



St Mary's
University
Twickenham
London

Sharing Stories: Practice and Research



St Marys University

Wednesday 25th March 2026

St Mary's Pedagogy In Action Special Interest Group (SIG)

Mission

The Pedagogy In Action SIG seeks to empower professional autonomy by exploring ideas that enhance knowledge, learning, and educational practice by engaging with and responding to the ever-changing educational landscape.

St Mary's Pedagogy In Action Special Interest Group was founded by Christine Edwards-Leis with the aim of creating a space for interdisciplinary pedagogic discourse.

We are an eclectic group of academics and active researchers with a broad range of research interests firmly rooted in practice. Our work ranges from professional development in early years, to decolonising the curriculum, from sports coaching to exploring identity and belonging in higher education, from maths to MFL and everything in between.

In 2025, our text '[Pedagogy in Higher Education](#)' was released. Co-edited by Christine Edwards Leis and Mark Price, this text explores the challenges and opportunities in contemporary practice. Through our [blog](#) and conference, we extend an invitation to those working in all phases from early years to higher education, to come together to share their stories about practice and research.

We are thrilled to have you with us at St Marys University today and hope you will enjoy the opportunity to connect and reflect with others about your pedagogic practice.

Viki Veale

(On behalf of St Mary's Pedagogy In Action Special Interest Group)

Welcome to St Mary's Pedagogy Research Conference

Arrival and Refreshments
9:00-9:30 Waldegrave Drawing Room

Welcome and Keynote Lecture
9:30- 10:30 Waldegrave Drawing Room

Title
[Victoria Byrnell: Inclusion Leader, Author of Inclusion and Trust in the Classroom](#)

(This session will be followed by a ten-minute comfort break while we move to breakout rooms)

Parallel Session 1
10:40-11:40

Waldegrave Drawing Room	Billiards Room	Senior Common Room
Mona Nasar Unlocking Potential: What Degree Apprenticeships can Add to Traditional Degrees	Christine Robinson (Online) Spiritual Capabilities: A Pedagogy Focused on Early Years Spirituality	Lucy Wicks How to Enhance Belonging in Your Curriculum (and why you should try!)
Elizabeth Kaplunov and Athina Ntasloti The Influence of AI Tools on Students' Critical Thinking Ability	Hayley Peacock Playoneering: The Power of Disruptive Teacher Questioning	Sophie Wilson Fostering Diversity and Inclusion in Geography Education: Using Virtual Field Trips to Teach about Sustainability
Gill Mason Pedagogy, Purpose and Possibility: Reclaiming Apprenticeships as a Socially Just Pathway in Early Years Education	Melanie Yates-Boothby Listening to Young Children: Exploring Behaviour, Engagement and motivation Within a Nursery Classroom that Does Not Use Extrinsic Rewards	Juilette Claro and Crista Hazell Reducing Language Anxiety in the MFL Classroom

(This session will be followed by a twenty-minute comfort break while we move to breakout rooms)

Parallel Session 2
12:00-12:45

Billiards Room	Senior Common Room
Stephen Bunbury (online) Reimagining Assessment: Student-led Authentic Tasks as Catalysts for Engagement and Inclusive Legal Learning	Helen Thouless, Rene Hartman and Zahara Hussein Increasing Access to Mathematics for a Pre-Service Teacher With a Visual Impairment
Alex McLean-Nelson Preparing Teachers for Inclusion: A case study of the Primary PGCE in England through the lens of lecturers and early career teachers.	Rebecca Shaw “We Want to be Heard”: Autistic Young People, Educational Policy and the Pursuit of Belonging

Lunch
12:45- 1:30 Waldegrave Drawing Room

Workshops 1:30-2:30	
Billiards Room	Senior Common Room
Sam Parkes Making Maths Meaningful Through Play: Exploring Digital Games-Based Learning for Fluency	Candida Javaid Inviting the Inner Critic to the Conversation
Emily Montenero and Alex Sinclair Bringing Back Concept Mapping to Develop Vocabulary and Understanding in Primary Science	Maria Alejandra Mareco (online) Bridging Word and Worlds: Interdisciplinary Teaching of Languages and Social Studies Through Translanguaging Inquiry

(This session will be followed by a fifteen-minute comfort break while we move to breakout rooms)

Parallel Session 3 2:45-3:30		
Waldegrave Drawing Room	Billiards Room	Senior Common Room
Nic Tierney Why Does it Matter How we Talk About Maths?	Mark Griffin Becoming a Drama Student: Reflections on Choice and Agency	Joelle Feudjo-maneze Putting policy into Practice: A Hands-On EYFS Toolkit for Early Years Professionals
Richard Waite Inclusive Play Through Technology Integration: A Case-Study From Waite. EYTS	Bert Orgaer Teachers in the Driving Seat: Co-Design as a Way of Working	Viki Veale and Janet Morris Creating a Joyful Community of Practice for Reception Class Teachers

