

RESEARCH-INFORMED TEACHING



**St Mary's
University College**

A College of Queen's University Belfast

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This report highlights some examples of research that informed teaching at St Mary's University College Belfast.

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Research In Teacher Education

In the *Conclusions And Next Steps* section of the final report from the BERA-RSA Inquiry into the role of research in teacher education, titled “Research And The Teaching Profession: Building The Capacity For A Self-Improving Education System”, the authors wrote the following:

‘This Inquiry has uncovered strong evidence that teachers and teacher educators need to engage with research, both in terms of their subject and phase specialism, and with regard to developments in education more broadly. There is also strong evidence that teachers and teacher educators need to be equipped to engage in enquiry-based practice, which means having the capacity, motivation and opportunity to use research related skills to investigate what is working well and what isn’t effective in their own practice’. (British Educational Research Association, 2014, p.37)



The Need For Research-Informed Teaching

The need for academic staff to engage with research ensures that higher education institutions facilitate students with learning through teaching that is informed by research. This is to guarantee that lectures, seminars, tutorials, etc are enhanced to impart relevant, up-to-date and evidence-based scholarly knowledge to students.



There are several ways in which teaching can be informed by research. These include, but are not limited to: when academic staff refer to appropriate published research that is pertinent to what they teach; when academic staff draw upon their own research to communicate the conclusions that are relevant to what they teach; when academic staff reveal literature, theoretical frameworks and methodologies associated with research to further knowledge and inform practice that are appropriate to what they teach; and when academic staff enable students to interpret and make sense of research findings in order to create a critical narrative through assignments and presentations that are related to what they teach.

Examples Of Case Studies

This report presents a snapshot of some case studies that outlined how research, consulted and conducted by academic staff, shaped their teaching and enhanced students' learning.



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CASE STUDY 1

Dr Frances Burgess



Dr Frances Burgess worked on a research project titled “‘Cambio’ Action Research Project: Year 1 Western Music History”. It aimed to: improve student engagement and interaction in music history; and make stronger connections between music-discipline studies and music education, using the theme of social justice and critical pedagogy. This involved personal scholarship that focused on reviewing literature on effective methods in music history teaching, social justice and critical pedagogy in music education, as well as examining the theoretical ideas from Freire, Foucault and Bakhtin.

Frances incorporated numerous teaching and learning activities throughout her course, which were: research-led - with students learning about research in music history i.e. the content; research-orientated - with students learning about what music historians do and working with primary sources, manuscripts and editions; research-tutored - with students critiquing music history research, particularly the canon and how it has been presented in curricula, textbooks and on the concert platform, as well as critiquing each other’s work in peer-assessed presentations; and research-based - with students engaging in independent research about a ‘missing’ composer and making connections with the mainstream.

The findings of her research indicated that, through focus groups, students showed increased interest and engagement in the course content and in the mode of assessment. Findings also showed, through critical incident questionnaires, the value of continuous evaluation of the course and revealed insecurities and difficulties encountered by the students as the course progressed.

Frances has already disseminated her initial findings from this research project at the Teacher Education Advancement Network conference, the Society for Music Education in Ireland conference, and to colleagues, via the College’s Summer Research Symposium.

CASE STUDY 2

Dr Donna Hazzard



Dr Donna Hazzard's doctoral thesis focused on the development of student teachers' critical literacy perspectives and was used for writing research articles for potential publication. It responded to three main research questions:

- Do student teachers have the capacity to develop a critical literacy perspective?
- How might a Bourdieusian reflexive sociology help student teachers better understand reproduction and transformation in literacy teaching and learning?
- What are the implications of this investigation for work in preparing pre-service teachers to teach critical literacy in the interest of social justice?

Donna's research informed her teaching as she took discrete critical literacy sessions with students and embedded the area of critical literacy throughout her teaching for all year groups. Her research work also informed the creation of a critical literacy teaching resource used by students that took the form of a school-based project for pupils at Key Stages 2 & 3. More than 4,000 pupils have become involved in projects using this critical literacy teaching resource in which students collaborated with teachers.

