

# Literacy News



## A Message from the President of the Literacy Association of Ireland

Clara Maria Fiorentini

The Literacy Association of Ireland is delighted to share the latest edition of our newsletter. This is the spring edition of our biannual newsletter, presented in an exciting new format, with content and materials representing various sectors of the Irish education system.

We are thrilled to share such a wealth of interesting articles and contributions in this edition - spanning from topics on literacy in the early years to curriculum redevelopment. I am extremely grateful to our editorial team who have placed significant time and effort in collating articles to create this exciting edition of Literacy News.

To date, our dynamic executive committee have been extremely busy behind the scenes in making plans for the year ahead and creating additional supports for our

registered members.



May I encourage you to take some time to explore our 'LAI Updates' and engage with some of the new and many existing resources we have housed on our [website](#).

This month, a survey was circulated to all members about the Science of Reading in Ireland. We value the feedback and contributions of our members greatly. If you are yet to complete this survey, we would greatly appreciate if you could do so before May 6, 2024.

2024 promises to be another very busy and exciting year for LAI. Plans are already in place for our annual conference in November. I would also like to take this opportunity to invite you to our upcoming 'fireside chat' on May 1 - details of which can be found in our News & Events section.

Tá súil agam go mbainfidh sibh taitneamh as an eagrán seo. Beir bua is beannacht, Clara

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[Click to learn more about our committee members!](#)



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Literacy News

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Spring 2024



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# Updates from LAI



## Literacy Learnings Léargais Litearthachta

*Insights into literacy learnings from authors and illustrators*

Explore this exciting new feature on our website where we house a selection of interesting and inspiring interviews with Irish authors and illustrators who have been shortlisted in the LAI Biennial Book Awards. A special note of thanks to executive committee member, Adrian Lohan, who organises this content.



## Conference Presentations 2023

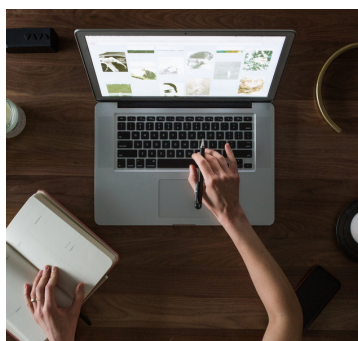
Registered members of LAI can access a range of the conference presentations from Conference 2023. Thank you to the presenters who have shared their work so generously!



## Science of Reading in Ireland: Member Survey

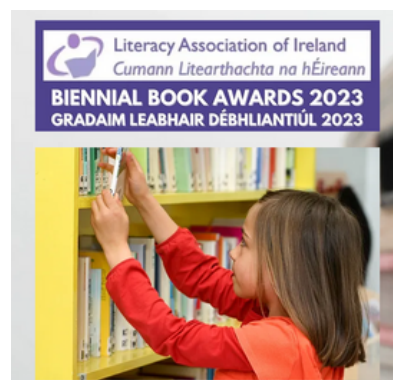
We value the feedback and contributions of our members greatly. If you are yet to complete this survey, we would appreciate if you could do so before May 6, 2024.

[Access the survey here](#)



## LAI & The Science of Reading

A new Science of Reading space has been created on the LAI website. This is free to access for all and houses a wealth of useful resources, links and material for educators interested in learning more about the Science of Reading. The executive committee intend for this to be a growing space and will continue to add to this feature over the coming months.



## LAI Biennial Book Awards Gradaim Dhébhliantiúla na Leabhar

The shortlisted and winning books are now listed on our website. This is a valuable space to explore some wonderful Irish children's literature with titles to suit the early years to young adult.



## LAI Portal

Explore the LAI portal to access a wealth of resources, webinar recordings, LAI publications and more.





# Early Childhood Education



Oideachas  
Luath-Óige







# Beyond Language and Literacy: Reading with Babies and Young Children Brings Many Psychological Benefits

Dr Suzanne Egan

A wealth of research going back decades demonstrates the positive impact of reading with young children for the development of language and literacy skills (see Hoyne & Egan, 2019, for a review). Various aspects of the literacy environment that young children experience (e.g., frequency of being read to, number of books in the home, quality of the shared reading interaction) are positively associated with multiple aspects of language and literacy skills. These important skills include things such as vocabulary development, phonological awareness, communication skills, and they also support school readiness.

However, the benefits of reading with young children extend beyond language and literacy, to a host of other psychological skills too, including the development of mathematical skills, numeracy skills (e.g., Wade & Moore, 2000) and reasoning skills. One study that explored the connection between the frequency of reading with 3 year olds and their non-verbal reasoning skills found that children that were read to every day had reasoning scores 7 points higher on average, than children that were not read to (Hoyne & Egan, 2022). Their vocabulary scores were also 12 points higher.

Shared reading with infants and young children also supports the development of attention skills. For example, when a parent or caregiver shares a book with a baby or young child, the process of both individuals focusing on the same object supports the development of joint attention (Farrant & Zubrick, 2011). Joint attention is a skill that is important both for cognitive and socioemotional development. This skill underlies much of a child's ability to learn from another person and to engage in social connection. This social connection is something that has been highlighted by parents of infants during reading and story time. In one study that explored parent's views on reading with their babies, the findings suggested that the main benefits of reading with their infants for parents were related to socio-emotional development and the time spent together (Egan et al., 2022). Parents mentioned how they liked seeing their baby's response to books (e.g., laughing, pointing, babbling), as well as how it supported their bedtime routine.

One early intervention programme with Irish infants (O'Farrelly et al., 2018) also found benefits when an infant was read to daily at 6 months old. By 12 months of age they had higher levels of cognitive and socioemotional skills, as well as vocabulary, compared with infants who were

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rarely or never read to. There are many benefits for infant development from shared book reading experiences in the first year of life. Other research also shows that infants read to in the first year of life had higher problem solving scores, as well as communication scores, compared with those that were not read to (Murray & Egan, 2014).



Findings from the Growing Up in Ireland Study show that most young children and babies are regularly read to (Murray & Egan, 2014). However, a significant minority are not read to on a regular basis at home. Given the high quality care and education provided in early years settings, and the high uptake of preschool places, early years professionals have a key role to play in facilitating story time and reading with babies and young children. In keeping with the Aistear themes of well-being, communication, thinking and exploring, and identity and belonging, reading with a young child supports not just their language and literacy skills, but so many other psychological skills too.

