

Showcasing Collaborative Research in Education Across the Island of Ireland

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This Special Issue of the *Irish Journal of Education (IJE)* (Volume 47) is a landmark enterprise in at least two respects. It is only the second dedicated Special Issue in the 56-year history of the *IJE* (following Volume 37 in 2006, which focused on PISA, the Programme for International Student Assessment).¹ It also provides a platform from which to mark the 20-year anniversary of the SCoTENS (*Standing Conference on Teacher Education, North and South*) network. Campbell and Nig Uidhir's (2023) accompanying introductory editorial presents more detailed background on SCoTENS and the work of the network over the last two decades, while this introduction focuses more closely on the breadth of research described across the various contributions to this Special Issue.

The development of Volume 47 as a Special Issue was a serendipitous outcome of a webinar about the *IJE* presented at the launch of the Teaching Council's Researchers in Residence Scheme in September 2021. During the discussion that followed, it became apparent that there was some appetite for an academic outlet for the type of practitioner-linked research funded by the Teaching Council's schemes and related work, including the research coordinated by SCoTENS (of which the Teaching Council is a member). The *IJE* has always been positioned as an outlet for rigorous academic work aimed at informing not just researchers and policymakers, but also teachers and other practitioners. As such – and coinciding with the re-launch of the *IJE* as an open-access online journal in 2021 – it was felt by the editorial team that disseminating a selection of high-quality, practitioner-led research outputs from SCoTENS projects would be an appropriate enterprise in keeping with the traditions of the *IJE* and an opportunity to acknowledge practitioners' contributions, which have always informed the work of the Educational Research Centre. Following productive discussions between the *IJE* editorial team and the SCoTENS committee, a call for submissions for this Special Issue was launched in April 2022 and ran to the end of November 2022. We are delighted now, in December 2023, to present the fruits of this collaboration between the Educational Research Centre and SCoTENS in the articles that follow.

The articles in this Special Issue cover a variety of topic areas and methodologies, with some focusing on the presentation of empirical findings and others taking a more reflective approach. All of the articles in the Special Issue offer insights for readers across the island of Ireland, and beyond.

1 See <https://www.erc.ie/2006/01/21/vol-37-2006/>.

The first article by McClelland and Purdy (2023) takes a retrospective look at the Arellian nursery, the first nursery school set up in Ireland in 1928, and considers its distinctive ethos and lessons that are still relevant in a post-COVID world. The next article by Mooney et al. (2023) moves from early childhood education to primary level, by reporting data on primary teachers' perspectives on food education and discussing healthy-eating policies in both jurisdictions on the island. Next, Concannon-Gibney and Magennis (2023) discuss early reading instruction and the role of children's literature for this purpose in primary schools, as well as professional development opportunities in this regard for teachers.

As befits a SCoTENS-themed Special Issue, the next set of articles shifts the focus more towards teachers and teacher education. The fourth article by Nig Uidhir and Ó Ceallaigh (2023) presents findings from a study focusing on the specific competencies and knowledge needed by teachers working in immersion education settings in Irish-medium schools. Fifth, Ní Dhuinn et al. (2023) reflect on, and make recommendations for, student teachers' research projects undertaken on practicum or placement experiences in schools during initial teacher education. Sixth, Flannery et al. (2023) continue on the theme of initial teacher education by presenting a study focusing particularly on outcomes associated with integrated arts education practices and by reflecting on a model for evaluating professional development. Seventh, Taggart et al. (2023) present detailed case studies of how teachers' use of digital technologies in schools relates to teacher wellbeing and pedagogical practices.

The final article, by Martin et al. (2023), brings the Special Issue to a close by broadening the perspective beyond the gates of the school. The authors provide a detailed consideration of parental engagement with schools by comparing and contrasting two schemes to promote home-school links on either side of the Border - namely, the Home-School Community Liaison (or HSCL) scheme and the Parent Officer scheme.

Readers will note some differences in the terminology used to describe the two jurisdictions on the island of Ireland (e.g., Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, North of Ireland, South). In the spirit of cross-border collaboration, we have taken an editorial view that consistency of terminology across articles, while often desirable, is not necessary or necessarily appropriate in this instance. Hence, the terms used throughout the articles were at the discretion of the authors.

We would like to extend our thanks to the many people whose work contributed to the production of this Special Issue, including Cian Ó Raghallaigh (Educational Research Centre) for administrative support and proof-reading; guest reviewers including (in alphabetical order) Emmet Feerick, Lorraine Gilleece, Joanne Kiniry, Lydia Mannion, Sarah McAteer, Gráinne McHugh, Adrian O'Flaherty, Sharon Nelis, Aisling Ní Dhiorbháin, and Natasha Toole; and Carmel Kearns, Gabrielle Nig Uidhir, Maria Campbell, and their colleagues on the SCoTENS committee. Finally, we thank all those who submitted articles for the Special Issue, including those whose contributions do not appear in the current volume, for their constructive engagement with the *IJE*.

We hope that you enjoy the Special Issue and that it will help to spur and inform future collaborative research work across the island of Ireland and further afield. Readers are also invited to view the new papers published in the regular 2023 volume (Volume 46) of the *IJE*, and papers from all previous volumes, on an open access basis at www.erc.ie/IJE.

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