

# THE researchED DUBLIN EVENT

Organised by practising teachers, researchED events are positive, enlightening and often exhilarating, and the recent Dublin event was no exception.

By Julian Girdham and Humphrey Jones

researchED is a unique phenomenon: on a Saturday in a school, hundreds of teachers gather in their own free time to attend talks on pedagogy, curriculum and classroom practice. The conferences are organised all over the world by practising teachers, like us, and they feature a special mixture of speakers from all levels of education: distinguished professors, interesting authors, and classroom practitioners describing their experiences with their peers. There is no general agenda, and no institutional involvement. Ticket prices are low since everyone gives of their time and expertise freely. As everyone who has been to a researchED event will tell you, they are positive, enlightening and often exhilarating experiences.

The second researchED day in Ireland took place in our school, St Columba's College in south Dublin, on September 24, 2022. The speakers came from all over Ireland, as well as the USA, the Netherlands, Sweden, Scotland, Wales and England. Over 20 of our colleagues volunteered to help on the day in their yellow t-shirts. There was also, of course, a real sense of anticipation for 350 attendees after the Covid years.

We hit the jackpot with our opening keynote speaker. Prof. Barbara Oakley generously made the trip all the way from South Dakota for a rare speaking appearance in Ireland (on her way to Norway, the Netherlands, Thailand, Nepal and Vietnam). She is the main designer of the world's biggest massive open online course, Coursera's Learning How to Learn, and gave a stunning demonstration of how the brain works when we are learning. Our other keynote speaker, Prof. Paul Kirschner from the Netherlands, called it "the best keynote I have ever experienced". This was Prof. Kirschner's first time in Ireland. One of the most important educational researchers in the world, he spoke twice: on educational psychology and, at the end of the day, on teacher effectiveness.

## Wide range of speakers

After Barbara Oakley's opening, everyone broke up to put together their own programme from the 35 speakers in five 40-minute sessions. There was an extraordinary range, and something for everyone: from the nature of feedback for boys in class to a history of physics textbooks in Ireland, from leadership to the cognitive psychology of learning mathematics. We were pleased to be able to feature sessions on the vital issue of diversity in Irish education (or rather the lack of). Primary school principal Simon Lewis spoke about his experience of being Jewish in this system. Annie Asgard gave a very well-informed talk about refugees and asylum seekers, and later Simon and Annie joined Clinton Wokocha for a fascinating panel discussion on being in a minority, looking at issues like 'colour blindness' and the challenge of tokenism.

Among the presentations by other Irish teachers (including ASTI members), Kate Barry returned to address the idea of explicit teaching in English, Olivia Derwin gave her experience of using YouTube in her biology classes, and Emma Regan spoke on setting up a professional learning community. Paul Nugent presented ideas on the question formulation technique, Dáire Lambert reflected on becoming evidence informed, and Brendan O'Sullivan



Humphrey Jones (left) and Julian Girdham at the Dublin researchED event.

directed his own talk specifically to mathematics research. Speakers from north of the border included James Maxwell, Principal of Carrickfergus Grammar School, who gave an account of his school's CPD journey, and his colleague Mark Roberts, who spoke as the first research lead in the country and an expert on boys' education.

## Pressing issues

Many ASTI members are concerned about Senior Cycle reform, and about the problematic nature of the Junior Cycle reform that preceded it. Will the inadequacies of the latter become embedded in the final school years, or will we learn from what went awry? As has rightly been said, teachers should be at the heart of educational reform, and they have not been in recent years here. Clare Madden from Glanmire in Cork looked at how the Junior Cycle Framework has not lived up to its promises, and Jerome Devitt from the King's Hospital in Dublin echoed these concerns in looking at the way the new Leaving Certificate politics and society course was introduced. These ideas were given an overview by Prof. Áine Hyland in a superb talk in the main hall challenging the dubious idea that revisions to several Leaving Certificate syllabi have been in line with international best practice.

There was so much more: educational superstar Kate Jones had a big audience for her talk on retrieval practice, and there were fine talks by several third-level speakers. And so much more also happened in the networking in the seven venues, at coffee breaks, at lunch, and in the gardens between talks. It was the very best kind of conference.

We were delighted again to receive financial support from the ASTI, and to welcome a delegation including the President, Miriam Duggan. We were grateful for further support from the Irish Science Teachers' Association, and Sodexo. As in 2019, tickets (just €40, including all catering) sold out within three weeks in May, and there was a long waiting list. We were delighted to host many teachers from Northern Ireland too. This was a genuinely all-island event.

For more information on researchED, see: <https://researched.org.uk/>, or @researchEDDub on Twitter.