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*Dr Suzanne M. Egan is a researcher and lecturer in the Department of Psychology, Mary Immaculate College, Limerick. She is currently co-chair of the Children's Research Network, a members' organisation bringing together a broad range of professionals with an interest in research and evidence-based policy and practice for children and young people on the island of Ireland.*



## Early Childhood Education



# Aistear & Your Local Library

## Aistear & Your Local Library

Clara Maria Fiorentini

When creating shared reading opportunities in the early years “how and what you read is of the utmost importance” (Moynihan, 2012). ‘Aistear & Your Local Library’ was a pilot project designed and facilitated in collaboration with dlrLibraries and Creative Ireland. This project aimed to explore and created increased opportunities for ECE educators to engage with their local library in support of the application of Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009). Libraries can provide a unique space for children and adults to interact and engage in playful and informal language and literacy skill development through book handling, shared reading and onsite events for children and caregivers. Public libraries are “well placed to play a prominent role” in early childhood and can provide valuable supports in nurturing fundamental “pre-reading skills and a love of reading” Campbell-Hicks (2016, p. 122).

Developing on the findings of this study, **dlrLibraries** have launched a new series of resources specifically designed for Early Childhood Educators. A new Story Sack collection and series of online videos aim to explore and create increased opportunities for early childhood educators to engage with their local library in support of their application of Aistear: The Curriculum Framework for Early Childhood Education (2009).

### Early Literacy Videos

Three informative videos were designed for the dlrLibraries website, to support Early Childhood

Educators in their engagement with local libraries and book use in their everyday practice. These videos are available to all and are of use and relevance to primary infant teachers and parents of young children too.

### Video 1: Reading Aloud



### Video 2: Choosing & Using Texts



### Video 3: The Reading Rope & Early Literacy





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## Story Sacks

The collection of 14 story sacks includes titles suitable for babies and older preschoolers as well as a number of titles in Irish. Each contains a contemporary picture book as well as various extension resources to support the theme of the story sack with learning opportunities mapped to the Aims and Learning Goals of the Aistear Curriculum Framework. The Story Sacks are available for loan to Early Years Educators in the Dun Laoghaire-Rathdown area in possession of a Teacher's card. [Explore the titles here.](#)



Learning happens well before children are 'school aged' and young children benefit significantly from opportunities to explore and discover their emerging literacy interests in a variety of spaces, including at home, in the community, and in public libraries (ALA, 2016).

Libraries provide a unique space for children and adults to interact and engage in playful and informal language and literacy skill development through book handling, shared reading and onsite events for children, educators and caregivers.



In Ireland, local libraries offer a valuable role in supporting our ECE settings and ECE educators by:

- supporting educators in sowing the seeds of early and emergent reading development sharing resources, knowledge and professional development opportunities
- building reading relationships
- creating accessible spaces for book-talk, "book-blether" (Cremin, 2014) and bookplay
- creating communities of reading and creating communities of readers (Cremin, 2014; Commeyras, 2003)

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*Clara Maria Fiorentini is a Lecturer in Education (Literacy & ECE) at Marino Institute of Education, Dublin.*

*For further details on this project please email: [clara.fiorentini@mie.ie](mailto:clara.fiorentini@mie.ie)*

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# Primary Education



## Oideachas Bunscoile





## To Read or Not To Read?: The Place of Independent Reading in Our Classrooms

Dr Treasa Bowe

The positive benefits of reading volume on reading attainment are well known (Allington and McGill-Franzen, 2021), and once initial reading proficiency has been attained, the amount a student reads impacts on vocabulary, knowledge and motivation. Yet despite this, there continues to be debate as to whether independent reading is best situated within the school or home, and indeed as to whether it is the role of educators to develop a love of reading within their classrooms.

This debate is all the more pertinent in light of the 2021 PIRLS findings (Delaney et al., 2023). The data indicates that 43% of Irish students spend less than half an hour reading outside of school. In addition to this, one in six students almost never reads for fun, and a further 16% only read once or twice a month. When compared with the 2016 results, we see a decline in pupils' enjoyment of reading and an increase (9% to 26%) in the number of students that consider reading to be boring. In light of these findings, devolving responsibility for independent reading to the home is not the most equitable solution.

At the heart of Timothy Shanahan's (2019) concerns is the loss of instructional time with the teacher. When time is at a premium for literacy instruction, we must make sure that we consider which instruction gives the greatest returns.

Therefore, teachers must be mindful of how much time they give to independent reading, the time of the day it takes place and their own role. Teachers often read themselves during this time, acting as a model of a good reader. However, this removes support from students at the very moment they may need it most. Instead, Donalyn Miller (2014) advocates for teacher conferring with students during this time, to respond to their needs and support them.

Christopher Such's (2024) description of fake reading in a classroom will resonate with all teachers. When left unsupported during independent reading time, some students will employ diversion tactics to distract from that fact that they are not reading. To identify students who are avoiding readers, look for those who:

- Finish books quickly, or don't finish books at all
- Find the biggest book in a library and use it as a problem
- Regularly abandon books
- Look to change books during reading time, or find other jobs to do
- Don't have a book to read

During independent reading time, the teacher can use status of the class to determine how students are progressing in their reading and the nature of support they would benefit from. Using a simple form, the teacher can quickly note where each child is and how they are advancing with the book.

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The aim is not to set a determined number of pages that the student must read, rather to look for patterns in rate, areas where obstacles arise, and indeed preferences for different genres. Most importantly, during conferencing, the teacher should ask open ended questions which can help provide information on the child's comprehension and engagement with the text. It will also give more in depth profile of the child as a reader. This can be used, in addition to more formal assessments, to plan future instruction. Topics to discuss could include:

- *Are you enjoying this book?*
- *Why did you choose this book?*
- *Tell me about what is happening in your book?*
- *Tell me about the main character in this book?*
- *What's the most surprising thing that has happened in this book?*
- *Who else in this class might also like the book?*
- *If you enjoyed this book, you should also consider.....*