CASE STUDY 3

Julie Hamilton



Julie Hamilton worked on a research project titled “Student Hopes: Achievement, Research, Equity And Diversity”. It aimed to explore how teacher educators could prepare and support student teachers to negotiate and engage with challenges of educational underachievement while on school placement. This was to raise awareness of the potential to change and influence educational trajectories and to impact positively on educational outcomes through positive and active social justice that was underpinned by pedagogy. A greater appreciation of these issues, as well as possibilities offered by such research, led Julie to place a greater focus on social justice issues within her teaching, particularly as they related to students’ preparation for classroom teaching.

Her research was two-fold, which utilised an action-research approach that explored the student teachers’ understanding of teacher agency, educational engagement, achievement and attainment. In the first strand, student teachers were introduced to concepts of sociology and social justice within education, and participated in focus groups based on these topics. In the second strand, the student teachers acted as researchers and explored these same concepts within their practice, with their pupils as the participants.

This research project had multiple benefits for Julie, as a teacher educator and more widely. The findings informed student teachers in their preparation for school experience, with a focus on making connections between the theoretical elements of their initial teacher education programme and their daily pedagogy, as well as practice. In addition, the project provided an example of how student teachers can be researchers of their own pedagogy and practice. In this case, by using age-appropriate methodologies that engaged and enabled pupils to articulate their views on various issues using a student voice approach.

CASE STUDY 3 (continued)

Julie Hamilton

Julie, who collaborated with colleagues from Marino Institute of Education, had her research featured at the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South, which funded the project with the Shared Island Unit. She also presented it to colleagues during the College's annual Summer Research Symposium.



CASE STUDY 4

Prof Martin Hagan



Prof Martin Hagan, along with colleagues from Marino Institute of Education, worked on a research project titled “Determining Student Teachers’ Engagement With, And Application Of, Educational Research To Enhance Professional Practice In Two North And South Teacher Education Institutions”. It aimed to: investigate how student teachers engaged with and in education research during their initial teacher education programmes; determine the extent to which student teachers applied their research knowledge and experience during professional placement; and discover how teacher education programmes best supported students to apply their research during professional placement.

Integral to his teaching, Martin was keen to gather evidence of students’ understanding of what was meant by a research-based profession and of how students applied their research during professional practice. He generated data from students of initial teacher education that investigated their understanding of and application of research in practice. The purpose was to identify a pattern and then to explain the pattern, using in-depth data drawn from a subset of students.

A mixed-methods approach was used to provide a holistic account of student engagement in and with research. First, surveys were undertaken with final year students to provide a contextual backdrop. Next, students’ practical engagement with research during their professional practice was explored through the use of focus groups, the data from which was then analysed using an inductive and hermeneutical approach.

Key findings addressed students’ subject and pedagogical knowledge, research literacy and their application of research to practical experience within the professional context.

CASE STUDY 4 (continued)

Prof Martin Hagan



Martin presented the findings from the first round of data collection at the Educational Studies Association of Ireland conference. The research, funded by SCoTENS, informed his practice in preparing students for and engagement with research, particularly in the classroom and school contexts.

CASE STUDY 5

Dr Matthew Martin



Dr Matthew Martin had his research featured in publications, including *The International Journal of Educational Management* and *An Introduction to Tutoring in the Writing Centre*, as well as at conferences. He also helped to develop handbooks and resources for teachers.

His research work centred on three key areas, which linked directly to his teaching. The first area was writing pedagogy. His research-related presentations, publications and affiliations linked the teaching of writing to children to his own students' understanding of their identities as writers and their experiences of the writing process. He set up the College's Writing Centre and it allowed him to act as a consultant, setting up other Writing Centres.

