



## Wellbeing Research for Education Conference 2025

“Well What? Interrogating  
Wellbeing Across the Education  
Continuum”

Conference Book of Abstracts  
Saturday June 7th 2025

## Contents

Keynote Presentation 1 .....	1
Keynote Presentation 2 .....	2
Parallel Session 1a.....	3
Parallel Session 1b .....	7
Workshop 1 .....	11
Poster Alley .....	12
Parallel Session 2a.....	19
Parallel Session 2b .....	23
Workshop 2 .....	26
Wellbeing Tasters .....	27

## Keynote Presentation 1

Venue: T118

Chair: Margaret Nohilly

<b>Title</b>	<i>The 'Well-th' of the Bairns: Enacting a socially just and relational curriculum</i>
<b>Presenter</b>	Donna Dey (University of Dundee)
<b>Biography</b>	<p>Donna Dey began her career teaching biology in secondary education in 1997 and subsequently undertook professional learning to collaborate and lead on Guidance and Pupil Support in various secondary schools in Scotland as principal teacher. Since 2013, Donna has been a part of the University of Dundee's Teacher Education faculty. She has been actively involved in teaching and leading modules focused on social justice and health and wellbeing at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. Currently, she serves as the Curriculum and Assessment Convenor for the MEd Programme. Donna's research interests lie in the areas of social justice and health and wellbeing. Her work has primarily focused on embedding health and wellbeing within secondary education and evaluating policies in practice. Her interest in health inequalities has also led to her involvement in a national dental project with dental colleagues across the UK to develop classroom interventions to improve toothbrushing in adolescents. She is a member of Scottish Universities Inclusion Group and is an elected member of Scottish Education Research Association (SERA) executive team. Donna is a co-convenor of the SERA Inclusive Education Network, that organises professional learning opportunities for educators across Scotland and beyond. Currently, she is collaborating with colleagues to explore the enactment of the health and wellbeing policies within Initial Teacher Education across Scotland. In addition, her ongoing PhD study examines the development of teachers of social justice through Initial Teacher Education from a Scottish perspective. This research has deepened her interest in critical pedagogy and the role of care ethics in supporting the wellbeing of young people through learning.</p>
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This keynote presentation explores the interconnections between social justice, citizenship, and wellbeing, and their enactment through a school curriculum. It highlights the essential role these elements play in fostering an inclusive and supportive educational environment for the wellbeing of all children and young people. The presentation aims to provide educators, teacher educators, policymakers, and participants with insights from theory, research and policy that may act as an encounter in which to 'think with', in the creation of a curriculum for wellbeing for children and young people. The presenter will also draw from their experiences of wellbeing through the curriculum in Scotland, both as a teacher and as a teacher educator researcher.</p>

## Keynote Presentation 2

Venue: T118

Chair: Maria Varvarigou

<b>Title</b>	<i>Well what indeed! Where have we come from and where are we going in Irish education?: A critique of the history and development of Wellbeing in the curriculum</i>
<b>Presenter</b>	Dr Fionnuala Tynan (Mary Immaculate College)
<b>Biography</b>	<p>Dr Fionnuala Tynan is a lecturer in inclusive pedagogy in Mary Immaculate College, Limerick and won the Shannon Consortium Teaching Excellence Award in 2018. Her research interests span across and merge inclusive education and wellbeing. She is director of the Williams Syndrome Neuro Developmental Education Research (WoNDER) Centre, which promotes applied research into the education and wellbeing of people with this rare genetic condition, and is an internationally renowned researcher with the Williams Syndrome community.</p> <p>She has also developed modules and presents lectures in the Master's of Education in the Leadership of Wellbeing. She works hand-in-glove with Dr Margaret Nohilly in the area of wellbeing; they co-authored the book <i>Wellbeing in Schools Everyday</i>, were co-leads of the NCCA systematic literature review on Wellbeing (April 2023), have published numerous papers on both Wellbeing policy and practice, presented nationally and internationally on these topics, as well as organising professional development for teachers and parents on wellbeing in education.</p>
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The introduction of Wellbeing into the Primary School Curriculum is an important acknowledgement of the place of Wellbeing in the lives of our children. It finally completes the pathway from the emphasis on Wellbeing as a theme in the <i>Aistear Early Childhood Curriculum Framework</i> to the <i>Wellbeing Guidelines for Junior Cycle</i>. However, there is a lack of clarity regarding the philosophical basis of Wellbeing in the education continuum, which in turn impacts the interpretation of Wellbeing for policy and curricular programmes and interventions. Tynan will examine the implications of the philosophical lens through which Wellbeing is taught in schools and interrogate the current evidence: Are we moving more towards a hedonic view of Wellbeing, with a focus on feeling good? Are we further reinforcing Western values of individual Wellbeing over collective Wellbeing and contributing to a rise in narcissism? Or, are we reducing Wellbeing to a health issue or a set of socio-emotional skills, thereby risking the holistic Wellbeing of our children? She will critique the current conceptual framework for Wellbeing in Irish education and consider the possibilities for effective implementation of Wellbeing across the education continuum. In response to the title of the conference 'Well what?', Tynan asks if Wellbeing in the Irish educational system is already an outdated concept and whether we should really be considering the integration of 'Well-doing' across the Irish education continuum instead.</p>