Closing Thoughts
3:30-4:00 Waldegrave Drawing Room

Poster Presentations

Poster presentations will be displayed in the exhibition area throughout the day. Please enjoy the opportunity to browse and chat over a cup of coffee on arrival and during the breaks between sessions

Sara O'Beirne	Bringing Maps to Life in a Year One Classroom

Keynote Speaker: Victoria Byrnell

We are delighted to welcome Victoria to the 2026 Pedagogy Research Conference

Inclusivity and Trust in the Classroom: Helping the Child in Front of You to Learn and Thrive



Victoria Byrnell MEd (Dist.) is an experienced inclusion leader and SENDCo across specialist, mainstream, primary and secondary settings. She is the published author of 'Inclusivity and Trust in the Classroom' (2025). Now embarking on the next phase of a 30 year career, her focus is on professional development for educators.

I have always been passionate about developing innovative methods to support teachers to have the greatest impact in classrooms with disadvantaged students. My interest in researching relational trust arose from experience pointing to trust as crucial to inclusive practice whilst it's practical application remained unclear. With a proven track record in leading inclusion I could not have anticipated the impact of my research findings, both on my practice and the responsibility I felt to act on my findings.

In this lecture my objective is to elicit a shift in thinking; to posit the deployment of trust theory as a powerful pedagogy to alleviate some of the most pressing concerns educators' face, from rising exclusions and student engagement to staff well-being. Developing understanding of trust theory and its centrality to student learning is arguably foundational knowledge which empowers professionals to create more inclusive classrooms and schools.

Presentations and Presenters: Parallel Session 1

Unlocking Potential: What Degree Apprenticeships can Add to Traditional Degrees



Mona Nasar: University of Portsmouth

Senior Teaching Fellow at the University of Portsmouth and the Digital Marketing Degree Apprenticeship Course Lead.

This presentation will explore how Degree Apprenticeships can be used to enhance the quality, and employability focus of traditional Undergraduate degrees. The presentation will be used to reflect on the Degree Apprenticeship experience and how it responds to the expectations of the Higher Education system, employers and students. This will be done through highlighting the strengths and practical aspects of the Degree Apprenticeship and how traditional degrees can benefit from it particularly in relation to authentic assessments, scaffolded learning, skills development and behavioural competencies. Degree apprenticeship is strongly relying on applied learning where assessments are well linked to their real workplace tasks. Apprentices are required to apply theory to practice rather than providing a theoretical perspective or decontextualised activities. Integrating similar forms of learning and assessment, not only increases students' engagement, motivation and improves their learning but also decreases their reliance on AI as a tool to write their assessments. It also prepares them for their future career. Another feature of Degree Apprenticeships is the skills and behaviour set required. Embedding skills and behaviour sets within traditional degrees, support skills development and help with students progression, professionalism, communication, responsibility and ethical conduct. It also helps with students' employability and readiness for the workplace. Overall, this presentation can help colleagues in considering employing some of the degree Apprenticeship aspects to improve our current courses and ensure that it is more relevant to the current market.

Spiritual Capabilities: A Pedagogy Focused on Early Years Spirituality



Associate Professor Christine Robinson: Edith Cowen University, Australia

Established HE leader and chair of G.R.A.C.E, working previously as an Associate Dean Research, Program Coordinator and Assistant Principal. Christine researches and teaches in spirituality, play-based pedagogies, literacy and religious education.

Spirituality is often understood only in a religious sense when in fact, the spiritual capacity is integral to the human person, an innate capacity that requires awakening and nurturing. The development of a Framework for Young Children's Spiritual Capabilities emerged from a desire to intentionally address the spiritual capacity of children in the early years, embedded within the holistic, relational and play-based pedagogical focus of the Australian Early Years Learning Framework (AGDE, 2022). The Framework draws on wide-ranging research to present capability statements that intentionally promote children's experience and expression of spirituality. The significance of this lies in the ability for spirituality to act as a protective factor for children -

growing a sense of connection, resilience, wonder, curiosity and ethical responsibility in childhood can provide long-term strategies for managing adversity later in life. In this presentation, the term 'spirituality' will be explored as both a secular and religious construct, as identified in the research literature. The Framework will be introduced as a tool that educators can employ to intentionally embed a pedagogy of spirituality.

How to Enhance Belonging in Your Curriculum (and why you should try!)



Lucy Wicks: Didcot Girls School/ NCLE

Passionate about motivating lifelong learning, developing and delivering continued professional development that inspires teachers, NPP/SLN Lucy, teaches Chinese and Spanish in Oxfordshire.

