormal. Norms structure what is acceptable and what is punishable. Those who fall short are corrected, improved, or excluded (Miller 2008:253). Foucault contends that in our carceral society, a departure from the norm evokes a response that equates it to the greatest crime (1977a:299). While punishment is an overt technique of power, penal leniency can also be

configured as a technique of power (1977a:24). These features of normalization identify the need to look for the solutions, punishments and sanctions imposed on the *illiterate person*.

Foucault contends that power has transformative as well as destructive effects (2000b:294). Power is involved in the process of making the unseen visible and giving a value to the overlooked, thereby producing new objects of knowledge and new bodies of information (1980b:51). In *Discipline and Punish,* Foucault actively re-positions previously silenced local knowledge in relation to prisons. As a result, the first publication of this work in France moved prisoners from the margins of social research into the mainstream for the first time.

Foucault rejects the idea that the imposition of power produces stasis. He argues that his work shows how resistance, change and transformation are possible (2000b:294). Power and resistance co-exist in a mutually-constitutive relationship. Those who are enmeshed in power relations can resist, rebel, escape, transform and cease being submissive (2000b:294). In conversation with Deleuze on the topic of '*Intellectuals and Power*,' Foucault suggests that research practices must be considered part of a subtle network of power (1977c:207). They have the negative capacity to transform the intellectual into its object and instrument in the sphere of 'knowledge', 'truth', 'consciousness,' and 'discourse' (1977c:208). The 'indignity of speaking for others' leads him to the position that only those directly concerned can speak on their own behalf (Foucault 1977c:209). Accordingly, while my research study can aspire to address other researchers, it cannot claim to speak on behalf of those with literacy difficulty.

KNOWLEDGE

Foucault claims that every discourse has an *object of knowledge* (1972a:182; 1977a:24). A discourse can produce knowledge, can regulate what is expressed as knowledge about the topic, and how that knowledge

is manifested (1972a:183-184). This position suggests that discourses pertaining to the *illiterate person* will have an effect on knowledge about the illiterate person. Those who appropriate a discourse gain its knowledge as well as its power (1972b:227). The holders of knowledge partake in at least two forms of local power, as they have the power of knowing the 'truth' and the power to disseminate this knowledge (1980a:34). The analysis therefore considers the ownership of the knowledge used in discourses pertaining to the illiterate person.

Foucault contends that knowledge, like power, has destructive as well as productive capacities. He cites the Frankfurt School view that the accumulation of knowledge, instead of offering a source of liberation, can have negative effects in terms of enslavement and domination (2000b:291). This capacity of knowledge to confer 'mastery' (1977a:26) suggests that the holder of knowledge about the *illiterate person* can occupy positions of power over both the illiterate individual and the topic of illiteracy.

The productive interaction of knowledge and power can generate new knowledge and new objects to regulate and control (1977a:29). In this way, power produces both the individual and knowledge about this individual (1977a:194). Institutions such as the prison apply knowledge while also gathering knowledge that is subsequently used to develop new applications (1977a:249). The carceral society permits perpetual observation and capture of the human body, producing new knowledge and new instruments, techniques and technologies of control (1977a:305). These conceptualisations of the destructive and productive capacities of knowledge and power require the study to consider the institutions and techniques used to produce new knowledge about the illiterate person and new forms of regulation and control.

The social constructionist approach is concerned with everyday knowledge in all its guises. Foucault declares a similar interest in matching 'scholarly erudition' to 'local memories', focusing attention on local, subjugated, disqualified forms of knowledge that are confined to the margins (Foucault

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2003:8). Censorship and the prioritisation of intellectual knowledge are often used to subjugate such local knowledges (Foucault 1977c:207). Foucault's concern with subjugated knowledge underpins social constructionist research on processes of marginalization and resistance, such as resistance from below and languages of resistance (Miller 2008:258). The consideration of *local knowledge* is therefore also relevant for this study.

SILENCE

Those with literacy difficulties have opportunities to present their personal testimony within the *agora*, but as Bauman points out, the increasingly individualized nature of the *agora* means that personal testimony seldom gives rise to any public polemic (Bauman 2001:108). The absence of a public polemic fosters a silence that provides further impetus for this research.

Silence is an integral component of speech, used in private conversation and public oratory to mark pauses for reflection or to add dramatic emphasis. Silence fulfils a similar role in musical performance. Pianist and conductor Daniel Barenboim describes the 'unavoidable relationship' between sound and silence in the production of music (2009:7). The silence before the first notes commence and the silences between notes shape how music is heard (2009:9). Cage's composition *4' 33"* (Cage 1952) requires musicians to perform a silence lasting 4 minutes and 33 seconds for a silent audience, underlining the capacity of silence to be performed, broadcast and received. Terms such as the *pregnant pause* and the *ominous silence* identify how silence can contain texture and depth. The song *Sound of Silence* describes the capacity of silence to be touched, to increase in size, and its potential for malignancy (Simon and Garfunkel 1964).

Silence, whether in music or speech, can convey more than the absence of sound. If a discourse is *a way of speaking* about a topic, silence provides

ways of *not speaking* about the topic. Foucault contends that there many effective ways of not speaking about a topic. In addition to the form of silence where nothing is said, the activities of declining, forbidding or imposing discretion between speakers can impose silence (1978:27). Voices can be deliberately silent or muted so that they cannot be overheard (1978:35). Exclusions can be performed without using words. Foucault refers to the *stifled truth* of a suppressed collective knowledge (1977c:208). What is hidden and unsaid can give rise to misunderstanding and to superficial explanations. Something that is deliberately hidden and kept secret is more difficult to find than something that is unconsciously overlooked (1977c:214).

These meditations on the qualities of silence in social interaction are equally relevant in approaching silences in written interactions. Evoking the way music arises from silence, Foucault describes his written work as giving shape to a blank space. It is defined by 'the exteriority of its vicinity', by what surrounds it, what is adjacent and what is excluded (1972a:17). Silences are more than the absence of information. As Foucault remarks in *The Will to Knowledge,* silences can be deployed as strategic devices (1978:27). Accordingly, the strategic use of silence is given analytical consideration in this study.

In her description of archival research, Tamboukou remarks that there is a need to 'somehow include' silences into the analysis of archival materials (2014:619). This study explores the silences encountered within the documents used as data, regarding them as ways to address the overlooked elements accompanying discourses about the illiterate person. This involves describing the silences that are detected and identifying their effects. A discourse is considered not only in relation to what is excluded from it, but also in relation to the silence that accompanies it.

2.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design informs the data collection and analytic methods, and in turn, choices and decisions relating to these methods shape the research outcomes. The lived experience of the illiterate adult provides a recurring research topic in the late twentieth century, suggesting possible templates for the data collection and analytic methods required for this study.

Freire describes responses to literacy and illiteracy observed among Latin American adults in the 1970s, while Scribner and Cole (1981) and Street (1984) draw from observational research activities in Liberia and Iran respectively. Street (1984) relies on his impressions and interpretations as an 'outsider' observer in his anthropological account of literacy in Iran. Street's work underpins the Literacy Studies research strand within the field of education. His research approach adopts an idealist epistemological stance, constructing literacy as a social practice that must be explored within its social context.

The concepts of *literacy practices* (activities relating to reading and writing) and *literacy events* (where reading or writing form the centre of a social interaction) are organising devices that focus attention on the social meaning of literacy, predisposing literacy researchers to using observational and ethnographic methods. Barton and Hamilton (1998) apply ethnographic methods to study literacy practices in a city in England. They use extensive interviews with participants to present 'insider' accounts of everyday literacy practices and events. Bailey and Coleman (1998) conduct a group-interview study of the lived experiences of Irish adults with limited literacy. Like Barton and Hamilton, the researchers rely on participants' self-assessment of literacy rather than on direct measurement. Schooling is closely intertwined with literacy in both studies. The participants unanimously identify the school as the location where they learned, or failed to learn, literacy. Attempts to address poor literacy are undertaken in school-based settings, such as adult education classes. Barton and Hamilton refer to the 'stigma' of poor literacy (1998:162), but do

not raise this topic in their interviews with participants. Many of the Irish adults describe how reaching school-leaving age without being able to read and write is a source of shame (Bailey and Coleman 1998:12). Literacy is constructed by these participants as a school-based skill that must be acquired by age 15. Their self-judgement involves comparison to this norm. Those with poor literacy identify their relationship with the school as the reason. While both sets of researchers relay the participants' construction of the school as the basis for literacy / illiteracy, they do not comment on it, suggesting their implicit acceptance of this aspect. Other aspects that remain uncontested within these research studies include the assumption that literacy is beneficial, and the role of the school as a neutral vector of literacy.

Feeley (2014) details the past literacy learning experiences of adults attached to a community-learning centre in Dublin. Her longitudinal study uses *critical ethnographic memory work*, involving observing, interviewing and interacting with participants. This *community of interest* are former residents of Irish Industrial Schools (2014:21). Feeley occupies a dual role as volunteer literacy tutor and researcher. Her study is guided by a *literacy practitioner research* approach that connects tutors, learners and researchers (2014:21). This approach reflects adherence to Freire's emphasis on democratic dialogue and reflection between educator and learner (Feeley 2014:36). As in the previous studies, respondents provide their own subjective classification of literacy status on leaving school, with half identifying themselves as having unmet literacy needs (2014:28). They discuss the 'cultural stigma' of illiteracy and how it leads to self-activated exclusion (2014:72).

In contrast to a *deficit discourse* that holds educationally disadvantaged people responsible for their own unequal life outcomes, Feeley argues that the state is primarily responsible for learning inequalities (Feeley 2014:17). She finds that 'literacy learners' are generally located within disadvantaged, misrecognised, disrespected groups (2014:17). However, she also refers to other 'literacy learners', such as a group attending literacy evening

classes whose busy work and family schedules precludes participating in the research (2014:23), and she identifies that some of her research participants are in full-time study or employment (2014:27), implicit evidence that not all those with poor literacy are marginalized.

The construction of literacy as an individual skill displayed within *practices* and *events* (whether in the present-day or past) predisposes the use of ethnographic research methods. Such methods have produced a rich store of knowledge on the lived experience of the illiterate person, some of it recounted above. My research question, instead of focusing on skills, practices or events, asks how the illiterate person is constructed and positioned within social interaction. My analytic focus on *discourse* displaces the individual as the unit of analysis. The research design must therefore provide access to discourses.

Interviews offer one method to gain access to spoken discourses. The shared experience of shame and social exclusion related by participants to Bailey and Coleman (1998) and Feeley (2014) suggests that negative constructions of illiteracy exist within everyday social interactions. However, the use of interviews to elicit constructions of the *illiterate person* from those who are literate raises questions about response bias in terms of social desirability, where participants might be unwilling to acknowledge negative constructions to a researcher.

My decision to use documents as research data is based on their capacity to bear the imprint of discourses. Documents provide evidence of social interaction between author and reader through written language, performed independently of the researcher. They can transcend temporal and physical locations. They also interact with other documents either explicitly or implicitly. Foucault contends that a book is a node within a wider network of other books (1972a:23), highlighting the intertextual capacity of documents to refer and respond to one another. Written documents reproduce taken-for-granted aspects of their contemporary social world. They can demonstrate how everyday knowledge is expressed in a written

format. They do not necessarily co-incide with each other, but together they produce interlinked images and ideas that provide access to the discourses that give rise to them. Written documents can also discuss ideas that are no longer part of contemporary debate, allowing the researcher to examine forgotten or rejected knowledge (O'Farrell 2005:86). Three research studies undertaken by Tamboukou (2000), Carabine (2001) and McGowan (2015) demonstrate the application of analytic frameworks derived from Foucault's work to historical documents.

Tamboukou's analysis of female college students' experience in Victorian Britain uses auto/biographical writings as data. It makes use of Foucault's concepts of *heterotopia* and *technologies of the self* (Tamboukou 2000:250). The *community of interest* comprises the students attending the first women's colleges. These female students are creating new spaces that transcend the social boundaries of 'acceptable womanhood' in this era (2000:260). Their letters and biographies record personal responses and resistances to prevailing patriarchal domination (2000:260).

A study of single motherhood by Carabine analyses nineteenth-century documents relating to the 1834 Poor Law Act in Britain (Carabine 2001). The 1834 Act introduces 'Bastardy Clauses' that alter eligibility for payments to single mothers. Carabine selects this part of the 1834 Act as the basis for her study, and she examines discussions of these clauses in other contemporaneous documents. She traces a *discourse of bastardy* through these documents, to examine how single motherhood is 'spoken of' and with what effects. Foucault's work offers her a lens to analyse and read such discourses (2001:268). Carabine describes how the discourse of single motherhood has changed over time as it interacts with and is mediated by other discourses (2001:273). She argues that underlying ideas about sexuality continue to play a significant role in the formulation and practice of present-day British social policy (2001:267).

A study of Irish marriage law 1945-2010 by McGowan (2015) draws on Foucault's concepts of *bio-power* and *government* to examine how legal

and social concepts of marriage have governed personal intimate relationships in Ireland. The data comprises documents produced by the Irish government, including legal instruments and reports relating to marriage (McGowan 2015:32). These legal documents form the basis for regulating marriage, co-habitation and divorce in Ireland. McGowan finds that marriage law operates as a technique of government, involving detailed surveillance and control to ensure conformity in relationship behaviour.

A diverse range of documents are used in these studies. Tamboukou (2000) analyses personal letters, biographies and other writing arising from her community of interest. Carabine's data is drawn from a network of published documents in the public domain. The documents on marriage law analysed by McGowan (2015) come from the body of knowledge in everyday use within the legal domain. The documents I analyse have references to literacy and illiteracy as their shared organising device.

My choice of the 1900-1980 timeframe reflects the period of the twentieth century when the Irish population was regarded as 'fully literate'. 1900 marks the start of the century when 'full literacy' was ostensibly achieved. The National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) was launched in 1980 to campaign on behalf of those with poor literacy, providing the first public recognition that the *illiterate person* existed in twentieth-century Ireland. 1980 thus marks the end of the 'fully literate' era.

A major methodological decision for this study was to use documents from publicly-available archives, rather than those located in private or restricted domains. This decision to seek publicly-available documents addresses twin concerns. First, others can evaluate the credibility of the research interpretations by reading the same documents. Second, and equally importantly, the accessibility of these documents accords with Foucault's imperative to seek what is hidden in plain view and disturb what has been taken for granted (1977b:147). This decision means that my data is confined to documents located in publicly-available archives. Some of these documents are well-known, while others, openly residing in the same

archives, have been overlooked. They all relate in some way to the *illiterate person* and all were created between 1900 and 1980. Reflecting an attempt to capture a wide variety of written social interactions, they come from a range of sources, including self-published pamphlets and government-commissioned reports as well as documents published by trade unions and religious authorities.

2.5 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

My search for data sought documents created between 1900 and 1980 that discuss some aspect of literacy or have some bearing on the *illiterate person*. The data searches took place in physical archives and online archives. I visited physical archives in the National Library of Ireland, the National Archives of Ireland, the Irish Military Archives, Maynooth University Special Collection and Trinity College Book Depository. The online archives used were:

The Statistical Report Section of the Irish Department of Education https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Statistics.

The Enhanced British Parliamentary Papers section of DIPPAM (Documenting Ireland: Parliament, People and Migration) at http://www.dippam.ac.uk/eppi.

Teachers College Record Archive at http://www.tcrecord.org/library.

The methods used to locate potential data reflect a pragmatic response to varying document management practices in these archives. I started with keyword searches for 'illiteracy' in the National Library catalogue, as I wished to analyse how the illiterate person was described and discussed within documents discussing illiteracy. I found that illiteracy seldom featured as an overt topic in the years 1900-1980, reinforcing the perception that illiteracy did not exist in twentieth-century Ireland. I therefore moved to keyword searches using 'literacy' and proxies for literacy such as 'reading' and 'writing', on the basis that documents on these topics might make some reference to the illiterate person. This proved more fruitful, delivering a small selection of results in the National Library database.   These

documents often referred to others that I subsequently located, a variation on the 'snowball sample' where one respondent provides introductions to others. The Military Archives, visited at the midway period of data-collection, did not have a keyword-searchable database. Documents were located with the assistance of the archivists through discussion of my research purposes. I explained that references to literacy provisions in the US and UK Armies led me to seek if similar provisions existed in the Irish Defence Forces. This interactive search process led to a set of annual reports located in the main office, and to other material that had lain undisturbed for many years. I read through all the documents presented by the archivists, to select those included in the final data. Searches in the National Archives that occurred towards the end of the data-collection period were more deliberate, seeking files referred to elsewhere in the data or background reading. The Maynooth University Special Collection and Trinity College Book Depository contain twentieth-century publications not in the National Library collection, allowing me to locate further material arising from the initial searches. The online archives provided access to legislation, government reports, and other publications relevant to the timeframe.

These searches yielded a range of documents that were read both for contextual information and to consider their potential as research data. Carabine underlines the need for wide reading in the documents of the era. Such reading leads to context-building and provides an understanding of the power and knowledge networks of the time (2001:284). It also assists in situating a discourse within its social, political, cultural and economic contexts (2001:301). This need to contextualise and situate requires a long period of reading and re-reading documents before any final data selection can occur.

Reading through these documents provided a basis to situate and contextualise the sub-set that was ultimately selected as data. The analytic process required continued interaction with this data, involving regular

return visits to the archives on a purposive basis to re-read and re-consider the archival material.

Activities pursuing Irish-language revival feature throughout the years 1900–1980. Few Irish-language documents were evident in the initial pool of potential data, reflecting the position of English as the dominant vernacular language. I made a deliberate decision to restrict the data to English-language documents. Although I read the Irish-language documents for background information, they were excluded as data on the basis that their use in an English-language study would involve translation into English, thereby introducing additional complexity. Flagging such difficulties, Akenson discusses the 'extraordinary flexibility' in usage of the Irish word *Gaeltacht* in Department of Education documents (Akenson 1975:173). The option of conducting a parallel analysis of Irish-language documents using the Irish language would allow these documents to be examined in their own language. While such an analysis offers access to Irish-language discourses on the *illiterate person*, this was deemed beyond the scope of the current study. The removal of Irish-language documents from consideration is thus a restriction on the data.

The final data selection criteria required that particular 'ways of speaking' were evident across several documents, in recognition of Foucault's proposition that a widely-circulating discourse will show shared characteristics across a range of different sites and document genres. This removed once-off statements from consideration. Figure 2.A depicts the cumulative effect of the selection criteria in terms of restricting the data. The excluded documents join those that remained undiscovered by the searching methods used, and documents that once existed and are referred to but were never archived. These excluded documents could provide evidence of other different discourses apart from the ones analysed in this research study.

As McCulloch highlights, the classification of documents into primary and secondary sources is beset with difficulty (2004:31). The documents used

as data are accorded significance based on their presence in the public archives, giving unpublished archived reports the same weight as books and newspaper articles.

FIGURE 2.A: THE IMPACT OF SELECTION CRITERIA ON THE POOL OF POSSIBLE DATA

DATA SELECTION CRITERIA	RESTRICTION IMPOSED
Available in publicly accessible archives	Documents in private and specialist archives excluded from consideration
English-language documents	Irish-language documents excluded from consideration
Created between 1900–1980	Retrospective accounts produced since 1980 excluded from consideration
Shared ways of speaking evident across more than one document	Documents with stand-alone statements excluded from consideration

The selection criteria led to a data set comprising of 40 discrete documents, written in English, and created between 1900 and 1980. They reflect a range of sources, reflecting the broad reach of the searches. They comprise 11 published books, 11 published reports, 6 newspaper articles, 4 pamphlets, 3 journal series, 3 archived reports, and 2 sets of conference proceedings. Their authorship ranges from individuals to government-appointed committees.

This final set of data reflects successive subjective selections from the initial pool of documents about literacy, illiteracy, and the illiterate person. It also reflects a pragmatic culling of available material to provide a manageable and relevant corpus. The analysis focuses on these documents, recognising that they are a non-random, limited sample of the documents that circulated in twentieth-century Ireland. The analysis of a different selection from these archives, or of other documents such as private papers and Irish-language material, could generate different conclusions.

One ethical dimension of using historical documents is the need to acknowledge the context of their production in temporally distant cultural and social settings. This requires relating each text to its context (McCulloch 2004:6). The principle of 'fair dealing' is applied when interpreting material whose authors have no 'right of reply', for example, by seeking meanings for obscure phrases. The position of power inherent in analysis and interpretation is acknowledged, as well as limitations due to constraints.

Foucault advises the need to 'disconnect the unquestioned continuities by which we organize, in advance, the discourse that we are to analyse' (1972a: 25). A discourse must be responded to in context, 'as and when it occurs' (1972a:25). This requirement to suspend preconceptions accords with the social constructionist concern for critical reflexivity. It demands the operation of 'vigilance' in relation to the researcher's personal cultural positions (Williams and May 1996:192). My position as a White Irish female researcher, bilingual in Irish and English, educated to third-level, and living in twenty-first century Ireland has implications for the research process. These personal aspects contribute both an 'insider' understanding of the cultural context, and an 'outsider' perspective derived from participation in academic research practices. My dual position as 'cultural member' and 'cultural commentator' shapes the analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006:24). As Carabine points out, it is difficult to 'step outside' your own contemporary social world (2001:307). Current perceptions of literacy inevitably inform the study, evident in the aspects from the past that I consider significant. For example, statements about the information processing and creative writing aspects of literacy interest me more than those about penmanship and calligraphy. An ethical approach also identifies the need to acknowledge the contexts of the illustrative extracts used in the final report. The decision to present documents and extracts in chronological order wherever feasible removes the temptation to condense time periods or to obscure contextual details. Any links made across time should be robust enough to tolerate this constraint.

2.6 DATA ANALYTIC PROCESS

Archives provide Foucault's preferred form of empirical evidence. His pronouncements are underpinned by close attention to first-hand and contemporaneous accounts of historical events (O'Farrell 2005:11; 52). Foucault's personal archives display the extensive note-taking and cross-referencing he engaged in prior to publication (Elden 2016:9). However, details of these practical research activities are subsumed within his published work, which foregrounds the outcome rather than the process of analysing historical data. Foucault does not promote a definitive analytic method or approach. Instead, he describes himself using 'gadgets' and 'tools' that he makes available for others to use and transform (1980d:65). He provides detailed descriptions of his concepts and analytic devices throughout his work. This 'toolbox' of methods promotes a choice of analytic tools rather than a uniform template (O'Farrell 2005:50).

A selection of Foucault's 'gadgets and tools' provide the basis for a theoretical framework that facilitates a *thematic analysis* of the data in this study. Clarke and Braun promote thematic analysis as a method for identifying and analysing patterns of meaning *within* and *across* qualitative data (2017:297). A thematic analysis can also acknowledge fluidity, interconnectivity, and paradox (Attride-Stirling 2001:402). It facilitates both inductive (data-driven) and deductive (theory-driven) analyses, and it has the potential to capture explicit surface semiotic meanings and implicit underlying meanings (Clarke and Braun 2017:298). Clark and Braun consider it an analytic method rather than a methodology, reflecting a theoretical flexibility that does not adhere to any specific theory of human meaning-making (2013:120).

A thematic analysis allows the researcher to 'unravel' and interpret data (Attride-Stirling 2001:402). As in any analytic method, it aims to be systematic and methodical (Attride-Stirling 2001:386). Activities of *coding* and *theme-development* are key elements of a thematic analytic approach (Braun and Clarke 2017:297). The process of coding in qualitative research

analysis allows the researcher to group pieces of data that share conceptual similarities (Taylor, Bogdan and DeVault 2016:177). Clarke and Braun define a *code* as the smallest unit of analysis that captures interesting features of the data, relevant to the research question (2017:297). They define a *theme* as a larger pattern of meaning underpinned by a central organizing concept or shared central idea (2017:297). These themes, described and named by the researcher, provide a framework for organizing and reporting the analytic observations (2017:297). The conceptualization of *codes* as 'the building blocks' of *themes* (Clarke and Braun 2017:297) accords well with the description of *statements* as the 'elementary units' of a *discourse* (Foucault 1972a:80). As outlined in Section 2.3, the term *statement* in this study refers to any fragment that can carry meaning, such as a piece of text, a diagram, or an image. The term *discourse* refers to a shared systematic way of speaking about a topic, arising from a group of *statements* that share a common system of formation. The congruence between statement/code and discourse/theme underpins the selection of a thematic analytic method to complement my research perspective and research question.

My analysis of *statements, discourses,* and *silences* arises from deductive engagement with the data, using a pre-determined theoretical framework. This analytic focus on theoretical and conceptual elements requires data-reduction and abstraction at each level of analysis, which inevitably reduces the complexity of the data. While emphasising the need for analytic claims to be anchored within a theoretical framework (Braun and Clarke 2006:97), Clarke and Braun also highlight the 'active role of the researcher' in coding and theme-development, pointing to the inherently subjective nature of a thematic analysis (2017:297). Similarly, the lack of formal guidelines for higher-phase analysis requires the researcher to choose which aspects to address (Braun and Clarke 2006:97). These subjective activities are part of the 'messy reality' of qualitative research (Clarke and Braun 2013:122).

In a sociological study of political struggle over citizens' emotions, Kotliar adopts an 'interpretive-constructivist' approach that relies on Foucault's

concept of discourse as a dynamic element in the construction and reconstruction of social realities and subjectivities (2016:272). Kotliar uses a thematic analysis of transcribed email exchanges, website posts and interviews to identify recurrent themes and major concepts, which are subsequently clustered and categorized according to their content (2016:272). The deductive thematic analytic method used in this study is similarly located within a social constructionist approach and it too draws from Foucault's conceptualisations of discourse. A set of historical documents are coded for two features, the first being *statements about literacy* that are grouped into *discourses*, and the second being *silences about literacy* that cohere into a *discursive device*. Findings from this thematic analysis are used to address the research question on the social construction of the illiterate person in twentieth-century Ireland. Foucault advises that his analytic focus is limited and bound to the data and therefore not generalizable (1972a:158-159), and this precept guides my interpretation of the analytic findings.

My thematic analysis is a three-part iterative, systematic process, grounded firmly in the data and using the theoretical framework described in Section 2.3. Like all analytic processes, it involves formal systematic data analysis requiring deep engagement with the data, accompanied by continued reflection and writing about the analytic outcomes (Saldana, Leavy, and Beretvas 2011:90). The first phase of the analysis examines *statements* about literacy in the data, and the second phase analyses the discourses arising from these groups of statements. The third phase examines the use of *silence* as a discursive strategy within the data. These three analytic activities are discussed in more detail in the next three sub-sections. While they are described sequentially, in practice they were recursive and reiterative, and were revisited throughout the study.

ANALYSING STATEMENTS

Foucault's contention that 'ways of speaking' often have material consequences orientates the thematic analysis to the discursive level of the documents, focusing on the statements they contain. Statements are regarded as the 'elementary units' of a discourse (Foucault 1972a:80), thus providing the starting point for the analysis. *Statements* are understood here as any part of the document that conveys meaning about literacy or illiteracy. These include text, diagrams and statistical tables. Such statements fulfil several functions. They provide samples of contemporary anecdotal and numerical evidence that complement and cross-cut each other, providing a multi-layered account of the *illiterate person* in twentieth century Ireland. They also produce definitions, descriptions, explanations and solutions pertaining to the illiterate person, providing a means to analyse the discourses they belong to.

The first analytic phase requires reading and re-reading the documents used as data, to gain familiarity with the topics and themes discussed, to transcribe the statements they contained, and to understand links between and across the documents. Most archives allow researchers to use pencils or laptops. I use pencil and paper to transcribe every statement related to literacy and illiteracy into dedicated notebooks, building up a set of notebooks that stores these extracts from the data. The process of hand transcription acts as a first analytic examination. The close attention required for accurate transcription requires each statement to be read in detail. This focuses attention on the choices of words and punctuation used. The activity of transcribing phrases from a document evokes memories of transcribing other similar phrases elsewhere, generating a sense of engaging deeply with the current document and others produced before and after it. Tamboukou describes these interactions between researcher, data and archive as 'multifarious entanglements' of the material and discursive, that operate together to produce the research findings (2014:622).

The statements originally read in one context within the archive are later read in a more instrumental way outside the archive. This involves a methodical examination of the statements, noting the multiple ways that the *illiterate person* is 'spoken of', at both the surface level and within the implied assumptions. Transforming the written transcriptions to a digital format allows analytic software packages such as MAXQDA to locate and count researcher-determined words and phrases. As Feeley remarks, the software assists in retrieving data for comparison and facilitates coding the data, but it does not replace the cognitive activity required in data analysis (2014:35). The need to move beyond a content analysis to identify relationships and implications requires a more nuanced interaction, described as 'immersion in the data' by Carabine (2001:282). Carabine refers to the emergence of themes and categories arising from such immersion (2001:284). The term 'emergence' suggests that fully-realised 'themes' and 'categories' reside within the data, waiting to be discovered by the researcher. However, the analytic process that Carabine goes on to describe relies on analytic questions derived from interaction with Foucault's work, facilitating deductive abstractions from the data. As Braun and Clarke remark, such researcher-led activity precludes any claims that themes 'emerge' of their own accord (2006:7). The term 'emergence' over-simplifies the work involved in developing, consolidating and applying the theoretical framework described earlier in Section 2.3. Unless the immersion process is guided by a theoretical framework focused on specific elements, there is a risk of drowning in the data.

The analytic process attempts to make the premises of each statement explicit by examining the conditions that make the statement possible (Foucault 1972a:108). A constant iteration between surface semiotic level and the implicit assumptions addresses the analytic question: What must be the case for this particular statement to make sense? In Becker's terms, the analysis conducts an appraisal of implicit assumptions, seeking the hidden major premises that underlie minor premises and conclusions provided by the statements (Becker 1998:149). The analysis therefore

seeks to explicate the judgements, assessments and proposed solutions contained within the statements. Elements of *categorization* and *conformation* within the statements are examined. Metaphors, descriptions, forms of measurement, and methods of differentiation are considered ways to effect categorization. Strategies of humiliation, shaming, and correction are used to justify interventions that enforce conformation to the norm, and the application of solutions to what is considered abnormal. The analysis adopts Becker's advice to search for the source, the implications and the effects of activities that differentiate and categorize (Becker 1998:150). These analytic questions are asked across the entire data, and this process informs my determination of prevalence (Braun and Clarke 2006:11). Features that are prevalent across the data are considered more significant than once-off occurrences, as the recurrence of common elements across different sites indicates a shared way of speaking, a discourse.

ANALYSING DISCOURSES

The second analytic phase focuses attention on each set of linked statements, now named as a *discourse,* to identify the unifying features. This part of the analytic process aims to produce a description and name for each discourse (Braun and Clarke 2006:94). It involves close interrogation of the discourse to explicate the different discursive elements. Each discourse produces the *illiterate person* as an object, expressed in the statements that describe, explain, pronounce judgements and promote solutions to the illiterate person. Similarly, each discourse assigns a set of subject positions. Each named discourse has objectives of intervention, subject positions, explanations and proposed solutions relevant to the illiterate person. The power of each discourse to assign subject positions and objectives of intervention is understood as a local operation of power, where the different discourses will justify different ways of treating the illiterate person. The capacity of each discourse for political struggle (Foucault 1972a:120), their transformations, and their relations to social

institutions are also considered (1972b:235). The analysis also tries to identify the relations between the status, site and subjects of the discourse (1972a:50-55). This process of naming and explicating a discourse is an iterative process that moves back and forth within the groups of statements. This analytic process is designed to ultimately produce a detailed description of the discourses relevant to the *illiterate person*, the interrelationships between them and their interactions with other discourses and institutions in twentieth-century Ireland. Foucault differentiates the description of a discourse from an analysis of its intentions (1972a:27). He is not interested in what he terms 'the transcendental subject' or 'psychological subjectivity', but in how the discourse determines the subject (1972a:55). This contrasts to the normative, evaluative and prescriptive focus on social change within the Critical Discourse Analytic (CDA) approach advocated by Fairclough (2010:ix). CDA applies 'a coherent set of values' to address how 'wrongs' might be 'righted' (2010:7). Another discourse analytic approach, the Sociology of Knowledge Approach to Discourse (SKAD) amalgamates the work of Foucault with that of Berger and Luckmann (1966) and Hall (1997). The SKAD approach analyses social relationships and politics of power/knowledge, using *reconstruction*, a process of theoretically informed empirical inquiry in the pragmatist sense (Keller 2017:65). In allocating a key role to human actors, SKAD incorporates the contradictory theoretical positions of Foucault and Hall in relation to agency and representation. My analytic approach prioritises social interaction, discursive resources and social effects over human agency.

ANALYSING SILENCES

The third analytic phase responds to the presence of silences within the data. Silence is considered a strategic device that offers support to a discourse, so this analytic mode examines the data for different forms of silence in relation to the *illiterate person*. It initially examines the deployment of silence in terms of obvious gaps, anomalies and exclusions.

This draws on wider reading, where assumptions about what *should* or *could* be present are compared to what *is* present.   Carabine explicitly seeks specific gaps and silences related to gender and class in her data on single motherhood (2001:285).   The absence of statements on male responsibility is one evident gap in her data, pointing to a gender differentiation that treats single mothers differently from single fathers. Carabine concludes that the representation of single mothers as 'immoral' is strengthened by the absence of a similar morality discourse for men (2001:296).   While the physical skills required for literacy are not considered gendered activities, literacy practices and literacy events are often gender-differentiated.   Although the *illiterate person* is not considered in a gendered way within this study, gendered aspects are noted when encountered in the data.   A sensitivity to absences relating to class directs attention to gaps such as the limited information on the literacy of the elite. These absences are pursued through the data.

The data is also examined for silences reflecting the muted information and stifled knowledge described by Foucault. Early in the project, a muted form of silence is noted in relation to incomplete school attendance statistics, and as a result, other statistical statements are examined carefully to see how they relay information. The concept of a silence that points to 'stifled knowledge' leads to analytic interest in the transmission of knowledge about the *illiterate person*.   As in the analysis of discourses, the analytic process aims to produce a detailed description of the strategic use of silence in the documents.

The analytic process described here orientates the thematic analysis towards considering the position of the illiterate person in the context of the twentieth-century Irish nation-state, and it facilitates formulating an answer to the research question: How is the illiterate person constructed in twentieth-century Ireland?   Figure 2.B summarises these three analytic operations.

As in other thematic analyses, the analytic questions are not directly related to the overall research question (Braun and Clarke 2006:85). However, there is consistency in relation to the themes that drive the analysis, and in relation to what counts as prevalence across the data (2006:11).

FIGURE 2.B: THREE PHASES OF THE THEMATIC ANALYSIS

ANALYTIC FOCUS	ANALYTIC QUESTIONS
STATEMENTS	What is being said about the illiterate person? What must be the case for this particular statement to make sense? Identify: categorizations, differentiations, comparisons, hierarchizations, exclusions, homogenizations, binary oppositions, stereotyping, shaming, correction, interventions, judgements, assessments, proposed solutions What are the sources, implications and effects of activities that differentiate and categorize?
DISCOURSES	What are the status and sites of the discourse? What is considered normal and abnormal within the discourse? What is included and what is excluded? How is the illiterate person constructed and positioned within the discourse? What are the subject positions? What objects of intervention are assigned to be acted upon? Is there a capacity for political struggle? Are there links with social institutions?
SILENCES	How are discursive strategies of silence deployed in the data? What are the obvious gaps and absences? Are there muted references to the illiterate person? How is knowledge about the illiterate person presented?

From a realist perspective, this is an incomplete analysis, as it pays little attention to the underlying social processes that structure and organise the documents used as data. From an idealist perspective, the analysis ignores

the meanings and intentions of the document's authors, and imposes an etic interpretation of the data, using theoretically-derived concepts. From a positivist perspective, the analysis cannot produce scientific findings as it does not identify an observable link between the data and the society it circulates in. The analysis does not identify causality, and it evades explanations or predictions. The analysis instead dissects the surface appearance of the data to explore the discourses evident within it, producing what Kendall and Wickham call a 'flat' account (1999:140). This analysis, informed by concepts of discourse, power, knowledge and silence derived from Foucault, highlights the shared discursive resources drawn upon in social interactions relating to the *illiterate person*. These resources are often implicit and unacknowledged, not always evident in formal discussions on the topic. The thematic analytic approach adopted here provides access to these tacit components of Irish social life, to facilitate consideration of how they influence material conditions for a significant group within the Irish population.

2.7 CONCLUSION

Expert, legislative and institutional knowledge provide a range of formal definitions of literacy and illiteracy. However, the exclusion and isolation ascribed to those with literacy difficulty is experienced in the everyday social world as well as in the legislative and expert domains. This research project responds to the spirit of sociological inquiry that Mills promoted, by questioning long-standing everyday assumptions about the *illiterate person* in Ireland. It 'troubles' a topic that is long considered settled.

The social constructionist approach focuses attention on the 'everyday' knowledge used to construct and position the *illiterate person.* The thematic analytic method described here examines the *statements*, *discourses*, and *silences* that contribute to the everyday knowledge about the *illiterate person* in Irish society. Discourses shared through dynamic social interaction are continuously changing, with multiple versions in

circulation at any one time. Recognising the impossibility of capturing all discourses about the *illiterate person*, this study focuses on a small set of twentieth-century documents, and it describes the discourses and silences evident within them.

Documents based on the topic of the *illiterate person* facilitate analysis of more than the statements contained within them. A written document is a record of social interaction, where those who write for public consumption engage with their intended audience. They will make use of 'ways of speaking' already known to their readership. They will often explain new contributions in terms of existing ones. Conceptualising documents as nodes within a wider network draws attention to their intertextual nature. They interact with other documents and discourses, implicitly and explicitly. Some documents may be tellingly silent in relation to aspects that are discussed in others. The statements and the silences evident within each document are 'fixed' for a moment in time, providing an opportunity to explore how the discourses and silences operate together to construct the *illiterate person*.

This thematic analysis can be characterised as an etic, analyst-driven, deductive analysis, guided by analytic questions derived from Foucault's work. Statements extracted from the documents are interrogated using specific analytic questions related to pre-existing theoretical and epistemological commitments. The analysis explicates discourses in terms of the subject positions, objectives of intervention, explanations and proposed solutions, using concepts defined by Foucault. These analytic findings are grounded in the data and they provide the basis to develop an interpretation based on the theoretical framework. Concepts of discourse, power, knowledge and silence are important considerations in this exploration of how the *illiterate person* is positioned in twentieth-century Ireland. Although past discourses cannot 'explain' events in the present day, the findings from this analysis can provide a starting point in questioning assumptions within contemporary 'ways of speaking' about the *illiterate person* in Ireland.

This chapter outlines the theoretical and analytical frameworks underpinning the research approach. The next chapter is the first of five chronologically-ordered chapters that describe and discuss the empirical research findings. Chapter 3 examines statements relating to literacy and illiteracy contained within documents produced during the years 1900-1920. The chapter describes the discourses evident in the data, how they position the *illiterate person*, how they produce knowledge about illiteracy, and the silences that are evident.

CHAPTER 3: THE ERA OF ANTICIPATION 1900 TO 1921

3.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter focuses attention the years 1900 to 1921, prior to Irish Independence. The *United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland* is a bounded political entity, where formal legal instruments identify the right of the British Parliament to govern Ireland. Long-running political negotiations for Home Rule in Ireland form a backdrop to this era of anticipation. The Second Home Rule Bill in 1893 obtains a Commons majority before being defeated in the House of Lords, an indication that passage of Home Rule legislation is within reach. Political options under consideration at the turn of the century include maintenance of the Union, reinstatement of a subordinate Irish Parliament within the Union, and separate nationhood for Ireland (Mansergh1975:319). The lengthy existence of this debate at political level ensures that the future shape of Ireland is a topic of discussion within the public sphere. The shared English language allows debate on this topic to circulate across both islands of the United Kingdom, while British liberalism in relation to publication permits printed expression of a variety of political positions (Darnton 2014:89). In this period of 'heavy modernity' (Bauman 2001:21), the level of social certainty generated within a relatively fixed society allow claims to be laid on the future (2001:36). In the early twentieth century, there is an implicit belief that the future can be planned. The documents discussed in this chapter are produced in the context of designing an anticipated new Ireland, which included deliberation on the state's responsibility to provide literacy through the state-funded mass education system.

The chapter considers statements relating to literacy and illiteracy, contained within a selection of publications produced during this time,

ranging from official Government reports, published books, privately printed pamphlets and publications of nationalist organisations. These statements cohere around two discourses, a *discourse of deficiency* and a *discourse of superior intellect*, linked to political affiliations. The chapter describes these two discourses, how they position the *illiterate person*, how they produce knowledge about literacy, and the silences that are evident. Section 3.2 considers statements orientated to a continuing Union between Ireland and Great Britain. Section 3.3 examines statements by nationalists writing in anticipation of an independent Ireland. Section 3.4 considers the social contexts of the different literacies evident in these early years of the twentieth century.

3.2 LITERACY IN THE SCHOOLS

A 1904 British Government Report on *Primary Education in Ireland* (HMSO 1904), by an English Primary Schools Inspector, F. H. Dale, is regularly cited in accounts of Irish education (e.g. Akenson 1975:5; T. Walsh 2012:63). It provides an 'outsider' view of Irish state-funded National Schools at the start of the twentieth century. The report examines the 'economy and efficiency' of Irish state-funded National Schools and compares their 'premises, equipment, staffing and instruction' with elementary schools in England (HMSO 1904:2). Dale assesses physical conditions in the Irish schools as well as pedagogical methods and makes recommendations to the British Government. He conforms to the established scientific approach of previous British Government inquiries by undertaking personal observation within selected Irish National Schools, and by conducting formal interviews with Schools Inspectors. The knowledge gained from this first-hand evidence allows him to describe in detail and to generalise from his observations. English educational provisions act as benchmarks for Dale, who finds that Irish conditions compare unfavourably. The report contains a range of statements in

relation to school attendance, progression within schools and literacy tuition, some of which are examined here.

Dale notes that Irish schools use slates for writing, discontinued by now in most of England. He draws attention to widespread overcrowding in Irish schools and their location in unsuitable premises. The urban schools he visits are generally overcrowded, unclean and under-resourced. They typically consist of large rooms occupied by three or more classes, with up to 200 children crowded into one space, sometimes overflowing into hallways. As there are few desks, the pupils rotate between sitting and standing during the school day. The rural schools are markedly dirtier than the urban schools. However, they are generally not overcrowded, as rural school attendance rates tend to be lower than in urban schools. Due to the Catholic Church's emphasis on gender and age segregation, there are separate boys' and girls' schools, and separate Infant and Senior schools, all with Principal Teachers and Assistants. Dale remarks on the extra expenditure incurred by this duplication, while at the same time noting the meagre teaching resources provided in the schools.

Under the Irish Education regulations, the pupil-teacher ratio is higher in Ireland. An Assistant Teacher is employed only when average daily attendance reaches 60, compared to the lower number of 50 in England.

> A School with an average attendance of (say) fifty-nine children will generally have nearly ninety on the rolls; and in the months when attendance is at its best, there will be some seventy or more children present. Without any blame being due to the Teacher, the Irish Schools of this kind, where one Teacher has to struggle with some forty to seventy children of all ages, are in a most unsatisfactory condition, as my experience proved.
> (HMSO 1904:49)

The low level of school attendance is presented as a well-established and unremarkable feature of Irish education. The average school attendance rate in Ireland for 1902 is 65%, compared to 84% in England (HMSO

1904:53). The Irish Education Act 1892 allows exemptions from school enrolment and attendance on numerous grounds, including domestic necessity, the employment of children in farming and fishing, and distance from school in remote areas. Akenson refers to the Act as 'a net with more gaps than webbing' (Akenson 1975:11). The Catholic hierarchy considers compulsory education to be an unwelcome infringement on parental rights, and their lack of interest in the enforcement of school attendance legislation is another factor in the tolerance of low school attendance rates (Akenson 1975:11).

Although he refers to the legal exemptions, Dale assigns a main cause of poor attendance to the poverty of parents, who require their children's contributions as wage earners or as labour on family farms. He notes the presence of 'extreme poverty' on several occasions, although he does not discuss it.   He also considers parental ignorance and apathy as further explanations for low school attendance, finding that '…irregularity [in attendance] is in a far larger proportion of cases than in England due to the apathy and ignorance of parents' (HMSO 1904:56).   Dale makes a strong correlation between school attendance and educational attainment:

> It is obvious that the children whose attendance at School is limited to 50 or 100 days a year cannot be expected to make much progress. In consequence, there are almost invariably to be found a number of children, forming in the country Schools that I visited some 15 to 25 per cent of the scholars, who were in a very low standard for their age, and who, though frequently eleven or twelve years of age, could only read or write at all with difficulty. Even in the town Schools these children are much more numerous than in England.
> In the St Joseph's Girls School in Dublin, for example, I found out of thirty-four children present in Standard IV - a class which an English child, as a rule, leaves at eleven years of age - four children over thirteen, seven over twelve years of age. In these cases it appeared almost invariably upon enquiry, that the

defective education was due to irregularity of attendance. Further, though the syllabus for the higher classes, Standards V and VI, in Ireland is not so difficult as in England, the number of children who reach them is smaller.
(HMSO 1904:55)

This extract describes poor progression to the higher standards. Despite an earlier acknowledgement of poor resources and large classes, the extract demonstrates the assumption that poor education is solely due to poor attendance. The comparison with English provisions underlines their superiority, emphasised regularly throughout the report.

Dale notes the limited presence of books, a vital resource for literacy. Local Authorities in England supply schoolbooks to pupils, while Irish pupils must provide their own. Poorer children depend on the teacher's generosity to obtain books. Dale remarks that the books supplied by parents are often questionable:

On the other hand, in consequence of the narrow means of the parents, the Reading-books are cheaper and, as a rule, not so full or good as the English books; and in the upper classes the children have only two readers each instead of three, as is usual in England.
(HMSO 1904:14)

School libraries, 'one of the most useful ways of fostering a love of reading among children', are present in over 25% of English schools, but in only 6% of Irish schools (HMSO 1904:15).

Dale uses a description of reading and writing instruction in Infants classes to illustrate deficiencies in terms of discipline, methods, and aims of instruction (HMSO 1904:59).

In the Reading, which occupies a considerable part of the school-hours, the younger children are made to repeat, generally together, some isolated words

written on the blackboard time after time, though they frequently do not understand the meaning of the words; while the older children, reading from a small book of some thirty pages, repeat similarly each page again and again until, as I found not uncommonly, they know it by heart.

It is difficult to convey by a description to anyone who has not been present at this type of lesson, which was usual in my experience, a conception of the extent to which this monotonous repetition of the same few pages day by day is carried in Irish schools, the object being that the children may be certain to know the particular words or sentences picked out by the Inspector on the day of examination. I very rarely heard a Teacher encourage the children to talk about the subject matter of the piece read or to connect it with any event or lesson, so as to lead them to regard a Reading lesson as other than an aimless repetition of sounds. Nor is this a matter for surprise, since such work would fall entirely outside the scope of the examination.

Similarly, the instruction in Writing is, as a rule, unconnected with the Reading or with lessons in Drawing, while in Arithmetic very much less use than in England is made of concrete illustrations or of the Ball-frame.

(HMSO 1904:60)

Dale finds that the Irish schools focus on mechanical accuracy and recall to the detriment of other elements of literacy. He discusses this aspect several times in the report, emphasising the superior outcomes of schools in England. He suggests that an explanation lies in the long-term effects of the *payment-by-results* system deployed in Ireland between 1872 and 1900. This encouraged the 'didactic and mechanical' delivery of a narrow range of subjects (T. Walsh 2012:19). In Dale's view, the *payments-by-results* approach was designed to ensure that children were 'literate' in only a technical sense. He finds that the National Schools in 1904 continue to focus solely on the rigid and narrow literacy syllabus formerly examined by the Schools Inspectors (HMSO 1904:66). He remarks that this limited

proficiency provides a poor preparation for Technical and Secondary education (HMSO 1904:65). The mechanistic literacy and absence of *higher-order literacy skills* in Irish National Schools is noted in several places:

> Similarly, much more time is spent in Irish than in English schools on the transcription of passages from the reading book - often passages of the most unsuitable character.
> (HMSO 1904:60)

> The Reading in Irish Schools is quite as fluent and correct as in English [schools], though, as I have said, frequently more monotonous and indistinct; but the children, save in exceptional cases, have not been so well trained as in England to obtain a grasp of the subject matter read, or to regard reading as a means of obtaining information. I commonly found that though the children had been reading a single small book for a year, they were unable to give, when questioned, any account of the general substance of a piece in it, even though in a few cases the piece had been read the day before my visit (HMSO 1904:63).

