



INSIGHTS INTO

RESEARCH



**St Mary's
University College**

A College of Queen's University Belfast

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(September 2024 - February 2025)



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Academic Involved in Book on Global Education

One of our established academic writers, Professor Gerard McCann, was part of an editorial team who produced the book "Global Education in Ireland: Critical Histories and Future Directions", which one reviewer referred to as: *An Irish voice with international implications for global education*. It was published by Bloomsbury in October 2024 and the eBook edition has been made available open access via its website. The book, which contained three chapters by Gerard, brought together leading global education practitioners and academics who provided a history of global education in Ireland.

Ireland is regarded as a leader in the field of global education worldwide, with a rich history going back to the 1970s. Despite this, there is a lack of reflection on its role and contribution to global education internationally.

This book bridged this gap and critically explored the history of global education policy and practice in the Irish context through different perspectives from across the education spectrum in Ireland and internationally. The contributors explored the philosophical, pedagogical and globalisation influences on global education, as well as policy trends and curriculum developments. The range of topics discussed included global education and the sustainable development goals; global citizenship education; activism; solidarity; and critical pedagogy. The role of institutions and other stakeholders were discussed, as well as the challenges for transformative practice. Alongside thematic chapters, practical case studies were introduced which illustrated global education practice over time. Relevant to practitioners of global education in Ireland and beyond, the book presented a critical, radical and decolonial global education.

The three chapters authored or co-authored by Gerard were titled "Starting Points - The Influence of Liberation Theology and Critical Pedagogy on Development Education"; "Global Education Policy and Practice in the North of Ireland"; and "Overview: Key Themes and Trends - Curriculum Developments".

'The book... brought together leading global education practitioners and academics...'





MEd Students' Research Displayed in the College

One aspect of Masters-Level study in the College is the research that students conduct for their dissertations, as well as assignments, and it forms part of their postgraduate experience that they can bring into their practice in, for example, schools. It is important to highlight the research work of our students and one way of doing this is to display summaries of their research-based dissertations on noticeboards throughout the College. In December 2024, examples of recent MEd graduates' research for their dissertations were made into posters for display purposes to inspire other students in their journey to completing their degree programmes. These examples focused on research that related to, for example, student wellbeing; autism inclusion; and teachers' job satisfaction.



Research Projects Highlighted at Annual SCoTENS Conference

The SCoTENS conference, which took place in October 2024, saw two members of academic staff from the college present their research to delegates from across Ireland. Dr Matthew Martin was one of the presenters and he gave a paper related to his collaborative research project with Dublin City University. The theme of the conference was Innovative Pedagogies for Inclusive Education: Implications for Policy and Practice, and it offered a timely opportunity for delegates to critically consider and examine the issue of adopting innovative pedagogies to ensure inclusive education is offered to and available for all learners.

The title of Matthew's presentation was "Inclusion of Newcomer Children via Initial Teacher Education". In it, he referred to a sense of belonging being defined as the extent to which individuals feel accepted, respected, included and supported by others in their social environment. He talked about the recent unprecedented numbers of asylum seekers and refugees entering Ireland, both north and south, and

emphasised the responsibility teachers have in fostering newcomer children's sense of belonging within the school community.

Matthew explained how the research study explored pre-service teachers' understanding of belonging, while also gathering their perceptions of the opportunities and challenges they face in creating a sense of belonging for newcomer children. Findings revealed that pre-service teachers in both jurisdictions value developing a sense of belonging among newcomer children over their academic development. However, the research noted a lack of awareness among pre-service teachers in relation to the resources and support available for this purpose, as well as a varied understanding among the pre-service teachers of the term 'belonging'.

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The second presenter at the SCOTENS conference was Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir and she delivered a paper related to her collaborative research projects with University College Cork. The title of Gabrielle’s presentation was “Professional Learning for Inclusive Immersion: Navigating Policy and Educational Practices”. During her talk, she informed delegates about the production of the learning resource Core Competencies in Irish-Medium Education: A Framework for Learning and Professional Development for Practitioners. The research goal was to determine how well and comprehensively this framework describes the core competencies of immersion education required by the Irish-Medium (IM) sector. Socio-cultural theory and an interpretative lens were used to guide the mixed methods study.