The second area was personalised teacher professional development. Through his research-related work on "TeachMeets", Research Lesson Study and Personalised Professional Development, he gained experience and authority in developing students' professional judgement, which was key to them taking ownership of teaching professionalism. This, in turn, led to the development of a forthcoming online professional development journal, *WeLearn*, for Northern Ireland teachers that gave students and teachers a platform to become learning leaders.

The third area was linking literature and literacy. His work on Shakespeare, Irish studies, drama and A-level texts allowed him to connect the work he did with English literature subject specialists to implications for teaching. For example, he taught *Visions of Modernity* which, through examining texts such as Aldous Huxley's *Brave New World*, gave students a chance to probe their understanding of education within a culture dominated by social media and the "distractions" of the internet.

CASE STUDY 6

Dr Seán Mac Corraidh



Dr Seán Mac Corraidh conducted ongoing research to evaluate the use of the close reading of texts when considering extracts from various Irish language sources. BEd and LA students in their second year of study were participants in the research, thus providing them with a greater understanding of using close reading in the context of literature in Irish.

The outcomes of this research informed his own teaching, as well as research, and provided him with information about the opinions of his students on the close reading strategy.



CASE STUDY 7

Padaí de Bléine



Padaí de Bléine conducted research on a project titled “Iniúchadh ar chur chuige na ceardlainne maidir le haistriúchán ó Bhéarla go Gaeilge”. It investigated the use of workshops to teach translation studies in Irish. It involved action research with BA students in the third year of their study and aimed to determine if the workshop approach to translation from English to Irish benefitted those students. The findings of the research provided Padaí with another method to develop translation techniques with students. It brought grammar points and translation together, with data from students gathered by questionnaires, focus groups and videorecording.

Translation from English to Irish formed a part of the assessments for BA students and they found this to be a challenging aspect of their module. In his research, Padaí set out to gather more qualitative data on the students’ views of translating from English to Irish and on the structured workshop approach. He followed the suggestion of Fitzpatrick and Hunt (2019) regarding the design and format of the workshop and had a structured piece of prose for the students to translate, with reference books and website links available, so they could use them to guide their translation. The students were familiar with the references given, as they came from literature and grammar books studied over the course of their degree programme. The translation from English to Irish had specific points of grammar and contained certain vocabulary and phrases that could be sourced by using the references provided. The focus of the research was to find out the merits or otherwise of this approach through student participation and feedback.

The research methodology involved a questionnaire to gather the students’ views on translation in a general sense at the outset. The students were given a questionnaire with rolling scale answers and open-ended questions, which sought to gain their

CASE STUDY 7 (continued)

Padaí de Bléine



views on the area of translation from English to Irish and on the current approaches to delivering this aspect of their module. The students took part in a structured workshop that involved translating a piece of prose from English to Irish.

They were provided with resources required to complete the task, which was conducted in a group format. The workshop was recorded with the consent of the participating students. Following the completion of the translation, the students took part in focus groups in the same week as the workshop. The in-depth focus groups ascertained the students' views of the workshop approach and discovered the merits or otherwise of it. The students completed another short questionnaire, with the rolling scale answers and open-ended questions, to see if their views of translation changed, considering the new approach.

Padaí had a corresponding paper of the research published in the peer reviewed journal *Léann Teanga: An Reiviú* and also presented his findings to colleagues at the College's Summer Research Symposium.

CASE STUDY 8

Sharon Haughey



Sharon Haughey worked on a research and development project known as Video Interactive Guidance (VIG). Geared towards professionals, it was an initiative that used the key principles of attunement as a framework for analysing professional observations and reflections. Along with her co-researchers, Sharon employed VIG as a tool for analysing aspects of professional practice which could lead to positive changes. This occurred through an increase in awareness of both verbal and non-verbal methods of communication.

The professional development aspect of this work was supervised by an educational psychologist. The main research question was:

- How effective was VIG, as a methodology in teacher education, in enhancing staff's and students' reflective practice?