## Parallel Session 1a

Venue: T206

Theme: Wellbeing and Inclusion

Chair: Emer Ring

<b>PAPER 1</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Inclusion as a pathway to wellbeing for children and families in Early Learning and Care settings.</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Chloe Beaty
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The aim of the current research was to assess whether inclusive practices in Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings increases children's wellbeing in these settings. The research is part of an overall evaluation of the Leadership for INClusion in the Early Years (LINC) Programme provided to Early Childhood Teachers (ECTs) to build their competencies in creating inclusion within their inclusive ELC settings. Using an adapted version of Guskey's (2002) framework for evaluating continuing professional development, data were collected across 6 ELC settings that had a LINC graduate working as an INclusion Coordinator (INCO). A map-making methodology was employed to gather children's perspectives on inclusion in context (Gowers, 2022). Children created maps of their setting, which served as a basis for child-led tours and dialogue based on key principles of inclusion (Ring et al., 2021). Semi-structured interviews were also conducted with their parents. Preliminary data analysis of the children's data shows inclusive cultures, practices, and pedagogies existed within their settings, which had an influence of the child's sense of belonging, wellbeing, and happiness within the setting. This was emphasised by the themes emerging from the parent interviews, which show that the children within these ELC settings felt well-adjusted and valued in their setting. Equipping ECTs with knowledge on inclusive practices therefore improves the sector for the children within it and increases the professionalisation of the sector. The methodology used also shows playful participatory approaches as powerful tools for identifying impact in ELC settings.</p>

<b>PAPER 2</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Does Animal Assisted Pedagogy involving Canines facilitate the Establishment of Inclusive Learning Environments for Autistic Children</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Sinéad Morgan
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The involvement of animals in education is referred to as animal assisted education. A recently published literature review regarding animal assisted education involving canines was published by Morgan (2024) as well as a qualitative study involving autism assistance canines and autistic children (Morgan and O'Byrne 2023). Both publications identified the benefits accrued from animal assisted education whilst also highlighting the lack of research available regarding the concept of animal assisted education within the educational system. The primary objective of both publications is to examine whether animal assisted education involving certified canines supports the establishment of inclusive environments for autistic children. Emphasis has been placed on theoretical insights, primarily attachment theory. Such findings have provided a basis for a grounded theory study which aims to facilitate the co-construction of a theory that underpins animal assisted education by adhering to a grounded theory methodology. Consistent with grounded theory principles data is simultaneously gathered and analysed within the primary school environment. The study comprises of two phases. The initial phase entails the application of the Mosaic framework ensuring that multiple voices of autistic children can be heard, valued, respected and listened to (Clark and Moss 2011). The child participants within this study are aged between 4 to 12 years. The subsequent phase entails semi-structured interviews with teacher and canine handler participants. The information accrued is analysed to provide a theoretical insight into educational research and practices concerning animal assisted education. It is anticipated that such findings will enhance the educational system and will be of benefit to future policy makers and researchers alike.</p>

<b>PAPER 3</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>The sky is the limit</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Sarah Alley & Beth Hickey (Corpus Christi Primary School & Family Centre)
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This study explores The Sky is the Limit (TSTL), a school-based, trauma-informed model of therapeutic and family support developed by Corpus Christi Primary School (CCPS) in Moyross, Limerick. Conducted in partnership with the TED Project at Mary Immaculate College, the research examines the development, implementation, and impact of TSTL over a three-year period. Using a qualitative ethnographic case study approach, informed by narrative inquiry, the study engaged over 100 participants through focus groups and interviews. Findings highlight TSTL's transformative effect on student wellbeing, family engagement, and staff capacity with core strengths including multidisciplinary collaboration, accessible on-site services, strong relationships across stakeholders and a responsive, inclusive ethos. Key components, such as creative arts therapy, mindfulness, after-school programmes, and the Corpus Christi Family Centre contribute to a holistic, community-centred framework that addresses adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) in a DEIS Band 1 context. While identifying key challenges, the research also outlines clear, evidence-based recommendations for sustainable growth. This research positions TSTL as a scalable model of trauma-informed, inclusive education that fosters resilience, promotes wellbeing, and strengthens school-community connections in marginalised urban settings. Alongside this evaluation, a separate but related study is currently being conducted on the role of music therapy within the TSTL model. While music therapy is increasingly recognised as a valuable intervention for child mental health, little research exists on its implementation in mainstream school settings. This ongoing ethnographic study aims to explore the potential benefits of music therapy for children experiencing behaviours of anxiety which have been induced by trauma. Through expert interviews and diverse music therapy sessions, including individual, group, and family-based approaches, the study seeks to identify the most effective orientation for supporting children's mental health in this context. Together, these studies contribute to a growing evidence base on trauma-informed educational interventions. While the broader evaluation of TSTL demonstrates the effectiveness of an integrated, community-based model, the music therapy study offers a focused investigation into one of its key therapeutic components. The findings will inform best practices for supporting student wellbeing and fostering resilience in marginalised school communities.</p>

<b>PAPER 4</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Intergenerational arts programmes for community building and wellbeing</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Ho Thi Cat Tien
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Social changes such as urbanisation, migration, and digitalisation have reshaped traditional family structures and intergenerational relationships. Older adults now have fewer opportunities to pass on knowledge or learn from younger generations. This generational divide can intensify social exclusion and age-based prejudice, while valuable skills and cultural heritage risk being lost. In response, intergenerational programmes promote social inclusion and solidarity by fostering mutual understanding and collaboration across age groups. These initiatives aim to bridge generational gaps and strengthen communities by drawing on individuals' diverse strengths and experiences. This study evaluates a community-based intergenerational arts project through qualitative research, exploring the experiences of young children, older adults, and project facilitators. Data were collected via focus groups and interviews, then transcribed, coded, and analysed using Braun and Clarke's framework for inductive thematic analysis. Preliminary findings show that both older adults and children had positive experiences. Participants built meaningful relationships and engaged in informal learning, enhancing interpersonal skills and cultural understanding. The project helped shift perceptions, participants gained a deeper appreciation of the other age group and developed greater self-awareness. Facilitators reported similar benefits, highlighting the programme's value in enabling generational exchange and community connection. Intergenerational arts programmes offer a creative, community-based approach to enhancing wellbeing, socially, emotionally, and intellectually. Insights from this research may guide policymakers, educators, and community stakeholders in designing inclusive programmes that connect generations and strengthen community wellbeing.</p>



