

Research Newsletter



St Mary's
University College
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THE PARADOX OF VIOLENCE AND NON-VIOLENCE IN POLITICAL THOUGHT

The Europa Hotel, Belfast was the location for the Political Studies Association Annual International Conference on 3-5 April 2012 hosted by the University of Ulster. Guest speakers included David Blunkett MP, John Bercow MP and Martin McGuinness MP MLA. The conference provided an opportunity for Dr Birgit Schippers, a political theorist at the College, to showcase her research paper "Radical Politics or Ethics: Violence and Non-Violence in Judith Butler's Recent Political Thought".

In the proposal for her paper, Dr Schippers wrote, "The concept of violence has received much attention in recent political theory. It also figures prominently in Judith Butler's current writings on international political philosophy, ethics and post-9/11 politics. These texts can be read as Butler's topical response to the so-called war on terror, to the racialised and gendered discourse on terrorism and the framing of bodily vulnerability. Increasingly in her recent work, she poses fundamental questions about the role of violence in the formation of subjects and communities, and about the prospects for an ethics of non-violence. It is the aim of my paper to elucidate an apparent paradox in her argument: while she posits violence as generative, granting it a formative role in subject and community constitution, she also advocates an ethics of non-violence. Butler's response to this paradox, invoking an ethics of responsibility, and seeking recourse to the subversive displacement of the violence of norms, is an intriguing one. However, I want to suggest a more nuanced consideration of violence's disruptive and generative features as a way out of this impasse. Such an approach, I will argue, will strengthen the radical political strand in Butler's thought, which has been neglected in her recent turn to ethics."

INTERNATIONAL PARTNERS VISIT BELFAST FOR "STIMULA" PROJECT TEAM MEETING



An EU-funded project known as "STIMULA", which aims to develop innovative methodologies that will inspire post-primary pupils to consider a career in science and technology, held a project meeting on 22-23 March 2012 at the College. The project team, consisting of Kieran McGeown, Damian

Knipe and Martin Hagan, welcomed the international visitors to Belfast. They came from an education foundation in the Basque Country known as Elhuyar Fundazioa, a university in Spain known as Universidad de Zaragoza, a research and development company in Germany known as Phaenovum, a knowledge transfer centre in Germany known as Steinbeis Innovation Center, and a secondary school in Romania known as Colegiul National Nicolae Titulescu. The meeting focused on the research findings of post-primary pupils related to science and technology, as well as planning associated with teacher competences, pedagogy and linking schools with industry. Staff from Sentinus, an organisation that designs STEM programmes for schools, also attended the meeting.



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SPECIAL POINTS OF INTEREST

- Siobhán O'Doherty collaborated with a team to design an activity-led maths programme *Heinemann Active Maths Northern Ireland* published by Pearson in February 2012
- *An tÁisaonad* produced sixty exciting books for an early reading programme launched at a College event in February 2012

CREATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY USED WITH PUPILS

Support for Learning
British Journal of Learning Support

nasen
Helping Everyone Achieve

SfL



Dr Louise Long, a senior lecturer in Education, has had a research article published in the February 2012 issue of the journal “Support for Learning”. The research was conducted in collaboration with Therese McPhillips (St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra), Michael Shevlin (Trinity College, Dublin) and Ron Smith (Queen’s University Belfast). The paper “Utilising Creative Methodologies to Elicit the Views of Young Learners with Additional Needs in Literacy” examines the dominant ‘assessment’ and ‘participation’ stories of Key Stage 2 pupils with long-standing and marked literacy learning needs. It explores their views on increasing the level of participation they have towards the assessment and remediation of

additional needs. It also questions how they perceive themselves as literacy learners. The research adopted a case study approach and utilised creative methodologies within a focus group setting to investigate sensitively the views and experiences of pupils with additional literacy needs. The results are based on the outcomes from four schools in Northern Ireland that participated in the original cross-border study. Findings are discussed in the context of strategies for promoting holistic and empowering pathways for learners with additional needs in literacy.

“The research adopted a case study approach and utilised creative methodologies within a focus group setting to investigate sensitively the views and experiences of pupils with additional literacy needs.”

REF HIGHLIGHTED AT MEETING OF ACADEMIC BOARD

Members of the academic community in the College were presented recently with a talk on the forthcoming Research Excellence Framework (REF). During the presentation, reference was made to the three core elements of the REF—output, impact and environment. The academic audience was informed of the purpose of the REF and was provided with an outline of the grading criteria to be used by the REF sub-panel members in their assessment of the three core elements.

Following the presentation a discussion ensued on the College’s preparation for the REF in 2014 and indeed further into the future.

RELIGIOUS PLURALISM IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE DISCUSSED AT CONFERENCE

A research conference hosted in partnership with the Irish Centre for Religious Education (ICRE), the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), as well as the Mater Dei Institute Educational and Research Trust, was held in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick on 23 March 2012. The theme of the conference was *Toward Mutual Ground: Religious Pluralism in Educational Practice in Irish Schools*, and it offered practitioners from a broad range of schools and educational contexts an opportunity to discuss the question of how to recognise and respond to religious pluralism in schools in Ireland. The keynote speakers outlined the main principles for understanding religious pluralism, reflected upon international research, policy and practice concerning approaches taken to religious pluralism in educational practice, and highlighted the current situation and challenges in the Irish context.

