

Research Newsletter



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

RESEARCH VISIT TO UNITED NATIONS GENEVA

The United Nations Office at Geneva was the venue visited by Dr Birgit Schippers in March 2019, where she attended the meeting of a group of governmental experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS). Birgit's focus was to conduct research fieldwork in the form of ethnographic observation and the collection of written material, as well as networking with practitioners and scholars. The topic of LAWS, colloquially known as 'killer robots', is a key concern of Birgit's current research on the ethics and politics of emerging technologies. The meeting included delegations from the High Contracting Parties to the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, as well as non-governmental organisations and representatives from academia.



Dr Birgit Schippers at the UN Office, Geneva

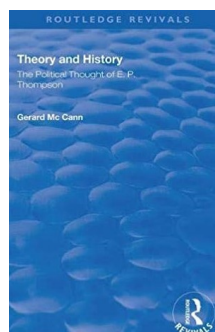
The discussions explored the potential challenges that LAWS pose to international humanitarian law. Delegates also sought to establish a common understanding of the meaning of autonomy in weapons systems, and they aimed to clarify the significance of human-machine interactions in the development and deployment of LAWS.



ROUTLEDGE REPUBLISHES ACADEMIC'S BOOK

Dr Gerard McCann had his book, titled "Theory And History: The Political Thought Of E.P. Thompson", republished in May 2019. First published in 1997, the aim of Gerard's book was to look at the historical materialism of E.P. Thompson while introducing him as a political thinker of distinction.

The study examined many aspects of Thompson's life and work to give a comprehensive statement on his theory of historical change. It surveyed the intellectual background from which he emerged, the core values of socialist humanism as understood by his generation of the Left, his contribution to history from below, his critique of structuralist Marxism, and his practical input to political dissent. The scope of the study covered fifty years of socialist polemics and offered an insight into the battles which were fought between the old and new Left until the collapse of command-economy communism in 1989. The work of Thompson was presented throughout as a testimony to a lineage of social thinkers, as well as to the ideal of the common weal much cherished by radical practitioners of the past.



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GUEST EDITORIAL ARTICLE ON DEVELOPMENT EDUCATION FEATURED IN JOURNAL

Issue twenty-eight of the journal, *Policy And Practice: A Development Education Review*, was published in the Spring of 2019 and featured a guest editorial article by Dr Gerard McCann titled “The Development, Conflict And Security Nexus: Development Education As Peace-Building”. In the article, Gerard referred to how education has been a counter-balance to security across the world in an attempt to build peaceful interdependent societies. He outlined the tensions between development and security in terms of spending and aid, as well as the complexities of development education and the various terminologies associated with

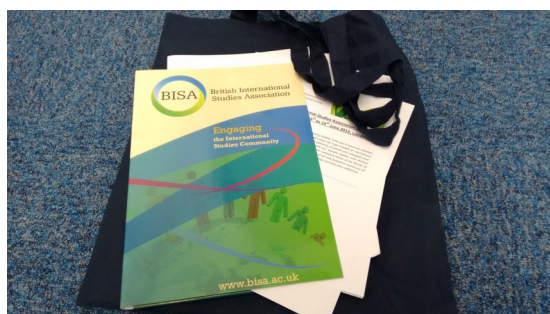
peace education. He offered various definitions of and viewpoints towards peace education, as well as ways of implementing peace education in schools. In concluding his article, Gerard wrote: “... educating for peace has a particular and important role in the process of human development. In effect, learning to live peacefully is implicit to the process of overcoming societal, causal, intercommunity, domestic, state and structural violence. All are implicated in the same dynamic, working towards a culture of reconciliation and peace building as a developmental process.”



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CONFERENCE PANEL’S RESEARCH ON LETHAL AUTONOMY IN MILITARY SYSTEMS

The British International Studies Association (BISA) held its annual conference in London during June 2019 and one



of the panels, Critical Perspectives On Lethal Autonomy In Military Systems, was convened and chaired by Dr Birgit Schippers. During the panel session, Birgit presented her research through a paper titled “Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems And The Ethico-Politics Of Vulnerability”, which accompanied four other paper presentations. In her paper Birgit considered the notion of vulnerability as an ethico-political response to developments in the field of lethal autonomous weapons systems (LAWS).

