

Research Newsletter



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

COLLEGE'S ONLINE ANNUAL STAFF RESEARCH EVENT 2021

The fourth Annual Staff Research Event took place online during June 2021, with the aims of providing the time and space for academic staff to disseminate the outcomes of their research with colleagues and of mapping out plans for the research groups. The event featured presentations from four members of academic staff who shared information on their current or recent research projects. This gave rise to much discussion, as the presenters took questions from those in attendance, and they appreciated the feedback from their colleagues. Following the four online presentations, members of each research group met online again in their corresponding groups and discussed their research plans for the upcoming academic year.

After a welcome and introduction from the Research Officer, the first presentation was delivered by Padaí de Bléine. It was titled 'Iniúchadh ar Thionchar an Phiarsaigh ar Mháire agus é ag scríobh Mo Dhá Róisín agus ábhair eile' and offered a close examination of the influence of Pearse on Máire when he was writing Mo Dhá Róisín and other subjects. The second presentation, from Dr Gerard McCann, was titled 'Select Research in the Irish Collection of the Jagiellonian Library' and referred to Gerard's upcoming visit to conduct research at the Jagiellonian University in Kraków.

The third presentation was given by Dr Brian Hanratty. It was titled 'Two New Research Papers: Two Journeys of Exploration' and informed colleagues of his recent research articles that were featured in the academic journal *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*. The final presentation of the day, from Dr Seán Mac Corraidh, was titled 'Grinnléitheoireacht á meas ag mic léinn ar chúrsaí Gaeilge (BA agus BEd) mar mhodh múinte le bheith ag foghlaim faoi scríbhneoireacht liteartha i nGaeilge' and examined students on Irish language courses evaluating the close reading of texts as a teaching method to learn about literary writing in Irish.

The event was brought to a conclusion by the Chairperson of the Research Committee who congratulated the four members of academic staff in relation to their presentations, wished them continued success with their research and emphasised the importance of academic staff further developing their own research projects into publications.



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DEVELOPING A CRITICAL LITERACY PERSPECTIVE IN STUDENT TEACHERS

The annual conference of the Educational Studies Association of Ireland took place during March 2021 and among the many Zoom presentations, there was one from Dr Donna Hazzard in parallel session six on the second day of this online conference. Donna's presentation was titled 'Inclinations of Habitus and the Challenge of Changing Dispositions: Critical Literacy as a Social Imperative' and was based on research connected to her recent doctoral study.

In her research presentation, Donna drew on a Bourdieusian analysis to argue that having a critical literacy perspective is vitally important because it fosters tendencies that dispose student teachers to work in the direction of social justice and, in so doing, has the potential to help mitigate some of the barriers exacerbating inequality. She considered how developing a critical literacy perspective can nurture student teachers' ideas and

understanding about teaching for social justice. She argued that being critically literate can provide philosophical principles that help student teachers connect what is done in schools with the wider social world and has the potential to reframe student teachers' perceptions about the world and about the possibilities of a more just education system. Donna's action research study was conducted in a teacher education college and involved the evaluation of eight self-selecting student teachers' experiences as they participated in a literacy module infused with critical literacy.



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COLLABORATION RESULTS IN PUBLISHING CLASSROOM RESEARCH

Dr Geraldine Magennis collaborated with a former Masters-level student from the College, Gemma Fitzpatrick, to write an article for a publication jointly produced by the English Association and the United Kingdom Literacy Association. This publication, titled English 4-11, enhances primary education by providing articles on innovative practice and reports on classroom research, accompanied by interviews with authors that generate discussion points. Geraldine's co-authored piece was titled 'Using Innovative Methods to Capture Primary Pupils' Perspectives on Reading for Pleasure' and it appeared in the current issue during August 2021.