A variety of sources were also used (i.e. questionnaire, interviews, focus groups, conference workshops) to gather data from key stakeholders across the continuum of IM education in order to gain insights during the consultation process. Representative sampling for participants was used and they included IM student teachers who had completed at least one placement in an IM school; teachers and principals from IM primary and post-primary schools; teacher educators from IM undergraduate and postgraduate teacher education programmes; and academics and specialists in immersion education who attended workshops held during academic conferences.





College Represented at Leading Literacy Conference

Academic staff who presented their research at the annual Literacy Association of Ireland conference were joined by a MEd student, which resulted in the College being represented at three of the conference sessions. The conference, which was held at Marino Institute of Education in November 2024, focused on the theme of Leading Literacy: Laying Foundations for Future Success and it presented an opportunity for the academic staff and the student to discuss literacy learning and corresponding evidence-based research that enhance literacy experiences in educational settings.

The first member of academic staff was Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke who co-presented research with Philip Lavery (Mount St Michael's Primary School). It was titled "From Faltering to Flowing: One Primary School's Journey Embedding Oral Reading Fluency in Key Stage 2". Their project was designed to explore the experience of one primary school, as it journeyed through the embedding of Oral Reading Fluency. This was chosen as the focus since it has been found to help combine the code-based and language comprehension strands of Scarborough's Reading Rope (2001) together, which is essential for the acquisition of skilled reading comprehension. Over two and a half years, a deliberate emphasis was placed on giving pupils multiple opportunities each week to read for different purposes, audiences and across an increasing variety of genres. Quantitative and qualitative rubrics were used to capture data as a means of tracking potential progress in accurate, automatic and suitably phrased reading. Alongside this, further data were garnered through conducting focus group interviews with a stratified sample of pupils across the Key Stage 2 cohort. Semi-structured interviews were carried out with the parent/guardian of each of the children who took part in the focus groups, along with the Key Stage 2 teachers and the vice-principal. Findings revealed that some positive impact occurred regarding Oral Reading Fluency scores, pupils' attitudes to reading, as well as fruitful reshaping of the wider literacy curriculum and pedagogy.

'... data were collected from experienced literacy coordinators in the IM education sector, which was facilitated through conversation and workshops.'

Other members of academic staff included Dr Seán Mac Corraidh and Dr Thomas Rogan who, along with Helen O Donnell (Researcher at the College) and Mary Carabine (CCEA), presented their research project titled “Irish Language Framework for Children in Irish-Medium Settings”. Their project aimed to identify linguistic standards in listening, understanding and talking, reading and writing in Irish-Medium (IM) primary schools. A major part of their project involved the collaborative development of a language framework with IM practitioners to build on the good practice that already exists in facilitating the teaching of the language and the achievement of targets.

The presenters informed delegates about the history of the project, its current stage of research, as well as their future plans. The first stage of the project was desk-based and investigated international practices of development in the target language in immersion education settings, which informed the development of the language framework for IM primary schools. In the second stage, data were collected from experienced literacy coordinators in the IM education sector, which was facilitated through conversation and workshops. They made professional observations on their pupils’ current standards in language skills that included listening, understanding, speaking, reading and writing from Year 1 to Year 7, which aided the creation of the language framework. Future plans for the project involve guidance provided to IM primary schools to implement the language framework.

The MEd student was Teresa Wilson, who recently graduated, and she talked about her research-based dissertation that was titled “Five Key Principles for Transitioning to Plurilingual Approaches in Linguistically Diverse Classrooms: A Survey of Teacher Experiences in an Urban Co Meath Primary School”. Teresa’s project focused on teachers’ experience of the transition to plurilingual approaches in a linguistically diverse primary school.