The paper proceeded in two steps. First, it extended vulnerability’s deployment in recent critical theory, e.g. in efforts to articulate opposition to war and militarisation, or in the formulation of feminist and LGBTI discourses, to writings associated with ‘new materialism’ and ‘posthumanism’. These critical theories, their respective relational ontologies and epistemologies, together with their focus on human-nonhuman networks and a wider commitment to relational conceptions of ethics, are said to displace human exceptionalism and anthropocentrism by emphasising instead the significance of distributed cognition environments and practices of co-produced knowledges and worlding. Developing this discussion, the paper asked, second, how the resources offered by an ethics of vulnerability, including its stress on relationality and on the decentring of human autonomy and agency, provide a critical perspective on the problem of killer robots.

Birgit suggested that the effects of an ethics of vulnerability are paradoxical: while the foregrounding of the subject’s relationality and entanglement appears to curtail the subject’s capacity for agency, vulnerability also generates conditions for critical ethico-political strategies that counter the politics of LAWS.

RESEARCH ON CULTURALLY DIVERSE CLASSROOMS

The conference of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland (ESAI) took place in Sligo, Ireland during April 2019 under the theme Education In Times Of Change, Choice And Challenge. It was attended by Peter Stevenson and a colleague from outside the College who presented their paper titled “Preparing Irish Student Teachers For Culturally Diverse Classrooms: Exploring Opportunities, Challenges And Perspectives From Both Jurisdictions” (referring to

Northern Ireland (NI) and the Republic of Ireland (RoI)). Their research aimed to identify the factors which influence the extent to which student teachers critique and adapt their pedagogies in order to minimise the potential for excluding or minoritising pupils in culturally diverse classrooms. Students were introduced to Critical Media Literacy as a concept, and they practiced and were supported in the critique of popular media, in particular the unpacking of hidden messages or subtext contained in the representation of minorities across various media forms. Students also created posters for culturally diverse schools.

The researchers viewed all posters and gathered data via focus groups from more than fifty students. A thematic critique of the findings indicated that the poster topics chosen and issues raised by the students were primarily related to current political events, e.g. same-sex marriage. Consequently gender and, to a lesser degree, race were the dominant topics chosen by students from the RoI. The ongoing religious and political tensions in NI, in particular the collapse of the NI Assembly, were of primary concern to the NI students and consequently religion and, to a lesser degree, disability were the dominant topics chosen. It was evident that the institutions’ intervention heightened students’ awareness of their role in opposing or supporting the minoritising of pupils through their critique and use of media in the classroom. Students acknowledged the importance of avoiding identity reductionism, which was not evidenced in practice, in their posters and responses during the focus groups. The students’ habitus, i.e. their own life experiences influenced by their social and political contexts, appeared to determine the degree to which they empathised with and ascribed blamelessness to those who were minoritised by society and consequently, their adaptation of pedagogical and other practices.



ACADEMIC IS KEYNOTE SPEAKER AT CONFERENCE

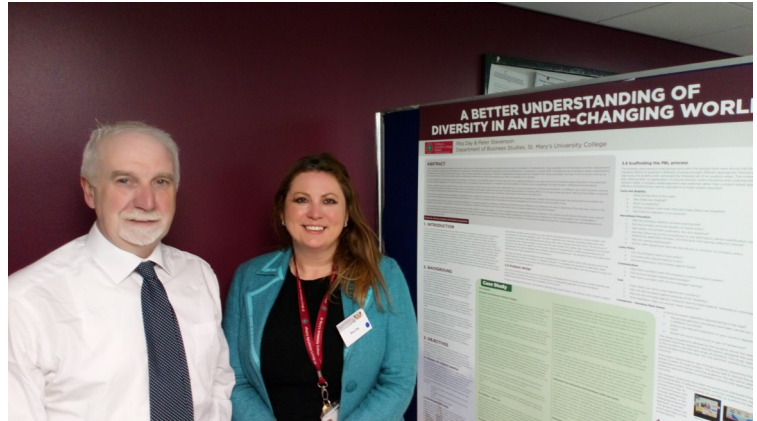
The EUROGEO 2019 Annual Conference, titled Hidden Geographies, was attended by Dr Tracey McKay during August 2019 and it was held in Ljubljana, Slovenia. Tracey’s research paper, which she presented as a keynote speaker, was titled “Hidden Geographies Within Initial Teacher Education: Trainee Teachers Encountering ‘Otherness’ In The Museum Of Orange Heritage, Belfast, Northern Ireland”. It focused on her

