

The End of Denominational Schooling in Newfoundland and Labrador: Lessons for Northern Ireland?

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Abstract

The early English and Irish settlers in Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada), significantly shaped the province's social institutions, including the creation of a system of denominationally segregated schools that remained in effect until the late 20th century. Educational reforms enacted in 1997 replaced the denominational model with a single public school system, ending more than 150 years of control by the Christian churches. At roughly the same time that these changes were being made, in Northern Ireland, the Belfast Agreement resolved decades of conflict and set forth goals for educational and social integration, including the establishment of integrated schools. In this paper we review and compare the education policy contexts in the two jurisdictions and explore the differences in their current structural approaches—public education in Newfoundland and Labrador versus the continuation of denomination-based schooling in Northern Ireland. While denomination-based schooling remains the norm in Northern Ireland, it is possible that lessons learned from the experience of Newfoundland and Labrador might contribute to ongoing discussions about potential futures for Northern Irish education.

Keywords: Comparative education, Newfoundland and Labrador, Northern Ireland, Education reform, Shared education, Education governance, Denominational schooling.

Introduction

In Newfoundland and Labrador (Canada) in the 1990s, actions taken by the provincial Liberal government ended 150 years of denominational schooling. The federal government's subsequent constitutional change, which enabled these reforms, has already generated an extensive body of research (e.g., Elliott, 1998; Galway & Dibbon, 2012; Galway, 2014; Sheppard & Galway, 2016; Ralph, 2020). In this paper we examine those changes and their consequences in the context of their relevance across the Atlantic in Northern Ireland where the historic Belfast Agreement sought to end the internecine conflict often called "The Troubles." One key clause in that agreement committed the government to officially encourage the education of Catholic and Protestant children together in what are called *integrated* schools (Belfast Agreement, 1998).

Comparative educational research often allows new insights to emerge; for example, we were struck by the difference between Newfoundland and Labrador's radical transformation of its education system in 1997, in which all religious schools were converted to public schools, except for a few unfunded private ones (Warren, 2012) and Northern Ireland's comparatively slow progress with just 8% of its children enrolled in integrated schools, in 2023. The Liberal government in Newfoundland and Labrador made difficult and sometimes divisive changes to its entire school system, while the scope and pace of change

in Northern Ireland was very slow. Some research has called attention to the views of parents in Northern Ireland (e.g., Hughes & Loader, 2023) to explain low enrolments in integrated schools, but very little attention has been paid to the action/inaction of the British government while governing Northern Ireland through “direct rule” for 27 years immediately prior to the Peace Agreement (1972-1998). Moreover, since yielding direct rule of Northern Ireland in 1999, the British government has frequently intervened to restore government because of the collapse of the locally elected power-sharing executive.

A comparative examination of the two education systems might also allow us to draw lessons from the effects of the reform of educational governance, over the ensuing 25+ years. Many of the claims made by supporters of these reforms, for example, that ending denominational schooling would result in better programmes and infrastructure, more efficient use of educational resources and respect for diversity can now be assessed more accurately. This historical contrast is also important in Northern Ireland since access to government archives is only now throwing light on the roles and perspectives of those charged with implementing educational policy during that time.

We start with an outline of how denominational schooling in Newfoundland and Labrador came to exist in the first place, what led to the changes that ended this system, how change was managed and what its consequences were. We will follow with an analysis of the moves to adopt integrated education in Northern Ireland and the role played by parents, the churches and politicians in London and Belfast. We conclude with a discussion of the key points of comparison.

Denominational Schooling in Newfoundland and Labrador

Origins of the Denominational System of Education

The collective works of McCann, (1988; 1994), McLintock (1941), Rowe (1964) and Warren, (1988) document the history of denominational governance and paint a colourful, if not bleak, picture of life in early 19th century Newfoundland. They provide important contexts for why separate school systems were initially created and how they prevailed for more than 150 years. In the early 1800s there was a very loose system of law and order, and an equally diffuse cultural and moral fabric to hold the society together (Greene, 1999; Janzen, 2008; McCann, 1988; Rowe, 1964). Newfoundland did not become a British colony until 1825¹ and living conditions for the lower classes, in St. John’s particularly, were extremely poor; by some accounts, the worst in North America (Greene, 1999; Janzen, 2008; McCann, 1988; Rowe, 1964). There were no schools for the vast majority of the population and long-standing British policies restricting the establishment of permanent settlements meant that those who came to Newfoundland (mainly Irish Catholics) felt neither a sense of permanence nor security (McCann, 1998; Warren, 2012). McCann (1988) describes the social order in pre-colonial Newfoundland as comprising a “small number of merchants, almost all Protestant, and a large number of fishermen, both Protestant and Catholic, with a small middle grouping of shopkeepers, clerks, boat owners, et cetera, mainly concentrated in St. John’s and Conception Bay” (p. 31).

The inability to legally establish permanent settlements effectively hampered efforts to establish the first schools (Rowe, 1964). In a society that exploited fishermen and laborers who struggled to maintain even a meager subsistence, formal education was a luxury mostly reserved for the merchant classes. The need for an organised system of formal education emerged in the notes and journals of Protestant missionaries whose travel logs, dating between 1800 and 1850, documented settlement after settlement where virtually no person could read or write (Rowe, 1964). Still, in the absence of a formalized school system some Christian organisations and other groups attempted to set up independent charity schools. Warren (2012)

¹ Newfoundland later gained independence from Great Britain in 1855.

affirms that the churches and their affiliated agencies² were alone in attempting to institute any kind of formal schooling in precolonial Newfoundland.

For these early schools, the teaching of reading and writing served to spread the Gospel and instill the churches' catechisms (McCann, 1988). Therefore, the first schools taught basic literacy, but with a thoroughly religious orientation (Galway, 2019). Although there was some measure of interdenominational cooperation in the early schools, the sponsoring organisations were generally oriented toward a specific denominational affiliation.

The first Education Act was introduced in 1836. The government preferred a non-denominational system of elementary schools and provided £2,100 to assist organisations in their efforts to set up and sustain such schools (Rowe, 1964), but the original attempts to introduce non-denominational education failed due to political and denominational maneuvering, disputes over which text of the bible would be adopted, and general religious intolerance (McCann, 1988). The Education Act of 1843 divided public funding for education between the Roman Catholic and Protestant churches, giving Newfoundland a denominational system that lasted for more than a century and a half (Galway & Dibbon, 2012).

Conflict over the manner in which education was structured and funded was not limited to Protestant and Roman Catholic families: from 1843 forward, there were internal disputes among the various Protestant denominations. According to Rowe (1964), “[h]aving tried all reasonable alternatives, many in the government felt the only workable system was complete denominational separation” (p. 90).

