

ISSUE 3 | NOVEMBER 2016

# EDUCATION NEWS

*Newsletter of the Department of Education  
- passionate about all things educational!*



Welcome to the 3rd edition of the Department of Education's newsletter! So much has happened on the national education scene since our last instalment in April, and for us here at Maynooth University, things have been equally busy. We are simply thrilled that four new staff members have decided to join us: Professor Aislinn O'Donnell; Dr.

Victoria Showunmi, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership; Dr. Nikoloas Fotou, Lecturer in Science Education and Ms. Anne Lavelle our new Executive Assistant. You'll learn more about them in the pages within. Along with their warmth and creative energy, our Department is continuing to grow in exciting ways. Keep your eye on our website in the Spring, when new offerings in Educational Leadership and professional doctorate programmes will be announced, which complement our new modular MEd degree.



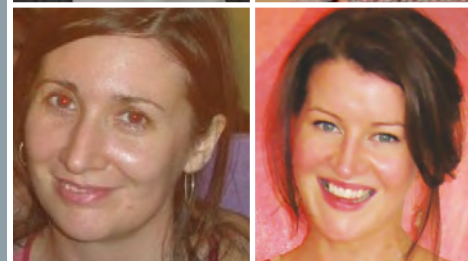
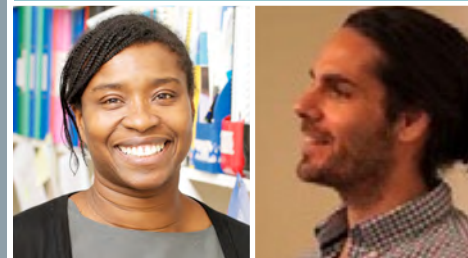
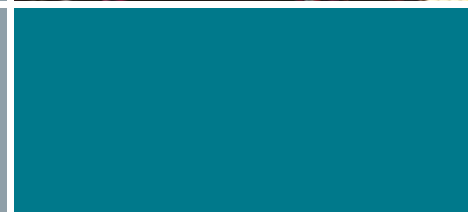
Professor Sharon Todd

For those of you involved in our Initial Teacher Education programmes as co-operating teachers, principals of partner schools, or tutors, I'm sure you will be delighted to hear that our first ever cohort of PMEs graduated in September, along with the final cohort of undergraduate students in Maths and Science Education. Students in this latter programme will now be joining our PMEs next year and we wish all of them tremendous success. In addition, you will find some alteration to the placement days for our students starting in September 2017. We have made the adjustments based on feedback from you in the schools and from the students. Keep your comments coming!

Finally, one of the most exciting changes to take place is our recent move to the new School of Education building. This means that all three education departments, which represent the continuum from early childhood through to adult education, have now found a permanent home together. This move heralds a new era for all of us, creating a dynamic hub of activity, both on the teaching and research fronts. Together, we strengthen each other and our department is looking forward to enriching our already significant initiatives through even more collaboration and dialogue across the sectors. As many of you already know, too often the bigger questions of why we educate or what the purpose of education is get lost when we are confined within our narrow fields of interest. Breaking out of our silos means that we can allow these big questions to inform our work within our individual sectors while at the same time maintaining that all too vital conversation between them. It is our hope as a department that we can embody the spirit of those conversations in ways that both draw on and inspire your own in the field.

*Please feel free to drop by, check out our department in the new building, and inquire about programmes or research opportunities. Our doors are always open!*

Professor Sharon Todd  
Maynooth University Department of Education



## FaSMEd Project

Maynooth University School of Education hosted the final conference for the EU funded FaSMEd project on the 1st and 2nd November.



This research project looked at the role of technology in supporting formative assessment in science and mathematics education. Working with three of our partner schools, Maynooth Community College, Coláiste Pobail Setanta (Clonee) and Oaklands Community College (Edenderry), we have developed a toolkit of materials. Check out <https://microsites.ncl.ac.uk/fasmedtoolkit/> for lots of ideas from eight different countries on how technology can enhance formative assessment in science and mathematics teaching and learning.

