<table>
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<th><strong>Title</strong></th>
<th>Contemporary research in Irish education: Volume 5: Book of abstracts of the 7th Annual Postgraduate Research Seminar</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Author(s)</strong></td>
<td>MacRuairc, Gerry; Connolly, Cornelia; Hall, Tony</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publication Date</strong></td>
<td>2018-04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Publisher</strong></td>
<td>School of Education, NUI Galway</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Item record</strong></td>
<td><a href="http://hdl.handle.net/10379/7283">http://hdl.handle.net/10379/7283</a></td>
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Seventh Annual Postgraduate Research Seminar
School of Education, NUI Galway
Education Building, Nuns Island
Wednesday 11th April 2018. 5.15pm

Book of Abstracts
Welcome and Introduction

We are delighted to welcome you to the 7th Annual Postgraduate Research Seminar of the School of 
Education, NUI Galway. A central part of the School of Education’s recurrent Research Seminar Series, 
this annual research colloquium affords the School’s master and doctoral researchers the opportunity 
to present their research to colleagues and peers. The seminar furthermore provides opportunities to 
share and discuss the School of Education’s postgraduate research, and the broader conceptual and 
methodological contexts within which that research is undertaken. 

This book of abstracts is the fifth in the series, Contemporary Research in Irish Education. As in the 
previous publications, this year’s book of abstracts includes synopses of current and ongoing graduate 
research within the School of Education, NUI Galway. The research summarised in the 2018 Book of 
Abstracts engages with and addresses salient questions and topics in contemporary educational 
research, both in Ireland and internationally, including:

- The use and purpose of data in leading Irish post-primary schools
- The development of a questionnaire to measure Irish Primary children’s science self-efficacy 
  beliefs and sources.
- Examining difficulties in initial algebra: Development of a scoring system for an algebra 
  diagnostic test
- Constructivism through discourse: An exploration of ‘locating’ learning with Special 
  Education Needs (SEN) in suitable setting, based on social, historical and political conditional 
  categorisations.
- Role Models for Boys: Addressing issues of gender modelling in Irish primary schools
- Blending learning – incorporating innovation in course delivery in Accounting in tertiary 
  education
- IDIRLION: Interactive Design and Immersive Realities for Learning Irish in an Online Network
- The teaching of enterprise in Irish Second Level Schools: An analysis of the Antecedent and 
  Contextual Factors with Deliver Success for all..!

This year’s seminar includes MEd students pecha kucha presentations. These enquiry-based teaching 
projects presentations are part of the MEd Contemporary Classroom Methodologies Module.

Building on the successes of the previous seminars, and as a publication output from this year’s 
colloquium, this book of abstracts includes the programme for the School of Education’s 2018 
Postgraduate Research Seminar and the abstracts of the presenters, outlining their respective 
research questions, methodologies, data collection and analysis.

We would like to congratulate the presenters in the seminar this year and their supervisors, and to 
thank all involved in organising this evening’s event, particularly those colleagues who are chairing 
the respective parallel sessions. We look forward to an interesting, insightful and productive 
discussion and sharing of contemporary, critical educational research.

Le gach dea-mhén,

[Signatures]

Professor Gerry MacRualc
Head, School of Education

Dr. Cornelia Connolly
Chair, Research Committee

Dr. Tony Hall
Editor, Book of Abstracts

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Seminar Schedule

5.15-5.30 pm: **Welcome** – Science Teaching Centre (STC)

Welcome & Overview, Prof. Gerry MacRuairc, Head, School of Education

5.30-6.15 pm: **MEd Pecha Kucha Presentations**

MEd students implemented enquiry-based teaching projects as part of their Contemporary Classroom Methodologies Module

- Yvonne Coen, *Jigsaw*-engaging children of all abilities in the 6th class classroom
- Cathal Hanley, *A look at the merits of changing the format of math lessons with the use of video technology*
- Gregory Harris, *Flipping my classroom*
- Ciara O Donoghue, *Post-Primary Interdisciplinary Planning & Alignment: A Text Production Project celebrating Multiple Intelligences in our Classroom (Stimulus: Artemis Fowl)*

6.15pm: **PhD Student presentations, Parallel Session**

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MEd students implemented enquiry-based teaching projects as part of their Contemporary Classroom Methodologies Module