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The Influence of AI Tools on Students' Critical Thinking Abilities



Dr Elizabeth Kaplunov FHEA, Senior Lecturer at Regent College London, UK
Researcher focused on motivation, digital health, and inclusivity, leading inclusive, culturally responsive teaching and designing structured learning to support diverse student engagement across HE levels.



Athina Ntasioti FHEA, Lecturer at Regent College London, UK.

Researcher focused on mental health, inclusion, and AI. Athina Ntasiotti also delivers interdisciplinary teaching, supervises research dissertations and contributes to programme development for UK HE.

As artificial intelligence (AI) tools such as ChatGPT become increasingly embedded in higher education, questions arise about their influence on students’ critical thinking. While AI can enhance access to information and streamline learning tasks, it may also encourage uncritical, surface-level engagement with knowledge. This study explores how generative AI affects key dimensions of critical thinking—analysis, evaluation, creativity, and reflection—and how pedagogical design can support deliberate, reflective use. Grounded in Kahneman’s Dual-System Theory and Cognitive Load Theory, the research conceptualises AI as potentially reinforcing intuitive, heuristic (System 1) thinking at the expense of slower, analytical (System 2) reasoning. A mixed-methods design is employed, combining quantitative surveys of students’ ChatGPT usage patterns with qualitative interviews exploring perceptions of cognitive impact. An experimental component will compare AI-assisted and non-AI learning tasks to examine how guidance, reflection, and accountability influence engagement. The study aims to generate evidence-based insights for educators and policymakers on integrating AI tools in ways that preserve and strengthen critical thinking. By identifying effective scaffolds—such as metacognitive prompts, reflective questioning, and accountability-focused assessment—the project seeks to inform curriculum design and digital literacy development across disciplines. Ultimately, it positions AI not as a substitute for human reasoning but as a catalyst for deeper, more reflective learning in higher education.

Playoneering: the power of disruptive teacher questioning



Hayley Peacock: Founder and CEO, Atelier 21 School

Hayley’s work is grounded in the belief that education must evolve to meet the complexity of our times, cultivating agency, adaptability and purpose in both children and educators.

In the PLAYONEERING approach, children’s interests are the sparks that ignite authentic learning — but it is the educator’s response that determines whether those sparks simply flicker or grow into sustained inquiry. This session explores the concept of problematizing children’s thinking: the intentional act of positively disrupting children’s ideas through questioning, reflection, and action. Rather than steering or simplifying children’s interests, educators can learn to compliment and complicate them — to relaunch ideas back to children in ways that create new lines and offshoots of exploration. This is where an emergent curriculum truly evolves: not from pre-planned topics, but through thoughtful moments of tension, curiosity, and surprise that invite deeper thinking. Participants will engage with real examples of how teachers can use disruptive questioning to challenge certainty, extend dialogue, and nurture theory-building in play. We will unpack the delicate balance between teacher guidance and child autonomy, and consider how such interactions cultivate metacognition, creativity, and collaborative meaning-making. This session invites educators to reframe their role — from observers of children’s interests to co-constructors of inquiry. By learning to problematize with intention and respect, we empower children not just to play, but to think critically, question boldly, and reimagine possibilities.

Fostering Diversity and Inclusion in Geography Education: Using Virtual Field Trips to Teach about Sustainability



Associate Professor Sophie Wilson: St Marys University

Sophie is an active member of the university's Sustainability Committee and was principal investigator on the Erasmus+ funded 'GI pedagogy' project

In a world undergoing rapid change and facing complex challenges—from geopolitical shifts to environmental crises—geography plays a vital role in helping learners understand and engage with pressing issues such as inequality, migration, and justice. This presentation explores the crucial theme of fostering diversity and inclusion within geography education, with a particular emphasis on teacher training and the development of trainee teachers. Drawing on insights from the VGeoSciEd project, this session will examine the challenges and opportunities involved in embedding inclusive approaches to diversity within Sustainability Education through the innovative use of virtual field trips. Attendees will discover effective practices and strategies that can be applied across a range of controversial topics, empowering educators to create more equitable, reflective, and responsive teaching and learning environments in geography. The presentation will showcase the latest outputs from the VGeoSciEd project, including a glossary, guideline, and two instructional videos. Initial findings from case studies developed as part of this work will be shared, providing practical examples of how virtual field trips can be adapted to promote inclusivity and address diverse learner needs.