## Maths Week in Maynooth University

*Children at play are not playing about; their games should be seen as their most serious-minded activity.*  
Michel de Montaigne 1533 – 1592.

During **Maths Week**, Maynooth University School of Education hosted Gordon Hamilton who ran the Julia Robinson Mathematics Festival that aims to inspire students to explore the richness and beauty of mathematics through activities that encourage collaborative, creative problem-solving. Two first year groups from Maynooth Community College enthusiastically tried out a variety of maths tasks with BSc.Ed students. Check out <http://www.mathpickle.com> for a range of visually compelling puzzles and games that engage students in tough problem solving.



## Education is on the Move!

The Department of Education moved to its new home within the University in mid-October. Having spent in excess of 20 years in Education House, the new state-of-the-art education building will be shared among the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, the Department of Education (Post-primary), the Department of Adult and Community Education and the Maynooth University Centre for Teaching and Learning.



Aerial view of the new education building.

Designed by Architects Scott Tallon Walker, the building is 4,500m<sup>2</sup> and is comprised of 66 offices and 23 teaching spaces. As can be seen from the photos, it is designed in 2 blocks with a central atrium. It was built over a 16-month period at a total cost of €12 million. The building is flooded with light and enjoys great vistas across both the north and south campus of the university. Please call in for a tour if you are passing!



View from the new education building over the south campus





# Making History: The First Graduates from the 2-Year PME Programme

*Dr. Anthony Malone, Year 2 Course Leader*

In August 2014 the Department of Education, Maynooth University launched a two year consecutive teacher education programme. The newly titled Professional Master of Education programme (level 9) aimed to build in an advanced way on the aims of the existing one year programme and enable student teachers to exercise greater levels of professional responsibility and autonomy.

In year 2, the programme covers a diverse range of modular inputs on themes such as 'Perspectives on Inclusive Education,' 'Educational Leadership,' 'Restorative Practice,' 'Junior Cycle Reform and Assessment,' 'Quality Teaching and Learning,' and 'Advanced Special Education Needs' among others. A full programme of **Professional Studies** has also been devised which treats a range of specialised topics including 'Building Effective Relationships with Parents,' 'Dealing with Critical Incidents,' 'Wellbeing and Mindfulness' in addition to a module on 'Understanding Self in Interactions.'

Expertise in pedagogic content areas is a key priority and student teachers are provided with a range of opportunities to engage with their teaching subjects in differing ways: subject specific, subject related, generic and cross-curricular. Similar to Year 1 of the programme student teachers undertake dedicated specialised methodology sessions with a host of leading subject specific experts. They are also provided with opportunities to engage in subject related ways with their teaching subjects through a series of TeachMeet events. These are structured spaces which provide rich opportunities for student teachers to meet and share good pedagogic practice, innovative resources and ideas as well as personal insights and/or dilemmas. To support this work generic methodologies treat varying pedagogic content knowledge areas such as Junior Cycle reform and assessment, differentiation, Key Skills and educational technology.

There is also opportunity for student teachers to develop cross-curricular expertise through engagement in Lesson Study. This Japanese inspired model of teacher-led research prompts groups of teachers work together to target an identified area for development in their students' learning. Using existing evidence, student teachers are tasked to collaboratively research, plan, teach and record a series of lessons, using ongoing discussion and reflection to track and refine their interventions. The work concludes with a large poster exhibition of student teachers' on-going work at the end of each semester.

## Students at Lesson Study Poster Events

Programme design also prioritises engagement with significant educational themes, topics and issues. On a number of days across the year the timetable is given over to zoom events. These intensive one-day/half-day events direct attention to significant thematic areas such as Social Justice, Literacies, Arts Education, Wellbeing, Development Education and Team Teaching that are relevant to our practice as professionals.

Zoom events link directly with the Teaching Council's recently published draft document *Cosán* (2016) which seeks to 'foster a culture of "powerful professional learning based on teachers' active engagement in their own learning, for their benefit and that of their student" (p.3). They afford important opportunities to hold personal and professional values and practices up to the light and reflect deeply on the kind of teacher they wish to be; the values they stand for and the kind of world they wish to build. Doing so affords them significant opportunities to exercise self-direction and agency. This is a feature which permeates all aspects of the PME Year 2 programme particularly in the Discretionary module where student teachers are tasked to build new and substantive professional educational experiences. Many exciting and innovative projects have emerged as a result of this module.