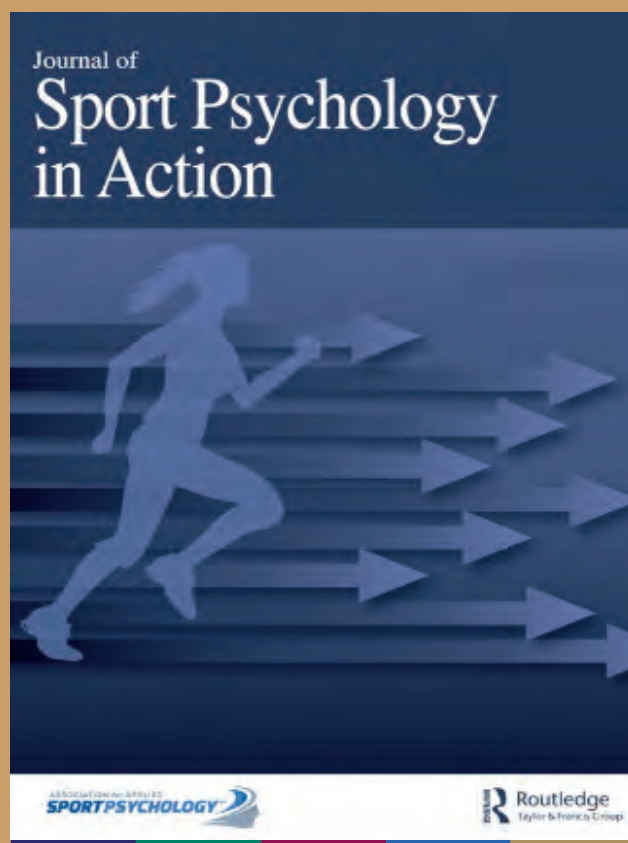


During her presentation, she referred to plurilingualism being a key feature in the Primary Language Curriculum, including Modern Foreign Languages, and to children being encouraged to use their entire linguistic repertoire as part of the plurilingual approach, which can include the use of children’s home languages, alongside English and Irish. Five key principles for making the transition to plurilingual approaches arose from Teresa’s review of the literature. Her data collection process had three main components. Firstly, a baseline survey gathered teachers’ initial perceptions and understanding of plurilingualism. Secondly, participant teachers engaged in an intervention entitled A Plurilingual Approach to Picture Talk. And thirdly, a post-intervention survey and focus group established teachers’ experiences of the transition to plurilingual approaches. Advantages and obstacles of the transition were key features of both the post-intervention survey and focus group. Advice for colleagues considering the transition and implications for future practice were central to the discussion of her focus group session.

Research Project Results in Journal Article and Conference Presentation

Success for Dr Ciarán Kearney, whose collaborative research project resulted in a publication, titled “Principles and Practical Strategies for Psychologically Informed Coaching of Young Players in Gaelic Games: Introducing Síceolaíochas in an Oiliúint Lúthchleasaíocht na nÓige sna Cluichí na nGael (SÍOL na nÓige)”. It was co-authored with his colleagues from the University of Lincoln and the Gaelic Athletic Association and was featured in the Journal of Sport Psychology in Action in December 2024.

Ciarán's co-authored article presented proposed principles and actionable strategies for coaches to develop environments that facilitate positive sport experiences among young Gaelic games players. In doing so, the authors introduced six key principles, which together make up Síceolaíochas in an Oiliúint Lúthchleasaíocht na nÓige sna Cluichí na nGael (SÍOL na nÓige). By applying principles and strategies within SÍOL na nÓige, they envisaged that coaches of young Gaelic games players would be more equipped to create psychologically-informed playing environments that would enhance the long-term participation, personal development and wellbeing of players.



Ciarán also gave a presentation on his research at the National Coaching Conference in November 2024, which had the theme of Coaching for the Future. Topics that were covered during the conference focused on, for example, psychology informed coaching; reflective practice; and coaching philosophy, and they were presented through keynote speakers, breakout sessions and panel discussions.



Conference on Using Literacy Research to Actuate Agency Attended by Academic

Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke attended the annual conference of the Literacy Research Association in December 2024 to present her research based on a collaborative project involving Marino Institute of Education and Indiana University Northwest. The conference consisted of plenary addresses, paper sessions, roundtable discussions, alternative format sessions and symposiums, with Geraldine's paper being featured in the Pre-Service Teacher Education in Literacy roundtable session. The Literacy Research Association is composed of scholars who share an interest in improving literacy research and practices. It advocates research that enhances knowledge, understanding and the development of lifespan literacies in a multicultural and multilingual world.

