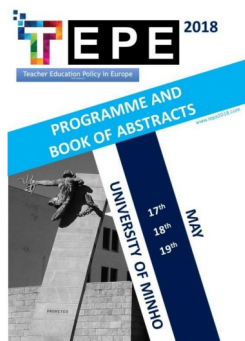


# Research Newsletter



St Mary's  
University College  
Belfast  
A College of Queen's University

## REFLECTIVE PRACTICE TASKS FOR STUDENTS



A member of the College's Curriculum, Pedagogy & Assessment (CPA) Research Group, Dr Martin Hagan (who was awarded a Doctorate in Education recently), attended the Teacher Education Policy in Europe Annual Conference held in the University of Minho, Braga, Portugal in May 2018. Martin's presentation, titled "Developing Self-Authorship Through Reflective Practice In Initial Teacher Education", referred to his research study which was interpretative and embedded within a co-constructivist paradigm. It considered the experiences of a

purposive sample of six students engaged on the first year of a four-year teacher education programme. Data were collected from individual episodic documents, along with semi-structured interviews conducted one year apart, and were subjected to a thematic analysis, underpinned by a hermeneutical, dialectical and interpretative approach. At the outset, the participants found the concept of reflection difficult to comprehend as it conflicted with the highly structured, didactic experience they had as pupils in school. Structured reflective tasks helped the students see the value of reflective activity in helping them clarify their professional learning experiences. Greater challenges arose as less-structured approaches were adopted, which when combined with the practical demands of everyday teaching, meant that the students tended to reflect in less meaningful ways.

## WRITING STRATEGIES FOR STUDENTS

Jonathan Worley, a member of the College's CPA Research Group, presented his research at the Higher Education Academy's Advance HE Teaching & Learning Conference held in Birmingham, England in July 2018. During his conference session, titled "Fostering Agency In Student Writing", Jonathan contrasted his experiences of teaching academic writing at undergraduate institutions in the United States of America (USA) with undergraduate institutions in Northern Ireland, focusing upon the issue of student agency. He emphasised that while the USA's pedagogy on writing has stressed the importance of creativity, independence and making choices, the test culture in the United Kingdom has discouraged students from venturing into these areas. Jonathan referred to his exploration of how students in the College initially viewed themselves as writers and followed this by an exemplification of the strategies used to encourage them to write with greater freedom and personal insight.

**AdvanceHE**

Teaching in the spotlight:  
Learning from global communities



### INSIDE THIS ISSUE

Reflective practice tasks for students  
Writing strategies for students  
Teaching short stories in Irish  
Developing STEM education in primary schools  
Immersing students in the theme of diversity  
Teachers' perceptions of meeting SEN pupils' needs  
Sharing research with immersion educators  
Challenges and CPD needs of Naiscoil teachers  
The Irish-medium classroom language climate  
Recommending teaching strategies and immersion pedagogy  
Components for readiness in transition to Irish-medium primary school  
Student teacher research in education conference 2018  
Schools challenged in promoting greater inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding  
Political changes altering the study of interdependence and human development  
Student teachers as reflective practitioners  
Engagement with ethical and political implications of new materialism  
Staff profile

## TEACHING SHORT STORIES IN IRISH



Padaí de Bléine, who is a member of the College's CPA Research Group, attended the launch of an online research journal, *Léann Teanga: An Reiviú*, which was held at the National University of Ireland, Galway, Ireland in May 2018. A paper written by Padaí, titled "An Gearrscéal Gníomhach", was featured in the language teaching section of the journal and it related to the teaching of short stories in Irish.



*Padaí de Bléine at the launch of the journal  
Léann Teanga: An Reiviú*

---

*"...featured in the language teaching section of the journal and it related to the teaching of short stories in Irish."*

---

## DEVELOPING STEM EDUCATION IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

The 36<sup>th</sup> Pupils' Attitudes Towards Technology International Conference took place at Athlone Institute of Technology, Athlone, Ireland in June 2018 and it featured a paper by Dr Kieran McGeown, a member of the College's CPA Research Group, in collaboration with Dr Michael Ievers from Stranmillis University College Belfast.