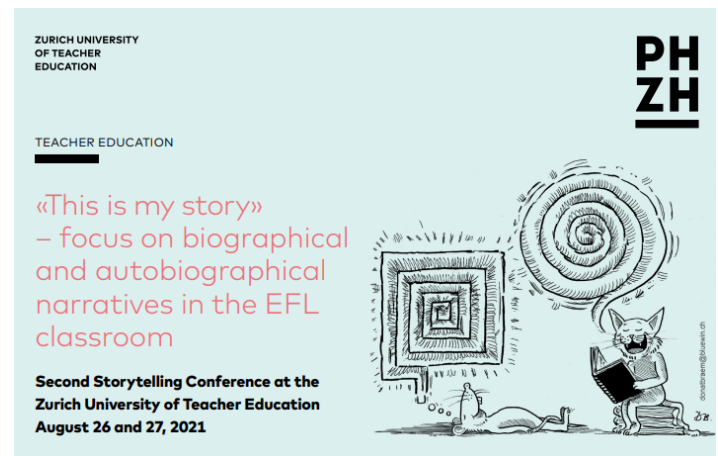


The article outlined child-friendly methods used to elicit 7- and 8-year-old pupils' views on the enablers and barriers to their desire to read voluntarily. The findings suggested that often pupils receive mixed messages as to the nature and purpose of reading and these messages colour their enjoyment of reading. They included whether or not it is a product-driven or process-derived experience, the social or solitary aspect of it, and if it involves choice or compliance.

LEADING CONFERENCE DELEGATES THROUGH FORESTS OF FAIRYTALES

An online conference to celebrate storytelling and reading as a window on the world was attended by Catherine Gilliland during August 2021, at which she presented a paper titled 'Through Forests of Fairytales and Mountains of Make Believe.' This academic conference hosted by PH Zurich, with a focus on research as well as on practice in primary and secondary schools, was part of an initiative to establish subject specific networks in and across Swiss universities of teacher education. It went under a theme referred to as This Is My Story and brought together authors, illustrators, storytellers, teachers, researchers and teacher educators from all educational levels.

Catherine's paper focused on how children's literature can be used to develop children both critically and creatively. It illustrated how they can be empowered and inspired to learn lessons from the past and apply them to both current and future situations. It was based on a school-based research project where children engaged in a series of cross curricular lessons related to a book, *The Matchbox Diary*, by P. Fleischman. During her presentation, Catherine took conference delegates on an historical journey from Italy to America and, using a series of graphic organisers, she unlocked the text through a variety of curricular lenses.



A LITERARY-CRITICAL EXPLORATION OF TEACHING IRISH SHORT STORIES

A journal, which has featured several articles by Dr Brian Hanratty over the past few years, became the home again for his latest research paper, titled 'Teaching the Twentieth-Century Irish Short Story in the Sixth-Form Classroom in Northern Ireland: A Literary-Critical Exploration.' This paper appeared in the latest issue of *Changing English: Studies in Culture and Education*, having first appeared online during March 2021.

The paper is predicated on an argument for presenting the Irish short story as a statutory recommendation within the A-Level English syllabus in Northern Ireland (and also, perhaps, in syllabi set by Examination Boards in other parts of the United Kingdom). Employing a carefully considered literary-critical perspective, the paper offered a detailed evaluation of a representative selection of twentieth-century Irish short stories. The first part, sub-divided into two sections, provided, firstly, some observations about form in the Irish short story and, secondly, it offered some historical and social contexts which provide a backcloth to the evolution of the short story as the twentieth century progressed. The second part, in exploring a carefully selected range of stories, sought to highlight both their thematic richness and their well-honed craftsmanship. Some of the themes which emerged, and which arguably have universal resonances, included the trauma of emigration, the changing role of women in a society beginning to loosen the shackles of patriarchy, and the inhumanity of war.



COLLABORATIVE RESEARCH ON EDUCATIONAL UNDERACHIEVEMENT IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Professor Peter Finn was part of a research team, in collaboration with Stranmillis University College, that worked on a recent research project, having received funding from the Northern Ireland Office and the Department of Foreign Affairs. One of the outcomes from this research project resulted in a report, titled ‘Loyalist and Republican Perspectives on Educational Underachievement in Northern Ireland,’ published during May 2021 on the website of the Centre for Research in Educational Underachievement. The project involved loyalist community activists, which included former prisoners, and members of Coiste Na nIarchimí, which is a coordinating body for groups and projects providing services to republican ex-prisoners and their families.