PME year 2 students engage collaboratively and share their work



For example:

- » Collaboration with Trócaire on developing short course on climate justice.
- » Design and implementation of an Equine Assisted Therapy programme for children with additional needs.
- » Design of Wellbeing and Mindfulness programme for Senior Cycle students.
- » Establishing a Primary Language Learning Support Programme.
- » Design and implement Preventive Education Intervention Programme with Juvenile Liaison Officers.

Cultivating these kinds of capabilities enables student teachers to become their own best critics and develop greater levels of professional responsibility and autonomy.

These skills are further strengthened through the group dissertation where students complete a 10,000 word group-based, practice-based, issue-based project. The project is intended to develop the students' critical skills in applying theories and methods to work together within a defined academic area. Following submission of the group dissertation each group are invited to attend a group viva examination which assess the group's depth of engagement with the specified topic as well as the group's breadth of engagement with the chosen field of study.

In September 2016 103 students graduated from the 2 year PME programme. These are an exceptionally gifted group who are already making significant contributions as teachers to schools. We wish to thank all our partner schools for the work you did with these teachers so they could be the very best they could be.

For further information on Year 2 of the PME programme please don't hesitate to contact Dr. Anthony Malone at [anthony.malone@nuim.ie](mailto:anthony.malone@nuim.ie) or at 01-7083760.

## Presentation at ATECI Conference

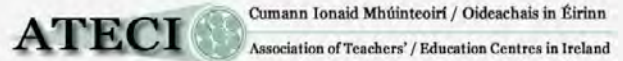
Amy McDowell, Year 2 PME (2015-16)

On Saturday 22nd of October, Veronica Tandy, Mary Byrne and I presented our thesis at a conference for Teachers of primary and post-primary students at Drumcondra Education Centre. The day kicked off with a keynote address by Dr Gerard McHugh who emphasised the important role teachers play in “cultivating humanity”.

We were the first group to present, and had thirty minutes in which to do so. Some of the findings in our research highlighted the time restrictions imposed on teachers and a need for more significant CPD. This motif was repeated throughout other presentations that day.

We heard from teachers who brought a new meaning to active learning by incorporating PE into their maths and Irish classes. Teachers that sought to move the importance placed on “care” in the teaching profession to a more focal place. Teachers, who not only practiced restorative approaches to classroom management, but moved it into the heart of their teaching.

We were honoured to present our thesis and received a lot of positive feedback throughout the day from principals and teachers alike. It was a



great day of networking. We also took away many notable ideas we intend to implement in our own classrooms, to improve our own teaching.

I highly recommend that all PMEs, NQTs and long serving teachers attend such conferences to hear the different teaching approaches and research that is on-going. I also hope that PME students submit their theses at the end of year 2. *It really was a most informative and enjoyable day.*

## New Staff



Dr Victoria Showunmi

### Dr Victoria Showunmi, Senior Lecturer in Educational Leadership

My research interests focus on gender, class and race and how they interact within the context of sociology, philosophy and education. In particular my research spans across two interconnecting themes which are 1) educational leadership and 2) young women and their well-being. It is so important to explore both these issues if we are going to address society and its perception on what a leader looks like in the 21st century.

I have worked on these issues for some time including being part of the ‘Feminist in Schools’ project which is being developed in schools that are located in England and Wales. In addition to this I completed a study exploring the notion of identity and leadership which captured the experiences of BME (Black Minority and Ethnic) female leaders across different sectors

and geographical areas in England. I work on international research projects which include co-leading a gender and leadership study in Pakistan. I work with colleagues in Germany contributing to their MA programmes on Gender and Diversity.

I use a variety of research designs which includes the use of both qualitative and quantitative methods. I have an interest in the use of autobiographical and critical ethnographic research as a tool to collect and analyse data.