Subsequently, the Education Acts of 1874 and 1876 further sub-divided the Protestant allocation of the education grant, on a proportional basis, between the Church of England and the Methodist church. The Education Act of 1892 recognized the Salvation Army as a separate Protestant denomination, thereby establishing four separate government-funded education systems.

In 1920, at the urging of teachers, the Government established a nondenominational Normal School, situating teacher education within a *public* institution instead of the denominational colleges (Andrews 1985a). This modest shift was strategic—for the first time, teacher candidates of all religions would be educated together without the trappings of the denominational authorities. Nevertheless, the churches' authority over education became even more robust when Newfoundland joined Confederation in 1949, at which time the education system was governed by seven denominations: Catholic, Anglican, United, Moravian, Presbyterian, Salvation Army and Seventh-day Adventist (Bergman et al., 1997). Rather than address the issues inherent in separate school systems, as part of the Terms of Union with Canada, the Newfoundland Act (1949) entrenched the rights of the denominational authorities in the administration of education, including the funding of schools – in effect, guaranteeing funding to the churches for the continuation of denominational schools (Galway & Dibbon, 2012). While the major Protestant churches did amalgamate into an *Integrated School System* following on the recommendations of a 1967 Royal Commission on Education, the Pentecostal Church was given the right to govern its own schools in 1988. For the next ten years, until the public referendum of 1997, the Government of Newfoundland and Labrador continued to provide funding for separate denominationally based school systems, including numerous duplicate school boards and schools in some areas.

² These included the Society for the Propagation of the Gospel in Foreign Parts (SPG), which operated in Newfoundland as early as 1722, the St. John's Charity School Society (1804-1826), the Benevolent Irish Society (1826-1841) and the Newfoundland School Society (1823-1923).

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The Road to Reform: Establishing a Public System of Education

In comparison with other Canadian provinces, at the time of confederation, schools in Newfoundland were poorly resourced and over-governed. Until the 1970s, many children didn't complete secondary school, and few pursued post-secondary studies. Premier Joseph Smallwood attempted to address the system's challenges, but a sudden surge of 50,000 students between 1950 and 1960 hindered efforts to align with Canadian standards. Despite a \$70 million funding increase in that decade, Smallwood admitted that, in relative terms, the situation in the late 1950s was worse than in 1949 (Andrews, 1985b). By 1964, with a population under half a million, there were 1,266 schools across 270 denominational school districts, revealing a grossly inefficient system (Graesser, 1990). The 1967 (Warren) Royal Commission highlighted low teacher qualifications, high student attrition and inadequate amenities in rural schools. Progress was made in infrastructure and teacher certification, but the government faced challenges in terms of rising teacher salaries, increased student transportation costs, and an expensive and duplicative infrastructure.

Speaking at Memorial University in 2008, Philip Warren reflected that if political mood had been right, he would have recommended full school system amalgamation in the 1967 Royal Commission Report. However, even modest suggestions for restructuring led to Roman Catholic Commission members issuing a minority report opposing any level of amalgamation, arguing it would lead to "complete secular education" (Warren, 1967, p. 195). Such was the significant influence of Christian denominations on Newfoundland's education and social agenda in 1967. Over the next 25 years, however, the political and socio-cultural environment changed as Newfoundland's citizens became more educated, less socially conservative, and more cosmopolitan.

As the 1990s approached, the general migration toward secularization Western society had reached Newfoundland and Labrador's shores (Harte, 1989). The population was becoming more diverse and the proportion of Newfoundland's citizens—especially women—who attained a university or college-level education was nearing the Canadian average (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1998). More people were moving into professional occupations, away from rural centres and away from a religious-communal orientation. Especially in the larger centers, the insular worldview, prevalent among a large demographic in the early and mid-20th century and foundational to the influence of the Churches in Newfoundland society, was changing.

Several other issues also dampened public opinion about denominational schools, including the distressing revelation of widespread sexual abuse at Mount Cashel Orphanage in 1989, which resulted in the conviction of Catholic priests and Christian brothers for abusing boys in their care (Bergman, Stokes-Sullivan & Fisher, 1997). Similarly, some of the education policies and practices of the denominational authorities were being called into question (Harte, 1989). For example, catchment areas for schools were determined by denominational affiliation, causing some children to be bused long distances to attend a specific denomination's school. Graesser (1990) also highlighted conflicts between the legal framework of the denominational system and teachers' and citizens' rights. Teachers had voiced worries about surveillance by some school districts to ensure adherence to a prescribed religious and moral lifestyle. The Supreme Court of Newfoundland upheld a Catholic school district's right to dismiss a teacher who converted to the Salvation Army faith, citing religious affiliation as a valid condition of employment. By the 1980s, such cases prompted public debates on whether the denominational system had become outdated and inflexible (Galway & Dibbon, 2012). One proponent of reform, the Newfoundland and Labrador Teachers' Association (NLTA), argued that the duplication and underperformance of the system could be largely addressed by reorganizing schools along cooperative lines (Hancock, 2012).

Other factors were more pragmatic in nature, including an economic downturn triggered by high interest rates and a collapse in the groundfish fishery, significant declining enrolment, and lower than expected performance on standardized tests, especially mathematics and science (Galway, 2012a). In 1989, a government task force reviewed K-12 outcomes in mathematics and science and complained of a ‘crisis of low expectations’ and an urgent need to bring educational outcomes in line with the pan-Canadian levels (Crocker, 1989). That same year, a Liberal government, led by Clyde Wells, a successful, no-nonsense lawyer, came to power and embarked on a neo-liberal programme of social and economic reform, including budget cutbacks, a public sector wage freeze, and the sale of government assets. The following year it launched the *Royal Commission of Inquiry into the Delivery of Programs and Services in Primary, Elementary and Secondary Education* (McCann, 2002). The 1992 (Williams) Royal Commission, as it was known, focused on the inefficiency and duplication of the denominational system and was a key impetus for change (Galway & Dibbon, 2012). The government and its supporters argued that the denominational system promoted waste and inefficiency, lacked effectiveness, and infringed on individual rights. The Williams Commission proposed four models for reform of the system, each with progressively less involvement of the churches. After three years of political and legal wrangling—primarily with the Catholic and Pentecostal Churches—the government announced a public referendum on a proposal to reduce (but not eliminate) church control over education. The results yielded a slight majority for the Yes side leaving the government in the position of deciding whether to seek a constitutional change.