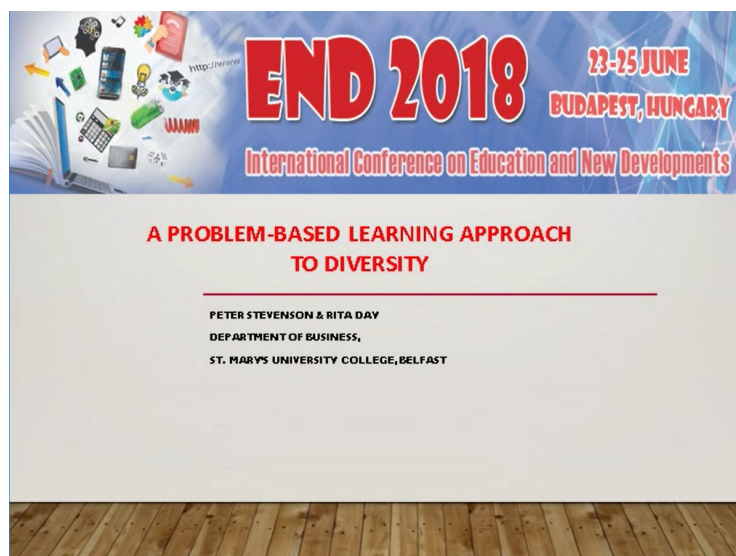
The aim of the research, which resulted in a paper titled "STEM In Northern Ireland Primary Schools: Where Is It At, And Where Should It Go?", was to record pupils' voices regarding how STEM education should be developed within the primary schools of Northern Ireland. These were recorded alongside the voices of those in positions to significantly impact upon the pupils' experiences. The principal objective was to film an academic documentary to constitute both a methodology for data collection and a medium for dissemination. Pupils were interviewed within small groups, while adults were interviewed individually. Key findings from the pupils revealed the relevance and importance they attributed to STEM education, as well as the enthusiasm with which they engaged in STEM experiences. From the adults, key findings revealed the critical need for training, the need for societal value of practical skills, the consensus that STEM education should be problem-based and compulsory, the need for effective transition, and the need for a more effective coalition with business.



*Dr Kieran McGeown during his presentation at the  
PATT International Conference*

## IMMERSING STUDENTS IN THE THEME OF DIVERSITY

Peter Stevenson, a member of the College's CPA Research Group, and Rita Day submitted a presentation to the Education and New Developments International Conference held in Budapest, Hungary in June 2018. This virtual presentation, titled "A Problem-Based Learning Approach To Diversity", focused on research that immersed students in the theme of diversity as an aspect of human resources, within small international groups. The presenters suggested that diversity is a positive approach to diversity management as well as the systematic, fair and objective management of workforce diversity, and can be triangulated into discrimination, difference and dominance. The objective was to achieve a better understanding of disabilities, by working on a real life case study. Students in the study attended a conference with other students from various European countries who worked together to find a solution to the case study during the three-day timeframe. Students needed to be open-minded and willing to listen to the opinions of others, in order to build upon their understanding of cultures, as well as behaviours, and immerse themselves in a different way of life. Students worked in small groups to tackle, and to try to solve, the problem. The method was problem-based learning using the seven-step approach of: clearing difficult words and terms; defining the problem; analysing the problem; systematic reorganisation (constructing a mind map); defining aims of learning; searching information; and reporting.



*'Virtual' presentation of research by Peter Stevenson & Rita Day at the END International Conference*

## TEACHERS' PERCEPTIONS OF MEETING SEN PUPILS' NEEDS

Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir, who is a member of the College's Irish-Medium Education (IME) Research Group, collaborated with Bairbre Tiernan and Ann Marie Casserly from St Angela's College Sligo to produce a paper titled "Towards Inclusive Education: Instructional Practices To Meet The Needs Of Pupils With Special Educational Needs In Multi-Grade Settings". This article was published in the International Journal of Inclusive Education in June 2018 and stemmed from a SCoTENS funded research project.