The report began with a brief introduction to the project and then went on to provide an overview of the context of community division in Northern Ireland. It included a discussion of educational underachievement within working-class communities and outlined the ongoing work to promote greater educational aspiration and to address the underlying causes of educational disadvantage including the Northern Ireland Executive’s programme of tackling paramilitarism. It then went on to offer a theoretical framework for the study grounded

in the work of the French sociologist Pierre Bourdieu. The report referred to the project’s methodology that set out the research design and ethical considerations, as well as the procedures followed by the research team. The results from the research took the form of an analysis of the qualitative findings, whilst highlighting several emerging themes. A critical discussion of the findings was included towards the end of the report, accompanied by tentative conclusions leading to the identification of key challenges and recommendations for further research related to this area.

This project and corresponding report served as an excellent example of collaborative research between the two university colleges in Northern Ireland in relation to the key issues associated with educational underachievement.



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MEMBERS OF ACADEMIC STAFF FEATURED IN LÉANN TEANGA: AN REIVIÚ

Dr Seán Mac Corraidh and Padaí de Bléine had their individual research articles featured in the most recent issue of the online journal Léann Teanga: An Reiviú during May 2021. Seán’s article was titled ‘Grinnléitheoireacht á meas ag mic léinn ar chúrsaí Gaeilge (BA agus BEd) mar mhodh múinte le bheith ag foghlaim faoin scríbhneoireacht liteartha i nGaeilge’ and focused on students on Irish language courses (BA and BEd) evaluating the close reading of texts as a teaching method to learn about literary writing in Irish. Padaí’s article was titled ‘Iniúchadh ar thionchar an Phiarsaigh ar Mháire agus é ag scríobh Mo Dhá Róisín (1921)’ and provided a close examination of the influence of Pearse on Máire when he was writing Mo Dhá Róisín and other subjects.



ACADEMIC STAFF COLLABORATE ON RESEARCH FUNDED BY SCOTENS

The College had success during April 2021 in relation to securing funding from the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South (SCoTENS) for three research projects in collaboration with other universities throughout Ireland.



The first project will involve Ciaran Walsh and Dr Elaine McLaughlin and is titled 'Value Orientations of Teacher Educators in Physical Education: Investigating Beliefs, Curricula and Programming in Two Jurisdictions.' It will be a collaborative piece of research with the Institute of Education at Dublin City University, Marino Institute of Education, Stranmillis University College and Maynooth University. The project's three associated research questions are: Are the value orientations of physical education teacher educators (PETEs) displayed in their professional practices and programmes of study? To what extent are these values and practices compatible with those found within their respective national curricula for physical education? Can a shared understanding of these value orientations help PETEs to foster deeper understanding of curriculum texts and, in turn, support their practice with pre-service teachers?

The second project will involve Dr Claire Connolly and Dr Martin Hagan and is titled 'Determining Student Teachers' Engagement With, and Application of, Educational Research to Enhance Professional Practice in Two North and South Teacher Education Institutions.' It will be a collaborative piece of research with Marino Institute of Education. The project's three associated research questions are: How do student teachers engage with, and in, educational research during their teacher education programmes? How do student teachers apply their research knowledge and experience during professional placement? How can teacher education programmes best support students to apply their research during professional placement?

The third project will involve Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir and is titled 'Developing Teacher and Leadership Capacity in Irish-Medium Education: An Analysis of Immersion-Specific Competences.' It will be a collaborative piece of research with Mary Immaculate College. The project's two associated research questions are: What are the distinctive professional competences that are considered essential for Irish-medium teachers? How are the identified immersion-specific competences manifested in Irish-medium classrooms?