> As may be supposed from the excessive attention paid to Spelling, Dictation, and Transcription, the really valuable and educative part of this branch of School work viz., the training of the children to express their ideas in simple yet correct language, to which Handwriting and Spelling are but a means, has been much neglected in Irish Schools.
> (HMSO 1904:64)

> The Composition taken was usually limited to letter-writing. Only in a few of the best Schools was it connected at all with the Reading, or used to test the recollection of any oral lesson previously given by the Teacher.
> (HMSO 1904:64)

> Grammar is not connected with the Composition and
> the children, though having a good knowledge of the
> technical terms used in Grammar and able to parse
> isolated words very well, make bad grammatical
> blunders in their written work.
> (HMSO 1904:65)

These statements here and throughout the report describe a *banking model* of education (Freire [1970] 1996), where teachers provide disparate pieces of information to uncritical students. The established norm of a limited, functional, circumscribed literacy is evident. Literacy tuition is accompanied by rules and repetition that are drilled and imprinted upon the students, requiring them to conform to a mechanistic *lower-order* form of reading and writing. The activities of copying and letter-writing, remarked upon here, are recurring features in many other discussions of literacy, identifying their roles as pivotal elements of literacy tuition within mass education.

Dale consistently categorizes Irish schools as belonging to a past, less-developed age, stating that Irish schools resemble English schools of twenty years earlier. His proposed solution is to apply English administrative, legislative and pedagogical practices to the Irish education system.

The *Seventieth Report of the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland* (HMSO 1905) is an 'insider account' of the Irish National Schools produced the year following Dale's report. It responds to Dale's findings by highlighting the steady decline in illiteracy since the introduction of National Schools in 1831. Demonstrating full confidence in the Census returns as evidence of literacy rates, the report recounts the 'reduction in the percentage of illiterates from 47 per cent in 1851 to 14 per cent in 1901', among those aged 5 years old and upwards (HMSO 1905:2). However, later in the same page, it remarks: 'Nevertheless, the number of illiterate voters who presented themselves at the last General Election, made it evident that the condition of elementary education in Ireland was still defective' (HMSO 1905:2).

The Commissioners give detailed attention to school attendance, acknowledging that the average Irish school attendance rate of 'about 65%' compares unfavourably to that of Scotland at 85% (HMSO 1905:6). The 1901 Census returns are used to show school attendance rates throughout the island of Ireland during the week ending 11th May 1901 (HMSO 1905:46). These figures show that 29% of Irish children from 6-14 years were not in attendance at any school in that week. The percentage *not attending* school ranged from 21% in Cork to 47% in Donegal, with the rate for Dublin at 23% (HMSO 1905:46).

These enrolment and attendance rates suggest that substantial numbers of children do not attend school. Absences from school are measured, but unlike Dale, the Commissioners are silent about possible causes. Alternative explanations such as attendance at Christian Brothers schools and private provisions outside of the National School system, exemptions from attendance under the Education Ireland Act 1892, child labour, childhood incapacity, and child mortality are not discussed. The silence about unenrolled and absent children suggests that these children are of little concern to the Commissioners of National Education in Ireland.

In the second decade of the century, the topics of illiteracy, school attendance and early school leaving feature in two pamphlets published privately by Frederick W. Ryan, a wealthy Irish Catholic barrister, President of the Juvenile Traders Court, and later Chairman of Mountjoy Brewery (Findlater 2001:86). The pamphlets arise from papers Ryan presented to the Statistical and Social Inquiry Society of Ireland (SSISI) in 1912 and 1917. The SSISI membership is drawn from a cross-section of the Irish academic, business and professional elites. Founded in 1847, it provides a forum to discuss the social conditions of Ireland (Daly 2007:227). In the late twentieth century, it sponsors the establishment of the Economic Research Institute, later the Economic and Social Research Institute (Murray 2012:68). Being a non-political organisation, senior administrative officials participate, including those responsible for the Census. SSISI

members also contribute to the design of questions asked on the Census forms, notably in 1881, in 1926 and in 1946 (Daly 1997:40).

F. W. Ryan's 1912 pamphlet *School Attendance in Ireland under the compulsory clauses of the Irish Education Act, 1892* identifies education standards in England as the norm. Ryan, like Dale, compares school attendance and illiteracy rates in Ireland to those in England. Ryan points to differences between the two legislative frameworks that facilitate poor school attendance in Ireland. The *1880 Education Act* in England compels children to attend school every day, while the *Irish Education Act 1892* requires a minimum of 150 days' attendance out of a school year of 220 days. Ryan finds that the minimum requirement in Ireland has become the accepted rate. He states that at December 1910, only 4% of Irish children attended more than 200 days. 17% attended the legal minimum of 150 days, while 11% attended under 100 days and 9% attended less than 50 days.

As well as discussing the school attendance rates derived from enrolment records, Ryan draws attention to the children who are not enrolled in any school, stating that the number of children 'failing to get an education' is unknown by the state (1912:12). Under the *1892 Irish Education Act,* Irish children living more than 2 miles from a school need not enrol. In England, the local authorities organise transport for such children (1912:8). Local Authorities in Ireland are not compelled to enact the school attendance provisions of the 1892 Act. Even when enacted, the resources are limited. There are 18 School Attendance Inspectors for 45,000 children in Dublin. The average daily attendance in Dublin is 78% of those enrolled, while the corresponding rates for London and Birmingham are 89% and 90% respectively (1912:13).

Ryan outlines the regulatory provisions governing the education of children engaged in street trading and factory work. He remarks that the Street Trading Bye-Laws are more lenient in Ireland than in England. Those under 11 years are not legally allowed to work as street traders in Dublin, but

those aged 12-14 years may if they have reached the equivalent of Fourth Standard proficiency in 'the 3Rs', provided they also attend school for the minimum 150 days. Ryan refers to this as the 'Dunce's Certificate required by Dublin Corporation' (1912:9).

In relation to factory work, the *Workshop and Factory Acts* from 1895 in England require children employed in factories to have achieved Seventh Standard proficiency as well as a minimum number of annual attendances in the preceding 5 years. They must also attend school on a half-time basis during the working week. Although the Act was extended to Ireland in 1901, the relevant certificate of proficiency is at Fifth Standard level, and while 3,550 such 'half-time' pupils are on the National School Rolls, only half attended in 1910 (Ryan 1912:11). These legislative provisions that facilitate farm work, domestic work, street trading and factory work establish that child labour is acceptable in this era. They also grant official recognition to Fourth and Fifth Standards as acceptable points of departure from compulsory mass education.

Ryan uses statistics derived from electoral registers and marriage registers to compare literacy rates between Ireland and other parts of the United Kingdom. The Irish literacy rate is consistently lower:

> A rough proof of the relative progress in the two countries will be found in the facts that in a recent year those voting at elections in Ireland over 10 per cent could not write; the corresponding number in England and Wales is less than 2 per cent.
> (Ryan 1912:12)

> Take, therefore, the signing of the marriage register by mark, representing in part, the young Ireland. Over 5% and in country parts, over 6% or 7%, do so by mark in Ireland, the corresponding figure for the rest of the United Kingdom is less than 2%.
> (Ryan 1912:13)

Mr Graham Balfour, the educationalist, estimated not ten years ago that one-eighth of the Irish population were illiterate. The superiority of the English figures can only be ascribed to the high standard of attendance required by law, the English Education Acts requiring attendance on every occasion the school is open.
(Ryan 1912:13)

The prevalence of poor attendance and early school leaving is discussed in Ryan's 1917 pamphlet *The Preparation of National School Pupils for Technical Training and Industrial Life.* He ascribes the low standards of education in the National Schools to 'bad attendance' and 'leaving school too soon' (Ryan 1917:4). He provides statistical tables on school attendance and early school leaving in the Dublin area for 1914, focusing exclusively on boys. His tables are reproduced here as Figures 3.A, 3.B and 3.C. He finds that 17,281 boys are enrolled in Standards 1 to 8 at December 1914. Figure 3.A shows that 12,771 of these are in Standards 1 and 2, and just 4,510 in the higher standards 3 to 8. Figure 3.B shows the marked decline in progression to the higher standards. Remarking that 'the distribution has remained constant in recent successive years' Ryan concludes that there are presumably 8,000 boys each year who have not advanced far beyond Standard 2 (1917:15). Attendance rates for the 17,281 boys enrolled in 1914 are presented in Figure 3.C. Discrepant numbers between Figures 3.A and 3.B are contained in the original tables.

FIGURE 3.A: BOYS ENROLLED ON 31ST DECEMBER 1914 IN DUBLIN

NATIONAL SCHOOL STANDARD	NUMBER OF BOYS
Standards 1 and 2	12,771
Standards 3 to 8	4.510
TOTAL	**17,281**

Source: Ryan 1917:15

FIGURE 3.B: BOYS ENROLLED ON 31ST DECEMBER 1914 IN DUBLIN BY STANDARD

NATIONAL SCHOOL STANDARD	NUMBER OF BOYS
Enrolled in Standard 3	1,747
Enrolled in Standard 4	1,270
Enrolled in Standard 5	840
Enrolled in Standard 6	448
Enrolled in Standard 7	161
Enrolled in Standard 8	35
TOTAL	**4,501**

Source: Ryan 1917:15

FIGURE 3.C: BOYS ANNUAL ATTENDANCE RATE ON 31ST DECEMBER 1914

ANNUAL ATTENDANCE	NUMBER OF BOYS
200 days and over	269
175 - 200 days	3,331
150 - 175 days	3,404
125-150 days	2,489
100 - 125 days	1,767
75 - 100 days	2,252
50 - 75 days	1,859
Under 50 days	1,910
TOTAL	**17,281**

Source: Ryan 1917:16

Of the 17,281 boys enrolled at December 1914, 10, 277 (59%) did not meet the legal minimum requirement of 150 days' attendance. Ryan remarks that they could not have made much progress in their schooling (1917:16).

As in his 1912 pamphlet, he proposes amending the Education Act of 1892 regarding compulsory attendance.

Dale in 1904 remarks on the impact of poor literacy proficiency on preparation for Technical and Secondary education (HMSO 1904:65). Ryan in 1912 also draws attention to the limited proficiency of National School pupils who progress to Technical Schools:

> If proof were needed I would point out that the Technical Schools in this city are forced to hold introductory classes in Elementary Mathematics and English for many of their pupils.
> (Ryan 1912:13)

The 1917 pamphlet also discusses 'the young worker backward in his reading' (Ryan 1917:6). Ryan recommends the provision of Continuation classes and Night Schools for those who have left school early. There were 631 Night Schools in 1905, but by 1915 there are only 301. In a 1913 journal article, Ryan finds a small proportion of Evening Schools in proportion to day schools in that year: 8,337 Elementary [National] Schools in 1913 compared to 412 elementary Evening Schools (1913:70). He states that no detailed programme exists for the Night Schools, and there are no suitable school readers for the students (1917:6). Grant aid for Elementary Evening Schools was introduced as part of the Primary Education system from 1846, but gradually became confined to the Dublin area. Some are attached to National Schools and Technical Schools to teach those who cannot attend during the day, and others are run by the Gaelic League to teach Irish only (Department of Education Annual Statistical Report 1929:19). The scheme is discontinued in 1929 (DEASR 1931:135).

Ryan, like Dale, refers to the extreme poverty among those whose children attend National Schools. He states that most of the poor children attending Dublin National Schools live in tenements, a floating population subject to eviction, noting that there are 250 'ejectment cases' weekly in the Police Courts (Ryan 1912:9). Despite recording these circumstances, Ryan

presents Irish parents as deliberately rational and wilfully neglectful in relation to school attendance. He finds that they abide by only the minimum requirements of the Education Act by making full use of clauses that exempt school attendance. Echoing Dale's description of parental apathy and ignorance, Ryan views parents as being responsible for their children's poor educational standards:

> ...there seems such a general apathy in educational matters among the parents of the bulk of the children in National Schools, that the extent of their schooling largely depends upon the compulsory attendance clauses of the Act in question.
> (Ryan1912:4)

As in Dale's Report, levels of school attendance in England are presented as the norm, and Irish equivalents are consistently lower. The laws prevailing in England are noted with approval, leading Ryan to propose the solution of adopting English legislative remedies.

Newspapers often provide incidental remarks describing everyday uses of literacy. Newspaper reports describing the first Old Age Pension payments in January 1909 record the high numbers of elderly claimants who sign with a mark, with 'not one in forty' able to sign in Tralee (Ó Gráda 2002:129). The Commissioners Report in 1905 and Ryan in 1912 both remark on the presence of illiterate voters at elections, where only adult men can vote. When a voter declares himself illiterate, the presiding officer is obliged to clear the polling booth, ask the voter his preference and then mark the paper on his behalf. This allows the voter's 'secret' ballot to be overheard, providing a public declaration of illiteracy. A newspaper report from 1901 describes *illiterate voters* in a Galway City by- election:

> The polling for the Claddagh district took place at the local National School, and shortly after the booths were opened a large detachment of the fishermen appeared upon the scene for the purpose of recording their votes, accompanied by some half

dozen Roman Catholic clergymen. At the last election the Claddagh District went solidly for the Hon. Martin Morris, but on this occasion the electors there have turned over almost in a body to the support of the Nationalist party. Many of the fishermen are illiterate, and till two o'clock only one of these illiterates had cast his vote in favour of the Unionist candidate.
(Irish Times 1901)

The defeated Unionist candidate in this by-election was Horace Plunkett. Plunkett remarks on the literacy of adults in *Ireland in the New Century* (Plunkett 1904). He refers to '…the intellectual qualities with which the race is admittedly gifted' (1904:viii). The Irish people are 'endowed with intellectual capacities of a high order,' possessing 'literary gifts and an artistic sense', but the Census returns show that 'there are still large numbers who escape the tyranny of books' (1904:33). He writes 'The statement that our people do not read books is generally accepted as true' (1904:151). He describes farmers whose education is poor, 'though their native intelligence was keen and receptive' (1904:133). He argues that the intellectual capacities of the Irish people have not been developed properly within the existing political and social structures. Plunkett points to the success of the Irish Agricultural Organisation Society he founded as proof that an education system orientated to the Irish population would enhance and develop their innate qualities. Like the previously discussed publications, he calls for improvements to the existing education system, although he looks beyond Britain to the Danish adult education provision as a useful model (1904:131).

The statements examined here make a strong positive correlation between school attendance and literacy, suggesting an uncritical belief in the capacity of the education system to produce literacy. There is an underlying assumption that mere attendance at a school is the catalyst for literacy, notwithstanding overcrowded classrooms, poor teaching resources and a lack of printed books. Literacy is treated as a transparent indicator of educational achievement, providing a basis to compare educational

outcomes in Britain and Ireland. The assessment of literacy within the *payment-by-results* system demonstrates one use of literacy as an instrument to regulate and control both teachers and pupils. Although *payment-by-results* is discontinued, the routine inspection of reading and handwriting are continuing manifestations of the insidious supervision of the pupil and the school. This normalised integrated system of disciplinary surveillance uses 'simple instruments' of hierarchical observation and subjective judgement, whether individually or combined in the direct examination (Foucault 1977a:170). The extracts demonstrate the use of statistical operations to transform observations and measurements into categories and percentages displayed in tables (Foucault 1977a:148), thereby producing new knowledge to assist in further regulating schools. Such statistical operations provide an objective basis to make judgements and determine solutions.

The statements coalesce to produce a *discourse of deficiency*, where the state-funded Irish National Schools are characterised in deficit terms. There are deficiencies in the physical provisions, the legislative provisions and the material provisions of Irish schools. Irish parents are deficient in their support of schooling, displaying 'apathy' and 'ignorance'. British educational standards and educational practices are constructed as the norms, and the Irish provisions consistently fall short. Irish schools are lacking in books and reading material as well as desks and physical space. The Irish education regulations contain lower educational standards and lower school attendance requirements than those pertaining to other parts of the United Kingdom. The *illiterate person* is both a product and proof of this deficiency.

The *discourse of deficiency* is centred upon the objective of 'education in Ireland', ultimately producing 'citizens of the British Empire'. Irish children are positioned as 'poorly educated' in these terms. Irish parents are 'apathetic' in their support for this enterprise. Comparisons between Britain and Ireland exclude any consideration of economic, political or denominational contexts. There is silence about the state-sanctioned role

of the churches within the Irish education system, overlooking their power in shaping legislative measures relating to school attendance and educational resources in Ireland. The British state in Ireland shared its educational power with churches whose interests would have been affected by deficiency-addressing measures.

The *illiterate person* is the outcome of poor school attendance and points to the need to improve the existing regulation of attendance.   As Irish deficiencies are measured in relation to English norms, the solutions applied in England are the preferred options.   The proposed solutions include legislative changes, local authority control of education and stricter enforcement of school attendance.   These solutions propose more schooling and more regulation. Such solutions aim to ultimately integrate and assimilate Irish educational provisions with their British equivalents.

The *Education (Ireland) Bill* of 1919 (MacPherson Bill) is a material expression of the *discourse of deficiency*. It proposes legislative changes to the funding and control of schools (T. Walsh 2012:20) to align them with British practice. The strong opposition to the Bill and its eventual defeat indicates that other discourses on education and literacy circulated in Ireland. The *discourse of deficiency* co-exists with other discourses, including the *discourse of superior intellect,* discussed in the next section. These two discourses share a concern with improving educational provisions in Ireland, but they arise from different bases and are working with differing definitions and criteria.

3.3 LITERACY IN AN IRISH IRELAND

This section examines statements from nationalist publications discussing education and literacy in Ireland. These topics are discussed within books, essays and policy documents that represent the future Ireland as an independent nation-state. These publications can be viewed as activities directed towards increasing *national consciousness* (Hroch 2000:12).

They use knowledge of Irish history and heritage to pronounce judgments on existing educational provisions. They reflect Habermas' contention that activities designed to transmit nationalist ideals tend to emphasise emotive aspects of the nation rather than abstract notions of citizenship and state (Habermas 2012:288). Educational standards in Ireland are discussed in the context of a nationalist ideology. These explanations and solutions reflect the centrality of the *nation* rather than the people, a defining feature of all nationalist ideologies according to Smith (2010:9).

Plunkett's conceptualisation of an Irish race with unique intellectual capacities is shared by many nationalists writing on the topic of education. Where Plunkett considers that the existing British education system requires improvement and re-orientation to Irish sensibilities, nationalists contend that this education system deliberately undermines the intellectual potential of the Irish people. According to the *Sinn Féin Policy* (1907), the current education system instils British values and ideology. The *Policy* characterises the primary education system as an external tyranny imposed by the British Government in order to perpetuate 'ignorance' (Sinn Féin 1907: 7). The secondary school system is similarly designed to prevent the 'higher intelligence of the country performing its duty to the Irish State' (Sinn Féin 1907:7). The British education system makes the Irish people 'oblivious of their rights as men and duties as citizens' (1907:7). It is a deliberately political instrument that must be rejected. The *Policy* seeks the transfer of the education system to 'the Irish people', and failing this, suggests that 'the Irish people' take control of the system themselves, by removing all children from National Schools and placing them in non-state-funded Christian Brothers Schools, or by funding their own voluntary schools (1907:9).

In his book *Home Life in Ireland,* Lynd links the apathy of Irish parents to a system of government 'which discourages the people of Ireland from taking an interest in education.' (Lynd 1909:85). He describes how poor reading and writing are a consequence of using education to erase Irish national identity and produce 'a happy English child' (1909:91):

> …the National Schools were not established to meet the needs of Ireland, but to fulfil certain political objects. Instead of fitting boys and girls to live useful and charming lives in Ireland, they were used as a means to forget there was any such country as Ireland.
> (Lynd 1909:90)

> Teachers who knew no Irish… put in charge of schools whose pupils knew no English, and the absurd spectacle was common of a teacher trying to instruct in reading and writing and arithmetic children who did not understand a word he said.
> (Lynd 1909:91)

The overcrowded and unhealthy schools described by Dale in 1904 are considered further evidence of deliberate British political intent. Lynd writes of unsuitable school buildings that make a child feel of less account than a criminal (1909:82), while Gwynn in *Irish Books and Irish People* remarks on the unsavoury surroundings of National Schools, where '…the raggedest child out of the dirtiest cottage will probably be in full keeping with his environment when he takes his place in class' (Gwynn 1919:74).

Pearse writes extensively on education in Ireland. His collection of essays *The Murder Machine* (1916) describes the existing education system in terms of violence, the violation of human rights, and a focus on mechanical conformity:

> Professor Eoin MacNeill has compared the English education system in Ireland to the systems of slave education which existed in the ancient pagan republics side by side with the systems intended for the education of freemen.
> (Pearse 1916:4)

> Our common parlance has become impressed with the conception of education as some sort of manufacturing process. Our children are the 'raw

material'; we desiderate for their education 'modern methods' which must be 'efficient' but 'cheap'; we send them to Clongowes to be 'finished' ; when 'finished' they are 'turned out'; specialists 'grind' them for the English Civil Service and the so-called liberal professions, in each of our great colleges there is a department known as the 'scrap-heap', though officially called the Fourth Preparatory - the limbo to which the debris ejected by the machine is relegated. The stuff there is either too hard or too soft to be moulded to the pattern required by the Civil Service Commissioners or the Incorporated Law Society.
(Pearse 1916:6)

Pearse has little to say about primary education in *The Murder Machine.* The specific examples he gives are all drawn from the secondary system, reflecting his own experience of teaching at second level. The following extract refers to the limited range of textbooks within a secondary school system orientated to examination results:

Precisely the same text-books are being read to-night in every secondary school and college in Ireland. Two of Hawthorne's "Tanglewood Tales", with a few poems in English, will constitute the whole literary pabulum of three-quarters of the pupils of the Irish secondary school during this twelvemonth [1912-13]. The teacher who seeks to give his pupils a wider horizon in literature does so at his peril. He will, no doubt, benefit his pupils, but he will infallibly reduce his results fee.
(Pearse 1916:15)

Gwynn, like Pearse, remarks on the conformity produced by an education system designed to produce minor administrative functionaries for the British state (Gwynn 1919:81).

Primary education, secondary studies, as governed by the machinery controlled through the Board of Intermediate Education, and university teaching as directed and rewarded through the Royal University,

have all in the last resort been inspired by Englishmen who thought it very desirable that Irish boys and girls should learn to read and write and cipher, and that young men and young women should equip themselves for clerkships in the civil service, but who never for one instant realised that the end of education is divergence not conformity - to elicit, whether from the race or from the individual, a full and characteristic development. In twenty years perhaps a paper of interest may be written to show the positive results of education upon Irish character. At present the most noticeable facts are negative, and may be summed up by affirming a total lack of correspondence between the system employed and the needs and qualities of the Irish people.
(Gwynn 1919:82)

Lynd, Pearse and Gwynn discuss education in the imagined 'Irish Ireland' of the future, where the education system will be orientated to producing 'citizens for Ireland' (Gwynn 1919:70). For Lynd, a suitable education system prepares boys and girls to live 'useful and charming lives in Ireland' (Lynd 1909:90), for Gwynn it provides 'a full and characteristic development' (1919:82), and for Pearse, 'a true education system' encourages a love of books and knowledge, demonstrated in the extract below:

In a true education system, religion, patriotism, literature, art and science would be brought in such a way into the daily lives of boys and girls as to affect their character and conduct. We may assume that religion is a vital thing in Irish schools, but I know that the other things, broadly speaking, do not exist. There are no ideas there, no love of beauty, no love of books, no love of knowledge, no heroic inspiration.
(Pearse 1916:6)

Pearse, considered 'a significant Irish educationalist' by Ó Buachalla (1980), locates the explanation for present Irish educational deficiencies in

the forced abandonment of old Gaelic educational practices. The solution is to return to these practices:

> It is not merely that the old Irish had a good education system; they had the best and noblest that has ever been known among men. There has never been any human institution more adequate to its purpose than that which, in pagan times, produced Cu Chulainn and the Boy-Corps of Emhain Macha and, in Christian times, produced Enda and the companions of his solitude in Aran.
> (Pearse 1916:10)

> A new education system in Ireland has to do more than restore a national culture. It has to restore manhood to a race that has been deprived of it. Along with its inspiration it must, therefore, bring a certain hardening. It must lead Ireland back to her sagas.
> (Pearse 1916:17)

The 'new education system' proposed by Pearse is not an innovation, but one that turns back to recreate the ancient Gaelic culture. This objective chimes with Sinn Féin's political policy (1907). These ideological and educational aspirations cast the ancient Gaelic people as a more advanced society, and therefore a suitable model to emulate.

Although not evident in these extracts, Pearse is familiar with Dale's 1904 Report. Ó Buachalla describes an editorial in *An Claidheamh Soluis*, titled 'Mr Dale on Irish Language' in March 1904, where Pearse appraises incidental remarks about the Irish language made in the Report (Ó Buachalla 1980:40), while overlooking the report's account of poor attendance, poor attainment, and poor literacy. In 1919, Gwynn writes admiringly of Pearse: 'What he [Pearse] embodies is the central strength in Irish nationalism – its disregard of the immediate event' (1919:116). The nationalist lack of concern with details of the present education system allows the imagined future education to occupy centre stage.

The imagined new education system draws inspiration from ancient and rural sources, not linked in any way to modern urban lives. Nationalist designs for a future education system elide any reference to its future pupils. Ryan (1912) draws attention to the poverty of National School pupils in Dublin:

> Most of the poor of Dublin - those, in fact, for whom the National Schools exist - live in one-room tenements which they rent, not from the Corporation, nor from building companies, as in other big cities, but from individual landlords - generally themselves middlemen. "It is computed", says a recent report of a School Attendance officer, "that roughly 22,000 families in all live in this way in the slums of the city."
> (Ryan 1912:9)

These details of urban poverty are corroborated in the *Dublin Housing Inquiry* (HMSO 1914:3). Pearse's critical view of the British education system refers to progression through Clongowes Wood College, the Civil Service Commission and the Incorporated Law Society, all unlikely destinations for Dublin's National School pupils. The education system Pearse engages with and the proposed new education system are not concerned with the children of the poor.

The modernisation of Irish-language literacy is a feature of this era. The nineteenth-century Italian nationalist Mazzini remarked on the absence of any distinctive national features differentiating Irish people from English people (Mansergh 1975:96), thus questioning claims to Irish nationhood. Scholarly research that classified the Irish language as more ancient than English allowed nationalists to claim a linguistic differentiation. The Irish language is accorded superior status on the basis that it is scientifically proven to be older than English. The position of Irish as the ancient vernacular language of Ireland, and its symbolic role in conferring a distinctive national identity, places a high value on its revival.

By the early twentieth century, English is the 'language of state' used for administrative purposes in Ireland (Anderson 2006:78). It is also the majority vernacular language of the Irish population, and the chief print-language. The main export markets and main employment destinations are English-speaking. The Irish language is not routinely used in any formal technical, commercial or professional matters. It is a *restricted literacy* in Scribner and Cole's terms (1981:238). Irish is spoken in the margins of the island, in peasant communities that are physically remote and isolated from each other, where it survives as a predominantly oral language.

The *Irish-speaking illiterate peasant* plays an important role in nationalist narratives. In his study of Irish literature, Alfred Nutt, a British folklorist and founder of the Irish Texts Society, describes the illiterate peasant as a useful informant in relation to cultural heritage.

> Thus the half-unintelligible, almost nonsensical, formula of an illiterate peasant may yield to the historical critic that convincing fact which he would seek in vain from the official record or the fashionable literature of the time.
> (Nutt 1903:20)

Nationalist writers enlarge upon this view of the illiterate peasant as a valued link to the ancient Gaelic literate culture, seen here in two extracts from Gwynn (1919).

> There is nothing better known about Ireland than this fact: that illiteracy is more frequent among the Irish Catholic peasantry than in any other class of the British population; and that especially upon the Irish-speaking peasant does the stigma lie. Yet it is, perhaps, as well to inquire a little more precisely what is meant by an illiterate. If to be literate is to possess a knowledge of the language, literature and historical traditions of a man's own country - and this is no very unreasonable application of the word - then this Irish-speaking peasantry has a better claim to the title than can be shown by most bodies of men. I have heard

the existence of an Irish literature denied by a roomful of prosperous educated gentlemen; and, within a week, I have heard, in the same county, the classics of that literature recited by an Irish peasant who could neither read nor write. On which part should the stigma of illiteracy set the uglier brand?
(Gwynn 1919:44)

There you have in a glimpse the custodian of a legend. The man was illiterate, technically, but he knew by instinct, as his ancestors had known before him, that he was the guardian of the life of a song; he recognised that it was a scripture which he had no right to mutilate or alter.   He had to the full that respect for a work of literature which is the best indication of a scholar, and for him at least the line was unbroken from the Ireland of heroes and minstrels to the hour when he chanted over the poem that some bard in the remote ages had fashioned.
(Gwynn 1919:55)

The role of personal observation in constructing knowledge about literacy is evident here as it was within Dale's 1904 Report. The impact of the nineteenth-century Irish cultural revival is also evident in these extracts. These statements discuss literacy in metaphorical and inverted ways, focusing on semantics rather than statistics. The peasant can be both illiterate and literate, within a flexible definition of literacy. The illiterate Irish-speaking peasant is reimagined as a cultural asset, a guardian of the ancient Gaelic traditions underpinning the founding myths of the nation. This re-positioning of the illiterate peasant resembles the 'counter-definitions' of other marginalized groups who re-define their subjective and objective identities (Berger and Luckmann 1966:186). This allows those with leprosy to consider themselves divinely elected, and it permits Gandhi to designate Hindu outcasts as 'Children of God' (1966:187).

There are very few published books in Irish at the start of the twentieth century. The printed Irish-language output is dramatically smaller in comparison with other marginal Celtic languages. There are over 8,500

publications in Welsh, but less than 150 in Irish (Ó Ciosáin 2013:348). Frederick Michael Ryan, an Irish socialist essayist and journalist, remarks on the distinct lack of internationally recognised literary contributions in the Irish language (F. M. Ryan 1904:218). His critical view of Irish-language revival as a distraction from political and social problems is not widely shared.

Cultural organisations such as the Gaelic League attempt to remedy the low numbers of native Irish speakers and dearth of printed materials. The Gaelic League transmits Irish-language literacy to adults, operating outside the formal education system. Emulating the initiatives to revive vernacular languages in other European countries described by Hroch (2000), the Gaelic League publishes periodicals and books in Irish that record and celebrate Gaelic myths and folklore. It also campaigns to promote Irish-language literacy within the state-funded National Schools and in the National University matriculation requirements (Ó Buachalla 1980:xxiii). The success of these campaigns sees the Irish language legitimated by the British authorities, conferring an increasing power on the Gaelic League itself (T. Walsh 2012:80). The Gaelic League 'Direct Method' is widely accepted as the one correct way to teach the Irish language. Douglas Hyde is founder and President of the Gaelic League. Co-founder Eoin MacNeill is a member of the Executive Committee, as is Patrick Pearse. Robert Lynd conducts Gaelic league classes in London (Ferriter 2009). In 1909, University College Dublin appoints Hyde and MacNeill as Professor of Irish and Professor of Early Irish History respectively, providing these prominent Gaelic League activists with further opportunities to exert their influence on Irish academic and cultural activities.

The use of the old Gaelic print-script is a feature of the language revival, compelling Irish-language learners to acquire an additional literacy skill. No modern dictionary or vocabulary exists for the Irish language, there are no agreed spelling conventions, and variable non-transferable grammatical rules exist within several regional dialects. Irish-language publications of this time display changeable spellings and grammar, the construction of

new terminology, and oscillation between Roman script and Gaelic script. These gaps provide spaces for a new iteration of the Irish language to be negotiated and shaped. This literacy-in-progress is subject to tension between a conservative preservation of older forms and the need for a modern language and print-script.

The relative positions accorded to regional dialects provides an ongoing source of controversy among Irish-language enthusiasts. Intense effort is devoted to selecting the dialect for use at national level (Murray 1993). The inevitable interplay between political patronage and language use ensures that the dialect favoured by the political rulers eventually prevails. The senior members of the Gaelic League who participate in the 1919 Dáil can impose their preferred versions of the Irish language and literacy. The existence of a parallel Sinn Féin government and parallel Sinn Féin courts provides a context to the promotion of a parallel language. The parallel government subsequently gains legitimate power, raising initial expectations that the Irish language will ultimately replace the English language. In later years, the concept of apathy and disinterest among Irish parents reappears as an explanation when the slow pace of Irish-language revival becomes evident.

These nationalist statements together construct a *discourse of superior intellect*. This discourse, like the *discourse of deficiency*, has as its objective 'education in Ireland', but in this case, the focus is on the production of 'citizens of Ireland'. The *discourse of superior intellect* is underpinned by concepts of ancestry and inheritance, suggesting a biologically determined capacity for scholarship that positions the Irish people as innately intelligent and sophisticated. It counters the stereotypical images of illiterate, incoherent, simian Irishmen prevalent in contemporary British representations (e. g. Curtis 1971; McClintock 1995:52). By celebrating the achievements of illustrious Gaelic ancestors, Irish identity is remade as a badge of pride. The Irish population, as direct descendants of these Gaelic high-achievers, contain similar capacities that have been deliberately suppressed under British rule. Irish intellectual

capacity is ill-served by the existing English-language education system, a system designed for political and cultural assimilation.

The *discourse of superior intellect* implies that the Irish population are predisposed to excel at all educational activities, provided they are delivered in the old Gaelic way. An education system that cannot deliver superior outcomes is therefore inadequate and must be replaced. Within the *discourse of superior intellect*, the illiterate person plays a role in providing evidence of the need to overthrow the British education system. The existence of *the illiterate person* supports nationalist claims that English-language literacy is inappropriate for the Irish people, but illiteracy excites little concern otherwise. This discourse excludes any reference to poverty, school attendance or educational attainment. The existence of a 'national feeling' allows nationalist activists to feel connected with the more passive population (Smith 2010:6). Within this presumption of a shared national perspective, poor school attendance and poor school achievement can be recast as patriotic activities. The 'apathy and ignorance' of Irish parents in withholding children from schooling can be reconstructed as adherence to the *Sinn Fein Policy* (1907), which advises conscious acts of resistance against a system designed to eradicate national identity.

Achievements from the Gaelic past underpin the norms promoted within the *discourse of superior intellect*. Pearse links education to the ancient Irish sagas (Pearse 1916:17), and Gwynn ties literacy to knowledge of ancient myths. The founding myths of the ancient Irish nation evoke the same reverence as the scientific findings of historians and linguists. These founding myths reach back into a glorious Golden Age of literate warriors, scholars and religious heroes, such as Cu Chulainn, the Boy-Corps of Eamhain Macha, and Enda and his companions in Aran. These founding myths produce an idealised ancient Irish person in terms of intermingled honour, piety and literacy, traits that coincide with Irish nationalist ideals. The peasant lifestyle is exalted as a direct link to this Gaelic, Irish-speaking past.

Hroch finds that urban middle-class nationalist activists across Europe idealise the peasant lifestyle (Hroch 2000:154). In Ireland, the Irish peasant is celebrated within a discourse that explicitly excludes any discussion of poverty or urban life. This discourse is orientated to both the future and the past, rather than to conditions in the present. It faces forward to a future time when Ireland will be an independent nation, while drawing on accounts of intellectual achievement from ancient times. This 'antiquarian' approach seeks to preserve the conditions under which the ancient Gaelic nation existed. The language, mythology and artefacts of the past are constructed as monuments to be revered. Both Foucault and Anderson see an inherent conservatism in the preservation of monuments, whether cultural or material. Such activities block creativity in favour of homogeneity and fidelity, preventing the formation of a new identity (Foucault 1977b:162) and they inhibit movement towards modern progressive ideas (Anderson 2006:181).

A material expression of the *discourse of superior intellect* occurs in the practice of combining responsibility for Education and the Irish language in the 1919 Dáil. The education reports of these Irish rulers-in-waiting make a complete break with the annual education reports of the Commissioners of Irish Education such as the 1905 Report discussed earlier. Formal reports on Education in the 1919 Dáil records consist of accounts describing the progress of Irish-language revival, reflecting a closer adherence to nationalist cultural goals than to educational goals. Information on low English-language literacy levels are of little interest to nationalists concerned with establishing a new nation and erasing ties with the previous rulers.

3.4 LITERACY AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

The documents and statements discussed here display a literacy that reflects the social contexts of their authors. Their experience of an 'Empire Education' in terms of secondary schooling and university education in the

late nineteenth-century United Kingdom provides a shared background for this group of administrators, educators and writers. They have more in common with each other than with the pupils of state-funded National Schools. A variety of allusions, such as to 'the Laocoon' (Pearse 1916:13) and to Aristotle (Gwynn 1919:75), identifies the common store of knowledge provided by a private classical education. Their writing is intended for those with the education and inclination to purchase and read non-fiction publications, activities beyond the reach of poor households. It appears that Dale, the Schools Inspector from England, is the only one to have first-hand experience of Irish National Schools.

The writers and their audiences, unionists and nationalists alike, are members of the privileged middle and upper classes who can afford to attend fee-paying secondary schools and universities. London-born Frank Harry Busbridge Dale (1872-1918) obtained a Master's degree from Balliol College, Oxford. He lectured at university for two years and taught in Borough Road Teacher Training College in London before becoming a Schools Inspector in 1900, and Chief Inspector for Elementary Schools in England and Wales in 1913 (Mangan 2006:127). Frederick. W Ryan (d.1956) was a wealthy Irish barrister, connected to wine merchants and breweries (Findlater 2001:86). Educated in Clongowes Wood College and Trinity College Dublin, he was on the education staff of the British Army in Ireland in 1920, and President of the Juvenile Traders Court from 1924-1926 (*Irish Independent* 1956; *Irish Times* 1956). Sir Horace Plunkett (1854-1932), son of Baron Dunsany, attended Eton and Oxford. He used his personal wealth to promote agricultural co-operatives in Ireland, and he was instrumental in developing the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) (West 2012).

As Hroch found across Europe, the Irish nationalist writers are concentrated among the urban, upwardly mobile, middle classes. Gwynn, Lynd and Pearse were educated privately before attending university. Stephen Gwynn (1864-1950) worked as a private tutor and secondary teacher for eight years before becoming a full-time writer (Maume 2009a). Robert

Wilson Lynd (1879-1949) was born in Belfast, educated at Queens University Belfast, and was a journalist, essayist and editor in London (Ferriter 2009). Patrick Pearse (1879-1916) obtained degrees in classics and law, and he was editor of the Gaelic League newspaper *An Claidheamh Soluis* from 1903-1909. He taught in University College Dublin, in CBS Westland Row, and Alexandra College for girls, and was External Examiner in Irish History for Clongowes Wood College, before founding St Enda's Secondary School in 1908 (Ó Buachalla 1980; Lee 2013).

These nationalist and Unionist writers share an entitlement to make judgements on the lives of others, a form of 'lay judgement' combining social privilege and specialized competence (Habermas 1989:40). This allows Dale and Ryan to criticise the 'apathy' of the poor, and permits Gwynn, Lynd and Pearse to valorise the lives of marginalized peasants. These and other acts of judgement construct a hierarchy that identifies 'the Irish people' as a group distinct from the Irish people writing about them. None of the education systems proposed for 'the Irish people' resembles the education system experienced by the proposers. This distinction is evident in recommendations for compulsory schooling and school attendance legislation. These regulatory devices are not relevant to children receiving private tutoring or attending fee-paying schools. The Commissioners of Irish Education Report explicitly excluded private education from state inspection in the early nineteenth century (HMSO 1825:2). This exclusion from state inspection continues into the twentieth century and remains in place in twenty-first century Ireland.

Dale and Ryan's discussions of literacy indicate that their main concern is not with the wider Irish population, but with the literacy of children attending state schooling. The 1825 Report laid out the parameters of a literacy deemed appropriate for 'the poor'. The literacy programme of the Kildare Place Society (The Society for Promoting the Education of the Poor in Ireland founded in 1811) was noted approvingly as a form of literacy that focused on inculcating loyalty to the state and to moral principles (HMSO 1825:41). The reading materials and methods approved at that time remain

in use in the early twentieth century. Textbooks produced by the Irish Commissioners are used in other parts of the British Empire (Graff 1979; P. Lyons 2006). In the years immediately prior to Irish independence, English-language literacy in the state-funded National Schools is taught as a practical, mechanical, measurable skill. Dale describes the focus on teaching younger Infants to read and spell a few individual words, and how older Infants are required to read the same one sentence correctly from their reader, leading to the endless repetition he observes (HMSO 1904:60). He remarks on the excessive attention given to spelling, dictation and transcription in all standards (HMSO 1904:64). This emphasis on copying and reproducing is a feature of state-provided literacy, where mechanical elements take precedence over conceptual features of writing (Howard 2012:29). A focus on calligraphy rather than on creativity constrains the potential for writing to stimulate revolutionary action.

The literacy of the educated elite and the literacy taught in Irish National Schools are separate and distinct practices, reflecting class distinctions. The 'exclusive, expansive and expensive' education' of the wealthy (O'Neill 2014:2) allows access to a range of books and literacy skills not made available to the state-educated children. The literary resources available to the classically-educated elite is wide-ranging and unsupervised, while the literary resources of the state-educated comprise pre-vetted Board of Education Readers The ability to write letters is at the limit of writing skills taught in the state system, while those in the private system are given the tools to become professional 'men of letters' like Lynd and Gwynn.

In nineteenth-century Ireland, the wealthy educated elite participated in the regulation and control of mass education through membership of bodies such as the Kildare Place Society and the National Boards of Education, as well as the governing councils of fee-paying schools. The role of education provider was thus available to all members of the literate educated elite, granting them the power to shape mass schooling provisions in Ireland. The contributions of Ryan, Gwynn, Pearse and others share this tacit

assumption that the schooling and the literacy of the poor continues to be in the gift of the literate educated elite.

3.5 CONCLUSION

The statements explored in this chapter discuss aspects relevant to literacy in Ireland in the first two decades of the twentieth century. They arise from official reports, pamphlets and books published between 1900-1921. They discuss literacy within the context of envisioning the most appropriate mass education system for Ireland. The writers are members of a literate educated elite who appropriate the power to make judgements on the literacy of others.

The statements examined in the chapter fulfil several functions. They present contemporary anecdotal evidence and numerical data that complement and cross-cut each other, providing a multi-layered account of literacy at that time. These statements are intertwined with discussions of schooling, reflecting the widespread acceptance of schooling as the vector for literacy. The statements also provide a means to analyse the discourses they belong to.

The chapter discusses two discourses that position *the illiterate person* in different ways. In the *discourse of deficiency*, the illiterate person is both a proof and a product of deficiency, and the solution is to impose more schooling and more regulation. The norms within the discourse relate to the pedagogical and legislative measures that prevail in England. This discourse implicitly engages with the *autonomous model* that associates literacy with cognitive benefits and economic progress. It can be located within wider Unionist aspirations that envisage progression to a modern technological future within the British Empire. Personal observation, Census data, and comparison to English standards form the basis of knowledge about literacy. There is a clear divide between the literacy

displayed by the writers and the more restricted literacy they advocate for state-funded schools.

The *illiterate person* in the nationalist *discourse of superior intellect* occupies an ambiguous position, being cast as both a victim of inappropriate British education provisions, and an important link to the glorious past. The solution is to abandon existing educational practices and return to ancient Gaelic traditions. This discourse recognises the ideological use of literacy as a method to instil British political aspirations. Personal observation and familiarity with the founding myths underpin the knowledge about literacy. The norms within this discourse relate to the past, allowing present-day conditions to be inverted. The 'illiterate peasant' is now literate, and the proposed 'new education system' is the ancient Gaelic one. The urban-based middle-class nationalist writers celebrate an idealised rural lifestyle rooted in the founding myths of the ancient Gaelic nation. The urban industrial poor are 'written out' of this imagined Gaelic future. This discourse is silent about any existing deficiencies in English-language literacy, as it is orientated to an imagined future where the Irish language prevails.

Both discourses are underpinned by knowledge about literacy that is produced from personal observation. Those without first-hand experience of National Schools consider themselves qualified to offer recommendations on an equal basis to professional educators. The standard of literacy considered suitable for 'the Irish people' is of a different calibre to the literacy of these privately-educated observers. Both discourses construct the state as the sole arbiter of education in Ireland, muting any reference to the prominent role played by the churches. Both discourses are silent about the existence of extreme poverty in Ireland, reflecting liberal conservative views of poverty consistent with the social outlook of a classically-educated elite.

Southern Ireland is no longer part of the United Kingdom after 1921. It moves from peripheral province to independent nation-state. Catholic

nationalists, previously a minority in the United Kingdom, become rulers of the Irish Free State. In contrast to forming one region of a larger United Kingdom within a world-wide Empire, the new state is a small religiously homogenous territory bounded by its physical location on part of one island. The next chapter considers the position of *the illiterate person* in this new configuration of state, territory and population during the 1920s and 1930s. In the new Irish nation-state, a *discourse of deficiency* orientated to the educational norms of England becomes irrelevant. F. W. Ryan's examination of school attendance in Dublin falls into obscurity. He develops other business interests and becomes an authority on Malta (*Irish Independent* 1956). F. M. Ryan dies unexpectedly in 1913 and is mourned as a democratic and socialist nationalist by Sheehy Skeffington (1913). However, his socialist journalism is forgotten, while Pearse's nationalist essays on education are widely admired in the new nation-state.

The next chapter explores the position of the *illiterate person* within newly independent Ireland. It first focuses on the statements of ideologues who seek Irish-language revival and Catholic Church clergy who advocate print censorship, and then examines the discourses arising and their effects.

CHAPTER 4: THE ERA OF INDEPENDENCE 1920S AND 1930S

4.1 INTRODUCTION

In 1922, the new nationalist government in Ireland acts like many other revolutionary leaderships who clamber into the 'worn, warm seats' of their predecessors (Anderson 2006:160). In contrast to the previous position of Ireland within the British Empire, the sovereign territory of the Irish Free State is located on one small island. The reduced physical space coincides with more confined horizons in the new nation-state. Whyte refers to the autocratic authoritarian style evident within the Government of this time (Whyte 1980:22). It contains many whose formative experiences occurred entirely within the state's borders, and whose shared cultural references are associated with Secondary schooling by Catholic religious orders, membership of the Gaelic League, and military activity during the War of Independence and the Civil War. The confined and reduced interaction with the outside world produces what Akenson describes as a 'cultural implosion' (1975:39). External benchmarks are no longer relevant in the new state, where an indigenous custom-made education system emerges.

This chapter considers the *illiterate person* in this re-configuration of state, territory and population during the 1920s and 1930s. The newly-independent Irish nation-state uses forms of literacy shaped by censorship and Irish-language revival as a marker of difference from Britain. Goldring defines *intellectuals* as the self-selecting elite who thinks it knows what is best for 'the people' (1993:10). Chapter 3 considered contributions from the university-educated elite. The *ideologues* and the *clergy* are two further *intellectual* groups identified by Goldring (1993:11). This chapter considers statements produced by ideologues that actively seek Irish-language revival, and Catholic Church clergy who campaign for censorship. Section

4.2 addresses how the ideologues of Irish-language revival sought to impose a new language and new form of literacy on 'the people'. Section 4.3 considers the Catholic Church's campaign to censor the written language of 'the people'. Section 4.4 concludes the chapter by examining how these activities construct positions for the *illiterate person* in the first decades of Irish independence.

4.2 IRISH LANGUAGE IDEOLOGUES

This section examines some of the public statements made in support of Irish-language revival in the Irish Free State.

From 1919 onwards, the embryonic Dáil begins to function as a national decision-making assembly, although operating illegally. The *Tuairisg Oifigiúil* (Official Record) for the period August 1921–June 1922 records its deliberations (Irish Free State 1922). Queries on educational matters in the 1919 Dáil are addressed to Aire na Gaedhilge (Minister for Irish), J. J. O'Kelly, president of the Gaelic League (Irish Free State 1922:48), as the assembly has no minister for education. Discussions on educational matters recorded in *Tuairisg Oifigiúil* generally consist of reviews of the state of spoken Irish in the country, focusing particularly on the Gaeltacht areas and foregrounding the Irish-speaking peasants. The assembly decrees that primary teachers may not be appointed without certificates in Irish, and the co-operation of the Bishops in this is reported (1922:47). Poor school attendance is noted because it is regarded as an impediment to the pupils' acquisition of Irish (1922:47).

O'Kelly, Aire na Gaedhilge in 1919, is appointed as Minister of Education in August 1921, although outside the Cabinet (1922:82). As further inducements to the use of Irish, it is decreed that Secondary School scholarships will be based on Irish-language proficiency (1922:290), and that County Councils may withhold scholarships from schools and colleges that refuse to play 'native Irish games' (1922:512). These forms of officially-

sanctioned discrimination based on language and culture gain the assembly's approval. This focus on language revival through the schools, evident in the proceedings of the 1919 -1921 Dáil, comes to the fore in the first years of the Irish Free State, when the Irish language becomes the dominant subject in the National School curriculum (Akenson 1975:35).

The Irish Free State acts like other new nation-states who reinforce popular nationalist support by embedding their ideology into the education system, the administrative system, and the wider public sector (Anderson 2006:114). The imposition of the Irish language within the education system and within public-sector recruitment requirements is a key element. The Gaelic League contains the Irish-language expertise required to support the government's language revival aspirations, consolidating its position as a powerful *special-interest association* (Habermas 1989:200). Such groups seek to impose their special interest as the common public interest. They exercise social power and acclamatory consent while claiming a legitimate role. The Gaelic League resembles other powerful interest groups in having considerable political power at their disposal without having to sacrifice their private character (Habermas 1989:200). At national level, the Gaelic League's Executive Committee provides a readymade group of experienced managers and administrators who are appointed to government roles in the Irish Free State. At local level, Gaelic League Irish-language instructors and organizers continue to develop an extensive network of classes and summer courses.