'Jigsaw'-engaging children of all abilities in the 6th class classroom

Yvonne Coen

I wanted to implement a methodology in my classroom that would benefit all levels of ability. My main concerns were that certain children, regardless of their ability, were easily disengaged and I wanted to implement something new which would both engage them and require them to take ownership of their own learning. I was also concerned about adequately meeting the needs of the students of higher ability in my class. I wanted to use a methodology that allowed me to extend their learning and also to motivate them to engage in group work and paired activity, more frequently and in a meaningful way, as these children often preferred to work independently. I also wanted to create more opportunities for my students to use their evaluative and analytical skills.

I decided to implement the collaborative methodology 'Jigsaw' with my sixth class students. I used this methodology to teach Geography and History lessons. Jigsaw involves a topic being split into 4 or 5 sections. Each section is allocated to a group of 'experts' and they then study this section as a group. They discuss it, take notes and create visual aids such as concept maps or illustrations to help them to learn about their section. An expert from each group then forms a new group where the children teach each other about their section. An emphasis is placed on speaking clearly and listening carefully, asking questions for clarification and asking questions to ensure learning has taken place, revising and retelling. The children in that final group may then create a poster, comparative chart etc. based on the overall topic.

I gathered data about this project through observations, informal interviews, questionnaires and studying the quality of work created. Every time I taught a lesson through 'Jigsaw' I endeavoured to improve its effectiveness. Creating an environment where children carefully listened to one another without becoming distracted was challenging. A huge focus had to be placed on respecting one another as if their classmate was the teacher.

I aimed to improve my own planning of each topic and the implementation after each session. I sometimes grouped children based on ability and sometimes did not. I realised that careful planning and ensuring that the content is engaging and at a suitable level for each group, is essential.

I acted as a facilitator for teaching and learning, providing modelling and guidance and helped the children to realise that the onus was on them to sufficiently learn their section so that they could then teach it well. It took time to foster this independence and self-sufficiency in some of the children. I provided support for those who needed it through groupings, paired teaching and one-to-one guidance and modelling.
A look at the merits of changing the format of math lessons with the use of video technology

Cathal Hanley

How do students learn maths in school? The teacher introduces a new section or topic and spends the majority of the lesson at the board explaining it to the students. The students might get to do a few questions in class and then they are bombarded with questions for homework. This is the general structure of maths lessons across the country. It was how I was taught in school and basically how I teach my students today. Students get introduced to a new topic and basically how I teach my students today. Students get introduced to a new topic and then practiced in class where they have a support network of a teacher, special needs assistant and their peers? To test out this new conceived method I choose one chapter and a higher level third year mixed ability group and started making YouTube videos. In the videos I would introduce a new section, do a few examples and give them a few questions, then in the lessons they practiced the new methodology with the support network. This presentation will outline the methodology, challenges and results of the investigation.

Flipping my classroom

Gregory Harris

For my Contemporary Classroom Methodologies project I chose to experiment with flip learning. This involves moving instructional learning outside of the classroom and into the home environment using online learning tools. As students have already learnt lesson content at home (for example by watching a Youtube video) they should arrive at class with knowledge about the topic. This should free up class time so that lessons can become a place for active learning where students put their knowledge into practice.

In this presentation, I will discuss my use of flip learning in delivering an SPHE unit on substance use. In doing this, I will consider the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology, along with some of the practicalities of using this approach. I will argue that flip learning has the potential to be a very powerful tool, which has benefits for both teachers and students.

In my current school, there is no culture of using flip learning and no virtual learning environment. I will argue that such a situation exacerbated the problems associated with flipped classrooms. I will conclude, therefore, that flipped learning is most likely to be successful as a whole school initiative which has the backing of school management.
Ciara O Donoghue

My enquiry promoted the use of interdisciplinary planning in my 1st Year English classroom i.e. students were encouraged to utilise skills from other subjects to enhance their understanding in English, and thus realise that transferrable skills and cross-curricular alignment can broaden our overall learning experience. The project aimed to tap into the often overlooked multiple intelligences that are present in our classrooms. Many language learning activities are inherently passive, and this approach does not include all learners. It is important to recognise, support and celebrate multiple intelligences in our classrooms. This project enabled students to showcase various talents and skills.

