

Pathways to Innovation and Development in Education

A Collection Of Invited Essays



Rose Dolan (Ed.)

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CONTENTS

Introduction.....	6
Rose Dolan	
What sort of teacher do I want to be - critical and creatively constructive or compliant, conformist and conservative?	10
Jim Gleeson	
School Patronage, Educational Experience and Religious Teachings.....	16
Pádraig Hogan	
The Impossibility of Curriculum Change in the Mind of Someone Educated: Shark, Sabre-Tooth and Junior Certificate.....	20
Gary Granville	
“Making fools of ourselves”	32
Angela Rickard	
Constructing identities with young people: making visible cultural norms.....	38
Grace O’Grady	
Curriculum, Culture and Society.....	48
Dermot Quish	
Distributed Leadership and the Newly Appointed Teacher.....	54
Eilis Humphreys	
Bravery and Leadership.....	60
David Harris	
Sustaining Innovation in the Classroom.....	64
Lynda O’Toole	
The New Junior Cycle: Learning from Innovations in Transition	69
Denise Kelly	

Home School Community Liaison as Part of a School’s Pastoral Programme	74
Noel Kelly	
Schools and Community Service.....	78
Carmel Boyle	
Collaborative Practice at the Heart of Student Welfare	85
Margaret Keating	
Setting up a School Guidance Service	92
Emer O’Keefe	
Circle Time as a Learning Space: Challenges and Opportunities.....	95
Bernie Collins	
Experiential Learning as a vehicle for thinking critically on the assessment process; reflections of an educational psychologist in training.....	102
Maeve Daly	
Literacy and Creativity: a Personal Essay	108
Kevin Mc Dermott	
The Challenges of Teaching-Tales from the Frontline	112
Hayley McCann	
The Singularity.....	115
Lisa Connolly	
Key Considerations For A School Wishing To Be Genuinely Inclusive.....	118
Audrey Halpin	
Development Education through Drama in Education.....	127
Céline Healy	

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Introduction

Rose Dolan

The Department of Education in NUI Maynooth is pleased to publish the first of a series of publications that commemorates the work of our colleagues and our graduates. The series was conceived as a way to mark the contributions of two members of the department on the occasion of their retirement. This publication marks the work of Dr. Gerry Jeffers. Colleagues and graduates were invited to contribute a short essay on a topic that related to the overall theme of the publication, a theme chosen to reflect the multifaceted work that Gerry has engaged with over the course of his career in education, not just in our department but in the education system as a whole. This collection allows others to dip into this world and to experience it through the writings of practitioners in the field of education.

For our student teachers, the essays will serve as valuable introductions to some key ideas about teaching and learning but also ones that challenge their assumptions about schooling. For the more experienced teachers on our Postgraduate Diplomas, Masters and PhD programmes, the essays might inform and enthuse, nudge readers towards innovation and experimentation and emphasise that the *status quo* is not inevitable.

[Professor Jim Gleeson](#) opens the publication with a paper entitled *What sort of teacher do I want to be - critical and creatively constructive or compliant, conformist and conservative?* This is the beginning of a series of questions that challenge us to engage critically with the concept of a theory-practice divide, on being constructively critical, on professionalism and on recognising that schools need to change. In doing so, we engage with other issues such as neo-liberal ideological influences, anti-intellectual bias, the neglect of education research and the historical influence of the church.

This is followed by [Dr. Pádraig Hogan](#)'s contribution on *School Patronage, Educational Experience and Religious Teachings* which highlights the difference between the role of patron bodies and public education authorities and reflects on the roles of each in a pluralist democracy.

[Professor Gary Granville](#) invites us to consider *The Impossibility of Curriculum Change in the Mind of Someone Educated: Shark, Sabre-Tooth and Junior Certificate*. He describes the City of Dublin Humanities Project from the 1970s and demonstrates how the proposed Junior Cycle reforms bear a striking similarity to those contained in the project from 40 years ago.

Through the medium of a play set in Unreal Academy "*Making fools of ourselves*", [Angela Rickard](#) challenges us to confront assumptions about learning. The idea that learning takes

place only in ‘hallowed sites’ and in ‘calm tranquility’ is turned upside down by the introduction of a carnival into the Academy.

Drawing on research carried out in two community schools, [Dr. Grace O’Grady](#) considers the notion of identity as visible or invisible, depending on where we are positioned in relation to the dominant culture. *Constructing identities with young people: making visible cultural norms* challenges us as educators to be aware of these cultural norms and to offer our students opportunities to cross cultural borders.