Pedagogy, Purpose, and Possibility: Reclaiming Apprenticeships as a Socially Just Pathway in Early Years Education



Gill Mason: Kids Planet Day Nurseries

Early Years vocational pedagogy and apprenticeships leader, delivering high-quality workforce development, sector innovation and impactful training that strengthens practice, improves outcomes and supports professional progression

Academic qualifications have afforded some privileges within education. Vocational routes, such as apprenticeships remain undervalued despite their proven impact on workforce quality. Apprenticeships are often viewed as a 'second choice' when compared to other modes of study. As such, this imbalance is a potential social justice concern. Undervaluing apprenticeships risks excluding young people whose strengths lie in practical, relational, and experiential learning - skills that define effective early years pedagogy. At Kids Planet Day Nurseries, our early years apprenticeships are reframed as an equitable model of professional learning. Learners are supported through mentoring, reflective practice, and collaborative inquiry to grow as confident, thoughtful educators. Learning is embedded within real contexts, shaped by relationships and guided by pedagogical dialogue. This practice-based approach embodies a pedagogy of empowerment: valuing doing as knowing, and recognising knowledge as co-constructed through experience. This paper argues that valuing vocational pedagogy is not just about workforce

development—it is an act of social justice, ensuring that all learners, regardless of background or pathway, have access to a meaningful, respected profession. Drawing on qualitative data from apprentices, mentors, and managers, we highlight the transformative potential of apprenticeships in developing practitioners who are deeply embedded in the ethos of care and learning. We argue for a reframing of vocational education as a vital component of professional pedagogy alongside policy and institutional recognition of this status.

Listening to young children: Exploring behaviour, engagement and motivation within a Nursery classroom that doesn't use extrinsic rewards.



Melanie Yates-Boothby: University of Wolverhampton

Early years teacher-researcher and PhD candidate exploring autonomy, flow, and well-being in EYFS pedagogy.

This mixed-method qualitative study explores engagement, motivation and behaviour in a mainstream Nursery setting that doesn't use extrinsic rewards, aiming to elicit children's voices and foreground their lived experiences of learning and behaviour. Research on motivation has predominantly focused motivation as a prerequisite for academic success. Behaviourist and social justice paradigms have shaped coercive behaviour management models, frequently relying on token economies and external reinforcement to meet performance targets. Such approaches often marginalise children's autonomy and intrinsic motivation. This study draws on interaction approaches and relational behaviour frameworks, alongside an integrative motivation framework that connects autonomy, engagement and behaviour. It adopts a qualitative interpretivist paradigm, informed by the Mosaic Approach (Clark and Moss, 2000), positioning children as co-researchers, using mixed methods to capture children's lived experiences. Children's right to withdraw was respected throughout. Non-verbal signals of assent were incorporated to ensure inclusion and autonomy for all communicators. Data were anonymised, and pseudonyms used for reporting. Findings from the pilot study informed refinements to data collection methods, including non-verbal assent signals. Observational data were captured via video and transcribed to preserve the nuances of emergent communication. The study aims to contribute a practical framework for promoting engagement, motivation and positive behaviour in early years settings, without reliance on extrinsic rewards, foregrounding children's voice and autonomy.

Reducing language anxiety in the MFL classroom



Juliette Claro FCCT

Fellow of the Chartered College of Teaching, expert in creativity in language classrooms, culturally sensitive coaching and mentoring, multilingualism, and teacher development as a pathway for wellbeing in education.



Crista Hazell

Consultant, author, development manager for the association for Language Learning, MFL subject Lead Expert, pedagogy and pastoral champion, education, Linguascope webinar host and Mental Health First Aider.

Language anxiety continues to undermine learner engagement and attainment in Modern Foreign Languages (MFL), particularly among adolescents navigating high-stakes assessment and peer scrutiny. This paper draws on the expertise of colleagues across the initial teacher training network of St Mary's University in West London and Pioneers Partnership SCITT in Greater Manchester exploring inclusive, evidence-informed strategies for reducing affective barriers in the languages classroom. With over four decades of experience in teaching MFL in primary and secondary sectors and as link tutors in teacher training, the authors draw on their experience as teachers and as mental health first aiders to advocate for creative, engaging, authentic and relational pedagogical approaches that foster trust and reduce the fear of error in language learning. Whilst drawing on the best practice of expert colleagues in the profession, the authors highlight the importance of low-stakes oral practice, creative approaches to develop learners' autonomy and sense of efficacy to mitigate anxiety. This presentation synthesises effective strategies emphasising the role of the teacher to consider scaffolded risk-taking and culturally responsive activities that build linguistic competences and confidence. It considers the impact of curriculum and exam pressures on learners and argues how integrating other framework of proficiency such as the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages may rebalance affective and cognitive priorities in MFL pedagogies. Our presentation and paper offer practical recommendations for teachers to explore how to engage, motivate and build the self-esteem of learners in their foreign languages lessons

Presentations and Presenters: Parallel Session 2

Reimagining Assessment: Student-Led Authentic Tasks as Catalysts for Engagement and Inclusive Legal Learning



Stephen Bunbury: University of Westminster

Stephen Bunbury is a Reader in Law, National Teaching Fellow and Principal Fellow, specialising in inclusive pedagogy, disability, assessment design, and student experience education.