## Parallel Session 1b

Venue: T207

Theme: Wellbeing, Curriculum and Pedagogy

Chair: Margaret Nohilly

<b>Paper 1</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Exploring Irish primary mathematics education through a wellbeing lens</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Mairéad Hourigan
<b>Abstract</b>	Mathematical wellbeing is defined as the fulfilment of one's ultimate or core values, accompanied by positive feelings and functioning in mathematics education. While this area is under-researched, the seven dimensions have been associated with students' mathematical wellbeing are accomplishment, cognition, engagement, meaning, perseverance, positive emotions and relationships. In this presentation, this model will be used to reveal the nature of Irish primary pupils' mathematical wellbeing as reflected in the findings of the Consultation with Children report; completed to inform the Primary Mathematics Curriculum (2023). The presentation will also explore the alignment between these dimensions and the various features of primary mathematics curriculum as well as the implications of implementation as intended on Irish primary pupils' mathematical wellbeing.

<b>Paper 2</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Wellbeing, Religion and Religious Education: Strangers, Rivals or Partners?</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Daniel O'Connell & Amalee Meehan
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The vision of the new Primary Curriculum Framework (2023) in Ireland is to provide a strong foundation for every child to thrive and flourish, supporting them in realising their full potential as individuals and as members of communities and society during childhood. Being Well is central to that vision as a key competency. This competency aims to develop children's ability to be as healthy as they can be "physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually. Indeed, "being spiritual and having a sense of purpose and meaning" is listed as one of the attributes of Being Well. Yet the curricular understanding of Being Well as articulated in the Primary Curriculum Framework is limited to just two subjects - PE and SPHE" with no mention of the proven potential of other subjects in this regard. This limitation impoverishes the holistic approach to children's education aspired to in the Framework. This paper argues that while it should never be the case that the rights of parents or their children regarding Religious Education are compromised, research in the field shows that Religious Education can make a real and positive contribution to Being Well as understood in the Primary Curriculum Framework. The paper begins by reviewing some recent international longitudinal studies to demonstrate the strong positive correlation between religion and wellbeing. It goes on to highlight the potential of Religious Education in helping schools to fulfil the Primary Curriculum Framework vision of Being Well. It concludes that as a legitimate source of wellbeing, Religious Education with sound content and pedagogy, should be an integral part of a truly holistic understanding of Being Well and therefore of the Wellbeing Specification for a primary education.</p>

<b>Paper 3</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Experiential Wellbeing. Supporting the Teacher-Pupil Relationship through Ordinary, Everyday Interactions</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Helena Walsh
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This study aims to identify the ways in which interactions based on Dan Siegel and Tina Payne Bryson's 'Yes Brain' (2019) principles support the teacher-pupil relationship to foster wellbeing in the classroom, perceptions and perspectives of teachers. Pertinent to this study are the ways in which the interactions support a teacher's ability to connect and respond to challenging behaviour, thus maintaining a supportive, connected relationship and foster wellbeing in the classroom. After extensive exploration of work by Dr. Dan Siegel and Dr. Tina Payne Bryson, the researcher designed a workshop based on interactions to foster 'The Yes Brain' (2019) principles of Balance, Resilience, Insight and Empathy. Particular focus was paid to the centrality of the teacher-pupil relationship in supporting a child's wellbeing and how the creation of a psychologically safe teacher-pupil relationship free from fear and threats, plays an important role in this. Key to this is how teachers view behaviour and approach discipline. This exploratory case study investigated the perceptions and perspectives of the participants using questionnaires and a focus group. The research showed that teachers did find the interactions effective and there was an overall shift to a more compassionate approach to discipline after the intervention. There were limitations and implications for further study on this topic in an effort to solidify the evidence base for such an approach. The research highlighted a need for further support in how teachers can prioritise their own self care, to nurture a calm, empathetic presence in the classroom. Teachers would benefit from being further equipped with skills to maintain that presence, capable of connection and co-regulation, in an overwhelming classroom environment.</p>

#### Paper 4

##### Title

*Leveraging Arts-Based Practices for Enhanced Learning and Wellbeing in Initial Teacher Education*

##### Presenter(s)

Anne Marie Morrin

##### Abstract

This presentation explores the potential role of art-based reflective practice strategies in shaping preservice teachers' self-awareness and self-efficacy. To teach inclusion and diversity, educators must consider incorporating different disciplinary approaches to facilitate a balanced and comprehensive understanding. This presentation introduces an original methodology called '*The Data Reflective Wall*,' devised as a transdisciplinary approach (STEM and Visual Art) to student individual and collective understanding of their learning. The methodology emerged from context-based learning and incorporated student voice through strategically aligned reflection, where reflection on action played an integral part in shaping the content and assessment.

My observations will focus on several key findings. Firstly, I will consider the significance of facilitating and embracing a more flexible, open-ended approach to teaching and learning, informed by reflective and reflexive practices and student autonomy. Secondly, I will explore the transformative nature of socially engaged art practice, which provides a collective creative experience. This process increased students' understanding of their learning journey while documenting their well-being. The teaching and learning environment, based in the art studios, utilised art-based reflective practices to gain insights into the personal resources that student teachers draw upon and their concerns as they enter the final stages of the B.Ed. Program.



Reflective Data Wall 2025: Created as part of the B.Ed. Visual Art Elective.