I have been appointed incoming Conference Co-ordinator of BELMAS (British Education Leadership Management Administration Society) along with being an elected Council member and Co-lead Gender and Leadership. I am the treasurer and secretary for AERA (American Education Research Association) International Studies SIG (Special Interest Group) and on the organising committee for the EDI (Equality and Diversity Inclusion) conference.



Nikolaos Fotou

### Nikolaos Fotou, Lecturer in Science Education

Nikolaos Fotou is a lecturer in science education. He has studied Physics at the University of Crete in Greece and obtained his MA degree in science education at the University of Leeds, UK. He Started his PhD at the University of York and after completing two years he was transferred back to the University of Leeds where he received his PhD, in the area of students’ ideas, reasoning and self-generation of analogies. He has three years

of experience as a secondary and high school physics, mathematics and chemistry teacher. He has also worked for the past 7 years as a physics and mathematics private tutor and supply teacher, teaching students from primary up to first year undergraduates. In 2016, he worked in the Science and Technology Education Group, University of Lincoln on a project aiming at improving students’ achievement in, and attitudes towards science and on a small scale study exploring the achievement and understanding of primary education children with special educational needs and disabilities.

Within the same year he worked in a British, non-ministerial government department providing physics subject and assessment expertise to produce a functioning assessment of practical skills in science. He also worked as an editorial assistant for the *Tools and Mathematics* book which is an exploration of issues in mathematics education related to tools and how such tools can be used as Instruments for learning. In 2014 he worked as a research assistant in a research project looking at the use of ICT in mathematics classrooms. During 2012-2014 he was involved, as a research assistant, in different phases of the Wellcome Trust funded CPD project for primary science specialists. He is particularly keen to foster a more evidence-based, as opposed to opinion-based, approach to educational initiatives and his research interests are in science, physics and mathematics education with a focus on analogical reasoning, self-generation of analogies, nature of students’ knowledge, teaching and learning in the context of interactive pedagogies by the use of ICT and design and evaluation of educational interventions.



## Discovering Documentary Project

Earlier this year four PME students participated in an innovative project called Discovering Documentary. Discovering Documentary was run in conjunction with the GuthGafa International Film Festival, the Professional Development Service for Teachers (Film in Schools project). It was designed as a practical, hands-on exploration of social justice and development education themes through the medium of documentary film-making.

Coordinated by Conor Harrison and Angela Rickard in the department Discovering Documentary consisted of a series of five 3-hour workshops that were held from February to April.

The work culminated in the production of a series of films by Transition Year students from: Scoil Dara, Kildcock, Co. Kildare; Moyne Community School, Co. Longford; Ard Scoil Chiaráin Naofa, Clara, Co. Offaly and Gaelcholáiste na Mara, Arklow, Co Wicklow.

Film-making workshops were led by film makers, David Rane and Samantha Corr from Guth Gafa and students were introduced to the narrative style of a number of different Irish and international documentary films. Working closely with the student teachers and their cooperating teachers David and



From Left: Sinéad Kelly-Roche, David Rane, Amy McDowell, Laura Whelan and Laura Foley.

Samantha explored the skills involved in digital filmmaking in general and social justice documentary-making in particular. The films produced covered issues of interest to the students, including anti-racism, gender equality and a focus on local community which involved interviews with local residents, shopkeepers and one former Taoiseach!

Student teachers were invited to a reception at the GuthGafa International Film festival in early August where the films were available for festival goers to view and see an exhibition of the "Making of..." the films.

## New Staff *(continued)*



Aislinn O'Donnell

### **Professor Aislinn O'Donnell**

Aislinn O'Donnell is Professor of Education in Maynooth University. She specialises in Philosophy of Education and is particularly interested in exploring the relationship between theory and practice, and in thinking about the practice of education. Aislinn has taught in a range of educational settings and departments from Philosophy in UCD and the University of Dundee, Art in the Contemporary World MA in NCAD to Philosophy of Education in MIC

(Limerick). Her interests are very much trans-disciplinary. She writes about a wide range of questions and themes in philosophy of education and education from counter-terrorism and education, failure, and violence and curriculum, to experimentation, unpredictability and joy in pedagogy. She is currently developing an ERASMUS+ project called 'The Enquiring Classroom' which seeks to explore ways of engaging with difficult questions with students through philosophical enquiry, a lived values approach to religions and beliefs and arts-based methodologies, and she would love to talk with teachers and school leaders as the project develops.