In the paper, the authors suggested effective inclusion of pupils with special educational needs (SEN) in multi-grade classrooms to be complex. It depended on the ability of teachers to meet challenges posed in delivering a broad and balanced curriculum, while simultaneously meeting the often quite specific needs of pupils with SEN. The paper provided details from the findings of research that investigated perceptions of mainstream teachers in relation to how they met the needs of pupils with SEN in multi-grade classrooms. It focused on adaptations to the instructional practices used in multi-grade classrooms, which facilitated the education of pupils with SEN alongside their peers. The research highlighted great similarity between multi-grade classrooms and inclusive classroom practices reported in the literature. Flexibility of grouping and teaching practices, as well as differentiation and planning, emerged as valuable in facilitating the effective inclusion of pupils with SEN in multi-grade settings.





## SHARING RESEARCH WITH IMMERSION EDUCATORS

In May 2018, three members of the IME Research Group, Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh, Dr Seán Mac Corraidh and Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir, attended the Second All-Ireland Research Conference on Immersion Education. They presented their individual pieces of research to an audience of linguists, researchers and Irish-medium immersion and immersion educators. The main aim of the conference was for delegates to critically reflect upon and share research in the context of immersion education, and this was done by providing the space to exchange and discuss new directions in the ever-evolving field of immersion education.



*Dr Seán Mac Corraidh, Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh & Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir at the Second All-Ireland Research Conference on Immersion Education*

---

*“... the conference was for delegates to critically reflect upon and share research in the context of immersion education ...”*

---

## CHALLENGES AND CPD NEEDS OF NAÍScoil TEACHERS

Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh's presentation, titled “Inniúlachtaí Teanga Múinteoirí sa Luaththumoideachas”, was offered at the Second All-Ireland Research Conference on Immersion Education held in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland in May 2018 under the theme An Tumoideachas: Deiseanna agus Dea-chleachtais (Immersion Education: Opportunities and Good Practice).



*Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh presenting her paper at the Second All-Ireland Research Conference on Immersion Education*

In her research, Eibhlín referred to the fact that a community's decision to set up an immersion model of education usually begins with a Naíscoil. She highlighted the challenge of recruiting staff who have the required childcare/education qualifications as well as the necessary degree of fluency in Irish to act as linguistic models for the Naíscoil children. Her research investigated the qualifications of leaders/teachers in thirty Naíscoil in the north of Ireland, their self-evaluation of their Irish in the work environment, and their continuing professional development needs.

## THE IRISH-MEDIUM CLASSROOM LANGUAGE CLIMATE

Dr Seán Mac Corraidh presented his research, titled “Teaching Grammar In Irish-Medium Education”, at the Second All-Ireland Research Conference on Immersion Education. It was held in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland in May 2018 under the theme An Tumoideachas: Deiseanna agus Dea-chleachtais (Immersion Education: Opportunities and Good Practice).

In summarising his paper, Seán suggested that immersion education involves the teaching of curricular content through the medium of an immersion target language. He referred to the teacher delivering comprehensible input using language that is focused on the pupils gaining skills and developing capabilities in areas of learning in the curriculum, but also that aids the acquisition of the immersion language by pupils. This is done through active, highly communicative teaching. Teachers have an eye on subject learning objectives and on language learning objectives. He acknowledged that recently researchers, including Jim Cummins and Roy Lyster, opine that the immersion pedagogy needs to be refined in order to bring about a counterbalance in subject and language learning. It is within these ideas that Seán’s paper suggested how the Irish-medium classroom language climate can be enriched through the expressive forms that are found in the living language and in literature.



