

Advocacy and the activist professional:

Public education in tough times

Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO), 35 Parnell Sq, Dublin 1. August 22, 2016.

The event is organised by WERA *Researching families, educators and communities as educational advocates: cross national perspectives* research network. For further details about the network visit <https://educateadvocate.wordpress.com/>

This event is FREE. We are very grateful to INTO for hosting and supporting this event.

Programme

9.30-10.00 Registration and coffee/tea.

10.00-11.00 Opening presentation and discussion.

Howard Stevenson (University of Nottingham) **Why, if it's kicking off everywhere, is it not kicking off where I am? Making sense of 'resistance' in the neoliberal school system.**

This will be a presentation, followed by questions and structured small group discussion.

11.00-11.45

Sue Winton (York University, Toronto) **Equity Is not enough: Seeking persuasive arguments for policy change**

11.45-12.00

Short comfort break

12.00-13.00

Lauri Johnson (Boston College, MA) **Rethinking "advocacy" and "activism" in parent empowerment: What do we mean across national contexts?**

13.00-14.00

Lunch

14.00-15.00

Nina Bascia (OISE, Toronto) **Teacher unionism in Scotland: union renewal as co-construction**

Alison Gilliland (Irish National Teachers' Organisation) **Getting actively involved in a trade union: the experiences of young teacher activists.**

15.00-15.30

Patricia Silva (University of Llerida), Serafin Antunez (University of Barcelona) and Charles Slater (California State University Long Beach) **Social Justice and Migrant Families in Spain.**

15.30.16.00

Plenary – panel and discussion.

An opportunity to reflect on the day, further discuss the issues arising and think through the implications for the Network's research agenda.

16.00

Close, followed by . . .

Following the formal events we will retire to the Teachers' Club for much more informal discussion of the day's proceedings. The Teachers' Club is located in the same building as the seminar. Everyone attending the seminar is welcome.

The Network will then be having an early evening meal in Dublin centre. Again, all are welcome, but please email howard.stevenson@nottingham.ac.uk in advance so we can make a reservation. Restaurant details will be provided on the day.

Abstracts:

Why, if it's kicking off everywhere, is it not kicking off where I am? Making sense of 'resistance' in the neoliberal school system.

Howard Stevenson (University of Nottingham)

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Times are tough – but that does not always result in teachers speaking back to reforms in the ways that we might expect, or indeed hope for. In this paper I explore why teachers sometimes resist, and often times don't, and why they always behave unpredictably. In arguing we have to analyse consent as much as we try to understand resistance I will argue that those involved in activism and organising need to act as 'organisers of ideas' if teachers are to develop progressive collective responses to the neoliberal restructuring of public education systems.

Equity Is Not Enough: Seeking Persuasive Arguments for Policy Change

Sue Winton (York University, Canada)

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I present findings from research that examined the persuasive arguments mobilized by People for Education (P4E), an educational advocacy group in Ontario, Canada, in three campaigns over the past two decades. The campaigns aimed to change government policies related to school fundraising, school fees, and special education assessments.

The campaigns had different outcomes: the government banned school fees and school practices changed; a fundraising policy was introduced but school practices did not change (indeed fundraising may have intensified to offset funds lost through the change in school fees policy); and special education assessment policy remains unchanged. Examining the campaigns in their socio-historical contexts, Ontarians and its Liberal government appear to support equal opportunity (which explains changes after the new school fees policy) but are not persuaded by arguments to ensure equity. Indeed, the appearance of equal opportunity is necessary to legitimate Ontarian's belief in meritocracy and the inequities it produces.

I hope these findings inspire a conversation with audience members about persuasive arguments in policy advocacy since the argument for equity does not, on its own, appear to matter enough to change inequitable practices.

Rethinking "advocacy" and "activism" in parent empowerment: What do we mean across national contexts?

Lauri Johnson (Boston College, MA)

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This presentation and discussion will explore different ways that researchers have looked at parent involvement/empowerment in different national contexts. It will mostly draw on studies from US, Canada, and UK, but will also include studies from Hong Kong, Maori families in New Zealand, Eastern Europe, & South Africa.

Teacher unionism in Scotland: union renewal as co-construction

Nina Bascia (OISE, Canada)

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Education policy in Scotland has developed in ways that are much closer to its Northern European counterparts, than, for example, its immediate UK neighbour, England. Scottish education policy has retained a strong commitment to local government provision and for many years has set itself against curriculum prescription, standardised testing and privatisation. This has often been presented as a direct repudiation of 'the neoliberal agenda' (national policy officer and project interviewee).

The focus of this paper is the Educational Institute of Scotland. It will focus on how the union has engaged with government, and through this relationship between labour and the state has co-constructed a consensus that has challenged the trajectory of neoliberal reform. The paper will particularly focus on the ways that the union has sought to fuse professional and industrial issues, and its innovative use of 'union learning representatives' to engage members around a wide range of issues (Alexandrou, 2009).

The paper will explore the tensions inherent in such a strategy, and in particular the challenges now presented by a policy agenda that is developing in new and potentially threatening ways (see for example the introduction of standardised testing and possible emergence of league tables).

Getting actively involved in a trade union: the experiences of young teacher activists.

Alison Gilliland (Senior official, INTO)

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This presentation will explore the preliminary findings of one particular aspect of my doctoral research into young teacher union activists - the influences, experiences and contexts that led to them becoming actively involved in their union.

Social Justice and Migrant Families in Spain

Dr Patricia Silva (University of Llerida), Dr Serafin Antunez (University of Barcelona) and Dr Charles Slater (California State University Long Beach)

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Schools today have the challenge and commitment to address the problems arising from the economic crisis and changes in the social structure which are a product of the migration of entire families. Teachers have had to learn quickly on issues related to social justice and management of resources to care for children. This study from Spain provides data on how schools make every effort to implement meritorious professional practices to: (i) assist students in academic and social aspects; (ii) promote and implement the participation and collaboration with families; (iii) review and improve educational processes, organizational processes and performance management; and (iv) improve relations between the school and the community.