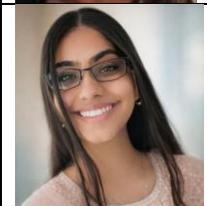
This presentation shares the story behind a mixed-methods study that repositions authentic assessment as a powerful driver of student engagement within undergraduate legal education. Traditional law assessments (often doctrinal, individualised, and text-heavy) have long been criticised for failing to reflect the realities of contemporary legal practice or the broader skill sets required for employability. This session introduces findings from two university-funded student partnership projects that explored how student-led workshops and other practice-informed tasks can diversify assessment and enhance the perceived relevance of learning. Drawing on qualitative focus groups and quantitative survey data, the study examines how both students and staff make sense of authenticity in assessment, and how these perceptions shape motivation, confidence, and professional identity development. Rather than attributing performance differences solely to assessment type, the research highlights relevance and relational engagement as the true catalysts: students consistently recognised authentic tasks as meaningful, aligned with real-world expectations, and supportive of inclusive, collaborative learning environments. Through concrete examples and reflective insights from the partnership projects, this presentation offers practical guidance for educators looking to embed authentic, student-centred assessment within their own disciplines. It also considers important limitations, including the single-institution context and modest sample size, while identifying opportunities for future cross-institutional and longitudinal inquiry into inclusive legal pedagogy. By foregrounding student voice and shared pedagogical storytelling, this session invites participants to reflect on how authentic assessment can reshape learning cultures, strengthen belonging, and bridge the persistent gap between classroom practices and professional realities.

Increasing access to Core Mathematics for a preservice teacher with a visual impairment



Helen Thouless, St Mary's University, Twickenham

Helen joined St Mary's in 2021 and is a Senior Lecturer in Primary Mathematics. Her research focuses on the intersection of SEND and mathematics.

	<p>René Hartmann, St Mary's University, Twickenham</p> <p>René joined St Mary's in 2013 and teaches on the Primary Education Undergraduate and Postgraduate programmes for Initial Teacher Training and is the Y1 coordinator.</p>
	<p>Zahara Hussain, St Mary's University, Twickenham</p> <p>Visually impaired since birth, Zahara has battled the education system her entire life. Currently training to become a primary school teacher and committed to equitable education.</p>
<p>This participatory research involved Zahara, a visually impaired (VI) student on the BA (Hons) Primary Education course, and her lecturers on the 2nd and 3rd year Core Mathematics modules, René and Helen. Zahara was an active contributor throughout the research process, developing interview questions, participating in an interview with René, and participating in the dissemination of the findings. Through the interview Zahara identified aspects of our Core Mathematics sessions that were accessible to her, suggested changes that would have made the module more inclusive, and introduced strategies that she wished her lecturers knew about teaching and learning mathematics with a VI. In this presentation we share out key findings and reflect on what the participation in this project meant for the different participants.</p>	

<p align="center">Preparing Teachers for Inclusion: A case study of the Primary PGCE in England through the lens of lecturers and early career teachers</p>	
	<p>Alexander McLean-Nelson: St Marys University, Twickenham</p> <p>PhD research student at St Mary's Twickenham. My focus is on teacher training and inclusive practices.</p>
<p>This embedded qualitative case study examines a Primary PGCE course through lecturers' and Early Career Teacher (ECT) perspectives on SEND preparation. Data from focus groups with fourteen lecturers across English universities providing the Primary PGCE and interviews with eight ECTs reveal structural tensions undermining inclusive teacher education. Lecturers identified systemic pressures, including accelerated timelines, underfunded partnerships, and inconsistent mentoring, which constrained the integration of inclusive practice. ECT data highlighted a pivotal theory-practice gap. Trainees with pre-course school experience integrated inclusive pedagogy critically; those without often dismissed theory as irrelevant. ECTs consistently felt underprepared for SEND, with highly variable school placements being the most influential factor. The study concludes that without structural reform to authentically connect theory with practice, policies risk perpetuating systemic failure. A key recommendation is to reinstate the pre-training experience requirement to develop the critical reflection necessary for inclusive teaching.</p>	

'We Want to Be Heard': Autistic Young People, Educational Policy and the Pursuit of Belonging



Dr. Rebecca Shaw: The Grange School

SENCo, Executive Head teacher and Former Barrister, championing relational approaches, ethical practice and affinity-based education, influencing policy and practice to ensure that every learner is supported to thrive.