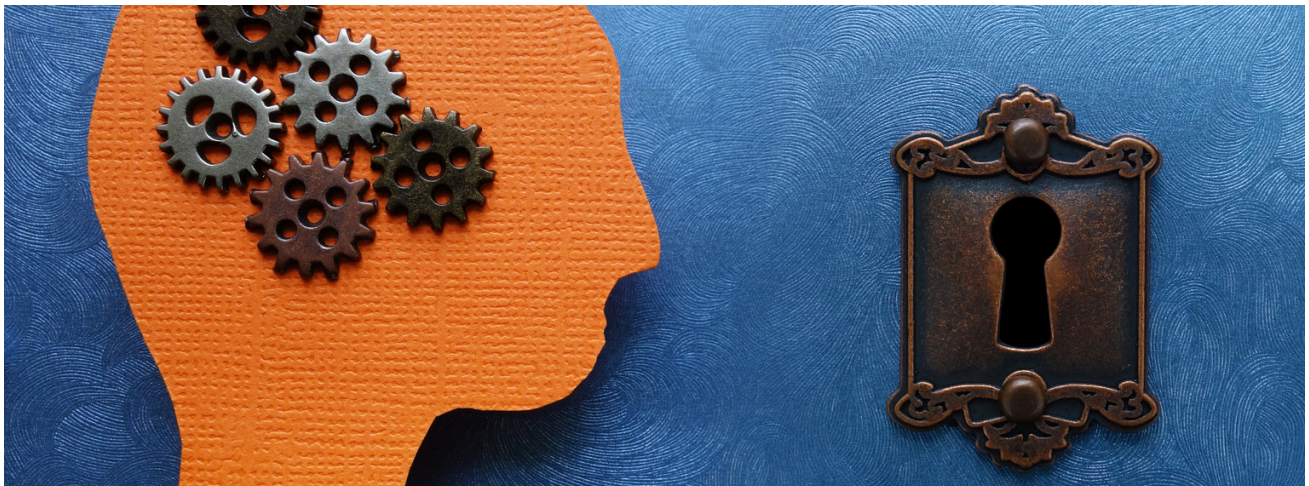
If the book is acting as prop, the teacher can use this time to first of all determine the cause of this avoidance tactic. If the student is struggling to find a book of interest, the teacher might build a book stack for them to peruse. In cases where students need support to select books which they can read successfully, the teacher can model strategies and help guide them to make supportive choices. This can also be a time where the teacher sits with a child who needs more support and helps in the application of learning.

As the debate continues regarding independent reading, it is important to remember that it need not be a choice between teaching children to read and providing opportunities for children to read. We can do both, but only when teachers are as active during independent reading time as they are during the other times for literacy instruction.



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- Dr Treasa Bowe is a primary school teacher from Cork with over 24 years teaching experience, both in Ireland and Los Angeles, California . Across her career, Treasa has had keen and special interest in the area of literacy with her Masters research centred on Comprehension Strategy Instruction (CSI). Treasa was a member of the team that developed the highly regarded comprehension programme Building Bridges of Understanding (Mary Immaculate College, 2009). Treasa's PhD research focused on the role of on-site continuing professional development in promoting a whole school approach to CSI. More recently Treasa has become better known to educators on Instagram as @betweenthecoversofagoodbook , where she shares her knowledge about literacy, and picture books on a regular basis.*



# In a Post-Truth Hellscape Critical Literacy is a No-Brainer

Dr Donna Hazard

### Introduction

When faced with overwhelming evidence to disprove her claim, an accuser in the Hampstead Paedophile Hoax that aired recently on Channel 4 said, “truth is an individual experience” (March, 2024). Worryingly, this signals a profound and seemingly fast-moving problem, a post-truth hellscape of mis-, dis- and mal-information, of individuals too willing to make unscrupulous use of artificial intelligence and deepfake technology, of the rise of online scamming, conspiracy mentalities, and toxic influencers. It’s hard not to wonder what the world holds in store for children and young people, and it would be a folly for today’s educators to ignore this troubling question. In this article I suggest that being critically literate can help inoculate against a whole new world of deniability where genuine information sits alongside fake and to which none of us is immune.

### What is critical literacy?

Critical literacy is a departure from the traditional conception of literacy as reading, writing, speaking, and listening as mere communicative acts. It is an expansive view of literacy foregrounded by Paolo Freire. Freire’s understanding is that critical literacy is a philosophy of education, a mindset, a way of viewing and interacting with the ‘word and the world’ (1970: 54).

The educational objective here is for individuals to become active subjects in their own lives and achieving this requires having critical command over our cognitive function. This requires a set of tools that help to generate a healthily sceptical mindset that is based on the following four concepts (Shor, 1999).

#### *i. Beliefs, values, and attitudes*

Our natural propensity is towards basic self-centredness, to see and interpret the world from the lens of self. Becoming critically literate depends upon our everyday relations with ourselves and others (Shor, 1999). For example, becoming aware of our own contradictions, inconsistencies, and biases allows us to understand how we and others are ‘positioned with inferences, interpretations and conclusions’ (Mulcahy, 2015: 22). The challenge for critical literacy is to expose the beliefs, values, and attitudes we hold so that we learn to see the ways in which we are all socially constructed and shaped by our experiences (Chubbuck, 2010).

#### *ii. Critical praxis*

Secondly, critical praxis according to Giroux (2004: 84) ‘is about more than understanding; it is also about the possibilities of self-determination, individual autonomy, and social agency’. The key themes here are informed reflection and transformative action. Janks (2014) references Lorenz’s metaphor of ‘the butterfly effect’ to illustrate these characteristics. This entails seeing the world as a set of related systems. In other words, ‘our actions here

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generate effects there' (Janks, 2005: 32). It is in the mundane and ordinary aspects of daily living that critical literacies are negotiated and have potential to enhance everyday life here and beyond (Comber, 2001).

*iii. A problem posing, problem solving mindset*

Thirdly, the underlying premise in critical literacy is that neither the word nor the world is neutral. Both perpetuate systems of oppression and suppression that directly impact on people's lives (Luke, 2022). Meaning in texts is, therefore, always contestable (Cervetti, Paradales and Damico, 2001) and learners need to learn how to read against the text. This means learning to problematise and subsequently, to problem-solve (Loewen, 1996).

*iv. Complex critical thinking*

Finally, in the traditional literacy classroom, critical thinking, often linked to critical reading, tends to focus on high-level comprehension skills (Mulcahy, 2015). For Kincheloe and Weil (2004), being critically literate requires the ability for complex critical thinking. Complex critical thinking exposes power-related dynamics, for example, how public issues of power and privilege manifest in texts, contexts, and relationships. Complex critical thinkers acquire the ability to question the comfortable, taken-for-grantedness of everyday life and understand how for example, some members of society are privileged and entitled while others are marginalised and arbitrarily othered because of class, gender, race, religion or sexuality (Weinstein, 1995).

For educators, the development of these skills might seem at first daunting, but everyday classroom texts and contexts offer safe spaces for exploring and reflecting on issues such as identity and relations of power. This is supported by varying pedagogical models and frameworks such as that posited by Freebody and Luke (1990).



