

Final Report on All-Ireland Doctoral Conference May 2013

Organisation and planning of the conference

A joint committee was established between the Schools of Education UCD and QUB to plan and prepare for the conference. This consisted of two academic leaders Prof Dympna Devine UCD and Prof Janette Elwood QUB along with doctoral students from UCD, QUB, UU, NUIG and NUIM. In addition Dr Declan Fahie – an IRC funded Post –doctoral scholar was also a key leader of the team in UCD. In the make up of the committee, we included one student from UCD and QUB who had each been involved in the organization of the conference in the previous year. This ensured transfer of learning and building of capacity across the two schools in hosting and organizing the conference. A meeting was held in QUB between core members of the committee October 2011 where it was agreed following much deliberation about the purpose and history of the conference to entitle this year's theme:

'Understanding, collaboration and synergy – Building a community of doctoral researchers in Education'.

The keynote speaker were discussed and identified. Professor Martin Mills, University of Queensland kindly accepted the invitation and the topic of his presentation was agreed. In the following months a poster to advertise the conference was designed by the students (see attached) and this was circulated to all higher education institutions north and south through the doctoral programme directors and school managers/administrators in each of the institutions. It was also advertised in the ESAI newsletter and the prior network of attendees in the previous conferences. A full team planning meeting was held in QUB in March 2013 to sort through and review the 65 abstracts received from Doctoral Students north and south and from across 9 HE institutions including QUB, UCD, TCD, UU, St Patrick's College of Education, DCU, UL, NUIG and NUIM. Considerable care and attention was given to structuring the presentation sessions into appropriate thematic clusters providing the doctoral students with a very clear understanding of the process of review and selection involved. In total 16 parallel sessions were planned structured under the following themes, itself illustrative of the depth and breath of research being conducted across the island of Ireland at doctoral level:

- Parental involvement in education
- Research Methodologies
- Pedagogy
- Citizenship
- Inclusive education
- Initial Teacher Education
- Intercultural education
- Shared Education and cross community links
- Critical approaches to educational policy reforms
- Evaluation and interventions

- Curriculum and Assessment
- Digital literacy and life long learning
- Leadership
- Mental health and emotions in education
- Education and younger children
- Assessment in Higher Education
- Continuing professional development
- Rights and Equality in Education

There was considerable liaison between committee members by email in the final period leading up to the conference. A conference brochure with full details of abstracts, delegate information and timetable was developed (see attached) and professionally printed for circulation in prepared conference packs. Participation in the committee was a considerable learning experience for the students – as they sorted and selected abstracts and organized the layout and timing of the conference itself. The joint nature of the co-operation between the lead institutions also helps to consolidate links that has consolidated to include other institutions over the years.

The Conference: Sessions, roundtables and Key Note Presentation

The conference was held in the School of Education, UCD on May 17th and 18th 2013 under the theme of In addition to the 16 parallel sessions detailed above it also consisted of a round 10 round table sessions – facilitated by colleagues from the School of Education and QUB as well as recent graduates of the Doctoral programme in UCD who had themselves attended the conference as students in previous years. These round tables have emerged as one of the key ways to bring delegates together in mixed groups interacting and connecting around shared concerns and challenges in completing their PhD. Themes covered in these sessions and based on preferences indicated prior to the conference by delegates and included:

- How to get published
- Academic writing
- Preparing for the viva
- What to expect from your supervisor
- Ethics in educational research
- Researching in the field – challenges

The key note address delivered by Professor Martin Mills from the University of Queensland, Australia. His research interests include the sociology of education, social justice in education, alternative schooling, gender and education, school reform and new pedagogies. The title of his address was “Building Inclusive School Communities: Learning From The Margins” and was very well received, giving rise to lively discussion for 30 minutes afterwards. Prof. Mills had attended many of the

presentations and referred to these during his keynote, as appropriate that was a wonderful validation to the students themselves and something they commented on subsequently during conference feedback. These discussions were also carried through during the wine reception and into the conference dinner where again Prof. Mills engaged and interacted with the students.

The Conference: An Academic and Social Event

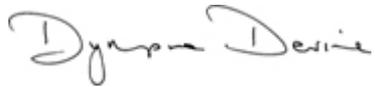
Throughout the conference time was scheduled in for regular breaks over tea, coffee and tray bakes. As in previous years, this proved to be a valuable opportunity to chat informally to fellow delegates about the everyday experiences of life as a doctoral student. The poster display was situated in the same space and again provided a good template for discussion. The atmosphere during these coffee breaks was particularly noted as being friendly, welcoming and relaxed, and the feedback from delegates has been almost unanimously positive on their value for setting the atmosphere of the conference as a whole.

On the Friday afternoon of the conference following the key note speech, a wine and cheese reception, sponsored by the host school UCD, was provided for all delegates. This was an extremely well attended and much enjoyed part of the day. Feedback received noted the great atmosphere and opportunity to get to know fellow delegates during this part of the conference. The conference dinner in a local hotel also provided an important social networking venue, enabling colleagues and students to expand on earlier connections and conversations, and to form new friendships. Live music was provided by a Phyllis Clegg – a doctoral student in UCD and her country and western band - It proved to be an extremely successful evening with many new links being made and in-depth discussions had, as well as plenty of fun and laughter.

Feedback on the conference

As in previous years feedback was obtained through follow up contact with delegates two weeks following the conference itself. The majority of the delegates found the roundtable sessions useful, describing it as participative, engaging and informative. The keynote address was also enthusiastically commented upon as was Prof Mills availability to talk and mingle with students for the remainder of the evening and at the conference the following morning. In addition delegates commended the smooth level of organisation of the conference, the positive and constructive feedback received during presentations and the spirit of collegiality and support that permeated the event. For many this was the conference where they felt most comfortable trying out (for many for the first time) their ideas and presentation skills in an environment where that was encouraging and relaxed. They also enjoyed obtaining an overview of the type of research that was being conducted at Doctoral level North and South and identifying many of the similar challenges that existed across both jurisdictions. A number of students commented that attendance at the conference had given them the

confidence to keep going – and many found the interaction with students at a later stage of their PhD , or who had recently completed their studies to be an important reference point and source of inspiration for their own work ahead. Students found the travelling to and from the hotel – which was located in Stillorgan a little awkward and would have preferred a restaurant option rather than the hotel itself for the conference dinner.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dymphna Devine". The ink is dark and the handwriting is fluid and legible.

Prof Dymphna Devine

June 2014.