## Workshop 1

Venue: T205

Chair: Mary Jo Kennedy

<b>Title</b>	<i>Integration across the Primary Wellbeing Specification</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Ciara Blennerhassett & Maria Kelly
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The Primary Curriculum is undergoing significant changes. The Primary Curriculum Framework (DE, 2023) outlines the vision for the redeveloped curriculum which is due to be published in autumn 2025. The curriculum will be underpinned by seven key competencies, including “Being Well” which aims to develop children’s understanding and appreciation of wellbeing, focusing on their physical, social, emotional, and spiritual health (DE, 2023, p. 11). Learning and teaching will be organised according to the five integrated curriculum areas. The curriculum area of Wellbeing integrates the subjects of Physical Education (PE) and Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE). This workshop will introduce the key competency of “Being Well” and provide an overview of integrated learning within the Primary Wellbeing specification. Through group activities and discussion, participants will gain hands-on experience applying integrated Learning Outcomes within the context of Wellbeing. By the end of the workshop, attendees will have a foundational understanding as to what lessons in Wellbeing could look like in their contexts and discuss how to prepare for teaching and learning that is aligned with the new specification. This session is ideal for primary teachers, principals, and education professionals who are looking to deepen their understanding of the primary Wellbeing specification.</p>

<b>Poster 1</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Wellbeing for Whom? Navigating Inclusion and Diversity in ELT</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Paromita Sengupta
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Wellbeing in education is often positioned as a neutral or universal good. However, in English Language Teaching (ELT)—particularly within international further education contexts—this framing can obscure how systemic inequalities, migration, and identity-related stress shape the lived experiences of both learners and educators. In classrooms where many students are multilingual migrants or refugees, and where part-time teachers face precarity and emotional labour, wellbeing is not a static concept—it is deeply contextual, relational, and unevenly distributed.</p> <p>This poster presents a critical and practice-based exploration of wellbeing, inclusion, and identity in ELT. Drawing on a case study from an Irish further education ELT setting, it highlights how coaching-based wellbeing workshops—delivered by trained facilitators in collaboration with student support teams—created reflective, inclusive spaces for both students and staff. These sessions invited participants to examine the links between language and identity, surface unspoken challenges, and co-create wellbeing norms that respected cultural difference and individual voice.</p> <p>Grounded in both inclusive pedagogical theory and coaching methodologies, the approach enabled the development of identity-affirming language practices, peer support structures, and opportunities for teacher reflection on emotional labour. The coaching framework provided participants with a clear-set goal, and with tools for self-awareness, values clarification, and resilience-building, while also fostering community and shared responsibility. Outcomes included enhanced learner engagement, greater belonging, and reduced stress and burnout among educators. This work advocates a move beyond individualised, performative notions of resilience toward collective care and institutional responsiveness. It positions coaching not just as a personal development tool, but as a systemic intervention that can centre inclusion and equity in educational practice. Ultimately, it asks: <i>Whose wellbeing is being supported in ELT—and what might it take to ensure that care is shared, sustained, and truly inclusive?</i></p>

Poster 2	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Online is the place to go: Adolescent perspectives on mental health information A Qualitative Focus Group Study</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Lorraine Conheady
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>In recent years, we have seen a rise in mental health disorders among young people (Twenge et al., 2017). It is now being suggested that mental health awareness efforts may be a contributing factor (Foulkes &amp; Andrews, 2023). Therefore, it is timely to re-examine young people’s perspectives on mental health. This study aims to investigate young peoples views on mental health information they receive in school or access elsewhere. A qualitative, exploratory approach was used to address the research question: What do young people think about mental health information? Seventeen students aged 16 years or older were recruited from a secondary school in the west of Ireland. Data was collected from four focus group discussions which took place on the school grounds. A reflexive thematic analysis was carried out and two themes were developed: (1) The same thing over and over and (2) Online is the place to go. An overarching theme was also developed: One size does not fit all. Participants acknowledged that due to increased mental health awareness, it is now easier to talk about mental health and access supports. They also stated that they prefer to go online when they want to learn more about mental health, noting that they find online information more relatable and authentic. No specific evidence that increased exposure to mental health information is leading to the rise in mental health problems was identified in the data gathered. This said, upon analysis of the focus group discussions, it is clear that further research should be conducted in order to establish if this is the case.</p>

Poster 3	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Child agency and wellbeing: exploring the lived experiences of the agentic child in early childhood educational settings</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Michelle Lehane
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Personal well-being is linked to agency and the belief that we have some control over our self and the world (Hayes and FilipoviÄ 2018). The opinions of children indicate that agency is linked to their sense of wellbeing (Fane et al. 2020). Child agency can be defined as children having voice and influence over their own learning (GoI 204). This mixed methods and case study research, underpinned by Bronfenbrenner’s bioecological model (Bronfenbrenner and Morris 2006) and Lundy’s model of participation (2007), examines how child agency is facilitated in preschools that participate in the ECCE programme. Phase 1 of the study is an online survey of early childhood professionals towards child agency in the ECCE programme in preschools. Phase 2 is an in-depth case study of two preschools participating in the ECCE programme that seeks the opinions of children aged 2-6, with feedback from parents and educators towards child agency. The wellbeing of children is a priority during phase 2 and data will be gathered during free play as this contributes to their sense of wellbeing (Moore and Lynch 2019; GoI 2024). Other methods including drawing, digital photography or other method chosen by the children, will capture the verbal and non-verbal opinions of children. Thematic analysis (Braun and Clark 2022) of the data will be member-checked with the children in a storybook format (Fane et al. 2020). With the permission of the children, their information will be discussed with the educators to provide opportunities for the educators to reflect on the opinions of the children and to discuss the agentic child in practice. The findings will form the basis of a doctoral thesis and create new knowledge on how child agency is facilitated in the ECCE programme in preschools and what factors, if any facilitate or hinder child agency.</p>