The new JC demands that students engage with the exam paper so activities such as this learning process can help to enable the children to become confident of their own self-efficacy, and to become familiar with extrapolating their own opinions and ideas – not just a regurgitated summary of their teachers’ opinions. Various Methods included: i) Student-led decision making; ii) Group/paired brainstorming; iii) Ongoing monitoring and feedback; iv) Creating personalised rationales and evaluations; v) Creating (and presenting) projects in class; vi) Reflection activities; vii) Students providing feedback to teacher.

Learning Points:

i.  My school is 100% supportive of implementing contemporary classroom methodologies

ii. Genuine interest and feedback from colleagues based on my students aligning their learning with other subjects

iii. Feedback from the students was invaluable

iv. The journey is just as important as the destination and this project really compounded that theory; it was incredible to see the pride that kids had in their projects, the risks that they took and the creativity that they showcased.
The use and purpose of data in leading Irish post-primary schools.

Alan Kinsella
School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway

The issue and use of data within education for accountability, instructional and improvement purposes has been to the fore of school management and leadership over the past 3 decades. While the value of using data as evidence to inform school leadership and the pedagogical endeavour is widely attested, the manner in which this is carried out and the level of intensity by which it is executed varies considerably between jurisdictions. It is in its implementation at macro, mezzo and micro levels that differences arise and questions are raised as to its efficacy in relation to improving student outcomes and facilitating teachers in providing enriching, valuable and meaningful education for their students. It is important to note that when speaking of the use of data in education, one is addressing a very broad spectrum of information and evidence which informs practice. Educators have always used such sources to inform their practice, to varying degrees, however this has traditionally occurred in an informal manner. What is being examined here is the formulation of structured and systematic approaches to the collection, collation, analysis and use of data to inform practice and improve student outcomes.

Much research has been carried out internationally in relation to the positive - or otherwise - impact of data use in education, however the Irish experience in this area differs from that of many other countries, in particular our nearest neighbours in the United Kingdom. This research proposes to examine the current use and attitude towards data use by school leaders in Irish post-primary schools; the practical issues that schools encounter; the extent to which school planning and pedagogy is informed by data; how the data-capacity of schools has developed since the introduction of school self-evaluation; and how school leaders both use and facilitate the use of data and evidence to impact on classroom teaching.
The development of a questionnaire to measure Irish primary children's science self-efficacy beliefs and sources.

Sarah Carroll
School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway

Emergent in the literature is the need to increase levels of student engagement in science, with informal science education (ISE) playing a contributing role (DES 2017). Whilst children find science to be interesting and important to society, many children can view it as difficult and not “for them” (Aspires 2013). Science Self-Efficacy (SSE) is the self-belief an individual has in their own abilities to perform scientific tasks successfully in a given context. There is a positive link between high SSE and motivation (Bandura 1997). Children’s SSE has not yet been explored in the Irish context, nor has the influence of scientists on SSE been investigated internationally (Usher & Pajares 2008). Due to the recent prevalence in ISE initiatives aiming to increase children’s motivation in science, it is necessary to inform ISE providers of best practice regarding SSE beliefs. However, first it is necessary to be able to measure any effect they may have. This work will describe the development, pilot validation results and future directions of a Science Self-Efficacy and Demonstrator Competence (SSEDC) questionnaire. The questionnaire contains six Likert-like scales, each measuring a different aspect relating to SSE and perceived competence of scientist demonstrators. It was piloted with 92 children aged between 10-12 years old in a pre-post data collection design before and after participation in an informal science education activity. Four children (two boys and two girls) also participated in interviews to explore questionnaire comprehension and interpretation. Preliminary results suggest that overall children interpreted the questionnaires correctly and that the internal consistency of the items are reliable. However, the questionnaire needs to be further modified to effectively capture the scope of SSE sources and beliefs. Once validated, this questionnaire will be an excellent tool for both formal and informal science educators and practitioners who are interested in targeting the SSE beliefs of their students.

References
Examining difficulties in initial algebra: Development of a scoring system for an algebra diagnostic test.