The Irish language, because of its weak state at the start of the twentieth century, receives intensive care from the Gaelic League. This intervention refines the rural language of peasants to suit the needs of a conservative, anti-modernist interest group seeking to impose its will on the population. Political manoeuvring to promote one dialect for national use (Murray 1993) indicates a willingness to intervene in the organic growth of the language. The Gaelic League had circulated their own Irish-language education programme to schools during 1918 (T. Walsh 2012:130) and is a prominent

contributor to the Programmes for Primary Education of 1921 and 1927.

The *First Programme of Instruction* arises from a decision of the Irish National Teachers Organisation (INTO) to convene a conference aimed at producing a primary education programme 'in accordance with Irish ideals and conditions'. T.J. O'Connell of the INTO is the secretary to the conference. Reverend Timothy Corcoran S.J., educated at Clongowes Wood and Professor of Education in UCD (Maume 2009b), 'placed the benefit of his advice and experience at the disposal of the conference' (National Programme Conference 1922:3). Corcoran, although not a linguist or a primary teacher or proficient Irish speaker, exerts significant influence according to accounts of Irish education such as Akenson (1975:44), Coolahan (2005:39), and T. Walsh (2012:141). Both Corcoran and Chairperson Máíre Ní Chinneide are members of the Gaelic League Education Committee. They helped prepare the 1918 Gaelic League Irish-language programme, as did the Minister for Education J. J. O'Kelly (T. Walsh 2012:130).

The *First Programme* (National Programme Conference 1922) outlines two grounds for criticising the primary school programme of the British Administration, first because it is overloaded with obligatory subjects, and secondly because it does not prioritise the Irish language.

> The Irish language, which it was evident the vast majority of the Irish people wished to have taught to their children, was placed in a subordinate position on the programme and except in a few "bilingual" schools was not classed among the obligatory subjects. In addition, the programme, generally speaking, was felt to be out of harmony with national ideals and requirements.
> (National Programme Conference 1922:3)

The Programme strengthens Irish as a subject and as a language of instruction, eliminating Drawing, Elementary Science, Cookery, Laundry, Needlework, Hygiene and Nature Study. Singing is taught through Irish-

language songs (1922:14). History and Geography are taught through the medium of Irish. The focus of the new history syllabus is outlined:

> One of the chief aims of the teaching of history should be to develop the best traits of the national character and to inculcate national pride and self-respect. This will not be attained by the cramming of dates and details but rather by showing that the Irish race has fulfilled a great mission in the advancement of civilization and that, on the whole, the Irish nation has amply justified its existence.
> (National Programme Conference 1922:5)

The *First Programme* introduces a new departure: 'The work of the Infant Standards is to be entirely in Irish' (1922:15). The Programme states that parents' wishes will be respected wherever the majority object to Irish or English as an obligatory subject (1922:4).

Coolahan highlights the limited attention given to theoretical or philosophical aspects in the *First Programme* (Coolahan 2005:40). Instead of addressing pre-existing concerns about literacy, the programme adds additional sources of literacy difficulty by imposing a new language and a new Gaelic script on teachers and pupils. The *First Programme Proofs* (National Conference on School Programmes 1921) and the final printed Programme are almost identical, with a few differences. Among them are the instructions on the type of English language reading material for use in schools:

> In the higher standards reading in English should be mainly directed to the works of European authors, ancient and modern, drawn from the many good translations which abound. English authors, as such, should have just the limited place due to English literature among all the European literatures. In other words, the English read in Irish schools should be as far as possible emptied of specifically English thought and culture. There is plenty of European thought, prose, poetry, history, travel, romance in

English, but not influenced by English ways and modes of thought and English standards of taste and conduct.
(National Conference on School Programmes 1921:5)

These guidelines for English language reading materials reflect the impetus to *de-anglicize* first promoted by Douglas Hyde, the founder of the Gaelic League. The final version of the Programme modifies the 1921 instructions:

In order to bring the pupils as far as possible into touch with European thought and culture, reading in English in the higher standards should be mainly directed to the works of European authors, ancient and modern, drawn from the many good translations which abound. English authors, as such, should have just the limited place due to English literature among all the European literatures.
(National Programme Conference 1922:5)

The Programme discusses school attendance rates: 'The statistics with regards to school attendance in Ireland disclose a lamentable and indeed discreditable condition of affairs' (1922:24).   The latest statistics show 708,353 children enrolled in National Schools. Average daily attendance is 488,031, equivalent to 68.9%, which compares unfavourably with the attendance rates of 83% in the remote Orkney Islands and up to 95% in other parts of Scotland. The Irish statistics show a daily absence of 220,322 from schools (1922:24). The Proofs refer to the 'well-known fact' that a further estimated 200,000 of schoolgoing age are not on any school rolls (1921:26). This number of 200,000 is amended to 100,000 in the final Programme (1922:24). Both versions conclude that 'almost half the children of Ireland of school-going age are absent from school every day' (1921:26; 1922:24). The Programme also identifies that the average leaving age in Ireland is 11 years, deeming it 'much too low' (1922:24). It suggests that uncooperative parents are responsible for poor attendance. It recommends that children between ages 5 and 14 should attend school daily, and it calls for legislation to remedy 'the present deplorable state of affairs' (1922:25).

[In the] meantime it appeals with confidence to the various representative bodies, school managers, teachers and others concerned to do everything possible to bring the light of public opinion to bear on this crying evil and to show to those responsible the wrong which they are doing to their children and their country.
(National Programme Conference 1922: 25)

Despite the stated intention to produce a new form of education in the new nation-state, previous attitudes and assumptions regarding parental responsibility are still evident. The *Programme for Primary Instruction* exhibits continuing elements of the *discourse of deficiency* by identifying parents as the cause of poor attendance.

Figure 4.A below outlines the literacy guidelines given in the new primary school syllabus, in terms of the instructions for Reading, Spelling, Writing, and Composition set out in the Programme and implemented in National Schools in September 1922. The Programme advises: 'In teaching English grammar the terminology of Irish grammar should be used as far as practicable' (1922:10).

FIGURE 4.A: LITERACY GUIDELINES IN THE NATIONAL SCHOOL PROGRAMME 1922

STANDARD	LITERACY SKILL	IRISH LANGUAGE	ENGLISH LANGUAGE
FIRST STANDARD	**Reading and Spelling**	Conversation – Direct Method Read simple words from the blackboard. Read and understand a simple Primer. Easy rhymes	Copy words from the blackboard. Read and understand a Primer
	Writing	No instructions	Copy writing models, mainly from the blackboard. Headline copybooks should be used
	Composition	No instructions	Conversation lessons

STANDARD	LITERACY SKILL	IRISH LANGUAGE	ENGLISH LANGUAGE
SECOND STANDARD	**Reading and Spelling**	More advanced conversations. Read and understand a suitable elementary Reader. Memorise and understand a simple song or poem of about twenty lines and understand a simple story in Irish. Transcribe sentences from the Reader	Read and understand the lessons in a suitable Reader. Recite at least fifty lines of suitable verse. Proficiency in spelling acquired through reading and transcription Practice oral spelling
	Writing	Copy writing models, mainly from the blackboard. Headline copybooks should be used.	Copy writing models, mainly from the blackboard. Headline copybooks should be used.
	Composition	No instructions	Conversation lessons Reproduce in own words the subject matter of the lesson read.
THIRD STANDARD	**Reading and Spelling**	Conversation about everyday activities. Memorise songs and poems totalling about forty lines. Tell and understand an easy story in Irish. Read and understand a suitable Reader. Transcription exercises from Reader	Read and understand the lessons in a suitable Reader. Recite at least fifty lines of suitable verse. A suitable story book should supplement the ordinary Reader. Proficiency in spelling through reading, transcription and dictation. Practice oral spelling.
	Writing	Copy writing models mainly from the blackboard	Copy writing models, mainly from the blackboard.

STANDARD	LITERACY SKILL	IRISH LANGUAGE	ENGLISH LANGUAGE
THIRD STANDARD (continued)	**Composition**	Orally form short consecutive statements about familiar subjects, or describe a series of actions.	Write from memory the substance of short stories.
FOURTH STANDARD	**Reading and Spelling**	General conversation. Read and understand a suitable Reader. Memorise and understand songs and poems totalling about sixty lines. Reproduce orally the substance of passages in the Reader.	Read and understand the lessons in a suitable Reader. Recite at least one hundred lines of suitable verse. Proficiency in spelling through reading, dictation and composition.
	Writing	Write a well-proportioned, free and legible hand. Large hand should be practiced occasionally.	Write a well-proportioned, free and legible hand. Large hand should be practiced occasionally.
	Composition	Write short consecutive sentences about familiar subjects or describe a series of actions.	Descriptions of familiar scenes and incidents. Letter-writing.
FIFTH STANDARD	**Reading and Spelling**	General conversation. Read and understand suitable reader. A suitable story Reader should supplement the ordinary Reader. Memorise and understand eighty lines of poetry or an equivalent amount of suitable prose.	Read and understand at least two interesting books. A large proportion should be silent reading. Recite one hundred and twenty lines of suitable verse. Proficiency in spelling through reading, dictation and composition.

STANDARD	LITERACY SKILL	IRISH LANGUAGE	ENGLISH LANGUAGE
FIFTH STANDARD (continued)	**Writing**	Write well-proportioned, free, legible hand. Large hand should be practiced occasionally	Write well-proportioned, free, legible hand. Large hand should be practiced occasionally.
	Composition	Easy exercises in written composition. Short dialogues in set subjects. Letter-writing.	Description of familiar scenes and incidents. Letter-writing.
SIXTH STANDARD	**Reading and Spelling**	Read with intelligence and appreciation suitable matter in a newspaper or magazine. At least two standard works should be read Memorise and understand eighty lines of suitable poetry.	Read with intelligence and appreciation suitable matter in a newspaper or magazine. At least two interesting standard works should be read. Recite one hundred and twenty lines of suitable verse. Proficiency in spelling through reading, dictation and composition.
	Writing	Write well-proportioned, free, legible hand. Large hand should be practiced occasionally	Write well-proportioned, free, legible hand. Large hand should be practiced occasionally.
	Composition	Easy exercises in written composition. Short dialogues in set subjects. Letter-writing.	Description of familiar scenes and incidents. Letter-writing.

Source: National Programme Conference (1922:6-10)

In 1927, Reverend Timothy Corcoran reprises his role as external advisor to the conference that produces the *Second Programme for Primary Education.* This conference affirms the principle of teaching Infant classes through Irish:

> The members of our Conference agreed on the supreme importance of giving effect as far as possible to this principle; and in confirmation of their belief they received authoritative evidence. It was argued with much weight that a "direct" method of teaching Irish, continued during the length of an ordinary school-day for a few years, between the ages of 4 and 8, would be quite sufficient, given trained and fluent teachers – to impart to children a vernacular power over the language; while in the case of older children, it was shown that such a result would be more difficult of attainment.
> (Department of Education Annual Statistical Report 1926:23)

The *Second Programme* outlines the aim of educational policy in the Irish Free State:

> …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.
> (National Programme Conference 1927:8)

These words form part of the official statement made by Pádraig Ó Brolcháin / Patrick Bradley at the transfer of responsibilities from the Board of National Education to the Irish Government in January 1922 (*Cork Examiner* 1922; *Irish Independent* 1922; *Irish Times* 1922). Pádraig Ó Brolcháin, although not an educator, is a prominent member the Gaelic League and the Irish Volunteers, and at Independence he moves from the Health Insurance Commission to become Chief Executive Officer of the Minister for Education with responsibility for Primary Education (Akenson 1975:166; Coolahan 2005:41; Ó Buachalla 1988:345). The regular reappearance of this phrase here and in other places suggests that

Government education policy has not developed far beyond its original objectives in the intervening years.

The *Second Programme 1927* reprints the advice given in a 1922 Circular from the Department of Education to all School Mangers and Teachers:

> Our primary education, as well as being Irish in outlook, should also be such as to turn the minds and effort of the bulk of the pupils in rural schools towards the land of Ireland and the great agricultural industry on which, for generations to come, the economic life of the nation will be based. In soliciting literature for reading in the schools, books which tend to develop the pupils' interest in the land, in the pleasures of country life, in the production of crops, in the rearing herds, should, where available, be given an important place.
> (National Programme Conference 1927:12)

Urban pupils are encouraged to take a lively interest in the Irish craftsmanship of the past and the industrial life around them and to recognise this as the life destined for them (1927:13). Parents are still responsible for school textbooks. The programme discusses the consequences of parental poverty:

> At the same time, where children, whose parents are unable to supply books, are forced to attend school, in which if they have no books they are mostly wasting their time, books should be supplied to them somehow.
> (National Programme Conference 1927:16)

The report also suggests that the books supplied should be vetted and censored by the Department of Education, echoing similar concerns about school books in the nineteenth-century by the Commissioners of Irish Education (HMSO 1825).

> We have evidence that many of the books in actual use are out of harmony with the educational policy of the Department. Publishers should, it seems to us, be placed under closer restriction and given fuller guidance with a view to ensuring that the books produced by them may promote the educational aim of the nation.
> …
> We would, accordingly, recommend that the Department appoint some permanent Committee whose function it would be to supervise, and even to veto, books used in our schools; and if necessary to take charge of the production of suitable ones.
> …
> The Department should publish a list of approved books.
> (National Programme Conference 1927:16)

The *Second Programme* makes superficial amendments, and it allows English to be spoken until 10.30am in Infants classes. No further curriculum development occurs until 1934 when Tomás Derrig, Fianna Fáil Minister for Education, implements a Revised Programme without consultation. The English language is no longer allowed in Infant classes and is optional in First Class. The standard of Irish taught to all classes is raised. There is no programme in English for First Class pupils, and a lower standard of English is introduced for the other classes, equivalent to the loss of one years' schoolwork according to Coolahan (2005:42).

The Primary School Programme from 1922 identifies the educational standards deemed appropriate in the Irish Free State. It underpins Irish education policy until 1971, shaping the educational experience of several generations of schoolchildren. The focus on Irish-language proficiency dominates education policy. The emphasis on early Irish-language immersion assigns a pivotal role to the Infant Classes as the locus of language revival. The standards for reading and writing contained in the Programme act as guidelines for literacy attainment. These initiatives in primary education put into practice long-held nationalist aspirations to promote a Gaelic- speaking, rural- dwelling nation tied to the land.

Government regulations make the Irish language compulsory for most civil and public-sector posts, officer cadetships in the Defence Forces, and access to professional careers such as solicitors. Schools Inspectors in the Department of Education set and supervise state examinations, and they conduct the oral Irish tests for candidates to the Civil Service and the Civic Guards (Department of Education School Inspection Report 1927:10). The introduction of Irish-language proficiency tests creates a new barrier to entry into professions and careers. Irish-language proficiency functions as *linguistic capital* that produces a profit of distinction (Bourdieu 1991:55).

Anderson examines how language use when tied to nationalism can build 'particular solidarities' (2006:133), leading to exclusion. This process is evident in the Irish Free State. The impetus to Irish-language revival underpins overtly exclusionary practices in the 1919 Dáil, such as restricting education scholarships to Irish-speakers. The Free State language revival policies limit access to university, public sector, and professional careers, thereby imposing sanctions on English-language speakers.

The *Educational Yearbook of the International Institute of Teachers College,* edited by Isaac Kandel, is published by Columbia University from 1924 to 1944. It provides annual summaries of educational developments in selected countries. The two entries on the Irish Free State, in 1926 and 1937, are both written by T. Corcoran (no other details given). They illustrate how the Irish-language revival is presented to outsiders:

> 1926: IRISH FREE STATE by T. Corcoran
> PROBLEM OF CURRICULUM AND METHOD, 1921-16 –
> *Elementary education* -Since the Provisional Government of the Irish Free State assumed control in January, 1922, one issue has dominated education policy, without displacing other problems of administration and associated method. That issue was clearly defined when the Chief Executive Officer for Primary Education informed the members of the Board which had hitherto controlled it that the principal educational purpose of the Irish Government is "the strengthening of the national

fiber by giving the language, history, music, and traditions of Ireland their natural place in the life of the Irish schools."

…

RESTORATION OF IRISH –But the most interesting issue in this field of constructive education which has been opened up by all the recent reforms is centred around the Irish language, defined to be "the national language," while English is described as "also an official language." The Irish language has to be restored to full vernacular use in all the main areas of the Irish Free State, all areas, indeed, except the western seaboard and one or two other tracts.

…

The restoration of a vernacular is evidently a very special, even unique, issue in method. That it can be done by the schools and within the school hours, without any large measure of positive aid outside them, is widely held by Irish educators. The example of a famous and successful school at Ring, Waterford County, Province of Munster, and of several other pioneer schools is properly adduced; it could be paralleled by the facts that in the schools of Imperial Rome vernacular Greek was fully acquired, and that in the medieval grammar schools and universities Latin became a substantial vernacular. The Commission of 1925-26 unanimously accepted the doctrine that the true age for the acquisition of a vernacular in the schools is from 4 to 8 years of age, and that the best skill of the teaching power should concentrate on that period.
(T. Corcoran 1926)

1937: IRISH FREE STATE by T. Corcoran
THE IRISH LANGUAGE IN THE SCHOOLS -The clear national decision of the main mass of the Irish people, to restore the full vernacular command of the Irish language all over the country, has taken effect since the change-over from English administration in 1922.
….

There is ample evidence that children of that age [4 – 8 years] are normally able to acquire and freely use, by exercise within school hours alone and without positive aid from the home, not one non-vernacular language, but two, and occasionally three. Evidence of this aptitude is available in ample measure, from the schools of all the border areas in Europe, from Holland and Flanders, through Luxembourg, Lorraine and Alsace, down to the frontiers of Switzerland and France, France and Italy. The experience of the French State in Alsace, 1919 to 1936, has shown clearly that the fullness of vernacular power over a second language during the primary school age-period is readily attainable, given a competence of teaching power. On the other hand, the expansion of that power over an acquired language, from within the school walls across into the homes and daily lives of the people, has always required more than fifty years to be effective.
(T. Corcoran 1937)

The phrase on educational aims attributed to Pádraig Ó Brolcháin reappears in T. Corcoran's 1926 report, an indication of its wide acceptance as an official policy statement. The 1926 summary links the Irish language to classical Greek and Latin, conferring prestige by proximity. The 1937 summary forges new links by comparing Ireland to bilingual populations in selected European states. Comparisons with bilingual English-speaking populations in nearby Wales and Scotland are absent. The English language is presented as a secondary language in these extracts, negating its position as the major vernacular language in Ireland.

The focus on children aged 4-8 years is consistent in both reports, as is the repeated claim that teachers can revive a language within school hours alone. The capacity of Irish children to learn a language in this way implies an innate ability to absorb languages with little effort. These remarkable language abilities of Irish children are another manifestation of the discourse of superior intellect described in Chapter 3. The decision to rely on schools alone to revive Irish has the consequence of filtering the Irish

language through the religious ethos of religious-run teacher training colleges and clerical school managers, producing a sanitized language fit for the ears of children and for clerical sensitivities.

The Fianna Fáil party elected to Government in 1932 gives a high priority to the Irish language in its founding documents and election manifesto (Ó Buachalla 1988:346). T. Corcoran's 1937 reference to the 'clear national decision of the main mass of the people' may refer to the popular support for Fianna Fáil, and it also recalls similar claims made in the *First Programme* in 1922. This conceptualisation of popular demand for language revival is evident in the address by Taoiseach Éamon de Valera to the 1936 Fianna Fáil Árd Fheis.

RESTORING IRISH BY SACRIFICES: Mr DE VALERA'S ADDRESS

People did not always understand when he had spoken of sacrifices concerning the revival of Irish. Using a medium of expression which one was trying to learn required strength of character. If they wished to restore Irish they would have to make sacrifices: they would have to accept the person with Irish when making appointments, even though his qualifications in other matters might not be as great as the other applicant. If children were to be taught the knowledge of Irish that would be needed in future, the teacher with the best knowledge of Irish must be appointed. While they did not want to rush matters there was a limit to the time they could delay, and the day was rapidly coming when certain sacrifices would have to be made by persons who would have to give way to those who had a knowledge of Irish which they themselves might not have got. There would also be the sacrifice made by those making the appointments by selecting persons who might be only second in technical qualifications, but first in Irish. It was a big sacrifice, but it must be made if they were to succeed, and if they were not serious let them not waste money, time and effort if they wanted to restore Irish simply for linguistics.
(*Irish Times* 1936, p11)

This speech, as reported by the *Irish Times*, suggests that government efforts to revive Irish are in response to the demands of the population, who have subsequently shown apathy and deficiency in complying with the restoration. The *discourse of deficiency* is now used in relation to language revival. Those who appropriate a discourse gain the powers associated with it (Foucault 1972b:227), in this case the power to remedy the deficiency through government decrees like the 1934 *Revised Programme.*

The knowledge-base of Irish-language revival draws on the expertise of the Gaelic League in relation to training Irish-language teachers and developing the Irish-language syllabus. This special interest group unites Government Ministers, university professors and a large network of adherents throughout all parts of the Civil Service and public sector. The social context of the Irish language changes as a consequence of Government actions. The language of marginalized peasants now offers a *linguistic capital* that provides access to desirable careers and preferment, supporting the emergence of a new socially mobile elite within the Civil Service and the professions. State regulations that stipulate Irish-language proficiency are supported by the Civil Service Commission, the Inspectors, and the examiners who enforce the regulations at local level. Their tacit agreement and cooperation embeds Irish-language entry requirements as normal everyday features.

The nationalist ideal of an Irish-speaking Ireland is actively constructed as a norm by statements that refer to this aspiration as a concrete demand of the population. This aspiration is further entrenched by successive Programmes for Education that displace English-language literacy. A belief that transmission by the schools alone is sufficient to generate Irish-language proficiency is evident, although tempered by allowing 'fifty years' for success.

Schools Inspectors assess oral Irish-language proficiency where once they inspected reading and writing. The Irish language used within the schools is a sanitised form of the vernacular peasant language. It is a semi-artificial

language sustained by permanent intervention (Bourdieu 1991:60). An orientation to instilling official nationalist ideology precludes teaching the form of language required for evaluative critique.

Theories of linguistic interdependence propose that first language (L1) literacy provides a basis to learn the literacy of a second language (L2). Those without proficiency in L1 literacy will struggle to gain L2 literacy. Theories relating to script-dependency suggest that similarities and differences in the two scripts will affect skills transfer between L1 and L2 (Shum, Ho, Siegel and Au 2016:324). Both theoretical positions are relevant for English-speaking children learning Irish as a second language with a non-Roman script.

Irish National Schools, forbidden to teach the English language for the first three years, increasingly focus on spoken Irish language rather than the written form. The National School pupil runs the risk of being illiterate in two languages, particularly those who leave school early. This, allied with an emphasis on oral proficiency for state and public-sector entry requirements, suggests a restricted form of language, one likely to generate 'civic illiteracy' in Giroux's terms (Giroux 2016).

The material benefit accruing to Irish-language proficiency is recognised by the middle classes, who can afford to attend residential Irish courses and can attend Irish-language classes provided by the Gaelic League and the Technical Schools to prepare for the entrance tests. Irish-language proficiency presents itself as an egalitarian process, recalling the vernacular language of the past, but it ultimately acts as an effective gatekeeping mechanism that benefits selected groups.

4.3 IRISH CATHOLICS AND EVIL LITERATURE

After the *Act of Union* came into effect in 1801, the Protestant religion dominated the public sphere in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland. Catholics were discriminated against throughout the Kingdom until

the *Roman Catholic Relief Act* of 1829. The cohesive national church structure created in the late nineteenth century by Cardinal Paul Cullen gave the Catholic Church in Ireland a powerful position to resist state intervention, especially in education matters (Ó Buachalla 1988:38). By the late nineteenth century, the British government tended to defer to the Irish Catholic hierarchy in relation to policy initiatives in Ireland, although the government ultimately acted in an executive capacity. In the twentieth century, Catholic religious sanction legitimates Irish Free State government activities in the Civil War (Whyte 1980:10). Garvin identifies the close personal ties between 'priests and patriots' in the new state (Garvin 1986:67). He claims that the 'intellectual mentors' of the new leaders are the Catholic clergy, who are themselves products of a narrow and intellectually limited training process (Garvin 1986:71). Although Whyte describes the Catholic Church and State as mutually independent in the new state (Whyte 1980:15), Akenson finds that the Catholic Church operates a wide sphere of influence in relation to any matter that can be construed to impact on faith and morals. This legitimates Church intervention in the political and legislative arenas (Akenson 1975:94), but there is no reciprocal state intervention in Church matters. The Catholic Church's activities cast it as another powerful *special-interest association* (Habermas 1989:200). The Catholic Church provides many social services on behalf of the State while operating as a separate jurisdiction within the state. It does not hold itself responsible to the state legislature in all matters. For example, it is willing to carry out marriage ceremonies that the State considers bigamous (Whyte 1980:55), and school attendance legislation is regularly flouted in the Industrial and Reformatory schools run by Catholic religious orders (e.g. DEASR 1928:88). At the same time, the Catholic hierarchy demands that the rules of Catholicism are fully protected by the Irish state. It particularly guards the extensive control of education that it secured under British rule (Whyte 1980:21). Paseta refers to the 'cordial relations' between the Catholic Church and a government composed almost entirely of Catholics sympathetic to Church teaching (Paseta 2003:194), while Whyte remarks that the ruling parties in this era, Cumann

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na nGaedheal and Fianna Fáíl, are both willing 'to uphold, by law if necessary, the traditional values of the Catholic Church' (Whyte 1980:40). The Catholic Church occupies a powerful role in shaping state policy without needing to seek election to public office (Keating 2013:292). Government Ministers routinely appoint clergy to State Commissions, and the Catholic hierarchy become increasingly visible and vocal in Irish society, reflecting a relationship of close interaction rather than independence between the Catholic Church and the State.

This section considers some of the Catholic clergy's pronouncements on the *illiterate person* in this era. These statements, designed for public consumption, draw from a discourse of morality. Regular references to moral aspects recur, creating a strong link between reading and immorality. Although the statements span several decades, their common concern is to regulate and control this source of immorality. The *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* list of prohibited books in the Middle Ages is an example of the Catholic Church's longstanding preoccupation with controlling print media. The Catholic religion demands of its adherents that they should read only material approved by the church, viewing all publications through the filter of Catholicism.

According to Hayes, Cardinal Paul Cullen's *Discourse on Catholic Education,* a public speech from 1872 that argues against state education, continues to underpin Irish Catholic education policy in the twentieth century (Hayes 1979:1). In this speech, Cullen states that the sole purpose of education is the salvation of the soul. The acquisition of knowledge must be approached with vigilance, and it must be guided by Catholic morality. Within these parameters, state-funded education is 'the poison of error' administered in a golden cup (Cullen 1872: 419). Cullen refers to the need to ensure that only books acceptable to the Catholic religion are provided for schoolchildren:

> What shall I now say of books so compiled as to meet
> the exigencies of [religiously] mixed education?

> ...
> This suppression of Catholic truth is most detrimental
> to our poor Catholic children, many of whom never
> read any books except those which they use in school,
> and learn nothing except what they meet with in
> these books or hear from their master. Is not this a
> serious loss? Is it not a great evil for Catholics to be
> brought up in ignorance, not only of the doctrines but
> also of the history of the Church to which they belong,
> and of the lives and deeds of so many Christian heroes
> whose virtues illustrated the world?
>
> How far superior is the system of the Christian
> Brothers and other Catholic educational institutions?
> Their books make continual reference to the
> mysteries of religion, they depict the glories of the
> Church, the majesty of the Apostolic See, and
> continually inflame the youthful mind to the practice
> of good works, by proposing to them the lives and
> virtues of holy men, and by reminding them every
> hour of their religious duties, of the end of man, and
> of other great motives calculated to induce them to
> serve God.
> (Cullen 1872:440)

In 1920, almost fifty years after Cullen's speech, Fr Andrew Murphy
presents a similar view on reading in a pamphlet *The Choice of Books*
published by the Catholic Truth Society (Murphy 1920). The back cover of
the pamphlet sets out the Society's objectives:

> ...to disseminate cheap devotional literature, assist
> the uneducated poor regarding religion and to
> combat the pernicious influence of infidel and
> immoral publications by the circulation of good,
> cheap and popular Catholic books.
> (Murphy 1920: Back Cover)

The Catholic Church condemns and forbids 'the criminal recklessness of
indiscriminate reading' (Murphy 1920:12). Books need to have a moral or
educational value to be deemed 'fit and proper' for Catholics to read:

> A book may, for instance, be well calculated to amuse and entertain, and yet be very objectionable on moral or on educational grounds.
> (Murphy 1920:2)

Murphy makes recommendations on appropriately educational reading:

> One may give, without the slightest hesitation, the first place in educational value to the books of our own Irish novelists – the Banims, Griffin, Kickham, and many others, and this on no more ground of sentiment, but on true and sound educational principles.
> …
> Our novels deal with the clean and healthy Irish spirit, deeply religious, and pure as the air of the Irish hills, and Irish men and Irish women can form no truer ideal, can be filled with no higher purpose, than to imbibe and absorb that spirit, to make it live again in themselves, and, in this, its renewed life, be the inspiration of those who come after us.
> (Murphy 1920:8)

The cited authors are all nineteenth-century writers: Michael Banim (d. 1874), John Banim (d. 1842), Gerald Griffin (d. 1840) and Charles Kickham (d. 1882). Where nationalists identify the ancient Gaelic past as their 'Golden Age' in relation to literature and culture, it seems that Murphy and other Catholic clergy favour the nineteenth century of Cardinal Cullen. Both groups, however, share a belief in the value of the 'pure' air of the Irish hills, reflecting a preference for an idealised rural lifestyle rather than the urban industrial world.

Murphy distinguishes female from male readers: 'Women, too, can learn much by reading' (1920:9). Later, he differentiates between *specialist* and *ordinary* readers. The *specialist reader* has received a university education and can therefore 'winnow truth from falsehood and error', which the ordinary reader cannot (1920:10). *Ordinary readers* need guidance and protection against dishonest and untruthful authors:

> All that can be done is to beg that all readers may strive to realise how vitally important it is to select with care the books they read for information. The only legitimate and reasonable end of such reading is the attainment of truth, and the ordinary reader has no business to read any book on any sort of subject unless its teaching is sound and true.
> (Murphy 1920:10)

> …need to read slowly and look for verifications and for logical conclusions – ordinary people need to confine their reading to subjects within their capacity. Otherwise they will be persuaded by authors who travesty and pervert the truth.
> (Murphy 1920:16)

Murphy quotes John Ruskin 'You ought to read a book as you take medicine, by advice, and not advertisement …. Ask some one who knows good books from bad ones to tell you what to buy, and be content' (Murphy 1920:10). He also quotes Thomas Carlyle 'It would be much safer and better for many a reader that he had no concern with books at all' (Murphy 1920:11). Later, he draws attention to the ambiguous nature of reading, containing risks as well as benefits:

> …but I often think that we forget that other side to this glorious view of literature – the misuse of books, the debilitating waste of brain in aimless, promiscuous, vapid reading, or even it may be in the poisonous inhalation of more literary garbage and bad men's worst thoughts.
> (Mr Frederic Harrison in Murphy 1920:12)

> …reading may strengthen, improve, refine and elevate our mental faculties and our moral sense, and that is what we call the educational effect of reading

> …. the other side of the picture, the danger of indiscriminate reading,..
> (Murphy 1920:16)

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> Never was there a time when there was a greater need than now for reading, which leads to this crowning perfection of education, because never was there a time when reading was responsible for so much evil. If reading makes us clever and brilliant, without making us good, better for us if we had never learnt to read
> (Murphy 1920:19).

'Indiscriminate reading' is presented as an evil, dangerous and reckless activity, fraught with risks to morality. In this context, the *illiterate person* is safeguarded against evil.

Cardinal Cullen cites John Stuart Mill and other non-Catholics to advance his argument against state education, while advocating that only Catholic writers are appropriate for Catholics to read (Cullen 1872). Murphy (1920) quotes from Ruskin, Carlyle, and Harrison, all non-Catholics, and unlikely to feature on recommended reading lists for *ordinary* Catholic readers. These references underline the wider reading allowed to *specialist readers* and the limitations placed on *ordinary readers.* Cullen and Murphy demonstrate their familiarity with international writers, but they seek to prevent ordinary readers from gaining any knowledge of such writing.

Prior to Irish Independence, publications that promoted discussion, debate and dissent circulated in Ireland under tolerant British views of censorship. In the Irish Free State, a Catholic perspective on reading takes hold, transforming the act of reading into a potentially criminal and immoral activity. All popular publications are treated as putatively evil. They are potential enemies of the Catholic Church and, by extension, enemies of the Irish state. The Catholic hierarchy permits its clergy to devote time and energy to combatting this threat. The activities of the Catholic Truth Society are one example. Another is the involvement of Catholic clergy in the Irish Vigilance Association, formed in 1911 under the auspices of the Dominican Order (Horgan 1995:62; Keating 2012:24). Fr Richard Devane S.J. of the Vigilance Association is prominent in staging public protests and carrying out vigilante raids on newsagents (Horgan 1995:61-63). No prosecutions

arise from these activities, ascribed to 'extra-legal zeal' by Horgan (1995:62). Fr Devane later tells the Committee on Evil Literature 'There are only two alternatives to stamping out an evil: law or terrorism, and we had to fall back on terrorism' (quoted in Horgan1995:62).

The Catholic Church publishes guidelines and lists of books deemed appropriate for devout Irish Catholic readers. A *Catalogue of Novels and Tales by Catholic Writers* by Fr Stephen Brown SJ, founder and honorary librarian of the Central Catholic Library, is published in March 1927, and all 500 copies are sold out by October. The revised second edition in 1928 is supported financially by the Knights of St Columbanus (Brown 1928:iv). An eighth edition is published in 1946. Brown (1881-1962), educated in Clongowes Wood and the Royal University of Ireland, is an internationally renowned librarian and bibliographer (Moran 2009). Brown is also a founder-member and lecturer at the UCD School of Library Training, established in 1928. In 1937, Brown co-founds the Catholic Association for International Relations with F. W. Ryan, encountered earlier in Chapter 3.

Brown has previously published several catalogues of Irish novelists (e.g. *A Readers Guide to Irish Fiction* 1910), reflecting a nationalist pride in Irish literary publications. Hroch describes the tendency of the Catholic hierarchy across Europe to support popular and cultural nationalism until the emergence of overtly political and social demands, at which point explicitly religious concerns are pursued (2000:145). Brown's series of catalogues reflect this trajectory, moving from listing Irish writers in the pre-Independence years to an exclusive focus on Catholic writers post-Independence. The following extracts from the 1928 edition demonstrate the rationale behind the catalogue:

> Books included in the list: All fiction, original or translated, in the English language by Catholic writers. As regards converts to the Church, while not excluding works written prior to their conversion, we have not been at special pains to record them all. (Brown 1928: iii)

A certain number of novels have been deliberately omitted as being considered objectionable from a moral standpoint.
(Brown 1928:iv)

And now for the question of Catholic fiction. …on what mental pabulum shall our people nourish – or starve, or poison: their intellect, imagination, and heart? … we may take it as certain that the great majority of those among our people who read at all are reading, and will continue in increasing numbers to read, fiction. That may or may not be desirable, but it is a fact. Accepting it as a fact, I would plead that it is a fact fraught with momentous consequences for evil or for good. In what I have to say I have chiefly in mind those years of vague impulses, riotous imagination, more or less tumultuous emotion, and feeble self-control, between the ages of fourteen and twenty – l'age ingrate, as they call it in France.
(Brown 1928:vi)

Brown outlines a three-part typology of unsuitable novels. The first type is morally unacceptable:

My first contention is that the atmosphere of a great many modern, and especially recent, novels is a poisonous atmosphere.
(Brown 1928:vi)

Cullen in 1872 uses the metaphor of poison to refer to the dangers of education. Brown uses the concept of *moral poison* in his discussion of morally unacceptable literature. He cites *Moral Poisons in Modern Fiction* (1923) published in London by R. Brimley Johnson, described as a 'non-Catholic literary man', who states 'without hesitation, I would maintain that an immense number of novels now being written contain much deadly poison'. Accordingly:

> ...   The conclusion is only too plain – much
> contemporary fiction is infected with what can fairly
> be described as moral poison.
> ...
> Whatever else may be said about it, at all events the
> Catholic novel that is a Catholic novel is free from
> moral poison.
> (Brown 1928:vii)

The second type of unsuitable novel contains an unwholesome intellectual atmosphere:

> ...And so we have novels of Socialism and of Christian
> Science, of Spiritism, and of Psycho-Analysis; novels
> that preach Eugenics or New Thought, Divorce or
> Evolution, or Rationalism in one or other of its many
> forms....'The usual novel of today' writes the Catholic
> novelist Mr Frank H Spearman 'is a very hot-bed of
> every sort of propaganda, from the immoral to the
> insane.....will such readings leave no trace in memory
> or imagination?
> (Brown 1928:viii)

The third type of unsuitable novel contains an unacceptable religious atmosphere, one that is un-Catholic or anti-Catholic. Brown equates this type of novel with Protestant, English fiction.

> The non-Catholic, above all the non-Christian,
> necessarily views life from a standpoint very different
> from ours, whenever he comes upon its deeper things
> ....
> The general outlook of a novel can scarcely escape
> being the expression of the general outlook of the
> novelist. Its morality is his morality.
> (Brown 1928:x)

According to Brown, the Catholic novelist is a morally, intellectually and religiously superior type of novelist: 'He cannot at one and the same time keep within the bounds of Faith and stray very far from the limits of right

reason' (Brown 1928:viii). The Catholic novelist is free from 'unwholesome' moral, intellectual and religious influences (Brown 1928:ix).

> The danger to morals presented by many modern novels is recognised not only in religious circles, but outside them.
> …
> One remedy, I venture to suggest, is to be found in lists, such as the present, which point to fiction that is free from moral and intellectual poison.
> (Brown 1928:xi)

Brown refers to the Instruction from the Holy Office of Pope Pius XI on 11th May 1927, advising Catholic Archbishops and Bishops to take action against 'one of the most deadly evils of our day'. This refers to the wide circulation of immoral fictions, dramas and comedies that are 'tainted with the same evil character as that of the sensual novel (Brown 1928:xi). In the conclusion of his pamphlet, Brown draws attention to the dangers of 'the flood of evil fiction' (Brown 1928:xi).

As well as producing guides for readers, the Catholic Church lobbies for state censorship. The Catholic religious groups campaigning for censorship claim the support of public opinion, although there is little evidence of widespread public support (Paseta 2003:198). The Minister for Justice Kevin O' Higgins states in the Dáil in November 1925 that the existing legislation is sufficient to deal with obscene literature and that it not the duty of the state to decide on the reading matter of the Irish public, but he subsequently indicates his willingness to form an investigatory committee (Dáil Éireann Debate 1925). Following concerted representations from organisations of Catholic clergymen such as the Christian Brothers, the Priests' Social Guild and the Catholic Bishops' Standing Committee, the Minister establishes the Committee on Evil Literature in February 1926. Two clergy are among the five men appointed.

The initial impetus for the investigation relates primarily to regulating obscene material and information advocating contraception, in keeping with

similar anti-contraception legislation in the US and other jurisdictions. However, the Committee's deliberations widen this interpretation. Submissions are sought from a variety of organisations, most of whom are male and not related to child-bearing in any way. The topic of birth control is discussed and debated by men, despite its relevance to women and the assertion that it is mainly women who write and circulate birth control information (Paseta 2003:206).

Reports to the British government, such as Dale (HMSO 1904), tend to present their recommendations and conclusions within a semblance of scientific detachment. In contrast, the Committee's report to the Irish Government presents general summaries of the submissions, glossing over any dissenting voices. Thus, they present the views of 'practically all' as a unanimous conclusion:

> The witnesses were practically all agreed that this propaganda is offensive to the preponderant moral sense of the community of the Saorstát.
> (Committee on Evil Literature 1927:15)

This statement overlooks the submissions of groups such as the Dublin Christian Citizenship Council, who refer to the need for a free press in a free state. Their submission advocates that the best methods of coping with 'the evil of pernicious printed matter' are the promotion of education and better school attendance, the establishment of libraries and reading clubs, and cultivating the love of 'good literature' (Horgan 1995: 65). The views of Charles Eason, book wholesaler, are similarly overlooked. The Committee ultimately recommends a scheme of prevention by prohibition (Committee on Evil Literature 1927:9).

> …But the grounds of prohibition should be strictly limited to the case of publications undesirable from the point of view of public morality.
> (Committee on Evil Literature 1927:15)

The Committee's report provides the basis for the Censorship of Publications Act 1929, enacted in July 1929. The restriction on reading material is also a restriction on writing, particularly on journalism. The maximum fines in relation to the press are ten times those in relation to books, £500 as opposed to £50. A prison sentence of up to six months can be imposed in both cases. A £500 fine is sufficient to bankrupt a newspaper (Keating 2012:22). The first prosecution under the Act takes place in October 1929, just three months after its introduction, when the editor of the *Waterford Standard* is fined for printing details of a sexual assault trial. This demonstration of swift action leading to fines and prison sentences serves to promote deference and timidity within the mainstream Irish press. Consequently, Irish newspapers choose to operate *censorship by anticipation* (Keating 2012:17). According to Keating, this self-regulatory mechanism has a lasting impact, curtailing investigative journalism and freedom of expression within the Irish press industry (Keating 2012:32). This constraint on the role of the press diminishes the public sphere of which it is an important element. Material deemed to endanger a newspaper's existence will not be published or circulated in Ireland. As Habermas remarks, editorial decisions to publish or not to publish have an impact on the dissemination of critique (1989:169). Critical debate and dissent must retreat to the private sphere.

The formal Censorship Board, established in May 1930, proceeds immediately to ban books and journalism. No appeal mechanism exists until 1946. From 1930 to the mid-1950s, most Censorship Board members are drawn from the Catholic Truth Society and the Knights of Columbanus (Keating 2014:72). The Catholic Truth Society, founded in Maynooth in 1899, is under the leadership of Dominicans and Jesuits by the 1920s (Keating 2014:68). As well as providing members to the Censorship Board, the Catholic Truth Society is also a major source of referrals to the Board. The Censorship Act focuses on 'obscene' criminal and sexual topics, particularly in relation to contraception. The Catholic Truth Society campaigns to bring all forms of religious blasphemy into the remit of the

Board. Despite lacking legal grounds, the Board bans books such as George Bernard Shaw's *The Adventures of the Black Girl in her Search for God* (1932) on a solely religious basis (Adams 1968:97; Keating 2014:75). These 'extra-legal' activities of the Censorship Board proceed without sanction, as did those of the Irish Vigilance Association before them. Those who express a dissenting opinion on censorship are publicly vilified and risk ostracism. These measures, involving proscription, public humiliation, and the risk of financial penalties or loss of liberty through prosecution, all serve to differentiate writing that is deemed acceptable from writing that is deemed unacceptable. Irish writers whose work is banned by the Censorship Board publish abroad, thereby removing their writing, and often themselves, from the state. Those who can read and write in Ireland are confined to the range of topics approved by the State's Censorship Board, which are effectively those approved by the Catholic Church. The arena for dynamic critical debate is circumscribed. The *agora* fills with the concerns of the special interest groups rather than the concerns of the population. The newspapers, careful to comply with the censorship legislation, devote much space to daily events in clerical life. Fallon's remark about the *Irish Independent* is relevant for all Irish newspapers in this era: 'It is to be doubted if any national newspaper, in any European country, has ever given so much space or emphasis to the doings and sayings of its country's priests and bishops' (Fallon 1998:227)

A speech by Archbishop Finbar Ryan reported in the daily newspapers on 19th October 1937 avers that the flood of evil fiction referred to by Brown in 1928 has become a torrent a decade later (*Irish Press* 1937a). Dr Ryan is a member of the Dominican Order, a teaching order that provides the leadership of the Vigilance Association and the Catholic Truth Society. Archbishop Ryan expresses his view on the topic of literacy during a speech delivered to the Dominican Aquinas Study Circle. He addresses his audience as *specialist* educated Catholics, fit to 'lead the masses':

He had come to doubt the value of compulsory education. Young people, he thought, would be better off if they did not know how to read, because the power of reading without the corresponding power of discrimination was a terrible danger. He would ask them not to regard him as a reactionary. He hoped he was not. Just as he thought the greatest disaster to the world was the invention of the printing press through which flowed such a torrent of evil books and literature which could be bought for next to nothing, he thought that the education that allowed them to do it should be a thing to be decried. This, however, was a world of fact and the printing press was there, and old people could read its productions, consequently they must have a certain proportion of their people possessed of that definite education which would enable them to lead the masses. This, he believed, was the responsibility of educated Catholics and the purpose of organisations such as the Aquinas Study Circle. This was not only admirable and worthy of praise, but absolutely necessary to prevent intellectual corrosion and ultimate social ruin in society.
(*Irish Press* 1937a, p9)

In 1937, Ryan makes use of the same concepts of morality, the inherent evil of literature, and the differentiation between *specialist* and *ordinary* readers evident in the statements by Brown, Murphy and Cullen before him. Ryan's assertion that young people would be better off illiterate, which he defends as a personal view, can be linked to similar statements stretching back to the previous century.

Other literacy-related activities reported in the national newspapers during the same week in October 1937 highlight the close interaction between the Catholic clergy and the reading public. In this arbitrary seven-day period, reported activities include the formation of a Hospital Library Committee chaired by Rev Stephen Brown (*Irish Press* 1937b), encountered earlier as author of the *Catalogue of Catholic Writers.* The *Irish Press* of the following day 22nd October contains a front-page photograph of Rev Brown and the

Hospital Library Committee, and a further article about the committee on page10 (*Irish Press* 1937c; *Irish Press* 1937d).

The *Irish Press* of 23rd October reports on three new Dublin libraries (*Irish Press* 1937e). The following extracts from the newspaper account indicate the role of the clergy in authorising and supporting appropriate reading for the *ordinary readers* of Dublin.

> THREE NEW DUBLIN LIBRARIES OPENED: CITY 'CHAIN' NOW COMPLETE. PRIESTS THANK THE CORPORATION ON THE PEOPLE'S BEHALF
>
> Father Macardle said the opening of the library would be of great educational benefit and, on behalf of over 20,000 people of the district, he thanked the Corporation.
> …
> Rev Father Scannell, CC Fairview, said that he hoped that they would see numerous translations by [sic] good Spanish, French and German Christian cultural works in circulation in the library.
>
> Very Rev. J.M. Neary, P.P., Ringsend, opening the Ringsend branch, said that it fulfilled a long felt want. The building had a splendid appearance. There were about 10,000 volumes, which would prove of immense cultural value. On behalf of the people he thanked the Corporation.
> (*Irish Press* 1937e, p11)

The Catholic Church's self-appointed role as both representative and guardian of 'the people' is evident in these extracts. The priests perform official opening ceremonies and give official thanks on behalf of largely silent populations. The clergy act as an unelected mediator between the government and the population, advocating on behalf of the population, while operating a critical reasoning governed by Catholic teaching. State resources such as libraries are discussed in terms of their moral and spiritual aspects.

The deference given to Catholic Church rulings on publications severely reduces the potential for a critical reasoning reading public to emerge within the new Irish Free State. The mainstream press does not publish dissenting voices. Debate and dissent among devout Irish Catholics are confined within narrow Catholic religion-based parameters. The introduction of state censorship further limits the range of reading material available in Ireland. The 'triple lock' of state censorship, religious guidance and the control of clerical publication reduce access to written forms of religious or social dissent. Consequently, a vibrant and independent critical rational reading public is not a feature of Irish society in the first decades of the new state.

In the statements considered in this section, books and reading constitute particular risks to the delicate nature of morality. Books are conduits of evil, requiring control and censorship. The vetting and censorship of schoolbooks is accepted as a longstanding feature of state educational provision. The Catholic Church's discourse of morality promotes the extension of such censorship to all publications. This discourse differentiates *specialist* from *ordinary* readers. Specialist readers are educated to second or third level, ensuring familiarity with Catholic teaching, as this guarantees adherence to morality. A hierarchy of morality places the educated Catholic clergy at the top, and those educated to primary level at the bottom. Those with a primary school education are assumed to have less powers of discrimination and are therefore likely to make moral errors. The potential for 'indiscriminate reading' to lead to immorality underlines statements that identify the spiritual benefits of being an *illiterate person*.

Morality, presented as a key component of Catholicism, is subject to constant external threats. Repeated references to 'moral poison' and to an unprotected population who are vulnerable to the effects of 'evil literature' evoke the experience of poison gas attacks on defenceless people. Constant vigilance and robust activity is required to counter this threat. The existence of a powerful, insidious and deadly enemy justifies the use of weapons such as censorship. The concept of censorship within military

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conflict is familiar in the Irish context. The British administration suppressed publications deemed to be 'seditious' over many centuries. Censorship of information was a feature of the First World War, and both sides in the Irish Civil War engaged in censorship of the daily press. The concept of state censorship in peacetime arouses some opposition, although these voices are effectively muted, by being 'written out' of reports, and being 'talked around' by the clerical delegations sent to Ministers.