<b>Poster 4</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>My world, my health: unlocking real world experience for real world skills</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Christina Duff, Katherine Scott and Dinah McCarthy (Irish Heart Foundation)
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Health literacy is the ability to access, understand, appraise, and apply health-related information to make informed health decisions and maintain good health throughout life. The WHO recognises health literacy as a determinant of health and addressing health literacy in schools can improve both educational and health outcomes. The Irish Heart Foundation has a strong record of developing and implementing health programmes for schools. Through research on health literacy in post primary schools, we have co-designed adaptable tools for health education. The goal of this project is to design a toolkit of health literacy resources that can be adapted to meet the needs of different post primary schools. In our research, students expressed that the didactic approach of being given information about health does not resonate with them, and there are misconceptions about what wellbeing choices are within an individual's control. There is also risk of educator bias or assumptions and fear of judgement or shame. To overcome this, we co-designed tools to (1) facilitate discussion of factors that affect health in the context of young people's real lives and (2) de-personalise health conversations to remove stigma and focus on practical solutions. The tools lay the foundations for meaningful discussion and consideration of young people's environments and unique contexts, without judgement or assumptions.</p>

Poster 5	
<b>Title</b>	<i>The Role and Functions of the Educator funded under the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Claire Butterly
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>As a result of AIM, more children with extra needs are attending the Early Childhood Care and Education programme, with Goodman (2022) noting an increase of 150% in the number of children and settings receiving additional support. Level 7 of AIM provides settings with the funding to recruit an additional team member to be used as a shared resource within their ECCE room (DCEDIY, 2021). This research explores the role and function of this educator. Through a constructivist approach, this study adopts an exploratory sequential mixed method research design (Creswell, 2014) to identify the key factors that influence the recruitment of AIM educators and their perceived roles and responsibilities within ECEC settings. Phase One consisted of online surveys, which were completed by Managers (n=178), Lead and General Educators (n=126) and AIM educators (n=106). Analysis through SPSS and thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2020), findings revealed that despite AIM guidance (DCEDIY, 2021) specifying the role of AIM educators as a shared resource, their role varies widely, demonstrating that the term shared resource is open to individual interpretation. These findings shaped for Phase Two's interview questions, which included online semi-structured interviews with Managers (n=8) and Educators funded under AIM (n=12). A key finding indicates that AIM educators are functioning differently depending on the setting, offering universal support, pedagogical support and targeted support. Some educators are also involved in creating the My Inclusion Plan and engaging with parents and external agencies, whereas other educators do not have this as part of their responsibilities. There is a call for reform to improve AIM through increasing funding allocations, providing universal training and upskilling on inclusion for all educators and managers being given more autonomy over the supports they can approve.</p>

Poster 6	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Strengthening Schools from the Heart: Neart agus Folláine – Global Wellbeing Practices in Irish Education</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Sarah Curran
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>In this poster, I will share my experience in leading comprehensive wellbeing programs and initiatives, underpinned by evidence-based practices that have transformed school cultures and positively impacted students, staff, and families. In my role as Head of Wellbeing, I have been instrumental in driving my organisation to achieve Mental Health Award Accreditation and we are currently shortlisted for the Pupil Wellbeing Award in the MENA region. These accolades demonstrate the commitment and passion toward creating inclusive, resilient, and emotionally intelligent school environments. Over the past decade, I have developed and implemented a range of wellbeing frameworks, including a curriculum guidance framework called We SHINE and have been designing and implementing wellbeing clubs including Stretch Your Strengths, which integrates social-emotional learning, mindfulness, and Character Strengths. These programs have been successfully adopted in a variety of educational contexts, from early childhood and primary and have contributed to enhanced emotional regulation, resilience, and academic success. The topics which I would love to share in the conference include several key areas where I have successfully integrated wellbeing practices:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Embedding Character Strengths into the Curriculum: Participants will explore how to use the character strengths framework to foster emotional intelligence and resilience in their personal and professional lives, and of course in their students' lives. I will share insights into how this approach has been embedded into classrooms, for students, teachers and parents (and also within extracurricular programs to promote positive identity development and mental health).</li> <li>2. Emotional Literacy and Self-Regulation: Participants will explore strategies to help students develop emotional literacy and self-regulation skills, which are critical for academic success, personal growth, and mental health. I will share how to implement activities that encourage emotional awareness, regulation techniques, and coping strategies in students.</li> <li>3. Creating a Coaching Culture for Wellbeing: I can demonstrate how developing a coaching culture within schools can support staff wellbeing, enhance leadership capacity, and promote a strengths-based approach to personal and professional growth.</li> <li>4. Mindfulness for Wellbeing: As the research shows, mindfulness practices have proven to be effective tools for reducing stress and promoting emotional regulation. I am currently working on MBSP accreditation and in this I will provide practical examples of how mindfulness and character strengths activities can be seamlessly integrated into our school routines, helping both students and staff enhance focus, reduce anxiety, and develop a grounded, focused routine.</li> </ol>

With my well-rounded international experience, including delivering workshops for KHDA, What Works Wellbeing, BSME, Bounce Together, and You HQ, I am passionate about contributing to Irish education by bringing innovative and globally-recognised strategies that can be adapted to meet local needs. I believe my international perspective can help enrich and advance current wellbeing practices within Irish schools.

#### Poster 7

**Title** *Stronger Together: Home & School Partnerships for Wellbeing & Learning*

**Presenter(s)** Paul Knox and Jacinta O'Connor

**Abstract** This poster will present research on effective home-school partnerships, specifically in the context of supporting children's wellbeing and learning in Special Education Needs (SEN), and Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE). The poster will highlight practices for integrating parents into the educational process in a meaningful and democratic way. This poster is designed to spark meaningful discussions and provide practical ideas for improving home-school collaboration in support of children's wellbeing and learning in Special Education Needs (SEN), and Social, Personal, and Health Education (SPHE).