## **Critical literacy pedagogy**

Freebody and Luke's Four Resources Model (1990) provides a practical overview to critical approaches in the classroom. Cultural resources in the form of texts (in all their manifestations) provide the foundational and contextual platform for the application of the model. The framework involves mastering a series of four competencies that support analytical and discursive practices across the range of media domains. These include (Freebody and Luke, 1990):

- Code breaking (coding competence)
- Meaning making (semantic competence)
- Text using (pragmatic competence)
- Text analysing (critical competence)

Latterly, Hinrichsen and Coombs (2013) reconceptualised this framework to create the Five Resources Model. The fifth competence, Persona, addresses the deeper epistemological stances that have structural and operational implications for the technological field. For example, the development and management of one's online persona.

The above competences can make us more alert by providing us with mental antibodies that help us to see and think about the word and the world that is truly aware. Freire believed that critical literacy, as a transformative pedagogy grounded in courage, respect for others, and dispositions of hope (1996) and lovingness (1998). Humility, he believed 'is the quality that allows us to listen to others beyond our differences' (Freire cited by Darder, 2017: 50), and as McLaren says, 'we need to fight for each other's differences and not just our own' (2000: 169). Critical literacy is a transformative and empowering pedagogy that encourages us to reject all forms of oppression, injustice, and inequality. It teaches us to use our voice in the context of everyday life to question, to provide counter, more democratic, inclusive narratives.

## **Conclusion**

In a world in which the perception for some is that 'truth is an individual experience' (Channel 4, 2024), critical literacy needs to be taken seriously. That said, there is no magic wand, but before we become completely out of our depth, we need to create spaces for educationalists to come together to learn more about critical literacy theory and pedagogy. Otherwise, is there a danger of miseducating today's children and young people?

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*Dr Donna Hazzard is a Principal Lecturer at St Mary's University College, Queen's University, Belfast where she has taught undergraduate and postgraduate Literacy for 26 years. Donna is Course Team Leader for Literacy and Director of the college's Master's degree programme. She has been the Northern Ireland representative for the United Kingdom Literary Association (UKLA) since 2005. Donna's main research interest is in the field of critical literacy. She is creator of the award winning Young News Readers Critical Literacy Project which many schools across Northern Ireland participate in annually.*



# Oideachas Bunscoile



## An Ghaeilge agus Bua an Ilteangachais

Dr Claire Dunne

Cabhraíonn labhairt na Gaeilge leat a bheith mar chuid den phobal comhaimseartha ilteangach agus tugann sé deis duit freisin tuiscint a bheith agat ar stair agus ar shaíocht mhuintir na hÉireann.

Bíonn deiseanna ag páistí na teangacha seo go léir a fheiceáil agus a chloisteáil sa phobal agus bíonn deiseanna acu teangacha breise a fhoghlaim go foirmiúil sa chóras oideachais. Tá gá leanúnach le tarraingt ar bhua an ilteangachais sa seomra ranga.

Bain triail as na gníomhaíochtaí thíos. Cabhróidh do chuid Gaeilge agus teangacha eile leat. Tá tuilleadh cleachtaí ilteangacha ar fáil sa leagan uasdátaithe de Sceitimíní atá ar shuíomh an LAI.



### Gníomhaíochtaí Gaeilge agus Breatnaise

Is teangacha Ceilteacha iad an Ghaeilge agus an Bhreatnais agus mar sin tá roinnt cosúlachtaí eatarthu.

### Laethanta na Seachtaine

Is féidir do chuid Gaeilge, Béarla agus teangacha eile a úsáid chun cabhrú leat dul i dtraithí ar laethanta na seachtaine sa Bhreatnais.

- Féach ar an liosta de laethanta na seachtaine sa Ghaeilge ar chlé.
- Sa cholún ar dheis, tá liosta de laethanta na seachtaine sa Bhreatnais ach níl siad san ord ceart!
- An bhfuil aon laethanta na seachtaine sa Bhreatnais cosúil le laethanta na seachtaine sa Ghaeilge?
- An bhfuil aon laethanta na seachtaine sa Bhreatnais cosúil le laethanta na seachtaine i dteanga eile?
- Déan iarracht iad a mheaitseáil le chéile.

Dé Luain	Dydd Sadwrn
Dé Máirt	Dydd Liun
Dé Céadaoin	Dydd Sul
Déardaoin	Dydd Mawrth
Dé hAoine	Dydd Gwener
Dé Sathaim	Dydd Mercher
Dé Domhnaigh	Dydd Iau

### Gníomhaíochtaí Breise

- Déan taighde ar bhunbhí laethanta na seachtaine sa Bhéarla. Déan taighde ar bhunbhí laethanta na seachtaine sa Ghaeilge.
- An bhfuil an leagan Gaeilge cosúil nó difriúil?
- Cad is bunbhí leis an bhfocal 'Aoine'? Cad is bunbhí leis 'An Chéad Aoine'? Cad is bunbhí le 'Idir Aoine'?

### Ainmneacha Iteangacha na mBláthanna

Uaireanta tugann an t-ainm Gaeilge ar bhláthanna eolas suimiúil dúinn faoi dhath an bhlátha, faoin gcruth atá air, nó faoin am den bhliain ina bhfásann sé.

Breathnaigh ar na hainmneacha bláthanna seo a leanas:

Cailleach dhearg  
Coinneal Mhuire  
Cúig Mhéar Mhuire  
Fiacla an Leoin  
Plúirín Sneachta  
Lus an Chrom Chinn

### Spreagcheisteanna

- Ag breathnú ar an ainm, an bhfuil aon leid ann faoin dath atá air?
- An bhfuil aon leid ann faoin gcruth atá air?
- An bhfuil aon leid ann faoin am den bhliain ina bhfásann sé?
- Anois téigh ar [tearma.ie](http://tearma.ie) agus breathnaigh ar an leagan Béarla agus Laidine den bhláth.
- An bhfuil aon eolas breise ann faoin dath, faoin gcruth nó faoin am den bhliain ina bhfásann sé?
- An bhfuil ainm an bhlátha sin ar eolas agat in aon teanga eile?
- Féach an bhfuil an bláth sin ag fás i ngairdín na scoile, ar an mbalcóin sa bhaile, i do ghairdín nó sa pháirc áitiúil.
- Tá áis mhaith ar shuíomh Léigh Leat maidir le bláthanna na hÉireann a aithint.

Clliceáil ar an áis mhaith seo faoi bhláthanna na hÉireann [anseo](#).

- An féidir ainm an bhlátha a mheaitseáil leis an bpictiúr?

Breathnaigh ar fhíseán maith faoi bhláthanna fiáine na hÉireann [anseo](#).

