

INSIGHTS INTO

# RESEARCH



**St Mary's  
University College**

A College of Queen's University Belfast

VOLUME 03 (SEPTEMBER 2025 - FEBRUARY 2026)





## Volume 3

(September 2025 - February 2026)



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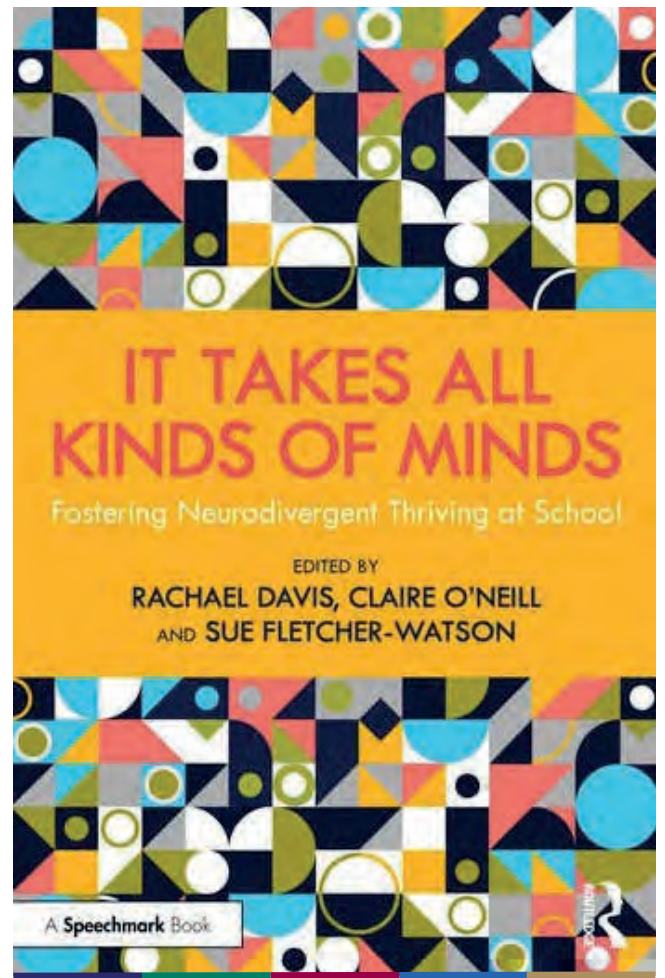
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# Research on Eliciting the Voices of Neurodivergent Learners

A book that provides an inspiring and accessible introduction to neurodiversity in educational settings, titled “It Takes All Kinds of Minds: Fostering Neurodivergent Thriving at School”, features a chapter by Dr Craig Goodall. It was published in December 2025 and offers a carefully curated collection of chapters exploring many kinds of minds and how they can best learn and flourish at school.

Craig’s chapter, **Informing Educational Practice by Supporting, Listening to and Acting Upon the Voices of Neurodivergent Learners**, refers to research and practice to explain why it is crucial to support, listen to and act upon these voices. He suggests that educators recognise these learners’ autonomy and agency, but should also champion these learners to be central actors in developing an understanding of their educational experiences.

Without seriously engaging the perspectives and everyday experiences of neurodivergent learners, Craig argues that educators will struggle to develop classroom practices and pedagogy that ensure such learners thrive in a system, which educates them in mind. He proposes that appropriate examples of supporting, listening to and acting upon the voices of neurodivergent learners should focus on the processes used to garner voices of primary-age autistic learners within the autism support service.



*'... refers to research and practice to explain why it is crucial to support, listen to and act upon these voices.'*

# College Hosts Music Education Research Conference

October 2025 saw a gathering of researchers, professionals, scholars, practitioners and musicians in the college, all of whom exchanged knowledge and shared experiences across every level of music education. The conference was organised by the Society for Music Education in Ireland, under the theme “Crossroads and Connections”, and the chairperson for 2025 was Dr Frances Burgess, whose collaborative paper was featured during one of the sessions.