The title of Geraldine's paper was "A Cross-Atlantic Community of Readers for Pre-Service Teachers: Results From a Design-Based Research Study" and it outlined an innovative initiative between two institutions of initial teacher education in Ireland and one in the USA. The project was designed to develop first-year student teachers in the art and craft of planning, resourcing and performing rich and effective school-based lessons, using the read-aloud method of literacy instruction. A concurrent goal of the project was to shape the students' identities as read-aloud teachers, while building an ethos of a community of readers.

'...an innovative initiative between two institutions of initial teacher education in Ireland and one in the USA.'



Academic Presents His Research at One of Europe's Largest Education Conferences

The annual International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation took place in November 2024 and it was attended by Professor Martin Hagan, who presented his paper titled "Formative Factors Shaping Teacher Identity: Insights from the USA and Northern Ireland". The theme of the conference was Transforming Education, Transforming Lives and it enabled delegates to exchange their different perspectives on the rapidly evolving landscape of education. There was a global community of academics, researchers and educators from over eighty countries in attendance and their thought-provoking presentations and discussions, via oral and poster sessions, dynamic interactive workshops and enriching networking activities, made the conference a great success.

Martin's paper drew upon teacher identity as a field of research, which has emerged to help understand how teachers develop their knowledge, competence and practice, while at the same time navigating their way through the complexities and challenges that they face in their professional lives. The field focuses on exploring how identity is defined and developed, how teachers make sense of their evolving and changing identity, and how their emergent sense of professional self and professional practice is influenced by their personal experiences, values and beliefs. Martin's study compared two distinct socially constructed learning contexts, one in Northern Ireland and the other in the United States, and it aimed to gain a deeper understanding of how teacher identity is formed during the early stages of teacher development. He employed a qualitative, interpretive research design for his research, using open-ended questions and contextual examinations to determine participants' perspectives and meaning-making processes. Data were collected via semi-structured interviews with a purposive sample of student teachers in their first or second year of study, along with a sample of teacher educators responsible for the design, organisation and management of their respective programmes.



An inductive thematic analysis revealed key issues related to the participants' personal dispositions and prior learning experiences; their motivations and aspirations for choosing teaching as a career; the influence of the teacher education programme on which they were enrolled; and the extent to which experiences working with teachers and pupils in schools challenged and transformed their views on teaching as a professional activity. The study also highlighted that within the teacher-learning process across the two contexts, varying degrees of influence were exerted by those occupying different roles (e.g. tutor, mentor, student). The findings contributed to an understanding of how those beginning to teach develop a sense of professional identity in the initial stages of their professional formation. The study offered insights for teacher educators and policymakers in designing strategies, programmes and pedagogical approaches, which support professional growth and positive identity formation.

Research on Reducing Student Teachers' Maths Anxiety Results in Doctoral Award

The newly titled Dr Geraldine Parks recently graduated from Liverpool Hope University, having completed her professional Doctorate of Education with her research-based dissertation titled "Implementing Mastery Approaches for the Reduction of Mathematics Anxiety in Primary School Pre-Service Teachers". Geraldine's graduation ceremony took place at Liverpool Metropolitan Cathedral in January 2025, where the university formally recognised the successful completion of her EdD.

Her research used a quasi-experimental sequential mixed-methods design that drew upon quantitative and qualitative approaches, with two five-week cycles of quantitative data collection separated by a period of qualitative methods that informed preliminary analysis and reflection. Geraldine's study included trainee teachers in their second year of a Bachelor of Education degree. The cohort was split in two, with one group receiving a mathematics mastery intervention over ten weeks, while the other experienced teaching as usual. The mixed-methods approach enabled insights from the first cycle of data collection that informed the second cycle. Teacher mathematics anxiety and anxiety in teaching mathematics were measured before and after the intervention. In addition, a visual analogue scale was used to measure students' weekly feelings of self-efficacy, motivation, anxiety and attention, following each mathematics class. The qualitative data were comprised of semi-structured interviews, undertaken between the two five-week cycles.