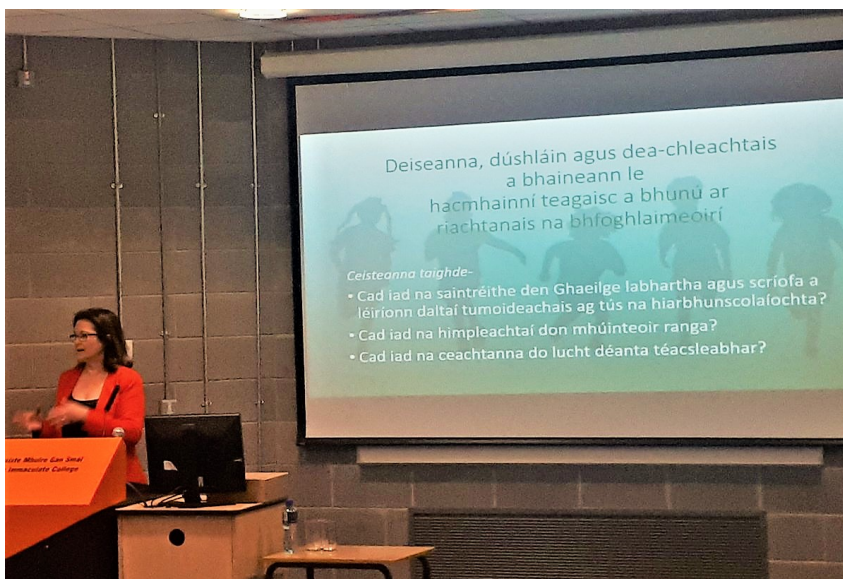
*Dr Seán Mac Corraidh presenting his paper at the Second All-Ireland Research Conference on Immersion Education*

## RECOMMENDING TEACHING STRATEGIES AND IMMERSION PEDAGOGY

Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir presented her paper on the linguistic competence of immersion pupils, titled “Measúnú ar an Ghaeilge ag daltaí EC3 sa Ghaelscolaíocht”, at the Second All-Ireland Research Conference on Immersion Education. It was held in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, Ireland in May 2018 under the theme An Tumoideachas: Deiseanna agus Dea-chleachtais (Immersion Education: Opportunities and Good Practice).

The aims of the research were to assess the spoken and written Irish of pupils at the start of Key Stage 3, to

analyse the data and to produce guidelines for writers of Key Stage 3 textbooks. The findings showed that the pupils’ acquisition of the target language allowed them to communicate with fluency and confidence. The grammatical and phonological patterns emerging after seven years of immersion education showed a wider range of variation among the pupils and is a reminder that the bi-lingualisation process, even in the immersion context, is a long-term development. Analysis of the evidence of pupils’ manipulation of the target language, as well as the linguistic features that were prevalent, led the researchers to make recommendations about teaching strategies and immersion pedagogy as well as resources and teaching materials.



*Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir presenting her paper at the Second All-Ireland Research Conference on Immersion Education*



## COMPONENTS FOR READINESS IN TRANSITION TO IRISH-MEDIUM PRIMARY SCHOOL

Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh, who is a member of the College's IME Research Group, took the opportunity to disseminate details of her research at a conference held in April 2018. The presentation was given during the multilingualism section of the First Conference on Frisian Humanities, held at the Fryske Academy, Leeuwarden, The Netherlands and it was titled "Educational Outcomes Of Irish-Medium Pre-School Education In The North Of Ireland".



The research explored which core components led to optimum readiness for transition to Irish-medium primary school and the extent to which these components were present in Irish-medium pre-schools in the statutory and voluntary sector in the north of Ireland. This included an examination of the learning outcomes, set or expected, for Irish-medium pre-schools, the criteria used to establish outcomes and how they were assessed. The research methods were qualitative including a desk-based legislative and policy analysis, a literature review and semi-structured interviews with school staff and strategic stakeholders. Findings revealed that Irish-medium pre-school practice was different from monolingual English-medium practice in a number of significant ways including the immersion pedagogies employed to develop pupils' understanding and expression. The findings indicated that curricular guidance, assessment practices, transition arrangements and frameworks for evaluating quality in Irish-medium settings should all reflect the nature of immersion pre-school Irish-medium education experienced by pupils.