She is also involved in international networks like the Anna Lindh Foundation, New Research in Philosophy of Education, and the COST looking at 'New Materialism'. Over the years, Aislinn has developed a number of creative research and teaching projects that seek to introduce philosophy to settings like the prison, probation projects, and drug projects. She has an ongoing collaborative project in primary schools called 'Art and Philosophy in the Classroom' with gallery educator and curator, and current Maynooth PhD student, Katy Fitzpatrick.

She is particularly interested in exploring innovative and experimental approaches to teaching philosophy, fostering cross-disciplinary dialogue between philosophy and other subject areas, and developing pedagogical strategies to help us to reflect upon ethics, inclusion, diversity, and the global refugee crisis in educational institutions and society. She is also interested in thinking about how public institutions in Ireland can become more pluralistic and participatory, creating more opportunities for the voices of all those who are part of those institutions to be heard. Further information can be found at <https://maynoothuniversity.academia.edu/AislinnODonnell>



Anne Lavelle

### **Anne Lavelle, Executive Assistant**

Anne Lavelle joined the Department of Education in September as the administrator for School Placement and PME Year 1. She comes to Maynooth University from UCD where she worked in various roles with prospective, undergraduate, postgraduate and post-doctoral students since 2005. Having joined the UCD

Access Centre team in 2008 she began by managing the centre's primary school outreach programme and then moved onto manage the various outreach programmes designed to target second level students from socio-economically disadvantaged communities around Dublin and the surrounding counties. Anne is passionate about the transformative effect of education and is excited to work with the educators of the future. Anne is a graduate of DCU and UCD.

## School Placement

School placement is an integral element of all of our initial teacher education courses and as part of the Post Graduate Diploma in School Guidance Counselling (PGDSGC). The Department of Education really values the strong relationships that it has fostered with placement schools over the years and appreciates the efforts schools make to facilitate the placement of our students. We are aware of the additional work that teachers undertake in supporting our students on placement and we hope that our student teachers, in turn, enrich life within your schools. In recent years, demand for school placements has increased with the extension of all initial teacher education courses and we have now extended our radius to 160km from Maynooth University. It is great to be in partnership with more and more schools each year and to learn from innovative work in the more than 450 schools within the radius.

Based on feedback from our students and from schools in surveys issued last April, we have decided to alter the days on which Professional Master of Education (PME) student teachers are on placement. This decision has been made so that student teachers have a number of consecutive days in schools. Moreover, as placement days will be attached to weekends, it allows student teachers to base themselves closer to their homes if desired and reduces the number of commutes to attend university/schools. From the start of the 2017-18 school year, the following arrangements will be in operation for PME placements:

- » Year 1 PMEs will be on school placement on Thursdays and Fridays
- » Year 2 PMEs will be on school placement on Mondays, Tuesdays and Wednesdays



There will be no change to the placement arrangements for BSc in Maths and Science Education (BSc.Ed.) student teachers. Further information on school placement for 2017-18 is available in the flyer sent to all schools in early November and which is available at the following link [https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/School\\_Placement\\_2017-18a.pdf](https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/School_Placement_2017-18a.pdf) or by clicking on the School Placement Flyer above.

In the current school year, we have approximately 340-student teachers on placement in partner schools across the BSc, PME and PGDSGC courses as follows:

<b>42</b>	Year 2 BSc.Ed student teachers
<b>30</b>	Year 3 BSc.Ed student teachers
<b>21</b>	Year 4 BSc.Ed student teachers
<b>121</b>	Year 1 PME student teachers
<b>104</b>	Year 2 PMEs student teachers
<b>24</b>	PGDSGC student teachers



## Team Teaching Workshops 2016

The successful collaboration between Maynooth University and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) in delivering team teaching workshops to student teachers and experienced teachers has continued in autumn 2016.