There were substantial political risks in proposing to dismantle a constitutionally-protected school system in the face of opposition from the still-powerful churches and a large proportion of the voting public – most of whom identified with one of the Christian religions. However, by the 1990s the notion of making at least some changes to the faltering Church-run system seemed possible or maybe even popular. The government, the teachers’ union, certain academic voices, the business sector and a large segment of the public were all calling for change (Galway & Dibbon, 2012). Graesser (1992) reported results from a 1991 public opinion poll that showed 60% of people favoured a single public educational system, while 40% preferred to keep the current system, but the results varied depending on denominational affiliation, gender, age, and educational level. Moreover, 77% of respondents agreed that teaching religion in schools “gives an overall better education” and 88% felt that “teachers had a responsibility to show a commitment to religious values and standards” (Graesser, 1992, pp. 613; 614).

Despite a diluted proposal for change—advocating interdenominational schools while preserving their Christian character and allowing children to attend neighbourhood schools unless separate schools met enrolment thresholds—the Yes side barely won with a slim 54 to 46 percent outcome. This narrow victory revealed a divided public opinion, indicating potential unpopularity for any attempt to revoke constitutionally protected rights among a significant voter base. The politically cautious approach involved further negotiations with churches, aiming for a compromise—which is exactly how the government proceeded.

The original constitutional amendment, which was authorized by the House of Commons and proclaimed by the Governor General in the Spring of 1997, represented a compromise in that it allowed for single denominational schools. But it also provided the Newfoundland legislature with additional powers to organise and administer public education through a system of "interdenominational" schools, while retaining the right to establish single denominational schools under certain conditions (where numbers warrant). However, the first attempt to legislatively implement the change under a revised provincial Schools’ Act was successfully challenged in the Newfoundland Supreme Court, and Roman Catholic and Pentecostal churches were granted a temporary injunction, effectively paralyzing the system.

The Provincial Government initiated an appeal to the Supreme Court of Canada, but by then there was a sense that the public was growing weary with the stalemate created by the denominational authorities and there was a decision to change course and aggressively pursue a different policy option to a fully non-denominational system. Premier Brian Tobin, who succeeded Wells in 1996, announced that he would hold a second referendum to secure a mandate to amend Term 17 once again. In his address to the public, he charged that the discussions with the denominational authorities had become a “never ending debate.” Interviewed in 2017, more than two decades after the referendum, the former Premier recalled that his government was “putting... money into maintaining buildings—some of which were half empty—and busing people an hour away rather than letting them go to the school in their community because it wasn't a denominational fit” (Bartlett, 2017, ¶ 9).

The second referendum results were clear: 73% of voters favoured revising Term 17 to create a public education system. The subsequent unprecedented reform was extensive, transferring school governance from churches to elected boards. Over 150 schools were slated for closure or consolidation, prompting widespread changes in attendance zones, student transport, leadership structures, teacher assignments, curriculum, and more.

Education in the Post-Reform Era

Structural Changes and Financial Efficiencies

Once the new Schools' Act was proclaimed into law, structural and governance changes were immediate. Twenty-seven denominational school districts were abolished, and 10 Anglophone (and one Francophone) public school districts were created—each governed by publicly-elected school trustees. The once-powerful denominational education councils became redundant, and the church-appointed school boards were dissolved – their members free to stand for office as elected trustees in the public system, should they choose to do so. The new legislation stipulated that school and district buildings from the denominational era, would by law continue to be used and maintained in the new system until they were no longer required (Galway, 2011). When a former denominational school was no longer needed, it was sold or otherwise discharged and the proceeds apportioned, according to records of the distribution of initial construction costs. However, enrolment declines meant that many schools were considered surplus and closed well before the transition to a public system. During the 10-year period between 1989–1990 and 1999–2000, some 200 of the province's 543 schools were closed or consolidated.

Upon enacting the new *Schools' Act (1997)*, the K-12 system became virtually fully publicly funded. Teachers and administrators were paid directly by the government. The remaining education grant was earmarked, based on enrollment proportions, for school operations—busing, repairs, materials, and other essentials. The government extended its control to teacher allocations, capital expenses (including major repairs and construction), and teacher contract negotiations (Sheppard, 2012). Newly established school districts handled practical implementations of structural and curricular changes, overseeing grade offerings, staffing, attendance zones, and site-based educational decisions. While responsible for school operations, including unpopular tasks like closures or consolidations, these districts were almost entirely reliant on government financing and with no tax base, had very limited flexibility.

It seems fair to conclude that the government's financial goals for education reform were realized. Although per-student expenditures increased (the result of enrolment decline), by the end of the decade, total public school educational expenditures were lower than they had been in 1989–1990, the year on which the Williams Royal Commission based its financial analysis. Over this period of rationalization more than 1650 educators either retired or were declared reductant and dropped from the system (Galway, 2012a).

Religious/Moral Education

When the Williams Commission recommended the dismantling of the denominational system, the Churches and their supporters argued that a non-denominational education system would remove Christianity from the classroom. The government responded that the constitutional change to Term 17 and the new Schools' Act (1997) would provide for a non-denominational religious education curriculum and, when requested by parents, religious observances in schools (Hodder, 2012). The Department of Education was then faced with the formidable task of developing a religious education programme to be offered at all grade levels to children from all denominations.

Of the three major philosophies of religious education described by Hull (2001)—learning about a single religious tradition (educating into religion); learning about different living faith systems (a religious studies approach) and learning from religion (students develop their own views on religious and moral issues)—the province based the curriculum on the third model. The instructional focus would situate students at the centre and bring their own experiences into consideration. Hodder (2012) argued that religious education actually became more accessible to students after the reforms. The post-reform curriculum was non-confessional³ in nature, but religious education at the K-9 level became mandatory in keeping with the educational objective of better preparing students to live in a multicultural and multi-faith world. A review of the K-6 curriculum guides currently in use (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2015; 2016) shows that the goals of the religious education curriculum are clearly embedded in a philosophy of *learning from all religions* in an environment where family and faith communities assume the primary role for influencing and nurturing a child's personal spirituality. The province's approach to religious education is that schools perform a role that is complementary to the family's role, ensuring that religious instruction is inclusive of other faiths, to help children appreciate differences in beliefs, and to ensure that any information given about other faiths is accurate:

This religious education curriculum respects the place and role of family and faith communities as primary influences on the faith lives of young people. At the same time, it acknowledges the complementary and supplementary role of partnership that the school can play in the spiritual, moral, and faith development of young people (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2016, p. 3).