Frances worked with colleagues from Dublin City University and Stranmillis University College on a research project that resulted in their presentation, titled **Beyond ‘Competency’ and ‘Capability’: Process, Emotion and Innovation in Student Teachers’ Narratives of Creativity in Music.**

In their presentation, they highlighted their research findings from interviews undertaken with eighteen first-year student teachers across both jurisdictions on the island of Ireland, which explored how they defined and understood creativity in their musical lives. Their study drew on elements of a narrative inquiry orientation, not as a fixed methodological framework, but as a guiding principle that foregrounds stories, lived experiences and meaning making. This approach enabled student teachers’ accounts to be read in ways that highlighted the personal, relational and contextual character of their understanding of creativity.

The student teachers’ perspectives pointed to creativity as a process of exploration and discovery, where ideas emerged through experimentation rather than pre-planning. They emphasised the interplay between formal learning and personal innovation, as well as the emotional and identity-shaping dimensions of creative practice.

The analysis suggested that these perspectives stand in contrast to curriculum framings of creativity as a discrete element

## SOCIETY for MUSIC EDUCATION in IRELAND

13<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference of the SMEI

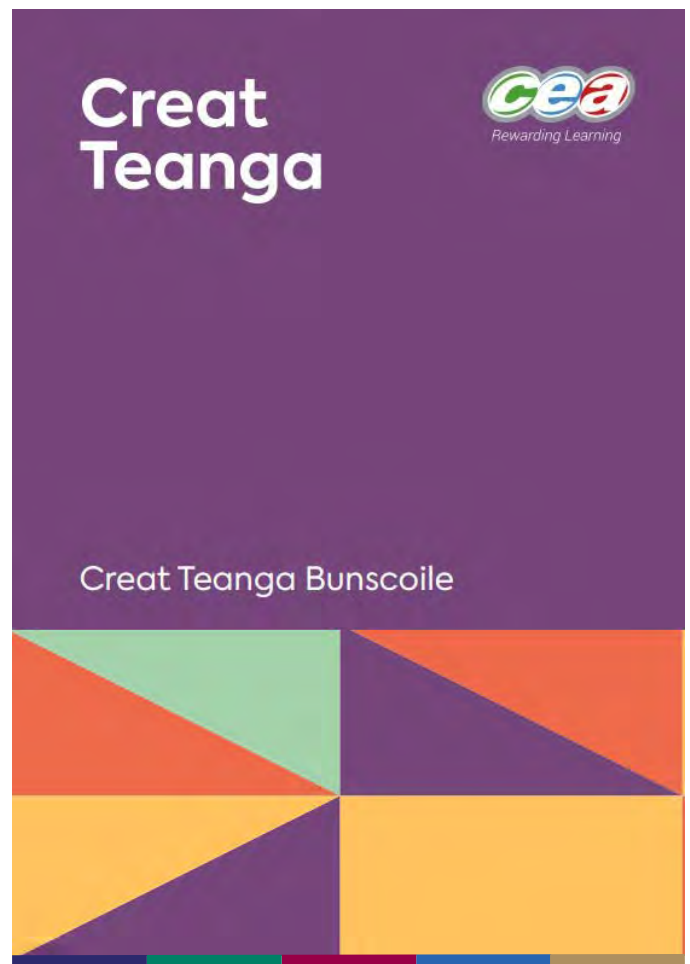
28 - 29th October 2025

of a curriculum. It also suggested that greater attention to student teachers’ understanding can enrich primary music education by valuing creativity as processual, relational and emotionally grounded, requiring classrooms that balance formal skill development with opportunities for exploration and self-expression.