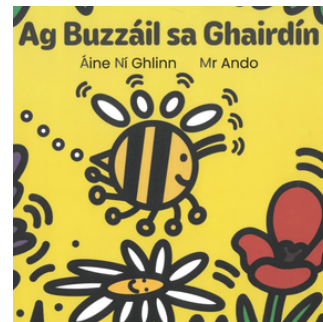
### Léitheoireacht Chabhrach

Tá na scéalta seo a leanas go hiontach mar spreagadh litríochta:

- Gairdín Mháire na mBláth le Tatyana Feeney.



- Ag Buzzáil sa Ghairdín le hÁine Ní Ghlinn.



*Is í Claire Dunne an Ceann Roinne ar Roinn an Bhéarla agus Roinn na Gaeilge in Institiúid Oideachais Marino ó 2022. Is léachtóir le Gaeilge agus aistritheoir í san institiúid chéanna le 16 bliana anuas. Tá idir ailt taighde, ailt irisí agus áiseanna foghlama scríofa aici maidir le teagasc, litearthacht, léitheoireacht, agus litríocht na Gaeilge. Ó 2022-2023 bhí sí ina hUachtarán ar an Literacy Association of Ireland.*





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## Primary Education



### Welcoming Newcomer Pupils who speak English as an Additional Language into your Classroom

Dr Tara Concannon Gibney

As Irish classrooms become increasingly diverse, many schools are welcoming more newcomer pupils who speak English as an additional language into their classrooms than they may have in previous years. This article is designed to support teachers and schools in developing an induction plan for these pupils. If you are wondering about how best to support newcomer pupils who speak English as an additional language in your school, the eight key points below should provide some guidance.

**1. A Welcoming Environment:** Do not underestimate the importance of a warm, friendly and relaxed classroom and school environment in learning to speak a new target language such as English. It is essential that new pupils feel comfortable and welcome in the school. It may not be wise to single a child out so that they 'can tell us about yourself' in front of the class, as this may put undue pressure on the child to speak. Instead, consider developing a buddy system within the class or across the school, where children who speak the same home language or children who simply want to help can work together to assist that the child to settle in.

**2. Value Prior Learning:** All EAL pupils bring 'funds of knowledge' to the classroom in relation to language, culture, content knowledge and literacy knowledge. Find out what languages they speak and if they can read or write in other languages. Use informal chat to discover their

interests and knowledge and harness this in your teaching, to develop confidence and engagement in lessons.

**3. Informal Assessment:** Consider using a 'beginner's box' to get a sense of the child's language level in English. This consists of a box filled with toys (e.g. small teddy bears), games (e.g. Pokémon, soccer cards, small board games), art materials, writing materials (post-its, highlighter pens, gel pens), and environmental print (Smyths' catalogues, Lidl catalogues, flyers etc.). The aim of the beginner's box is to support informal 'chat' between the teacher and the newcomer EAL pupil so that the teacher can get a sense of their language level and interests without the need for formal testing which may be intimidating in their first few weeks of school.

**4. Ensure Understanding:** Make sure that the child can understand what is being communicated in lessons. Newcomer pupils may arrive with varying levels of English but in order for them to progress; they need to have some basic understanding of what is going on in each lesson and across the day. Therefore, it is important to slow down your speech, perhaps repeating key instructions as necessary and avoid idiomatic speech or colloquialisms unless they are clearly explained or are essential to learning in the lesson. Visuals can be important in ensuring understanding. This might be simply lifting the textbook to show the page you are going to work on and writing the page number on the board rather than simply giving oral instructions. It is also advisable to use pictures on the IWB or illustrations in books to emphasise key vocabulary.

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so use them as much as possible, particularly with younger children. Your facial expressions and gestures can also enable understanding and should be used to enhance learning. In addition, thematic teaching can make new vocabulary more accessible to children as they can encounter similar vocabulary and concepts across several subject areas. This can increase their understanding and their confidence in the classroom.

**5. Translanguaging:** This practice involves supporting students to bring all their linguistic resources to understanding language and creating texts. This means that pupils should be encouraged to share their home languages in the classroom. This can take many forms. It could be learning whole/part of a familiar action rhyme in other languages in an infant classroom. During a reading lesson or a teacher read-aloud, translanguaging could take the form of identifying how a key vocabulary word encountered in a text is expressed in another language or by discussing the differences in sentence syntax across languages spoken in the class. Translanguaging can also be apparent in the creation of a bilingual texts on topics such as family traditions in English, Irish and their home language.

**6. Collaborative/social learning:** It is important that EAL pupils have numerous models of target language use and multiple opportunities to use their developing language and receive feedback through interactions. Prioritise pair work, group work and whole class discussion in lessons across the curriculum. Adapt materials or provide scaffolding for your EAL pupils during oral work so that they can gain maximum benefit from these activities. Be conscious that interaction can take many forms and EAL pupils who are in the silent period of language acquisition or those who are in the early communication stage may need opportunities that allow them to interact through gesture, facial expression or with visuals and/or props. Encourage children to brainstorm writing ideas with each other before writing, engage in peer editing during the writing process and share writing products with different audiences.

**7. Culturally Responsive Resources:** It is important that the resources used in teaching represent the diversity in your school and classroom. For example, if you were setting up a home corner for *Aistear* think carefully about