The VIG project involved further developing the pedagogical approach in a teacher education setting. Student participants had the opportunity to become familiar with a tool for professional reflection that should be useful to them throughout their teaching careers.

Staff engagement with VIG led to enhanced professional practice involving a range of activities, such as giving feedback to students, teaching that is informed by meaningful reflection and applying the principles of attunement in staff-student interactions. Both PGCE and BEd students have participated in this research and development project.

The project team have presented the project at the College's research seminar series.

Dr Geraldine Parks

Initial findings from Geraldine's research suggested that mastery teaching may alleviate maths anxiety and increase confidence in teaching mathematics. She argued that if mastery pedagogy goes some way to obtaining this goal and helps raise standards in

Dr Geraldine Parks

These included: which pedagogies caused least anxiety, more confidence, better motivation and increased concentration; which topics in numeracy caused students most anxiety; how confidence related to attendance; and the best teaching styles and methods based on student feedback.

As a result of her research, Geraldine was invited to present her findings at the Developing Awareness of Maths Anxiety in Ireland Workshop, organised by the Mathematical Resilience Network, and she also gave a presentation at the Standing Conference on Teacher Education North and South.



CASE STUDY 10

Prof Gerard McCann



Prof Gerard McCann has focused much of his research over ten or so years on a project referred to as “From The Local To The Global”, which involved university academics and NGOs in the UK, Ireland and the Global South. The research generated from this project has been instrumental to his scholarly work and has informed his teaching both within the College’s Liberal Arts (LA) degree programme and beyond in terms of delivering lectures, seminars and conference presentations to international audiences. The project enhanced research partnerships and teaching in the field of international development and resulted in: academic publications; an academic research journal; a network of organisations; a European Union lifelong learning project; a key textbook adapted and translated from English into Slovakian, Polish and Greek; a lecture tour of universities across Europe; and ongoing teaching/talks.

The contribution of Gerard’s research had a significant international impact in that it contributed to the discourse in higher education and NGOs on the process of globalisation and the study of international development. The key textbook (McCann, G. & McCloskey, S. (2015) *From The Local To The Global*. London: Pluto Press) became a mainstay of international studies in universities in India, Africa, Australasia, Europe as well as the USA and was accompanied by keynote lectures and talks in various universities. The impact, underpinned by research, has been widespread and pervasive in regards to the promotion of the subject discipline and teaching of international development studies. The research has brought the issues pertinent to development onto a broader stage and has given it international recognition.

Both the Centre for Global Education and the Global Learning Programme have utilised the publications stemming from the project as benchmarks in the field. The outworking of the

CASE STUDY 10 (continued)

Prof Gerard McCann



initiative also led to Gerard working as an adviser on the English language version of guidelines for members of the Polish Parliament and senators in the Polish Presidency of the European Union Council, as well as those working with the Council and European Parliament Committees on international cooperation. Importantly though, the work involved in this research project also informed much of Gerard's teaching, especially in one of his modules within the LA degree programme.

CASE STUDY 11

Ciaran Walsh

Dr Elaine McLaughlin



Ciaran Walsh and Dr Elaine McLaughlin worked on a research project titled “Value Orientations Of Teacher Educators In Physical Education”. It aimed to determine the value orientations of physical education teacher educators and the level at which these value orientations were displayed in their professional practices and programmes of study, namely their teaching approaches, the content they focused upon, and the ways in which they carried out assessment.

This topic of interest connected directly to the teaching of their courses and helped them gain a shared understanding of how value orientations could assist them in fostering a deeper understanding of curriculum texts. In turn, this supported their professional practice with students of initial teacher education.

Using collaborative self-study methodology, Ciaran and Elaine drew upon examples from six physical education teacher educators who taught different primary pre-service programmes. Data consisted of: a value orientations inventory, pre- and post- a physical education module; three reflective writing tasks, each over the course of the module with feedback provided by a critical friend; one meta-reflection each; and a final group discussion.