Attendance was open to all teachers in partner schools of Maynooth University and team teaching is an integral element of the programme for Year 2 PME student teachers. This is in line with the underpinning philosophy of the course to provide opportunities and support for professional collaboration in classrooms and schools.

To date, close to 200 student teachers and experienced teachers have participated in the workshops in Carlow, Maynooth, Navan and Tallaght in October 2016. This provided opportunities for participants to develop their understanding of team teaching, to explore their experiences of team teaching to date and to investigate different models of team teaching. The second workshop, to be held in November 2016, will deepen this understanding and



Team teaching workshop participants busy at work in Carlow!

allow participants to debrief after team teaching a lesson or series of lessons in the interim. The project will culminate in a national seminar on team teaching, co-hosted by Maynooth University and the PDST, on **Monday 13th February 2017**. This will provide an opportunity for project participants to share and celebrate their work and to engage with other interested educators around team teaching.

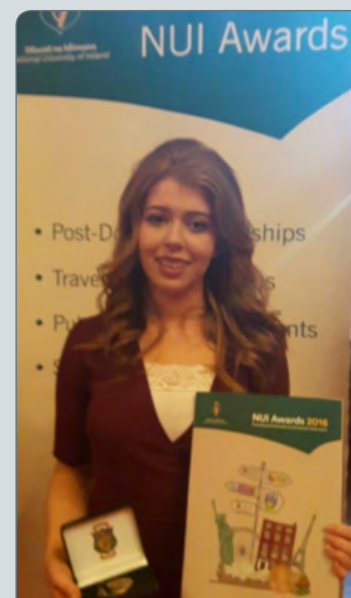
Further information and resources on the project to date are available at: <http://www.pdst.ie/teamteaching>. This includes the slides from the various workshops, poster presentations from the national seminar in February 2016 and videos of team teaching from post-primary classrooms in Ireland. We will be in contact with partner schools in due course with further details on the national seminar in February 2017.

## Duais Chiste Theach an Ardmhéara sa Ghaeilge 2016

In November 2016, Caroline Hourigan was awarded the the Duais Chiste Theach an Ardmhéara sa Ghaeilge.

This prize was presented as part of the Mansion House Fund Awards which are designed to promote the study of Irish and Irish History. These awards are allocated based on external examination of the written work of final year students achieving the highest marks in the four Constituent NUI Universities. The prize was presented at the annual NUI Awards ceremony in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. Caroline is a first year PME student undertaking school placement in St. Oliver PP, Oldcastle, Co. Meath.

*Well done Caroline!*





## China Teaching Placement 2016

In May 2016 five adventurous PME students from Maynooth University travelled to China to teach for four weeks in a Hailiang Cambridge International school. This exchange was established following an initial teacher education course offered in China by Keith Young and Angela Rickard in June 2015. Working with a Chinese partner, Guan Fei from Global Culture Exchange (<http://szglobalculture.com>) and with the help of the International Office in MU, we worked on finding a school for Maynooth student teachers the following year. Hailiang Cambridge International School will become Maynooth University's international placement partner in Zhejiang province. The Education Department will be offering further placement opportunities there for student teachers in the coming year.

Two of the five students who travelled last May, Kevin Smith and David Lee, decided to stay for this academic year as David's article below describes. Plans are underway to host an Irish Week in the school in March 2017 with an MU staff visit to Hailiang and other schools in the province.

"This was an unforgettable teaching and learning experience. I would encourage all PME students to apply as China gave me a greater appreciation



Left to right, Irene Ní Heabhí, Colm Walsh, Kieran Hammersley, David Lee, Kevin Smith at Wuxie National Park.

of contemporary education in Ireland. It also gave me the opportunity to experience and explore a beautiful and complex part of the world." Colm Walsh Year 2 PME (2015-16).

### A Journey into the Unknown! David Lee, Year 2 PME (2015-16)

Having spent virtually my entire life within the confines of Wicklow, Dublin, and Kildare, deciding to up sticks and hop on a plane to China in October was a decision that puzzled some people. From sitting down to a plate of frogs' legs after a long day's work, to travelling on the world's fastest trains, I suppose life is different here in a lot of ways. Every day is an adventure, but a thoroughly enjoyable and worthwhile adventure.