Religiosity

In recent decades, Canada has experienced a general decline in religiosity, notably among younger cohorts (Cornelissen, 2021). Still, a high proportion of residents in Newfoundland and Labrador report that they are affiliated with a Christian denomination. Over 30 years (1991 to 2021), this affiliation dropped by about 15 percentage points, yet more than four out of five residents still identify as Christian—significantly higher than the Canadian average of approximately 53%. Decoupling the influence of the transition to a public schooling system on this decline in religiosity amidst broader societal changes, increased education levels, and the impacts of abuse within Christian Church institutions is complex and beyond the scope of this article⁴. It is worth noting, however, that there are contrasts between the generations with respect to religiosity and that these differences are more profound in the Atlantic Provinces, suggesting that changes in the religious landscape are taking place and signalling an important area for further study.

³ teaching is neutral in relation to different religions

⁴ Abuse in the context of schooling for the Indigenous people of Canada is outside the scope of this work and its effects are the focus of a great deal of current research in education (e.g., Hop Wo et al., 2020).

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Instructional and Human Resource Costs

The government likely did not fully anticipate the complexity and impact of the reform process, especially its impact on local programmes and learning initiatives. Several researchers have argued that the schedule for the transition to the new structure was too aggressive, resulting in school and system-level upheaval, instructional discontinuity, and insensitivity to the impact of the changes on teachers and administrators (Green, 2014; Sheppard, 2012; Tucker & Fushell, 2021). Some senior school district personnel retired; others were required to compete for a substantially smaller number of positions. Green (2012) observed that one of the often-overlooked consequences of educational reform is the “turmoil, confusion, and disruption caused in the personal and professional lives of educators and school administrators” (p. 235). Her case study of school district reform described a climate of stress and uncertainty as staff struggled to deconstruct systems that they had spent much of their careers creating (Green 2014).

Sheppard’s (2012) interviews with senior administrators revealed that the implementation of the new structure, left mostly to district administrators and school principals, effectively diverted the attention of school districts away from student learning. While there was uniform agreement that the shift to a public system was a great step forward for education, district directors reported that staffing levels set by the government were lean, forcing the redeployment of programme staff to the administrative tasks of reorganising and consolidating schools rather than curriculum-based issues, at least in the short term:

All of our interviewees from districts throughout the province were unequivocal that the first restructuring that commenced in the early 1990s refocused, for at least a decade, the attention of school boards, school personnel, and parents toward structural and governance issues and away from issues that directly related to teaching and learning in schools (Sheppard, 2012, p. 210).

Galway (2014) argued that the direction set by Williams Commission may have resulted in too much efficiency for the education system to absorb. Just two years after the structural changes were set into law, there were urgent calls from stakeholders to re-examine the way the system was resourced—particularly in the allocation of teachers to schools. In 1999 – two years after reforming the system – the provincial government decided to appoint another task force, the *Ministerial Panel on Educational Delivery in the Classroom* (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2000). The Sparkes-Williams Task Force, as it became known, was given the task of resolving a mounting list of system-level grievances, the most vexing of these being the call for a more nuanced model for the allocation of teachers during a period of enrolment decline, that could address the teaching and learning needs of small, rural schools. The Department of Education accepted the report’s recommendation to amend the formula for teacher allocations, place soft caps on class sizes, recognize the unique challenges of small schools, increase guidance counsellors and other specialized services, and create a provincial virtual school to deliver specialized high school programming, including advanced courses in mathematics and the sciences. In 2000, the province established the virtual school—a major undertaking requiring a significant and sustained financial commitment from governments past and present. For more than two decades, a range of programmes (e.g., high school and Advanced Placement courses, e-tutoring, and counselling) have been delivered through e-learning in schools that, individually, would have been incapable of offering such programmes (Saqlain, et al., 2020).

Centralization of Authority for Education

The consolidation of school districts in Newfoundland and Labrador began a shift towards eliminating elected school boards, centralizing education authority within the provincial government (Galway, 2014, 2017; Galway, et al., 2013; Sheppard, 2012; Sheppard & Galway, 2016). Sheppard (2012) interviewed education directors who reported increased government control and interference with local decision-

making (e.g., school consolidation and new building construction) after the 1997 reforms. Over the past 25+ years, the system experienced multiple changes, moving decision-making closer to the government. In 2004, the 10 anglophone districts were consolidated into four regional districts; in 2013 the remaining four districts were merged into a single provincial district, and in 2023, the government introduced legislation to collapse the remaining school district into the operations of the Department of Education and to abolish elected school trustees in favour of an appointed advisory board (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2023). Researchers have expressed concerns about diminished local input, increased bureaucracy, and the loss of elected trustees due to centralization of education authority concerns (Dibbon et al., 2012; Galway, 2012b, 2014, 2017; Sheppard, 2012; Sheppard et al., 2013; Sheppard & Galway, 2016; Tucker & Fushell, 2021).

Public School Student Outcomes

When the Williams Royal Commission released its final report, it highlighted long-standing concerns related to the underperformance of learners, based on standardized testing, going back to the 1970s:

[T]here is also a widely held and documented belief that educational standards are too low, and that too many graduates lack the basic and relevant skills required to function in our present society, let alone the modern, global marketplace that is quickly establishing itself as the economic arena of the future (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 1992, p. 1).

From the perspective of student outcomes, Newfoundland and Labrador entered confederation with Canada on a decidedly uneven playing field; annual per-student expenditures were approximately \$35, about one third of the \$104 Canadian average (Wisenthal, 2008). For some time, the impact of these conditions was reflected in the educational attainment levels of the province's students. In the 1960s, grade 9 pass rates typically fell in the range of 50 to 55 percent (Warren, 1967). By the 1970s, there had been some improvement, but more than a third of students still failed to reach grade 11 (Galway & Dibbon, 2012). Student performance on the Canadian Tests of Basic Skills—a battery of standardized tests that were administered on an annual basis beginning in 1974—were stubbornly low and remained below the 50th percentile until they were discontinued in the 1990s (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2002).

The long-term impact of the move away from church-run schools has been beneficial to the province on several levels—financial accountability, quality of educational facilities, inclusivity and fairness—but also, and importantly, on student learning. We have already described research documenting a period immediately following the transition to a public system when attention to student learning was stalled by the transitional processes associated with such a monumental change (Sheppard, 2012). However, recent indicators of student achievement on international reading, science and mathematics assessments have documented advances towards higher provincial performance standards. Notwithstanding years of system-level change and curricular reforms, Newfoundland and Labrador's public education system has recorded achievement and educational attainment gains, which are documented in the government's own public accountability reports and in the results of national and international assessments. For example, in the 2018 OECD Program of International Student Assessment (PISA), which tested student achievement in reading, science and mathematics, Newfoundland and Labrador students achieved at the Canadian average and above the OECD average in reading and science and at the OECD average in mathematics (Council of Ministers of Education, 2018). While there are still advances to be made, it is important to note that, considering the state of education following confederation with Canada, no other province has accomplished such a rapid and substantial increase in general education levels in so short a period.