In this battle against 'evil literature', the clergy adopt the power to determine whether publications are moral and immoral, based on their expertise as arbiters of Catholic morality. Suggested safeguards from this danger involve reading non-fiction, reading only what religious authorities permit, and not reading at all, i.e. *the illiterate person*. The option to improve educational provisions so that all readers become *specialist readers* is not considered.

Those that oppose any legislation upholding Catholic teaching are subjected to public castigation (Paseta 2003:203). Many liberal intellectuals have left the country by the time the Censorship legislation is enacted. *The Irish Statesman*, a platform for dissent edited by George Russell, ceases in 1930. Opposition to the Censorship Act is faint and muted, and it lacks visible public support (Paseta 2003:215).

Despite the Censorship Act, English-language publications that are officially banned continue to circulate in Ireland (Fallon 1998:205). The legislation sets out formal penalties, but these do not guide local instances. Direct applications to the Minister can circumvent the legislation (Paseta 2003:181). In many cases, banned books circulate openly, and no action is taken unless they fall into the hands of those deemed *ordinary* readers. Such decisions see leniency used as a technique of power (Foucault 1977a:24). As a result, a broader range of English-language publications exist other than those sanctioned by the State and the Catholic Church.

The official *Register of Prohibited Publications* contains only English-language publications in 1968 (Adams 1968:178), indicating that no Irish-

language publication has been banned. Few publications in Irish warrant attention from the Vigilance Association or the Catholic Truth Society, and the number of Irish-language publications entering Ireland from abroad is negligible. An Gúm, the main Irish-language publisher established by the Department of Education in 1926, must abide by the censorship regulation. Reading materials in the Irish language generally conform to the requirements of the Censorship Act. Akenson describes long-standing concerns of Protestant educators about the overwhelmingly Catholic tenor of Irish-language textbooks (Akenson 1975:123), evidence of the successful co-mingling of the Irish language and Catholic religion. Thirty years further on, the Catholic Presentation Brothers running Brian Titley's Secondary School promote the use of Irish, not just because of its historic credentials, but also because it is free from 'the filthy literature' of the English language (O'Donoghue and Harford 2016:114). The Irish language and its publications come closest to resembling the morally conservative vernacular language sought by the Catholic Church.

4.4 CONCLUSION

In the Irish Free State, the impetus to create an idealized Irish nation leads to interactions that tie social legislation to nationalist and religious aspirations (Paseta 2003:217). Within this context, the activities of Irish-language ideologues and Catholic clergy construct everyday language as an object requiring intervention and control. Reading and writing are considered potentially subversive and seditious activities. Two powerful special interest groups aligned with the state both seek the replacement of an existing language. Irish-language ideologues seek to replace the English language with the Irish language. The Catholic Church seeks to alter the written English that circulates in Ireland and replace it with one conforming to Catholic morality and theology. A growing tendency towards the compulsory and forced imposition of these goals is evident. The Department of Education reduces English-language literacy requirements

in National Schools and forbids the use of English in Infant classes. The Catholic Church demands legislative sanctions in relation to publications, and later seeks to extend the remit of the legislation. These activities recall Bauman's claim that h*eavy modernity* contains an inherent capacity for totalitarianism (2001:101).

The Irish language provides the basis for an 'unlikely alliance' between clergy and nationalists (Garvin 1986:74). The Irish-language revival programme is compatible with the Catholic Church drive to modify the English language, allowing political and religious aspirations coincide in relation to English-language literacy. Many key activists display allegiance to both campaigns. Reverend Timothy Corcoran is one of many Catholic clergymen who are prominent Irish-language ideologues. The Government openly supports both positions. It produces and polices the legislation underpinning a censorship based on Catholic morality, while also promoting Irish-language revival through the education system and through public sector recruitment practices. While these activities seek different outcomes, both are directed overwhelmingly against England as the source of inappropriate language and moral depravity. The regulation of English-language literature, shaped by censorship and language revival policy, differentiates the Irish nation-state from Britain and underlines its independence. Efforts to inculcate specific forms of morality and literacy reflect the *discourse of superior intellect*, where an idealised pious Irish-speaking population who are illiterate in English and unfamiliar with English-language literature evoke the Gaelic ancestors from the glorious Gaelic past.

The National Schools form the locus of Irish-language revival, and teaching resources are diverted to achieving this objective. English-language literacy is displaced and downgraded. The Irish language transmitted through the schools reflects its new role as a language to instruct children and to perform the duties of a public servant. Statements on Irish-language revival portray parents and the general population within a new form of the *discourse of deficiency*, where explanations for the poor pace of language

revival focus on deficiencies in the nationalist spirit of the population. The literacy provisions of the National School syllabus are predicated on the existence of the Irish child's superior intellect, able to an adopt a new language and new form of literacy during school hours alone without the need for resources such as free schoolbooks. Another echo of the *discourse of deficiency* is evident in the attention given to remedying poor school attendance within the Irish nation-state. The illiterate child is now considered the product of deficient parental interest in schooling, justifying the imposition of legislation to regulate parental compliance.

The Catholic Church statements examined here are underpinned by a discourse of morality that positions the clergy as arbiters of the moral status of the population. Members of the small elite in receipt of a Catholic Secondary School education are *specialist* readers, deemed capable of forming morally sound judgements on reading material. The *ordinary readers* with just a primary education require guidance, supervision and regulation regarding their reading. This discourse also presents censorship as a positive element in the interests of morality. Censorship ensures that the *ordinary reader* need not be concerned with decisions of morality. Everything made available for reading has already been deemed morally sound and may therefore be safely consumed. The *illiterate person* is represented as occupying an ideal state of immunity from contamination.

The Censorship of Publications Act has introduces constraints on readers and writers in both Irish and English languages. Publishers and newspapers are aware of the censorship legislation and its financial implications, and they respond by imposing self-censorship. There are few platforms willing to print opposition to the censorship legislation. The regulation of reading material reduces the range of topics that can be discussed in print.

The interplay between Catholic morality and nationalist language ideology limits the potential for a critical rational reading public to emerge in either of the Irish Free State's two languages. The activities of State Censorship, the State reading and writing syllabus, the downgrading of English-

language literacy, and Catholic reading lists are all ways to ensure an orthodox moral and nationalist population. The *illiterate person*, with no access to written critique, offers the potential to fulfil these requirements. The *illiterate person* has a positive value in both the religious and political arenas, where the productive power lies in the potential to be docile and uncritical. This is a valuable attribute when the acclaim of the population is sought rather than its critical engagement (Habermas 1989:201).

This chapter examined views on language and literacy. Chapter 5 considers statements made regarding the absence of literacy. The chapter uses statements from conference proceedings and national education reports to explore how the *illiterate person* is constructed at national and international level during the 1930s and 1940s.

Chapter 5: The Era of Social Progress 1930s and 1940s

5.1 Introduction

This chapter considers the *illiterate person* in the educational context during the 1930s and 1940s. In this era, the Irish nation-state is consolidating its identity as a Catholic nation-state and seeking to engage as an equal among modern developed nation-states. Full literacy is considered evidence of social progress, while deficiencies in literacy are viewed as undesirable and disruptive. Activities that foster literacy are considered in the context of European electorates voting for socialist, totalitarian, and Nazi regimes. These political outcomes are attributed to illiterate electorates, rather than the presence of poverty and social inequality.

The chapter focuses on primary education in Ireland because most of the Irish population do not progress beyond primary education in these years. Debate on educational methods among American and British educators sees a progressivism relating to the pragmatism of John Dewey questioning the overt moral, religious and ideological content of education (Soler 2006). A move away from rote learning and prescribed subject matter is becoming evident in English-speaking countries. Pedagogical approaches to literacy reflect insights from the new fields of experimental and behavioural psychology, where reading is represented as a psychological and physiological process. A new style of reading curriculum emerges in English-speaking countries to replace the traditional moral 'British Empire' approach to literacy (Soler 2006:12).

In contrast to these international trends, the Catholic Church retains its long-standing control over education in the Irish Free State. According to Reverend Timothy Corcoran, Professor of Education in UCD, 'the spiritual

life of the child is essentially the chief care in Catholic education' (Corcoran 1930:206). The Irish Catholic educational focus on morality is characterised by Akenson as an adherence to medieval theology that promotes resistance to modern educational practices (Akenson 1975:101).

The Government continues its attempt to displace the English language. By the 1930s, the Gaelic League no longer has the power accorded to a special interest group. Its exclusive authority in relation to Irish-language expertise diminishes as the Department of Education supplants the League's functions. The organization remains active as a cultural group. It mounts opposition to English-language usage, non-Gaelic games and jazz on the radio. This attempt to produce an Irish-speaking population has little appeal in the era of Hollywood cinema and wider social freedoms. The state can bypass the need for popular support by using policy levers and legal mechanisms to compel Irish-language revival. Places in teacher training colleges are reserved for native Irish-speakers, who are waived the minimum academic requirements. Fluency in the language is required for employment in the public sector and civil service. Fianna Fáíl's electoral success in 1932 reinvigorates the impetus for Irish-language revival at Government level, introducing further regulatory mechanisms such as an oral Irish test for entry to Secondary Schools (DEASR 1934:60).

The World Congress of the World Federation of Education Associations is held in Dublin during 1933. This week-long gathering of two thousand educators includes a session devoted to the topic of illiteracy. Section 5.2 uses the conference proceedings to explore how the *illiterate person* is constructed by educators at international level. Section 5.3 traces the construction of the *illiterate person* within national education reports in Ireland. It also examines the *illiterate person* in the context of the focus on Irish-language revival within National Schools.

5.2 LITERACY IN THE INTERNATIONAL CONTEXT

The World Conference of the World Federation of Education Associations takes place in Dublin in August 1933. The week-long programme includes a full day devoted to 'Illiteracy', examined in this section.

The World Federation of Education Associations (WFEA) was formed following a 1923 conference on 'World Peace' hosted by the American National Education Association (NEA). The WFEA adopted an educational, non-sectarian, and non-political stance (Smith 1944). An early resolution declared support for a campaign to eliminate illiteracy throughout the world. The formal sections of the organisation include a Department of Illiteracy (World Federation of Education Associations 1923:6). Mrs Cora Wilson Stewart, a prominent adult literacy campaigner in America and chairperson of the Illiteracy Commission of the NEA, is instrumental in developing this part of the WFEA. She chairs the 1933 Dublin session on illiteracy.

The WFEA attracts support from many prominent educators in the United States, including Professor Paul Monroe and Professor Isaac Kandel, colleagues of John Dewey in Columbia University. Monroe is President of the WFEA in 1933. Kandel taught classics in Belfast from 1906-1908 before undertaking PhD studies in Columbia University. He edits the Columbia Teacher's College *Educational Yearbook* from 1924-1944 (Pollack 2001). Both attend the Dublin Conference. T.J. O' Connell, General Secretary of the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) is appointed a Vice-President of the WFEA in 1927. He taught in Irish National Schools from 1902-1916, before becoming INTO General Secretary. He is the Director and Organising Secretary of the 1933 Dublin Conference. The Conference Proceedings are edited by O'Connell (1933).

Head of State Éamon de Valera and Minister for Education Tomás Deirg attend the Conference opening and the accompanying social engagements. This large gathering with an international focus appears to hold little interest for Catholic clergy, who are normally so prominent in

relation to educational topics. While they attend and contribute to the conference, they do not hold positions of authority within it. The 1932 democratic elections in Germany that led to a Nazi government and the subsequent expulsion of Jewish teachers and students from German schools in early 1933 provides a further backdrop to the conference.

The Conference programme includes a day-long session allocated to the 'Department of Illiteracy' with Mrs Wilson Stewart chairing the meeting and Ronald Cheng from China as secretary (*Irish Times* 1933). While seven speakers are listed, three papers relating to Spain, the United States and Mexico are recorded in the Proceedings. Dr Margarita Comas, Delegate of the Government of Cataluna, presents a paper titled 'The Struggle Against Illiteracy in Spain'.

> The young Spanish Republic is struggling very hard against illiteracy, but as we believe that the learning of the three R's is of little value if we don't awake[n] the interest for books and spiritual things, we are trying to get in contact with the country folks and to stir their intellect and their feelings. This is why the Government created in May, 1931, the Committee called "Patronato de Misiones Pedagogicas," the object of which is "to bring to the folks living in the small villages the moral stimuli and the examples of modern progress so that they feel they really are a part of the world."
>
> The "misiones" have three objects:
> (a) The increase of culture. – Founding of libraries, organisation of lectures, readings, concerts, pictures, art exhibitions, etc.
> (b) the improvement of educational methods of teaching. – Visits to the rural school teachers, conferences, model lessons in schools, study with the teachers of the rural environment, excursions, etc.
> (c) Political and civic education of the rural areas, by lectures, talks, etc.

The first object is the most important for our present purpose. In the first year they have been at work the "misiones" have been in more than fifty villages, and the results have been splendid. A group of students of several colleges from Madrid have organised an amateur theatre and a choir of folklore and classical songs, and every Sunday they go, accompanied by some teachers, to one village or another in 'mision'; after the visit they send books, establish a circulation of gramophone records etc. The libraries created up to the have as many as 1,400 volumes, and they are left, for the most part in schools. The books have been carefully chosen by experts for their interest.
(Dr Margarita Comas in O'Connell 1933:122)

Caroline Parham Stephens, an elementary teacher from Lafayette, Louisiana, speaks about 'A Moonlight School'. She presents Census statistics on the rate of illiteracy in the United States, linking the high rates in the Louisiana to the history of enslavement and the presence of French-speaking Acadians. She differentiates between black and white populations:

In the whole United States 20 per cent of the total population ten years of age and over, were illiterate in 1870; 11.5 per cent of the whites and 81.4 per cent of the negroes. There has been improvement all along, as shown by the census taken every ten years, until now (by the Census of 1930) only 4.3 per cent of the total population are illiterate; 2.7 per cent of the whites and 16.3 per cent of the negroes.
In the whole State of Louisiana 21.9 per cent of the population were illiterate in 1920; 11.4 per cent of the whites and 38.5 per cent of the negroes. The great Crusade against illiteracy, on which I am now reporting, which was carried on during the latter part of the decade, was so effective that, by the Census of 1930 the percentage of illiteracy for the whole State fell from 21.9 per cent to 13.5 per cent, the percentage of illiterate native whites fell from 11.4 per cent to 7.8 per cent, and the percentage of

illiterate negroes fell from 38.5 per cent to 23.3 per cent.

This Crusade or great push that was made in 1929 to wipe out as large a portion of illiteracy as possible by the Census of 1930 was due very largely to the continuing efforts of Mrs Cora Wilson Stewart, "The Lady of the Moonlight Schools", who had been devoting her efforts to this cause among the mountaineers of Kentucky during many years, and had won the interest and assistance of the National Education Association. She had especially gained the active approval and support of the late Dr. Albert E. Winship, editor of the Journal of Education, of Boston. The State Superintendent of Education in Louisiana, Mr. Thomas H. Harris, joined the movement with vigor and obtained an appropriation of $100,000 to be expended especially in wiping out illiteracy in Louisiana.

(Caroline Parham Stephens in O'Connell 1933:125)

Miss Stephens describes how she undertook to teach literacy in night classes organised in the school she works in. The adult students were selected in an unusual way, and they were taught in a primary school classroom:

I drove about the community with Mrs. Hart, our policewoman, and gathered a group of eleven adult illiterates, nine French and two Italian, ranging from 27 to 52 years of age. We met at night, and they sat at the desks of the primary children I taught during the day. They had to sit sidewise with their feet in the aisles, and we were bothered somewhat with mosquitoes and June bugs, but notwithstanding these difficulties, they learned to read and write, and then learned a little arithmetic.
…
At the end of twelve weeks the entire class had been raised from illiteracy to literacy – a miracle of no small moment.
…

This little story, of course, relates only one very small unit in the great Crusade, which piled up the big returns of nearly one hundred thousand illiterates changed to literates, white and black, throughout the State of Louisiana.

(Caroline Parham Stephens in O'Connell 1933:125-126)

Professor Maria De La Luz Grovas, MA, University of Mexico, discusses 'Illiteracy in Mexico.' Her account links illiteracy in Mexico to the Indian rural population. Like her Catalan colleague, the acquisition of literacy is also linked to cultural aspects.

Mexico has peculiar problems in the matter of illiteracy. The area of Mexico is 767,168 square miles - more than twice the combined areas of France and Spain. Its population is 16 and a half millions, representing eight persons per square kilometre. Four millions of these are full-blooded Indians, many of whom, due to the vastness of the territory, live in remote places far from civilised centres, and speak more than 150 different dialects, derived from the principal Indian dialects.

…

The Revolutionary Government, once firmly established, started an active campaign against illiteracy in general, and especially for the introduction of the Indian to culture and civilization.

…

The question of teachers for these schools was a difficult one at the beginning, for there were not enough either in actual numbers, proper training, or sufficiently heroic to undertake the enterprise of going to an isolated, unhealthy place, as most of them were, to deal with distrustful, sullen and half-savage natives. However, many responded to the patriotic call, among them young people with barely their secondary education finished, which for the moment would just suffice.

…

In this way Mexico is trying its best to give all its people the advantages of civilization and culture.
(Professor Maria de la Luz Grovas in O'Connell 1933:127)

Responses to these presentations are recorded. The first response is from F. W. Ryan, already encountered in relation to his publications on school attendance in Chapter 3. The other two Irish contributions move from considering the topic of illiteracy to a discussion of the recently introduced Primary Certificate.

Mr. F. W. RYAN, B.L. (late President Juvenile Street Traders' Court), Dublin, said that the general question of illiteracy was one that affected the world problem at all points. The question of whether illiterates, who were stragglers of the army of progress, should have votes, was one to be considered.
….
Mr. J. WALSH, B.A., Dublin, said that a small number of sub-normal children slipped through their primary schools, and were unable to read and write. This would be forestalled if the schools were better staffed and the teachers were able to give more individual attention. Of course, it was a matter of finance, but if classes were restricted to thirty pupils not a single illiterate child would leave their schools. At present employers and public did not appreciate the value of the primary school-leaving certificate, but in a few years it would probably become compulsory.

Mr. M. KEARNEY, of the Irish National Teachers' Organization, protested against the suggestion that the primary leaving certificate should be made compulsory. It would put small schools in competition with bigger - it would be most prejudicial.
(O'Connell 1933:128-129)

Later that week, the WFEA Delegate Assembly (including Irish delegates) adopts a resolution arising from the Department of Illiteracy deliberations.

> ILLITERACY
> The WFEA is of opinion that the presence of large numbers of illiterates in certain countries constitutes a menace to world stability and national progress.
> (O'Connell 1933:285)

These presentations, the responses, and the Delegate Assembly resolution encapsulate elements of a *discourse of disruption* evident in this time. The *illiterate person* is consistently constructed as part of Other groups, identified as 'country folk' by the Spanish delegate and as 'Indian' by the Mexican delegate. These Other groups live in remote places far from civilised centres. The 'distrustful, sullen, half-savage natives' in Mexico are implicitly contrasted to the civilised Spanish-speaking population. These explanations lead to the solution, which is the provision of education to the 'rural' populations. The American delegate uses Census statistics to differentiate between the 'negroes' and the 'native white' population. Her account of the literacy learners describes them as 'Italian' and 'French'. It does not clarify whether the designation 'French' refers to recent immigrants from France, or to descendants of Acadian settlers in Louisiana. The 'Crusade' in relation to illiteracy appears to be focused on mountaineers in Kentucky and French and Italians in Louisiana, despite establishing that the black population has the higher rate of illiteracy. In this case, a mismatch occurs between the explanation provided and the solution offered. The presence of a large illiterate black population explains high rates of illiteracy in Louisiana, casting them as the major cause of the high illiteracy rate. The solution to offer literacy tuition appears to focus on the white population. The legal enforcement of segregated schooling in Louisiana and Kentucky excludes black students from Miss Stephen's classroom, and prohibits a white teacher from teaching them. The legalised segregation of literacy tuition is a silent accompaniment to the account presented here.

Further references to the Other are evident in the Irish responses. The first response refers to illiteracy in Ireland as the property of 'stragglers' and the second links illiteracy solely to 'sub-normal children'. This negative status underlies the suggestion made to deny voting rights on grounds of illiteracy, a proposal that recurs on a regular basis throughout this era. Southern US States use literacy tests from the 1890s, and this method of direct disenfranchisement is actively considered by other legislatures. Although used as a tool for racial discrimination in the US, it addresses other concerns in more homogenous nation-states. The *illiterate person* is regarded as a one who cannot or will not benefit from the mainstream education system and is thus incapable of full integration in a modern society. The illiterate voter is considered a disruptive presence in a democratic state, legitimating the use of exclusion and expulsion to safeguard national security. The British Round Table Conference on constitutional reforms in India debates the merit of literacy qualifications for enfranchising Indian women (*Irish Times* 1932), proposing an exclusion based on both gender and literacy.

An amendment making literacy a condition of enfranchisement features in a Dáil debate on the proposed new Irish constitution on 1st June 1937 (*Irish Times* 1937). In the official record (Dáil Éireann Debate 1937), Mr Frank McDermott T.D. (Centre Party) who proposes the amendment, states that 'in these days of compulsory and universal education, the person who fails to make himself or herself literate is failing in his or her duty to the community.' He also claims that 'some of the most reputedly democratic countries in the world' exclude 'illiterates.' He argues for a similar exclusion in Ireland, on the basis that it would prevent abuse of the oral voting system and compel voters to become literate. The ensuing debate captures differing conceptions of illiteracy. In contrast to McDermott, who claims that those who are illiterate decline to learn literacy, Mr William Norton T.D. (Labour) suggests that they are 'victims of a very imperfect system of education' who are 'suffering from the disability of being unable to read or write'. Mr Eamonn Donnelly T.D. (Fianna Fáil) refers to the voting

procedures for illiterate voters as a commonplace feature of elections, claiming that such voters are 'a very big percentage of the register in some places and a bigger percentage than we might like to take credit for.' General Mulcahy T.D. (Fine Gael) suggests that the amendment is incomplete as it does not specify whether it refers to reading and writing in Irish or English or both. Éamon de Valera T.D. (Fianna Fáil), President of the Dáil, is not in favour of the amendment, stating that he does not wish to insert unnecessary disqualifications into the Constitution. De Valera concedes that 'There are possibly a number of people at present who are unable to read or write, a condition which is not exactly their fault.' He believes that this is a 'diminishing class' (Dáil Éireann Debate 1937). The amendment is subsequently defeated.

Literacy ability is used from 1917 to deny entry to the United States. The *1917 US Immigration Act* is known as the *Literacy Act* because it institutes literacy testing for immigrants. As well as listing excluded categories of immigrant, it bars entry to those over 16 years who are illiterate. On arrival to the US, immigrants must demonstrate the ability to read 30-40 words in their home language or face immediate deportation. The *1924 Immigration Act* added quotas to restrict immigrant numbers, and it requires prospective immigrants to obtain a visa from the US Consul in their home country before travelling. The *Department of Education Annual Statistical Report* in 1928 refers to the impact of 'American immigration regulations forbidding the entrance of illiterates' as a plausible reason for increased numbers of older children remaining at National School (DEASR 1928:35). The US Consul-General in Ireland confirms that the number of visas refused to intending Irish applicants amounts to 3,215 in 1928 (10% of applicants), 4,241 in 1929 (16% of applicants), and 4,195 in 1930 (19% of applicants), with 'the main cause' for rejection being illiteracy (*Irish Times* 1930; *Weekly Irish Times* 1930). The deepening economic recession from 1929 forms a background to these decisions. These statistics identify both the presence of illiteracy among Irish applicants, and the accepted use of literacy tests as a mechanism to exclude those considered undesirable to the US. The

resolution on illiteracy adopted by the 1933 WFEA Delegate Assembly adopts a similarly negative perspective, expressing a concern for world stability and social progress that constructs the *illiterate person* as a destabilising factor.

The proposed solutions to illiteracy identify deficits within adult learners. Spiritual and cultural aspects are promoted alongside literacy tuition in the Spanish and Mexican accounts. This implies that the person lacking literacy has a corresponding lack in other areas.   Young people with a bare secondary education are sent to teach literacy.   This inverts the usual teaching role, where the older wiser person teaches the younger one, presenting the illiterate person as immature and childlike.   The newly-literate adults are not allowed to choose books for themselves, these are 'carefully chosen' by experts, an activity suggestive of censorship.   The tendency to link illiteracy with immaturity also appears in the American account, where those trained to teach young children are engaged to teach adults, as an adjunct to their main job.   The illiterate adults are recruited by the policewoman and teacher driving together.   This may be the only transport available.   However, the presence of the policewoman suggests an element of coercion more relevant to approaching delinquents than to offering free tuition to adults.   The literacy tuition occurs in a children's classroom, with adults sitting at too-small desks.   The adults assemble at night in premises designated for children, casting them as clandestine interlopers.

The *discourse of disruption* makes use of intellectual, social, cultural and legal aspects to differentiate between those who are literate and those who are illiterate. A binary opposition is evident, where literacy is the desirable normal condition and illiteracy is the negative aberrant one.   This reflects adherence to the *Literacy Myth* (Graff 1979), the assumption that literacy confers economic and social benefits to the individual and to society.   The WFEA conference resolution portrays the *illiterate person* as a negative impediment to the progress of the entire world.   This inferior, negative status, justifies exclusion from full participation in society.

Within this *discourse of disruption*, the strong links made between literacy, maturity and culture constructs these conditions as both indicators and consequences of literacy. It follows that a literate society is stable and cultured. The presence of the *illiterate person* in a stable and cultured society is therefore incomprehensible. This aspect of the *discourse of disruption* is evident in the Irish responses stating that illiteracy is not a problem in Ireland. To acknowledge otherwise would imply that Ireland is not a modern developed nation. The Irish responses focus on the deficiencies of individual 'stragglers' or 'sub-normal' children. The reference to large class size suggests that illiteracy is possible where teachers are hampered by large numbers of pupils. These deficiencies in literacy relate to inherent qualities of the pupils rather than to any other factors.

The Irish delegates at the World Conference represent Ireland as a fully literate society in 1933. However, the *Department of Education Annual Statistical Report* for 1933 (DEASR 1934) provides a more complex picture of the Irish educational landscape. The 1933 National School statistics show an enrolment of 504,521 with an average attendance rate of 83.7% (DEASR 1934:2). This means an average absence of 16.3% of enrolled pupils in National Schools in 1933, equating to 82,000 children. Figure 5.A. shows enrolment rates for 1933 and preceding years. The table shows 76,830 enrolled in First Class in 1928.   In 1933, six years later, there are 36,939 enrolled in Sixth Class, a reduction of 39,891. This cumulative loss is evident in the diagonal path between First Class in 1928 and Sixth Class 1933. There is a reduction of 7,041 enrolled in Second Class 1929. There are 1,824 less by Third Class 1930, 6,698 less in Fourth Class 1931, and 8,840 less in Fifth Class 1932.   The entry for Sixth Class 1933 shows a reduction of 15,848, equivalent to 30% of those enrolled in Fifth Class 1932. This incomplete progression from First Class to Sixth Class is also evident for previous cohorts. The fall in numbers between Fifth Class and Sixth Class is particularly evident.

YEAR	INFANTS	1st	2nd	3rd	4th	5th	6th
1926	171,431	74,832	68,660	67,362	56,142	45,499	24,502
1927	Not Given	Not Given	Not Given	Not Given	Not Given	Not Given	Not Given
1928	155,509	76,830	69,171	66,971	58,730	48,333	27,551
1929	153,101	73,586	69,789	67,077	59,309	48,716	29,196
1930	150,777	71,379	67,548	67,965	59,825	49,319	29,658
1931	147,634	69,848	66,677	66,820	61,267	50,642	31,208
1932	139,261	69,726	65,537	65,939	62,406	52,787	34,509
1933	139,917	68,156	66,076	65,159	62,045	54,209	36,939

Note: Numbers for Infants may represent Junior and Senior Infants classes combined.

Source: Department of Education Annual Statistical Report 1934:4

The legal school leaving age is 14 years. A total of 41,339 pupils aged 14 years and over left National Schools during the school year between June 1932 and June 1933. These school leavers had completed their primary education, but not all had completed the full cycle, as 9,228 (22%) left without reaching Sixth Class. They are classified as leaving school in 'Fifth Class or Under' (DEASR 1934:130). A further 12,265 left during Sixth Class (DEASR 1934:130). The numbers leaving before the age of 14 years in 1933 are not officially recorded.

Of 11,145 candidates for the 1933 Primary Certificate, 8,330 pass and 2,825 fail, a failure rate of almost 25% in an examination based on the Sixth Class syllabus. A total enrolment of 30,966 pupils attend Secondary Schools in 1933 (DEASR 1934:51). This number is equivalent to 6% of the National School enrolment of 504,521 for 1933.

The statistics for 1933 are in keeping with those from previous years, indicating persistent rates of school absence, early school leaving and examination failure among Irish children. Such indicators of poor literacy

warrant further examination. The next section focuses on the *Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports* from 1921-1933 (DEASR 1925-1934), examining how literacy and illiteracy were viewed within the education system in the years prior to the WFEA World Conference.

5.3 LITERACY IN THE IRISH CONTEXT

At Independence in 1921, much of the existing British educational legislation and infrastructure is retained intact. This includes the network of National Schools, Secondary Schools, Reformatory Schools and Industrial Schools, as well as Technical Schools and Teacher Training Colleges. The first *Department of Education Annual Statistical Report* (DEASR) published in 1925 provides some limited information about the years 1923 and 1924. The next two reports in 1926 and 1928 are followed by annual reports after 1928. The reports increase in size and detail over these years, containing both numerical and text-based accounts of the Irish education system. Although the Irish nation-state contains citizens from Traveller and other ethnic backgrounds, the Annual Reports represent all schoolchildren as White Irish.

On first reading, these Reports are silent on the topic of illiteracy in mainstream schools, suggesting that Irish schoolchildren are fully literate. Foucault's contention that silence provides ways of *not* speaking about a topic (1978:27) provides an impetus to note what is celebrated, what is muted, what is indistinct, and what is silent in the Reports. The silences that accompany three indicators of literacy within the Reports are particularly interesting: primary school attendance rates, examination failure, and literacy assessments. This section describes how different forms of silence are utilised in each case, and how together they reinforce the existence of a fully literate society.

PRIMARY SCHOOL ATTENDANCE

The Annual Reports focus on improvements in National School attendance rates, rising from 73% in 1921 to over 80% by 1928. Accounts of the Irish education system tend to celebrate this improvement and contrast it with the lower rates under British administration. Figure 5.B depicts the published enrolment statistics for 1921-1933. Increased enrolments between 1924 and 1925 are related to the 1924 state agreement to fund the primary schools run by the Christian Brothers (DEASR 1928:6). Figures for these schools, established in the nineteenth century, were not included in the Annual Reports until they acquired state funding (Hyland 1980). Figures for 1925 and 1926 are the same, reflecting the transition in 1926 from reporting the year-end total in December to reporting the year-end total in June.

FIGURE 5.B: AVERAGE ATTENDANCE RATES FOR NATIONAL SCHOOLS IN IRELAND 1921-1933

YEAR	PUPILS ENROLLED	PERCENTAGE ATTENDANCE
1921	497,761	73.3
1922	495,836	71.8
1923	497,146	74.3
1924	493,382	73.5
1925	518,002	77.6
1926	518,002	77.6
1927	518,355	79.7
1928	512,333	82.7
1929	507,840	82.6
1930	504,427	83.4
1931	502,393	82.9
1932	503,017	82.9
1933	504,521	83.7

Source: Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports 1925 -1934

The narrative of improved attendance in the Annual Reports focuses on the ability of the Irish nation-state to attract an increased number of pupils to the National Schools. The emphasis on improved attendance rates tends to obscure the numbers absent from school every year, rendering these children silent. Figure 5.C includes the numbers for average absence, calculated from the published statistics.

FIGURE 5.C: AVERAGE ABSENCE RATES FOR NATIONAL SCHOOLS IN IRELAND 1921-1933

YEAR	PUPILS ENROLLED	PERCENTAGE ATTENDANCE	AVERAGE ABSENCE
1921	497,761	73.3	132,898
1922	495,836	71.8	139,721
1923	497,146	74.3	127,745
1924	493,382	73.5	130,794
1925	518,002	77.6	118,721
1926	518,002	77.6	118,721
1927	518,355	79.7	105,196
1928	512,333	82.7	88,359
1929	507,840	82.6	88,060
1930	504,427	83.4	83,486
1931	502,393	82.9	85,670
1932	503,017	82.9	86,000
1933	504,521	83.7	82,032

Source: Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports 1925 -1934

Figure 5.C shows the large numbers of children missing from the schools annually in the years up to 1933. It is necessary to look beyond the Annual Reports to gain an understanding of this silence about school absence.

The *1892 Irish Education Act* governed school attendance until the *1926 School Attendance Act* came into force. Section 4(1) of the 1926 Act stipulates that parents must send children aged 6-14 years of age to school

on all days the school is open. Section 4(2) allows for a number of 'reasonable excuses' for non-school attendance among enrolled children. Sections 4(3) and 4(4) allow children to miss school for up to ten days in Spring and again in Autumn in order to engage in 'light agricultural work' on the family farm.

Like the 1892 Act, the 1926 Act exempts children from school enrolment entirely in a variety of circumstances. Section 4(5) deems an 'accessible school' to be within two miles for children up to ten years old, and within three miles for those over ten years. Those without transport to schools further than this are not obliged to attend. As there is no comprehensive school transport system, children in remote rural areas are thus legally exempt from attending school. The Act contains restrictions on the employment of children, but Section 7(3) allows any child lawfully employed before the commencement of the Act to continue in employment, and expressly permits manual labour by children detained in Reformatory and Industrial Schools. The numbers legally exempt from enrolling are unrecorded by the Department of Education. A tendency to accept the National School statistics published in the Annual Reports as a narrative of educational improvement leads to silence about absence levels and legal exemptions from enrolment. The Department of Education in 1933 states: 'The attendance of the pupils at Primary School remains about 83 per cent. for the country as a whole, which may be considered a fairly satisfactory percentage for a scattered rural community such as ours' (DEASR 1933:2). The aim of the 1921 Programme Conference to match the 95% attendance rates of rural Scotland is thus quietly abandoned.

The school attendance rates in the Annual Reports do not relate to all children in the state, only to those children enrolled in state-funded National Schools. The Reports give few details about non-state-funded and private primary schools. The *School Attendance Act 1926* requires the certification of private schools providing elementary education, and the 1928 Report records 'One valuable result of the School Attendance Act has been to establish contact between the Department of Education and the private

schools which hitherto had no connection with it' (DEASR 1928:8). It notes that 'nearly 200 such schools' requested certification during 1927 (DEASR 1928:8). There is little further information on private primary schools in subsequent reports. Details of pupils on the rolls of private primary schools are given for 1937 and 1938, showing 2,034 and 1,873 respectively attending schools certified under the School Attendance Act 1926, 'other than Junior Departments of Secondary Schools' (DEASR 1938:146; DEASR 1939:137). The exclusion of the Junior Departments is not explained. This silence about private schools also imposes silence about their attendance rates and educational attainment rates. Information on private education in Ireland is very limited. Estimates and anecdotes substitute for statistical detail. Macnamara estimates that up to 10.6% of schoolgoing children attend private schools in 1961 (Macnamara 1966:47). The *Investment in Education* Report identifies 192 Non-Aided Primary Schools in 1965. These schools charge fees and do not receive state aid. Most are located in Dublin, attached as preparatory schools to secondary schools, and account for 4.2% of the 6-12-year-old cohort of pupils in 1965. The average pupil-teacher ratio in these schools is 24:1, compared to 32:1 in the state-funded National Schools (Department of Education 1965:9).

The comforting assertion that the Irish state education system is successfully reaching all Irish children contains some exclusions. The official primary education statistics relate only to children enrolled in state-funded National Schools. Those who are enrolled but absent can be located by inverting the attendance rate. There are limited statistics for private primary schools. The children legally exempt from enrolling in school and those under 14 years old in employment are not mentioned, so it is impossible to gauge whether they ever attended school or achieved literacy. These children and children who are not enrolled in any school are rendered mute and erased from consideration.

A continuum containing child labour at one end and elite fee-paying schools at the other is displaced by a narrative that promotes the provision of state-funded schools freely available to all Irish children. This activity better

matches the stated aspiration of the 1916 *Proclamation of Independence* to cherish all children of the nation equally.   The silences surrounding school attendance in the Annual Reports play a strategic part in promoting the existence of a state-educated egalitarian society.

EXAMINATION FAILURE

The *discourse of intellectual superiority* constructs the innate academic ability of Irish children. The Annual Reports accord with this discourse by focusing on the upwards trends in examination success rates over time. The first years of the new nation-state are represented as a period of improvement and re-orientation to the excellence of the past.

The Annual Reports celebrate increasing numbers of examination candidates for Primary Certificate, Scholarship, Intermediate, and Leaving Certificate examinations.   Pass rates are highlighted. Fail rates are generally presented in discrete pieces within a variety of text and tables, requiring extraction, extrapolation and other subjective interactions with the records.   The expectation that the children in the new nation-state will adapt easily and excel in the new custom-designed education system is not borne out by the poor pass rates and a persistent level of examination failure. These are strong indications that there are literacy difficulties among children in the mainstream education system.

The Primary School Certificate is introduced in 1929 and made compulsory in 1943. According to the Department of Education, 'The possession of the certificate is intended to indicate that the pupil has received a good general primary education and in this connection it should be of advantage seeking admission to secondary schools, Technical Schools, trades, etc.' (DEASR 1934:32). The Primary School Certificate examinations are supervised and marked locally in these years. In relation to the Primary Certificate examinations for 1933, the Annual Report remarks '…it was clear that in the case of a number of centres a correct standard of marking was not attained and that there was great liberality in the marking' (DEASR 1934: 32). Originally confined to National School pupils, the Annual Report for

1933 states that pupils in private primary schools may sit the Primary Certificate from 1934 (DEASR 1934: 53).

The Primary Certificate Examination occurs at the end of the Sixth Class in National School. These examinations contain an English paper. Failure of the examination is taken here to include failure in the English paper, used as an indicator that candidates have difficulties with literacy. Information on the Primary Certificate Examination appear throughout the reports, often in written format rather than in statistical tables. The Primary Certificate Examination has a failure rate of 20% in 1929, the introductory year. The failure rates in 1930, 1931 and 1932 are 26%, 23% and 31% respectively. These statistics suggest that significant numbers of Irish children fail a basic primary-level English examination. Similar failure rates continue into later decades. From 1943, the subjects examined are Irish, English and Arithmetic, with the pass level set at 40%. Children from Irish-speaking areas require only 30% to pass the English test (Akenson 1975:49).

Most Irish school-going children attend primary school only. Only a small proportion progress to Secondary School. The state pays capitation grants for Secondary School pupils, but Secondary Schools remain on a private fee-paying basis with minimal state involvement, as they were under British rule. Local Authority Scholarship examinations allow pupils to be funded in fee-paying Secondary Schools. These scholarships are retrospectively celebrated as a route for the children of the poor to compete as equals with the children of the elite. The narrative of state generosity towards poor clever children obscures the level of failure associated with these examinations. The information about the Scholarship examinations in the Annual Reports 1924-1933 informs about pass rates only. The published pass rates of 28% in 1929, 32% in 1930, and 40% in 1931 elide the high failure rates of an examination set at Sixth Class standard. As the scholarships were restricted in number, they were awarded to only a portion of successful candidates, as recorded in the Annual Report for 1933:

It is satisfactory to record, however, that the number of pupils competing for these scholarships increased from 1,054 in 1932 to 1,380 in 1933. Of this number 546 or 39 per cent fulfilled the conditions for a pass, and 240 or 44 per cent of these secured scholarships. (Department of Education Annual Statistical Report 1934:33)

Although popularly assumed to have provided funding for the entire duration of Secondary School, many of these scholarships were valid only to the end of the Junior Cycle. The poor clever children had to compete again for 112 Scholarships made available by the Department of Education, based on the results of the Intermediate Certificate examinations at the end of the Junior Cycle. This number is increased to 136 from 1938 (DEASR 1938:53). The Department of Education acknowledges that the Local Authority Scholarships have limited appeal: 'In many cases, the County Council Scholarships are scarcely valuable enough to enable the child of a really poor parent to take advantage of them, and there is the further point that the County Council scholarship does not lead to any definite goal' (DEASR 1933:17).

LITERACY ASSESSMENTS

Each Annual Report starts with sections detailing National Schools and Secondary education, followed by sections on teachers' pay, the National Library and other Department of Education responsibilities, with the final section on Reformatory and Industrial Schools (here called Residential Schools). The separation of these accounts in the Annual Reports reflects the physical segregation of the children committed to the care of the state. The Reports provide details for the children committed to Residential Schools from 1924 onwards. They include an annual table titled

'Educational Attainment on Admission', although in practice these tables record literacy levels only, another indication of the strong association made between literacy and educational attainment. These annual tables provide the only explicit measurement of literacy within the Annual Reports. They show that many of the children are deemed 'illiterate' on admission. The majority are assessed as having 'Imperfect Literacy' or 'Moderate Literacy'. Few are categorised as having the ability to 'Read and Write Well' or 'Superior Literacy'. There were 6,663 children resident in 52 Industrial Schools and 2 Reformatory Schools in 1933, including 795 new admissions. The Annual Report shows the literacy level of all admissions to the Industrial Schools, including 216 in the category '6 years and under' that includes very young children. Figure 5.D extrapolates from these statistics to show the recorded literacy levels of the 579 new admissions aged from 6 years -16 years.

FIGURE 5.D: STATE OF INSTRUCTION ON ADMISSION TO STATE RESIDENTIAL SCHOOL 1933

STATE OF INSTRUCTION ON ADMISSION	INDUSTRIAL SCHOOL Age 6-14yrs	REFORMATORY SCHOOL Age 12-16yrs
NEITHER READ NOR WRITE/ILLITERATE	190	0
READ AND WRITE IMPERFECTLY	208	10
MODERATE PROFICIENCY	110	8
READ AND WRITE WELL	45	0
SUPERIOR INSTRUCTION	7	0
TOTAL	**560**	**19***

* Admissions include 1 Boy categorised as 'Mentally or Physically Defective, Children's Act 1908, Section 62(2)'

Source: Department of Education Annual Statistical Report 1934:206-207

The practice of measuring the literacy of children detained in Reformatory and Industrial Schools is a material form of the *discourse of disruption*,

where illiteracy is aligned with negative attributes.   The only Irish children whose literacy is measured are those requiring detention.   The literacy levels of the children in mainstream schools is not measured, implying that their literacy is satisfactory.

In 1933, 5.1% of committals to Industrial Schools were for offences punishable by imprisonment in adults, 'low enough to justify the statement that very few indeed of the children in Industrial Schools can be regarded as delinquent in the strict sense of the word' (DEASR 1934:100). Committals for non-school attendance under the School Attendance Act amounted to 5%, and the remainder were for Begging, Wandering and Destitution (DEASR 1934:100).   In relation to Reformatory Schools, the Ryan Commission finds that many children are sentenced to detention on a first conviction, and that the crimes committed relate more to poverty than criminality (Commission of Inquiry into Child Abuse 2009:620).

The presence of literacy statistics in one section of the Annual Report amplifies the perfect silence in relation to literacy in the other sections. There is no evidence of literacy assessments in any other type of school. This reinforces the distinction made between children committed to the Residential Schools and children in the mainstream schools.   Taken together, the statistics and the accompanying silence serve to construct the residents of these Schools as the only illiterate children in the Irish state.

The literacy assessments in the Residential Schools are probably much more arbitrary than the published tables suggest. The Annual Reports do not define the terms used, making it difficult to understand the differences between categories such as 'Imperfect Literacy' and 'Moderate Literacy'. There is no information on how literacy is assessed.   Variation in assessment and categorisation among 54 Residential Schools must be considered.   Government inquiries have experienced difficulties in matching officially published statistics with physical documentation (e.g. Department of Education 1965; Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform 2013: 333), so it is entirely possible that these literacy assessments

have no extant supporting documentary evidence. Howsoever they were collated, returns on literacy assessments were forwarded to the Department of Education every year and duly published in the Annual Statistical Reports until 1959.   This confers on them the appearance of being objective, reliable, and relevant statistical information.

The annual literacy tables are not an innovation by the Irish Department of Education. They follow the format of annual tables on Reformatory School admissions first seen in the *Third Report of the Inspector of Reformatory Schools in Ireland for 1863* (HMSO 1865). The Irish Industrial Schools also produce similar tables (Barnes 1989:144).   The Irish Department of Education continues to use the same format and categories as those used by the British administration. As in 1863, these tables are entitled 'State of Instruction on Admission.' The returns for 1933 form part of a series of tabulations stretching almost a hundred years from 1863 to 1959.

As they are termed 'Schools', it is reasonable to assume that children in these residential institutions benefit from regular attendance and close supervision of their education. Indeed, Section 17(4) of the 1926 Act provides for committal to Industrial School for children whose parents failed to send them to a suitable school. However, manual labour takes priority over educational instruction in many of these Schools. The children provide the labour required to run a large residential institution. Some of the religious organisations managing the Schools use the residents' unpaid labour to fulfil commercial contracts. The Department of Education Report for 1928 identifies the Fourth Class syllabus (for age approximately ten years) as the extent of education provided for residents. Children aged over ten years on admission do not receive 'literary education', being allocated to 'manual instruction' instead. Newly-admitted children with poor education are similarly diverted directly to manual labour even if under ten years (DEASR 1928:86-91). The sections in the School Attendance Act requiring attendance to age 14 years are not fully observed in these state-funded schools, who benefit from the legal protection offered by Section 7(3) of the same Act allowing manual labour.   It is generally accepted that

length of education improves literacy attainment, but the length of stay in an Irish Residential School does not always improve educational outcomes. The poor education and poor literacy provided in these Schools provide grounds for financial redress in the present day (Residential Institutions Redress Board 2005: Paragraphs 12-14).

FOUNDING MYTHS

The annual publication of these literacy assessments does not seem to undermine the prevailing assumption that Ireland has a fully literate population. This paradox demands closer attention, to examine how these records detailing the poor literacy of Irish citizens have been excluded from consideration.

The Annual Reports construct a nation of school-attending, high-achieving children, while muting references to child labour, absenteeism and examination failure. The Residential School literacy statistics follow the same format every year, but the information relating to the mainstream schools follows a variety of formats, making it difficult to distinguish failure rate patterns. The fanfare afforded to examination success is more audible than the details about failure, allowing the Annual Reports to celebrate academic excellence while muffling details of poor educational attainment in mainstream schools.

This focus on celebrating educational achievement suggests that the Annual Reports draw from the *discourse of superior intellect.* They also evoke the *founding myths* that are part of Irish cultural heritage. The Irish founding myths tell of a literate ancestry, captured in the popular phrase *Island of Saints and Scholars*. Myths assume the dimension of reality to the extent that people believe in them (Strath 2008:631). Writing from a constructionist perspective, Strath suggests that myths allow a community to forge its identity as a nation. Different communities of remembrance exist in a society (2008:629). Although the production of myths is an expression of elite power, facilitating manipulation of the masses as Nietzsche and others contend, it must also negotiate with processes of social cohesion

constructed from below (Strath 2008:631). The entwined process of making myths from constructed memory and constructed oblivion links the elite with everyday life. Seen in these terms, the *Island of Saints and Scholars* is a compelling myth, negotiated through interaction between the nationalist elites and the wider population, reflecting activities of remembrance and silencing.

Official nationalism can make productive use of founding myths to confer ancestry and legitimacy on the new nation-state. Accounts from the past can inform contemporary actions, such as where myths of ancient 'natural frontiers' provide justification for actions to recover them in the present (Foucault 2003:123). The dual process of remembrance and oblivion that produces historical narratives also allows the political elite to suppress those founding myths that do not coincide with the nation-state's interests.

Habermas contends that emotive concepts of the ancient *nation* receive more popular attention and are disseminated more easily than abstract notions of the *state* (Habermas 2012:285). When the new nation-state's legitimacy draws from the ancient nation, membership of the nation can be accorded higher status than citizenship of the state. The ruling regime can supress its own citizens by denying them membership of the nation. Foucault argues that activities originally designed to repel external enemies remain embedded in a new nation-state (2003:51). They are redirected to cleansing or removing those considered deviant or dangerous, to ensure the 'purity' of the nation. He refers to the 'popular, almost medieval mythology' drawn on by the Nazi regime, and the concepts of 'social heritage' used by the Stalinist regime to justify imprisoning and executing their own citizens (2003:82-83). These actions privilege membership of the nation over citizenship of the state. They also indicate the role of founding myths in determining eligibility for membership of the nation. Citizens of the state are not always considered members of the nation.

