

Research Newsletter

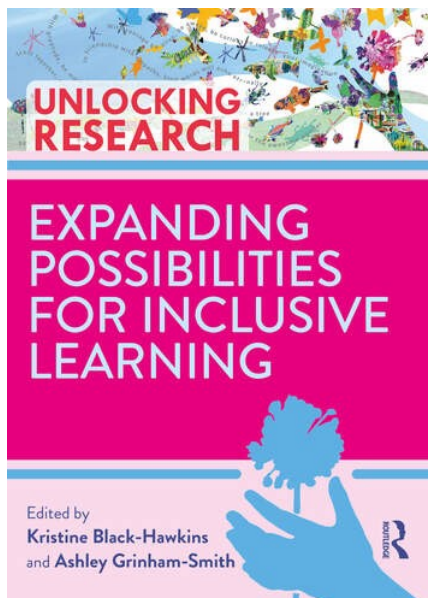


St Mary's
University College
Belfast
A College of Queen's University

CO-AUTHORED CHAPTER ON NEURODIVERSE LEARNERS IN SCHOOLS

One of our Associate Lecturers, Dr Craig Goodall, co-authored a chapter with John Ward-Sinclair that appeared in the book “Expanding Possibilities For Inclusive Learning”, edited by K. Black-Hawkins and A. Grinham-Smith. The book was published by Routledge in October 2022 and the title of Craig and John’s chapter is “Taking account of neurodiverse learners in the classroom: supporting inclusive classroom practices”.

In the introduction to their chapter, the authors refer to how using autism research as an illustrative lens to create positive responses to neurodiversity can inform the development of inclusive classroom practices. Their chapter includes the voices, experiences and perspectives of autistic young people, researchers and scholars. It also provides examples of how emphasising positive language and awareness can challenge often deeply held, and sometimes negative assumptions.



Book containing Craig's chapter

There is also an autistic perspective offered on autism, research development and neurodiversity. For the purpose of their chapter, the authors refer to neurodiversity as autism, ADHD, dyslexia, dyspraxia and other neurodiverse ways of being. Practical suggestions are also presented throughout the chapter to enhance inclusive classroom practice.



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ACADEMIC AMONG CO-EDITORS OF KEY TEXT ON COVID-19

A key book focusing on COVID-19 in the Global South was published in October 2022 by Bristol University Press. One of the editors is Dr Gerard McCann, along with N. Mishra and P. Carmody and the title is “COVID-19, The Global South And The Pandemic’s Development Impact”.

In an abstract to the book, the co-editors write that though a globally shared experience, the COVID-19 pandemic has affected societies across the world in radically different ways. This book examines the unique implications of the pandemic in the Global South. With international



contributors from a variety of disciplines including health, economics and geography, the book investigates the pandemic’s effects on development, medicine, gender (in)equality and human rights among other issues. Its analysis illuminates further subsequent crises of interconnection, a pervasive health provision crisis and a resulting rise in socio-economic inequality. The book’s assessment offers an urgent discourse on the ways in which the impact of COVID-19 can be mitigated in some of the most challenging socio-economic contexts in the world.

Dr Gerard McCann with other contributors to the book

As well as co-authoring the introduction, Gerard also contributed a co-authored chapter, titled “Pandemic structure and blowback: endemic inequality and the new (ab)normal” with Pádraig Carmody. In summarising the chapter, they write that with the advent of the global pandemic, the architecture of international development has changed. Limited advances made through the promotion of universal healthcare and attempts to reduce global equality have been put under strain in a manner not seen in a generation. The deviation from rights-based approaches to public and social policy since early in 2020 has continued throughout the various waves of the pandemic and has caused different regions to react in different ways to enforce lockdowns, protect pharmaceutical companies, enforce inequality and introduce sometimes draconian public health emergency laws. COVID-19 has also sometimes been used as a pretext to further erode equality legislation and human rights in different contexts around the world. This chapter assesses the implications of this pandemic inequality as a feature of international development in light of the actions taken by governments around the world over its first two years.

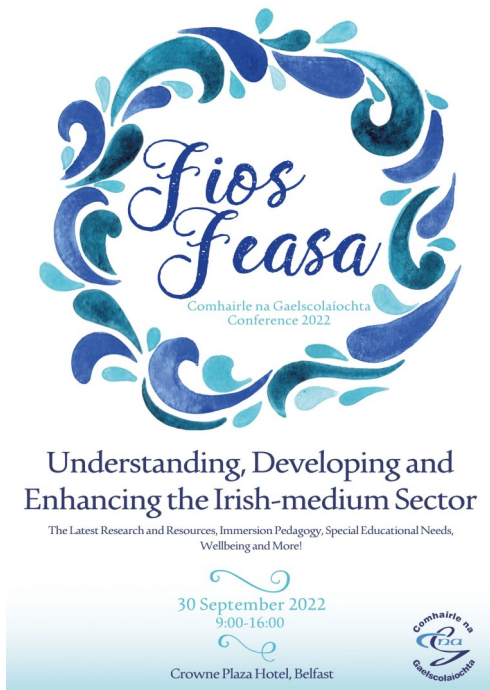
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Pandemic Structure and Blowback: Endemic Inequality and the New (ab)Normal

Pádraig Carmody and Gerard McCann

“With international contributors from a variety of disciplines including health, economics and geography, the book investigates the pandemic’s effects on development, medicine, gender (in)equality and human rights among other issues.”