Denominational Schooling in Northern Ireland

Context

Politically, Northern Ireland is part of the United Kingdom, separated from The Republic of Ireland by a 1921 treaty acknowledging Irish independence south of a defined border meant to safeguard those preferring to remain with Great Britain (Austin & Hunter, 2013). The aspiration for a united Ireland, embodied in the Irish constitution, unsettled many in Northern Ireland favouring union with Britain. Throughout the 20th century, political divisions persisted between the mainly Protestant Unionists and mainly Catholic Nationalist/ Republicans and the Unionist majority often exerted control in ways that discriminated against the Catholic minority.

In 1969, Catholic demands for political and civil rights gained support from the Irish Republican Army (IRA), sparking a prolonged period of conflict known as the Troubles. This led the British government to impose 'direct rule' from London until relative peace was established in 1998 (Bew, 2007).

The long history of political conflict and violence in Northern Ireland makes it difficult to directly apply the lessons learned from Newfoundland's move from denominational to public education but we hope that a careful consideration of some common elements will at least suggest some possible directions and enable reformers in Northern Ireland to anticipate both the benefits and challenges that might accompany a move toward a more integrated educational system.

Given the widespread view that integrated schools improve intercommunal relationships between children who might not otherwise meet (Hayes et al., 2007), it may be surprising that very few children in Northern Ireland attend integrated schools. We attribute this slow expansion of integrated schools to both history and politics. As noted above, since 1921 Northern Ireland has been pulled both by the attachment of some citizens to the United Kingdom and the desire for closer ties with Ireland by others. This political context influenced the question of schooling in the new state from the beginning. In 1923, Lord Londonderry, the first Minister of Education for Northern Ireland, saw an opportunity to end separate schools for Catholic and Protestant children (Hyde, 1979; Akenson, 1973; Farren, 1995). Like a similar British government initiative in 1831, the 1923 plan was firmly resisted by an alliance of different Protestant churches and their Catholic counterparts (Harris 1993). The arguments were similar to those used in Newfoundland to justify church control of schools—especially the importance of guaranteeing a denominational ethos. Because the question of who controlled schools and curricula had very deep roots in broad political issues of identity and allegiance, Catholic bishops were also wary of ceding any control to either the British government or the Unionist majority in Northern Ireland.

The Education System in Northern Ireland

The structure of the education system in Northern Ireland reflects the demand of parents for the right to choose schools, especially primary schools, that are either predominantly Catholic in ethos or nominally Protestant. Consequently, in 2023 just eight percent of children were attending "integrated" schools where children from different faiths or those who are unaffiliated are educated together. Still, some maintained and controlled schools have very mixed populations—in 2023, 25% of secondary schools and almost 10% of primary schools had at least 25% of students from different religious backgrounds (Department of Education of Northern Ireland [DENI], 2023). The Churches are represented on the Boards of Governors of "maintained" schools (which have a Catholic ethos) or "controlled" schools (in which Protestant beliefs and practices are emphasised). Other governors represent the interests of teachers, parents, the Department of Education and the Education Authority. As Akenson (1973) made clear, the influential position of the churches reflected the important role they had played in schools throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Another force shaping the education system is the influence of the so-called “11+” exam which selects about 45% of the students for the academically selective “grammar schools” (DENI, 2022). Thus, in 2021, Northern Ireland’s 1.9 million people were served by 796 primary schools, 192 post-primary schools, 39 special schools, and a few Irish language and independent schools. The cost of supporting all these schools in an equitable way has been and remains a challenge for policy makers.

Integrated Schools: A Response to The Troubles

As noted above, during the violent period called The Troubles in the closing decades of the 20th century the Irish Republican Army (IRA) sought to destabilise Unionists’ domination of the Northern Ireland government. In response, the British government deployed the army to support the local police, the Royal Ulster Constabulary (RUC), and increasingly confronted paramilitary groups from both sides of the political divide (Bennet, 2012).

Children’s lives were disrupted by the violence, frequent security checks by police or army (e.g., on buses and trains), and the pervasive tensions in daily life. Some parents sought a more peaceful future by advocating for schools where Protestant and Catholic children could learn and play together. In 1981, in response to parents’ demands, Lagan College in South Belfast became the first integrated school, government-funded rather than church-financed. Concerned about perpetuating conflict across generations through separate schooling, parents initiated this endeavour. By 2023, integrated schools numbered just 71, less than 10% of the total. Hughes and Loader (2023) noted a significant slowdown in growth within this sector over the last 15 years.

As we have seen, this is in sharp contrast to Newfoundland, which made all of its schools non-denominational (and directly government funded) following a referendum in 1997. Previous research on the emergence and early growth of integrated education (Montgomery et al., 2003) and from 1999 forward (Hansson et al., 2013) covered many elements of the issue such as the demand for such schools, the attitude of local political parties and the impact of integrated education on students. To make sense of the very different journey that took place in Northern Ireland, in this paper we examine the roles of the British government, locally elected politicians in Northern Ireland, the Churches, and parents.

Role of the British Government

Analysis of the role of the British government in Northern Ireland for the period from 1969-2000 by Cunningham (2001) makes no mention of education or schools. However, the gradual opening up of archives in London, Belfast, and Dublin suggests that there were two distinct phases of government action around integrated education between 1972 and the present: 1) events prior to the 1998 Good Friday Agreement, and 2) events afterwards when power was devolved to local politicians.

1972-1998 Background Support for Integrated education

The British government exercised “direct rule” for 27 of the years between 1972-1998 in the period covering the Troubles up to the Good Friday Peace Agreement, which brought an end to most of the violence. Direct rule involved the suspension of the Northern Ireland Assembly and transfer of governance to British officials based in the Northern Ireland Office in Belfast. The new governance arrangements were led by a Secretary of State for Northern Ireland and supported by junior ministers with responsibility for various areas of administration, including education.