## Parallel Session 2a

Venue: T206

Theme: Professional Wellbeing

Chair: Lisha O'Sullivan

<b>Paper 1</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Exploring Well-being and Ill-being in Education: Exploring educators' perspectives</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Ashling Bourke, Jones Irwin, <a href="#">Una McCabe</a> , and <a href="#">Frances Murphy</a>
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This paper will explore perceptions of well-being and ill-being in education from a range of curricular and disciplinary areas. As a small group of colleagues we have worked together to share ideas from our discipline and curricular areas - Philosophy, Psychology, Physical Education, and Arts Education - to help us understand what well-being means in the context of primary education. Through this work we endeavour to consider a wider and more nuanced understanding of well-being that allows for a more authentic perspective on human functioning that embraces ill-being and vulnerability rather than the narrow pursuance of individual happiness. This paper will focus on the notion of 'ill-being' as a limiting point to the current well-being discourse. In this presentation, we consider;</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1. Conceptual and theoretical frameworks for ill-being drawing on multi- and inter- disciplinary approaches to better understand the concept and how it might theoretically inform a more nuanced conceptualisation of well-being</li><li>2. An exploration of such 'ill-being' in the educational and existential lives of children, with a particular emphasis on primary years and school and curricular examples, specifically Physical and Arts Education.</li></ol>

<b>Paper 2</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>A national survey exploring the wellbeing of SENCOs (Special Education Needs Co-ordinators) in Irish primary schools.</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Emma O'Sullivan
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>This paper will provide an overview of the key findings from Phase One of this study's data collection, involving a national survey investigating the wellbeing of Special Education Needs Co-ordinators (SENCOs) in Irish primary schools. In the past number of years, while the Irish special education system has been under review, with policy proliferation, relentless pace of change, many special education teachers and SENCOs have not received adequate professional learning regarding these changes (Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017). The introduction of a revised SET Allocation model (DES, 2024), the paucity of policy outlining the role of the SENCO (Fitzgerald and Radford, 2017), as well as the increase in the prevalence of special education in pupils (McCoy et al. 2019), are all potential stressors negatively affecting the wellbeing of SENCOs (Doyle Bradley, 2021). Despite the developments in wellbeing policy and practice in Irish schools (DES 2019), there appears to be a focus on the wellbeing of students, with a neglect for the wellbeing of teachers and school leaders (Doran and Burke 2022).</p> <p>This research study utilises an interpretivist, mixed-methods approach involving a two sequential phases of data collection. This paper will focus on Phase One of the data collection process which involved a quantitative online national survey with 320 SENCOs. The online survey included a wellbeing scale: Mental health Continuum Short Form (MHC-SF; Keyes 2009), as well as closed and open-ended questions exploring the wellbeing of the participants. The participants reported that the lack of formal role recognition negatively impacted upon their wellbeing by affecting their relationships with staff and parents. The findings also revealed that supportive relationships, positive school culture and wellbeing practices positively affected the wellbeing of participants. The paper will explore these findings in detail.</p>

Paper 3	
Title	<i>Do you want to survive in the jungle or exist in the zoo? What role (if any) do positive psychology interventions play in educational leadership?</i>
Presenter(s)	Robbie O'Connell
Abstract	<p><b>Background:</b> The role of primary school principals in Ireland has become increasingly unsustainable due to mounting administrative demands, accountability pressures, and limited structural supports for leader wellbeing (Darmody &amp; Smyth, 2016; IPPN, 2022). While policy frameworks acknowledge the importance of wellbeing, practical support mechanisms tailored specifically for school leaders remain insufficient. This study investigates how positive psychology interventions (PPIs) may serve as practical tools for promoting the wellbeing and sustainability of educational leadership.</p> <p><b>Objectives:</b> This research aimed to explore the extent to which three PPIs—Self-Compassion, Three Good Things, and Character Strengths could positively influence school leaders' personal and professional wellbeing. The study sought to determine whether consistent engagement with these interventions could foster more sustainable leadership practices.</p> <p><b>Methodology:</b> A qualitative case study approach was adopted, involving five primary school principals over a six-week period. Data were collected through reflective diaries, character strengths surveys, and a semi-structured focus group. Thematic analysis was employed to identify common experiences and insights related to the implementation and perceived benefits of the interventions.</p> <p><b>Key Findings:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Self-Compassion</b> helped reduce negative self-criticism and promoted emotional regulation, enabling participants to respond more calmly and constructively in stressful situations.</li> <li>• <b>Three Good Things</b> enhanced participants' ability to recognise and appreciate professional and personal positives, contributing to improved mood and job satisfaction.</li> <li>• <b>Character Strengths</b> facilitated greater self-awareness and alignment between personal values and leadership behaviours, increasing authenticity and engagement.</li> <li>• All participants reported enhanced resilience, reduced stress, and a greater sense of professional fulfilment, suggesting that consistent engagement with PPIs can support leadership sustainability.</li> </ul> <p><b>Recommendations:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Policy and Practice:</b> Educational policymakers, including the Department of Education and PDST, should consider embedding PPIs into leadership development programmes and CPD structures.</li> <li>• <b>School Culture:</b> School boards and management bodies should foster a culture that supports leader self-care through reflective practices and peer support networks.</li> </ul>

- **Further Research:** Longitudinal studies with larger and more diverse samples are recommended to validate the findings and assess long-term impacts of PPIs in educational leadership contexts.