The officially-sanctioned founding myths in Ireland cohere into a discourse around concepts of national identity. This discourse produces the subject

position of the idealised ancient Irish person in terms of honour, piety and literacy, traits that coincide with Irish nationalist ideals. These founding myths of the Irish nation overlap to some extent with the founding myths of the state, particularly in relation to literacy. The founding myths of the ancient Irish *nation* reach back into a glorious Golden Age of literate warriors, scholars and religious heroes. The founding myths of the modern Irish *state* centre on the executed patriots of 1916 (Allen 2015:3), emphasising that they were poets and writers as well as revolutionaries. The literary and military skills of these self-sacrificing martyrs align them with the mythical heroes. The choice of the ancient Irish hero Cú Chulainn to represent the 1916 Rising in the GPO Memorial illustrates this linkage. The state-sanctioned education syllabus and textbooks provide prime vehicles to transmit the core elements of official nationalism (Anderson 2006:114; Foucault 2003:125). The widely-disseminated official founding myths provide a silent accompaniment to the Annual Statistical Reports.

Details about the Residential Schools are located in a separate section at the end of the Annual Reports, reflecting their physical status as walled institutions set apart from the regular society and governed by separate legal mechanisms. Ferguson refers to the exclusionary practices undertaken to prevent such children from 'contaminating' other innocent children (2007:133). These children do not receive the same legal protection, and their education is of less consequence. The use of formal court proceedings for placement in the Residential Schools superimposes ideas of criminality and deviancy on these children, regardless of their non-criminal circumstances. The presence of literacy statistics in the section on Residential Schools reinforces the strong link between the *illiterate person* and deviant behaviour. The activities of segregation, displacement, incarceration and internal exile that surround committal to a Residential School reflect the anthropoemic 'cleansing' activities of a dominant ethnic group seeking to purify their nation (Bauman 2001:216). These children are constructed as a threat to the Irish nation. They don't conform to the founding myths of honour, piety and literacy, allowing them to be excluded

from membership of the nation. The literacy statistics are published and circulated openly without undermining belief in a fully literate Irish population, because they refer to a group that is not considered entitled to membership of the Irish nation. The Education Reports can proclaim that all Irish children are literate. And in turn, the nation-state can claim a fully literate population.

On first reading, the overwhelming silence about the *illiterate person* in these Reports tends to confirm their absence from the Irish social world. However, national records are not neutral repositories of facts and figures. Habermas' contention that the bureaucratic activities of the state co-exist with the myths of the nation casts the national records as both an administrative aid and a cultural component of the Irish nation-state. They display favourable measurements of national progress that project flattering reflections of the Irish population. These records are as much a part of the national project as the founding myths underpinning nationalist sentiment. Archives play a role in building 'national truth' (Macías 2016:32).   Power relations within a society determine what is remembered and what is silenced (Strath 2008:630).   The silences accompanying school attendance, examination failure and illiteracy within the Irish Education Reports are not innocent omissions. They are strategic devices that support a permanent negotiation between the mythical ideals and the existing conditions.

The 1933 WFEA World Conference gives Irish educators the opportunity to discuss aspects of mutual concern with educators from other countries. It facilitates an exchange of views from different perspectives and different experiences. In a time when foreign travel is prohibitively expensive for Irish people, it is a valuable opportunity to take part in an international forum. The presentations on illiteracy are particularly revealing in terms of the common underlying conceptualisations shared by speakers from different parts of the world. The conference speakers acknowledge the existence of illiteracy in their countries, and they discuss officially-sanctioned responses. The Irish educators, in contrast, do not acknowledge any literacy issues in

Ireland, although existing Department of Education statistics show low literacy levels in the Residential Schools and suggest that low levels of literacy may exist among those who do not attend primary school, those who leave before attaining Sixth Class and those who fail the Primary Certificate.

IRISH LANGUAGE REVIVAL

The Catholic Church, who manage National Schools on behalf of the state, shows little concern about the presence of the *illiterate person*. In their focus on the spiritual realm, illiteracy provides a safeguard against heresy. The state's focus on Irish-language revival means that English-language literacy is downgraded. The National School remains the front line of Irish-language activity. As efforts to instil Irish-language literacy show limited success, emphasis shifts to encouraging oral fluency. In 1934, Tomás Deirg, Fianna Fáil Minister for Education, curtails the use of English language in the first three years of National School. No English may be spoken in Infants Classes, and there is no English-language syllabus set for First Class.

The letters page of the *Irish Times* provides one public platform to discuss the impact of this language revival policy. The following extracts from two letters on the topic make links between literacy, employment, and democratic progress, drawing from the same *discourse of disruption* as the educators at the 1933 conference.

> CRUELTY TO CHILDREN
> SIR – In my visits to our tenement slum areas I have frequently been distressed to see tiny school children, weeping and broken-spirited, coming back from school. I stopped yesterday to listen to a sobbing wee girl of eight telling her worried mother that she had been beaten again for not understanding the Irish explanation for her "division" sums.
> …
> How the coming generation will detest that language for the remainder of their lives, and also the

tyrannical system which is turning out a generation of stupefied youngsters unable to read or write English, or to do the simplest calculations – and what is a still heavier handicap, unable to understand the plain Dublin English as spoken by the employing class in this country.

….

During the past decade there has been a crescendo of illiteracy and "unemployability" among the poorest and most downtrodden citizens. Who has not been shocked to see "pade" and wrong dates put on small accounts paid at door, and the infinite pains and protracted labour involved in signing "Pat Kelly," "Jim Doyle," etc., to receipts?

….

Have we no patriots at all in our capital city willing to enlist for the defence of the oppressed and to rescue our citizens from this growing illiteracy and stultification?

….

As an enthusiastic lover of Irish, and holder of seven certificates from Irish colleges, I appeal to all true patriots to call a halt to this fantastic method of making the language hateful and our young folk a disgrace to their country. – Yours, etc., M. FAOITE
(Irish Times 1934)

EDUCATION THROUGH IRISH?
SIR- Nowhere outside the pages of "Alice in Wonderland" would one expect to find the paradoxical situation in which a Department of Education spends large sums of public money in ensuring the illiteracy of the children exposed to its bureaucratic whims and fancies. Yet that is precisely the spectacle that has been presented to us in this country in recent years.

….

 A political system that awards the spoils of office to those who can gull the greatest number of people creates a political vested interest in the ignorance of those people. The illiterate are so much easier to fool.

....
If something is not done we shall soon find ourselves the servants of a dictatorship masquerading as a democracy. And, as our experience of Irish in the schools shows, it will be a comic and fantastic tyranny. A bitter fate for an intelligent people. - Yours, etc., F. L. JACOB
(Irish Times 1935)

These letter writers explain the *illiterate person* by relating illiteracy to Irish-language revival. This section considers two reports on the revival of Irish through the National Schools, an 'insider' account produced by the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO 1941) and an 'outsider' account from a Czech educator (Pollak 1943).

Delegates attending the INTO Annual Conference in 1936 raise professional concerns about the impact of Irish-language policy on English-speaking children. As a result, the Central Executive Committee authorises a sub-committee to survey members' views. This committee of five male full-time teachers devises a postal questionnaire sent to 9,000 teachers in September 1936.   Total survey respondents number 1,347 by the end of 1936, a 15% response rate.

The postal survey is a novel research method in the 1930s.   Response rates between 2.6% and 14% for postal surveys in America are recorded in the 1932 *Journal of the American Statistical Association* (Starch 1932:190-201).   The INTO responses are obtained without using the monetary incentives or telephone follow-ups used to boost participation rates in later years (e.g. Longworth 1953).   Teachers who are members of Catholic religious orders do not join secular unions like the INTO, therefore this self-selected group of 1,347 respondents represents 11.8% of the 11,394 'lay teachers' (those outside religious orders) employed in the state's National Schools, shown in Figure 5.E.

FIGURE 5.E: TEACHERS EMPLOYED IN STATE PRIMARY EDUCATION 1936- 1937

CATEGORY OF TEACHER	NUMBER
Principal and Assistant Teachers	9,086
Junior Assistant Mistresses	1,722
Member of Religious Order in Monastery or Convent School paid by Capitation	1,852
Lay Assistant Teacher in Monastery or Convent School paid by Capitation	766
TOTAL	13,426
TOTAL excluding members of religious orders	**11,394**

Source: Department of Education Annual Statistical Report 1938:130

An Interim Report is submitted to the INTO and the Minister for Education in March 1939, and the full report is published in 1941. The original Congress Resolution in 1936 refers to teachers' concerns regarding educationally unsound teaching methods (Irish National Teachers' Organisation 1941:5). The final Report repeatedly refers to seeking better ways to support language revival, a change in emphasis that reflects the careful framing of any public critique of Irish-language revival policy.

> This Report is the outcome of an investigation by a committee of representative National Teachers into the use of Irish as a medium of instruction in the case of children whose home language is English. The investigation was undertaken because of the growing doubts among the teaching body as to whether the use of Irish as a medium of instruction in English-speaking districts was hindering rather than helping the cause of the language revival.
> (Irish National Teachers' Organisation 1941:3)

The support of a majority of teachers for Irish-language revival is repeated throughout the report, and the conclusion reiterates INTO support for this endeavour.

> We hope it [the report] will be accepted as a contribution to the acceleration, not the retardation of the Irish revival.
> (Irish National Teachers' Organisation 1941:67)

The 1941 Report details the responses to the questionnaire and summarises the main findings. The experiences of Infant Teachers are given particular attention, reflecting the role of Infant Classes in spearheading the language revival:

> The first obvious fact that emerges from this inquiry is that the majority of infant teachers are opposed to using Irish as the sole medium of instruction when English is the home language, but this must not be taken to mean that they are against teaching Irish as a subject to their young charges.
> (Irish National Teachers' Organisation 1941:19)

The Report finds that most survey respondents answer in the negative about the benefits of teaching primary school subjects through Irish, with only 20% finding a positive effect. In addition to outlining the survey findings, further anecdotal evidence is discussed in the report:

> We have adverted already to the fact that contrary to the opinions expressed in official circles, there is a considerable body of evidence to show that pressure was brought to bear on teachers to use Irish as a teaching medium against the teachers' own better judgement. It is of interest, too, to see that practically 50 per cent of children who got all their education through Irish used their home language when they competed at public examinations.
> (Irish National Teachers' Organisation 1941:58)

> There is, however, a constant theme running through all the replies which points to the fact that parents are generally opposed to a method for the Irish revival which would tend to lower the educational standard of the children, according to their values. Infant teachers have stated that it is a common practice for

parents to ask that infant children be provided with English readers so that they may be given in the home the instruction in English reading denied to them in the school. Many examples were cited of parents who endeavoured to teach their children at home through English, subjects that the same children were being taught in school through Irish, while it was repeatedly urged that complaints from the parents on the low standard of their children's general education were widespread. This attitude of the parents to the problem under review does not seem to have been adverted to by those directing the Irish revival. When the important place occupied by the parents in the education of their children is realised, then greater cognizance must be taken of their views on, and their attitude to, the present problem.
(Irish National Teachers' Organisation 1941:60)

The lack of suitable Irish readers for the schools, the lack of uniform or standardised spelling and the variations in grammar and spelling are represented as barriers to the revival of the language.

The fact that the language had been dying for a whole century and that it reached a stage when it might be said to have been almost dead, has meant that to-day it is deficient in words and terms to describe things now in everyday use.
(Irish National Teachers' Organisation 1941:64)

Physical and physiological barriers to learning are also outlined in the report. The authors cite evidence of poverty and malnutrition among primary school children given in Medical Officers' reports, reflecting F. W. Ryan's observations thirty years earlier.

A very big percentage of our primary school children come from what might be called slum homes, both urban and rural. Many of these children have had illnesses, and have not had adequate medical care in

their pre-school life. They are under-nourished and insufficiently clad.
(Irish National Teachers' Organisation 1941:14)

The Report indicates that a large majority of the respondents believe the focus on Irish to be unhelpful, and it highlights the unpopularity of this policy among parents. The negative impact on English-language literacy is a repeated concern of the report. However, the report receives what Coolahan describes as a 'frosty official reception' from the Minister for Education (2005:44).   The Minister holds that successive School Inspectors' reports indicate the success of the policy and that no inquiry is required (Ó Buachalla 1988:351).   The Chief Schools Inspector's 26-page typed response resides in the National Archives (Chief Inspector 1944). Written in English, it draws attention to the all-male composition of the INTO committee, and their lack of 'worthwhile' Infant teaching experience. It casts doubt on the use of a questionnaire instead of examining witnesses and visiting schools (Chief Inspector 1944:1). The respondents' average years of experience as teachers is noted, ' … it would appear that more of the elderly rather than the younger teachers replied'. This allows the statement: 'It [the INTO report] appears to represent the views of the middle-aged, somewhat tired, and too not well linguistically-equipped teachers' (1944:20).   The Chief Inspector contends that the INTO Report has little to offer, and the final sentence reinforces the use of the school day to revive the Irish language: '…the utmost use must be made of these four hours, and all our efforts concentrated on giving the chid the power to speak Irish as his natural language' (1944:26)

Walsh's account of Irish education refers to a 1943 report on Irish-language revival by Czech educator Dr Johanna Pollak (T. Walsh 2012:186).   Pollak, an educator from Czechoslovakia, and her husband Leo Pollak are granted Irish naturalisation in October 1939. Leo Pollak, a professor of cosmic physics, is employed initially with the Irish Meteorological Service, and becomes the first director of the School of Cosmic Physics in the Dublin Institute of Advanced Studies, an academic institution founded and

supported by Éamon de Valera while Taoiseach from 1937-1948. Johanna Pollak communicates her impressions of Irish language revival to the Taoiseach in 1943. Her submission, hand-written in English, is available in the National Archives. The page numbers used here refer to the typed nine-page transcript (Pollack 1943) located in the same file.

In a cover letter written in Irish, addressed to 'A Sheanascail' (Your Excellency), Pollak describes her submission as a response to a personal request from 'Your Excellency' seeking her opinion on the methods used for teaching Irish in the schools. A teacher in Czechoslovakia for over 25 years, her 'outsider' view of the Irish education system is gained from speaking to teachers, children, parents and reading newspaper reports. Like the INTO Report 1941, she frames her submission in terms of support for reviving the Irish language. However, she notes that few speak Irish fluently. She describes how a child, when asked for Irish-language conversation, '…would automatically recite some little poem, but was not able to tell me what it was about' (Pollak 1943:1).

Pollak recounts how Czech state intervention revived the Czech language. Young people in Czechoslovakia can now speak both Czech and German, but she does not see such bilingual fluency in Ireland. She suggests that explanations for poor Irish-language revival include large classes, poorly prepared teachers, and the inherent difficulty of teaching an 'artificial language' not in everyday use. Pollak, like the INTO Report, cites lack of standardization in spelling and dialect as an additional challenge for young learners. She expresses her shock at the pedagogical approach of the Irish education system, containing 'medieval' teaching methods that rely on 'mechanistic-memorization' and corporal punishment to instil a language among young children. This approach was used to teach Italian to German-speaking children in South Tyrol, resulting in a generation growing up 'practically as analphabets', with a hatred of school, teachers, and the Italian language (Pollak 1943:3). Her observation on the use of corporal punishment recalls the 'sobbing wee girl' of Faoite's 1934 letter:

To begin with the <u>discipline</u>, I must admit, that I was thoroughly shocked when a little friend of mine told me "I was 'smacked' for Irish today, because I did not know how to say 'two pigs'."; or another little boy pondered "If I write my homework, I'll be 'smacked' for each wrong sum. If I don't write it at all, I'll be smacked only once. May be, it's safer I don't write it!"; and even the proud statement of a little girl "There is no smacking in our school!" made me sad. Such remarks decidedly remind us of the 'dark Middle-ages' and the well-known latin nick-name of 'spara-dorum' for a book.
(Pollak 1943:7) [emphasis in original]

Pollak notes that the capacity to memorize even senseless words increases with practice, with the facility to retain them in memory decreasing at the same rate. She believes that this feature of 'mechanical-memorizing' explains why pupils forget Irish so quickly after leaving school (Pollak 1943:7). In her opinion, however, the 'decisive problem' is the presence and maintenance of a clear social divide within the education system. She met with an 'amazing prejudice' against the National School among 'middle-class' parents, endorsed by the teachers and owners of private and semi-private schools (Pollak 1943:7). The Irish language provides a basis to distinguish private schools from National Schools, allowing parents to imply that they choose such schools because the children do not need to learn Irish rather than acknowledging the exclusionary role of fee-paying schools.

From the first schooldays there is a wide gulf between the children of the rich and the poor. In order to disguise this real reason the private schools pretend to be better schools, because they save their pupils the difficulty of being taught through the medium of Irish (as a matter of fact it is hardly taught at all) & by this conjecture the existing gulf is widened still & the Irish language is degraded to "the language which only the poor have to learn."
…
The poor country people have to be thanked for the preservation of the language, but one cannot expect

the destitute of the cities to play the decisive part in
the artificial revival of the language.
(Pollak 1943:8)

There is no formal acknowledgement to Pollak's submission in the file. Five copies of the transcript are attached to the original submission, suggesting that copies made for distribution were subsequently retained. A separate packet within the file contains a further copy, with the INTO 1941 Report and another copy of the Chief Inspector's response (Chief Inspector 1944). Pollak's 'outsider' contribution receives the same official silence as the INTO 1941 Report. The total immersion policy for Infants classes remains in place until relaxed by the Coalition Minister for Education Richard Mulcahy in 1948 (Ó Buachalla 1988:352).

The shared *discourse of language confusion* evident in the *Irish Times* letters, INTO 1941, and Pollak 1943 identifies the confused illiterate child as a product of the existing language revival policy. The solution is to rebalance the policy and to apply a different pedagogical approach. This discourse is carefully framed within support for Irish revival, advocating reform rather than abandonment. However, this discourse is suppressed in favour of the official government language revival policy.

The summary dismissal of 'expert' submissions in favour of ungrounded aspirations is a recurring pattern throughout official pronouncements on Irish-language policy. Akenson remarks on the Irish Government's resistance to publishing the evidence underpinning its 'high-pressure language policy' (Akenson 1975:56). He goes on to suggest that the rigidity of politicians and civil servants in relation to reviving Irish through the schools reflects a fear that their 'collective litany' of Irish-language revival could not survive any form of critical appraisal (1975:61). The knowledge of front line primary school educators such as INTO teachers and Pollak is considered subordinate to the knowledge of Irish-language ideologue educators such as Corcoran and Deirg whose practical teaching experience is at second and third level.

The official support for Irish-language revival masks the low level of popular support. Some parents teach their children English-language literacy at home, in opposition to an education system designed to supplant English. Those who can afford it bypass the state education system altogether. A pervasive *narrative of egalitarianism* promotes the existence of a state-educated egalitarian meritocratic society, despite the financial barriers that allow only a privileged few to progress beyond the National School. While Irish-language proficiency offers access to professional and public-sector careers, it is of little assistance to those who leave school by 14 years and seek employment in Ireland or abroad.

5.4 CONCLUSION

The 1933 Conference of the World Federation of Education Associations allows Irish and international educators to discuss their experiences of illiteracy. The Irish delegates represent Ireland as having no literacy difficulties. The *Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports* proclaim a nation of high-achieving children, while simultaneously providing proxy evidence of literacy difficulty in terms of non-school attendance, examination failure, and early school leaving.

The reverence accorded to the illiterate Irish peasant is no longer evident in this era. Irish views of the *illiterate person* now accord with those expressed by visitors from other jurisdictions. The conflation of literacy with intelligence, civilized behaviour, and national progress is a recurring feature of these texts, casting the *illiterate person* as a disruptive menace to society. This *discourse of disruption* constructs the illiterate person as an unwelcome Other.

The documents analysed here indicate tacit adherence to the *Literacy Myth*, where literacy provides both an indicator and a vehicle for social progress. The documents engage with a *discourse of disruption* that is firmly entrenched at the international level. This discourse interacts with the

discourse of deficiency by focusing on the disruptive outcomes of illiteracy. The illiterate person is considered the disruptive product of deficiency seen in undeveloped countries and regions, requiring state intervention to ensure the inculcation of 'good citizenship' and the continuing social progress of the nation. The *illiterate person* is positioned in a negative, subordinate position and is subjected to differentiation, branding, silence and exclusion. Delegates from America, Mexico and Spain are willing to admit to the presence of the *illiterate person* in their countries, but they take care to locate such persons within specific populations. The Irish Education Reports firmly locate illiteracy within the Reformatories and Industrial schools. Poor school attendance rates, early school leaving, and persistent examination failure rates among mainstream schoolchildren are recorded, but these are not linked to illiteracy. Strategies of silence that mute evidence of examination failure and obscure the numbers of children not attending primary school allow INTO members at the World Conference 1933 to remain silent about the *illiterate person* in Ireland.

In the years after the World Conference, the INTO Report (1941) and Pollak (1943) examine the adverse effects arising from an Irish-language policy that effectively downgrades English-language literacy in National Schools. Both identify the potential for such policies to produce *the illiterate person*, but these critical views are formally ignored at ministerial level. The *discourse of language confusion* identifies the illiterate person as a negative but unexceptional outcome of Irish-language revival policies. It links illiteracy with a wider backdrop of unemployment leading to social unrest. The *discourse of language confusion* is localised, muted and limited to Ireland. It is muffled and couched in apologetic terms that incorporate allegiance to the nationalist project of language revival. Suppression by official non-response is evident. The illiterate person is no longer celebrated as an embodiment of the glorious past, but instead seen as an impediment to social progress in the present day. The silencing of this *discourse of language confusion* reflects a hierarchy of knowledge about language revival that suppresses the knowledge of front-line primary educators.

The next chapter will discuss the *illiterate person* in the context of employment-orientated literacy provisions in the Vocational Schools and the Defence Forces during the 1940s, 1950s and 1960s. These provisions prioritise English-language literacy, reflecting the widespread use of English by employers. The chapter examines statements about illiteracy made by educators in the Vocational Education system and in the Defence Forces, and it situates them in relation to findings on educational attainment contained in *Investment in Education* (Department of Education1965).

CHAPTER 6: THE ERA OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT 1940S TO 1960S

6.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter considers the literacy levels of those who leave Irish primary schools to seek employment in mid- twentieth century Ireland. In this era, the Irish nation-state begins to reflect the growing international focus on employment and economic development as safeguards against social disruption. Ireland transforms from an insular to a more open economy. In this context, literacy capacity is increasingly seen as a necessary skill for economic transformation.

Publications from the Vocational Education system describe pupils in second-level employment-orientated education provisions, while documents from the Military Archives inform about those entering employment in the Irish Defence Forces. The *Investment in Education Report* (1965) addresses Irish education from an economic development perspective and provides a wider context for the Vocational School and Defence Forces data.

The previously rigid borders of the Irish state become more porous by the middle of the twentieth century, allowing new ideas and approaches to circulate. A new focus on human capital in the context of economic development develops in American and Europe following the end of World War II. The financial inducements offered by the US Technical Aid scheme facilitates contact with American economic expertise. The Organisation for European Economic Cooperation, formed in 1948, becomes the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) in 1960. The European Coal and Steel community formed in 1951 to develop economic and trade links becomes the European Economic Community

(EEC) in 1957. Ireland's orientation towards participation in the US Technical Aid schemes, the OECD, and the EEC provide new extra-national sources of information and expertise in relation to economic development and employment. Section 6.2 considers evidence of educational attainment and literacy for those leaving primary education and entering Vocational Schools. Section 6.3 considers references to literacy within the Defence Forces. From 1952, the Irish Defence Forces record information on the education level of new recruits in the *Irish Defence Forces Statistical Abstracts* (Irish Defence Forces 1954-1981). Section 6.4 examines elements of educational attainment discussed by the *Investment in Education Report* (1965). This report by economists and statisticians addresses Irish education from an economic development perspective, providing an 'outsider' account of early school leaving and educational attainment in Ireland. These Department of Education and the Defence Forces records contain details of educational level and examination success that offer proxies for literacy.

6.2 LITERACY IN THE VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

From 1901 to 1930, those leaving Irish primary schools have the option to proceed to free second-level education provided in Technical Schools. The Technical Instruction system introduced in 1901 under the Department of Agriculture and Technical Instruction (DATI) is administered at local level through Technical Instruction Committees attached to Local Authorities. The Irish Technical Instruction Association (ITIA) acts as a representative body for the Technical Instruction Committees on the island of Ireland. The ITIA Annual Congress proceedings refer repeatedly to low levels of basic education among the young people attending Technical Schools. The schools are obliged to run 'Preparatory Courses' before students can engage in technical courses, and there is an annual discussion on the need for Continuation Schools to remedy the educational deficit seen in students

coming from the primary school system. Mr Speers, delegate from Holywood, makes the following remark at the 1907 Annual Congress:

> Now the truth of the matter is that if pupils have not reached the sixth standard in the national schools, they can take little or no advantage of the education we propose to give them in the technical schools.
> (Irish Technical Instruction Association 1907:26)

Mr Bradley, Director and Secretary of Tyrone Technical Committee, states:

> We can and do admit to our technical schools all who can read or write or those who don't know how to do either.
> (Irish Technical Instruction Association 1907:31)

> There are in the class some students who cannot write at all, and if they can write, they object to do so. My instructions to the teachers are "Don't insist on it, but let them answer the question in order to know their knowledge, and go on with the next subject."
> (Irish Technical Instruction Association 1907:32)

In 1907, the government proposes to pay grants to Technical Schools based on pupils' examination success, meaning that the numbers able to write will have an impact on the schools' income. Rev Fr Dowling (Cork), ITIA Honorary Secretary, states that of '700 or 800 students' in the Cork Technical Institute in 1907, there are only fifty eligible to claim such grants (ITIA 1907:38). Councillor Sisk, Vice Chairman of the Cork Committee, gives an example:

> In the boot-making class about thirty students presented themselves for examination, and only three could put their ideas on paper.
> (Irish Technical Instruction Association 1907:43)

The poor literacy of primary school leavers is a topic of sufficient concern to be raised at successive ITIA Congresses. The consequences of poor

literacy are significant in a poorly-funded Technical Instruction system. It imposes the additional costs of providing preparatory education and continuation classes to improve standards. Poor literacy levels restrict enrolment onto technical courses and require the instructors to proceed at the students' pace. There is also a potential financial impact in terms of grant aid.

The 20th Congress of the Irish Technical Instruction Association Congress in June 1924 coincides with the transfer of responsibility for Technical Instruction from DATI to the Irish Free State Department of Education. Delegates express optimism regarding the future integration of Primary, Secondary and Technical Education within one Department. The poor standard of primary education is still raised by delegates as in earlier congresses:

> …the difficulties and embarrassment of the technical educator who has to repair the defects of a general primary education before he can begin his own proper work.
> (Irish Technical Instruction Association 1924:54)

> Thousands seek instruction in Technical Schools who must be rejected because of poor standards of general knowledge.
> (Irish Technical Instruction Association 1924:56)

> The primary schools should teach pupils sufficient to enter technical schools – how to write, how to spell, how to draw. When these were done the primary teacher would have his task full.
> (Irish Technical Instruction Association 1924:65)

In 1926, the Government establishes a Commission on Technical Education '…to inquire into and advise upon the system of Technical Education in Saorstát Éireann in relation to the requirements of Trade and Industry' (Commission on Technical Education 1928:vi). The Report finds that many pupils leave National Schools with a poor basic education,

requiring preparatory classes in Technical Schools. In the Technical Schools, preparatory classes meant as refresher courses have developed into continuation classes for pupils, many of whom had only reached the Third Standard (Commission on Technical Education 1928:22). The Report makes repeated references to 'deficient primary education', irregular school attendance, and early school leaving:

> The facts are clear and indicate that many left school
> at an age when they could barely read or write.
> (Commission on Technical Education 1928:36).

The report refers approvingly to continuation education classes provided by W & R Jacob Biscuit Manufacturers and those provided by the state for Post Office messengers. In its recommendations, the report makes the following statement, capitalizing the words as follows:

> ...but it is our view that A PROPER SYSTEM OF CONTINUATION EDUCATION IS OF VITAL IMPORTANCE TO THE SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC WELFARE OF THE PEOPLE, AND ITS ORGANISATION MUST BE UNDERTAKEN WITHOUT DELAY. (Commission on Technical Education 1928:51)

In an Appendix, Commission member Mr John Good T.D. outlines his wholehearted agreement with the conclusions and recommendations made in the report, which he signed. His concern is that the Commission did not deal in greater length with primary education. He states that almost every witness laid stress on the low standard of education of boys and girls leaving primary schools (Commission on Technical Education 1928:153). He refers to 119 boys who registered at the Dublin Labour Exchange between June and September 1927. Of these, 60% had not gone beyond Fifth Standard, and of these 9% had only reached Third Standard and could be regarded as 'illiterates'. Of 94 girl applicants in the same period, 47% had not passed Fifth Standard, and 9% had not passed Third Standard (1928:153).

The Commission on Technical Education Report deploring the state of primary education contrasts with the report of the Committee on Inspection of Primary Schools, comprising representatives of National Schools Inspectors, managers and teachers (Department of Education 1927). This Committee is established to investigate the system of school inspection and to advise on a primary school examination. They confine themselves to these tasks. While acknowledging that the main purpose of school inspection is to promote a high quality of education (1927:7), the report discusses the need to develop moral characteristics among both teachers and pupils. No direct reference is made to the standard of education observed in the schools. There is no evidence of any educational difficulties in this 'insider' report from the managers and professionals involved in primary education. Their report is silent about the aspects discussed within the ITIA Reports and the Commission on Technical Education Report.

The 1928 Commission on Technical Education Report leads to the *Vocational Education Act 1930* (Oireachtas 1930). This Act restructures the existing system of Technical Instruction introduced by DATI, reorganising the Technical Instruction Committees at Local Authority level to become Vocational Educational Committees (Clarke 2016:87). Technical Schools are now Vocational Schools. The Irish Technical Instruction Association, dating from 1901, continues to represent Vocational Education Committees in the new system, later changing name to the Irish Technical Education Association (ITEA). Teachers in the Vocational sector establish the Vocational Education Officers Organisation (VEOO) in 1930 (Jones 1999). The VEOO newsletter, the *Vocational Education Bulletin*, usually produces four editions per year. The topics discussed include remuneration, pension entitlements, industrial relations, and they also discuss issues relating to literacy.

Those entering Vocational Schools and Secondary Schools in the 1930s are expected to be over 14 years and to have completed the full primary cycle up to Primary Certificate level. However, there is no requirement to possess the Primary Certificate. Despite the differentiation made between

Continuation and Technical education within the *Vocational Education Act*, the ITIA Congress Reports and the *Vocational Education Bulletins* indicate that Vocational Schools continue to provide preparatory and introductory classes in basic subjects for those enrolled in technical courses.

The *Vocational Education Bulletin* calculates that the Vocational system in 1937 has over 64,000 pupils, compared to 35,000 pupils in Secondary Schools. Secondary Schools employ almost 3,000 teachers, while 1,400 are employed in Vocational Schools. The average pupil-teacher ratio at primary level is 36 pupils, at Secondary School is 12 pupils, while in Vocational Schools it is 45 pupils per teacher (*Vocational Education Bulletin*, November 1938:154).

Vocational teachers are not drawn from religious orders or from the denominational teacher training colleges. They are generally qualified in technical and practical subjects, and they are engaged to impart these skills. However, it is clear from the *Bulletin* that many of those employed to teach practical subjects find themselves teaching 'English' to their students. At least one *Bulletin* every year contains a contribution on the topic of 'English'. This subject is not concerned with studying Shakespeare or Yeats, but with basic reading and writing skills. A common complaint aired throughout the 1930s and 1940s is that many students, who have come through the National School system, do not possess the literacy skills expected from an elementary education. The term 'literacy' implicitly refers to English-language literacy. Literacy issues usually arise in relation to the practical aspects of teaching the subject of 'English'. References to spoken language use and reading fluency indicate an understanding of the role that language and self-expression play in developing literacy skills.

An anonymous 1936 article entitled 'The Teaching of English' contains a description of the difficulties facing teachers in the Vocational Schools:

> A most difficult problem faces the teacher who has to
> take on the teaching of English to a class of twenty to
> thirty boys and girls from fourteen to eighteen years.

His trouble is not the task of teaching a mixed class ranging from those who can read and write quite well and know a smattering of grammar to those who stumble over the simplest readings, but it is the question of the aim in his teaching.
(X in Vocational Education Bulletin, April 1936:84)

In a 1937 article entitled 'Written Communication', another contributor writes:

It is a curious fact, not generally obvious even when mentioned, that, for the vast majority of persons in after-school life, the only writing ever done is the writing of letters. This fact, added to the sad knowledge that, in general, letters are not too well composed, spelt, presented or even addressed, forced me to the conclusion that in our day vocational Schools the teaching of written language should be very largely concerned with the writing of letters, of letters and again of letters.
(Ernest Priestly Barrett in *Vocational Education Bulletin*, October 1937:176)

An article entitled 'Student Defects' in 1938 contains the following echo of discussions at ITIA Congresses in previous decades:

Students joining Vocational Schools show certain disabilities which are to be corrected before they can do really good work. The most outstanding of these are: (1) Failure to 'speak up' when asked a question or to express themselves, clearly and adequately in conversation. (2) Inability to grasp the full meaning of reading matter, whether in texts or other books. (3) Bad handwriting. (4) Inaccuracy and slovenliness in Arithmetic
Some people say we should refuse to admit to the classes students who are defective in these fundamentals, but if this policy were strictly enforced the enrolment in most cases would fall so low that the question of closing the classes might easily arise. Because our schools are financed out of taxes and

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rates, it would be invidious, if not illegal, to refuse admission to any young person who is willing to submit to the ordinary school regulations and discipline. The trouble is that the energies of our teachers have to be directed from the special work of Vocational Education to work of a more general character. But we must face facts and cheerfully undertake the duty of making our students better talkers, readers, writers and calculators.
(Vocational Education Bulletin, March 1938:193)

The *Bulletin* for November 1939 contains an article over two pages titled 'The Need for Teaching English – A Problem for Vocational Teachers':

It would be not merely dishonest but damaging educationally to keep up the pretence that the general standard in English of children who come to the Day Vocational Schools after the age of 14 is satisfactory.
The speech, the reading, the vocabulary, the power of written expression, all these are at a low ebb, generally speaking, amongst entrants to vocational schools.
The Vocational Day Schools can do great work by remedying the defects in the English education of the pupils who enter them. To this end a realistic outlook must be cultivated.
(F. McN. in Vocational Education Bulletin, November 1939:327 329)

The *Vocational Education Bulletins* contain an insight into the different ways literacy is defined and understood by those attempting to address it. The following discussion of 'English' in 1941 describes how this subject is viewed within the Vocational system:

English, for example, is not alone the reading and appreciation of literature, but includes among other things the writing of business letters, the study of business documents, the value and use of books of reference, and the study of leaflets on particular

subjects, such as those issued by the Department of Agriculture. Such treatment will not only add to the student's knowledge, but will train him how to utilise the means of acquiring knowledge. This is exactly what is required by the farming community. It is generally true that the farmers of Ireland make little or no use of the sources of information available to them. I do not suggest for a moment that our farmers are to blame for this – the blame must rest on our educational system.
(Chairman's Address in *Vocational Education Bulletin*, November 1941:457)

Here, a description of functional literacy is contained within a critical view of the education system. Other variations on the term 'literacy' appear in the *Bulletin*, such as the use of 'literary' and 'language':

It would seem uncalled for to labour this point, as it should be obvious. Yet in practice, to judge by the present literary standard, it seems to be assumed that boys and girls, when they grow up, will be able to understand the problems of work and life (including social and political ones, which as Voters they have to settle) without having a sound grasp of the only medium through which such problems can be presented and discussed – language.
(Vocational Education Bulletin, April 1942:478)

The first stages of the teacher's work are devoted to enabling the child, for the good of others and the satisfaction of the urge within himself, to express his personality through the medium of language (speech and writing), to use numbers, and prepare for other forms of expression through art, music and so on.
(Vocational Education Bulletin, December 1945:729)

In the early ITIA Congress Reports and *Vocational Education Bulletins*, the poor quality of education in the National School is generally held to blame for the poor literacy standards of primary school leavers. An alternative explanation for poor literacy is offered in the Presidential Address to the

Irish Technical Education Association Congress of 1940. The ITEA President, Very Rev M. Mac Branáin PP, refers to young people 'becoming illiterate' after leaving school:

> Just think that before September 1938, when the scheme [in Cork] came into operation, there were 1,100 young boys and girls between the ages of 14 and 16 in the city of Cork who were receiving no instruction whatever. The great majority of these young people, we may presume, were beginning to forget all they had learned in Primary Schools, and would most likely have become in a few years practically illiterate. This is what is happening in a large number of places throughout the country. There might be at least 500,000 young people between 14 and 16 years of age who are receiving no instruction whatever.
>
> We are all of us familiar with the very poor attempts our young country boys who attend meetings of Committees of GAA, Gaelic League, Fianna Fáil or Fine Gael make to express their ideas in a written resolution or a simple letter in Irish or English. Yet these boys when in 5th or 6th classes in Primary Schools could write excellent compositions on ordinary subjects. They simply never attempted to read or write after leaving the Primary Schools. At the very time they were beginning to read and write with facility and derive pleasure and profit from their training they were rudely cut off from all literary pursuits and lapsed practically into illiteracy.
>
> (Irish Technical Education Association 1940:30)

This concept of school leavers forgetting their education is referred to again by the now Canon Mac Branáin in his Presidential Address to the 1942 ITEA Congress:

> These defects in the character of so many of our young people are to a great extent due to the fact that for many years past the vast majority of our young

people throughout the country received no Post-Primary education of any kind and after a few years forgot all they ever learned in the Primary School. (Irish Technical Education Association 1942:23)

The presence of poorly-literate students is evident throughout the *Vocational Education Bulletin* issues. However, the explanations offered for this change over time. In earlier years, the poor quality of education in the National School was generally held responsible. Closer co-operation among the teaching unions is evident from the 1940s, coinciding with the appearance of a new explanation for poor literacy. Mac Branáin's Presidential Address to the 1940 ITEA Congress describes young people 'becoming illiterate' after leaving primary school. He refers to this concept of school leavers forgetting their education again in 1942. This observation recalls Pollak's explanation for the poor retention of material learned through 'mechanistic-memorization' (Pollak 1943). However, Mac Branáin's remarks construct poor literacy as somehow related to an intrinsic personal process of memory loss among young people, thereby insulating the primary school from criticism.

Other recurring topics discussed within the *Vocational Education Bulletins* illustrate the relative status of Vocational Schools, Vocational students and Vocational teachers in the Irish second-level education system. Examinations undertaken in Vocational Schools are not considered relevant for entry to state or public-sector bodies. Vocational teachers' qualifications are not recognised as equivalent to those of Secondary teachers. Appointees to senior and permanent posts in Vocational Schools often come from outside the existing pool of Vocational teachers ('Marino Appointment,' *Vocational Education Bulletin,* November 1936:122: 'Chemistry Post in Cork,' *Vocational Education Bulletin,* October 1937:178). The Act governing Seanad elections in 1938 recognises the INTO and ASTI teacher unions as nominating bodies while excluding the VEOO (*Vocational Education Bulletin*, March 1938:190). Such discussions identify that those working within the Vocational School system are aware of its lesser status.

6.3 LITERACY IN THE DEFENCE FORCES

Drilling and repetitive training are an important factor in constructing professional armies, evident in the immediate response to verbal commands and the seamless action in unison understood as 'army discipline' in the present day. Foucault examines *discipline* in terms of its impact on individual bodies and on wider social institutions. He argues that the focus on instilling disciplined behaviour, that began in the seventeenth-century army, pervades schools and ultimately the wider society. Practices of 'drilling' students and marching them to the classroom in formation mirror army discipline, as does the emphasis on 'one correct way' of carrying out actions. As part of this analysis, he traces the connection between military discipline and school-acquired literacy (Foucault 1977a:159), evident in how writing is taught in a formal disciplined manner. All pupils are taught at the same time, regardless of capacity. The 'one correct way' to hold a pen is instilled by force if necessary, and the skill of writing is improved by repetition and drills. In this way, writing is transmitted as a disciplined and replicable activity (1977a:166).

As well as providing an occasion for military-style discipline in schools, literacy is an important aspect of everyday military life. The ability to read instructions and maps correctly contributes to efficient and effective military action, and letters home from combatants on the front-line serve to strengthen propaganda efforts and maintain civilian morale. Vincent uses army conscript tests as evidence of the progress towards full literacy in Europe. The educational assessment of French army conscripts started in 1827, five years before the initial provision of state-funded schooling (Vincent 2000:6). Vincent also refers to the consideration given to literacy at the end of the nineteenth century by the potential combatants in the looming Great War, when France, Prussia and Germany focused on instilling sufficient basic literacy among their potential army conscripts (2000:10).

US Army recruit training in the First World War brought literacy levels among young male conscripts into sharp relief.   The *US Selective Service Act 1917* introduced conscription for men aged 21-31 years, later extended to those aged 18-45 years. By the end of the First World War, 2 million men had volunteered and a further 2.8 million had been drafted. These included 290,527 African-American conscripts (Williams 2010:53).   The 1920 US Census showed 6% illiteracy over age of 10 years, but direct testing of 1.5 million Army recruits showed that almost 25% (375,000) were deemed 'functionally illiterate' (NEA 1922).

The British Army Educational Corps, established during the 1920's, estimates that between 10% - 50% of soldiers were 'illiterate' in the years before the Second World War began in 1939 (Beach 2008:688). Towards the end of the Second World War, a Harvard University Committee Report states that 200,000 US Army recruits between 1942 -1944 were 'functional illiterates' that required tuition through specialised literacy programmes.

> A special problem within a special problem concerns postwar provision for illiterates. Between June 1, 1942, and May 31, 1944, some two hundred thousand "functional illiterates" were inducted into the armed forces. Considerable numbers of these then went to school, often with results which put previous efforts to teach them to shame. The Navy Special Recruit Training Program has reported most encouraging experience. The older men, while unable to learn as rapidly perhaps as their younger mates, showed a stronger drive to learn the fundamental skills. They had not shown anything of this sort before. What had been holding them back?   The answer is, low educational standards within their communities.
> …
> It is the responsibility of the schools to see that what has been learned about illiteracy in the war-training effort is not overlooked in peacetime
> (Harvard Committee 1946:255)

This relationship between literacy and the military raises the question of literacy levels within the Irish military. The Irish Military Archives contain a wide variety of documents pertaining to education and training, facilitating a search for the *illiterate person* within the Irish Defence Forces.

The Irish National Army, established following the 1921 Treaty, engaged in a Civil War against the IRA anti-Treaty forces from June 1922 to May 1923. The National Army employed up to 30,000 men in those years. The main training priority for recruits during this time focused on weapons handling, with no educational requirements for enlistment. A reply to a Parliamentary Question in March 1923 states that the training period at the Curragh is between 4-6 weeks and adds that 'up to recently, once the responsible officer in charge of his unit was satisfied that a man was fit to handle a gun properly, he was liable to be called for ordinary duty' (Military Archives File A/8438; Dáil Éireann Debate 1923).

The IRA issued a 'Suspension of Hostilities' order in April 1923, and a 'Cease Fire and Dump Arms' order in May 1923. The *Defence Forces Act 1923* established a new national Army, Óglaigh na hÉireann. Details of British Army recruitment requirements were used as guidelines for recruitment to the Irish Army, particularly in relation to medical criteria and physical fitness.   The age range for new recruits was set from 18- 30 years. The Air Corps, founded in 1921, and the Marine Service, founded in 1939, were under Army control until 1948 and were collectively known as the Irish Defence Forces. Records for 1935-37 detail how Defence Forces fitness instructors devised and taught Physical Education programmes in St Patrick's Teacher Training College and in Secondary Schools such as St Columba's College Rathfarnham (Military Archives Box 498: Files 22-28), calling to mind Foucault's linkage of military and schooling.

Candidates for Officer Cadetships in the Army, Navy and Air Force had to be unmarried, and had to pass an examination at Leaving Certificate Pass standard.   The age limit was generally 18-20 years, with a year's extension for Irish-speakers. In addition to the extra age limit, those answering in Irish

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were awarded extra marks and could apply for reserved places. All officer candidates had to attend an oral Irish test from 1930 (Military Archives File MA/ACS/31). Officer cadets enlisted as recruits initially, but they pursued a separate training pathway prior to being commissioned.

Training syllabus details from the 1930s provide an insight into the educational provisions offered to general level recruits in the Defence Forces. The 1932 Syllabus for General Recruits comprises 235 hours of training in Drill, Marksmanship and other military skills (Military Archives Box 498: File 1). It also includes 35 hours devoted to Education, made up of lessons in Arithmetic, Irish History and English. Figure 6.A shows two English syllabuses for General Recruits and Infantry Recruits in 1932 (Military Archives Box 498: Files 1 and 7). Commissioned officers instruct the new recruits.

FIGURE 6.A: ENGLISH SYLLABUS FOR DEFENCE FORCES RECRUITS 1932

ENGLISH SYLLABUS 1 **REGULAR ARMY TRAINING COURSE** **Duration: 6 Hours Plus I Hour Examination**
Lesson 1. Reading passages from newspapers and explaining their meaning.
Lesson 2. Simple rules of grammar. Formation of sentences. Correcting error.
Lesson 3. Handwriting (corrections). Formation of letters and figures.
Lesson 4. Letter-writing. Sentences, paragraphs etc.
Lesson 5. Writing short simple essays on current topics.
Lesson 6. Writing short reports such as might be called for from time to time in Army Routine.

ENGLISH SYLLABUS 2
INFANTRY TRAINING COURSE   **Duration: 9 Hours Plus 1 Hour Examination**
Lesson 1. Reading and explaining passages from school books in use.
Lesson 2. Continuation of previous lesson.
Revision - Writing of simple compositions.
Revision - Writing reports on military subjects.
Revision - Letter-writing.
Revision - Rules of grammar. Words and Spelling.
Reading and explaining passages from text books.
English Optional Lesson.

Source: Military Archives Box 498: Files 1-21.

The 'English' classes provide basic skills in reading and writing. Recruits receive History and Geography lessons that do not require literacy as they are delivered orally (Training Circular 5 of 1954 in Military Archives File AC/2/6/102). Despite the designation of the Irish language as the official language of Ireland, the Defence Forces, like the Vocational Schools, provide their literacy instruction in English, giving priority to the language of most utility in these employment-orientated environments.

The first annual *Chief of Staff Report* is presented to the Minister for Defence in 1940. The *Chief of Staff Reports for 1940-1949*, edited for publication by Kennedy and Laing in 2011, provide details on recruitment and training during these years. They also detail annual enlistment numbers. The State of Emergency declared at the outbreak of the Second World War sees 7,600 in the Regular Army, 4,300 in the Reserve and 7,200 Volunteer Local Defence Forces (Kennedy and Laing 2011:xxi). The invasion of France and Benelux in 1940 leads to increased enlistment. Of 44,322 applications between April 1940 and March 1941, 25,020 are accepted (2011:35). Volunteer Local Defence Forces increase to 98,439 by March 1942 (2011:118). The Local Defence Forces train alongside the Regular Army and take part in the same army preparedness training. The

rapid growth in numbers enlisting leads to an enlarged Central Records Section and the provision of Records Officers in each Army Command (regional division) (2011:49). These high enlistment rates reduce by 1944, leading the Chief of Staff Report 1944 to request Government consideration of 'some sort of compulsory military service' (2011:279).

An Army Construction Corps is established in 1940 and continues until 1948. This labour corps recruits young unemployed men aged 18-25 years. Numbering 800 in March 1941, it reaches a peak of 2,110 in November 1943 (Kennedy and Laing 2011:327). The Construction Corps and Regular Army assist farmers in saving hay and cutting timber during the Emergency years, and to help bury dead animals following a 1941 Foot and Mouth outbreak. The Construction Corps receive a three-month training course, including literacy tuition. The annual Reports describe the educational provisions made for the Construction Corps, as in the Chief of Staff's Report for 1943:

> Classes for illiterates have been formed in each Battalion and all boys have learnt to read and write before leaving the Battalion Headquarters to proceed out on works projects.
> (Kennedy and Laing 2011:237)

The 1948 Report categorises the standards of 'English and Arithmetic' of the 616 members of the Construction Corps on entry as follows: 23% as Illiterate, 15% as Semi-illiterate, 47% at Third Class National School standard, and 15% at Fourth Class National School standard. It remarks 'The education of the boys in the low standards was brought up to Third Standard National School in every case' (2011:687).

'Educational Training' is encouraged on a voluntary basis for Regular Army personnel. Progression to NCO (Non-Commissioned Officer) depends on passing written Army Certificate exams or their equivalent. The 3rd Class Army Certificate is at Fourth-Fifth Class National School standard. The 2nd Class Army Certificate is at Sixth-Seventh Class National School standard.

Promotion prospects are limited for those with poor literacy skills who are unable to obtain the required accreditation. Educational Training is provided during the winter months. The recruits must purchase their own textbooks, and some unwillingness to do this is noted in the 1948 Report (2011:633). The Reports make regular requests for Department of Finance sanction to address a persistent shortage of resources, including a dearth of printed training manuals and instruction books.