# Launch of Framework Document Stemming from Research Project

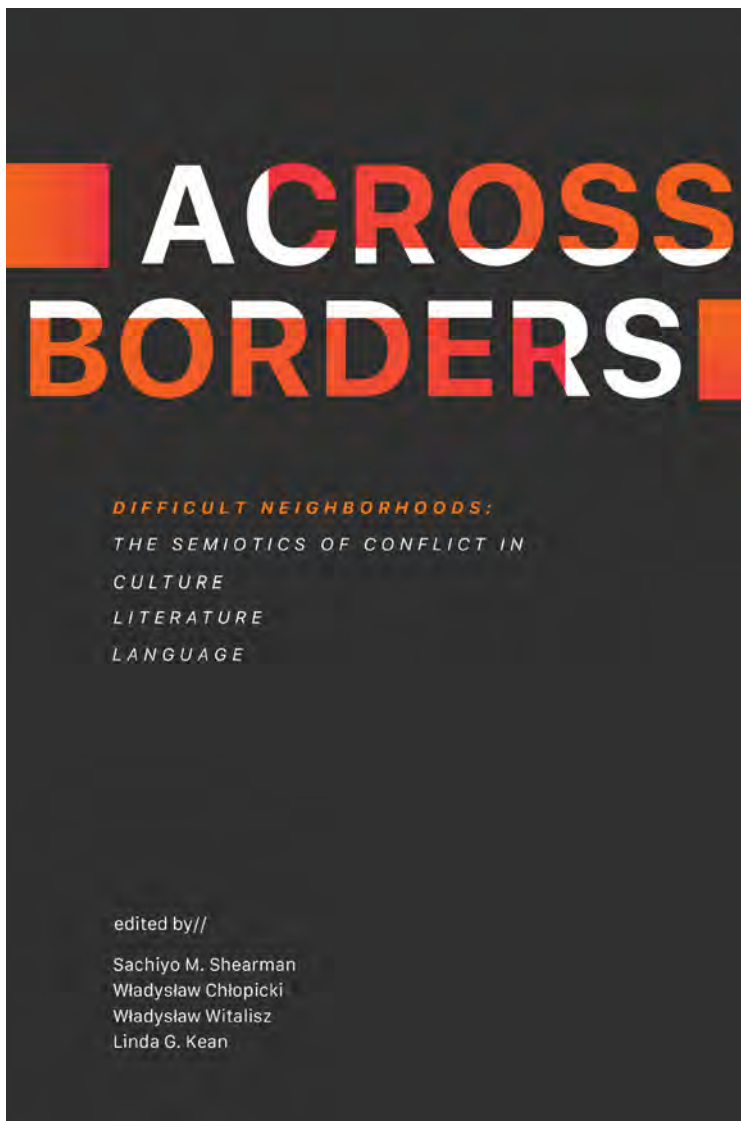
The research project, titled “Irish Language Framework Development for Primary Schools”, produced a pioneering framework in September 2025, which was launched in the college during December 2025. The academic staff on the project, Dr Seán Mac Corraidh and Dr Thomas Rogan, worked with staff from CCEA and the Department of Education, alongside numerous Irish-medium schools and units. This research-informed framework was specifically designed to meet the needs of these primary schools and units across Northern Ireland. It provides educators with practical guidance to strengthen and enrich the teaching and learning of Irish across the curriculum. It also offers clear support for teacher planning, sets realistic yet ambitious expectations for language development and delivers greater consistency and coherence in pupils’ Irish language learning. The document outlining the framework, **Creat Teanga**, represents a significant step forward in supporting Irish language development across Foundation Stage, Key Stage 1 and Key Stage 2.



# Chapter on Borders and Brexit Featured in Book on Conflict

A book, published by East Carolina University Academic Library Services in February 2026, titled "Difficult Neighborhoods: The Semiotics of Conflict in Culture, Literature, and Language", features a chapter by Prof Gerard McCann. The book is a collection of original research studies that examine the semiotics and pragmatics of conflict in various discourses of borders and neighbourhoods (geographical, political, ethnic, religious and linguistic), as expressed in widely understood cultural texts.

Gerard's chapter, **Borders, Brexit and the Reconstitution of Europe**, looks at the sociopolitical pressures that European states are facing. With particular reference to the withdrawal of the UK from the EU, it investigates reasons for the growth of euroscepticism. It concludes by reviewing how the process of European integration has been compromised and by examining points of intervention where European political life can reconstitute itself as a safeguarding entity for the diverse peoples of an increasingly polarised continent.



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# IRISH HISTORICAL STUDIES

The joint journal of the IRISH HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
and the ULSTER SOCIETY FOR IRISH HISTORICAL STUDIES

Joint editors: CLODAGH TAIT, ELAINE FARRELL AND ANDREW SNEDDON  
Copy-editor: CIARÁN MCCABE

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## Historical Research Article Based on Charlie Daly

Published by Cambridge University Press, the journal "Irish Historical Studies" features an article by Dr Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh, which came out in October 2025. This joint journal of the Irish Historical Society, as well as the Ulster Society for Irish Historical Studies, is the authoritative voice in Irish history. It publishes articles embodying original research on Irish history, papers on the scope and teaching of Irish history, as well as select and critical bibliographies.