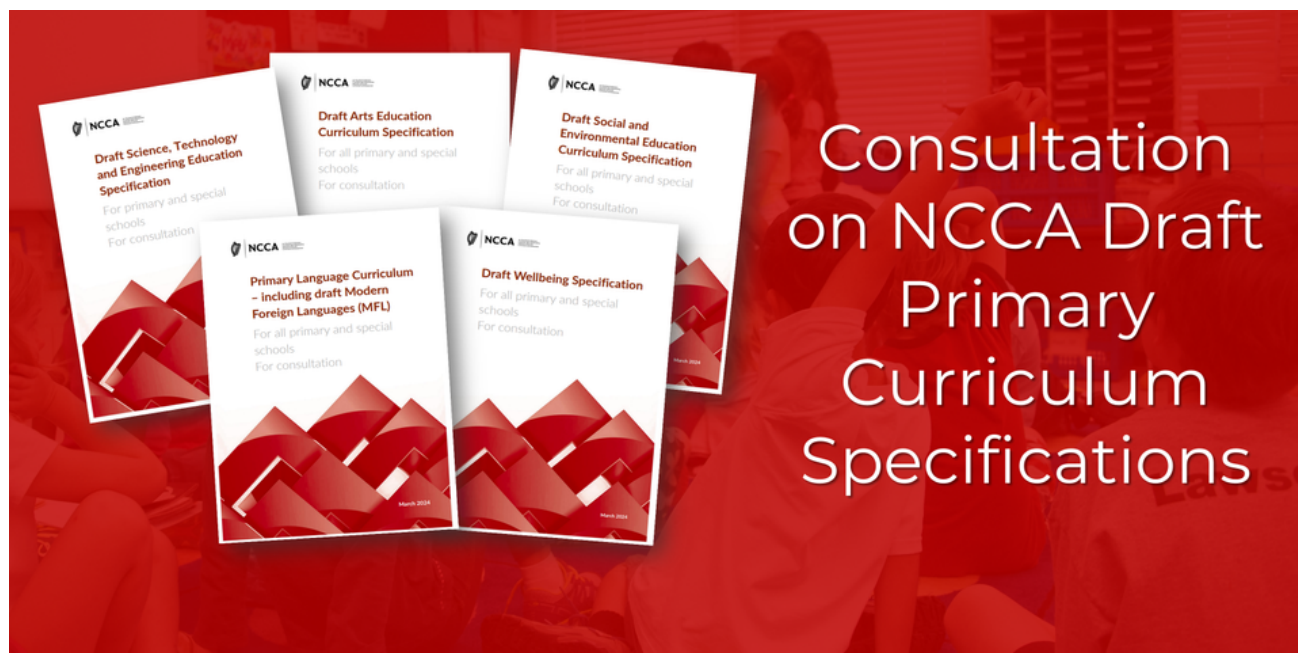
the types of foods used as props in your 'kitchen', the cutlery used (or not), eating from bowls or plates and the seating arrangements for dining (some cultures prefer to sit on the floor). Encourage pupil input when assembling a thematic area so that it is culturally diverse. Also, consider the children's literature that you use in read-alouds, in literacy lessons or in lessons across the curriculum. Are the texts that you use culturally diverse? Do they represent different races, countries, cultures? Multicultural literature should be used often and in a variety of contexts to build a positive intercultural climate in your school and classroom.

**8. Wide Reading:** In addition to a wealth of multi-cultural literature, newcomer EAL pupils also need access to a wide range of genres across the curriculum to build vocabulary knowledge. As a teacher, think about how often you could incorporate high quality children's literature or other informational texts such as newspapers and digital texts in various lessons to increase the quality of language input in your classroom.

Newcomer pupils bring a wealth of language and content knowledge with them into our classrooms and the challenge faced by teachers is how to ensure that they all achieve their potential and are successful in accessing the curriculum. The eight recommendations laid out above will enable you to ensure a positive start for pupils learning English in your classroom!



*Dr Tara Concannon-Gibney is a former primary school teacher and is currently an Assistant Professor of Literacy at DCU.*  
[tara.concannon-gibney@dcu.ie](mailto:tara.concannon-gibney@dcu.ie)



## Consultation on NCCA Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications

### *Répondez s'il-vous-plaît!* Looking at Language in the Consultation on Draft Primary Curriculum Specifications

**Dr Patrick Burke**

About once in a generation, an opportunity presents to reenvision the curriculum experienced by children the length and breadth of the country. The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) review of the primary school curriculum stretches back several years at this point. Earlier in March, this redevelopment reached a crescendo as draft curriculum specifications for five curriculum areas were published online:

- [Language \(Modern Foreign Language\)](#)
- [Social and Environmental Education](#)
- [Wellbeing](#)
- [Science, Technology and Engineering](#)
- [Arts](#)

These draft specifications will become 'final' specifications at some point in 2025, once presented to and approved by the Minister.

It is crucial that interested parties, including LAI members, respond to these draft specifications during the consultation period (running to June 7th, 2024). The curriculum foregrounds children's experiences and outcomes, but *teachers* must work with the intricacies of curriculum documents long after the buzz of a consultation period ends. Opinions should be voiced now, before hardcopies are type-set, bound and arrive in heavy cardboard boxes at the school gate. Your feedback can have a real impact on this specification in deliberations over the next year. The current proposals are, as yet, in *draft* form.

It is likely that readers of *Literacy News* will be particularly interested in changes to the *Primary Language Curriculum*. Salient points in the language proposals include:

- The [Primary Curriculum Framework \(2023\)](#) set out a vision for modern foreign languages in Stages 3 and 4; draft L3 proposals are included as **an addition to** the *Primary Language Curriculum* (2019) rather than as a separate curriculum specification.
- Under the proposals, the actual teaching of a third school language (e.g. French, German) will not commence until **Stage 4** (5th/6th class), with a notional time of 1 hour weekly. The draft specification envisages children communicating at a very basic/basic level at the end of this period, which broadly aligns with pre-A1/A1 on the [Common European Framework of Reference for Languages](#).
- The draft specification sees a heightened focus on **language awareness** in Stage 3 (3rd/4th class) but *not* the formal introduction of a new language. This builds on the notion of *plurilingual and intercultural competence* set forth by [Council of Europe](#). This focus is captured in the inclusion of an additional **element**: '*Building an awareness of languages and cultures*'.
- The **learning outcomes** for English/Gaeilge for Stages 1-4 remain unchanged.

The introduction of a modern foreign language presents both significant opportunities and significant challenges for the primary sector.



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Turning first to **opportunities**, the proposals herald manifold benefits for children in our future primary classrooms. Most notable, to me, is the potential to further harness the linguistic potential of our diverse classrooms through the increased focus on language awareness. The addition of a third language presents opportunities to deepen children's metalinguistic abilities, *i.e.* their ability to think about language and how it is used. In Ireland, the work of Dr Déirdre Kirwan has provided both insight and foresight on how *all* children benefit from exposure to multiple languages from a young age. Many teachers will be familiar with the exemplary practice showcased in her former school, *Scoil Bhríde (Cailíní)*, Blanchardstown. See, for example, *Language and Languages in the Primary School* on the PPLI website [here](#).

No other proposed change in the primary curriculum provides a greater hurdle than the introduction of a third curriculum language. The **challenges** are self-evident and cannot be easily dismissed. Who will teach L3 in the short- to medium-term? What supports will be available to primary school teachers to upskill? How will already jam-packed initial teacher education programmes fit in further language competences? And how will entry requirements to teacher education respond (will a requirement for a language beyond Irish/English now be necessary?). As with all curriculum proposals, the draft specification does not illuminate questions of enactment. It is incumbent upon the Department of Education to provide a realistic and long-term road map to engender confidence that this change to the curriculum is a realistic ambition. Few would disagree that the *Primary Language Curriculum* has had a less-than-straightforward journey from inception to implementation. This history must be borne in mind as it moves towards a third iteration (the PLC has had a 2015, 2019 and soon-to-be 2025 edition).