In *Curriculum, Culture and Society*, [Dr. Dermot Quish](#) details the five traditions of curriculum and links them to curriculum in the Irish context. He posits that, in the interaction between curriculum and society, the purpose of schooling can be clearly understood.

[Dr. Ellis Humphreys](#) invites student teachers and newly qualified teachers to consider their leadership role from the beginning of their career in *Distributed Leadership and the Newly Appointed Teacher*. She offers features of leadership for consideration and a series of questions to prompt the development of thinking about the teacher’s leadership role.

In *Bravery and Leadership*, [David Harris](#) contemplates the role of bravery in leading change in schools. Drawing on his experiences as a Head Teacher in England, he details seven aspects of bravery, including the recognition of the link between staff morale and the leader, and the importance of placing the child at the centre of all efforts to make things educationally better.

[Lynda O’Toole](#), writing about *Sustaining Innovation in the Classroom*, considers how innovation plays a role at each stage of the continuum of teacher education. She outlines the potential of activities, such as the Learning School Project in Cork, and policies, such as School Self-Evaluation and Whole School Evaluation, to develop and sustain innovation in classrooms in Ireland.

The New Junior Cycle: Learning from Innovations in Transition outlines the main tenets of the Junior Cycle framework and draws parallels with the Transition Year Programme. [Denise Kelly](#) challenges the profession to participate in curricular reform. She poses questions for the practitioner to consider and highlights the opportunities for students to participate in decision-making.

In *Home School Community Liaison as Part of a School’s Pastoral Programme*, [Noel Kelly](#) describes the role of the Home School Community Liaison and the rationale for the role in a DEIS school. He shows how it assists the transition from primary to secondary school and its significance in linking teachers with parents/guardians as they support the child at this period of change.

[Carmel Boyle](#) draws on her research findings on the impact of engagement in community service Transition Year students in *Schools and Community Service*. Personal growth and

development, learning through experience and the enhancement of communication skills are some of the benefits that students experienced as a result of their participation in this aspect of the programme.

Collaborative Practice at the Heart of Student Welfare is the title of [Margaret Keating's](#) contribution. In it, she describes the need for whole school approaches and collegial practices in order to deepen the care shown to students. She also highlights how a strong link between leadership and collaboration is highly significant to the role of the guidance counsellor.

[Emer O'Keefe](#) describes the process of *Setting up a School Guidance Service* in a school in Ireland. She draws us into her expectations in advance of taking the post and the realities of the experience while in the role. What she has learned through the experience is reflected in her advice to others who follow a similar path.

Research conducted on the use of circle time in primary schools provides the basis for [Dr. Bernie Collins'](#) essay on *Circle Time as a Learning Space: Challenges and Opportunities*. She shows that, while circle time presents opportunities for involvement, it is also a place where power can be exercised through silence and non-involvement. She highlights much that is positive and cautions us to be aware of areas for concern.

[Maeve Daly's](#) *Experiential Learning as a vehicle for thinking critically on the assessment process; reflections of an educational psychologist in training* shows how conducting a process of cognitive assessment on a student created cognitive conflict within herself. She highlights the tension between duty of care and ethical consideration in relation to our work with others.

In *Literacy and Creativity: a Personal Essay*, [Dr. Kevin Mc Dermott](#) offers a personal reflection on multiple understandings of the word literacy. He highlights the tension between the lived meaning of literate/illiterate and the conception of literacy in international studies such as PISA. He offers the notion of communicative competence as a more holistic approach to English as a subject.

Four years post-qualification, [Hayley McCann](#) describes the key questions that one should ask oneself before embarking on a programme of Initial Teacher Education. Her personal reflections in *The Challenges of Teaching-Tales from the Frontline* highlight both the challenges and rewards of the role.

[Lisa Connolly's](#) *The Singularity* that tells the story of a mid-career change into the world of teaching. Rather than a single way of being, it shows the complexity of the role and the paradoxes encountered over the past eight years.

The penultimate chapter from [Audrey Halpin](#) focuses on inclusion. At the outset of this chapter, Audrey prompts us to think about our own beliefs about inclusion. The essay highlights tensions between personal beliefs and practices within the education system, and systemic resilient beliefs about separate education, special pedagogies and the incompatibility of special educational needs with the pursuit of academic excellence.

In the final chapter, [Dr. Celine Healy](#) considers the use of drama as a pedagogical strategy in Development Education. She shows the power of drama as a means of learning that does not require an external audience and that assists in the acquisition of insight and perception. As the familiar becomes strange through its reconstruction, it allows the development of multifaceted perspectives.

Finally, I would like to acknowledge the meticulous work of Keith Young in preparing the text for publication. His capabilities in copy editing and e publication were of tremendous assistance in the completion of this manuscript.

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