ASSOCIATE LECTURER BECOMES RESEARCH TEAM MEMBER AND PRESENTS CONFERENCE PAPER

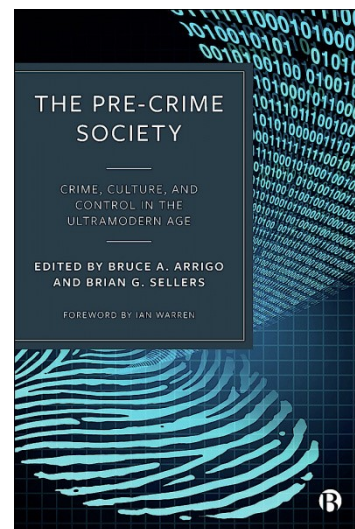
One of the College's Associate Lecturers, Dr Craig Goodall, is part of a research team that was awarded funding during April 2021 from SCoTENS for a project titled 'Standing Together for Autism and Neuro-Developmental Difference'. The research team will include academics from the schools of education at Hibernia College, Dublin City University, Trinity College and Ulster University. Combined with this recent success, Craig also presented a research paper at the Inclusive and Supportive Education Conference held online during August 2021. Craig's paper was titled 'Does Mainstream Inclusion Guarantee Social Justice for Autistic Young People?' Based on a participatory rights-based approach and semi-structured interviews, it reported that autistic young people found mainstream education to be a place they came to dread. Among other things, the research found autistic young people experienced inflexible teaching approaches, bullying, confusion and fear, along with overwhelming social and sensory overload, which exacerbated feelings of exclusion and otherness.

DRONES – POWER WITHOUT VULNERABILITY

A book, published during July 2021 that explored relevant theories, developing technologies and institutional practices to explain how a pre-crime society operates in an age of digital reality construction, featured a chapter by Dr Birgit Schippers. The book was titled *The Pre-Crime Society: Crime, Culture and Control in the Ultramodern Age* and Birgit's chapter, 'Drone Justice: Kill, Surveil, Govern,' was placed within its fifth section that focused on globalising surveillance, human rights and (in)security.

In her chapter, Birgit demonstrated how drones, as a central element of the contemporary techno-political assemblage of global violence, scramble and rescript the boundaries between the domestic and international, the private and public, the territoriality and extra-territoriality, as well as the lawfulness and extrajudicial. Birgit argued that drones materialise and visualise justice as spectacle, whereby they project a global power without vulnerability and their deployment generates structures of unequal risk distributions. These distributions, she argued, enable the networked construction of digital subjects as killable. The chapter reviewed the

history of drone development and usage, and it theorised the role that drone technology and drone strikes play in re-organising global power dynamics. Birgit further explored the biopolitical effects of drone strikes through pattern-of-life analyses and, to investigate these effects, she surveyed drone usage during the coronavirus pandemic. In conclusion, Birgit reflected on mechanisms for resistance and counter-conduct that envision new perspectives regarding justice in an age of drones.



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ACADEMIC STAFF REPRESENTED AT TEACHER EDUCATION ADVANCEMENT NETWORK (T.E.A.N.) CONFERENCE

Three presentations were made by members of academic staff at the annual Teacher Education Advancement Network conference held online during May 2021. They included:

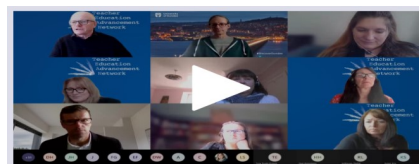
- ◆ Dr Geraldine Magennis, whose presentation was titled 'Exploring the Potential for Teacher Professional Learning Through Participation in a Book Study Group.'
- ◆ Dr Martin Hagan, in collaboration with Dr Geraldine Magennis and Jonathan Worley, whose presentation was titled 'Writing Reflectively in Initial Teacher Education: Laying Foundations for Career-Long Professional Learning.'
- ◆ Dr Tracey McKay and Sharon Haughey, whose presentation was titled 'Reflecting on the Use of Walking and Talking and Identity Box Research Methodologies within Teacher Education: Practice, Potential and Pitfalls.'

THE THREE T.E.A.N. PRESENTATIONS

Having referred to literature related to professional development and book study groups for teachers, Geraldine referred to her research that involved the creation of an intimate book study group. Participants in the group met each week via Google Meet for a period of eight sessions, having been given access to various tasks, activities and graphic organisers to guide their reading. Geraldine gathered data using a semi-structured interview schedule as well as the live discussion thread from each chatroom during the sessions and participants recorded their responses to questions or prompts. The findings from Geraldine's research generated four main themes, namely affiliation, affirmation, agency and authenticity.