#### **Implications:**

There is a compelling case for embedding PPIs into professional development and leadership training frameworks. Policy bodies such as the Department of Education and the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) should consider the implementation of structured wellbeing interventions to support school leaders in navigating the demands of their roles.

#### **Conclusion:**

Positive psychology interventions offer a low-cost, accessible, and meaningful means of supporting school leaders' wellbeing. Their consistent application may serve as a preventative measure against burnout and enhance the sustainability of educational leadership. As Waters (2011) suggests, the integration of positive psychology into the fabric of school leadership holds significant potential for cultural and systemic change.

#### **References:**

- Darmody, M., & Smyth, E. (2016). *Job satisfaction and occupational stress among primary school teachers and school principals in Ireland*. ESRI.
- Waters, L. (2011). A review of school-based positive psychology interventions. *The Australian Educational and Developmental Psychologist*, 28(2), 75–90.
- Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN). (2022). *Primary School Leadership: The Case for Urgent Action – A Roadmap to Sustainability*.



## Parallel Session 2b

Venue: T207

Theme: Classroom Supports for Wellbeing Programmes and Initiatives

Chair: Gerard Farrelly

<b>Paper 1</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Psytales</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Deirdre Kelly & Catriona Donoghue
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>IPPN is a partner organisation with the PsyTales project. Deirdre Kelly and Catriona Donoghue represent IPPN. PsyTales is funded by the European Union Erasmus + Programme and brings together researchers and practitioners from 5 European countries. The project is designed to help young people aged 9-12 by offering 33 engaging stories. These stories aim to support students in managing stress, anxiety, and challenges while promoting psychological resilience and wellbeing. By incorporating insights on optimism, character strengths, and emotional awareness, the project seeks to help pupils thrive both academically and personally. The project is motivated by the increasing mental health challenges faced by young learners. The PsyTales series of books will be published in English, French, Italian, Croatian and Greek and distributed across five different European countries. PsyTales focuses on equipping students with the tools they need to prevent mental health issues, manage stress, and build resilience. The initiative also addresses the needs of pupils with fewer opportunities, ensuring inclusivity and accessibility for all. Through comprehensive teacher guidance/parental guidance and innovative educational materials, PsyTales aims to enhance school health and wellbeing, reduce dropout rates, and provide pupils with the resources to lead fulfilling lives. By using relatable stories, the project helps students develop emotional literacy and resilience, enabling them to better manage stress, failure, and interpersonal conflicts. The key objectives are: Providing coping tools for students: The stories in PsyTales reflect real-life situations, encouraging students to adopt positive coping strategies such as emotional regulation and problem-solving to navigate challenges. Supporting educators with practical resources: the pedagogical booklet offers educators guidance on integrating wellbeing practices into their classroom, but also an online course tackling PsyTales stories creation. Enhance emotional literacy and resilience through storytelling: PsyTales engages students emotionally, helping them recognise and articulate their feelings while building empathy and self-awareness. Equip parents and caregivers to support their children: The stories of PsyTales empower parents and caregivers to foster a supportive learning environment at home, enriching their children's emotional growth and educational journey. PsyTales offers more than just stories. It provides a holistic educational approach that integrates wellbeing into learning. By equipping students with emotional tools and educators with practical resources, PsyTales fosters a supportive and inclusive environment that prioritises emotional wellbeing alongside academic achievement.</p>

Paper 2	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Be aware, be understanding, be empathetic, Be MindfUL: A Third-level Student Peer Awareness Training Programme</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Philp Desmond & Eva Devaney (University of Limerick)
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>The Be MindfUL programme is a comprehensive student peer awareness training initiative designed to address critical issues affecting third-level students' lives and foster a supportive community. It has dual aims: to foster students' personal development and to develop their capacity to positively impact their communities. The initiative builds on a similar programme (Brady et al. 2023) which was adapted to the local campus community context. It also responds to national strategic frameworks on addressing active consent, mental wellbeing, suicide prevention, substance use in higher education, and Healthy Campus (DoE 2020a, 2020b, HEA 2020, 2022). The programme offers four weekly insightful and engaging 150-minute workshops addressing aspects of wellbeing including empathy, bystander intervention, dignity and respect, bullying, substance use and gambling, cultural competencies, mental health, and suicide prevention. Over 100 students, from diverse groups and across a multitude of course years and disciplines, participated in the programme in its first year - 2024/25. Using a partnership model, the programme is delivered by expert speakers. Internal partners included UL Student Counselling; UL Psychology Department; UL Human Rights, Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion; and Healthy UL. External Partners included NiteLine and the Office for Suicide Prevention "HSE Mid-West. The initiative was supported by the Students' Union and the UL Chaplaincy service. The first author will explore the challenges and successes of developing and implementing the programme, highlighting strategies for engagement, logistical management and fostering a supportive environment. They will also present evaluation findings on the impacts of students; personal and academic lives, currently being collated and analysed, and will make recommendations for similar initiatives. The second author will reflect on their participation in the programme and make links to a Healthy Campus approach to wellbeing.</p>

<b>Paper 3</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>“Would a regular gratitude practice positively impact the social and emotional wellbeing of an Irish primary school teacher?”</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Mary Jo Kennedy
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Teacher wellbeing needs nurturing, and it supports student wellbeing. This mixed methods study assessed if practicing gratitude positively impacts the social and emotional wellbeing of a sample of six Irish primary school teachers. It used a twenty-one-day action research gratitude intervention, compiled of a variety of evidence-based exercises. The methodologies used were a pre- and post-intervention PERMA questionnaire (Butler and Kern 2016) focused on the Positive Emotions, and Relationship scores, coupled with semi- structured interviews.</p> <p>The gratitude practice increased the teachers social and emotional wellbeing; they conveyed that gratitude boosted positive feelings and helped them cope with stress. Participants reported an increase in relationship satisfaction. Some felt more tolerant. The quantitative data supported their experiences with significant improvement in ‘Positive Emotion’ and ‘Happiness’ scores. Participants stated that their gratitude practice positively affected their classes, subtly, and they plan to introduce gratitude to their schools. This study provides an example of a simple, quick and effective wellbeing practice for teachers, which may also benefit students.</p> <p>This research is unique as is the first to explore the impact of a gratitude intervention on Irish primary school teachers. This study contributes meaningful participants’ experiences to aid the understanding of why gratitude improves wellbeing.</p>