The *Chief of Staff Reports* increase in size over time, adding additional numerical tables and text-based sections each year. A series of *Defence Forces Statistical Abstracts* is produced annually from 1954 (Irish Defence Forces 1954-1981). They continue the tabulation seen in the *Chief of Staff Reports*, but without the text-based sections. The *Abstracts* display an emphasis on military secrecy. Each copy is numbered and allocated to a specific senior officer, reflecting their function as military documents pertaining to national security. However, they are now available in the Military Archives, and the detailed tables they contain provides a time-series of data relating to a significant employer in twentieth-century Ireland. The *Abstracts* provide an increasingly detailed inventory of staff capacities in the Army, Navy and Air Corps, mirroring the growing interest in measuring human capital in civilian life. The *Abstracts* provide details of educational standards on enlistment and the further educational qualifications gained within the Defence Forces. Collating and cross-referencing these returns highlights patterns in educational attainment over time that, in turn, can be related to changes in the wider society. A closer examination of the Abstracts from 1954-1965 provides data to complement the *Investment in Education* Report published by the Department of Education in 1965.

The first *Abstract* in 1954 includes details for 1952 and 1953, followed by annual reports. Full-time Defence Forces personnel number between 7,000 to 9,000 annually in the years 1952-1965. All those employed in the Army, Navy and Air Corps, including officer cadets, enlist as recruits initially, with a total of 22,908 new recruits enlisting in this fourteen-year period. While

there is a relatively even balance between the number of new recruits and the numbers leaving every year, the Defence Forces provide a long-term career for many. No female recruits are accepted until 1980. The *Abstracts* show that not all applicants to enlist are accepted, and that annual recruitment targets often remain unmet. In 1954, for example, of the 3,363 applications for enlistment, 1,578 are accepted and 1,817 are rejected. The main rejection category listed is *Below Required Physical Standard,* accounting for 597 rejections (Irish Defence Forces 1954:7).

A range of age limits apply in different sections of the Defence Forces. The youngest recruits are Bandsmen in the Army School of Music, required to be between 14-16 years in 1957, when 24 enlist. The lower age limit reflects the legal school leaving age. The age range is changed to 15-17 years by 1961, when 21 are accepted. An advertisement for General Army Recruits in 1958 seeks single men, aged 17 - 28 years, (or up to 33 years with previous service), in sound physical condition and at least 5 feet 2 inches in height. Written consent of parents/guardians is required for those under 18 years (*Irish Times* 1958). Enlistment is generally for 3 to 9 years, with 12 years for the Army School of Music, and the option to re-enlist. The *Abstracts* record that 80% to 90% of recruits enlist for 3 years. Prior to the Second World War, there were sufficient qualified tradesmen among Defence Forces recruits to provide skilled services, but rising wages in the post-war years mean that qualified tradesmen choose to remain in civilian life (Department of Defence 1998:4). An Army Apprentice School is established in 1956 to address internal demand for fitters and other trades, staffed by teachers seconded from Co Kildare Vocational Education Committee.

A popularly-held link made between Defence Forces recruitment and those leaving Reformatory and Industrial Schools is not borne out in the *Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports*, which give annual details of employment for those discharged from the Residential Schools. Figure 6.B shows that very few enlist in the Defence Forces on discharge from the Residential Schools between 1947-1965. Even if all boys

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discharged to employment were to enlist, the total number leaving these Schools annually is much lower than the annual number of recruits accepted to the Defence Forces.

FIGURE 6.B: DEFENCE FORCES RECRUITS FROM REFORMATORY AND INDUSTRIAL SCHOOLS 1947-1965

YEAR	TOTAL DEFENCE FORCES RECRUITS[1]	ENLISTING FROM RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS[2]	TOTAL BOYS ENTERING EMPLOYMENT FROM RESIDENTIAL SCHOOLS[2]
1947	1,584	8	420
1948	804	2	368
1949	804	3	363
1950	1,740	4	431
1951	876	1	347
1952	4,428	6	350
1953	2,273	6	321
1954	1,578	6	309
1955	1,219	5	275
1956	1,648	7	229
1957	1,118	7	187
1958	2,077	5	189
1959	1,808	10	166
1960	1,235	15	150
1961	1,107	5	123
1962	1,126	0	89
1963	1,140	2	84
1964	949	2	53
1965	1,202	1	84

[Note: Numbers of Defence Forces Recruits up to 1953 show all who enlisted, including re-enlistments. Numbers from 1954 show new enlistments only]

SOURCES: 1. Irish Defence Forces 1954-1981   2. Department of Education Annual Reports 1948-1966

The *Statistical Abstracts* record the information on educational attainment collated on enlistment, relying on self-declaration of highest educational standard achieved and examinations passed. Figures 6.C and 6.D, drawn from the *Abstracts*, depict the highest educational achievement of this cohort of fit and healthy young Irish men entering gainful employment in the years 1952-1965. As far as can be ascertained, there are no duplicates in these tables. No recruits under 14 years are accepted. All recruits had been subject to the School Attendance Act 1926 requiring attendance to age 14 years.

Figure 6.C. depicts the self-declared levels of education of new recruits between 1952 and 1965. In this table, 'Second Level' includes those who attended Technical, Vocational and Secondary Schools. A Leaving Certificate or Matriculation Certificate was required for Officer Cadets, and the number of those certificates matches closely with the number of Officer Cadets accepted each year.

In 1952, 95% of Defence Forces recruits have a primary standard of education as their highest education level. This category remains consistently above 90% from 1952 to 1960, falling in 1961 to reflect an unusually large intake of Officer Cadets in that year (possibly related to involvement in the UN Congo Mission). In 1962, the percentage with primary standard of education at 90% is in keeping with the 1952 rate, but this begins to fall below 90% in the following years. The accompanying increase in the percentage with second level education reflects the improved access to second level education due to increasing prosperity and the provision of more scholarships to second level from 1962 following passage of the *Local Authorities (Education Scholarships) (Amendment) Act 1961* (Oireachtas 1961). However, many did not remain very long at second level, leaving in the First and Second years before completing any examinations.

FIGURE 6.C: EDUCATION LEVEL OF NEW RECRUITS 1952-1965

YEAR	TOTAL NUMBER OF NEW RECRUITS	WITH PRIMARY LEVEL ONLY	WITH SECOND LEVEL	WITH LEAVING/ MATRIC
1952	4428	95% 4222	4% 174	1% 32
1953	2273	93% 2108	6% 127	1% 38
1954	1578	94% 1482	3% 53	3% 43
1955	1219	93% 1131	4% 45	3% 43
1956	1648	91% 1505	6% 88	3% 55
1957	1118	93% 1038	4% 43	3% 37
1958	2077	94% 1947	4% 93	2% 37
1959	1808	94% 1691	5% 88	1% 29
1960	1235	91% 1129	5% 56	4% 50
1961	1107	83% 923	5% 57	12% 127
1962	1126	90% 1014	6% 67	4% 45
1963	1140	87% 990	7% 86	6% 64
1964	949	85% 810	11% 105	4% 34
1965	1202	88% 1059	9% 111	3% 32

Source: Irish Defence Forces 1954-1981

Figure 6.D gives the highest self-declared levels of those who attended Primary School only. Significant numbers left before completing the full primary cycle at Sixth Class, including recruits whose primary education ended by Second or Third Class. Large numbers left at Fourth and Fifth Class. While many attended Sixth, Seventh and Eighth Class, few attained the Primary Certificate. The Primary Certificate, introduced in 1929, was made compulsory in 1943, and abolished in October 1967 (T. Walsh 2012:103). The Primary Certificate examinations assessed proficiency in Irish, English and Mathematics at the Sixth Class standard. By 1959, most new recruits in the age range 14-28 years should have sat the compulsory Primary Certificate. The percentage of those holding a Primary Certificate varies every year, from 1% of those with Primary level only in 1952, to the highest level of 19% in 1961 and 1965. The Primary Certificate was set as the minimum educational standard for enlistment during five months between June and October 1957, 'which certificate was required to be produced' (Irish Defence Forces 1957:9). However, only 134 (13%) of recruits with a primary education hold the Primary Certificate in 1957. 904 recruits are accepted without it. The requirement is dropped for later years.

The *Abstract* for 1955 refers to the reliability of the self-declared information on educational standards:

> Educational Standard Claimed by Recruits: The above figures show the educational standard CLAIMED by recruits. Obviously the tendency is for a recruit to overclaim on his educational standard, but, accepting the claims on their face value, 86% of recruits accepted in 1955 had not attained to 8th Standard National School, compared to 88% in 1954, 87% in 1953 and 91% in 1952.
> (Irish Defence Forces 1955:9)

The *Abstracts* for the following years contain similar wording regarding accepting the claims of recruits at face value, an implicit recognition of the social desirability factors accompanying self-declarations of educational level. Like the 1955 statement, the *Abstracts* continue to calculate the

percentage rates relating to those 'Not Attaining to Eighth Standard'. The use of Seventh Class as a cut-off point for primary education is not explained in the *Abstracts*, but the exclusion of those with Eighth Class education produces lower rates than those depicted in Figure 6.C column *Total with Primary Level Only*.

FIGURE 6.D: LEVEL OF PRIMARY EDUCATION DECLARED BY NEW RECRUITS 1952-1965

YEAR	2ND CLASS NS	3ND CLASS NS	4TH CLASS NS	5TH CLASS NS	6TH CLASS NS	7TH CLASS NS	8TH CLASS NS	PRIM CERT	TOTAL	PRIM CERT AS % OF TOTAL
1952	13	62	587	1102	1525	740	144	49	4222	1%
1953	2	9	122	575	903	361	92	44	2108	2%
1954	0	6	67	422	706	188	31	62	1482	4%
1955	0	4	31	199	637	173	33	54	1131	5%
1956	0	6	46	263	863	193	52	82	1505	5%
1957	4	2	41	160	423	230	44	134	1038	13%
1958	1	11	92	295	1045	249	62	192	1947	10%
1959	1	13	37	251	931	270	51	137	1691	8%
1960	0	7	23	178	572	207	18	124	1129	11%
1961	1	7	26	145	404	141	28	171	923	19%
1962	0	3	36	186	478	120	21	170	1014	17%
1963	1	5	16	161	510	130	13	154	990	16%
1964	0	2	17	126	437	93	8	127	810	16%
1965	0	1	20	166	546	117	7	202	1059	19%

SOURCE: Irish Defence Forces 1954-1981

The detail on early school leaving and accreditation in the Defence Forces data provides a comprehensive account of educational attainment among a group of young Irish men in employment. Enacting the *School*

Attendance Act 1926 and making the Primary Certificate compulsory from 1943 sought to ensure a minimum standard of education among the population. Despite these measures, large numbers of the young men joining the Defence Forces left school before reaching Sixth Class. These low levels of educational attainment in terms of standard attended and examinations completed indicate the potential for correspondingly low levels of literacy.

The Defence Forces are concerned with aspects other than educational attainment at enlistment. There are no explanations offered for early school leaving, but practical solutions are provided. Literacy tuition and other educational opportunities are constructed as unremarkable, everyday features of a military training that includes 'English' classes, Army Education Certificates and apprentice education. Acting as both employer and educator, the Defence Forces provide educational accreditation and trades qualifications for their personnel, enabling those leaving the services to emerge with improved educational attainment and enhanced employment prospects.

It is also apparent that those attempting to address poor literacy do not always acknowledge it by name. The US Navy provides literacy tuition through a 'Special Recruit Training Programme'. The 'English Classes' of the Irish Defence Forces and the Vocational Schools are basic literacy interventions. Those providing the classes designate themselves as 'English teachers', masking the task they are engaged in. Vocational teachers voice their irritation at being diverted from their own practical subjects, but nevertheless undertake the required duties. The Defence Forces documents show a similar acceptance of the need to provide an extra level of education, not strictly within the remit of an officer. It is acceptable for woodwork teachers and military officers to teach 'English' without specialist qualifications. The 'English' teachers in the Vocational Schools and the Defence Forces work independently of each other, even though they both deal with the same issue and both deliver similar responses. Both organisations provide solutions from within their own

resources, without making public demands on the state education authorities. The English classes provided by the Defence Forces and the Vocational schools allow the *illiterate person* to learn literacy, without disturbing the publicly declared position that the state education system successfully produces a fully literate population.

The Vocational system publications and the *Defence Forces Abstracts* provide a counter-discourse to the prevailing *discourse of disruption.* In contrast to the construction of the *illiterate person* as a threat to peace and stability, the *Abstracts* provide evidence that young men with limited literacy are not only capable of employment, but they are actively contributing to the security of the state. It is clear from these documents and from Vocational School publications that poor literacy is not unusual among primary school leavers. However, those with poor literacy do not openly acknowledge it, as they are aware of the consequences. Norms are an invisible aspect of what is considered *normal* (Foucault:1977a:184). When the normal expected condition is that all Irish adults are fully literate, those who have literacy difficulties are disadvantaged. The power of a norm is evident for those who do not measure up to it. The *illiterate person* risks being branded as Other and excluded from participation in society, as do their accomplices, leading to the strategic designation of these literacy classes as 'English lessons'.

Departures from the norm are often punished as if they were criminal breaches. One form of punishment relates to employment. It is possible for the *illiterate person* to obtain employment and earn a living, but it is often difficult to move upwards. Progression to advanced Vocational School technical courses is difficult without literacy. The *Defence Forces Abstracts* indicate that, while poor literacy is no barrier to employment, progression to NCO level requires passing written examinations. Promotion opportunities become increasingly dependent on accreditation, particularly in written English. Defence Forces personnel are encouraged to study for the Army Certificates, but only small numbers choose to take the courses. While many recruits move rapidly upwards, the *Statistical Abstracts* show that

significant numbers remain un-promoted even when displaying exemplary conduct and practical skills.

The methods used to ensure conformation to the norm are worth examining. This involves looking at the solutions applied to produce literacy. It is striking that the Vocational Schools and the Defence Forces both provide 'English' classes. These classes appear on the surface to be an extension of the English syllabus provided in primary schools, when in fact they are at a far more basic level. The type of literacy taught in these 'English' classes is not designed to produce *specialist* readers. The common focus on simple letter-writing and note-taking indicates a task-orientated restricted literacy. Although the solution to poor literacy is to provide tuition, this imparts an overtly functional type of literacy, another form of punishment for those who do not conform to the norm of being a literate adult.

The English classes provided by the Defence Forces and the Vocational Schools teach literacy in an adult-orientated environment. The objective of intervention is to produce adult employees who can take notes and read instructions. The *discourse of practical English* constructs poor literacy as an everyday occurrence that is addressed in a practical way. Explanations for poor standards of literacy are located within the primary schools rather than within the young adults. Literacy within this discourse is treated as one skill among many, and other skills such as crafts ability or leadership often take precedence. The *discourse of practical English* regards *the illiterate person* as capable of maintaining a job and maintaining the security of the nation. Literacy ability is treated as a skill, rather than an indicator of worth or value. However, this discourse that provides a useful place for the illiterate person is confined to areas that are themselves marginalized in mainstream society. The Vocational School and the Defence Forces rarely feature in popular accounts of Irish culture.

6.4 LITERACY FOR EMPLOYMENT

As the 1950s progress, a new critical-reasoning group emerges in Ireland, whose frames of reference are international and who are literate in the languages of economics, statistics and human capital. Trade union leaders and representatives of industries make use of Technical Aid funding available under the US Marshall Plan to undertake study trips to America and Europe (Murray 2009:107). Receipt of Technical Aid and recognition of the economic value of foreign direct investment introduces interaction with outside industrial practices. This tentative engagement with more developed economies leads to initiatives in assessing and measuring economic resources in Ireland. A 1953 American survey of the Irish textile and food processing industry discusses the presence of unreliable figures, over-confidence in existing practices and a reluctance to submit to outside scrutiny. The businesses are predominantly family-owned and operate under the impression that their products are of superior quality and can compare favourably in an international market (Murray 2009:50). This belief is not unique to the industrial sector. The education system displays a similar confidence in the intrinsic value of its product, allied with unreliable reporting and a reluctance to be scrutinised. The Secretary of the Department of Education privately concedes in 1962 that the education system is a 'sorry story' (Murray 2012:72). State Primary education in the 1950s continues to use a syllabus designed in the 1920s, and school attendance rates remain at a similar level, with a rate of 86.2% in 1959 indicating 67,721 non-attenders (DEASR 1960). Despite the existence of the *School Attendance Act* and the compulsory Primary Certificate, many leave primary school early without completing the full primary cycle. At second level, a twin-track system sees separate entry routes, separate state examinations and separate destinations for two types of second-level pupils. Fee-paying Secondary Schools focus on preparing pupils for university entrance and professional careers, while Vocational Schools provide a free education aimed at preparing students for technical and clerical occupations. Secondary Schools also play an important role in

recruiting the next generation of religious personnel (Akenson 1975:99), an aspect not generally evident in the Vocational Schools.

However, most primary school pupils do not proceed to any form of second level education. In the 1950s and 1960s, those without educational accreditation can avail of job opportunities in a variety of unskilled occupations within a mainly agricultural economy. The employment destinations of those leaving the Residential Schools provide a good illustration of the unskilled employment opportunities available. The *Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports* 1928-1960 show that farm work accounts for up to 40% of the boys leaving the Industrial Schools annually, while between 60% - 80% of the girls are placed as domestic servants, maids and cooks. The reports provide more detailed information about the smaller numbers leaving the Reformatory Schools. While farm work, manual work and domestic service continue to be the main employment categories, other employments listed include gardener, general labourer, tailor, clerk, shoemaker, van helper, messenger and 'house boy'. The categories of 'Hotel Worker' and 'Factory Worker' begin to appear in the 1950s Reports, reflecting changes in the wider society.

Educational standards are increasingly regarded as important elements of economic success, leading to a new focus on measuring educational attainment in the economies within the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC). This body, formed in 1948, becomes the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) in 1960. The focus on education in terms of economic inputs and measurable outputs leads to systematic appraisals of national education systems. In 1959, Ireland allows the first international appraisal of its education system, conducted by the Office of Scientific and Technical Personnel of the OEEC (Murray 2009:148). The resultant review process highlights low educational participation rates, a lack of integration between educational development and economic planning, poor progression for teachers, the gendered and denominational nature of education, and the complexity introduced by Irish-language requirements, aspects that were not usually

addressed in policy discussions at domestic level (Murray 2009:149-150) In his 1959 letter to the Ford Foundation recommending funding for an Economic Research Institute in Ireland, 'outsider' John Vaizey describes Ireland's economic and political situation from his vantage as an 'economist of education' based at Oxford University who is also familiar with Ireland. He refers to the opinion of OEEC officials that the education system in the Republic of Ireland is 'the worst in Western Europe' (John Vaizey in Murray 2012:74)

In 1962, Ireland becomes the first country to participate in the pilot programme of the Education Investment and Planning Programme of the OECD (Hyland 2014:127). The Department of Education in Ireland, with co-operation from the OECD, commissions a national survey of Irish education, published as *Investment in Education* (Department of Education 1965). The Terms of Reference include preparing an inventory of the existing position in relation to skilled manpower, a forecast of educational targets for the next 10-15 years, estimates of future enrolment and an evaluation of expenditure (Department of Education 1965: xxix). All fourteen members of the National Steering Committee are male. They include representatives of Bórd Failte, ESB and Wavin Pipes, and one clergyman, Dr J. Newman, Professor of Sociology in St Patrick's College Maynooth.

The survey is carried out by Patrick Lynch (Department of Economics UCD, and Survey Director), William Hyland (Statistician in the United Nations, formerly of the CSO), Martin O'Donoghue (Department of Economics TCD), and Pádraig Ó Nualláin (Inspector of Mathematics in the Department of Education). Áine Hyland, the survey's Research Assistant, describes how these Irish economists and statisticians, given office space in the Department of Education's head office, are regarded as unwelcome 'outsiders' by the permanent staff (Hyland 2014:126). Hyland remarks upon the everyday Irish-language use among staff at the Department of Education, a feature evident to another Canadian 'outsider' writing a decade later (Akenson 1975:131).

The Report approaches education as a social and economic activity, rather than a theological abstraction (Akenson 1975:144). It focuses on empirical evidence, examining it in relation to the future employment needs of the Irish state. The existing 'theocentric' approach, focused on spiritual and moral aspects, displays little concern with future employability or the measurement of educational attainment (O'Sullivan 2005:104). In contrast, the human capital economic focus of *Investment in Education* identifies the need to improve educational attainment at all levels of Irish education, to prepare for a different economic landscape. The Group Certificate and Intermediate Certificate are recognised as the minimum measure of educational attainment for a modern industrial society (Department of Education 1965:111; 316). This challenges a widespread tacit acceptance of early school leaving, where young people routinely leave primary schools and Post Primary schools without any formal qualifications.

The survey team describe their resulting report as 'a technical study of trends in Irish education and of the use of human and material resources in that system.' It is a 'pilot survey', a 'pioneering task', that is 'essentially fact-finding and analytical in character', carried out within a limited timeframe and hampered by a 'dearth of the basic data' (Department of Education 1965: xxxiii - xxxiv). The team find inadequate statistics within the Department of Education (1965:3). Hyland describes the logistic challenges posed by the limited statistical data. Returns from schools are often incomplete, and there are long time lags in collating and analysing these returns (Hyland 2014:132).

The survey team find 'about 14,000 teachers' in the National Schools, with 'some 12,000' trained, and 'about 2,000' untrained teachers. Religious personnel comprise one in four of the female teachers and one in seven of the male teachers (Department of Education 1965:9). The report particularly highlights the socio-economic and regional disparities in educational participation (1965: 133; 389). Two areas of concern arise in relation to participation in education in Ireland: the large number of pupils

leaving before completing the full primary school cycle, and rates of educational accreditation.

> It was decided not to ask for the certificate status of leavers. However, when we referred to the Department's [unpublished] lists of examination results we found ourselves in some technical difficulties – school numbers had changed and we were unable to trace some schools.
> (Department of Education 1965: 139)

The statistics relating to early school leaving and the Primary Certificate are particularly problematic, leaving the survey team to rely on estimates and extrapolations from other published sources. Using existing Department of Education statistics for 1961,1962 and 1963, Census returns for 1961, and their own survey data gathered from a representative sample of school principals, they estimate that 54,500 pupils, male and female, leave primary schools from Fourth Class upwards during the school year. While the majority continue to Post Primary schooling, an estimated 17,500 (32%) leave full-time education completely at Primary standard (1965:139). 8,000 of these are leavers from Fourth Class upwards and there are a further 3,000 who fail or were absent from the Primary Certificate exams, a total of 11,000 leaving primary school without the Primary Certificate (1965:141). The survey team suggest that similar numbers pertain for other years. They conclude that at least 8,000 are leaving the education system every year and starting adult life with a very basic level of education, as they did not reach Sixth Class standard (1965:389).

> Although the figure is undoubtedly exaggerated, the annual emergence of such a large number of young people who apparently have not reached what is commonly considered a minimum level of education, can hardly be viewed with equanimity.
> (Department of Education 1965: 140)

They conclude that this level of early leaving without accreditation merits a full examination (1965:141). At Post-Primary level, they estimate that a quarter of entrants to Vocational Schools do not hold the Primary Certificate, a total of 4,000 students in 1963-64 (1965:138). Figure 6.E summarises the report's estimates of annual numbers leaving schooling without accreditation:

FIGURE 6.E: ESTIMATED NUMBERS LEAVING EDUCATION ANNUALLY WITHOUT ACCREDITATION 1965

EDUCATIONAL STATUS	ESTIMATED NUMBERS
Leaving Primary School without Primary Certificate [1]	8,000
Leaving Vocational School without Group Certificate [2]	7,000
Leaving Secondary School without Intermediate Certificate [3]	6,500
TOTAL	**21,500**

SOURCES: 1. Investment in Education 1965: 141; 389.

2. Investment in Education 1965:136.   3. Investment in Education 1965:118

Those leaving Primary and Post Primary schools without accreditation are unlikely to improve their educational standards in later life, as there are limited provisions for further adult-orientated basic education in this era. The report also notes the high levels of emigration among the 15-39 age group, within a net emigration rate of 42.6% in the years 1956-1961 (1965:26).

The report discusses educational requirements in terms of post-primary accreditation for the labour force into the future, describing the existence of what the team refer to as educational 'deficits' (1965:205):

Our analysis reveals that there will be an appreciable deficit in regard to these educational requirements in the present decade.
(Department of Education 1965:204)

The conclusion which emerges is that, in terms of the targets specified, certain education 'deficits' exist in the present labour force, and will continue to persist (though on a much reduced scale) among persons entering the labour force during the decade 1961-1971.
(Department of Education 1965:205)

The report identifies 'significant deficiencies' in the basic education of those already in the labour force, particularly in the older age groups. It suggests suitably designed programmes to address those 'whose original education may now be inadequate'.   It discusses retraining needs arising from redundancy and change of occupations. It also refers to 'refurbishing, broadening and updating' the skills of more highly-skilled employees, who may require regular retraining, refresher courses and part-time evening courses, like the systematic provisions required in more advanced countries (1965:205 – 206).   Within this economic version of the *discourse of deficiency,* members of the labour force are presented as items of inventory. Their educational defects can be repaired, and their individual skills can be updated, refurbished and recycled. The object of 'educational deficiency' existing within individual workers requires intervention to fulfil the economic needs of the state. Such a deficiency is implicitly linked to previous personal decisions made in relation to leaving education early.

Investment in Education demonstrates the value of statistical data and analysis within the education system. It promotes the need for further educational research, explicitly identifying specific areas where there is scope for further research, such as early school leaving. The presence of estimates and approximations within the data offers an invitation for further research to pursue these avenues of investigation.   The changes in emphasis within Irish education policy that follows the report's publication

is described retrospectively as a 'seminal shift' (Loxley, Seerey and Walsh 2014:173), 'a paradigm shift' and 'a policy shift'.

A focus on educational attainment in relation to employment needs into the future underpins the *Investment in Education* report. Their estimates on existing levels of educational attainment accord with the Vocational Schools publications and the *Defence Forces Statistical Abstracts* discussed earlier. The conservative estimate of 8,000 leaving school annually without the Primary Certificate raises questions about the location of these young people. If the Defence Forces employ approximately 1,000 each year without the Primary Certificate, and 4,000 are accepted in Vocational Schools, a further 3,000 are seeking employment with similarly low levels of educational attainment. While employment options in unskilled farm labour and other unskilled work are available to young school leavers, these offer few opportunities for advancement. As the *Defence Forces Abstracts* show, promotion and advancement are increasingly dependent on the literacy skills required to gain accreditation. The retraining, refresher, and part-time evening courses proposed by *Investment in Education* are outside the reach of those with poor literacy. The *illiterate person* is becoming increasingly confined within the boundaries determined by aspirations to become a more technological society.

6.5 CONCLUSION

The Irish Vocational Schools provide free second level education to the Irish population and the Irish Defence Forces are a significant employer in twentieth-century Ireland. These sectors do not feature in popular representations of Irish life, despite their relevance for large numbers of the population. There are very few widely acclaimed biographical accounts centred on the lived experience of the Vocational School, and even fewer relating to the Defence Forces. The Vocational sector and the Defence Forces are poorly resourced, and both are viewed as catering for the poorest in society. This is reinforced by the lower recognition given to

Vocational School teachers and examinations, and a popular assumption that Defence Forces personnel are drawn from the Reformatory and Industrial Schools. The Defence Forces, because they operate behind high walls and under military secrecy, tend to be viewed as a separate and detached aspect of Irish life. Reading the *Statistical Abstracts* in conjunction with the *Investment in Education Report* suggests that the educational aspects of Defence Forces recruits are not an aberration, but instead reflect the lived reality for many adults in mid-twentieth century Ireland. Discussions of Irish-language revival are an absent feature of these employment-orientated documents, reflecting the everyday use of the English language in this era.

Vocational Schools publications and reports from the Military Archives show that both provide basic literacy tuition to large numbers of new entrants. The *discourse of practical English* emanating from these documents constructs illiteracy as an unremarkable feature of everyday life. The objective of intervention is to produce a functionally literate adult and the solution is to offer practical literacy tuition. The *illiterate person* holds the potential to participate and contribute successfully to Irish society. This discourse, offering a favourable place for the illiterate person, counters the *discourse of disruption* that constructs the illiterate person as a negative, disruptive impediment to modern society and promotes activities of exclusion and expulsion. However, the more pervasive power of the *discourse of disruption* is evident in discussions about 'English Classes' and 'English teachers'. These 'English classes' assist in transforming National School leavers into competent employees, but references to 'English classes' require decoding to understand that they refer to literacy tuition. This muffled terminology assists in preserving the assertion that all Irish adults are fully literate.

The *discourse of practical English* presents a new version of the discourse of deficiency by identifying the illiterate person as a product of deficient National School provisions. However, it is located within institutions that are themselves widely considered inferior to the National Schools.

Unlike the American Literacy Crusaders and the US Navy, the success of the Irish Vocational Schools and Defence Forces in producing literate employees from illiterate primary school leavers is not made known to the wider society. Such knowledge has a negative value in Ireland. Acknowledging the presence of the *illiterate person* can lead to unwelcome consequences, expressed in financial terms at the ITIA Congress 1907. Any knowledge that leads to critique of National School provisions is formally dismissed, demonstrated by the responses to INTO (1941) and Pollak (1943) in Chapter 5. Everyday knowledge about the *illiterate person* in the Vocational Schools and the Defence Forces remains confined within these institutions. This self-imposed strategic silence allows long-standing custom-made adult literacy provisions to continue without interference, but also allows the prevailing belief in a fully literate society to remain unchallenged.

This chapter examined discourses of the *illiterate person* in a society that considers itself fully literate. The next chapter examines the 'rediscovery' of the *illiterate person* in the 1960s and 1970s. An international emphasis on social and economic development underpins European and international comparisons of educational inputs and outcomes. These comparisons include the assessment of literacy. Chapter 7 considers some of the Irish responses to this new international focus on the individualized measurement of literacy and the *illiterate person*.

Chapter 7: The Era of Individualized Measurement 1960s to 1980

7.1 Introduction

This penultimate chapter considers the 1960s and 1970s, an era at the threshold of *liquid modernity*, when the increasing volatility of capital and the resultant disengagement between capital and labour are shaping new economic conditions (Bauman 20001:25). This era sees wide dissemination of Freire's work on literacy as a catalyst for social change, within the context of a continuing and more invasive focus on literacy as an economic asset. Supranational organisations like OECD, UNESCO and the EEC increasingly focus on literacy in terms of its contribution to economic development. From 1971, a literacy rate lower than 20% forms one of the criteria used by UNESCO to classify a country as 'least developed' (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2008:13), extending the correlation between literacy and development at the individual personal level to the national level. The orientation to meeting economic goals by using cost-effective solutions leads to demands for national and cross-national measurements of literacy outcomes, introducing new ways to measure and categorise the *illiterate person*. This impetus to measure literacy capacity leads to the quantification and comparison of literacy levels at national and international level.

An emphasis on the economic utility of literacy draws attention to the presence of the *illiterate person* in developed industrial economies such as the UK and US, often characterised as an unexpected 'discovery' that overturns the 'consoling myth of universal literacy' (Howard 2012:14). Measurements of literacy within education systems 'discover' poor literacy

among school-going populations. Ireland, no longer isolated from international trends, records similar 'discoveries' that generate a variety of responses.

This chapter considers documents from the 1960s and 1970s, spanning this era of individualized measurement, when the focus on measuring the amount of literacy in the world leads to unanticipated discoveries about the *illiterate person* in developed countries. Section 7.2 examines how the *illiterate person* is constructed at the international level. Section 7.3 considers the increased emphasis on measuring literacy within national education systems. Section 7.4 looks at the discovery of the illiterate adult in Ireland, while Section 7.5 explores how literacy initiatives address the newly-discovered *illiterate person* in the lead-up to the launch of the National Adult Literacy Agency in 1980*.*

7.2 MEASURING LITERACY INTERNATIONALLY

Previous chapters highlight how literacy skills are endowed with the capacity to represent other non-literacy attributes, allowing the ability to read and write to act as a proxy for intelligence and social progress. In the 1960s and 1970s, literacy gains additional significance as an indicator of economic progress. UNESCO funds literacy programmes in developing nations on the basis that literacy will advance economic development as well as political and social development.

The conference proceedings of the 1975 UNESCO *Persepolis Symposium on World Illiteracy,* edited by Bataille (1976), reflect an overt focus on *illiteracy* rather than literacy in this era. Two aspects of the proceedings are of interest here, firstly, the global illiteracy rates prepared by the UNESCO Secretariat, and secondly, the recognition of illiteracy as an issue in developed nations.

While acknowledging the difficulty of calculating illiteracy rates when a variety of definitions are in use, the UNESCO Secretariat estimates that

34.2% of the world population are illiterate in 1970. This overall rate masks regional variations. Africa and the Arab States have over 70% illiteracy, Asia has a rate of 50%, and Latin America has a 24% illiterate population (Bataille 1976:3). Although these rates have fallen since UNESCO's previous estimates, overall population growth means that the number of illiterate people is increasing (Bataille 1976:5).

Other variations relating to gender, location and occupation are also noted. The proportion of female illiteracy is given as 60%, and rural populations show a higher proportion of illiteracy compared to urban populations. A close relationship between poverty and illiteracy is evident, with the 25 poorest 'least-developed' countries having the highest *illiteracy rates*. Schooling is also a significant factor, particularly where there are poor attendance rates, high dropout rates, or large numbers never attending school.

Examples of improvements include China, where 80% of the population were illiterate in 1949, compared to 25% in 1975, 'according to recent information' (Bataille 1976:18). The report refers to projected future improvements in Somalia, where 90% of the population are illiterate in 1970. The country adopts the Roman alphabet for the Somali language in 1972, prior to initiating a concentrated government-sponsored literacy programme in 1973. The government plans to reduce the illiteracy rate to 20% by sending students and teachers to the countryside to teach literacy (1976:19), recalling similar provisions described by the Spanish and Mexican delegates at the World Education Conference in 1933.

Figure 7.A summarises a series of tables that depict *illiteracy rates* across the world in 1970 (1976:6-13). Nepal, Morocco, Algeria, Iran have illiteracy rates of over 75%. Spain, Greece, Yugoslavia, Poland, Hungary and Bulgaria feature as European countries with a percentage of the population classified as illiterate. Sources for the illiteracy rates depicted in the tables are not given. They are presented as officially sanctioned rates for each country.

PERCENTAGE ILLITERACY RATE	COUNTRY
Illiteracy Rate 75% -100%	Nepal, Iran, Rural Morocco
Illiteracy Rate 50% - 75%	Syria, Tunisia, Urban Morocco, Rural Brazil, Rural El Salvador
Illiteracy Rate 25% - 50%	Turkey, Mexico, Venezuela, Urban El Salvador, Rural Chile, Rural Ecuador
Illiteracy Rate under 25%	Spain, Greece, Yugoslavia, Thailand, Korea, Bulgaria, Poland, Hungary, Urban Brazil, Urban Chile

SOURCE: Table 5 and Table 10 in Bataille 1976:6-13

A set of indicators pointing to the potential for illiteracy can be abstracted from the conference proceedings, where rural agricultural societies with high poverty rates demonstrate significant levels of illiteracy.

The proceedings also note the recently 'rediscovered' presence of illiteracy in industrialised countries (1976:27). The extract below is an example of how this discovery is couched in broad terms:

> Recently two major industrial countries announced national programmes for their adult illiterate population, which ran into millions because it is not only in developing countries that illiteracy is a problem. Furthermore, these programmes are not considered as emergency programmes, but long-term programmes as the provision and content of existing formal primary education is not expected to overcome the problem of a substantial number of drop-outs who form the core of the semi-literate population.
> (Bataille 1976:14)

The overt linkage of illiteracy with undeveloped rural societies and poverty may partially explain the reluctance to name the developed nations that are

introducing long-term literacy programmes. These 'two major industrial countries' remain un-named and unidentified in the proceedings. Their illiterate populations are portrayed as 'drop-outs' from the education systems, implying an individual choice to spurn existing educational provisions. This contrasts to the prevailing tendency to view the illiterate person in the developing world as a victim of inadequate educational opportunities (UNESCO Institute for Statistics 2008:11).

The European countries included in Figure 7.A. are not discussed any further in the text. The examples of local literacy projects and programmes discussed at the conference are in Africa, Asia and South America. Although the proceedings contain several muffled references to literacy difficulties in developed countries, the *illiterate person* is overwhelmingly represented as a citizen of the developing world.

Literacy is consistently linked with both social progress and economic progress throughout the proceedings. Reference is made to the key role of *functional literacy* in providing individuals with the skills and knowledge to function effectively in a changing environment and to become agents of social change (Bataille 1976:19). The use of terms like 'functional literacy' and 'semi-literate' in the proceedings demonstrates how conceptualisations of literacy are shifting, moving from a binary of 'literate' / 'illiterate' to a more nuanced continuum of literacy.

The promotion of literacy as a factor of social and economic development, seen here and in other UNESCO documents, draws critique from those who regard literacy as a reflection of social, ideological and cultural practice. Literacy activists like Freire, while agreeing on the need to increase literacy levels, prioritise the emancipatory value of literacy rather than its economic value. Freire's adult-orientated participatory approach to literacy is critical of state interventions, focusing instead on cultivating critical engagement. His *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* is published in Portuguese in 1968 and he lectures at Harvard University in 1969. The English translation of *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in 1970 generates international interest.

Scribner and Cole regard the 'UNESCO approach', where literacy programmes are considered pathways to national development, as evidence of continuing belief in the capacity of literacy to generate a higher form of thought that somehow transforms individuals and societies (Scribner and Cole 1978:449). The 'UNESCO approach' implies that the illiterate person is incapable of participating in a modern industrial society, a belief that evokes the nineteenth-century *Literacy Myth*. For Street, the UNESCO focus on achieving particular 'literacy thresholds' to promote economic development is an application of the *autonomous model of literacy* (1984:13). Such programmes engage with the assumption that the provision of schooling and literacy of themselves can redress social and economic problems, without acknowledging that these problems relate to complex structural inequalities (Luke 2012:347). The simple correlation between literacy and progress ignores activities such as the state censorship accompanying the state literacy campaigns of Cuba in 1961 and Nicaragua in 1980 (De Castell and Luke 1987:428).

The 'UNESCO approach' critiqued by Scribner, Cole and Street emerges in a more sophisticated form in the 'developed' world, where a growing emphasis on economic progress is evident. The education systems of the European Economic Community (EEC) are increasingly orientated towards enhancing human capital and producing a European knowledge economy (Grek et al 2009:124). Literacy skills are considered a key component of the human capital required for this endeavour, with particular attention given to inadequate literacy levels among young people and early school leavers across Europe (2009:40-41).

The *discourse of disruption* of the earlier twentieth century positions the *illiterate person* as an impediment to *social* progress. Strategies of exclusion, such as restricting voting and immigration, reduce the risk of social disruption. The *discourse of economic utility* evident in these later decades constructs the illiterate person as an impediment to *economic* progress. The objective of intervention is to improve the economic utility of the population, by providing the kind of literacy that will be useful to the

economy. This focus on literacy in the context of economic development generates a strong impetus for the introduction of literacy programmes in poor nations. It also underpins a renewed interest in literacy within developed countries seeking to enhance their economic advantage. Such literacy interventions are represented as desirable and unproblematic activities. There are no concerns about the methods used to instil literacy, their ideological bases, or their implications for social control.

The *discourse of economic utility* prioritises the measurement, assessment and categorisation of the *illiterate person*, to maximise the outcomes of intervention. Such measurements are compared against ideal norms set in economic terms, where the needs of the individual are subservient to the needs of the economy. As Street notes, the prioritisation of statistical measures of literacy fails to specify what kinds of literacy practices and concepts the *illiterate person* is supposed to acquire (1984:13).

The focus on economic benefits of literacy is accompanied by more sophisticated measuring instruments and international collaboration. UNESCO adopts the *International Standard Classification of Education Systems* in 1978, thereby agreeing to collect and share administrative data on education with the OECD and Eurostat (the statistical directorate of the EEC), to facilitate supranational and international comparability (Grek and Lawn 2009:47). 'Comparison for constant improvement against competition' becomes the standard to judge public education systems, accompanied by an increasing number of applications requiring numerical data (Grek et al 2009:122). Activities of measurement inevitably affect what is measured. The measurement of literacy within a competitive environment leads to a focus on tangible outcomes, in a context where national results are scrutinised and ranked. Reflecting their new role as indicators of economic progress, literacy statistics play a key role in classifying nation-states in relation to their economic development.

The increasing focus on economic utility stimulates a new interest in measuring and comparing educational attainment within European

education systems and schools, particularly in relation to reading skills. Grek et al identify that the aim of producing a European-wide knowledge economy is not always fully reflected in the different national-level responses. National aspects such as distance from the metropolitan centre, local histories, and political aspirations all interact with the pressure to coalesce around supranational goals (Grek et al 2009:123). Nation-states will inevitably respond to the presence of the *illiterate person* in different ways. The next section, discussing school-based literacy research undertaken in the 1960s and 1970s, illustrates the tensions generated by national and cross-national comparisons of literacy.

7.3 MEASURING LITERACY IN IRISH SCHOOLS

Both the OECD and UNESCO support the measurement of educational outcomes at national and cross-national level. The OECD focus on education in economic terms provides an important impetus to the *Investment in Education* survey of 1965. The OECD later develops a range of competency-based cross-national literacy and educational assessments, including the population-level IALS (*International Adult Literacy Survey*) in 1998 and PIAAC (*Programme for the International Assessment of Adult Competencies*) in 2013, and the school-level PISA (*Programme for International Student Assessment*) from 2000, used to measure and compare educational attainment globally.

A UNESCO meeting of sociologists and educational psychologists in 1959 gives rise to the International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement, known as IEA. IEA seeks to address existing data-free assertions about the relative merits of national education systems. It develops curriculum-based international educational assessments, including TIMSS (*Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study*) from 1995, and PIRLS (*Progress in International Reading Literacy Study*) from 2001.

The first international comparative educational assessment undertaken by IEA is published in 1962. This pilot study assesses the achievements of 13-year-old students in twelve countries, demonstrating the feasibility of conducting large-scale cross-national studies (Foshay, Thorndike, Hotyat, Pidgeon and Walker 1962:19). National centres for educational research in Belgium, England, Scotland, France, Federal Republic of Germany, Sweden, Finland, Switzerland, Poland, Yugoslavia, Israel and USA participate in the study, with support from UNESCO. Representative samples in each country, ranging from 300 – 1,732 participants, complete assessment tests in Reading Comprehension and four other areas (Mathematics, Geography, Science and Non-Verbal Ability). Participants also complete background questionnaires. Each assessment test and questionnaire is developed in one country and translated into eight working languages. This study constructs common measuring instruments for cross-national use, and it introduces a new empirical dimension into comparative education (Foshay et al 1962:19).

Studies by John Macnamara (1966) and Desmond Swan (1978) are among a small number of literacy studies undertaken in Irish schools, and as both were published in book form, they remain accessible. Both studies were undertaken in a personal capacity, but with full co-operation by the schools involved. They illustrate Irish approaches to measuring literacy.

During 1961, Macnamara undertakes an English-language reading assessment study that permits cross-national comparison between Irish primary pupils and their British counterparts (Macnamara 1966). Macnamara presents his research findings as a contribution to the debate on bilingual tuition in Irish primary education. This debate, in his view, is taking place without any reliable empirical evidence (Macnamara 1966:5). His earlier review of the *Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language Report* highlights this lack of empirical evidence. He remarks on the discrepancy between the INTO 1941 Survey findings and the Commission's declaration that bilingual teaching confers positive benefits

on the educational attainment of primary school children (Macnamara 1964:170).

Macnamara, a Catholic priest and Lecturer in Education in St Patrick's College, Dublin with a PhD from Edinburgh University, is simultaneously an 'insider' and an 'outsider'. He educates primary teachers in Ireland and has studied abroad in a different education system. His 1966 book outlines two main objectives: to examine the effect of Irish-language tuition on arithmetical attainment and on English language attainment among primary school pupils. Macnamara's findings relating to English language attainment are discussed here. The reading measurement instrument is the Moray House English Test 14 (MHE14), standardised in British schools between 1941-1944. Macnamara outlines how he used the MHE32 test, standardised in 1958 in Britain, for a 1959 study of reading in Irish boys' schools. The relatively low scores obtained by Irish children on the MHE32 test was attributed to the coaching and test-sophistication of British children by 1958. To address this concern about comparison, Macnamara chooses the MHE14 test for his 1961 study, as it was standardised at an earlier time when the influence of such test-sophistication factors would have been less likely (Macnamara 1966:71-72). According to Macnamara, Irish-based teachers shown the MHE14 test considered it suitable for use in Irish schools, remarking that 'school English' did not differ appreciably between the two countries (Macnamara 1966:126). Macnamara's use of the MHE14 test thus compares test scores from Irish children in 1961 with those of British children tested twenty years earlier. These reading tests categorise participants in terms of 'Reading Age', a way of measuring reading ability used for both children and adults at this time.

The study participants are a representative sample of 1,083 pupils in Fifth Class, from 119 National Schools. Primary Schools Inspectors of the Department of Education administer the reading tests, with the permission of school managers and class teachers. The Irish children answer an average of 22 questions correctly, in comparison to an average of 64 for British children responding to the same test in 1941 (Macnamara

1966:118). Allowing for a variety of differences, Macnamara calculates that the mean difference between the reading of the Irish children and the British children is equivalent to 17 months in age for those in English language schools, while it is 30 months for those who are native Irish speakers (Macnamara 1966:134). Macnamara concludes that the principal reason for the difference is 'the fact that on average British children spend more than twice as much time at English than Irish children' (1966:134):

> Native-speakers of English in Ireland who have spent 42 per cent of their school time learning Irish do not achieve the same standard in written English as British children who have not learned a second language (estimated difference in standard, 17 months of English age). Neither do they achieve the same standard in Irish as native-speakers of Irish (estimated difference, 16 months). Further the English attainments of native-speakers of Irish fall behind those of native-speakers of English both in Ireland (13 months of English age) and in Britain (30 months of English age).
> (Macnamara 1966:136)

Macnamara's findings suggest that the Irish participants are disadvantaged by the school time allocated to the Irish language. His results indicate that neither English reading nor Irish reading benefits from the priority allocated to the Irish language.

The summary of Macnamara's findings given in the extract above is regularly cited in accounts of Irish education (e.g. O'Connor 1986:131; T. Walsh 2012:197). His account of sample selection is not usually cited, although it provides a valuable description of the Irish educational landscape in 1961. Extrapolating from Census returns, Macnamara estimates that private schools educate up to 10.6% of the school going population at this time. However, as no official list of private primary schools exists, a random sample cannot be selected from them and so the research participants are drawn from National Schools (1966:47). Private primary schools are thus excluded from the study despite their role in

educating over 21,000 Irish children, as estimated in *Investment in Education* (Department of Education 1965:4). Also excluded are the children attending schools for intellectual or physical disability, accounting for 2,080 pupils in 1961 (Macnamara 1966:47). Macnamara makes no mention of the 51 Industrial and Reformatory Schools, containing 3,891 children in 1961 (DEASR 1962:161). He selects respondents from mainstream Fifth Class, as this allows the most complete cross-section of National School pupils. He outlines the established expectation that at least 25% of Fifth Class pupils will leave primary school without completing the full cycle. Based on 1962 returns, 95% of pupils in Fourth Class progress to Fifth Class, but only 74% of Fifth Class pupils progress to Sixth Class (Macnamara 1966:47). Macnamara also notes that children in Fifth Class in 1961 range from 8 years to 16 years, as progression is based on ability rather than age. Children aged over 11 years can be found in all classes from Infants to Eighth Class (1966:48). Most of the schools included in the survey are one- or two-teacher schools, with a three-teacher school classified as 'large', reflecting the *Investment in Education* statistic that two thirds of Ireland's National Schools are one or two teacher schools (Department of Education 1965). While the national average pupil-teacher ratio is officially set as 34:1, Macnamara states that the number of pupils per teacher in the sample groups for this study is 'significantly greater', without elaborating further (Macnamara 1966:52). O'Connor describes the prevalence of up to seventy pupils per class in these years, particularly in disadvantaged areas of Dublin (1986:84). He records that direct ministerial action by Patrick Hillery in 1964 limits Dublin primary school class size to fifty (O'Connor 1986:85).

The publication of Macamara's book is surrounded by the kind of tension that leads to a forbidding silence. Horgan, praising the scholarly and impartial nature of the book, describes Macnamara's main conclusions as 'controversial in the extreme' (*Irish Times* 1966a). O'Connor quotes from a newspaper article by Garret Fitzgerald on 4th May 1966 that raises the issues highlighted by Macnamara and seeks a response from the Minister

for Education (*Irish Times* 1966b). 'But there was no discussion, nor did the Minister or Department respond' according to O'Connor (1986:132), an Assistant Secretary in the Department of Education at this time. Despite this assertion, the Minister's response is published in a newspaper article on 28th May 1966. Headlined 'Colley Challenges Priest's Study' it refers to Macnamara's book as a 'controversial study'. The article reports on an interview published in UCD student newspaper *Awake* where the Minister for Education 'has questioned the accuracy of some of Fr Macnamara's figures and has suggested that he did not succeed in avoiding some of the obvious pitfalls in his research' (*Irish Times* 1966c). The concerns about accurate figures and pitfalls are not explained any further in the article. O'Connor suggests that the 'technical' and 'abstruse' nature of Macnamara's book make it difficult to attract public attention (1986:132). The authoritative concerns about credibility expressed by the Minister for Education are unlikely to inspire public confidence in its findings. The book, instead of generating further research and debate, is censured on methodological grounds.   Notwithstanding the cross-national experience of Foshay et al in 1962 and the positive reaction accorded to *Investment in Education* in 1965, Macnamara's findings are received coolly by an education system that is reluctant to engage in external measurement and international comparison.   John Walsh refers to the presence of 'considerable tension' between public officials anxious to introduce educational reforms and Catholic managerial bodies seeking to retain control of Irish education (J. Walsh 2012:126). Such domestic disputes preclude any productive engagement with internal criticism or external developments.