This presentation explores the lived experiences of autistic young people within the English education system, critically examining the gap between policy rhetoric and everyday reality. Drawing on in-depth interviews with six autistic students from diverse educational backgrounds—including mainstream, special, and alternative provisions—the research on which this presentation is based upon foregrounds the voices of those most affected by educational decisions, yet too often marginalised in both policy and practice. Despite legal frameworks such as the SEND Code of Practice (2014) and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, the research found that autistic young people's perspectives are frequently overlooked or tokenised. Policy documents, while espousing inclusion, often rely on deficit-based and medicalised language, reinforcing stereotypes and failing to address the nuanced needs of autistic individuals. A central theme is the pursuit of belonging. Participants described how meaningful relationships with educators and peers, individualised support and adapted environments are crucial for feeling included. However, many recount experiences of sensory overwhelm, rigid rules, and exclusion, especially during transitions to secondary education. The burden of adaptation is often placed on autistic students, rather than on schools to create genuinely inclusive spaces. The research calls for a system-wide shift: embedding autistic voices in policy development, providing robust autism-informed training for educators, and prioritising relational, individualised approaches. True inclusion, it argues, requires not just listening to autistic young people but acting on their insights—ensuring they are not merely present but genuinely heard and able to belong.

Workshop Presentations

'Making maths meaningful through play': Exploring digital games-based learning for fluency



Dr. Sam Parkes: Number Club

With wide-ranging experience in primary maths (teacher, school and CPD leader, researcher and lecturer) Sam is passionate about improving access to maths for all learners.

In this workshop, we will explore the theoretical and research base for games-based learning in maths, and clarify the distinction between this and gamification. Drawing on playful pedagogies and key theories from cognitive psychology we will develop a set of principles for identifying pedagogically sound digital games for fluency. We will then apply these principles to a selection of free and commercial games to support professional decision-making when selecting supportive materials to enhance and enrich the maths curriculum.

Inviting the inner critic to the conversation



Candida Javaid: Abingdon and Witney College

Credentialed coach, educator and facilitator, specialising in reflective practice, leadership development and wellbeing in education.

Teachers often hold themselves to impossibly high standards. We care deeply about our pupils and want to get things right, yet that same care can turn inward as harsh self-judgment. Many of us recognise the inner voice that says, "You should have known better," or "You are not doing enough." It can be exhausting and can slowly erode our confidence and joy in teaching. This session offers a chance to slow down and listen differently to that voice. Instead of silencing or resisting the inner critic, we will experiment with inviting it into conversation. Through guided reflection and short paired activities, participants will explore what happens when we meet self-criticism with curiosity and a little kindness. We will look at how awareness and gentle dialogue can shift the balance from self-attack to self-understanding. Drawing on ideas from reflective practice and dialogic pedagogy, this 30-minute workshop will help teachers identify when the inner critic takes over, uncover what it might be trying to protect, and practise responding in a way that supports growth and confidence. The session is not about fixing or analysing ourselves, but about discovery. It offers a space to reconnect with the compassionate, learning self that drew us to teaching in the first place. It will appeal to anyone who has ever

ended a lesson thinking, “That could have gone better,” and wondered what it might mean to listen to that thought in a new way.

Bringing back concept mapping to develop vocabulary and understanding in primary science



Emily Montenero St Mary’s University, Twickenham

Emily is an Accredited trainer for science initiatives, including STEM Learning and Primary awards; associate consultant in primary STEM education; member of the Association for Science Education Committee



Alex Sinclair: St Marys University. Twickenham

Alex is Primary Science Lead at St Mary’s University. His resources include Standing on the Shoulders of Giants and Superhero Scientists. He was national co-Chair of the Association for Science Education.

This session introduces the pedagogical approach of using concept maps to teach vocabulary explicitly and foster meaningful connections between topic-specific terms in science education. We will demonstrate how concept mapping can promote oracy and child-led discussion, while also serving as a tool for retrieving vocabulary and consolidating knowledge. Although concept mapping is a well-established teaching strategy, its use in primary classrooms has declined. In light of the EEF’s 2024 recommendations to explicitly teach vocabulary, concept maps offer a valuable method for doing so—while also providing a meaningful way to assess pupils’ understanding. We will present small scale research highlighting teachers’ experiences and reflections on using concept maps in primary science. Participants will have the opportunity to create their own concept maps during the session. This approach to vocabulary development and meaning making goes beyond definitions found in knowledge organisers or typical retrieval practice activities. While our research has focused on primary science, the strategies and principles shared are applicable across all subjects.

Bridging Words and Worlds: Interdisciplinary Teaching of Languages and Social Studies through Translanguaging Inquiry



Maria Alejandra Mareco: Wake County Public School System, USA

Bilingual Elementary school educator and researcher based in North Carolina with extensive experience in language education and teacher development exploring the relationship between language, content learning, and identity.

For many of us who teach both language and content, the real challenge is helping students connect what they learn about the world with how they express it. In this session, I share some

classroom experiences where language learning and social studies naturally meet through inquiry and translanguaging, interdisciplinary work.

I will look at how students can ask and answer questions such as *How did different civilizations organize power and citizenship? or *What lessons can we bring to our communities today?