COLLEGE ACADEMICS COME TOGETHER TO PRESENT THEIR RESEARCH



There was excellent representation from academic staff and students from the College at the Comhairle na Gaelscolaíochta conference held at Crowne Plaza Hotel, Belfast in September 2022. The title of the conference was “Understanding, Developing And Enhancing The Irish-Medium Sector: The Latest Research And Resources, Immersion Pedagogy, Special Educational Needs, Wellbeing And More”. The first presenter was Dr Seán Mac Corraidh whose presentation was titled “Creatlach teanga don bhunscolaíocht”. Another was Dr Thomas Rogan and his presentation was titled “Ról an chuntóra ranga sa tseomra ranga lán-Ghaeilge: dúshláin agus féidearthachtaí”. Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir collaborated with T.J. Ó Ceallaigh on their presentation, which was titled “Croíchumais an mhúinteora tumoideachais: Nithe dofheicthe a nochtadh”. Twenty postgraduate students also attended the conference and had opportunities to interact with school practitioners and become familiar with current professional issues, as well as the latest research in Irish-medium education.



*Dr Seán Mac Corraidh & Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir
prior to their presentations*

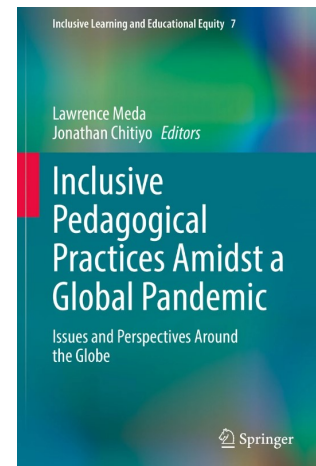


*Dr Thomas Rogan during
his presentation*

AUTISTIC CHILDREN'S LIFE IN LOCKDOWN

A book chapter, co-authored by an Associate Lecturer in the College, Dr Gillian O'Hagan, in collaboration with Bronagh Byrne, features in a book titled "Inclusive Pedagogical Practices Amidst A Global Pandemic". The book was edited by L. Meda and J. Chitiyo and was published by Springer in September 2022. The title of their chapter is "Understanding life in lockdown for autistic young people in Northern Ireland".

In summarising their chapter, the authors refer to the fact that as COVID-19 continues, there is limited understanding of how it impacts the lived experience of children and young people with disabilities in NI. They make reference, in particular, to autistic children in mainstream schools in NI having limited access to critical statutory support. This, they argue, combined with transitions to remote learning, is especially distressing, even with school learning support teams attempting to support online learning for autistic young people during lockdowns. However, they suggest this distress is potentially exacerbated by the autistic students' abilities to identify or express how lockdown restrictions are having an impact on their capacity for coping with remote learning.



Book containing Gillian's chapter

Through co-research with an autistic young people's advisory group, this chapter explores the impacts of COVID-19 on online learning experiences of autistic young people in post-primary schools. The research specifically considers the challenges experienced by autistic young people during lockdown, refers to the coping strategies developed by autistic young people during lockdown, and makes recommendations for helping autistic young people manage in similar situations in the future. The researchers used photovoice as the participatory arts-based method for their study to capture autistic students' lives during lockdown, as they learn at home. Their experiences are documented using smartphones enabling each young person to present insight into how lockdowns impacted their experiences. The young people's advisory group then assisted the adult researchers with a thematic analysis of the data. They provided guidance to ensure future online learning programs are accessible to autistic young people by presenting evidence-informed recommendations for education policymakers, schools and parents.

EXAMINING THEMES IN THE SHORT STORY "AN GNÁTHRUD"

The Literacy Association of Ireland featured an article by Padaí de Bléine in the December 2022 issue of its associated professional periodical. The article is titled "An Gnáthrud – Gearrscéal As An Ghnáth" and it explores the universal themes in the short story, "An Gnáthrud", by Deirdre Ní Ghrianna. In the article, Padaí refers to how Seosamh Mac Grianna believed a short story to be like a piece of poetry that moves the heart and the mind, and he explores "An Gnáthrud" in this context. The article also explores Sean Ó Faoláin's and Joseph Rippier's ideas of what makes a great short story. These authors' opinions of a successful short story are reflected upon in the context of "An Gnáthrud" and how successful or otherwise Ní Ghrianna was with her short story set in Belfast during the period known as The Troubles.