recent research on the perceptions held by Northern Ireland students of initial teacher education, from a mainly Catholic/Nationalist background, towards the Orange Order. The short case study by Tracey sought to contextualise the students’ responses and considered the extent to which memory contributed to those perceptions. The paper concluded with a short reflection on the implications for initial teacher education as it strives to play its part in the realisation of the shared society set out in the Good Friday Agreement.



POSTER OUTLINES RESEARCH AT LOCAL CONFERENCE

The Annual Learning and Teaching Conference, held at Queen's University Belfast in April 2019, had Peter Stevenson and Rita Day in attendance as they presented a research poster titled "A Better Understanding Of Diversity In An Ever-Changing World". The theme of the research conference was Shaping Change In An Educational Setting, and it brought together a diverse range of student-facing academic and professional support staff to share good practice.

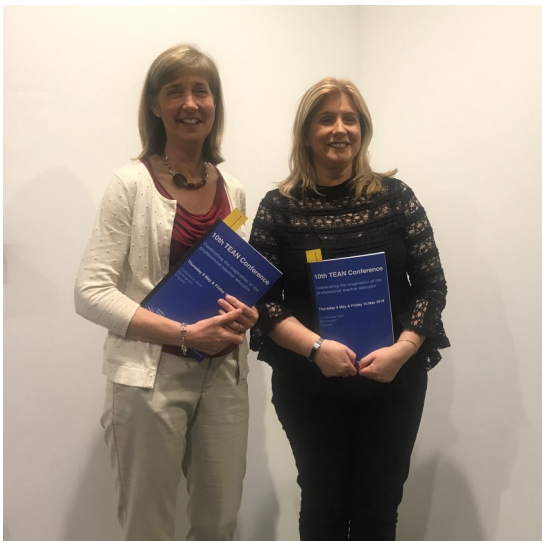


Peter Stevenson and Rita Day presenting their research poster at QUB

RESEARCH ON EVOLVING NATURE OF STUDENT TEACHERS' NEEDS

There was a team of academic staff who attended the Teacher Education Advancement Network (TEAN) Annual Conference in Birmingham, England during May 2019 to present papers based on their research related to teacher education. The theme of the conference was Celebrating The Inspiration Of The Professional Teacher Educator.

The first paper, presented by Claire Connolly and Deirdre Cree, was titled "Student Teachers With Specific Needs: A Changing Landscape. The View From Northern Ireland". Drawing on statistics from a specialist institution of teacher education in Northern Ireland, the paper aimed to contribute to informed debate regarding the changing landscape of student teachers' specific needs by exploring the evolving nature of those needs over the last five years. During the 2017-18 academic year, student support staff in the specialist institution of teacher education reported that the landscape had shifted further in terms of the issues presented by students, as well as the number of students entitled to support. As a result, an analysis of available data was undertaken to identify trends in terms of the nature of the students' needs, as well as the number of students presenting their needs. The paper disseminated the findings of that analysis.