Early attempts to devolve governance to local politicians were short-lived. For instance, after the 1973 assembly elections, an executive was formed, lasting only five months from January to May 1974. During this time, Basil McIvor, Minister of Education from the Ulster Unionist party, proposed creating shared

schools in which both Protestant and Roman Catholic Churches could equally participate in management (McIvor, 1974). Though the administration's collapse prevented its realization, the idea garnered support from the Republic of Ireland's Taoiseach, Jack Lynch. However, a Roman Catholic Bishop in Armagh promptly criticized Lynch's stance, highlighting the Church's significant moral and political influence and the role of Catholic priests in local communities:

I have just come from a Confirmation function in County Louth where the priests—some of whom I know to be strong supporters of Fianna Fail—were expressing astonishment that you should have spoken in the way you did on a matter of this kind. You may recall that when you were in office, I expressed anxiety at the weakening effect which the policies then being pursued in the Republic would have on Catholic schools—and ultimately on the country. That process has now been given added momentum in the other part of our country. (National Archives Ireland, 2024)

A return to direct rule after the collapse of the power-sharing left the British government to reflect on what its educational policy should be. A 1977 memorandum from Lord Melchett, then Minister responsible for Education in the Northern Ireland Office, to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, made clear that the idea of shared schools was having a mixed reaction in Northern Ireland. His note suggested that “the most determined opposition came from the Roman Catholic hierarchy” (Melchett, 1977, p.2). While acknowledging growing support for integrated schools from the Social Democratic and Labour Party, Republican Clubs, the Irish Teachers' Organisation and the Alliance Party, he noted that other problems in the implementation of integrated schools, such as the extent of segregated housing in the most troubled areas, would result in de facto segregation in the schools.

He concluded by summarising what the British government's position should be:

It is axiomatic that government is not going to attempt to impose integrated education by law, nor deprive the Roman Catholic Church of the grants which is [sic] currently enjoys. So our role can only be to remove any impediments which may exist and to ensure that we do not create any new ones, and this would have to be made clear in any statement of government policy. (Public Record Office of Northern Ireland, p.1)

The absence of locally elected politicians during the period up to the end of the Troubles in 1998 and a pre-occupation with security issues by the British government may have created the conditions whereby there was little appetite for fundamental structural change in education. It was, as we note above, parents who were in the forefront of setting up Lagan College in 1981, the first integrated secondary school. They were able to demonstrate that the school had suitable premises, well qualified teachers, and enough students to indicate future viability. Meeting all of these criteria meant that they were eligible for state funding. This was a critical issue, since it meant both recognition of a new type of school and a commitment to cover the ongoing costs of buildings and teacher salaries.

Government archives for this period, recently made public, reveal for the first time that British government officials continued to be supportive of integrated education. For example, in 1988, Dr. Brian Mawhinney, the Minister responsible for education at the time, issued a statement on the opening of Mill Strand Integrated primary school in Portrush in which he said:

This is yet another indication of the growing support for Protestant and Catholic young people to be taught together. It is a trend which the Government supports wholeheartedly. Indeed, under the educational reforms, there will be a statutory responsibility for my Department to foster the aims

of integrated education. There is no question of the Government forcing integrated education on anyone who does not want it. Nevertheless, the Government is pleased to be able to provide a structure for integrated schools to which parents can send their children if they so wish. (Northern Ireland Information Service press release: Mill Strand Integrated Primary School, 5 December 1988)

Ulster University's CAIN archive, a collection of evidence related to the Troubles, reveals that this statement of support for integrated education was part of a broader commitment by Mawhinney to the cause of integrated education. The educational reforms to which he referred eventually became law in 1989 as the Education Reform Order (NI), giving a significant boost to integrated education. This support came to the attention of senior civil servants in the British government's Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO). A note on 7 March 1988 from an FCO official stressed "the need to consult the Irish" and more generally, to indicate the government's interest "in the progress of further integration in education in Northern Ireland." (National Archives, England, FCO 87/2854). This is an important reminder that after the signing of the Anglo-Irish Agreement in 1985 between British Prime Minister Thatcher and the Irish Taoiseach, Garret Fitzgerald, there were closer ties between the two governments on at least some aspects of policy related to Northern Ireland.

The same note recognized that the proposals were contentious and "that a number of vested interests are going to feel attacked." The note went on to explain:

The Roman Catholic hierarchy have taken the lead in insisting on the preservation of separate Roman Catholic education (while welcoming cautious ecumenical projects), but this masks a similar attitude on the Protestant side. Nationalists and Roman Catholic hierarchy could well seek Irish government help. There could be an alliance with the Protestants in preventing innovation. (George, 1988, n.p.)

Further evidence of opposition to integrated schools from the Catholic hierarchy was contained in a statement from the Northern Catholic Bishops on 8 November 1989 in a response to the draft Education Reform Order (NI). Their objections were based on a concern that integrated schools would receive preferential financial treatment:

There are many ways of promoting mutual understanding and there are many Catholic and Protestant teachers and groups working in the field of inter-community reconciliation at school levels. It is therefore unfair and indeed unjust to these teachers and groups for government to give special financial treatment only to those bodies which have as an objective "the encouragement or promotion of integrated education." It is invidious for government to single out "integrated education" as its preferential option and as alone meriting a formal commitment by government to "encourage and facilitate" its development." (National Archives, England, CJ4/8851/1)

Opposition to the reforms was also expressed in more colourful language by the Free Presbyterian Church's Reverend Ivan Foster on 30 May, 1989, in a pamphlet entitled, *Stealing away our Children* in which he wrote:

The very day Mr [sic] Mawhinney was announcing his plans, his boss Tom King, was having a meeting with the head of the Roman Catholic Church in Ireland, Cardinal Thomas O'Fee. He was assuring the Cardinal that nothing would be done without the approval of Rome.

What Stalin did with monstrous barbarity and what the Khmer Rouge of Kampuchea attempted with sadistic cruelty, the NIO (Northern Ireland Office) is undertaking with sophistication and guile. The Ulster Protestant is going to have his spiritual, political, and ethnical future drastically altered. The minds of the young provide the fields in which the seeds of political innovations may be sown. What the propaganda machine and terror campaign may fail to do Brian Mawhinney's education programme will accomplish (National Archives, England CJ 4/8851/2, parentheses added).

While these views were not representative of other Protestant churches at the time, they are a reminder that schooling in Northern Ireland was the locus for competing visions about identity. The Reverend Foster feared the influence of both the British government and the Catholic Church. A British civil servant's memo of March 1988, reflecting on the enormous challenges facing supporters of integrated schools revealed the government's position:

Attempts to establish integrated schools at the moment are in a Catch-22 situation: parents need money to establish schools; but until they are established, they cannot get state funding. Further, new non-denominational schools face a near veto on the funding front from the governors of existing educational establishments who are already threatened by falling school rolls. The result is that Lagan College remains a pretty solitary phenomenon. While the new proposals will allow for the establishment of new schools with grant maintained integrated status, the constraints will in large measures continue to exist. Movement away from the communal barricades in education is largely a middle-class phenomenon. But even modest moves in the right direction deserve support. (George, 1988, n.p.)

By 1989, when two further integrated schools had been set up, the government passed the Education Reform (NI) Order which included measures to encourage integrated education and required all schools to teach the cross curricular themes of Education for Mutual Understanding and Cultural Heritage. For the first time, this legislation required the Department of Education in Northern Ireland to "facilitate and encourage integrated education" (Belfast Agreement, p. 25) and made it easier for parents to try to transform existing schools into ones that could be integrated by a simple majority vote of parents and evidence that the school had roughly even numbers of children from both communities.