Investment in Education may have introduced the Irish educational and political elites to a new language of human capital in relation to education (Loxley et al 2014:189). However, this new language does not pervade all parts of the education system, and the official response to Macnamara's 1966 research findings is in keeping with similar responses to the reports from INTO (1941) and Pollak (1943) a generation earlier.   By 1969,

Macnamara has left Ireland and the Catholic priesthood, and is Professor of Psychology at McGill University Canada, specialising in bilingual education and language learning.

In 1970, Fr Feichin O'Doherty, Professor of Psychology in UCD, oversees an assessment of educational attainment in terms of the reading, verbal intelligence, and arithmetic ability of a stratified sample of children in the Reformatory and Industrial Schools, on behalf of the Kennedy Commission (Committee on Reformatory and Industrial Schools 1970:113). Reading skills are assessed using the newly-devised Marino Graded Word Reading Tests, the first reading tests standardised on Irish students. The overall reading results are described as follows: "The extent of backwardness is very pronounced, ranging from 50.0 per cent in the case of twelve year old girls to 83.3 per cent for eight year old boys" (1970:115). There is no disputation of this finding relating to children in Residential Schools.

During 1972, Desmond Swan, Professor of Education in UCD, examines reading performance in second level schools, now collectively termed 'Post-Primary Schools' (Swan 1978). Free Secondary School education from 1968 has increased enrolment at post-primary level, and Swan estimates the 1972 'dropout' rate at the end of primary school is now below 5% (1978:3). Like Macnamara, Swan is simultaneously an 'insider' and 'outsider'. Originally a teacher at primary and second level in Ireland, he completed further studies in England, Austria, Germany and America. He holds membership of the Irish, UK and International Reading Associations, and is awarded a Fellowship from the International Reading Association in 1977 for significant research on reading. Aware of documented reading problems in the education systems of other countries, Swan believes that similar problems may exist in Ireland (1978:7).

In his Plenary Address to the first Education Conference in Ireland in 1976, Swan defines literacy in terms of at least three levels of comprehension, being the literal, interpretive, and evaluative levels, summed up as 'reading the lines, reading between the lines and reading beyond the lines' (Swan

1977:4) He also refers to the very postmodern concept that 'as you read the book, the book reads you' (Swan 1977:4).

Swan regards the capacity to read as a key area of personal and intellectual growth, relevant for overall personal development. Poor reading is therefore 'a personal failure with inevitable social ramifications' (1978:67). He does not identify any single cause of reading difficulties; instead, ascribing it to a 'constellation of factors' (1978:67-68). While recognising the importance of traditions and social attitudes in fostering literacy skills, Swan explicitly identifies the school as the main route to improving literacy standards, because changes in the education system are more easily implemented than changes in personal and social attitudes. He thus identifies formal educational provisions as a key route to improving literacy levels. He remarks on the need for heightened levels of public awareness and educational self-appraisal in Irish society in order to address literacy attainment (1978:68). Despite Macnamara's earlier findings, Swan finds no official acknowledgement of reading difficulties in Irish schools, only 'indirect indications' such as the Department of Education's provision of Remedial Teachers throughout the post-primary sector from 1970 (1978:7).

Swan's reading survey addresses the need he identifies for a national survey of reading performance at second level. He uses the terminology of 'Reading Backwardness', another term routinely used for literacy difficulty in this era. His pilot study poses two questions to 47 Secondary School principals in the Dublin area. 74% of the principals respond affirmatively to the question 'Is there a problem of reading backwardness in First Year pupils?' The second question, 'Is it the business of the Post-Primary school to deal with it?', receives a 57% affirmative response (1978:10).

The full study undertaken in 1972 uses a stratified representative sample drawn from First Year pupils in all post-primary schools. There are 3,377 participants, equivalent to 6% of the First Year pupil population in that year, selected from 161 different schools that represent 19% of all post primary schools (1978:28). The age range of this sample of First Year pupils is 11-

17 years, reflecting the spread of ages found in Macnamara's sample of primary school pupils.

Psychologists and students of educational psychology administer a reading test, a separate reasoning test and a questionnaire on personal details, taken under controlled conditions. The reading test is the National Survey Form 6 Test (NS 6) standardised in England and Wales, and already piloted in Ireland in four previous empirical investigations (1978:14; 72-74).

Swan categorises participants as Average Readers, Backward Readers and Advanced Readers, based on their NS 6 reading test scores. The maximum score is 60, and the mean population score is 34.97, with very little difference noted between girls and boys. In the total sample, 15.9% of participants have a raw score that is one Standard Deviation or more below the grade mean, scoring below 23.6, and they are categorised as 'Backward Readers'. The 'Advanced Reader' has a score greater than one Standard Deviation above the grade mean (1978:56). The 17.2% of participants scoring above 46.3 are categorised as 'Advanced Readers'.

A distinction is made throughout the research account between the two main types of post-primary school, Secondary Schools and Vocational Schools. The mean reading standard is significantly higher in Secondary Schools than in Vocational Schools (1978:40). The incidence of poor reading is almost four times greater in Vocational Schools (1978:56), and it is especially evident in larger Vocational Schools (1978:67). Although only one third of the total pupil cohort is enrolled in a Vocational School, nearly two thirds of poor readers are found within this group. Secondary Schools, with two thirds of the enrolment, have only one third of the poor readers (1978:59). Swan finds that previous attendance at a private primary school is positively associated with high reading scores in First Year (1978:47). Attendance at a rural primary school tends to be associated with lower reading achievement, although Swan notes that this finding requires 'careful interpretation' (1978:47). Results from the personal questionnaires show a correlation between literacy and occupational group, where the child

of non-agricultural manual workers is ten times more likely to be a poor reader than the child of professional parents (1978:59). Reading difficulties are more prevalent among pupils from lower socio-economic groups and agricultural backgrounds (1978:71).

A survey of 'streaming' in Irish schools, undertaken between 1978-1983 by Damian Hannan, Research Professor in the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI), finds a similar stratification of literacy levels among First Year pupils in Vocational Schools, Community Schools, and Secondary Schools (Hannon 1987:59). Hannan relies on 'estimates of literacy' made by school principals and guidance counsellors (1987:58), given in answer to a close-ended survey question on 'literacy problems' limited to five response options (1987:208).

The literacy research studies discussed here are initiated from outside the schools, in contrast to British primary schools in the 1960s and 1970s, where teachers such as Margaret Clark are facilitated and funded to carry out reading assessments in their own classrooms (Clark 2014). Macnamara (1966) produces a cross-national comparison with another English-speaking education system, while Swan in 1972 confines his research to an internal national comparison. Both highlight existing evidence of reading difficulties, in the form of previous small-scale research findings, anecdotal evidence, and the existence of 'indirect indications'. However, the literacy findings of Macnamara and Swan meet with very little approval or recognition within the Irish education system. O'Sullivan claims that a 'cordon sanitaire' around the Irish education system leads to its insulation from any competing or contesting viewpoints (O'Sullivan 2005: xiii). This reluctance to submit to scrutiny or to acknowledge any deficiencies can be seen in discussions of literacy studies by other Irish education researchers, such as James Cummins (1977) and Vincent Greaney (1977).

James Cummins, an Irish-born theorist of bilingualism and second-language acquisition based in the University of Alberta, acknowledges that

Macnamara's 1966 findings on English reading are 'reasonable' in his *Critical Review of Macnamara's Findings* (Cummins 1977), but he challenges the findings on poor arithmetical attainment. He claims that presenting arithmetical problems to children in their weaker language has a negative impact on their ability to solve them, thus disputing Macnamara's conclusions.

Vincent Greaney is a researcher with the Education Research Centre, attached to St Patrick's College Drumcondra. In his paper to the 1976 Conference of the Reading Association of Ireland (Greaney 1977), he identifies the 'rather modest proportions' of reading research in Irish schools compared to 'Western-European' and American standards (1977:3). He highlights the lack of valid measuring instruments, raising concerns about British and American reading tests 'which had not been adapted or re-standardised for use in Irish conditions' (1977:3). He finds that some tests are being used for purposes they were not designed for, while the tests used in other cases are unable to justify the reported conclusions (1977:3). He acknowledges that, despite these limitations, 'many studies are sufficiently valid' to permit comment on the outcomes of reading instruction (1977:3). He recounts the main findings of previous Irish studies, including Macnamara (1966) and a 1974 study by Swan, although no further details of the latter are given. Those undertaken in the 1960s tend to find differences in 'reading ages' between Irish and British children, while 'replications' of these studies in the 1970s find that the difference has not changed or has improved significantly (Greaney 1977:4). Greaney states that 'a number of the studies reviewed' were undertaken by graduate students, 'almost all of whom had to undertake their projects without the benefit of adequate formal training in research methodology' (1977:8). The low attainment found by these studies is contrasted to the positive outcomes of studies based on teacher ratings of pupils: 'The results of a 1968 survey (Greaney and Kellaghan 1972) showed that teachers did not perceive English reading as being a major source of difficulty' (Greaney 1977:7). Greaney refers to an INTO National Survey in 1976 that finds

improvements in the standard of English in Irish primary schools (1977:7), although no further details are given, and it is not listed in the bibliography. This reported improvement in literacy among Irish pupils contrasts to the experience of North American and other English-speaking countries in the 1970s, who perceive a 'literacy crisis' in terms of falling literacy standards in schools (e.g. De Castell and Luke 1987). However, this international trend and Ireland's deviation from it are not discussed.

Greaney highlights the Drumcondra Attainment Tests, norm-referenced group reading tests developed and standardised in 1975-76 by the Educational Research Centre, where he is based (1977:9). While the paper draws attention to the value of these Tests, in doing so it also undermines previous literacy research studies in Irish schools. By generalising poor research practice, the findings from all previous studies are represented as potentially unreliable. This treatment of existing research findings recalls Becker's remark that politically controversial conclusions are often attacked on methodological grounds (Becker 1998:199). Greaney refers to 'Irish conditions' that require specialised literacy research instruments, orientating reading research towards insular national comparisons rather than cross-European or international comparison. In later years, Greaney is an education research specialist at the World Bank, contributing to international assessment and education policy (e.g. *Monitoring the Learning Outcomes of Education Systems* by Greaney and Thomas Kellaghan 1996).

Studies reporting adverse findings on literacy in Irish schools, instead of initiating a debate on the standard of literacy within the Irish education system, are constructed as flawed sources of knowledge. The *Literacy and Numeracy Strategy* for primary and post-primary schools published by the Department of Education in 2011 is silent about previous empirical literacy research studies in Irish schools, emulating the lack of empirical evidence seen within the *Commission on the Restoration of the Irish Language Report* fifty years earlier.

Macnamara and Swan both describe the novelty of using reading assessments in Irish classrooms, requiring the co-operation of school managers and assistance from Schools Inspectors and Psychologists to administer them. The 1970 reading assessments in the Reformatory and Industrial Schools are overseen by a Professor of Psychology. This highlights that literacy assessments were not generally used in Irish schools in the late twentieth century, raising questions about the type of literacy assessments undertaken in Reformatory and Industrial Schools in previous decades. The assessment focus on reading rather than writing is also noticeable. These documents also identify how the production of knowledge about literacy is changing. Classroom observation and teacher estimates of literacy, seen in Dale at the start of the century, continue to be used as literacy measurements in Swan's pilot study and Hannan's report, but they coexist with the deployment of sophisticated measuring instruments administered by specialists, an example of how 'simple instruments' of observation and listening are, over time, replaced by more effective instruments to form and accumulate knowledge (Foucault 2003:33). Literacy research in the later decades routinely includes assessment of psychological and social criteria, seen in Swan's full study. Observation, surveillance and invasive direct measurement become normal practices of literacy researchers. Information about the literacy of children underpins much of the knowledge about literacy. Literacy studies are undertaken within schools as this allows access to children in the process of becoming literate, with state-funded school providing a key site for this research. Private schools are less likely to welcome literacy researchers.

This emphasis on individualized measurement aligns these studies with the *discourse of economic utility*. The relationship between literacy difficulty and Remedial Teaching seen in Swan's study is another link, where the illiterate pupil is 'remedied' through withdrawal from the classroom and targeted one-to-one intervention by a specialist expert, who can track and record improvements. The solution to poor literacy is exclusion from classroom and peers in order to achieve a literacy level that satisfies the

school. Measuring instruments that map on to scales of 'Reading Ages' and 'Mean Scores' reproduces such terms as unquestioned norms, allowing child-referenced 'reading ages' to be assigned to teenagers and adults.

The introduction of measurement inevitably shapes the activity measured. Measurement focused on economic utility will prioritise a different literacy than one focused on emancipatory literacy, determining the kind of literacy that is taught in schools. As Macnamara recognises, test-sophistication will produce results to match expectations. Test-sophistication of teachers can encourage 'teaching to the test', in a context where public ranking replaces the financial incentive of the nineteenth-century payment-by-results system. The development of standardised cross-national measurement also has implications for retrospective studies, as movement towards increasingly easier cross-European comparisons makes comparison within national pasts more difficult (Grek and Lawn 2009:52).

7.4 MEASURING LITERACY AMONG IRISH ADULTS

The impact of UNESCO, OECD and EEC concerns with literacy as a vector for economic progress is evident in the new attention given to education and literacy among adults in 1970s Ireland. This section considers how the *illiterate adult* features in a report on Adult Education in Ireland (Department of Education 1970), a survey on educational attainment in Dublin (Mac Gréil 1974), and a booklet on adult literacy published by state broadcaster RTÉ (Whyte 1976).

The 1970 *National Adult Education Survey Interim Report* introduces, defines and describes the recently discovered problem of 'functional illiteracy' in Ireland in Chapter V: 'Informal Adult Education' (Department of Education 1970:19). This chapter identifies *functional illiteracy* as a factor relevant to 'inadequacies' in the lives of people who do not engage in adult education. The existence of personal inadequacy is deemed to be

'particularly acute' where there is poverty and poor housing. This new problem is differentiated from 'absolute illiteracy' and defined more precisely in a footnote at the end of the page:

> Functional illiteracy is not absolute illiteracy; it is the inability to cope with the ordinary functions of living which require a knowledge of reading and writing; it is manifested by an inability to read advertisements, warning signs, notices, or to write letters and complete forms.
> (Department of Education 1970:19)

The Report refers to anecdotal evidence regarding the nature of 'functional illiteracy', stating that there are no exact statistics to discuss. It is presented as condition known and recognised by the survey writers but not fully understood at this time.

> We do not know, nor have any inexpensive way of finding out, the extent of functional illiteracy in our society but through submissions, especially from some Trade Unions, we conclude that the situation is a good deal worse than is generally believed. It has been submitted to us that the level of literacy and numeracy is so low amongst many of the working population that promotion, even to minor supervisory grades or further training that is not strictly manipulative is virtually impossible for many. We have also been urged to take account of a similar type of functional illiteracy amongst many farmers and farm workers, although the evidence is that no such problem exists among adult females in the rural community.
> (Department of Education 1970: 20)

Literacy difficulties among trade union members and farm workers are cited, as are gender differences, without any empirical support. The Report states that gathering information on literacy is expensive, surrounding the task of 'measuring literacy' with difficulty and complexity. This report remarks on the poor progression within employment for those with literacy

difficulties. 'Functional illiterates', especially young people in industrial employment, are designated as a group that require priority in a new national adult education programme. 'Functional illiteracy' is very clearly linked with those in employment at this point in the report, but subsequent pages identify a different range of groups as those most likely to display functional illiteracy. They include 'unattached youth', poverty groups, prisoners and 'itinerants', the under-employed and the unemployed, those about to retire, the aged and 'those concerned in any way with mental illness and handicap.' This, in effect, comprises a list of the most marginalized groups in Irish society. This part of the report aligns the *illiterate person* with poverty, unemployment, and marginalization.

> Unattached Youth: - Unattached youth are a widespread problem today, and one likely to become worse unless we can attract them to learn and to lead a fuller and more useful life. Many of them are on the way to becoming functionally illiterate too. (Department of Education 1970:20)

> Poverty Groups: - With poverty goes a sense of hopelessness and entrapment. Adult Education should first be aimed at these groups to enable their members to live better, in their domestic economy, even within their low income situation, and then to generate in them a widespread sense of commitment to an involvement in improving their incomes. This is turn will induce them to seek the type of formal education which they need and as a minimum, where necessary, to achieve functional literacy. (Department of Education 1970:20)

> Itinerants: - Itinerants are a special type of poverty group, with all of the group's problems plus the problem of adapting successfully to settled living. (Department of Education 1970:21)

> Prisoners: - Many prisoners, especially those on short-term sentences, are in prison because they cannot cope with life. Many of them are illiterate; a great

> improvement in their condition can be effected while they are 'in' and a start has been made. Adult Education can fulfil both preventive and remedial functions for them.
> (Department of Education 1970:21)

> Some farmers can learn from almost any kind of information source such as instructors, leaflets, radio etc. Others, usually those who have received much less formal schooling, are not able or willing to learn other than through personal contact and help from the instructor.
> (Department of Education 1970:23)

The provision of Remedial Education, referred to here in relation to prisoners, is mentioned again further on, where it offers a way to help adults address educational gaps caused by 'late development, retardation or deprivation' (Department of Education 1970:28). This focus on 'late development, retardation and deprivation' implies the impact of brain-related physiological factors, matching the report's tendency to use quasi-medical terminology to describe illiteracy. It is a condition associated with 'mental handicap' as well as poverty and deprivation. Unattached youth can develop functional illiteracy, as one develops an illness. Low income is identified as a possible cause, but the prescribed solution does not address this, focusing instead on self-medication through 'remedial education'. Individual motivation is regarded a critical element in the treatment of functional illiteracy, highlighting the need for compliance with the prescribed regime.

The earlier concern with those in employment is submerged under the more focused attention given to those living in identifiable marginalized groups. In this era, Travellers and 'unattached youth' are considered distinctively recognisable, and prisoners, by definition, reside in prisons. In contrast, those in employment and in trade unions are a more heterogeneous group, where individuals with literacy difficulties are not easily distinguishable. The report simplifies this complexity by linking the *illiterate person* with visible marginalization and poverty. The mechanism whereby individuals

develop functional illiteracy is not explained, except that 'unattached' young people comprise those most at risk. This process of moving from literacy to illiteracy echoes the concern expressed in the 1940s, when it was suggested that young people who were fully literate leaving primary school could become illiterate through lack of practice. The young people displaying this tendency to lose literacy in the 1940s were integrated into their local clubs and organisations, while the young people losing their literacy in 1970 are categorised in a more negative way as 'unattached'. What unites both sets of young people are the implicit assumptions that each one was fully literate while in school, and that each has 'lost' their literacy through lack of practice or by leading non-useful lives. This explanation preserves the core tenet that the education system delivers literacy, while simultaneously promoting the concept that the individual is responsible for losing it.

The *National Adult Education Survey* draws attention to the existence of poor literacy among adults, and it defines the newly-developed concept of 'functional illiteracy' in relation to everyday life. The report discusses literacy as a multi-level skill, rather than as a simple binary opposition of *absolute illiteracy* versus *full literacy*. However, the report also locates the *illiterate person* within marginalized groups in Irish society, and particularly among those lacking personal motivation. Poor literacy is thus presented as a personal inadequacy reflecting individual circumstances, and something easy to remedy once personal motivation is activated. The full *Adult Education in Ireland Report*, published three years later (Department of Education 1973), retains Chapter V unchanged from the Interim Report of 1970, adding an additional paragraph at the end:

> Since the publication of the Committee's Interim Report, many submissions and public comments motivated us to undertake or to commission research in this area of functional illiteracy. Initial findings indicate that it is wider than at first thought. The ESRI would be willing to undertake a major research in the total area of poverty and illiteracy. The Committee

> notes with satisfaction that some adult basic
> education projects have been successfully launched
> and that there is an ever increasing demand for such
> courses as Basic English and Mathematics.
> (Department of Education 1973:83)

This reference to the provision of 'Basic English' classes recalls the terminology of 'English' classes in the Vocational Schools and Defence Forces.

In 1974, the Catholic Communications Institute (CCI) of the Irish Catholic Bishops publishes *Educational Opportunity in Dublin* (Mac Gréil 1974) the report of a survey conducted by Fr Micheál Mac Gréil. Enlisting in the Defence Forces as an officer cadet in 1950, Mac Gréil resigns his commission in 1959 to join the Jesuit order (Mac Gréil 2014:3). He is a Lecturer of Sociology in St Patrick's Pontifical College Maynooth from 1971. The 1974 survey forms one part of his PhD research project undertaken through UCD, with a support staff of twenty funded by the CCI, where he is a member of the Research and Development Unit (Mac Gréil 2014:165-166; 186). The survey underpinning *Educational Opportunity in Dublin* is jointly sponsored by the CCI, the College of Industrial Relations and the Ford Foundation. The survey collates data on the educational attainment of a sample of adults in Dublin in 1972-73. Although the *Adult Education Survey Report* remarks on the difficulty of obtaining research data on literacy, details from Mac Gréíl's survey offer some useful indicators in terms of early school leaving and accreditation. It also allows comparison with contemporaneous Defence Forces statistics. It combines questionnaires and interviews administered to adults aged over 21 years, presented as a representative sample of the Dublin urban population (Mac Gréil 1974:6). A sample of 3,000 adults are selected by simple random method from the 1972 electoral register in Dublin, with a response rate of 78% (1974:7). The respondents are sufficiently integrated into their society to have registered to vote, and their presence on the electoral register also implies a minimum level of literacy. As noted in Chapter 1, the electoral

register for 1995 provides the sampling frame for Irish respondents in the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (OECD 2000:112).

Mac Gréil's survey asked respondents to provide details of the highest full-time education attained. Of 2,271 self-reported responses, 6.6% (149) had left before 14 years.

> The 6.6% who left before 14 years are mainly among the older members of the sample and were of school-going age when educational opportunities were more difficult, i.e. pre-1922.
> (Mac Gréil 1974:8)

The actual age of leaving school is not given. In a footnote attached to this statement, a breakdown relating to the respondents' age groups is provided, depicted in Figure 7.B, showing that early school leaving also occurred after 1922:

FIGURE 7.B: PERCENTAGE OF SURVEY RESPONDENTS WHO LEFT SCHOOL BEFORE 14 YEARS 1974

AGE RANGE IN 1972	PERCENTAGE AGE RANGE WHO LEFT SCHOOL BEFORE REACHING 14 YEARS
21-25 years	1.3%
26-30 years	4.6%
31-35 years	5.2%
36-40 years	6.9%
41-50 years	6.3%
51-60 years	4.7%
61-70 years	9.9%
70 years plus	16.9%

SOURCE: Mac Gréil 1974:8

Mac Gréil finds that 50% of the survey participants have no more than a Primary School level of education. 61% hold an educational certificate,

meaning that 39% of those surveyed have no educational accreditation (1974:55).

> Presuming our sample to be representative, half of the adults of greater Dublin only reached the primary level. Four times as many have attended secondary school as have attended vocational school and only 7.2% attended University. Also within the second level there is evidence of a high dropout rate. Almost 44% of the 192 who attended vocational school left before completing the course. The dropout rate in the secondary school was as high as 48%.
> (Mac Gréil 1974:9)

The survey report also compares findings on denominational grounds. Mac Gréil finds that the educational standards of the Church of Ireland /Presbyterian/Methodist respondents (N=134) are superior to those of Roman Catholic respondents (N=2,091). The 'relatively high percentage' of Protestants with no formal educational certificate at 38.6% is also noted (1974:25), although this is similar to the Catholic rate of 39.3%. Higher percentages of the Church of Ireland/Presbyterian/Methodist respondents achieved Intermediate Certificate, Leaving Certificate, University qualifications, and professional qualifications. Of those with no religious affiliation, 50% have either Leaving Certificate or BA degree (1974: 26). The number of these respondents is not given. In the Conclusion, Mac Gréil explains the lower educational attainment of Catholics in denominational terms:

> With regard to religious affiliation, Roman Catholics have an overall lower standard of educational achievement. This is probably explained by the deprived condition of Roman Catholics in Ireland prior to the founding of the State. Protestant superiority in educational standards is evidence of better educational opportunities for Protestants in Dublin.
> (Mac Gréil 1974: 55)

Mac Gréil is a member of the Gaelic League National Executive at this time, and his survey includes a section on the use of the Irish language among respondents. He finds that over 80% of respondents learned all their Irish while at school (1974:49). Higher proportions of those who went beyond primary school declare themselves fluent in Irish. Mac Gréil finds a positive correlation between the standard of Irish and the level of education achieved (1974:49). He aggregates those who self-declare their spoken Irish is 'Middling/Not so Fluent' and those who self-declare themselves 'Fluent/Very Fluent' to find the number of 'Potential Irish Speakers' (1974:49).

Mac Gréil's survey, carried out during 1972-1973, provides evidence of the educational attainment of Dublin residents. Like many research studies of this era, the findings are accepted as an end point rather than an invitation for further research. As in the Census and the *Defence Forces Abstracts*, self-reported details are accepted at face value. There are no details given regarding the 22% of the sample who were non-respondents. The educational attainments of these missing 660 could have given further reinforcement to the findings or skewed them in different directions.

Figure 7.C presents Mac Gréil's findings in conjunction with Defence Forces rates for educational attainments in the same period. A total of 1,958 enlist in the Defence Forces during 1973, and all provide self-reported details of educational attainment on enlistment. The 131 recruits with Primary Certificate are included in the column 'Primary Level Only' and are also included as holders of 'Educational Certificates' to allow comparison with Mac Gréil's findings. While the Mac Gréil survey sample comprises male and female respondents, the Defence Forces recruits are all male. Figure 7.C shows that similar percentages were educated to primary school level only. However, a higher percentage of Mac Gréil's survey participants hold an educational certificate, almost double that of the Defence Forces recruits.

DATA COLLECTION	TOTAL NUMBER	PRIMARY LEVEL ONLY	EDUCATIONAL CERTIFICATE	NO EDUCATIONAL CERTIFICATE
Mac Gréil Survey [1] Dublin 1972-73	2,271 Male and Female. Over 21 years.	50%	61%	39%
Defence Forces Recruits [2] Ireland 1973	1,958 Male only. Age 14-28 years.	52%	31%	69%

SOURCES: 1. Mac Gréil Educational Opportunity in Dublin 1974:9   2. Irish Defence Forces 1954-1981.

Despite the different orientations of the publications discussed in this chapter, there are common aspects within their conceptualisation of literacy. Literacy is explicitly regarded a necessary skill for living in the community in the *National Adult Education Survey* definition and in Swan's study. The strong association of the *illiterate person* with marginalized groups in the *National Adult Education Survey* further emphasises this. The *National Adult Education Survey* perceives poor literacy as an individual personal failing of motivation, and this concept is evident to some degree within all the documents.

However, the pupil reading surveys also consider the effects of education policy and teaching practices. Swan's discussion links literacy level with personal attributes such as reasoning ability, but he identifies 'the school' as the most important means of improving literacy levels. Greaney expresses an alternative view, stating that criticism of teaching methods is unwarranted because literacy is related to unnamed factors outside of the school's control.

> Further, they [the studies] imply that confining the blame for poor reading to one variable (e.g. teaching methods) may not be reasonable. Other variables, some of which are outside of the control of the

school, have been identified as playing an important
role in the acquisition of reading skills.
(Greaney 1977:8)

These references to 'the school' and 'teaching methods' provide a way to discuss teacher practices in an abstract way, and to simultaneously protect these teacher practices from overt examination.

Completion of the Primary Cycle is taken as evidence of full literacy proficiency. Mac Gréil's discussion of his survey findings show a greater concern with the low levels of formal accreditation than the fact that half of the participants had attained only a primary level of education.

Among the general conclusions which could be drawn
from this report are the following:

1. The overall standard of education in Dublin is
relatively high, with 50% having advanced beyond the
primary or national school level. This should compare
favourably with any other capital city in the world.
…
3. The relatively high percentage with no formal
certificate in education (39% of total sample) is quite
disturbing in an ethos which places much importance
on certificates of educational achievement. The
abolition of the primary certificate further aggravates
this deprivation.
(Mac Gréil 1974:55)

Despite Mac Gréil's assertion about the relatively high standard of education in Dublin, Swan's findings of poor literacy among those who had recently left primary schools suggests that a belief in the intrinsic value of a primary school education may be misplaced.

The growing importance of accreditation for employment is seen in Breen's analysis of the first three School Leavers Surveys 1980-1982, involving representative samples of school leavers from Post-Primary schools who entered the labour market between 1978 and 1981 (Breen 1984). Employment status one year after leaving school is closely related to level

of accreditation. Those without examination credentials are more likely to be jobless, either 'unemployed' or 'looking for a first job'. The weighted aggregated results from the three surveys show that 8% with Leaving Certificate remain unemployed a year after leaving school, compared to 29% without credentials (Breen 1984:28). Breen remarks that labour market position ultimately contributes to social inequality (Breen 1984:56). A recent analysis of School Leavers Surveys from 1980 – 2006 finds that patterns of inequality exist prior to leaving school, based on socioeconomic advantage (Byrne and McCoy 2017). The hypothesis of an *effectively maintained inequality* developed by Lucas (2009) suggests that socioeconomically advantaged students have a higher likelihood of progressing compared to other academically equivalent students, irrespective of whether a given level of education is universal in the population (Byrne and McCoy 2017:50). Using data from the School Leavers Surveys, Byrne and McCoy examine Lucas' hypothesis in the Irish context. Their analysis of the qualitative differences at the same level of education finds support for *effectively maintained inequality*. Byrne and McCoy conclude that patterns of social class inequality influence the length and type of participation in the Irish education system, regardless of the tailored programmes on offer (2017:69).

Silence about the private educational provisions of the socioeconomically advantaged is a noticeable element in the documents examined in this chapter. The school-based studies by Macnamara and Swan skirt around this issue, even though Macnamara acknowledges that he has not included private school pupils in his sample (Macnamara 1966:47), and Swan finds that previous attendance at a private primary school is associated with high reading scores (Swan 1978:47). The school-based reading studies collate information on socioeconomic background and match their literacy measurements to this data. A strong link between social background and literacy level is developed throughout these studies and also within the *National Adult Education Survey*, but without any comparable data relating to the children attending private schools or adults from the wealthiest

socioeconomic groups. This implies that those attending private schools have no reading difficulties, and that a higher income leads to a higher level of literacy. This is evident in the *National Adult Education Survey*, where poverty is explicitly linked with poor literacy. Such linkages reinforce the conceptualisation of literacy as a personal attribute, related to personal circumstances and the 'accident of birth' (Skeggs and Loveday 2012:481). The prime responsibility for poor literacy is located within the *illiterate person.*

7.5 ADULT LITERACY IN IRELAND

RTÉ Radio, following a similar initiative on BBC Radio, broadcasts a programme on *Helping Adults to Read* during 1976, leading to a Jacob's Award in 1977 for RTÉ Radio producer Kathleen Kelleher. The programme and an associated booklet of the same name describe what is involved in teaching adults to read. The booklet, edited by Jean Whyte (1976), is based on material provided by several people, including Rev Liam Carey, founder of AONTAS adult education organisation, and Lecturer in Adult Education at St Patrick's College Maynooth. The Foreword by Maev-Conway Piskorski, Head of the Education Department in RTÉ, discusses the role of literacy in contemporary society:

> Today writing and symbols are all-pervasive. To participate as a full citizen in society, it is not enough to be born; birth must be recorded in written documents and it is these documents that give a right of entry to channels of learning, of formal education, of political and economic life; the landscape is described and labelled in these same symbols. Without the ability to read no-one can feel fully at home in contemporary society. Against this backdrop, teaching adults to read becomes more than a skilled craft; it becomes an effort of communication - of

describing and understanding the everyday situations
which lead to this estrangement.
(Maev Conway-Piskorski in Whyte 1976: 3)

Further on, the RTÉ booklet refers to the international 'discovery' of illiteracy:

In recent years all over the world people are becoming aware of the existence of the problem of illiteracy.
…
This drawback [illiteracy] makes it very difficult to function in a society where so much information comes through the written word, yet many non-readers function very well indeed.   But they are restricted in their ability to develop their potential as individuals and as members of the community. (Whyte 1976:5).

The RTÉ booklet cites UNESCO in emphasising the value of literacy for elementary general knowledge, training for work and increased productivity, greater participation in civic life, a better understanding of the surrounding world, and opening the way to basic human culture (Whyte 1976:5).   An appendix lists the five main practical needs of adult literacy students as Home and Family, Leisure, Consumer Skills, Work, and Community Responsibility (Whyte 1976: Appendix H). The needs of learners are firmly located within adult-orientated activities relating to participation in family and community life.

 The booklet also cites the *National Adult Education Survey* statement that 'the extent of functional illiteracy is a good deal worse than generally believed' (Whyte 1976:6). The explanation for poor literacy is prefaced by a caveat recalling that of the *National Adult Education Survey*:

> We have no statistical information about the number of illiterate adults in this country nor is there any research into the causes of the problem.
> (Whyte 1976:5).

Despite acknowledging a lack of research, an authoritative explanation for the illiterate person is given in terms of contributory factors:

> …some factors generally accepted as contributing to the problem of illiteracy in adults:
> Physical - poor eyesight, deafness, illness leading to school absence
> Home Background - physical conditions, e.g. food, emotional relationships, parental interest in education and reading
> School - changes of school, teacher methods, large classes where child is already 'at risk' due to other factors, poor teaching or methods that associate reading with fear and nervousness
> Social Problems - poor visual memory, poor memory for sound-symbol relationships, difficulty remembering sequences of sounds
> Intelligence and Social Background: Below average intelligence or a disadvantaged social background do not in themselves lead to illiteracy. People of low IQ can learn to read…
> Intelligence can be a contributory factor but it is never the only one. Social background in itself does not produce an illiterate adult. Literacy students in Ireland to date come from a wide variety of conditions of living, of up-bringing and of employment.
> (Whyte 1976: 6).

Adult learners are explicitly differentiated from children, and the task of teaching literacy is differentiated from the 'traditional teacher role' (1976:6). The person who 'can help' is described as someone who is patient and responsive, flexible and imaginative in approach, and prepared to commit for a minimum of six months (1976:6).   The booklet provides an extensive reading list for aspiring tutors, drawn from the US and the UK, but makes no reference to previous research on literacy in Ireland.   No appeal for

State support or State provision is made   Those who wish to assist the *illiterate person* are expected to undertake their own self-directed learning, and they are addressed within a voluntary social service ethos. As seen in relation to Vocational teachers and Defence Forces officers in previous chapters, the resources to address the literacy difficulties of adults in a specific community are expected be found within the same community. The clear differentiation of adult students from children and the focus on a non-traditional teacher role all relate to the *discourse of participation* that locates adult literacy tuition within the newly-emerging field of Adult Education.

The RTÉ booklet offers a summary of the adult literacy landscape in Ireland 1976. It highlights that many adults are availing of literacy tuition, either from family and friends or through volunteer literacy schemes. Despite acknowledging the lack of research into this phenomenon, it offers a selection of explanatory causes. The explanations foreground physical, social and home deficiencies. The use of the term 'at risk' further locates the *illiterate person* within the terminology of social disadvantage and family dysfunctionality. There is a mismatch between these explanations and the reference made to the varied backgrounds of existing adult literacy students.

AONTAS, a voluntary organisation established to campaign for improved adult education, was founded in 1969 by Fr Liam Carey, then of the Dublin Institute for Adult Education.   In 1970, the organisation holds a three-day conference on 'Adult Education in the 1970s'. This conference establishes that AONTAS's main priority is to 'strive to eliminate educational difficulties'. Like the WFEA and UNESCO, it also undertakes to initiate 'a global fight against illiteracy' (AONTAS 2009).   The organisation establishes a subcommittee on the topic of adult literacy in the mid-1970s, chaired by Professor Desmond Swan. This leads to the formal launch of a new voluntary agency, the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), in 1980. This new organisation is supported financially by AONTAS and is initially located in the AONTAS premises. Freire's work provides a philosophical base for NALA, who apply his *problem-posing model* to develop student-centred and

student-directed adult literacy programmes (National Adult Literacy Agency 2012:16). By 1980 the two organisations have established separate identities. AONTAS restates its main objective as promoting the development of adult education in Ireland (AONTAS 2009), while NALA describes itself as taking a social justice approach to literacy education in Ireland (National Adult Literacy Agency 2011:8). This organisation produces studies of the lived experience of those with literacy difficulties in Ireland, (e.g. Bailey and Coleman 1998), and campaigns for improved literacy provisions. The limited state funding it receives is an official acknowledgement by the state that the *illiterate person* has a presence in Ireland. However, this acknowledgement also delegates responsibility for the *illiterate person* to a precariously-funded voluntary organisation that operates outside mainstream educational provisions.

7.6 CONCLUSION

This chapter considers published studies that measure educational attainment and literacy in Ireland during the 1960s and 1970s, prior to the formation of the National Adult Literacy Agency in 1980. The emphasis on literacy as a driver of social and economic progress leads to national and cross-national literacy studies. A new vocabulary of literacy introduces terms such as *functional literacy* and *functional illiteracy*, constructing a continuum of literacy that begins to replace the previous dichotomy of *literate* and *illiterate*. This focus on measuring literacy within populations provides a basis to quantify literacy within schools and at national level, and it also underpins the rediscovery of the *illiterate person* in Ireland.

A *discourse of economic utility*, evident in UNESCO and EEC concerns with economic progress, emphasises the value of measurement, categorisation, and intervention to produce the desired literacy standard. The illiterate person is linked to personal inadequacy and social deprivation, positioned at the margins of a developed society and in need of intervention. Such intervention will improve literacy to the required standard of 'functional

literacy' and enable the *illiterate person* to contribute to economic progress. The *discourse of economic utility* is a form of the d*iscourse of practical English* that reflects the increasing orientation to economic development at national and political level. Literacy measurements provide one way to assess human capital potential. The illiterate person is constructed as one who may be remediated, refurbished, and ultimately transformed into a more valuable unit of human capital for the benefit of the national economy.

An alternative *discourse of participation* arises from a more critical position that identifies the school and other social institutions as the sources of poor literacy. This discourse draws from the critical approach of Freire, Street and other theorists of literacy. It focuses on the 'local knowledge' of the *illiterate person*. This discourse is given material effect in the production of learner-centred literacy programmes that respond to local and individual need rather than to national economic imperatives. Such interventions seek to develop the illiterate person's power to effect actively social change, an approach at odds with the focus on passive economic contribution within the prevailing *discourse of economic utility*. The *discourse of participation* highlights the entitlement of the illiterate person to participate in social change. It counters the d*iscourse of disruption* and the *discourse of deficiency* to focus instead on the personal circumstances that lead to illiteracy. However, Ireland's increasing orientation to improved economic progress means that individual economic utility is considered more beneficial to the nation-state than personal development or participation.

The *discourse of participation* is evident in the form, focus and physical location of National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA), the newly-formed voluntary organisation devoted to adult literacy in Ireland. It locates itself within the field of social justice, and many of the groups affiliated to NALA are located within poor communities. A precariously-funded organisation, it operates outside formal state educational provisions. It recruits and trains volunteer literacy tutors from the everyday social world and it campaigns for the provision of services to the *illiterate person.* However, the location of this organisation at the margins of mainstream educational provisions

serves to reinforce the existing relationship between the *illiterate person* and the margins of society. This marginal positioning was prominent in the *discourse of disruption* in the earlier twentieth century and remains evident in the *discourse of economic utility*. The non-economically orientated *discourse of participation* is confined to non-mainstream organisations, where dependency on state funding circumscribes the capacity to effect social change.

The increased level of international attention given to the economic value of literacy leads to an accumulation of knowledge about literacy in the twentieth century. In the same way that the criminal is observed from all sides in Bentham's Panopticon, literacy specialists employ invasive examination methods emanating from a range of viewpoints, producing new knowledge about literacy and illiteracy. This accumulated knowledge produces mechanisms such as literacy typologies that list different types of literacy and different categories of *illiterate person*. The improved power to judge and classify produces new specialisms and new specialists, not all in accord with each other. Greaney's 1977 review of Irish literacy research is an example of dispute at the academic specialist level.

The accumulated knowledge about literacy provides justification for the application of new techniques and technologies, opening new avenues of power, expertise and judgement. Existing techniques and technologies are continuously enhanced by further observation and examination. The expanding amount of scientific knowledge about literacy disseminated as the twentieth century progresses offers increased 'mastery' of the *illiterate person*.

However, despite the increased knowledge and expertise about literacy, the practices of reading and writing do not change at the same rate. New categories of literacy and new types of literacy expert arise throughout the twentieth century, but the *illiterate person* in 1980 is very similar to the *illiterate person* of 1900. Knowledge about literacy and ways to measure

literacy are constantly changing, but the *illiterate person* retains the essential characteristic of having difficulty with reading or writing.

Foucault contends that knowledge is not made for understanding, but for cutting (1977b:154). Knowledge that can cut can also destroy. The literacy expert who holds specialist knowledge can diminish the subject of that knowledge, *the illiterate person*. The social economy of the illiterate person is a network of power that confers status on literacy experts and on their knowledge. It is evident throughout the documents examined in this chapter that the *illiterate person* occupies the least powerful position, a role of passive acceptance and co-operation in the production of further knowledge and expertise on literacy. The *illiterate person* is constructed as the docile recipient of intervention. The range of interventions reflect a variety of approaches, including 'remedial', 'specialist', 'voluntary' and 'emancipatory' activities, producing new literacy experts in these areas. The knowledge gained from interaction with the illiterate person enhances the literacy expert's position, conferring increasing power and authority, but without a similar gain for the illiterate person. Knowledge derived from activities of observation, assessment and intervention may benefit others more than it benefits the illiterate person.

The studies by Macnamara (1966) and Swan (1978) use direct measurements of reading ability, and their findings suggest that there are a variety of literacy levels within mainstream Irish schools. Such studies are subject to scrutiny in relation to validity and methodology, casting doubt on their findings. In contrast to this focus on the validity of empirical evidence, Greaney (1977) refers to increasing literacy in Irish schools without any supporting evidence. Such authoritative anecdotal knowledge about literacy supports the prevailing narrative of a fully literate population. Mac Gréil's study of educational attainment among Irish adults provides indirect support for this narrative. Relying on self-reporting, Mac Gréil finds that his respondents' level of education compares favourably with that of other similar populations.

In contrast to this complacency about national educational and literacy levels, the *National Adult Education Survey 1970* engages with international trends. It employs the new category of 'functional illiteracy' and draws attention to the 'discovery' of illiteracy among Irish adults. The survey refers to poor literacy among the employed, but it focuses more attention on illiteracy in relation to marginalized groups, without any empirical evidence to support the claims made. The report is silent about the school-based research conducted in previous decades, stating that no research on literacy exists and that such studies are difficult to undertake. The authoritative knowledge that no previous literacy research exists informs the RTÉ statements on literacy, transmitting the same silence from the *Adult Education Survey* in 1970 to the RTÉ Booklet in 1976. This process of constructing silence about previous literacy research allows the 1970s to act as a watershed in relation to discovering and addressing literacy issues in twentieth-century Ireland. The focus on adults constructs the *illiterate person* as one who has emerged fully-formed as an adult independent of any childhood. The illiterate adults of the present coexist with the fully-literate children of the past, preserving the *narrative of full literacy* without acknowledging the dissonance of this position.

The data from this era also contains a new version of the *discourse of language confusion* that is supported by empirical evidence arising from literacy measurement activities. It quantifies the role of Irish-language revival education policies in the production of the illiterate person. In contrast to the official silence that greeted the previous version, this new form generates resistance in terms of official responses declaring it a non-legitimate discourse requiring suppression.

This chapter and the previous four chapters present the main findings from a thematic analysis of the documentary data. This analysis explores the statements, discourses and silences the documents offer in relation to literacy and illiteracy. The discourses construct a variety of positions for the *illiterate person*, ranging from celebration to demonization. Chapter 3 outlines two contrasting positions for the illiterate person. The *discourse of*

deficiency constructs the illiterate person as a product of deficient educational provisions, and the *discourse of superior intellect* celebrates the illiterate person as an embodiment of the glorious past. The *discourse of disruption* in Chapter 5 constructs the illiterate person as a negative, disruptive impediment to modern society, while the *discourse of language confusion* identifies the illiterate person as the unexceptional outcome of Irish-language revival policies. Chapter 6 describes how the *discourse of practical English* confers the illiterate person with the potential to be competent. In Chapter 7, a range of positions on a continuum of literacy are offered by the *discourse of economic utility*, where the illiterate person requires individualized personal remediation. The *discourse of participation* positions the illiterate person as one entitled to participate in social change.

Chapter 8 revisits these findings to focus attention on aspects that are considered relevant. It moves beyond a chronological approach to examine three themes that are evident across the data and it revisits the theoretical framework. It also addresses the limitations of the study, and the chapter ultimately offers a response to the research question that asked: How is the *illiterate person* constructed in twentieth-century Ireland?

CHAPTER 8: THESIS CONCLUSION

8.1 INTRODUCTION

This research study explores one aspect of what Inglis refers to as 'Irish difference' (Inglis 2014:222). It aims to 'trouble' established histories (Ball 2013:35), by disturbing what is fixed and demonstrating the heterogeneity of what is considered consistent (Foucault 1977b:147). The popular retrospective *narrative of full literacy* constructs the Irish as a sophisticated literate population, able to read discriminately and write persuasively, resembling the 'rational-critical reading public' described by Habermas (1989). Retrospective historical accounts identify the provision of state education in the nineteenth century as the catalyst to widespread literacy by the start of the twentieth century (e.g. Lyons 1971; Coolahan 2005: Ó Buachalla 1988; Fahey 1992). Statistical evidence from successive Census returns between 1851 and 1911 indicate a trend towards increased literacy, underpinning assumptions that the trend continues in the same direction and at the same pace to reach an inevitable end-point of full literacy in the early decades of the twentieth century. This in turn implies that the *illiterate person* does not exist in twenty-first century Ireland. These assumptions about literacy proficiency generate silence, displacement and exclusion for those with literacy difficulties in the present.

The use of self-reported Census data to determine literacy rates was an acceptable practice up to the end of the twentieth century (e.g. Graff 1979; UNESCO 2005). However, concerns regarding the accuracy of self-reported literacy capacity mean that Census returns on literacy are no longer seen as definitive sources of literacy information. The *narrative of full literacy* relies on one set of documents, the Census returns from 1851 to 1911. This research study examines a wider range of documents to

present an alternative account, one that focuses on the presence of *the illiterate person* in twentieth-century Ireland. The research outcomes fracture the prevailing account by describing a range of discourses that address literacy in different contexts. Rather than re-synthesising the different discourses into another unitary narrative, the analysis recognizes that these discourses reflect the presence of multiple literacy levels within a heterogenous Irish population.

The research findings suggest that the *narrative of full literacy* overestimates the literacy proficiency of the Irish population. By offering a variety of positions for the *illiterate person,* the discourses outlined in the previous five chapters challenge comfortable assumptions that the *illiterate person* does not exist in twentieth-century Ireland. The prevalence of non-attendance, early school leaving, and examination failure within the National Schools is a recurring feature of the data, supporting the contention that a significant proportion of those who depend on the state for their education leave school with low levels of literacy. The need to provide basic literacy tuition within the Vocational Schools and the Defence Forces is an indicator of poor literacy among young adults entering employment. Those without literacy risk being branded as Other and excluded from participation in society, leading to the strategic designation of literacy classes as 'English lessons'. For those who can read, convergent Catholic Church and State regulations limit the range of reading material available in Ireland, constructing differentiated categories of *specialist readers* and *ordinary readers.* The details of community-based literacy schemes in the *National Adult Education Survey* 1970 and the formation of the National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) in 1980 indicate that the presence of the *illiterate person* is an issue of some concern in the later part of the century. These troublesome features counter the popular conception of twentieth-century Ireland as a fully literate society, making it harder to impose a simple 'grand synthesis' of past events (Prado 2000:35).

The discourses described in the previous five chapters produce a 'web of discourses' (Foucault 1978:30) that provide different positions for the

illiterate person. They overlap and interlink, displaying the capacity of each discourse to operate across a range of themes, domains and strategies (Foucault 1978:102). This capacity for cross-relevance permits the superimposition of an inductive order on the discourses outlined earlier. Previous chapters ordered the data within a chronological framework. This final chapter presents three further ways of ordering the data, to focus attention on specific aspects of the findings. Section 8.2 relates the data to three themes of Nation, Schooling, and Inclusion that recur across the data. Section 8.3 examines the findings in relation to the conceptualisations of Power and Knowledge discussed in Chapter 2. Section 8.4 explores how strategies of silence are evident across the data, and how they contribute to keeping the *illiterate person* hidden in accounts of twentieth-century Irish life. Section 8.5 moves outside the data to consider the study's limitations, and Section 8.6 provides an overall conclusion.