Fearghal's article, **Charlie Daly: Republican Brothers, Partition and the 'Sham' Northern Offensive**, analyses Charlie Daly's position as a member of the Irish Republican Brotherhood, Supreme Council and his prominent role in a pro- and anti-Treaty IRA campaign against the Belfast government between the Treaty and the southern Civil War.

The article begins by Fearghal contextualising the IRA's abortive northern offensive in the spring of 1922 within the wider framework of the Treatyite settlement. He then details Daly's position as a Supreme Council member, who initially co-operated with the emergent Free State army's northern policy. Fearghal also refers to Daly's subsequent removal from his command of the 2nd Northern Division as evidence of Collins, Mulcahy and O'Duffy's manipulation of the issue of partition to avert civil war and neutralise the northern IRA. Fearghal's analysis then examines Daly's role as anti-Treaty vice-commandant in Donegal during the May offensive, arranged through the Irish Republican Brotherhood, but abandoned by the pro-Treaty forces. His article concludes that Daly's execution, alongside Seán Larkin, may have been partly due to their knowledge of the no longer expedient northern conspiracy, and the disingenuous way the Free State military leadership removed Daly from his command to achieve its ends.

*'Fearghal's analysis then examines Daly's role as anti-Treaty vice-commandant in Donegal during the May offensive...'*

# Keynote Address Given at Event on Sport Psychology

The Psychology Society of Ireland held an event at the Sport Ireland Institute in February 2026 under its Division of Sport, Exercise and Performance Psychology (DSEPP). The theme of the event was “Looking Back To Move Forward” and it featured a closing address from Dr Ciarán Kearney, who was invited by the organising committee. The vision of the DSEPP is to build a community of professionals who share a commitment to advance the development of sport, exercise and performance psychology in Ireland and to represent the professional interests of practitioners and researchers in this field.

This event was a significant new chapter in the development of sport, exercise and performance psychology. During his keynote address, Ciarán reflected on a growing ambition to raise professional standards of applied practice in sport psychology across the island of Ireland and to cultivate connections between academics, researchers, students and qualified practitioners in applied sport psychology.



# SCoTENS Conference Highlights Research by College Academics

The annual SCoTENS conference took place in October 2025 and it was attended by five members of academic staff from the college. The theme of the conference was “A New Era for Professionalism: Teacher Identity, Authenticity and Agency” and it attracted researchers who explore the evolving landscape of teacher professionalism, by examining how shifts in society, technology and education policies have prompted a redefinition of what it means to be a professional teacher.

One of the presentations involved Dr Donna Hazzard and Joe Hughes, who spoke about their collaborative research project with University College Cork, titled **Enhancing Equity and Awareness in Initial Teacher Education Through Reasonable Accommodations / Adjustments for Students with Disabilities in Ireland.**

Their research adopted a mixed-methods design that included a survey, workshops and focus groups, involving students, lecturers, teachers, support staff and placement coordinators. Their research findings indicated marked disparities between university-based support and placement experiences. Students often hesitated to disclose their disabilities, fearing negative evaluations and reduced opportunities, leading to increased anxiety, diminished confidence and restricted participation during placements. Furthermore, many educators acknowledged operating mainly on self-taught knowledge, underscoring an urgent need for structured training and clearer policies. Donna and Joe’s corresponding report and toolkit from their research project were published by SCoTENS during October 2025.

Another presentation was given by Julie Hamilton, who participated in a doctoral roundtable that brought together doctoral researchers who worked on topics related to education and educators in its broadest sense. Presenters shared insights from their



research, posed questions, outlined the challenges they faced and engaged in deliberations with their peers and experts in the field of education.