According to Fraser and Morgan (1999), the 1989 legislation presented problems for the Department of Education in Northern Ireland whose civil servants were tasked with the facilitation of integrated education. They were concerned that appearing to favour one sector of the schooling system would be seen as discriminating against the others, leading to friction with the Churches. Furthermore, there were questions of cost, given that Northern Ireland already had both a large number of denominational primary schools and a selective secondary school system that led to many towns having both Catholic and Protestant Grammar schools and non-selective Secondary schools.

In the years immediately preceding the Good Friday Agreement of 1998, the British government's position on integrated education was reaffirmed by Michael Ancram, the Minister responsible for Education in a note to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland:

Our present policy is to respond positively to parental wishes for integrated education wherever a viable proposal presents itself. This policy is based on our view that integrated education is a desirable long-term investment in building a more united community, and it also reflects the statutory duty placed on my Department by the 1989 Education Reform Order "to encourage and facilitate the development of integrated education." (Ancram, 1995, CAIN archives)

In sum, while the evidence suggests background parental support for integrated education in the 1972-1998 period, the British government did not take the kind of decisive action we saw in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1997, stopping short of widespread consolidation of the system. In fact, by decoupling the creation of new integrated schools from the closure or consolidation of denominational schools, the 1989 legislation contributed to further duplication. That said, the British government's main priority being to end the violence in Northern Ireland, they avoided policies that would further alienate what British Prime minister Margaret Thatcher called "the nationalist minority" (Fitzgerald, 1991, p. 497). Given the close ties between the Catholic Church and the nationalist minority, the government proceeded cautiously on the contentious issue of integrated schools.

Integrated Schooling in Northern Ireland – 1998 to 2024

The Good Friday Agreement

The Belfast Agreement of 1998 (aka, the Good Friday Agreement), which largely eliminated sectarian violence in Northern Ireland, created a different set of circumstances for integrated education and the role of the British government. Although the agreement explicitly referred to integration in referencing "initiatives to facilitate and encourage integrated education and mixed housing," it was left to locally elected politicians to carry this through. In the intervening period between 1998 and 2024, the number of integrated schools has grown very slowly. We can discern six main reasons for this.

Political Structure

First, the Agreement created a power-sharing executive with the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and Sinn Fein as the two largest parties. The Education portfolio was taken initially by Sinn Fein and later by the DUP. Neither saw integrated education as a priority. (Farren, 1999; Hansson et al., 2013). Smaller parties like the Alliance party favoured integrated education but have not had enough electoral support to make a difference. Since education was a devolved portfolio, the British government had no obvious role to play.

Citizenship education

Secondly, two different approaches to the question of helping all schools in Northern Ireland to prepare young people to live together harmoniously began to emerge from the devolved administration. In 2007, all schools were required to include local and global citizenship in the curriculum (Worden, 2023) and this included extensive teacher professional development and the provision of resources. Although there have been questions about whether this kind of work can bring about changed attitudes when the majority of students are still learning in separate schools, it was a recognition that something needed to be done to reach every child in every school. Similar thinking applied to the second initiative which was based on the principle of schools retaining their separate character but working collaboratively. This approach, called Shared Education, relied on schools coming together to enable students and teachers to work together (Gallagher 2016).

Although support from political parties for integrated education was weak, this was not the case for Shared Education. All the Northern Ireland political parties and the Churches supported the introduction of legislation in 2016 to make Shared Education a clear focus for action. By 2023, two thirds of all schools in Northern Ireland were involved in cross-community shared education partnerships, funded in the main by external sources such as the European Union (EU). Further funding from the EU for 2024-2028 is aimed at drawing in the remaining one third of schools. (Department of Education of Northern Ireland, 2023). Positive external evaluations of the short-term impact of the work may be a further factor

in showing that integrated education is not the only way to build cross-community relationships (Social Change Initiative, 2020).

Financial Considerations

The third reason for the slow growth of integrated schools is that all areas of the public sector have been affected by economic cutbacks. Northern Ireland relies on a subsidy of £9.4 billion per annum from the UK government to balance the budget between revenue and expenditure (Burke-Kennedy, 2022). Thus, the money available for Northern Ireland's schools depends somewhat on the UK economy; for example, the Department of Finance of Northern Ireland reported a 0.4% reduction in the 2023 block grant (Torrance & Keep, 2023). Consequently, debates about the growth of integrated education have been increasingly focused on costs. Similar claims to those made by proponents of denominational school reform in Newfoundland regarding possible substantial savings from school amalgamation have been echoed by supporters of integrated schools in Northern Ireland (Roulston & Milliken 2023).

Political Instability

Following the terms of the Belfast Agreement, Sinn Fein and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) are required to work together with other parties in a power-sharing executive. However, since 1997, it is claimed that the NI executive has functioned for just 41% of the time (FactcheckNI, 2022) due to friction between the two main parties. Consequently, for much of the time, UK government appointees and local civil servants have been managing all branches of local government. In our view, such political instability is another reason why a contentious issue like integrated education has floundered. Only the smaller Alliance party has been unequivocal in its support for integrated education. The increased electoral support and energy for Alliance in the NI Assembly was a key factor in getting the Integrated Education Act passed in 2022 (Integrated Education Act (Northern Ireland), 2022). The Act required the Department of Education and the Education Authority to be more specific about a strategic plan for expanding the number of students in integrated schools. Whether this will lead to further growth in the integrated school sector remains to be seen.

Parents

Fifthly, parents were actively involved in setting up the first integrated school in Northern Ireland. Parental pressure is now channeled through the Northern Ireland Council for Integrated Education which actively campaigns to expand integrated education. But as Hughes and Loader (2023) note, while polls suggest strong parental support for the principle of integrated schools, parents' actual school choices suggest that they may remain attached to denominational schools "as communal institutions" and to grammar schools for "their perceived academic benefits." Parental choices may be equally or more influenced by habit, school proximity and their children's peers as they are by the type of school, integrated or not.

Finally, it is important to note that throughout the period, the attitude of British officials was inevitably coloured by the fact that in the rest of the United Kingdom, government supported a variety of faith-based schools, and it would therefore have been contradictory to rule out support for this type of school in Northern Ireland.

In concluding this section, we call attention to the Independent Review of Education commissioned by the Department of Education of Northern Ireland in late 2023 (<https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/publications/independent-review-education-final-report>). Many of its recommendations refer to the importance of children having greater opportunities to learn together, either through expanding the number of integrated schools or increasing collaborative partnerships across the community divide.