Together, I will try short bilingual activities, building timelines, designing “citizenship cards,” and writing reflections that link past and present. These tasks encourage students to move fluidly between languages while thinking critically about history and civic life.

The workshop connects to the North Carolina Standards for Social Studies (6.C&G.1–6.1.6) and Inquiry Indicators (I.1.1–I.1.11). More than anything, it’s an invitation to see how bilingual learning can make history feel alive, relevant, and deeply human.

Presentations and Presenters: Parallel Session 3

Why does it matter how we talk about maths?



Nicola Tierney: St Marys University, Twickenham

Senior Lecturer in Primary Mathematics. Former primary school teacher and mathematics leader in the UK and internationally. Editor of the PIA blog.

A critical view of mathematics is more important now than it has ever been. We live in a world where mathematics drives technologies which impact every aspect of life and whilst many applications of mathematics provide huge benefits for society, others create and perpetuate social injustices and inequality under the cloak of assumed objectivity and fairness. Challenging uncritical views of mathematics is therefore crucial to the development of a democratic and just society. This begs the question of what, in our education system, do we teach children to think about the nature of mathematics and what it means to be mathematical. The presentation will argue that it matters how we talk about mathematics in our classrooms, not just in standalone social justice projects or cross-curricular investigations, but in the everyday teaching of the mathematics curriculum.

Becoming a Drama Student - Reflections on choice and agency



Mark Griffin: St Marys University, Twickenham

Since qualifying as a teacher in 1993, Mark has worked as a Drama educator in Schools, Colleges, Universities and Youth Theatres internationally and across the UK

My work looks ethnographically at the way University drama students define themselves. Drawing on semi-structured interviews and filtered through the lens of rehearsed performance my work explores how and why students determine their path towards this definition. My presentation will reflect both on my own analysis of the interview transcripts, but also reflect on the way in which using these texts in the collaborative space of a rehearsed performance changes their emphasis and meaning, offering an alternative reading.

It is worth noting that a public performance related to this research is scheduled to take place on the afternoon of Saturday March 14th.

Putting policy into Practice: A Hands-On EYFS Toolkit for Early Years Professionals



Joelle Feudjo-maneze: Independent Consultant

Independent consultant in early childhood education and care, passionate about driving transformative pedagogy and supporting professional development in early years settings.

At this conference, I will present my work titled ‘Putting Policy into Practice: A Hands-On EYFS Toolkit for Early Years Professionals’—a practical, reflective tool designed to transform the EYFS from a static policy document into lived, meaningful, child-centred practice. Grounded in the Observe → Reflect → Plan → Act cycle, the toolkit embeds reflection within daily routines rather than adding extra documentation, enabling practitioners to interpret the EYFS through authentic interactions with children, families, and colleagues. Across eight units—mentorship, reflective inquiry and action research, cultural responsiveness, research-informed routines, practitioner empowerment, the Reflective Development Framework, and reflective leadership—the toolkit cultivates inquiry-led professionalism and distributed leadership. It positions early years practitioners not merely as implementers of policy but as researchers, interpreters, and co-constructors of practice who can shape provision responsively and inclusively. This toolkit reframes reflection as the foundation of quality, emphasising that meaningful practice emerges from daily observation, shared dialogue, cultural understanding, and evidence-based decisions. Rather than prescribing actions, it supports teams in co-adapting existing systems, planning tools, and documentation so that professional learning is integrated into natural routines and aligned with children’s lived experiences. Ultimately, Putting Policy into Practice offers a pathway toward sustainable, equitable, and high-quality early years provision. By strengthening professional identity, promoting shared leadership, and honouring the diverse contexts children bring into settings, the toolkit enables educators to move beyond compliance toward intentional, reflective, and transformative pedagogy for every child.

Teachers in the Driver’s Seat: Co-Design as a Way of Working



Bert Orgaer: Independent Educational Consult and Facilitator

Bert Orgaer is an educator and facilitator working across international education contexts, focusing on teacher agency, co-designed professional learning, and design-informed ways of working in practice.

Too often, teachers find themselves implementing decisions made elsewhere: the destination is set, and the route predetermined. At the same time, schools increasingly promote student agency, innovation, and futures-oriented learning, while teachers’ own professional agency is constrained by reform density, workload pressure, and additive approaches to professional development. This presentation explores how co-design can function as a practical way of

supporting teacher agency when professional learning is approached as an embedded, judgement-based practice rather than as an additional initiative. Drawing on professional practice across Belgium, Sweden, Finland, and Denmark, alongside findings from OECD TALIS and the UNESCO Global Report on Teachers, the session highlights a shift from collaboration as coordination toward co-design as a way of working. Rather than positioning teachers as implementers of externally defined priorities, co-design is framed as shared professional sense-making grounded in teachers’ knowledge of learners, context, and professional judgement. This shift does not require new programmes or additional workload. Instead, it depends on three enabling conditions: Time, Trust, and Tools. When these conditions are present, professional inquiry and design-informed ways of working can be integrated into existing rhythms of collaboration and reflection. Importantly, co-design is not framed as an obligation, but as a professional choice that supports teachers’ self-determination and judgement. This session invites participants to consider one small, realistic entry point for strengthening teacher agency in their own setting.