Aoife O’Brien
School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway

This research aims to investigate the algebraic performance of second year post-primary students in Ireland (approximate age 14 years). A diagnostic test for algebra has been developed to profile and identify students who are struggling with algebra. The development of this test involved the identification of key mathematical content areas that are critical for success in algebra. Test items have been selected and adapted from the literature and are aligned with both the key content areas and the Irish mathematics syllabus at junior cycle, the initial three years of post-primary education in Ireland. Each test item has been developed in order to identify students’ conceptual errors in the particular content area.

A sample (n = 569) of second year post-primary students, from nineteen schools across Ireland have been tested using the diagnostic test outlined. The development of the scoring system for the test, together with some initial results for this sample, will be presented. The scoring system assigns a cognitive score to each correct test item and each student has a total cognitive score for their test. Accordingly for each item answered incorrectly there is an associated error score. Students’ test results are grouped into quintiles on the basis of cognitive score attained. Initial results for the main types of errors occurring in each quintile will be presented. These results will provide the opportunity to examine key mathematical concepts associated with success in algebra or lack thereof, and have the potential to help educators identify sources of poor performance and to design learning activities to aid development of students’ conceptual understandings.
Construction through discourse: An exploration of ‘locating’ learners with Special Educational Needs (SEN) in ‘suitable’ settings, based on social, historical and political conditional categorisations.

Miriam Colum  
School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway

Adopting a conceptual framework stemming from the work of Foucault, this research engages with Foucault’s notion of situating the object (student) within the structure of power which normalises – ‘hence both constraining and enabling’ (Walshaw, 2007, 13) – the construction of how students are learners in the present.

Drawing on this theory, this research asks if the identity of pupils presenting with special educational needs (SEN), is subjected, through the power of language, thus segregated based on past social, historical and political presuppositions and students are in fact ‘disabled’ in the present.

Power is pivotal to this research and how power operates through discourse thus placing learners in the ‘best setting’ according to past assumptions – historically, socially and politically. Leadership in terms of the school principal and in-school management teams will be addressed and their observations of ‘best placing’ for pupils presenting with SEN will be examined. Are such perceptions informed from the past or from present experiences?

For this doctoral research, a mixed methods approach is proposed with a view to collect and analyse perceptions of key stakeholders – principals and in-school management teams - in school settings in Ireland. Participants will be asked to complete an anonymous quantitative questionnaire based on provision for students with SEN. Once data is analysed, a sub-section of participants will be interviewed (qualitative) to gain a greater understanding of emergent areas of interest.

The research aims to inform/contribute to thinking on school provision and designation for students with SEN.

The focus of this presentation is on the educational context and the placing of students with SEN in specialised settings as determined from a historical, social and political perspective, underpinned by the theoretical lens of Foucault’s work.
Role Models for Boys: Addressing Issues of Gender Modelling in Irish Primary Schools

Amy Mc Donald
School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway.

This presentation stems from analysis of previous research and theoretical perspectives outlining society's uncritical gendered assumption that more male role models in Irish primary schools will resolve current issues associated with the academic and behavioural underachievement of boys. Calls by popular media to close the ‘gender gap’ between the academic achievements of girls and boys has placed constant pressure on government stakeholders to address concerns regarding the numerical dominance of female teachers in our primary schools. Boys are seen as the new ‘disadvantaged’ and are ‘at risk’ during their primary schooling due to the ‘feminine’ environment and curriculum in primary schools that is seen to be more attuned to the learning needs of girls. The addition of more male teachers to act as role models for boys is the popular solution. However, there is limited local research conducted in Ireland with educational stakeholders that determines the need and effect of incorporating more male teachers as role models for boys. There is little evidence to define the characteristics of a good male role model and what implications gender modelling will have on the education of both boys and girls.

In this presentation, I will discuss the qualitative methodological element that enabled data collection within the research and identify the methodological orientation of the study. I will examine the early stages of data analysis and explore some of the key preliminary findings that have become evident within the research. Incorporating the responses of children’s questionnaires and interview respondents, I will explore perceptions of gender modelling in primary schools. While exploring the current direction of the research, I will briefly highlight unexpected themes and constraints that arose throughout the data collection.
Blended learning – incorporating innovation in course delivery in Accounting in tertiary education.