Summary

Since the Belfast Peace Agreement, the priority of the British government has been to stabilize the political situation through supporting the devolved administration where decisions about education and other devolved matters are left to locally elected politicians. However, when the executive has faltered, officials in the Northern Ireland Office have continued to provide background support for integrated education through modest financial help (NIO, 2022).

Although archival evidence for the last 20 years, from 2004-2024 is restricted, it seems likely that other political issues, particularly the United Kingdom's decision to leave the European Union in 2016, have taken precedence over questions to do with integrated education. Once a peace deal had been struck and local democratic representation was reestablished, the drive for integrated schools weakened for the reasons above.

Conclusions

Although Northern Ireland and Newfoundland and Labrador share many similar cultural and educational attributes, including long histories of funding schools through separate grants to Roman Catholic and Protestant religious institutions, the late 20th century was the occasion of some remarkable social and political differences that are still developing at the time of writing. In Newfoundland and Labrador, through public referendum, a new Schools Act (1997) abolished separate denominational schools and established new governance arrangements involving a single public school system governed by elected trustees, rather than the Christian Churches. The transition to public schooling was controversial and met with many challenges—legal and otherwise—but in the end, a new model of school funding was put in place and the question of denominational school governance was put to rest. By contrast, in Northern Ireland the Belfast Agreement of 1998 called for the development of “integrated schools” that would serve both religious communities, however, only a small fraction of Northern Ireland's students now attend such schools.

What then is to account for the stark differences in the evolution of the education systems between the two jurisdictions, even as the governance structures were largely the same and the goals for integration/amalgamation somewhat similar? While the governments in both jurisdictions both supported a shift towards integration, the social context and policy drivers that determined the conditions for reform differed substantively on several fronts. We offer the following observations.

Initially, both jurisdictions' education systems were established and governed by Christian Churches. The persistent tensions between the Roman Catholic and Protestant communities not only led to the creation of separate school systems but also perpetuated their existence. However, Northern Ireland experienced significantly higher levels of social segregation—marked by distinct boundaries and neighbourhoods reinforcing religious identities—than Newfoundland and Labrador. In the latter, factors such as economic disparities, geographic dispersion, and declining enrolments were primary drivers of educational integration. While instances of religious intolerance occurred in Newfoundland and Labrador, religious violence had ceased by the turn of the 20th century. In contrast, the Belfast Agreement, concluding decades of conflict, occurred relatively recently in Northern Ireland.

In addition, governments in both contexts approached the prospect of reform carefully, with attempts to negotiate the creation of integrated/shared schools and, at least initially, to assure parents and the Churches that change would not be forced. In the case of Newfoundland and Labrador, a decisive result from the first referendum would have allowed for the creation of public schools, while maintaining denominational schools where number warrant. However, even as a negotiated agreement was being sought, the Churches were pursuing legal avenues to block progress. After the results from the first

referendum showed that public opinion on the issue was split, government pushed for a public education system with no option for separate schools and the public agreed.

In Northern Ireland, the government did not enforce integrated education; this remains the current policy. Integration was introduced through a model in which proposals for integrated schools could secure funding, coexisting and competing for resources with denominational schools. The first integrated schools were predominantly driven by grassroots movements led by local parent groups. The Catholic Bishops and their Protestant counterparts, wielding considerable political power and resources, actively opposed the government's push for integrated schools. This "soft" approach to integration lacked strong organisational support, thereby limiting scalability prospects. Conversely, in Newfoundland and Labrador, there was no provision for public funding of denominational or independent schools. The government, notably the Premier, also played a pivotal role as a policy entrepreneur in driving reforms.

Both Newfoundland and Labrador and Northern Ireland governments faced considerable opposition by the Churches. The actors who worked to resist amalgamation and the stated reasons for opposing the integration of Catholic and Protestant children were effectively the same. In Northern Ireland, Church authorities continue to be wary of ceding any control of schools to government and, not unlike the resistance to education reform in Newfoundland, the question of who controls schools and sets curricula has very deep roots in the broad political issues of identity and allegiance. Through their ownership and administration of schools the Protestant and Catholic churches in both contexts were able to shape and, in many cases, set educational policies and practices with enduring social effect (Economic and Social Research Council, 2017; Galway, 2019). The prospect of losing control of schools, therefore, leads to the proposition of losing the religious and denominational ethos of schools and by association, the strength of the connection of adherents to their faith communities. As such, any loss of authority over education may be conceptualized, not only a loss of power and influence, but also as an existential threat, at least in the local context.

In the aftermath of the 1989 Mount Cashel sexual abuse scandal, the Roman Catholic Church in Newfoundland and Labrador was already experiencing damage to its moral authority, which is believed to have factored into public opinion about denominational schools. After several court challenges, it was evident that action on the reform of schools would continue to be stalled by the churches, the government acted deliberately and decisively. While there were certain growing pains in establishing a public system of schools and some of these have been explored above, once these issues were resolved, the intended outcomes of reform were generally realized.

Finally, in both jurisdictions, nongovernmental organisations, particularly teachers' unions, supported educational integration for various educational and financial reasons. However, in Newfoundland and Labrador, the teachers' union displayed more organised and vocal advocacy for changes in denominational education than has been the case in Northern Ireland. The union proposed education reform in 1986 through a policy brief titled, *Exploring New Pathways*. Courts had previously upheld Churches' authority in determining a teacher's suitability based on religious affiliation, which the union deemed discriminatory. They urged the government to investigate the education system. Other nongovernmental organisations, including the Newfoundland and Labrador Human Rights Association, the Economic Council of Newfoundland and Labrador, and the St. John's Board of Trade, echoed this call for change. They highlighted the system's discriminatory, non-inclusive, duplicative, and excessively costly nature (Higgins, 2011).

In conclusion, it remains to be seen what the future of integrated schools will be in Northern Ireland. Since the initial discussion of integrated schools in 1974, today, some 50 years later, fewer than 10 percent

of the schools on NI have transitioned to integrated schools. Despite working models for amalgamation of schools and for the teaching of Religious Education in integrated schools, most children remain segregated in a duplicate and financially inefficient system. There are, of course, differences between the social, political, and educational environments in Northern Ireland and those in Newfoundland and Labrador. These differences make it likely that any attempt to follow the example of Newfoundland and Labrador in reorganising Northern Ireland's educational system would meet with even more staunch resistance than we saw in Newfoundland and Labrador. Nevertheless, Northern Ireland's educational and political leaders might consider the experience of this Canadian province as an example of what decisive political will can achieve as they work toward creating an educational system that would serve to diminish rather than amplify the differences between its religious and political communities.

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