Quantitative data indicated no significant change in mathematics anxiety before and after teaching. By comparing weekly measures, it indicated some advantages of the mastery approach compared with teaching as usual, with the mastery group reporting increased mastery (reflecting increased student self-reported self-efficacy) in the mathematics material in the last five weeks compared with the first five weeks of teaching. In addition, qualitative data suggested that students responded favourably to the mathematics mastery approach.

The results have important implications for the development of pedagogical approaches for the delivery of teaching and learning in teacher training mathematics provision.



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Panel Speakers at Irish Conference

A discussion outlining a collaborative piece of research was delivered by two members of academic staff at An Chomhdháil ar Litríocht agus ar Chultúr na Gaeilge, which was a conference held at the University of Galway in September 2024.

The panel that was led by Dr Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh and Padaí de Bléine had a discussion on the theme Ómós Áite i saothar Mháire. It related to their ambitious educational research project titled “Saothar Mháire: gnéithe den chúlra stairiúil, den úsáid teanga agus den stíl liteartha”, which encompasses history, linguistics and literary criticism.



Research on Supporting Autistic Pupils

One of the College's associate lecturers, Dr Craig Goodall, coauthored an article titled "An Early Inclusive Start: Teachers' Attitudes to their Role in Supporting Autistic Pupils within Mainstream Primary Early Intervention Classes". It was published in 2024 within the Middletown Centre for Autism Research Journal and was based on a survey and semi-structured interviews with teachers. Findings indicated that participants held a positive attitude to the designated autism-specific early intervention class model and three themes emerged: Early Intervention Classes - A Good Start; School Readiness Preparation; and Initial Parent Support. These findings provided a snapshot of attitudes among teachers working in designated early-intervention autism classes and, potentially, have implications regarding how they can be supported and how this model can be operationalized within Irish mainstream primary schools.



Project Report on the Inclusion of Newcomers Published by SCoTENS

Following the completion of a collaborative research project with Dublin City University that involved Dr Matthew Martin and Karen McGivern, their report was published in January 2025 on the SCoTENS website. It was titled “INVITE: Inclusion of Newcomers – Video Diaries in Initial Teacher Education” and explored the understanding and perceptions of pre-service teachers regarding their role in fostering a sense of belonging for newcomer children in schools.

The research team used an anonymous online questionnaire distributed to pre-service teachers at two institutions that provide initial teacher education. It gathered both qualitative and quantitative data on their understanding of belonging and their perceptions of the challenges and opportunities associated with fostering a sense of belonging in schools. The findings revealed that pre-service teachers universally recognise the importance of fostering a sense of belonging. Key themes emerged, such as the role of belonging in promoting students’ academic success, social inclusion and emotional well-being. Teachers identified opportunities to foster belonging through inclusive classroom practices, promoting diversity in the curriculum, and building strong teacher-student relationships.

However, the study also highlighted several barriers to fostering belonging, including time constraints, language barriers, cultural differences and social group dynamics. Pre-service teachers expressed concern over the lack of resources and support to effectively implement inclusive strategies. The study underscored the critical role pre-service teachers play in creating inclusive school environments that foster belonging for all students, particularly newcomer children. While pre-service teachers have a nuanced understanding of belonging, the researchers concluded that further training and resources are needed to equip them to meet the challenges of increasingly diverse classrooms.

They argued that fostering a sense of belonging not only benefits newcomer children but enhances the educational experience for the entire school community.



INVITE: Inclusion of Newcomers - Video Diaries in Initial Teacher Education

Dr Peter Tiernan, Dr Matthew Martin, Dr Joe Usher & Karen McGivern

October 2024

A joint SCoTENS-funded project between St Mary's University College, Belfast and the Institute of Education, Dublin City University.