I'm teaching in Hailiang Cambridge International School, a school on the outskirts of Zhujiaji, which itself is a short train journey from Shanghai, Hangzhou, Nanjing and several other impressive cities in eastern China. The school is huge - similar in vastness to Maynooth University I would say - and very impressive. It's like nothing else I've ever seen. There are over 15,000 students, from Kindergarten right up to A-Level, who come from affluent nearby cities as well as more far-flung locations. I've taught Italians, Cubans and Iranians to name a few. The school has its own observatory overlooking the city, as well as an olympic-size swimming pool, hospital, hotel, stadium... You name it. They teach the Cambridge International Curriculum here, so the school caters largely for Chinese students who are seeking to receive a university education abroad.

I am currently teaching three IGCSE English classes - so, something similar to the Junior Cert. Contrary to what I expected, once you get into the classroom there are few differences between teaching here and back home. It didn't take long at all to adapt. Having just graduated from the PME, I feel well-equipped to deal with my students' needs. Although teaching towards an important exam will be a new experience for me, my classes are friendly and motivated and teaching here really is a pleasure.

One thing that is very different to the Irish system is the scheduling. Given that some of the students have lengthy commutes to school from their family homes, the working week here is generally ten days long with a four-day weekend. This allows students enough time to get home and spend time with their families. It is also ideal for Hailiang's foreign teachers, of whom there are many. My eighteen-storey apartment block on campus is full of foreign teachers like myself who, of course, are hoping to travel and see a bit of the world. I'll be travelling with a friend to Vietnam for a four-

day holiday next weekend. Travelling within Asia is inexpensive and the long weekends open up all kinds of opportunities.

Outside of school life, attempting to communicate without the language can admittedly be difficult at times. Since I've begun taking lessons in Mandarin, I've realised the enormity of the task ahead of me. For example, I have established that to say the Chinese for "I am" in my native Wicklow twang actually means "pleasure me", and "thank you" means "diarrhoea". Thankfully I nipped this in the bud early. Despite hazards such as these, having the cúpla focail along a few useful apps is enough to get by here, and I haven't had any problems thus far apart from a few cumbersome interactions with restaurant staff. Being a lanky Irishman brings with it a kind of celebrity status, so whatever vile notions you might inadvertently convey to a waiter are easily forgotten about.

The food is very different but, for the most part, very nice. To expect spice bags and 3-in-1's is a grave error of judgement. The first few days here are perhaps not for the fainthearted as you adapt to all the new kinds of food and ways of consuming it. I remember experiencing a sort of existential crisis here on the first night when I had to try and tackle a fried chicken head with a pair of chopsticks. I soon learned though that finding food to appease the Western palate is not difficult and that genuinely lovely food - Chinese or otherwise - is plentiful.

To conclude, my experience here has been terrific so far. The low cost of living, along with the handsome pay slips and long weekends, contribute to a lifestyle that is scarcely possible for teachers in Ireland at the moment. Perhaps Christmas will be a lonely time (I'll be working on Christmas Day), but I can catch up with friends and family in Ireland during the Chinese New Year break in January/February. Overall, I'm delighted to be here and I'm excited to see how things unfold.

## Empower 2016 @ Maynooth University

If you look at the logo for the Empower Project you will see that the M depicts two figures holding hands. It is a fitting emblem for the ideas that inform this creative and ambitious WorldWide Global Schools funded project led by St. Peter's College, Dunboyne and involving 10 schools in the LMETB region. Unlike the traditional, charity-based 'helping hand' offered by Irish schools towards the so-called 'Third World' in the past, the simple gesture of *holding hands* conveys instead notions of equality, friendship and solidarity. These qualities permeate the Empower 2016 project at a number of levels.