---

*"... curricular guidance, assessment practices, transition arrangements and frameworks for evaluating quality in Irish-medium settings should all reflect the nature of immersion pre-school Irish-medium education experienced by pupils."*

---

## STUDENT TEACHER RESEARCH IN EDUCATION CONFERENCE 2018

The annual Student Teacher Research in Education Conference, which addressed the theme of new approaches to professional learning in initial teacher education, took place in the College in May 2018. The conference was opened by the Principal who spoke about the educational benefits of the Capstone module for final year students. These students presented their research projects to their peers on various education issues. A representative from the Irish National Teachers' Organisation spoke about his role and presented awards on behalf of the organisation to three students. The first was Clare Diamond for her research project titled "Enhancing The Teaching Of Algebra In Key Stage 3 Through The Design Of An Interactive E-Book". The second was Catherine Rocks for her research project titled "An Investigation Into The Challenges And Barriers To Roma Education In Northern Ireland And How To Address These". The third was Saorlaith Ní Chearnaigh for her research project titled "Cothu i nGaelscoileanna: cas staidear".



*B.Ed.4 Students, Conference Organiser, Supervisors, Invited Guest and College Principal at the Student Teacher Research in Education Conference*

## SCHOOLS CHALLENGED IN PROMOTING GREATER INTER-CULTURAL AND INTER-RELIGIOUS UNDERSTANDING

Dr Niall Coll, who is a member of the College's Catholic Education Research Group, was busy preparing for and writing up his research for dissemination at three conferences held in March, April and July 2018.

The first of his presentations was given at the Religious Education in Catholic Schools Research Conference, held in March 2018 at the University of London's Heythrop College, London, England and it was titled "Catholic Religious Education And Interfaith Dialogue". The second presentation by Niall, titled "Interreligious Dialogue And The Catholic School", was offered at the 29<sup>th</sup> Annual Symposium of the Association of Catholic Institutes of Education, held in the University of Glasgow's School of Education, Glasgow, Scotland in April 2018 under the theme Catholicism, Culture and Education.

The final paper was presented at the Christianity, Education and Changing Contexts International Conference held in Liverpool Hope University, Liverpool, England in July 2018. During his conference session, Niall's paper, titled "Interreligious Dialogue And The Contemporary School", sought to explore how schools, those communities of early interaction and learning, are arguably the first place where the shape of the challenge involved in promoting greater inter-cultural and inter-religious understanding comes into full view. It also raised questions concerning how best to approach this work, especially in the context of the increasingly multi-cultural and multi-religious nature of societies in Western Europe.

### INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: CHRISTIANITY, EDUCATION AND CHANGING CONTEXTS



INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: CHRISTIANITY,  
EDUCATION AND CHANGING CONTEXTS

Liverpool Hope University, UK | Friday 6<sup>th</sup> – Sunday 8<sup>th</sup> July 2018



## POLITICAL CHANGES ALTERING THE STUDY OF INTERDEPENDENCE AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

Dr Gerard McCann, a member of the College's International Relations & Global Justice (IRGJ) Research Group, had a research paper featured in the journal *Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review*, which was published in the Spring of 2018. This was a special issue on development education in politically interesting times. Gerard's paper, titled "Global Learning In A Volatile World", introduced the special issue, which looked at how political changes have altered the manner in which interdependence and human development are studied.

In his introduction to the paper, Gerard suggested that international development and development education are facing some of the most serious challenges to confront the sectors in a generation. He argued that with ongoing questions being placed on the legitimacy of democratic processes and policy transparency, and with constant undermining of the core development principle of 'interdependence', the theoretical discourse underlying global inter-connectivity has been brought into sharp focus. He went on to add that delegitimising the post-war consensus on global partnership, solidarity, integration and harmonisation has become so commonplace across the political establishment and media that, arguably, it threatens the nature of democratic engagement itself. Gerard believed that re-energised xenophobia, populism, micro-nationalism and economic protectionism have brought forward not only a widespread rejection of internationalisation and interdependence, but this combative political environment has exposed threats to the very concepts of interculturalism, rights, freedom, tolerance and refuge – concepts that are central to the outworking of the international development and development education sectors.