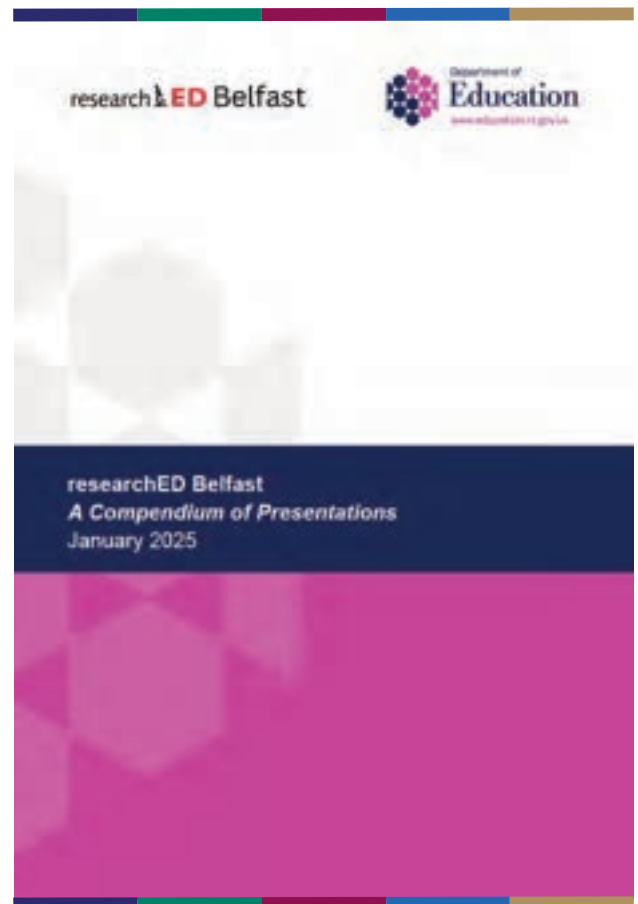


‘The findings revealed that pre-service teachers universally recognise the importance of fostering a sense of belonging.’

Compendium Features Research on the Science of Reading

The Department of Education produced a document in January 2025 that featured Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke's article "The Science of Reading". This document is a compendium of presentations that were given at a ResearchED conference attended by Geraldine in September 2024 at Carrickfergus Grammar School, the first of which to be held in Northern Ireland. The conference played a significant role in helping delegates to develop their understanding of evidence-informed teaching and learning and Geraldine's presentation focused on this by asking the question: How might the evidence base in literacy help inform the NI Primary Curriculum?

ResearchED is an organisation that strives to bridge gaps between research and practice in education. It organises events for academics, teachers, policy makers and other relevant individuals to share their research and practice. During Geraldine's presentation, which led to her published article, she referred to the field of literacy research growing rapidly and globally in recent years. She also acknowledged the increased pressure on educational organisations to keep in step with new and emerging information, regarding neuroscience and associated pedagogical instruction. In the context of the 'refresh' of the current NI Primary Curriculum being under way, her presentation provided a prime opportunity to call for cross-system discussions around what is presently in place in terms of curriculum content, pedagogy and assessment and how they line up with the 'science'. Throughout her talk, she referred to some of the national and international reports of literacy attainment in light of what is working well and what is still problematic. She explored seminal pieces of research as a means of pointing policy makers, curriculum/assessment designers, as well as educators in the direction of what is deemed best in evidence-based practice.



'... referred to some of the national and international reports of literacy attainment...'

Plenary Lecture on Brexit Delivered at Academic Gathering of Researchers



A group of researchers from the State University of Applied Sciences in Krosno, the Jagiellonian University in Kraków and the Cracow Tertium Society for the Promotion of Language Studies teamed up with Professor Gerard McCann to organise the Across Borders X international conference. The main theme of the academic gathering was Difficult Neighbourhoods: The Semiotics of Conflict in Culture, Literature and Language and it took place in September 2024 in Krosno, Poland. As well as being one of the organisers, Gerard also delivered one of the plenary lectures, which was titled "Borders, Brexit and the Reconstitution of Europe". The conference discussed the semiotics and pragmatics of conflict in various discourses of neighbourhoods and borders (geographical, political, religious, ethnic, linguistic) and expressed in widely understood texts of culture.