Julie’s presentation, **The Role of Creativity in Making Maths More Accessible for Pupils in Northern Ireland**, was based on her current doctoral research. In her research, she argued that promoting and fostering creativity to make maths more accessible is not only justifiable, but highly desirable from an educational perspective. Julie also suggested that the prevailing climate within mathematics education in Northern Ireland prioritises exam success above almost all else, to the detriment of robust mathematical understanding. At the same time, she referenced the changing demographic of pupils, indicating that all classrooms contain a wide and increasing variety of learning needs. Julie’s intention for her research was to explore what contribution creativity could make to mitigating some aspects of these challenges.


Other activities involving academic staff at the SCoTENS conference included committee meetings and chairperson business by Dr Gabrielle Nig Uidhir, as well as a panel discussion involving Dr Geraldine Parks, where she reflected on the conference theme and spoke about her thoughts on it in relation to teacher education.



*'... attracted researchers who explore the evolving landscape of teacher professionalism, by examining how shifts in society, technology and education policies have prompted a redefinition of what it means to be a professional teacher.'*

Twenty-third Annual Conference  
#ScOTENS2025  
[scotens.org](http://scotens.org)

**ScOTENS**  
THE STANDING CONFERENCE  
ON TEACHER EDUCATION,  
NORTH AND SOUTH



**A New Era for Professionalism:**  
Teacher Identity,  
Authenticity and Agency

**16 & 17 October**

Lough Erne Resort  
Enniskillen, Co. Fermanagh

## Research-Based Work of MEd Students on Display

The college places significant value on the research undertaken by students during their MEd programme. Dissertation projects and research-based assignments form an integral part of their postgraduate experience and contribute meaningfully to their professional practice across educational settings. To celebrate and promote this scholarly work, the college showcased summaries of exemplary student research on noticeboards throughout the campus. In December 2025, a selection of dissertations from recent MEd graduates were converted into academic poster-style displays. These posters were designed both to highlight the high standard of student research and to inspire current postgraduate students as they progress through their own degree pathways. The featured research represented a diverse range of contemporary educational themes, including teacher and pupil wellbeing, teachers' perspectives on shared education, transitions from nursery to primary school, the role of music in early years settings and the importance of reading for pleasure.



Collectively, these posters demonstrate the depth, relevance and impact of the research undertaken within the MEd programme.

## Conference on Irish Language, Literature and Culture

Three members of academic staff attended an annual gathering of scholars at, "An Chomhdháil ar Chultúr agus ar Litríocht na Gaeilge", which took place in the University of Galway during October 2025. This conference on Irish language, literature and culture featured research that was taking place in various areas of Irish Language Studies. One of the papers, titled **An stíl liteartha agus úsáid na Gaeilge i scríbhinní liteartha Mháire**, was delivered by Dr Seán Mac Corraidh and focused on aspects of Máire's literary style. A second paper was presented by Padaí de Bléine and it was titled **Léiriú na mban i bhfilíocht Uí Shearcaigh**, which offered a portrayal of women in the poetry of Cathal Ó Searcaigh. A third paper, by Dr Fearghal Mac Bhloscaidh, was titled **'Mo mhallacht do na curachaí': feidhm na n-amhrán ómóis áite i saothar Mháirtín Uí Chadhain**.

**An Chomhdháil ar Litríocht agus ar Chultúr na Gaeilge**  
**Áras na Gaeilge**  
**Ollscoil na Gaillimhe**  
**3ú - 4ú Deireadh Fómhair 2025**