Orlaith Kelly  
School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway

In a changing educational landscape, this study investigates the effects of blended learning on learning experiences in tertiary education. The needs of our student population are ever-changing and, as educators, we need to be proactive in responding to these changing needs. The aim of the study is to offer students an innovative and interactive learning experience using blended learning to enhance course delivery in an introductory accounting module. Bluc, Goodyear, & Ellis (2007, p.234) describe blended learning as “learning activities that involve a systematic combination of co-present (face-to-face) interactions and technologically-mediated interactions between students, teachers and learning resources”.

There is a dearth of research on the use of blended learning approaches in accounting education and this study begins to address that gap. There is great potential to utilise technology to change accounting education to the greater benefit of the diverse learners in our classrooms. This study proposes to investigate if delivering education in a language that students understand would increase student engagement and motivation and result in students taking greater responsibility for their own learning.

A design-based research approach is utilised where iterative cycles of the blended learning design are enacted, with design changes implemented in collaboration with key stakeholders (Hogan, Hall, & Harney, 2017). Barab & Squire (2004) propose that future progress in improving teaching and learning through technology can be realized through design-based research as an alternative model for inquiry in the field of educational technology.

A mixed methods approach is being employed to yield data-rich responses with the collection of quantitative and qualitative data through use of questionnaires, focus groups, student learning journals, learning management system (LMS) activity logs, exam result analysis and instructor field notes.

Despite the rapid technological change which has taken place since the researcher’s early student years, little change has taken place in the way in which accounting is taught, despite being faced with an ever-increasing technological dependent student population. The researcher is currently employed as a lecturer in Athlone Institute of Technology (AIT) and will focus on the background to the study and the first iteration of the design.

References:

Ronan Connolly  
School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway

While the number of native Irish speakers in Ireland continues to decrease, overseas interest in the language steadily grows. The overall aim of this research is to develop a supportive online space whereby Irish language skills can be developed and enriched amongst a community of students and specialists worldwide.

The first stage of this research investigates the use of immersive, location-based gaming and collaborative online tools to facilitate learning among Irish-language learners in Washington DC. IDIRLÍON (Interactive Design & Immersive Realities for Learning Irish in an Online Network) incorporates the mobile app ActionBound, which enables users to complete missions, watch and post videos, take quizzes and collaborate with fellow learners, all while exploring the world around them in the target language. Participants have a shared domain of interest in Irish language learning. Uploading their reflections and collaborations promotes mutual engagement, as users collectively engage in discussion to achieve their goals. This approach is based on the main tenets of social constructivist learning theory.

A mixed methods approach is being taken in pursuit of this research project, implementing both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The main methodology used is Design Based Research (DBR), which has been proven to be a successful methodology for innovative learning environments, often including new educational technologies.

It is hoped that IDIRLÍON will form part of a broader resource titled Gaeltacht.net, a language-learning social network site (LLSNS) aimed at encouraging communication and collaboration among language learners worldwide. This will be done through the use of online collaborative tools, digital storytelling and augmented reality, an approach that aligns with the community-of-practice theory.
The teaching of Enterprise in Irish Second Level Schools: an analysis of the Antecedent and Contextual Factors which deliver Success for all...

Gary McConway  
School of Education, National University of Ireland, Galway

Entrepreneurship is universally lauded as a means to creating young innovative citizens who benefit the local and national economy while also being one of the eight EU key competences. Its primacy is articulated in a myriad of European Commission and national reports and embedded in second level curricula and specifications. However, the delivery of these enterprise programmes in second level schools remains ad hoc and sporadic while measuring the success of enterprise education remains problematic due to the nature of the content and the lack of specific certification at second level. Much of the associated research literature focuses on the ‘what’ and ‘how’ enterprise should be taught, but a paucity remains in what shapes the ideal context for the delivery of enterprise programmes and what particular factors predispose a teacher, a school or community to develop excellence within the field. This study seeks to identify and analyse the primary factors, be they antecedent or contextual which facilitates this success in selected ‘exemplary’ schools by engaging with the relevant stakeholders.

Using purposeful sampling and qualitative research methods in five second level schools framed in a case study methodological approach, 30 semi-structured interviews were conducted with key personnel within the schools. The data collected was used to answer our central research question as to what are the antecedent or contextual which facilitates their success in enterprise education. A focus for this presentation is to explore the data analysis process enacted by the researcher and the initial data findings emerging from the five selected schools.