Looking beyond the draft language specification, literacy advocates will be interested to note opportunities for reading, writing and oral language dotted through other curriculum areas. These are most clearly represented in the **key competency** of 'Being a Communicator and Using Language'. Examples of language development are provided in the STEM, SEE, Wellbeing and Arts specification drafts. This cross-curricular focus on language is welcome, but the implications of the reduction in discrete time for language 1 (and 2) remain to be seen. The suggested allocations outlined in the [2023](#)

[Primary Curriculum Framework](#),(p.28) will see an L1 time reduction of 75 minutes weekly in Stage 3/4 (3rd-6th class). This allocation has already been approved by the Minister and pre-dates the current proposals.

If you would like to **express your views** on the curriculum proposals, there are many ways to get involved. These include:

- Participation in face-to-face or online focus groups
- Expressing your views through online questionnaires on individual curriculum areas or overall alignment
- Making a written submission

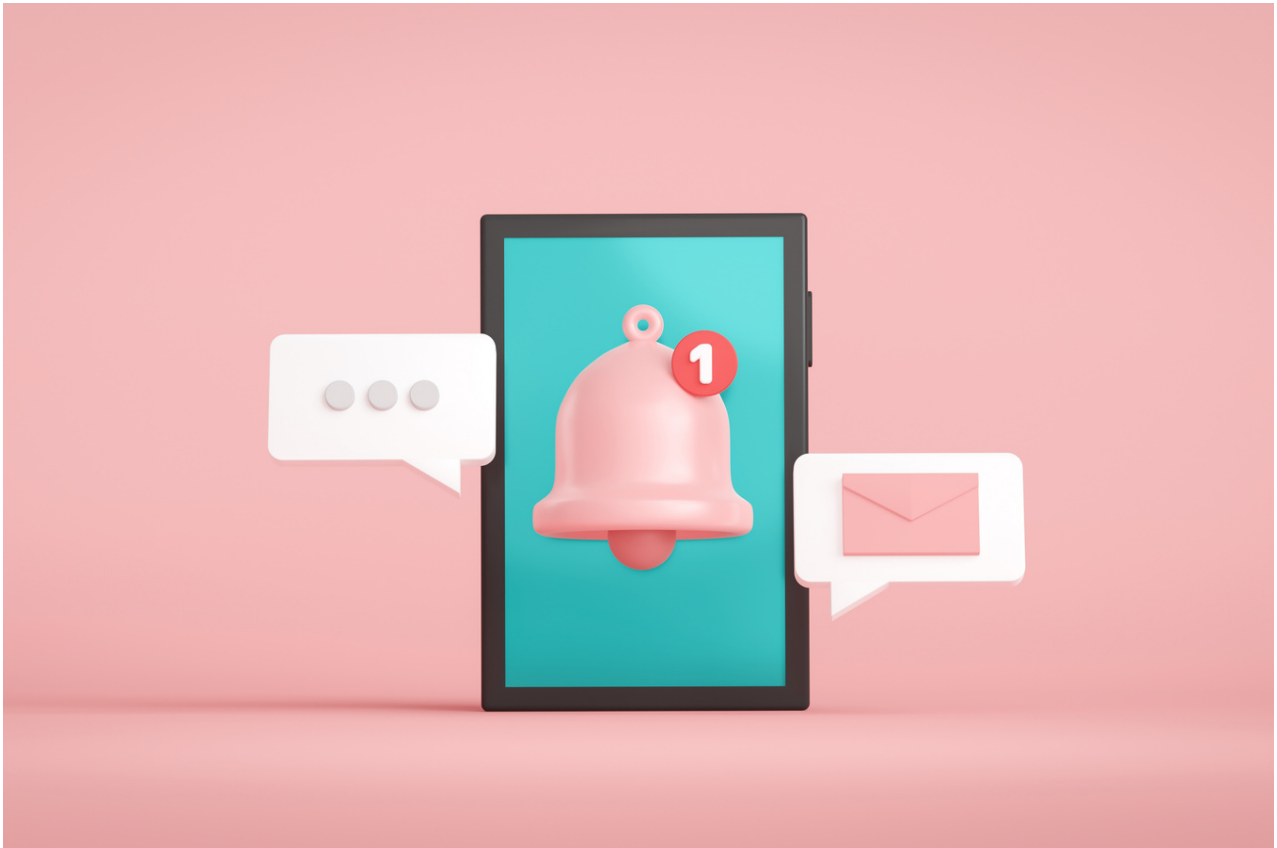
Details of these consultative avenues are available on the [NCCA website here](#). In the coming months, the LAI Executive Committee will also make a submission to this consultation. This will build on LAI's previous submission on the overall curriculum framework during the 2020 consultation ([read online here](#)).

As somebody who was involved in the NCCA Primary Language Development Group over the past number of years, I know that thought has gone into how best to craft L3 learning outcomes within the current language curriculum framework. A range of perspectives, including a large proportion of practising primary school teachers, have contributed to the draft. However, the voice of a broad sample of teachers/educators will add immeasurably to the final proposals that are approved by NCCA council and sent forward for approval to the Minister. Rather than humming '*que sera, sera*' as you scroll through the draft specifications, I would encourage you to take the time to contribute to the consultation now. **Tapaigh an deis!**

*Dr Patrick Burke is an Assistant Professor in the School of Language, Literacy and Early Childhood Education at DCU Institute of Education. He is chairperson of the NCCA Primary Language Development Group and Incoming President of LAI (2024/2025). This piece is written in a personal capacity.*



# Events / News & Notices



# Imeachtaí / Nuacht & Fógraí





# Fireside Chat Comhrá Cois Teallaigh

## Word recognition: What we know, what we don't know and what we're not sure about (yet)

*Bamboozled by conflicting messages about the teaching of phonics? Unsure of what to look out for when deciding how to teach word recognition in your school? Wondering what we actually know about using decodable readers?*

*The Literacy Association of Ireland is delighted to invite you to this exciting webinar on May 1. Join us for what will be a timely and informative conversation about the research evidence underpinning children's word recognition skills and implications for practice across English and Irish-medium reading instruction.*