The brainchild of two dynamic teachers from St. Peter's College, namely Ms. Sinéad Edmonds and Ms. Aileen Flood, the main aim of the Empower project is to *empower* second level students to learn more about the imbalanced world we live in. It provides the space for second level students from schools across the region to work together on creative ideas; to think as active citizens and explore ways to address issues of local and global injustice. Collaboration rather than competition is key to their work: symbolically schools are working hand-in-hand, building networks among students and teachers and consolidating relationships since 2014 when the project began.

The evocative symbol of hands held in friendship and solidarity also works in a cross-sectional way with Maynooth University as a collaborator and friend of the project. As the closest university to many of the schools in the LMETB region Maynooth University is an ideal place to bridge the second level/third level divide. In early September this year Maynooth University Department of Education hosted the Empower 2016 Conference on campus. The involvement of 12 Professional Masters of Education (PME) Year 2 students greatly facilitated the smooth running of the event and created further opportunities for conversations about development education in schools to occur.

The themes addressed at the conference and the active and peer-learning that run through it resonate with the university as a whole and with the Department of Education in particular where Development Education has a strong and long-standing tradition. The 350 plus second level students who participated in the event were welcomed by Dr. John McGinnity and Ms. Emma Shine from the University's Admissions Office. John outlined how the newly re-imagined undergraduate curriculum in Maynooth University opens up pathways for students in any faculty to take modules in areas such as 'Global Environmental Change'; 'Perspectives of Poverty and Development' and 'Engaging with Civil Society: Justice, Welfare and Environment' to name just three. With such options available the spark ignited among the participating TY students now can become the flame they hold aloft as they commence their third level education, regardless of their chosen area of study in the future.

The formal launch of the conference was conducted by Ms Liz Lavery, former Education Officer with LMETB and this was followed by a keynote presentation by author, film-maker and activist Zlata Filipović. *Zlata's Diary: A Child's Life in Wartime Sarajevo* was started when Zlata was eleven, and



At the Empower Conference 2016 in Maynooth University: Siobhan Kieran, Donal O'Reilly, Sinéad Emonds, Angela Rickard, Garvan Gormley and Niamh Maguire

written for two years during the war in Bosnia. Zlata's story is a powerful reminder of the devastation of war and Zlata herself has dedicated her life to being an activist: writing, making films and working with others to raise awareness about global injustice.

Following this moving keynote address the students selected one workshop out of twelve in the morning and another in the afternoon. In these they explored a range of topics in the areas of Development Education, Education for Sustainable development, Human Rights and Social Justice working with representatives of a wide range of NGOs and others from the field of development education.

The model of peer-learning that informs the Empower project is itself very powerful. It assumes that young people are not mere passive recipients of information, but shapers of ideas and capable of making change in the world. They are encouraged to develop ideas and in turn deliver workshops in their own schools. An additional innovation named by the TY students from St. Peter's Dunboyne as '*Flipping the Tables*' will see them becoming teachers to the student teachers in Maynooth as part of our Development Education Week in November. We are looking forward to having the tables flipped in our newly opened building and to being inspired by the young people in the Empower project. We also look forward to further opportunities to connect with this outstanding project in the years to come.

## International Links with Malta University

The Education Department continues to forge international links with European universities.

In January of this year a bilateral agreement was signed with the Gender Studies Department in Malta University under the Erasmus+ programme. The agreement supports up to 3 academics per year until 2020/1 from each university, for a 5-day visit to share expertise in teaching and research. Linking with a Gender Studies Department is an exciting departure for the Department of Education and expands the existing expertise within the Department. The study of gender helps us not only to broaden our understanding of gender identity and culture but also the intersection of gender with sexuality, ethnicity, class and race.



The objectives of phase 1 of the mobility are:

- » To share innovative research methods with level 9/10 students and departmental staff.
- » To begin conversations with both the Gender Studies Department and the Education Department in Malta around the possibility of collaborating on research projects.
- » To begin discussions on the viability of developing a joint international masters' or doctoral programme in gender studies and education.

Dr. Grace O'Grady (Education Department, Maynooth University) and Dr. JosAnn Cutajar (Gender Studies Department, Malta University) with students on the Master of Gender Studies and PhD students at the University of Malta in October 2016