**POLICY & PRACTICE**  
*A Development Education Review*

## STUDENT TEACHERS AS REFLECTIVE PRACTITIONERS

Three B.Ed.4 students had their research featured in the July 2018 issue of The STeP Journal: Student Teacher Perspectives. This is an online journal for student teachers designed to showcase excellent research and scholarly activity by student teachers. The students' research projects were supervised by Dr Elaine McLaughlin. The journal shows student teachers as reflective practitioners, with the ability to engage with theory to enhance their practice.

One of the students was Conor Meyler and his paper was titled "An Investigation Into The Correlation Between Parent's Influence In Their Child's Early Specialisation In Sport". The second student was Conor Convery and his paper was titled "An Investigation Into The Impact Of Gender On Early Specialisation In Sport". And the third student was Damian Bell and his paper was titled "An Investigation Into The Impact/ Influence Age Has On The Early Specialisation Of Children In Sport".

St Mary's University College, Belfast  
191 Falls Road  
Belfast  
BT12 6FE  
Northern Ireland

Phone: 02890 327678

Fax: 02890 333719

E-mail: [research\\_admin@smucb.ac.uk](mailto:research_admin@smucb.ac.uk)



St Mary's  
University College  
Belfast  
A College of Queen's University

## ENGAGEMENT WITH ETHICAL AND POLITICAL IMPLICATIONS OF NEW MATERIALISM

Dr Birgit Schippers, a member of the College's IRGJ Research Group, presented her research at the British International Studies Association Annual Conference held in Bath, England in June 2018. During her conference session Birgit's paper, titled "New Materialism, Corporeality And Ethics", worked towards a conception of ethics rights that is informed by the ideas of new materialism. To develop her argument, she unpacked various positions that travel by the name of 'materialism'. Furthermore, she assessed potential assemblages of the human/non-human and what this means for the way we conceive of, or even talk about, ethics. Birgit argued that new materialism's emphasis on embodiment, bodily materiality and corporeal relationality provides important insights into the way we understand 'the human'. However, she was less convinced by the ethico-political pronouncements and significance of some of the work associated with new materialism and she concluded by gesturing towards the need for a detailed and explicit engagement with the ethical and political implications of new materialism.



British International  
Studies Association



## STAFF PROFILE



Denise McKee joined the staff of the College in 2006 and holds the position of senior lecturer in Education. She is approaching the end of her doctoral study at Queen's University Belfast (QUB) and has found that the pursuit of this professional doctorate has enabled her to broaden her participation in research activities. Denise's focus for her study is the social and collective identities of Irish language learners and speakers, and the keen interest she has for the use of visual arts as a method of enquiry has supported her investigation of this subject.

In addition to presenting aspects of her doctoral research at the College's research seminar series, she has also presented her research findings at a number of conferences throughout Ireland. In 2014, Denise presented a paper at the Education Centre based in the Institute of Technology, Sligo. The theme of the research conference was 'Researching and Writing Irish Storyscapes' and focused on research that had a methodological or creative interest in narrative. Denise's paper was titled, 'Anglo' or 'Gael'? *An Auto-Ethnographic Exploration of the Cross-Currents of Identity and Experience in the Life of an Irish Speaker*. The following year she presented a paper at a research conference on immersion education, which took place at Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. Drawing upon her professional doctorate study, she presented a paper titled *Perspectives on Students' Opinions of their Competence and Needs in Relation to Teaching in the Irish-Medium Primary Sector*.

Denise is a member of the IME Research Group and during 2016/17 she was its chairperson. In the course of her tenure as chair, she was involved in the organisation of the First All-Ireland Irish-Medium Research Conference, in May 2017. The theme of the conference was 'Leading Learning in Irish-Medium Education'. In October 2017, Denise participated in a SCoTENS doctoral round-table event where she presented aspects of her study to other doctoral students, and in December of that year she was asked by Professor Joanne Hughes (QUB) to make a presentation of her doctoral methodology to a group of doctoral students.