8.2 LITERACY IN EVERYDAY IRELAND

This section discusses the findings in relation to three organising themes of the Nation, the Schooling, and Inclusion. The discourses described in previous chapters are allocated to one of these three themes, to address aspects that over-arch the data.

The first organising theme is located at the level of the Nation, and draws on the work of Anderson, Hroch and others regarding nationalist concerns with language, print and literacy. These are important elements for a nation-state that came into being during the twentieth century and defined itself by reference to a newly-revived language. Moving from the national level to the social level, the second organising theme is based on the role accorded by Habermas to a rational-critical reading public within the public sphere. The discussion focuses on the capacity of schooling in Ireland to produce a critically engaged literate public. The final organising theme of Inclusion addresses aspects of inclusion and exclusion for the *illiterate person* in everyday Irish society.

NATION

The first theme considers literacy in relation to Irish nationalist concerns with language, language revival and establishing claims to nationhood.

Like many other post-colonial states, the new Irish government strives to eradicate the preceding colonial version, while constrained by the same physical and geographical characteristics. Nations need narratives of identity (Anderson 2006:205) and accounts that locate the nation's past in 'antique dynasties' (2006:109). The essential defining qualities of the Irish nation are accordingly rooted in the past. Once nationality is seen in terms of continuity from the past, vernacular languages such as Irish gain status as deep-rooted historical artefacts. The study of vernacular language, folklore and folk music becomes the rediscovery of something 'always known' (Anderson 2006:196). The Celtic Revival study of Irish language, folklore and music forges a tangible link to the glorious past, providing a narrative of continuity between the antique dynasty and the present nation-state.

The *discourse of superior intellect* draws from contemporaneous scientific knowledge of the past, presenting the existence of the ancient Irish nation as a fact. The ancient Irish people are constructed as innately intelligent, implying a biologically determined capacity for scholarship, and countering racial discourses that present the Irish as inferior to others. The present-day Irish population, as direct descendants of these Gaelic high-achievers, contain similar intellectual capacities. This discourse focuses on producing 'citizens for Ireland'. It refers to the imagined future when Ireland will be an independent nation, while drawing on accounts of intellectual achievement from ancient Gaelic times. Existing accounts of school literacy deficits such as Dale (HMSO 1904) are of little interest to Irish nationalists concerned with erasing ties with the British rulers. The 'new education system of the future' will be modelled on the ancient Gaelic one (Pearse 1916), and the 'illiterate peasant' is now revered as a valued guardian of ancient Gaelic learning (Gwynn 1919). In the *discourse of superior intellect*, the norms relate to the past, allowing present-day conditions to be

inverted so that the *illiterate person* can now be considered literate. The terminology of literacy relates it to a variety of skills, among them the ability to recite ancient lore as well as the ability to read and write, seen in Gwynn (1919).

The *discourse of superior intellect* underpins belief in the unique language facility of the Irish population, given material effect in the revival of the Irish language and Gaelic print-script by the new government. These conservative, reactionary policies are a form of official nationalism emanating from the state, serving the interests of the state in terms of self-preservation (Anderson 2006:159).

The new Irish government in 1921 explicitly rejects markers of difference such as honours systems or hereditary titles. These activities reflect a *narrative of egalitarianism* that upholds the commitment to cherish all Irish people equally made in the 1916 Proclamation of Independence. Irish-language forms of address used on the new state's correspondence, such as 'A Chara' (Comrade) and 'A Dhuine Uasal' (Respected Person), convey comradeship and mutual respect, acting as pervasive symbols of this 'egalitarianism'. C. S. Andrews (1901-1985), an Irish nationalist and later senior public official, refers to 'our relatively classless society' in his autobiography (Andrews 2001:246). He recalls: 'The sense of Liberty, Fraternity, Equality had always been a potent element in the mores of Sinn Féin and the IRA' (2001:329). He contends that the egalitarianism of the IRA is characterised by their use of Christian names for all except Éamon de Valera, who is called 'Mr de Valera', 'Sir,' or 'Chief' (2001:329).

While Irish political leaders publicly emphasise their membership of popular cultural and nationalist organisations, they hide their experiences of private education, presenting themselves as a 'classless' political elite (Allen 2014:61). Andrews emphasises his own 'classless' credentials by describing a childhood among the tenements and slums of Summerhill in Dublin, although his family live in a large single-family house and employ servants. He attends fee-paying Secondary School and University College

Dublin. Regularly absent from university due to his activities as an officer with the Irish Volunteers, he is awarded his first-year examinations on the basis of this participation (Andrews 2001:216). Andrews claims solidarity with other Volunteers he encounters based on their mutual interest in establishing an independent Ireland. He recounts how these men continue in their daily lives in later years (2001:112), without acknowledging any basis for the unequal rewards among those who were formerly equal comrades.

Andrews' memoirs illustrate the 'erasure of difference' (Ball 2013:51) that assists in representing Ireland as a nation where all schools follow the same curriculum and where there are no barriers to educational achievement. Literacy is represented as a skill that all Irish people practice to the same equally sophisticated degree. The *narrative of full literacy* constructs Ireland as a fully literate nation and emphasises the unique literacy ability of the Irish. Successive statements by historians and cultural commentators support each other in ascribing full literacy to the Irish population. The provision of state schooling from 1831 explains the presence of literacy, while successive Census statistics up to 1911 confirm the spread of literacy throughout the entire country. The strong appeal of this narrative is evident in the responses made to any suggestion that the *illiterate person* exists in Ireland. The first Department of Education reports do not refer to previous British Education reports, enabling the new Irish education system to break links with the past. In doing so, it rids itself of the literacy difficulties observed by the British administration. The poor literacy remarked upon by Dale (HMSO 1904) no longer exists in the Department of Education reports, except for those designated as requiring detention in Reformatory and Industrial Schools. Irish citizens who do not conform to ancient ideals of honour, piety and literacy can be excluded from membership of the Irish nation, allowing the Irish nation to remain fully literate.

Academic studies that produce findings counter to the *narrative of full literacy*, such as the INTO Survey (1941), Pollak (1943) and the literacy

studies of Macnamara (1966) and Swan (1978) are unacknowledged, or officially dismissed as unscientific and unreliable. The *illiterate person* is considered an anomaly, found only in the Residential Schools. The *narrative of full literacy* interacts with the *discourse of superior intellect*, representing Ireland as a modern nation arising from a gloriously intellectual past. There is no place for the *illiterate person* in this Ireland.

The threat of Evil Literature provides an impetus to censorship and prohibition in early twentieth century Ireland, with both religious and nationalist authorities fearing the impact of secular literature from England on the Irish population. The *illiterate person* is regarded more favourably than the reader of English-language publications. In this context, the imposition of the Irish language and Gaelic print-script in the National Schools reflects more than an aesthetic choice. An Irish-speaking population that can read and write only Gaelic script will have restricted access to English-language publications, thus fulfilling nationalist ideals. Policies that promote the Irish language and Gaelic script operate alongside a popular nationalism that glorifies the ancient Gaelic past. Anderson refers to Vietnamese nationalist organisations who willingly adopted the *quoc ngo* script introduced by the French colonial rulers, incorporating a device designed to restrict access to revolutionary ideologies (Anderson 2006:128). Irish nationalists similarly embrace a new language and script as distinctive cultural emblems, notwithstanding that they function as effective barriers to the outside world.

The *discourse of superior intellect* prior to Independence, the *narrative of egalitarianism* in the aftermath of Independence, and the *narrative of full literacy* in the later twentieth century all suggest that the *illiterate person* has no presence in the new Irish nation-state, as all members of the Irish nation are equally fully literate.

SCHOOLING

The state-funded school is expected to produce a literate school leaver, able to meet the literacy demands of a variety of state institutions. Legal contracts require reading skills, and signatures to legal documents carry legal weight. Marriages become legally binding on signature of the register. Military recruits enter an employment contract when they sign the enlistment form. The act of voting involves making a choice from a written list of candidates. It is preceded by a written application for enfranchisement, and a formal literacy test in some jurisdictions. State schooling is expected to deliver these minimum standards of literacy.

The *narrative of full literacy* represents the Irish population as a rational-critical reading public, one that can contribute to civic life and mediate in the public sphere. The capacity of the Irish education system to produce a critically literate population is taken for granted within this narrative. The state-funded National School is therefore a crucial element in the production of critically literate readers. Three discourses position *the illiterate person* in relation to the literacy achieved from the National School. The *discourse of deficiency* is evident in the years prior to Independence. A *discourse of practical English* is also evident in these years and continues throughout the twentieth century, while a *discourse of language confusion* is evident in the later part of the century.

The d*iscourse of deficiency* is evident in successive Reports on state-funded Primary Education in pre-Independent Ireland. The discourse is centred on the object of producing 'citizens of the British Empire', and it draws on comparisons between Britain and Ireland. British educational standards and educational practises are constructed as the norms, and the Irish equivalents consistently fall short. In the *discourse of deficiency*, the *illiterate person* is a proof of deficiency. The school is firmly identified as the locus of literacy and the solution is to impose more schooling and more regulation of schooling.

Throughout the twentieth century, a *discourse of practical English* is evident in relation to the world of work. For those leaving the state education system, Technical and Vocational Schools offer free second level education orientated to employment. Teachers in these Schools find that many students have come through the primary system without the literacy skills expected from an elementary education. Those paid to teach practical subjects find themselves teaching a subject called 'English' instead, imparting basic reading and writing skills. The *discourse of practical English* constructs *the illiterate person* as the product of a deficient primary education. Explanations for poor standards of literacy are located within the National Schools rather than within the young adults. The 'English' syllabus for Defence Forces recruits in 1932 is essentially a basic literacy syllabus that responds to the needs of large numbers of recruits who did not complete primary schooling. The 'English' classes provided by the Defence Forces and the Vocational Schools teach literacy in an adult-orientated environment. These two sets of 'English Teachers' work independently of each other, although they deal with the same issues and deliver similar responses. Literacy within this discourse is treated as one skill among many. The capacity for literacy is separated from the potential to be competent. The *discourse of practical English* regards the illiterate person as capable of maintaining a job or maintaining the security of the nation. However, this discourse remains confined within areas that are themselves marginalized in mainstream society, as Irish popular culture is silent on the large numbers who attend Vocational Schools and those who join the Defence Forces.

The political focus on Irish-language revival generates discourses on Irish-language literacy that are as complex and intertwined as those relating to English-language literacy. The discourse most relevant for this present study addresses the Irish-language education policy in terms of its impact on English-language literacy. This critique of revival policies produces a *discourse of language confusion*. Within this discourse, *literacy* refers to English-language literacy, and *the illiterate person* is a rational and

unexceptional outcome to the imposition of Irish-language policies in the National Schools. The implementation of these policies explains the presence of the *illiterate person.* The objective of intervention is to promote English-language literacy, and the proposed solutions are based on reallocating state education resources to the improvement of English-language literacy. Seeking to be heard against the strong official support for Irish-language revival, such critique often adopts an apologetic and conciliatory tone. This leads the INTO to preface its 1941 survey of National Teachers with a reaffirmation of the organisation's support for language revival. The Language Freedom Movement, founded to seek the abolition of compulsory Irish in schools, couches its opposition in similarly conciliatory terms at its foundation in 1965 (O'Connor 1986:106). This form of oblique and muffled critique tends to be met with silence at official government level.

One noticeable feature of the data is the silence about private schooling. The literacy of the private schools and the literacy taught in state schools remain separate distinct practices throughout the twentieth century, as they were in the nineteenth century. The 'exclusive, expansive and expensive education' of the elite (O'Neill 2014:2) allows access to a range of books and literacy skills, to develop the capacity to manage and govern. In contrast, the literature available to the state-educated consists of a limited range of school textbooks. The State syllabus for reading and writing promotes competence in a very narrow range of literacy skills. State-educated pupils are taught how to copy texts rather than how to create them. The introduction of State Censorship in 1929 allied with Catholic Church lists of approved reading controls the reading matter of state-educated *ordinary readers.* The reading of these *ordinary readers* requires close regulation, as without guidance they are likely to be persuaded by the written words of others. The *specialist readers* of the educated elite do not require supervision, as a private secondary education confers the skills needed to discriminate between good and bad reading materials.

The distinction between the literacy of the state school and the literacy of the private school is maintained throughout the twentieth century, and the boundary between the two is enforced by differential religious, legal and educational criteria. While the literacy deficiencies of the state school are displayed publicly in annual reports, the literacy provisions of the private school are kept hidden from public view. In nineteenth-century Ireland, the *First Report of the Commissioners of Irish Education* explicitly excluded the education of the wealthy from inspection (HMSO 1825:2). This exemption of private schools was allowed stand by the Irish Department of Education and continues to the present day. Private schools in Britain and Ireland remain outside formal state inspection into the twenty-first century. Recent attempts to introduce formal state inspection to the private school sector in Britain have met with resistance (Barker 2014). The continued exclusion of Irish private schooling from inspection ensures that the literacy of the elite remains outside state intervention and outside the remit of official reports.

It is useful to consider how the Irish nation-state produces the fully literate person constructed within the *narrative of full literacy*. Recurring features within the data suggest that there are constraints on the state's capacity to transmit literacy. At the educational level, these aspects include a limited syllabus for reading and writing, the prevalence of large classes and large numbers of untrained teachers, a requirement to teach in two languages, and the non-provision of school textbooks. The social aspects include the disruptive impact of a civil war followed by several economic depressions in the early years of the new state, the presence of a long-established widespread poverty leading to the necessity to earn a living as soon as possible, and the impact of state and religious censorship on the type of reading material available. The political aspects include decisions to facilitate teacher training for Gaeltacht-born Irish-speakers who are not required to meet the minimum education standards, to downgrade English-language literacy requirements in the school syllabus, and to tolerate early school leaving and examination failure. Given these constraints, it is

difficult to see how the National School can produce a rational-critical reading public*.*

The research findings suggest that the private school system may be more likely to produce a rational-critical reading public. The impact of poverty is less evident among the pupils in private schools. These schools are not subject to state inspection or regulation, so a wider syllabus can be provided, and schools can decide for themselves on the issue of bilingual tuition. Private schools can offer minimal Irish-language tuition, as Pollak outlines in 1943. FitzGerald remarks in 1966 that it is acceptable for national 'leaders' to opt out of the National School system by sending their children to private schools where English-language proficiency is prioritised (*Irish Times* 1966b). The fee-paying Secondary School potentially provides access to a wider range of literacy practices than those made available in the state-funded schools. State and Church censorship are of less concern to those attending fee-paying schools. Andrews receives *The History of the Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* by Edward Gibbon as a gift from his father, and he reads it although aware of its long prohibition by the Catholic Church (Andrews 2001:126). Fee-paying Secondary School pupils often gain access to banned books through their teachers (e.g. O'Donoghue and Harford 2016:50). Although Edna O' Brien's books are officially banned (Adams 1968:252), Fleming orders copies from a British bookseller and hides them under floorboards in Maynooth College (2012:2). The banning of Brendan Behan's *Borstal Boy* does not stop it being widely read (Fallon 1998:202). Fallon recalls many banned books being openly on sale, remarking that 'the average writer or intellectual' has little difficulty obtaining the books they want (1998:205).

The *narrative of full literacy* does not reflect the limited literacy provisions of the National School. It is more in accord with the opportunities to develop *specialist readers* provided by the fee-paying Secondary School. The findings tentatively suggest that a narrative reflecting the experience of a privileged minority has been adopted as the expression of an entire population. However, this study focuses on the construction of the *illiterate*

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person in Ireland. A similar study on the construction of the Secondary School-educated *specialist reader* could address this aspect in more detail. The silence surrounding the lived experience of elite education has been eased recently by O'Neill (2014), O'Donoghue and Harford (2016), and Courtois (2015; 2016). These accounts of elite education in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries challenge generalised assumptions that overlook gender and religious differences within such education. The existence of variation within the elite education system is a reminder that a similar heterogeneity exists within the literacy provisions of the state-funded National School system and deserves similar attention.

INCLUSION

The *discourse of disruption* and *discourse of economic utility* consistently position the illiterate person as an abnormal individual in opposition to a socially cohesive collective society, although with differing consequences in terms of inclusion and exclusion.

From early in the twentieth century, the *discourse of disruption* makes use of intellectual, social, cultural and legal aspects to construct a binary opposition, where literacy is the desirable normal condition and illiteracy is the negative aberrant one. Adults without literacy occupy an inferior, negative status, justifying their exclusion from full participation in society. The unpredictable, unstable, individualistic nature of the *illiterate person* threatens the social cohesion of the state. Legal mechanisms such as literacy tests for enfranchisement and for immigrants offer tenable solutions to the threat posed to *social* progress by the illiterate individual.

The *discourse of economic utility*, evident later in the century, constructs the illiterate person as an impediment to *economic* progress. The illiterate person has limited utility in a modern industrial economy. However, the economic perspective seeks to make efficient use of all resources, including human resources. The previous focus on exclusion is superseded by a drive to integrate the illiterate person into the labour force through

educational interventions. The conceptualisation of literacy in overtly economic terms by supranational organisations such as UNESCO, the OECD and the EEC generates an impetus to categorise, measure and quantify literacy competency. Ethnographic and anthropological studies introduce typologies of literacy proficiency and literacy activity, while quantitative demographic studies and economic cost-benefit analyses promote the economic value of literacy. The proliferation of research studies increases the terminology associated with literacy, producing new designations such as *functionally literate* and *functionally illiterate*. Instead of a binary choice between *literate* and *illiterate*, the individual can be placed more precisely on a continuum that ranges from completely illiterate to fully literate. Reflecting the economic thrust of such definitions, *functional literacy* refers to the literacy skills required to function as an employee, rather than the literacy skills required to function as a critical observer of society.

The matrix of possible explanations for illiteracy is often reduced to a simpler proposition that conceptualises the illiterate adult emerging fully formed from a disadvantaged community. The presence of one is an indicator of the other, as seen in the *National Adult Education Report* 1970. The underlying assumption is that personal impediments prevented the individual from gaining full benefit from the state's educational provisions. Pre-existing structural barriers to education are of less concern than individual personal circumstances. Proposed solutions focus on ameliorating the illiterate person's condition by offering 'remedial education' and 'basic skills' on a one-to-one basis. The tendency to overlay such activities with layers of confidentiality means that the process of addressing illiteracy is surrounded by silence.

By 1980, the focus and physical location of the newly-formed National Adult Literacy Agency (NALA) is a material manifestation of the *discourse of participation*. This discourse constructs the *illiterate person* as one entitled to participate in society, regardless of literacy status. NALA is a voluntary organisation that operates outside state provisions. It locates itself within

the field of social justice, and campaigns for the provision of services to the *illiterate person*. Many constituent groups of NALA are themselves located within poor communities. The work of Freire provides an important theoretical basis for NALA. This promotes a critical view of formal educational provisions. The alternative 'problem-posing' model is adopted as the most appropriate way to deliver literacy tuition to adults. The 'English teachers' of previous years worked within the formal state provisions of the Vocational Schools and the Defence Forces. Volunteer literacy tutors working within the NALA framework generate their own resources without any state aid. The *illiterate person*, now constructed in more positive terms as a *literacy learner*, participates in preparing literacy programmes. Volunteer literacy tutors support the literacy learner to engage constructively with the wider social world. However, like the 'English teachers' before them, such tutors are located at the margins of mainstream educational provisions. NALA remains a voluntary organisation in the present. Although regarded as the pre-eminent literacy organisation in Ireland, it is not a formal state agency. It receives annual state grants and solicits donations and sponsorship. This form of exclusion from mainstream state recognition is another facet of exclusion for the *illiterate person*.

The precarious nature of present-day adult literacy provisions can be presented as a straightforward casualty of *liquid modernity*. Bauman's conceptualisation of the increasing atomization and individualization in everyday life provides one perspective to consider the limited resources provided for adult literacy. They are of a piece with the increasing tendency to remove social issues from the political agenda and make them the concern of the individual (Bauman 2001:13). For Bauman, the concept of 'solidarity' forms a key component of the shift from *heavy modernity* to *liquid modernity* (Bauman 2001:30). The reduction in solidarity accompanying this shift leads to the emergence of atomized and individualized approaches to social life. Such an explanation offers an overarching cause- and- effect narrative that explains limited adult literacy resources by reference to the rise of global neo-liberal economic forces. This identifies an extra-territorial

economic force as an explanatory mechanism, thus removing the everyday exclusionary activities of the Irish state and Irish society from consideration.

This research study finds Bauman's contention, that solidarity is eroded within the movement to liquid modernity, is not fully borne out in relation to the *illiterate person*. The first decades of the Irish state traverse the relatively stable social landscape of *heavy modernity*. Instead of a decline in solidarity as the century progresses, shared *literacy events* such as the communal reading of newspapers continue. Concerns about poor literacy skills voiced in the ITIA Congress of 1907 are echoed seven decades later in the *National Adult Education Survey* of 1970. The actions of 'English teachers' in state organisations and volunteer literacy tutors in the wider community can be considered bonds of inclusion and solidarity. Whether related to altruistic social solidarity, institutional pragmatism, or economic efficiency, there are areas in Irish life where the *illiterate person* is treated in an inclusive manner throughout the timespan examined here. However, this impetus to solidarity and the participatory focus of activist organizations co-exists with the individualising and atomizing activities of literacy experts, and strong inclinations to exclude, brand and marginalize. The documents examined here suggest that complex mechanisms are at play in relation to the tension between including and excluding the *illiterate person*, with the progression to *liquid modernity* only one aspect among others. The founding myths in relation to literacy and their role in conferring entitlement to full membership of the Irish nation are another aspect, as is the persuasive appeal of the *narrative of full literacy* supported by strategic silences about the illiterate person. All contribute to maintaining the marginalized position of the *illiterate person*, despite evidence that those with literacy difficulty have always been part of the mainstream Irish social world.

8.3 POWER, KNOWLEDGE, AND LITERACY

The previous section examined the findings in relation to thematic considerations relating to *the illiterate person*. This section addresses elements of power and knowledge evident in the data.

POWER

A dynamic tension between the negative economic utility and the positive productive value of the illiterate person operates as an arena of power throughout the data. Foucault considers the effects of power in relation to the demands made on the physical body (1980c:58). Throughout the twentieth century, the Irish state makes a range of competing and contradictory demands on its citizens' reading and writing skills. From an economic perspective, there is an increasing need to be competent in literacy to gain employment. The economic value of literacy confers *the illiterate person* with a negative economic utility. At the same time, a political imperative to be moral and nationalist is a strong component of the new Irish nation-state. An adherent to religious and nationalist teaching needs to accept the prevailing orthodoxies and reject heretical ideas. In order to safeguard the religious and nationalist morality of the Irish population, the State and the Catholic Church exercise intertwining powers of exclusion and constraint in relation to literacy. The activities of censorship, the state reading and writing syllabus, Catholic reading lists, the promotion of Irish-language literacy and the denigration of English-language literacy are all ways to produce a moral and nationalist population. The activities of reading and writing are construed as potentially subversive and seditious activities, and they are duly surrounded by difficulty. Limitations on literacy are put in place in the attempt to produce the ideal Irish citizen. The *illiterate person*, with limited access to written critique, offers the potential to fulfil these requirements. A population that is unable to critique or to challenge the prevailing orthodoxies of religion and nationalism offers benefits to a conservative Catholic nation-state. The potential of *the illiterate person* to be docile and uncritical is a precious

attribute when the acclaim of the population is more valuable than its critical engagement (Habermas 1989:201).

The *illiterate person* has a positive value in the intersection of religious and political aspirations. Those unable to read 'evil' English literature are regarded favourably by the Catholic Church, just as some Irish-language ideologues aspire to a population unable to read any English literature. The dominant position of the Catholic Church in relation to state schooling ensures that the moral aspects of reading and writing are closely supervised. State-funded schools provide the main site for official Irish-language revival policies that attempt to impose Irish as the vernacular language. Those attending National Schools are exposed to the impact of these overlapping pressures. The *illiterate person* is the unsurprising outcome of a restricted and restrictive literacy programme that reflects the interplay between Irish-language revival policy and Catholic religious orthodoxy.

Another productive aspect relates to the role of the *will to knowledge* in human society (Foucault 1972b:218). The *illiterate person* provides an increasingly valuable source of knowledge that generates new experts and new expertise throughout the century. This new expertise allows the educated elite to judge and regulate the literacy of others, an exercise of power facilitated by the accumulation of knowledge (Foucault 1980b:52) and reflecting the contention that all knowledge rests on injustice (Foucault 1977b:163). The data used for this study comprises written documents produced from one site of literacy. This literacy is generally the *specialist literacy* of the educated elite, containing a specialised terminology. When the statements refer to literacy, they are implying *ordinary literacy* and, unless specified, English-language literacy. When they refer to schooling, they imply state schooling. There are also very consistent absences in the data. There are no overt discussions of *specialist literacy*, ensuring that the formative literacy activities of the authors remain hidden. This form of self-censorship contributes to maintaining the power differential between *specialist readers* who act as judges of literacy, and those whose literacy is

judged. The main qualification to make judgements on the literacy of others is to be a *specialist reader*. In his discussion of the *power to punish* and the *power to judge* (Foucault 1977a:23), Foucault identifies how the prisoner shares the same set of assumptions about punishment as the presiding judge. The *illiterate person* similarly tolerates the assessments made by the judges of literacy. The power to judge literacy is exercised within a hierarchical operation, but it is also localized and interactive because both parties share the underlying assumptions that support it. The written documents used as data provide access to these localized interactive elements, and their material effects at local level such as censorship.

References to practices of censorship recur throughout the data. The activity of censorship can be considered a *literacy event* that uses literacy itself as a means to prohibit and constrain literacy. The censorship applied may be formally enacted in legislation, or may be less overt, such as the vetting of school textbooks. Judges of literacy, such as teachers and members of the Censorship Board, are granted the power to read and examine the written work of others. The knowledge of what is acceptable and unacceptable is at the discretion of these *specialist readers*, but this discretion is not always transparent. Decisions not to punish or to extend leniency are further exercises of power. The State Censorship legislation sets out formal penalties, but these are not always used to guide local instances. Banned books continue to circulate, with no action taken unless they fall into the hands of *ordinary readers*. These decisions on leniency further emphasise the privileged position accorded to *specialist readers*.

Judges in general are represented as uninvolved, tranquil, objective personages, who are considered experts and intellectuals (Foucault 1980a:30). Their judgements and punishments, whether lenient or severe, are accepted, tolerated, and endured (Foucault 1977a:303). The accumulation of published expert knowledge on literacy allows the *specialist reader* to become knowledgeable about *the illiterate person*, without needing personal interaction. There are also discursive resources

available. The *narrative of full literacy* and *the discourse of disruption* offer a technology of representation in the form of popular assumptions and stereotypes about *the illiterate person.* Evidence for the power of these cultural elements can be seen in popular literature and the work of historians and Irish-language ideologues, where *the illiterate person* is often represented in negative terms.   Far from offering detached objective judgements on *the illiterate person*, the judges of literacy are inevitably enmeshed in the prevailing discourses of literacy and the range of positions, explanations and solutions that they offer.

Statements emanating from the local knowledge of *the illiterate person* could potentially offer an alternative range of subject positions, explanations and proposed solutions, but no statements from this perspective are evident in the data. This silence empowers the judges of literacy to pass judgement without the requirement to ascertain the lived experience of *the illiterate person.*

KNOWLEDGE

The international attention given to the economic and political benefits of literacy leads to an accumulation of knowledge about literacy, providing justification for new techniques and technologies. Further observation and examination open new avenues of power, expertise and judgement. The necessity to champion and protect this knowledge leads to academic disputes such as that between Macnamara and Cummins (Cummins 1977).

Those who pronounce judgements on literacy must demonstrate expertise in the scientific study of literacy. The 'simple instruments' of listening and observing are no longer sufficient to categorise the illiterate person. More sophisticated techniques are required to discriminate between a range of categories. These techniques are increasingly more intrusive, seeking to measure aspects such as social circumstances and intellectual capacity. This proliferation of measurements and categories allows the *illiterate person* to be differentiated from others who are illiterate, further promoting

the processes of individualization and atomization. Each illiterate person is illiterate in their own way. Knowledge of the illiterate person's precise location on the continuum of literacy is a prerequisite to determining the most cost-effective method of instilling functional literacy, to facilitate inclusion into the workforce. These interventions are designed to bring the illiterate person into the economic embrace of the mainstream society.

This expanding store of scientific knowledge about literacy offers increased 'mastery' of *the illiterate person*. Although knowledge and measurement of literacy are constantly evolving, *the illiterate person* retains the essential characteristic of being unable to read or write. The knowledge gained from observing, assessing and measuring *the illiterate person* confers increasing power and authority on the literacy expert, but without a similar gain for the *illiterate person.* As the 'subtle instruments' develop, more forms of literacy practice and more types of literacy event come under scrutiny. New categories of literacy, such as Health Literacy, Financial Literacy, Information Literacy, Digital Literacy and others, produce new forms of illiteracy, each one with its specialist researchers and experts. The fragmentation of the *illiterate person* into ever-increasing categories provides new ways to identify, to intervene and to monitor the *illiterate person* in all areas of everyday life.

The high value placed on *egalitarianism* in Ireland suggests that all Irish children are educated to the same sophisticated degree of literacy, overlooking the disparities in educational access and attainment that are a feature of the Irish education system (e.g. Byrne and McCoy 2017). This narrative of egalitarianism is silent about the hierarchies of literacy evident across the research data. One such hierarchy is evident within formal Catholic Church statements on reading. Despite the limited literacy provided by the National School, the Catholic Church represents it as a potential source of contamination to Catholic morality. The *ordinary reader* educated in the National School needs the guidance of the Catholic Church to ensure the selection of appropriate reading material. Given the moral dangers posed by unsupervised reading, the *illiterate person* is preferred to

the *indiscriminate reader*.   The minority of the population who have progressed to fee-paying second and third level education are deemed *specialist readers* who can be trusted to make an informed judgement on the same reading material denied to the *ordinary reader*.

The activity of writing is also surrounded by difficulty.   Copying and calligraphy skills are prized more highly than creative ability within the state school literacy syllabus. Published forms of writing are subject to censorship. In the later years of the century, concepts of *practical English* and *functional literacy* identify a limited type of literacy deemed necessary for employment.

The Irish language adds an additional layer of complexity. The capacity to read and write in Irish provides linguistic capital for those who can progress to professional careers in the public sector and Civil Service, but knowledge of the Irish language is of limited benefit to National School leavers seeking work in the everyday English-speaking economy.

8.4 SILENCE AS A STRATEGIC DEVICE

Foucault contends that many forms of silence provide integral support to discourses (1978:27). This section considers the uses of silence within the research data.   Silence can be deployed by both parties, and it has both negative and productive capacities.   Silence provides insulation from unpleasant sounds. It allows adverse findings about illiteracy to be filtered out, and more comforting voices to be amplified. Other soundscapes can be created that provide alternative explanations for illiteracy and *the illiterate person*.

The prevailing *narrative of full literacy* relies on the popular acceptance of specific historical evidence from the Census, while the officially-sanctioned founding myths offer literacy capacity as a simple mechanism to determine eligibility for membership of the Irish nation. The data demonstrates that a lack of reading and writing skills does not incapacitate the *illiterate person*,

who is able to participate in employment and in everyday life. However, it is self-evident that those without literacy cannot leave written first-hand accounts. The *illiterate person* rarely features in written accounts that transmit and preserve information about twentieth-century Ireland. The *illiterate person* cannot read and so cannot challenge these incomplete accounts, enabling them to stand as 'truth'.

The cultural assumption that full literacy is the norm for an Irish adult produces negative experiences of exclusion for *the illiterate person*. Those living in a society that imbues literacy with cultural significance are fully aware of the negative consequences of identifying as an *illiterate person*, and they can use strategic silences to avoid acknowledging this status to others. The *illiterate person* can strategically choose to keep their literacy status hidden and disguised, as can those who are involved in the social economy of illiteracy, including the 'English teachers', the newspaper-sharing neighbours, the spouses and family members who assist. When *the illiterate person* is associated with disruption and deviancy, those with bonds of solidarity to the illiterate person choose to speak very carefully. The danger of being branded as Other means that those associated with the Other are also at risk. Silence is strengthened by voices that are consciously muted or hidden (Foucault 1978:35). The silence of *the illiterate person* offers protection from negative consequences, but it also reinforces the belief that such people do not exist in Ireland. This self-imposed silence and the strong prevailing narrative of a fully literate society mutually reinforce the erasure of the *illiterate person*.

The silence about literacy within the wider society can also be productive, by offering protection to *the illiterate person*. Literacy is regarded as the normal adult state, and those who do not meet the norm are liable to be punished. However, because there is little everyday discussion about poor literacy, the *illiterate person* is not easily identifiable and therefore does not always receive the punishment due to transgressors of the norm. There is no requirement to self-identify as illiterate in a society that believes in full literacy. Simple actions such as mentioning 'forgotten glasses' allow others

to hear that the inability to read is due to socially acceptable eyesight difficulties rather than less-acceptable literacy difficulties.

Written representations of illiteracy are often muted and disguised, contributing to silence. This is particularly evident in documents from the earlier decades of the century. The Vocational Teachers' discussions about 'English classes' are initially difficult to decode, as are references to 'English classes' within the Defence Forces data. With the syllabus to hand, the nature of these classes becomes evident. The process of decoding disguised statements about illiteracy works retrospectively also. The study's use of educational attainment as a proxy for literacy allows the official statistical data on school leaving and examination failure from earlier decades to speak more clearly of illiteracy.

The Department of Education records improvements in school attendance rates while declining to speak about numbers absent, remaining silent on the implications of non-school attendance. The Department of Education ceases to publish data on early school leaving after the 1930s, allowing the *Investment in Education Report* in 1965 to re-constitute early school leavers as a homogenous group who attend school until Fourth Class and attain a relatively advanced level of education (*Investment in Education* 1965). The Defence Forces recruits who left school in Second and Third Class are consequently made to appear anomalous rather than reflecting longstanding early school leaving practices, evident in F. W. Ryan's tables of Dublin school attendance rates (Figures 3.A and 3.B, Chapter 3), the Department of Education's published statistics for enrolment by standard (Figure 5.A, Chapter 5), and John Good's details about job-seekers (Section 6.2, Chapter 6). Official statistics on literacy rates in Reformatory and Industrial schools are presented in conjunction with silence about literacy rates in other types of school. This silence supports the implication that the only illiteracy in the state is contained within those deemed 'delinquent.'

For most of the twentieth century, the political and religious preference for limited literacy co-exists with limited requirements for literacy within employment. The prevailing theocentric education system remains firmly in place, until the *Investment in Education Report* (1965) identifies the need to orientate the education system to changing economic demands. In response, fees for Secondary Schools are abolished in 1968, and 1971 sees the National School syllabus revised for the first time since the 1920s. Despite this new economic orientation, research studies contributing knowledge about literacy levels in Irish schools remains surrounded by difficulty and dispute, leading ultimately to a silence that stifles any adverse findings about literacy.

A strong differentiation exists between those who can speak about *the illiterate person* and those who cannot. The presence of the *illiterate person* can be discussed openly provided it relates to the pre-Independence era. Gwynn (1919) and other nationalist writers celebrate the illiterate peasant in pre-Independent Ireland. Ó Gráda's account of illiterate Old Age Pension claimants locates them firmly within nineteenth-century childhoods (2002). In his survey on educational attainment, Mac Gréil identifies the cohort with the least education as those who had attended primary school prior to 1922 (1974:8). Those who describe *the illiterate person* in terms of the marginalized Other may also speak freely. This is seen in the World Education Congress, where illiteracy in Ireland is linked with the' sub-normal' and 'the straggler' (O'Connell 1933:128). The *Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports* publish annual tables on illiteracy rates in the Reformatories and Industrial schools, and 1970 Report of the Committee on Reformatory and Industrial Schools (the *Kennedy Report*) describe the poor outcomes of literacy testing in these schools. However, the findings on poor literacy within the Residential Schools do not warrant any adverse comment on credibility or methodology, as these children do not conform to the founding myths of a pious, honourable, literate nation. This contrasts to the cacophony of dissent surrounding unfavourable findings on literacy in mainstream schools such as those from the INTO

Survey (1941), Macnamara (1966) and Swan (1978). Official disputation produces a form of silence that forbids reference to these reports. Public disputation surrounds the results of later international literacy assessments such as the *International Adult Literacy Survey* (OECD 2000) and successive PISA reports, demonstrating the 'trouble' generated by those who speak about the *illiterate person* as a member of the mainstream population in post-Independence Ireland. A growing tendency to link illiteracy to individual personal difficulty is seen in documents such as the *Adult Education Survey* (1970) and RTÉ booklet (Whyte 1976), promoting the construction of literacy as a private individualized concern of little interest to the state.

This research study considers the different silences surrounding *the illiterate person* as strategic devices rather than the results of oversight or neglect. They assist in the production and reproduction of the ideal nation, one that contains a fully literate Irish population. Pronouncements on literacy based on the Census of 1901 and 1911 offer definitive evidence of full literacy. The *narrative of full literacy* and the silences surrounding *the illiterate person* work in tandem to support the nationalist project, helping to construct the independent Irish state as a successful modern progressive literate nation.

The silences throughout the data are strategic elements, and they provide important contributions to developing this alternative account of the illiterate person in twentieth-century Ireland. Such strategies of silence are not unique to the *illiterate person*. There are others in Irish society who are surrounded by silence and rendered mute. This is evident in the scarce accounts of other 'Lepers and Exiles' (Ball 2013:32) in Irish society, those groups that exist in large numbers but are invisible because they do not conform to the nationalist self-image. This research highlights the many thousands of Irish people attending Technical and Vocational Schools throughout the twentieth century. They gain access to education and employment, but their existence is clouded by silence and vagueness. A tendency to describe any form of second level school as a *secondary*

school often glosses over attendance at Vocational School. The Department of Education's annual statistics vary in how they categorise Vocational School pupils, leading to uncertainty about the precise numbers in attendance (e.g. Loxley et al 2014:179).

Service in the Defence Forces rarely features as a celebrated cultural event. Roy Foster distinguishes between the revolutionaries and the foot soldiers who took part in the Easter Rising and War of Independence. The *revolutionaries* who instigated and directed these events tended to arise from the educated urban middle classes, and they are commemorated as martyrs and heroes. Those who carried out 'the actual fighting' were often less privileged and are not celebrated to the same extent (Foster 2014:331). In his autobiography, Andrews links 'professional soldiers,' like those who join the Irish Defence Forces, to 'the lowest form of society', in contrast to the reverence he extends to his unpaid comrades in the IRA (Andrews 2001:229). The high status accorded to those whose military endeavours led to an independent Ireland is not extended to those who take up military careers following the Civil War. Requests to increase the limited state funding of the Defence Forces are a recurring feature of the 1940s Annual Reports (Kennedy and Laing 2011), suggesting that the military occupies a low official priority. Kennedy and Laing record that at least 100,000 men participated in the volunteer and full-time Defence Forces at the threat of war in 1942. The *Irish Defence Forces Statistical Abstracts* for the years 1954-1980 record over 44,000 young men who marched through initial training (Irish Defence Forces 1954-1981). These large numbers with military experience have a silent footfall in the wider society.

The substantial numbers employed as domestic servants and farm workers are evident from the Residential Schools discharge statistics, but their lived experience is seldom considered in accounts of twentieth-century Irish life. Despite the presence of women in industrial and retail employment (e.g. Luddy 2005), popular descriptions of female working life in twentieth century Ireland are dominated by accounts of the civil service marriage ban, reconstructing a middle-class world of stay-home mothers and 'the family

wage'. This excludes the lived experience of low-waged female workers, many of them mothers working to supplement their husbands' incomes. This focus on the experience of one type of family and the accompanying silence about other families serves to construct the Irish nation-state as a forward-facing middle-class population who aspire to participate in a globalised world. One way to consolidate this pleasing version of the present-day is to re-construct a matching history of the twentieth-century. The past experiences of one group becomes the default experience of all Irish people. In this fashion, the type of literacy offered in private fee-paying secondary schools can become the historical norm. The literacy of the educated elite is ascribed to the entire Irish population, regardless of whether they ever attained it. This recalls the tendency to conflate literacy with the oral transmission of cultural knowledge, thus according literacy to the Irish peasant who could not read or write.

8.5 LIMITATIONS

This study explores an under-researched area, where the data and the discourses were unknown and unanticipated beforehand. Authoritative assertions that the Irish population were fully literate throughout the twentieth century suggested that there might be limited references to *the illiterate person* in the public archives, resources already available to historians and others. A fear of finding few traces of *the illiterate person* led to a search for data across the timeframe 1900 to 1980. This produced a wider variety of potential data than I had expected. The decision was made to present the findings within the original chronological order, to acknowledge the abundance of data pertaining to the *illiterate person*. Instead of focusing in detail on one decade or one set of documents, the events of eight decades are compressed into five chapters. The thesis can therefore present only a broad overview and outline of the *illiterate person* in the twentieth century. A similar thematic analysis of a smaller, more bounded set of data could have produced a deeper level of analysis. An

alternative case study approach would have facilitated closer consideration of aspects that are examined superficially, such as the World Education Congress 1933, the 'English' programmes in the Defence Forces and the Vocational Schools, and the school-based literacy research of the 1960s and 1970s. An examination of literacy in twentieth-century Ireland through the lens of gender could have provided yet another perspective on the *Island of Saints and Scholars*.

The concept of looking for that which is hidden in plain view led to the use of publicly-available empirical evidence, most of it located in the National Library, the Irish National Archives and the Irish Military Archives. Only one archive, the *Teachers College Record* online archive, required an access fee ($25 in 2017). The documents that support the research argument are available for others to consult. Many of these have been publicly available for a considerable period of time, and some, like the *Department of Education Annual Statistical Reports*, have been examined by previous researchers. This is an important consideration in relation to exploring the operation of long-standing silences in relation to *the illiterate person*.

The data for this study is available only because of the activities of archivists. It is not a neutral store of material, but one that reflects decisions made by others in relation to preservation and cataloguing. It is also the case that the archives do not reflect all available documents from the past. The *First Programme of Primary Instruction* (1922) is a key document in Irish education, as it lays the foundation for the Irish National School curriculum until 1971 (T. Walsh 2012:4). Akenson remarks on his difficulty in obtaining a copy in 1975, with 'both the Department of Education and the National Library of Ireland having lost their copies' (Akenson 1975:171). Akenson relies on a copy given privately. I located three copies, a photocopied version marked 1 May 1975 and a proof copy from 1921, both in the National Library, and an original copy in the National Archives. Gaps in an archived series of journals such as the *Vocational Education Bulletin* are another reminder that the archives are not all-encompassing. The presence of annotations and inscriptions on many documents signal that

much of the archival material was collated by others before being donated to the institutions. As a result, the pool of possible research data may have been distilled several times, reflecting omissions and selections made by the original owners as well as the archivists' interventions.

The decision to use accessible archives means that documents offered from other sources were excluded. Such offers included uncatalogued archival material and privately-held papers.   A wider range of documents offers the possibility to provide a more fine-grained picture that reflects other groups in Irish society. The inclusion of Irish-language documents would provide access to the Irish-language discourse on literacy, which is another gap in this study.

This research study does not incorporate the 'local knowledge' of the *illiterate person* but instead relies upon documents produced by those with literacy. The documents that best matched the research criteria turned out to originate mainly from educators, civil servants, military officers, university lecturers, and Catholic religious personnel. They share common elements of educational accreditation and secure employment in a society where these are rare attributes. The authors are overwhelmingly male. Based on such data, the study offers a partial and incomplete account of how the *illiterate person* is constructed in everyday Irish society.   The study ultimately examines how the *illiterate person* is constructed within a small cross-section of documents produced by privileged members of twentieth-century Irish society.

The deliberate focus on mainstream Ireland means that the literacy of groups such as Irish emigrants is not addressed here.   Many Irish immigrants arrived with poor literacy to receiving countries such as UK, USA and Canada (e.g. Graff 1979). This has been incorporated into the retrospective *narrative of full literacy*, whereby illiterate emigrants leaving twentieth-century Ireland are often represented as former residents of Industrial Schools. This explanation differentiates those who emigrated from those who remained in Ireland and thus preserves the norm of the fully

literate Irish adult. However, the tendency to cast the Industrial Schools as the sole origin of Defence Forces recruits is not supported by the statistical evidence, and suggestions that the Industrial Schools provided the source of all illiterate emigrants may be spurious also. This offers an invitation for further research in British and American archives relating to immigration from Ireland.

The analytic approach adopted in this study focuses on the surface of the data. What is written in the documents is taken at face value, producing a 'flat account' (Kendall and Wickham 1999:140). The main research concern is with the discursive features of the data rather than with its political intent. The requirement to prioritise aspects relating to literacy means that examination of the political, economic and educational landscapes of twentieth century Ireland occupies a secondary place. Holding these areas in check exposes the elements relevant to the *illiterate person.* This approach also elides gender issues. The research interpretation can be undermined in relation to this superficial treatment of the data and the artificial isolation of one aspect of Irish society

On a more personal level, Foucault's advice to suspend personal judgement and focus on the discursive aspects is a compelling theoretical concept, but one difficult to impose in practice. The process of writing about research data from the past brings many elements of the present day into sharper focus, 'troubling' my own knowledge and leading me to re-evaluate it, as Foucault describes. For example, statements about Irish-language revival, concerns about rote learning in schools, and debates about national identity all resonate with my lived experience of twenty-first-century Ireland. Other twentieth-century aspects are more difficult to understand. Activities such as the employment of young adults as domestic servants and messengers, the range and volume of devotional literature produced, and the widespread tolerance of early school leaving challenge my retrospective understanding of the past century, leading to re-evaluation of other received wisdom about the Irish cultural experience.

The study makes use of two very specific simplifications. In the first, the term *illiterate person* is a synecdoche for all forms of literacy difficulty. The use of this term is a response to the ever-changing definitions of literacy and illiteracy. It removes reliance on any specific academic or economic definitions. However, it also reduces all forms of literacy capacity to two options, where the person is either literate or illiterate. The reduction in complexity compresses all forms of literacy into two extreme poles, creating a binary opposition where a recognisable continuum of experience exists.

The other simplification is the use of educational attainment as a proxy for literacy. Given the lack of any specific measurement of literacy for most of the twentieth century, the details on educational attainment within the Department of Education and the Defence Forces reports are used as indicators of literacy levels, linking the highest Class attended with the literacy guidelines for each Class outlined in the 1921 Syllabus given in Figure 4.A (Chapter 4). As with any proxy measure, there are limits to its capacity to provide an accurate representation of literacy. These limits include a reliance on self-reporting, the effects of attending school intermittently, and the possibility of gaining a higher level of literacy after leaving National School.

8.6 OVERALL CONCLUSION

This study examines discursive and material elements that address the research question: *How is the illiterate person constructed in twentieth century-Ireland?* The popular retrospective *narrative of full literacy* constructs a fully literate population in the twentieth century. Within this narrative, the *illiterate person* is officially absent from independent Ireland, erased by a state education system that nurtures the Irish cultural propensity to scholarship. This is an overly simplistic account that homogenises the entire population and surrounds the *illiterate person* with silence.

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The research findings demonstrate that there is a wide variety of literacy capability within the mainstream Irish population during the twentieth century. The discourses explicated in earlier chapters offer a variety of positions for the *illiterate person,* ranging from celebration to demonization. Cumulatively, they recognise the existence of the *illiterate person* within Irish society, who is likely to reside in the mainstream, maintain employment, participate in the community, and be indistinguishable from those with literacy.

Statistical and anecdotal accounts of early school leaving and examination failure provide indicators of poor literacy among school leavers throughout the twentieth century. The presence of 'English classes' in the Vocational Schools and the Defence Forces demonstrate the low literacy levels of many young adults entering employment. The findings highlight the productive power of the *illiterate person* in producing a population unable to critique or to challenge prevailing orthodoxies of religion and nationalism. Towards the end of the century, the *illiterate person* provides a productive source for new specialists and new expertise, with this new knowledge in turn facilitating the further judgement and regulation of literacy. Strategies of silence in relation to illiteracy are evident across the research data, allowing the *narrative of full literacy* to remain uncontested and unchallenged. Irish citizens can be quietly denied membership of the Irish nation if they cannot display the literacy associated with Irish ancestry. These strategic devices ensure that the Irish nation-state does not have to formally acknowledge the existence of the *illiterate person*.

This research project cannot claim to produce definitive explanations, prescriptions or recipes. It can only offer an alternative account of literacy in twentieth century Ireland, as a contribution to the existing store of knowledge. It adds complexity to existing accounts, to fragment them rather than replace them. It presents an argument that attempts to initiate debate, discussion and dialogue about an area of Irish society that up to now has been confined within one uncontested all-encompassing interpretation.

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