All qualitative data were coded using the constant comparative method to identify themes. The analytical process was carefully designed to facilitate the voices of the researchers by building in a critical questioning of their own values throughout the research.

Ciaran and Elaine collaborated with colleagues from Dublin City University, Marino Institute of Education, Stranmillis University College and Maynooth University on this SCoTENS-funded research project and had their research featured at numerous conferences. These included the World Congress of the International Association for Physical Education in Higher Education, as well as the College’s Summer Research Symposium.

CASE STUDY 12

Dr Angela Vaupel



Dr Angela Vaupel's research interests are interdisciplinary and draw mainly from cultural and film studies, intercultural education, as well as exile and identity studies. She is a founding member of the International Feuchtwanger Society, an external member of the Centre for Irish-German Studies and a fellow of the UK Higher Education Academy. Angela worked on a research article related to the impact of Brexit on multilingualism and cultural identities in the UK and Northern Ireland. She had a chapter on teaching for mutual understanding published in a book with a focus on language learning and teaching in peace and global education. Other chapters on, for example, borders and memory as well as the translation of German exile literature were published.

Angela's scholarly activities focus on international studies, with a specialist interest in cultural studies. Within the LA degree programme, she teaches aspects of European culture and area studies such as the history of the idea of Europe, minority identity representations, as well as otherness in film and literature, all of which are informed by her research. Second and third-year LA students in particular benefit from her research expertise in film studies, which forms a substantial part of or is, indeed, the main media taught and analysed in her second and third-year modules. Angela's students undertake their own research projects within the contexts of the modules she teaches related to her field of expertise. She also provides the students with thoroughly instructive guidance regarding academic research practice and ethics.

CASE STUDY 13

Dr Barry Doherty

Julie Hamilton

Gerry Trainor



The mathematics course team collaborated on a research project titled “Effective School Mathematics Tasks: Developing Understanding Among Trainee Teachers”. The project explored student teachers’ perceptions of what makes a good mathematics classroom task and how/why this develops over the course of their initial teacher education.

Associated literature documents the central importance of the role of the teacher in supporting the success of classroom mathematics tasks. Accordingly, this project provided greater insight into student teachers developing professional judgement and informed teaching in this area on the mathematics course. Both qualitative and quantitative data were collected, via an online questionnaire, from students at each stage of the BEd mathematics course, as well as from recent graduates.

The findings indicated clear consensus in the task features to which student teachers assigned priority: mathematical meaning; differentiability; and curricular relevance. It was evident also that student teachers’ views evolved over the course of their studies, with both school experience and subject application courses contributing to this development. In light of this, subject application teaching is placing increased focus on developing students’ professional judgement.

The research team submitted an article for publication and presented their findings at the annual Summer Research Symposium.

CASE STUDY 14

Sharon Haughey



LEADERSHIP



Sharon Haughey worked on a research project that was based on a case study of best practice in leadership and Catholic education. It focused on three research questions:

- How does the leader seek to share the distinctive vision and mission of Catholic education in today's secular society?
- What does it mean to lead by example?
- To what extent is it important for every member of staff to serve as leaders in a Catholic school, acting as role models for everyone?

The research sought to demonstrate a high level of commitment to the aims and objectives of the Department of Education's report *Learning Leaders: A Strategy for Teacher Professional Learning*, insofar as it placed leadership and research at the heart of educational practice at both under- and post-graduate level.

The motivation for this research came from Sharon's planning and teaching for a summer school course at Masters level titled *Leaders in Catholic Schools*. The research informed her teaching as it offered Masters level students the opportunity to focus on recent, relevant and local research related to their specialism. Since the focus of the research was on the Catholic primary school, it informed her work with under-graduate students in Religious Studies.