The purpose of Martin, Geraldine and Jonathan's research study was to explore how a sample of student teachers were able to develop reflective orientations and the extent to which this helped support their professional knowledge, understanding and practice. A qualitative, interpretative research design was employed with a specialist group of student teachers in their first year. Data were collected from October to May and captured from focus groups, semi-structured interviews and the participants' reflective journals. These were then subjected to a thematic analysis, underpinned by a hermeneutical, dialectical and interpretative approach. The participants found the concept of reflection conflicted with the previous pedagogical approaches they had experienced. Findings suggested that structured reflective tasks helped in making sense of the variety of new academic and practicum experiences the participants encountered. As the practical demands of everyday teaching increased however, along with a requirement for less structured approaches to reflection, the quality of the students' reflective writing declined and became less meaningful. The researchers concluded that to make reflective activity become more purposeful, novice teachers need to be scaffolded to balance and integrate the demands of practical classroom teaching with the more reflective dimensions of teacher development.



Tracey and Sharon's presentation outlined their recent experiences of employing two relatively new communicative research methods within a case study on leadership in an outstanding primary school (walking and talking interviews and the production of identity boxes). It also sought to critique the potential application of these methodologies within undergraduate initial teacher education and postgraduate research-orientated modules. The researchers referred to how they used the mobile walking and talking interview approach to address the relative inactivity of the traditional interview and to generate a richer place-based narrative about leadership in their case study school. As part of their research, they combined walking and talking with another qualitative method, known as identity boxes. They employed the use of identity boxes to understand the impact of leadership on the school community, staff and pupils alike, where perceptions, thoughts, feelings, experiences and memories were central to their concern.

RESEARCH ARTICLE ON THE IRISH COUNTER-REVOLUTION

Dr Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh had a research article, titled 'The Big and the Long Fellow; Or the Tragedy and Farce of the Irish Counter-Revolution,' published in the online journal Irish Marxist Review during May 2021. This journal aims to offer readers with scholarly analyses of political, economic and social developments in Ireland and Fearghal's article positioned itself well within the journal's aim.

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



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

THE SURVEY COACH DELIVERS ONLINE COURSE

The College hosted Dr Pamela Campanelli as she delivered online professional development to academic staff during June 2021 that related to conducting online surveys and the corresponding analysis of data. Pamela introduced academic staff to the key principles of designing survey questions by focusing on, for example, overcoming problematic question formats, conducting surveys via the internet, designing surveys with MS Forms, as well as understanding the concepts of data analysis. Interspersed throughout the course, were three workshops that focused on writing, designing and critiquing surveys, which will help academic staff in the future when conducting their own research that has an online survey element to it.

STAFF PROFILE



Dr Claire Connolly has worked in the College for the past 28 years and is a Principal Lecturer, combining her role as School Experience Coordinator with that of lecturing in Music. She received her doctorate recently at the University of Glasgow and produced a thesis titled 'Reflective Activists? Exploring Student Teachers' Emerging Practice in Northern Ireland: A Bourdieusian Analysis.'

Claire has been proactive in developing her research in recent years and has had success in securing research funding, presenting at research conferences, as well as having her work published in scholarly outlets. Her current research interests focus firstly on Bourdieu's signature concepts in relation to student teachers' perceptions of social class and academic selection in education, and secondly on the development of student teachers' professional learning.

In terms of recent research activities and outputs, Claire is currently working on a SCoTENS funded research project in collaboration with Marino Institute of Education, which will run between 2021-2023. The project is titled, 'Determining Student Teachers' Engagement with, and Application of, Educational Research to Enhance Professional Practice in Two North and South Teacher Education Institutions.' She has also had a research article published during July 2021 in the International Journal of Educational Research and it was titled 'Recognising Misrecognition: Challenging the Reproduction of Inequality and Subverting Doxastic Thinking in Initial Teacher Education.'

Claire also co-presented a paper at the Teacher Education Advancement Network conference during May 2019, titled 'Student Teachers with Specific Needs: A Changing Landscape,' and took part in the College's Annual Staff Research Event during September 2019, when she provided her colleagues with a brief summary of her doctoral study. Claire is a member of the Curriculum, Pedagogy and Assessment research group in the College and has collaborated with other members of the group on research activities.