Claire Connolly and Deirdre Cree at the TEAN conference

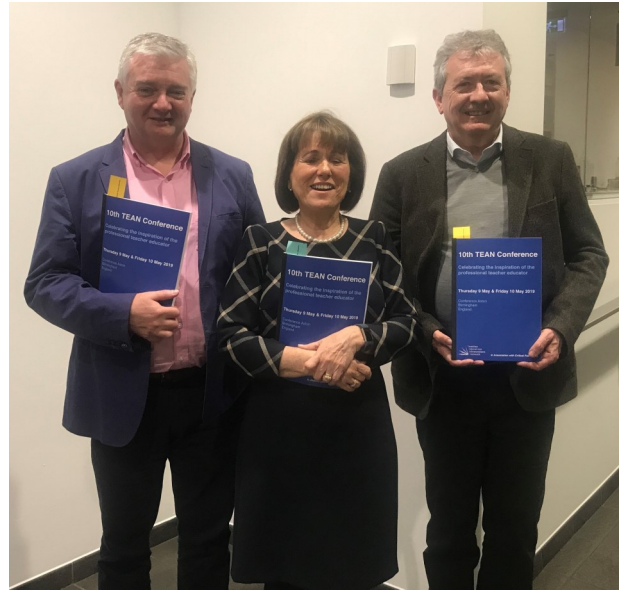
The presentation began by setting the context for the specialist institution in Northern Ireland and by summarising the demographic of the student population, it then went on to outline the methodology that was used to underpin the study. The trends that were identified through the analysis of available data were presented to highlight the nature of the specific needs of today's student teachers in Northern Ireland. The analysis also aimed to provide some insight into the range of issues emerging, which may impact upon how the individual needs can be best met by teacher educators while ensuring relevant competence frameworks are achieved by students. The conclusion identified the key issues emerging and considered the implications of these for the professional learning and practice of student teachers and the teaching profession in general.

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CONFERENCE FEATURES COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH ON SCHOOL LEADERSHIP

The second paper was presented by Dr Martin Hagan and colleagues from outside the College and was titled “Learning Leaders: The Role Of The General Teaching Council For Northern Ireland In Developing Leadership Competence”. The aim of the paper was to present the rationale for, and the inherent challenges in, developing a leadership competence framework in the context of Northern Ireland. The General Teaching Council for Northern Ireland (GTCNI), as the professional body for teachers, was subsequently tasked with developing leadership competence to support the aims of a Department of Education (Northern Ireland) strategy published in 2016 called “Learning Leaders: A Strategy For Teacher Professional Learning”.

This reflective paper reported on the development and the inherent challenges of this work. It began by outlining the role of the GTCNI in ensuring broad consultation with the professional community and the management of different ‘voices’ and perspectives, and continued by disentangling the concepts of leadership and management and defining leadership in the context of the strategy. The paper referred to the proposal of a set of guiding principles to underpin the development of the leadership competence framework, and highlighted the challenges involved in undertaking work of this scope and significance. Critically, the paper discussed the importance of developing leadership competences that are not only integral to all stages of a teacher’s career and can contribute to a process of personal reflection, but which can also assist with the identification of professional learning needs for school leaders and provide a framework for continuous professional learning and development.



Dr Martin Hagan, Carmel McCartan (St. Louise’s Comprehensive College) and Gerry Devlin (GTCNI)

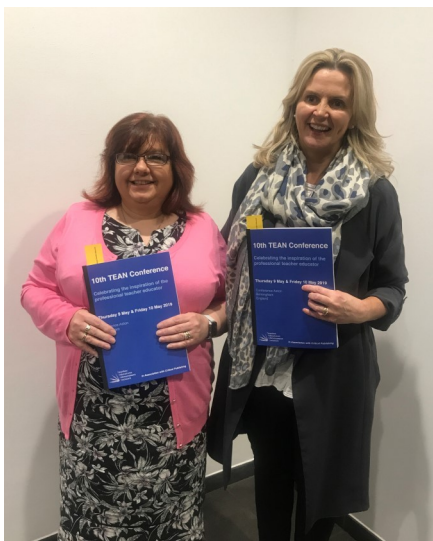
USING ICT CREATIVELY WITH FUTURE TEACHERS

The third paper was presented by Geraldine Parks and Clare Halligan and was titled “The Creative Use Of ICT To Improve Problem Solving Skills In Student Teachers”. The paper aimed to explore the impact of the improved use of ICT in numeracy with undergraduate teachers with an emphasis in using programmable devices as a cross curricular resource.