Dr Patrick Burke



Cillian O'Sullivan



Dr Claire Dunne



Dr Emily Barnes



Clara Fiorentini



7pm

May 1, 2024



*Hosted in collaboration with Navan, Clare & Tralee Education Centres.*





## KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards

Dr Becky Long, Children's Books Ireland

Teachers know better than anyone that children and young people deserve books that represent their lives – and books that show them worlds they could have never imagined. Books offer children access to a multiplicity of childhoods and experiences, and that access can never be taken for granted. In Children's Books Ireland, our vision is for every child to be a reader, and for that vision to be achieved, we know we have to support the adults who care for and care about children, especially teachers in classrooms around the country. Through our supports and programmes, we want to celebrate schools as centres of excellence and enjoyment in reading, and to empower teachers, pupils, and parents to embrace a love of stories and storytelling. This is why the KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards are so important. The Awards are Ireland's leading annual children's book awards, celebrating and promoting excellence in books for young people by Irish authors and illustrators. The Awards also offer readers around the country the chance to get involved in the judging process – and that's where teachers come in! The Junior Juries Programme is a unique activity for schools, libraries, and book clubs where young readers essentially 'shadow' the adult judges of the Awards panel in reading, discussing, and assessing the shortlisted books each year. Participating groups make their own selection of suitable titles from the books shortlisted for the KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards, using a specially designed activity pack

to guide them in their reading. At the end of this process, each group is asked to collectively vote for their favourite book. Children's Books Ireland then invites some of our Junior Juries to attend the official winners' ceremony in Dublin in May and to announce the Junior Juries Award. The Junior Juries Programme is ideal for book clubs, shared reading groups and class groups of all sizes and interests. Just take a look at the books that have been shortlisted this year!

*The Hare-Shaped Hole*, a gentle story about loss and acceptance by author John Dougherty and illustrator Thomas Docherty (5–8, 8–10)

*April's Garden*, a delicate début picturebook exploring a mother and daughter's search for a new home, written by Isla McGuckin and illustrated by Catalina Echeverri (5–8, 8–10)

*Three Tasks for a Dragon* follows unlikely hero Prince Lir and not-so-helpless maiden Cethlenn, by author Eoin Colfer and illustrator P. J. Lynch (8–10, 10–12)

*Global*, a graphic novel spotlighting the interconnectedness of our world and the impact of the climate crisis, by writers Eoin Colfer and Andrew Donkin, and illustrator Giovanni Regano (8–10, 10–12, 12–14)

*Wider Than the Sea*, a lyrical, uplifting novel about a spirited young girl who struggles at school and finds solace through an unlikely friendship with a dolphin named Sunny. This début novel by Serena Molloy features dyslexic-friendly blank verse with illustrations by George Ermos (10–12, 12–14)

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The Girl Who Fell to Earth, a science fiction novel set in contemporary Dublin that explores the concerns of our time through the eyes of a new visitor to earth, by the current Laureate na nÓg, Patricia Forde (10–12, 12–14)

The First Move, a teenage romance which follows the budding relationship of chess-loving Ronan and Juliet in contemporary Northern Ireland, by Jenny Ireland (15+)

My Life as a Chameleon, a poignant début novel that follows sixteen-year-old Lily as she finds herself in an upheaval that takes her from Nigeria to Manchester, by Diana Anyakwo (15+)

Catfish Rolling, a début novel unfolding between modern-day Japan in the wake of a deadly earthquake and a magical dimension rich in mythological notes, by Clara Kumagai (15+)

Treacle Town, a gritty novel set in Scotland that explores toxic masculinity, gangland violence, social deprivation and the power of slam poetry, by author Brian Conaghan (15+)

Supporting children to discover a love of reading and to read for joy is heroic work, and we celebrate our teachers for it. And teachers are often best placed to recognise the reading heroes in their classrooms – those pupils who love reading, even when it's hard work; those pupils who inspire their friends with tales of imagination from the pages they've read; those pupils whose eyes light up when they open a book. If you have a pupil like that in your classroom, we'd love you to nominate them for our KPMG Reading Hero Award! This special award recognises a young person's potential and gives them encouragement to pursue their chosen path.

Teachers and young people around the country are already our reading heroes – celebrate with us on the 22nd of May when the winners of the KPMG Children's Books Ireland Awards will be revealed!

You can find more information about the Awards and all of our programmes and resources at [www.childrensbooksireland.ie](http://www.childrensbooksireland.ie)



**Dr Becky Long, Education Outreach Manager, Children's Books Ireland.**

*Becky holds a BA in English Studies, an MPhil in Children's Literature, and a Doctorate in Irish Children's Literature from Trinity College Dublin. She has worked with Children's Books Ireland in various capacities, including as a Book Doctor, since 2016, and has a background in youth facilitation and outreach work. She also lectures in children's literature in Trinity College Dublin. Becky joined the CBI team in September 2023.*



# Student Teacher Educational Research (STER) Conference



The poster features the STER logo at the top left, which consists of four colorful circles (purple, blue, green, yellow) with a lightbulb icon inside the yellow one, above the word 'STER' in large blue letters. To the right is a large lightbulb icon with yellow and purple scribbles. A central purple banner reads 'CONFERENCE 2024'. Below this, a dark purple rounded rectangle contains a calendar icon, '09 APR', a clock icon, '3 PM', a location pin icon, and 'MARINO INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION'. Three circular callouts on the left highlight 'Keynote Presentation' (with a book cover 'ACTION RESEARCH FOR THE CLASSROOM'), 'Panel Discussion' (with microphones), and 'Student Presentations' (with a student at a podium). A central photo shows four people holding a 'STER' sign. On the right, a vertical strip shows a 'PODCAST' and 'E-JOU' logo. The bottom dark purple banner says 'BOOK YOUR TICKET TODAY' and 'www.ster.ie/conference' with a hand cursor icon.

Student Teacher Educational Research (STER) is an Irish Higher Education partnership project that supports education students to share their dissertation research with the wider education community. STER provides students with a unique opportunity to share and publish their dissertation research with the support and guidance of the STER team. Participants can present at the STER Conference, publish in the peer-reviewed e-Journal, or participate in a Podcast Interview.

[Click here for further details and registration for STER 2024.](http://www.ster.ie/conference)



# DCU

Ollscoil Chathair  
Bhaile Átha Cliath  
Dublin City University



# Literacy Research in Action

**From the Classroom to the Thesis  
(and Back Again)**

**Thursday April 25, 6:00-7:30pm  
Online on Zoom**

Join graduates of the M.Ed in Literacy Professional Practice as they share insights from their master's theses exploring a range of important topics in literacy.

For further information:

Email **Dr Patrick Burke** at [patrick.j.burke@dcu.ie](mailto:patrick.j.burke@dcu.ie)



# LAI Conference 2024

## Comhdháil CLÉ 2024



**8 - 9 November**

## Leading Literacy: Laying Foundations for Future Success



**Marino Institute of Education**  
Institiúid Oideachais Marino  
**Bígí linn!**



**Are you interested  
in presenting at this year's  
conference?  
Call for abstracts opens  
April 30!**