This research project also informed Sharon's supervision of students on leadership-focused Masters level dissertation topics and her growing knowledge and application of creative and communicative methodologies has supported work with under-graduate students in preparation for their research projects.

CASE STUDY 15

Karen McGivern

Dr Matthew Martin



Karen McGivern and Dr Matthew Martin collaborated on a SCoTENS-funded research project titled “Inclusion Of Newcomers: Video Diaries In Initial Teacher Education”. It focused on the topic of inclusivity and belonging among newcomer children in schools in Ireland, north and south.

This project engaged with students studying initial teacher education programmes and had three main aspects. The first was a baseline survey to gather students’ current understanding of their role as ‘place-maker’ for newcomer children and to capture the opportunities, as well as the challenges, they envisaged as student teachers in the classroom. The second involved students’ involvement in a conference to explore belonging through the eyes of newcomer families, community leaders, school representatives and experienced teachers. The third related to students creating video diaries, which documented their reflections on belonging after the conference, including any changes to their understanding.

A sharing event was also organised, allowing a selection of students to meet and discuss the results of the research. The research proposal involved consultation with leaders in schools that had a high proportion of newcomer children and with members of community organisations that supported immigrant communities. A review of the relevant literature was the starting point for the research project and it informed work with students in subject application, on school experience, and in the teaching of literature that addressed issues of multi-culturalism and cultural belonging. The digital dimension also informed the teaching of English in that students were asked to create digital video artefacts.

The outcomes of the research project, in partnership with Dublin City University, included producing a research report, presenting at an education conference, as well as disseminating findings at the annual Summer Research Symposium and other outlets.

CASE STUDY 16

Prof Martin Hagan



Prof Martin Hagan collaborated with colleagues both within and outside the College on three recent research projects. The first of these projects examined the grading of the practicum by calibrating the assessment of professional competence in initial teacher education. The purpose of this study was to move towards greater calibration of understanding between university tutors and student teachers on the most appropriate means of assessment of competence as displayed in the practicum experience of their initial teacher education programme. The research, which was accepted for presentation at a conference on education and new developments, involved students as participants and aimed to have a significant impact upon the assessment of school experience, which is a key component of the BEd programme for all year groups in the College.

The second project focused on writing reflectively in initial teacher education by laying the foundations for career-long professional learning. The purpose of the study, which involved Dr Geraldine Magennis-Clarke, was to explore how a sample of student teachers were able to develop reflective orientations and to determine the extent to which this helped to support their professional knowledge, understanding and practice. The research, which was accepted for presentation at a conference on teacher education, involved students as participants and aimed to have a significant impact upon the development and improvement of reflection across the BEd programme for all year groups in the College.

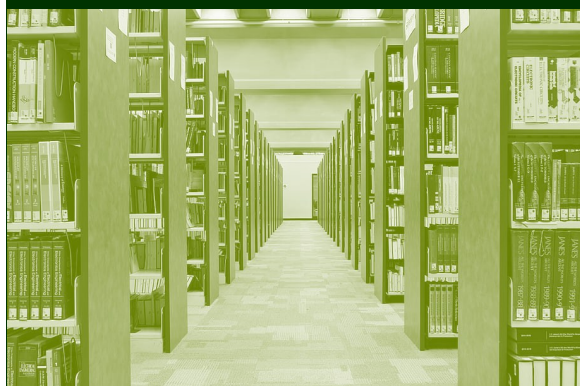
The third project asked the research question:

- Should teaching be a Masters level profession?

It took the perspective from Ireland and involved two of Martin's colleagues from the University of Maynooth. The purpose of the

CASE STUDY 16 (continued)

Prof Martin Hagan



study was to explore the extent to which engagement with Masters level study impacted upon teachers' sense of professional identity and professional practice in relation to pupils and colleagues. The outcomes of the research project aimed to involve students as participants and to have a significant impact upon programme development by Martin and his teaching in the Masters level programme.



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