The creative use of ICT in teaching is becoming more and more debated as the nature of classrooms and the skills required for the future are changing. Whilst exposure varies, society is becoming more and more dependent on technology and future teachers have to feel confident in applying this to their teaching. The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) in Northern Ireland promotes the use of ICT to improve

thinking skills, develop self-motivation and encourage flexible thinking. The study aimed to establish the needs of student teachers and direction of professional learning with a view to identifying good practice and address barriers to implementation of successful professional learning course. The research project aimed to provide a way forward and build links with other professional learning opportunities including working with industry to develop skills and competences and encourage creativity through entrepreneurship and collaborative practice.

In broad terms, the main research questions included, What are undergraduate teacher experiences of understanding and using programmable devices as a cross curricular resource? How can increased experience and practice, in their professional knowledge, be adapted to take account of a technological changing society and how will this improve their confidence and understanding going forward to improve the learning experiences for children? The findings demonstrated that the majority of student teachers lacked knowledge and experience with an ever increasing variety of devices and wished to have more training and experience of coding and its uses in a cross curricular environment.



Geraldine Parks and Clare Halligan with the TEAN conference programme

ACADEMIC PROVIDES ADVICE ON EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP WITHIN FEMALE SPORT

Dr Elaine McLaughlin gave a presentation at the Female Sports Forum's conference held during March 2019 in Belfast, Northern Ireland. The theme of the conference was The Ultimate Goal: Embedding Cultural Change and Elaine's talk was titled "Building Team Culture And Leadership In Female Sport". Over one hundred sports sector staff, volunteers and professionals, from across Northern Ireland, attended the conference after which they became inspired and better equipped to develop the ultimate goal of cultural change within their sporting organisations, academic institutions and local communities.

A workshop delivered by Elaine related to the four key pillars outlined in the Female Sports Forum's active, fit and sporty strategy which include media, leadership, role models, as well as research and evaluation. Through listening to Elaine's presentation, delegates developed a knowledge of how to develop effective leadership and positive team cultures.



Dr Elaine McLaughlin speaking at the Female Sports Forum Conference

ARTICLE ON TEACHING POETRY IN PRIMARY SCHOOL

An article, co-authored by Dr Brian Hanratty and Dr Peter McPolin, was chosen for publication during Spring 2019 in the academic journal Changing English: Studies In Culture And Education. The title of Brian and Peter's paper was "Re-Focusing The Teaching Of Poetry At Key Stage Two In Northern Ireland: Some Literary-Critical And Pedagogical Explorations" and it argued that there is scope for considerable change and improvement in the way in which poetry is taught at Key Stage Two in Northern Ireland.



Dr Peter McPolin and Dr Brian Hanratty with the journal that featured their co-authored research article

In making this case for significant improvement, the paper had three interconnected parts. In the first part, a range of critical ideas highlighted the richness of poetry as a literary genre. Secondly, a number of pedagogical ideas were presented, which emphasised the enjoyment of poetry as an end in itself. In the third part, there was firstly a comparative evaluation of the statutory requirements for teaching Key Stage Two poetry in Northern Ireland and England. Secondly, the results of a questionnaire, which was distributed to a reasonably representative selection of literacy coordinators in primary schools across Northern Ireland, were evaluated. The results suggested that there is indeed considerable scope for improvement in the teaching of poetry at Key Stage Two in Northern Ireland.

"... it argued that there is scope for considerable change and improvement in the way in which poetry is taught at Key Stage Two in Northern Ireland".

INTERVIEW HELD WITH CO-AUTHOR OF PUBLISHED RESEARCH REPORT

Northern Visions Television (NVTV) conducted an interview in March 2019 with Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh, who discussed her newly published research on educational outcomes for children in Irish-medium nurseries. At



Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh and Ciarán Ó Brolcháin (NVTV)

the beginning of the interview, Eibhlín talked about the recent publication of the findings from the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) funded research report, referring to the reason for the study, the linguistic importance of Irish-medium education in nursery schools, and the rise in the number of children attending Irish-medium nursery schools. Eibhlín then went on to outline some differences between voluntary and statutory Irish-medium nursery schools in terms of accommodation, pay and working conditions for staff, and the qualifications of staff.



Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh being interviewed for NVTV

CONFERENCE PAPER LEADS TO PUBLICATION IN ACADEMIC JOURNAL

A special edition of TEANGA, the Journal of the Irish Association for Applied Linguistics, featured a research article from Dr Eibhlín Mhic Aoidh in March 2019 titled “Factors Which Impact On Transitions From Irish-Medium Náiscoil To Bunscoil”. Eibhlín’s paper reported on research commissioned by the Department of Education (Northern Ireland) on the educational outcomes of Irish-medium pre-school settings.



The research explored which core components lead to optimum readiness for transition to Irish-medium primary school and the extent to which these components are present in Irish-medium náiscoileanna in the statutory and voluntary sector in the north of Ireland. The research methods were qualitative including a desk based legislative and policy analysis, a literature review, and semi-structured interviews with school staff. Findings indicated that Irish-medium náiscoil practice is different from monolingual English-medium practice in a number of ways including transition practices. There were also differences between statutory and voluntary náiscoileanna. A number of recommendations were made in order to ameliorate differences in provision and associated inconsistencies and to ensure equality in provision and the best outcomes and transition experiences possible for young Irish-medium learners.

NEW ERASMUS+ PROJECT

Joe Hughes, John Rafferty and Dr Catherine Quinn are partners in an Erasmus+ project titled “EMERGENT: Gender Awareness And Implementation Strategies In STEM Education”. The project sees a need for research within gender issues in science education and a change within teacher education and training. Eight project partners plan to revise and strengthen the professional profile of the teaching profession, with an aim of fostering equity and inclusion in science education. The project’s main objective is to raise and share good science education practices for gender balance through innovative workshops involving different educational professionals.

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TWO ACADEMIC MEMBERS OF STAFF HAVE THEIR RESEARCH PUBLISHED IN THE SAME IRISH JOURNAL

The New University of Ireland Galway launched the most recent edition of *Léann Teanga: An Reiviú* in May 2019, which was attended by Padaí de Bléine who had a paper featured in the publication. The title of Padaí’s paper was “Céim ar an Bhealach: spléachadh ar an chéad chaibidil de *Mo Bhealach Féin* le Seosamh Mac Grianna”.

Dr Seán Mac Corraidh also had a paper included in the publication and it was titled “Mic léinn san ardoideachas ag dul i ngleic le húrscéal Gaeilge: cás-staidéar ag amharc ar a spéis agus a ndúil ann”.



Padaí de Bléine holding the journal that featured his research article

STAFF PROFILE



Catherine Gilliland has been a member of staff in the College for the past twenty-one years. She attributes both her interest and success in the area of research to the College’s Erasmus programme. As part of its European links, Catherine was invited to present at the Tell Me A Story, Show Me The World conference held in the Zurich University of Teacher Education (PH Zurich). The image chosen for the conference’s publicity appropriately showed two children looking at a map of the world contained within a huge speech

bubble. The conference aimed to celebrate storytelling and reading as a window on the world. It was this opportunity that prompted Catherine to write and deliver research presentations nationally and internationally. She used her natural talent in storytelling to engage audiences in the world of literacy and to addict children to literacy.

In September 2013, Catherine was the keynote speaker for the Literacy Association of Ireland (LAI) annual conference in Marino College, Dublin. She took the theme of addiction and brought conference members on a story journey of how this can be achieved in a variety of classroom scenarios. As a result, she was interviewed by Inside Education, which is an Irish radio programme on news and stories from the world of education.

Catherine spent time recently writing a chapter for an internationally acclaimed book, titled “Playful Teaching And Learning”, which was published by Sage in 2017. Her chapter, titled “Playful Approaches To Literacy”, brought readers on a journey through three interconnecting themes supporting holistic development of essential early literacy skills. This book is used widely in teacher education and early years study courses across the world.

Catherine speaks annually at the United Kingdom Literacy Association conference and the LAI annual conference. She has had six articles published in the LAI’s Literacy News, written both individually and in conjunction with her colleagues in the College.