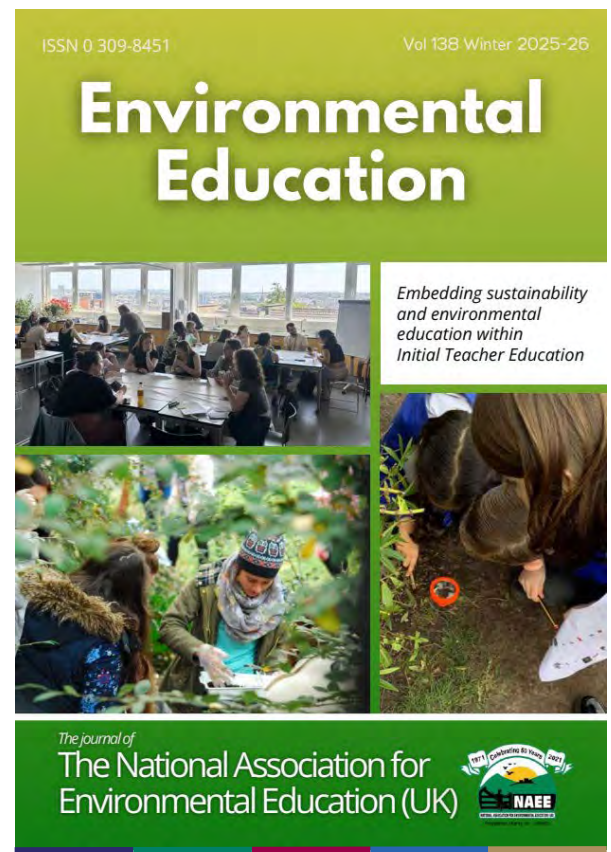


OLLSCOIL NA  
GAILLIMHE  
UNIVERSITY  
OF GALWAY

# Article on Science Teaching Through an Environmental Lens

The most recent volume of the journal “Environmental Education”, published during Winter 2025-26 by The National Association for Environmental Education, features an article by Dr Katrina Mulholland, Dr John Prenter and Prof Gerard McCann. Titled **Science Teaching in Belfast – through an environmental lens**, it focuses on students’ experiences of a third-year module that enables them to develop their understanding of pedagogy through an environmental lens.

In the article, the authors refer to the module’s aims that ensure students explore major concepts in ecotoxicology and anthropogenic influences on the environment, as well as develop pedagogical links between these concepts and the environmental components of The World Around Us in the Northern Ireland Curriculum. They refer to the students being highly engaged and understanding the importance of sustainability, which brings with it an ethical imperative that can be seen in their learning experiences and through their teaching practice classrooms and resulting careers. They also mention students developing important transferable skills including qualitative and quantitative research methods, report writing, data handling, theoretical analysis and scientific methods. Finally, they inform readers about their ongoing longitudinal study that involves students and aims to establish their understanding of and interest in climate change and the science underpinning it. To date, their data not only expose common misconceptions among students, but also measure their attitudinal shifts and levels of ethical awareness.



# Article Published on Literacy within the Transformed NI Strategy

The Autumn 2025 edition of “Literacy News”, under the theme LAI at 50: Wishes for the Next 50 Years, featured an article by Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke titled **The Place of Literacy in the Re-Professionalisation of Northern Ireland’s Education System**.

In her article, Geraldine refers to the challenges facing the NI education system over the past ten or so years, but then goes on to discuss the Transformed NI Strategy, which was launched in 2025. In relation to literacy, Geraldine mentions it being placed squarely at the heart of this transformation, with a new literacy strategy due to be launched in September 2026. She also highlights that the Department of Education is crafting general literacy guidance for schools, which will be supplemented by regular bulletins, designed to expand upon and provide illustrations of the evolving evidence base and related practice in literacy. Geraldine concludes by referring to the future of literacy looking bright in Northern Ireland, as policy and practice become realigned with the research evidence.



# Research on the Philosophical Context from which the Idea of Hope Emerges

The biannual journal “Policy & Practice: A Development Education Review”, which is published by the Centre for Global Education, featured an article in Issue 41, during Autumn 2025, by Prof Gerard McCann. This journal celebrates and promotes good practice in development education and debates the shifting policy context in which it is delivered. It provides a space for education practitioners to critically reflect on their practice, share new research and engage in debate with their peers.

Gerard’s article, titled **Philosophical Sources of the Pedagogy of Hope**, refers to hope being central to the understanding of pedagogy and the process of teaching and learning. He suggests that hope reflects a philosophy that has energised society and humanity’s lived experience in a manner that is essentially about building and forming human potential. In this sense, Gerard views education as hope, with it being at the very core of a community of learning.

His article explores the backdrop to this philosophy of education through the lens of one of its most important advocates, Paulo Freire, and he highlights some of the key facets of Freire’s pedagogy. It points to *conscientização* (critical consciousness), human agency and ethics-based liberation as the three pillars of his life’s work and looks at thinkers and movements that have helped to shape Freire’s understanding of the importance of education for society and democracy.



*‘... refers to hope being central to the understanding of pedagogy and the process of teaching and learning.’*