<b>Paper 4</b>	
<b>Title</b>	<i>Placing Well-Being at the Heart of the Classroom: Approaches from Positive Psychology</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Fiona Forman
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Well-being is now a priority within the Irish education system, and placing it at the heart of the classroom is more important than ever. Positive Psychology, the science of well-being, (Seligman &amp; Csikszentmihalyi, 2000) can offer educators many practical pedagogical approaches for doing so. These include prioritising positive, supportive relationships, upregulating positive emotions, nervous system regulation and embedding the language of Character Strengths (Seligman &amp; Peterson 2004) across the classroom.</p> <p>This paper outlines the author’s understanding and use of these approaches in her own primary classroom over an approximately ten-year period, and the positive benefits that she witnessed as a result of doing so. It offers practical suggestions for other educators to embed these approaches into their own teaching.</p>
	<b>References</b>

Seligman, M. E., & Csikszentmihalyi, M. (2000). *Positive psychology: An introduction* (Vol. 55, No. 1, p. 5). American Psychological Association.  
 Peterson, C., & Seligman, M. E. (2004). *Character strengths and virtues: A handbook and classification* (Vol. 1). Oxford university press.

## Workshop 2

Venue: T205

Chair: Emer Ring

<b>Title</b>	<i>Holding Space: Building Emotional Connection Through Communities of Practice</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Lorraine Diggins & Norma Lenihan
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Educator wellbeing is increasingly recognised as essential to the sustainability and success of educational systems, yet much of the discourse remains focused on individual coping strategies or top-down institutional interventions. This workshop offers a conceptual exploration of Communities of Practice (CoPs) as emotionally sustaining spaces that support educator wellbeing through connection, trust, and shared reflection. Drawing on existing literature, the session highlights how the affective dimensions of CoPs are often overlooked in favour of their role in knowledge exchange and professional development. Wenger (1998) defines CoPs as groups of people who share a concern or passion and learn how to do it better through regular interaction. While typically associated with collaborative learning, CoPs also have the potential to function as what Plett (2015) terms “holding spaces” environments where individuals can feel safe, validated, and emotionally supported. Scholars such as Kelchtermans (2005) and Senge et al. (2000) have noted the importance of narrative, trust, and vulnerability in professional learning environments, particularly in sustaining teacher identity and emotional resilience. This interactive workshop invites participants to engage in a facilitated, small-group “pop-up” CoP experience. Through reflective dialogue and shared storytelling, participants will explore how holding space can foster a sense of belonging, reduce isolation, and support wellbeing across the education continuum. The session will also offer practical tools and guiding principles for cultivating emotionally safe peer-led spaces within their own professional contexts. This workshop is relevant for educators, school leaders, wellbeing practitioners, and professional learning coordinators who are interested in the intersection of emotional wellbeing, professional identity, and collaborative learning. Participants will leave with enhanced insight into how CoPs can serve not only as learning communities, but as quiet yet powerful vehicles for relational care and collective wellbeing.</p>

## Wellbeing Tasters

Wellbeing Taster 1

Venue: T205

<b>Title</b>	<i>A taste of calm to enhance your wellbeing with Leesa Flanagan</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Leesa Flanagan
<b>Abstract</b>	Join me for a short introduction to mindfulness practice and discover how you can use simple practical mindfulness practices to help you reduce stress, support your emotional wellbeing and to be more present. In this taster session, you will learn how to bring some mindful awareness into your life. You will also explore the benefits of being present and having compassion for yourself and others. This session will allow you take a moment to pause and reset.

Wellbeing Taster 2

Venue: T115

<b>Title</b>	<i>An intergenerational sing-along</i>
<b>Presenter(s)</b>	Avril McLoughlin, Edmond Gubbins and Maria Varvarigou, together with Patricia O'Sullivan and Maeve Liston (Enterprise and Community Engagement Department, MIC)
<b>Abstract</b>	<p>Join us for an engaging, participatory music making session celebrating the culmination of an MIC Age Friendly Campus initiative on <i>Music for Wellbeing – Building Musical Connections across Generations</i>. This intergenerational initiative brings together 6<sup>th</sup> class pupils from Scoil Mháthair Dé and older adults from the Sisters of Mercy Convent in a shared exploration of music's impact on wellbeing.</p> <p>Through a series of collaborative workshops during Spring 2025, participants engaged in breathing exercises, gentle physical and vocal warmups, shared song singing, live music listening, and multisensory musical games. These sessions fostered creativity, enjoyment and mutual connection, highlighting the powerful role of music in enhancing wellbeing across generations. The final celebration and performance, held on June 7<sup>th</sup>, forms part of the Cruinniu na nÓg festivities and the Wellbeing Research for Education Conference at MIC. We invite you to join us in this joyful event that showcases the transformative potential of music to unite, uplift, and inspire.</p>



**Website:** [mic.ul.ie/Wellbeing-Conference](http://mic.ul.ie/Wellbeing-Conference)

**Email:** [WellbeingConference@mic.ul.ie](mailto:WellbeingConference@mic.ul.ie)