One of the speakers, Rev Dr Niall Coll, a senior lecturer in Religious Studies at the College, presented his paper “Religious Pluralism in Educational Practice in Northern Ireland”. It sought to explore the debate about the place of Religious Education in both controlled and maintained schools in an increasingly diverse Northern Ireland. In the paper Rev Dr Coll surveyed the characteristic approaches to Religious Education in both types of schools. He explored also the implications for Religious Education in relation to the growth of a more culturally and religiously diverse society. This is evidenced by the recent requirement that Religious Education students at Key Stage 3 study two world religions other than Christianity. The paper concluded with an analysis of the place and importance of multi-faith education in Catholic schools today.

Rev Dr Coll is currently revising the paper into an article for publication in a volume edited by Gareth Byrne and Patricia Kieran, provisionally titled “Towards Mutual Ground” which is to appear in 2013.



Ivor Hickey with delegates at the participatory conference held in W5, Belfast.

EXPERTS AND PRACTITIONERS SHARE THEIR EXPERIENCE OF INSPIRING PUPILS THROUGH ART AND SCIENCE

The coordinators of a research project SCIART: Interdisciplinary Art & Science - Inspiring Pupils to Engage with Education, funded by the Esmeé Fairbairn Foundation, held a participatory conference in W5, Belfast on 29 March 2012. The conference had a range of keynote speakers and offered various activities organised by the two coordinators, Deirdre Robson and Ivor Hickey.

After registration, the delegates were welcomed and provided with an introductory outline of the research pilot. This was followed by Dyfrig Ellis, a headteacher from a Welsh primary school, who gave a heartening presentation on The Leonardo Effect curriculum model used in his particular school, and how it inspired both teachers and pupils in relation to making learning more interesting and exciting. Two inspirational case studies from the SCIART pilot project with 11-14 year old pupils in Scotland and Birmingham were then presented by teachers. They spoke about the challenges they faced when introducing the project in their schools and described the methods used to overcome them to inspire creativity among their pupils. The first morning session then drew to a close by referencing the teachers' experiences to the findings of the SCIART project in post-primary schools.

The second morning session began with a thought-provoking talk by Frank Crawford, an external evaluator of the project, focusing on transformation in post-primary schools. This was followed by a workshop requiring delegates to work in groups on a series of questions related to inspiring pupils in science and art. After lunch, an encouraging presentation was delivered by John Timmons, a timetable consultant, who introduced the audience to strategies which could help manipulate the school timetable in order to include new initiatives in post-primary schools. Following a second workshop, there was a plenary session where the speakers reviewed the comments made during the workshops, and offered opportunities for further discussion and suggestions from the delegates.



BOOK REVIEW APPEARS IN IRISH LITERARY SUPPLEMENT

Dr Peter Collins, a History lecturer at the College, recently contributed a book review to the Spring 2012 edition of the Irish Literary Supplement (Volume 31, Number 2). Dr Collins reviewed the 2010 book by Rebecca Graff-McRae, "Remembering and Forgetting 1916: Commemoration and Conflict in Post-Peace Process Ireland" published by the Irish Academic Press, Dublin. The title of the review article is "Commemorationists and Historians". At the end of his review Dr Collins comments, "Rebecca Graff-McRae has written an intellectually challenging book not least for its application of multidisciplinary theory, which might be called "non-native", to Irish commemorative history. Whether it is part of a new wave coming to shake up postrevisionist Irish historiography only time will tell".

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STRATEGIES TO PROMOTE IRISH LANGUAGE LEARNING

The Poliglott4.eu International Expert Seminar on *Early Language Learning* was held on 9-10 February 2012 in the city of Leeuwarden, Netherlands, and was attended by Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh, senior lecturer in Irish-medium education at the College. The presentation focused on the early years in Irish-medium schools and explored successful strategies used by educators in promoting Irish language learning as part of the holistic development of young children. Poliglott4.eu is a project which promotes multilingualism in Europe, arising from the deliberations of the EU Civil Society Platform on Multilingualism. The seminar was organised by the Mercator Research Centre on Multilingualism and Language Learning, a part of the Fryske Academy.



STAFF PROFILE

Ivor Hickey is an academic and active researcher from the College's Science



department whose teaching focuses on topics relating to science and society. These include human evolution, genes and race, genetics of disease, as well as gene and stem cell therapies. When he joined the College 13 years ago his main research interest focused on genetic instability in cancer cells, a topic on which he had published

extensively. He then turned his attention to science education and obtained several grants from the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council (BBSRC) to support research and development in biology and science education with schools. He also developed research interest in creativity within science and having collaborated with the Art department, he has been able to attract over £300,000 of funding from organisations including the National Endowment for Science, Technology and the Arts (NESTA), the Paul Hamlyn Foundation, and the Education Subject Centre advancing learning and teaching in education (ESCalate).

The initial project, known as "Flights of Imagination", began in 2004 and focused on creating a new concept relating to the synchronised integration of art and science in the primary school curriculum by devising and evaluating a teaching programme on the topic of flight. This initiative developed into a nationwide research pilot, known as "The Leonardo Effect", which began during 2006 in 20 primary schools. The second stage of this work, the "SCIART Project" is currently funded by the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation and takes place in post-primary schools. Currently, Ivor serves on the College Research Committee and chairs the Research Ethics Committee. He has also been a member of the Research Committee for the Irish Association of Social and Scientific Environmental Education (IASSEE), the Executive of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI), and he chaired the Action Cancer Research Committee. He has published articles in Cultural Studies of Science Education, Primary Science, and Science Teacher Education, and recently co-edited a book *The Leonardo Effect: Motivating Children To Achieve Through Interdisciplinary Learning* which is due to be published by Routledge/David Fulton in November 2012.