Inclusive Play through Technology Integration: A Case Study from Waite.EYTS



Richard Waite: Waite:EYTS

Early Years Technology Consultant, advocate for inclusive play, supporting nurseries with STEAM and digital integration. Passionate about accessible, play-based learning for all children.

This story shares how Waite.EYTS supports a London nursery using the STEAM approach, with an Interactive Smart Table integrated into weekly learning. The project embeds inclusive, play-based learning by combining accessible technology and adaptable non-digital resources to meet diverse needs.

The STEAM approach—Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics—offers a creative framework for activities that encourage curiosity, collaboration, and problem-solving. The Interactive Smart Table acts as a catalyst for hands-on exploration, enabling children to engage in digital storytelling, collaborative art, and interactive games. Activities are adapted for accessibility, with visual supports, tactile materials, and opportunities for choice, so every child can participate meaningfully.

Each week, I independently plan experiences, tailoring activities to interests and developmental stages. At the end of each day, I share the intent, implementation, and impact with staff, supporting transparency and collaborative reflection. This information is recorded in the daily diary, supporting ongoing evaluation and improvement.

The result is increased engagement, confidence, communication, and enjoyment among all children. Staff report improved confidence in adapting activities and a deeper understanding of how technology and non-digital resources facilitate inclusion and creativity. Key lessons include the importance of online safety, collaborative reflection, and adaptable resources. This case study shows how thoughtful integration of technology and STEAM can transform learning environments, making inclusive play a reality for every child.

Keywords: Inclusive Play, Technology Integration, Early Years, Online Safety, STEAM

Creating a Joyful Community of Practice for Reception Class Teachers



Janet Morris: University of Greenwich

Senior lecturer in Early Years and Primary Education, co-coordinator of the Reception Class Teacher Network (RCTN)



Dr Viki Veale: St Marys University

Senior lecturer in Early Years and Primary Education, chair of TACTYC, co-chair of BELMAS LEY RIG and The Alliance4Children's Early Years Working Group, co-coordinator of RCTN, St Marys Women's Network and Pedagogy Research SiG lead.

Reception Classes are early years settings located in Primary schools. Although this puts Reception Class teachers in a unique position, finding relevant CPD can be challenging. In this presentation, Veale, Milligan, Williams and Morris explain the origins of the Reception Class Teacher Network, how it has grown and developed, how it is supporting pedagogic practice, professional confidence and understanding of this critical phase of learning and development. In this presentation, we reflect on our pedagogic journey as co-leads of this joyful community of practice and our next steps for sustaining the Reception Class Teacher's Network.

Poster Presentations

Poster presentations will be displayed in the exhibition area throughout the day. Please enjoy the opportunity to browse and chat over a cup of coffee on arrival and during the breaks between sessions

Bringing Maps to Life in a Year One Classroom



Sara O'Beirne: Teacher and MA student, Braeburn Nanyuki, Kenya

Year One teacher at an international school in Nanyuki, Kenya, with 10 years' experience, sharing practical ways to bring maps to life for young learners.

This presentation explores how creative, play-based pedagogy can be enacted in Key Stage 1 to foster engagement, inclusion, and deeper conceptual understanding. Drawing on classroom practice with Year 1 children, the focus is on introducing geographical concepts through an active exploration of maps and mapping. Rather than relying on direct instruction, the approach centred on inquiry, imagination, and multimodal expression. Children were first invited to consider the historical question: "What did people do before maps existed?" Through storytelling and role-play, they developed an awareness of the human need for navigation and communication. This learning was extended into hands-on group activities, where pupils designed their own maps of the school grounds using varied resources such as natural materials, drawings, and 3D constructions. The outcomes highlighted the power of active pedagogy in supporting diverse learners. Children who were less confident with abstract vocabulary gained understanding through physical and visual representation. Collaboration promoted peer dialogue, enabling children to articulate their ideas and build shared meaning. The approach also allowed children with different learning styles and needs to participate meaningfully, demonstrating the inclusive potential of multimodal learning opportunities. The submission concludes by reflecting on the broader implications for early years and Key Stage 1 pedagogy. By embedding play, creativity, and collaboration into classroom practice, teachers can create meaningful learning experiences that not only develop subject-specific knowledge but also nurture wider skills such as problem-solving, communication, and teamwork. This case study illustrates pedagogy in action as dynamic, responsive, and child-centred.

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