GOOD TURNOUT BY ACADEMIC STAFF AT SCOTENS CONFERENCE

Representatives from the College were present at the SCoTENS annual conference held during October 2022 at the Crowne Plaza Hotel, Dundalk. Some presented their research, while others attended workshops and events that focused on generating research funding and developing research skills. The theme was “Reflecting, Reconnecting And Re-Engaging With The Core Purpose(s) Of Education”. The conference explored links between education, schooling and societal wellbeing, and it enabled delegates and speakers the opportunity to pause and reflect, reconnect with each other, and re-engage with the core purposes of education.

One of the College’s representatives, Julie Hamilton, formed part of the research team, whose project report was launched at the conference, having received funding from the Shared Ireland Unit in the Office of the Taoiseach in partnership with SCoTENS. Julie and her co-researchers, Dr Melanie Ní Dhuinn and Dr Julie Uí Choistealbha from Marino Institute of Education, had the key findings from their research summarised by Julie during the presentation. The title of their research report was “SHARED: Student Hopes - Achievement, Research, Equity & Diversity” and it is available on the SCoTENS website. The aim of their research was to explore how teacher educators can prepare and support student teachers to negotiate and engage with the challenges of educational underachievement while on placement. It also aimed to make the students aware of the potential to change and influence educational trajectories and have an impact on educational outcomes through positive and active social justice related pedagogy. Their research adopted an action-research approach to explore student teachers’ understanding on teacher agency, educational engagement, achievement and attainment. Student teachers were participants in the research, guided by the research team. They also acted as researchers to explore the concepts within their practice and with their pupils.

Other representatives included Dr Donna Hazzard and Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke, who presented a paper based on their most recent research. It was titled “In Pursuit Of Critical Literacy” and was in collaboration with Dr Eithne Kennedy at Dublin City University. In their presentation, they reflected on the impact of the successful critical literacy project that was carried out in schools since 2017. Their research took a qualitative approach in research design, with methods including questionnaires and interviews with teachers. In the findings, the researchers referred to data that indicated the critical literacy project has had a positive impact on teachers’ engagement with the complex concept that is critical literacy. The data signalled a philosophical assertion and commitment among some participants to transform pedagogy to empower children and young people by equipping them with the knowledge, behaviour and skills needed to recognise power relations in their everyday lives. Participants also communicated the need for a curriculum and classroom practice that are grounded in the lives of students, critical in its approach to the world, hopeful, joyful, kind, academically engaging and rigorous.



The various academic staff attending and presenting at the SCoTENS 2022 conference

NEW MEMBER OF RESEARCH TEAM FOR IRISH LANGUAGE FRAMEWORK PROJECT



*Helen O'Donnell
(member of research team)*

Having secured research funding for a joint Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), Department of Education (DE) and St Mary's research project, titled "Research And Development Of Irish Language Framework For Irish-Medium Primary Schools", Dr Seán Mac Corraidh and Dr Thomas Rogan were joined by Helen O'Donnell in December 2022 to complete the research team. Helen will be working along with Seán and Thomas on the research and development aspects of the project, which involves working with Irish-medium primary schools and units across Northern Ireland.

Fluent in the Irish language, Helen has amassed immersion experience in Irish-medium educational settings, following her undergraduate degree at Ulster University. After two years working in a school, she undertook a master's degree in Irish Translation at Ulster University in 2020-21 and a PGCE through the medium of Irish at St Mary's in 2021-22. This provided Helen with further school experience in two different Irish-medium primary schools, giving her the knowledge and understanding that will be a worthy contribution to this research project on developing an Irish language framework.

The project involves research into local and international practices that aims to inform the development of a language framework for Irish-medium primary schools. This aspect acknowledges the wealth of relevant pedagogical expertise that exists in the Irish-medium educational community and the growing corpus of relevant research into immersion education globally. It also involves capturing teacher professionalism and expertise, by sharing both current practice in relation to the needs of the sector and professional judgement regarding children's current linguistic standards. It plans to take a qualitative approach to gathering data through a survey, interviews and focus groups from relevant stakeholders in Irish-medium primary schools and units.

These aspects are to lead to the development of an Irish language framework based on an immersion model of education and pedagogy, as practised in Irish-medium schools, aiming for additive bilingualism through interaction within meaningful, strongly contextualised, hands-on activities. As an integral part of the development process, a review of the workability of the framework is to be carried out and modifications, if needed, are to be made as a result of both the review and feedback from Irish-medium practitioners. Following the development of the framework, a series of regional seminars are to be planned in partnership with CCEA and DE, to inform and update key stakeholders in Irish-medium primary schools and units.

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