

Research from the School of Education
2025





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Welcome to the School of Education

- Professor Julie Rattray, Head of School

As part of sharing this magazine with you, it is important that we begin by telling you a little bit about who we are as a department and share our departmental vision.

We are a School of Education with approximately 165 staff comprising: full- and part-time academics and professional support colleagues, research and teaching assistants, and casual staff. We have approximately 700 students studying a range of undergraduate and postgraduate taught courses leading to both academic and professional qualifications in Education as well as a large doctoral student community. The School itself has been in existence, in one form or another, since 1909 when it was established as a Teacher Training college for County Durham. This college was affiliated to the University in 1926 and continued to fulfil its role of training high quality teachers. The current iteration of the School as an academic department dates back to 1977, and this is when our contributions to research really began to take shape. Durham is a top 100 university in QS World University Rankings 2026, reflecting its global reputation and standing. The School of Education is ranked second for research in the country following the Research Excellence Framework 2021.

We have been ranked first amongst UK Education departments in the [Times and Sunday Times Good University Guide 2025](#), and placed second in the [Complete University Guide 2026](#). Whilst we are incredibly proud of these league positions, they are only a small part of who we are.



Our vision is to be a recognised School of Education regionally, nationally, and internationally, fostering excellence in research, scholarship, and teaching. At the heart of this vision lies a commitment to a more equitable world where education plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals, communities, and societies to thrive. We believe that research, scholarship, and teaching conducted within the School of Education contributes to expanding the boundaries of educational knowledge and practice. This involves having a positive impact on individuals and organisations through policy and practice, creating a knowledge base that provides evidence for informed decision-making in education, and delivering rigorous and relevant, research informed, education that inspires our students to become the architects of an equitable and sustainable world.

We place a significant emphasis on research that is underpinned by a clear evidence base, reflecting our recognition that the generation of evidence offers a strong basis for change. As you will read in this publication, our research has been instrumental in achieving this and has contributed to a range of educational policy and practice innovations that have had a long-term impact on people and societies. Whether the focus is on the early years, schools or higher education, reflects policy or practice, the



1st

**UK Education
Departments**

in the
[Times and Sunday
Times Good University
Guide 2025](#)

2nd

**UK Education
Departments**

in the
[Complete University
Guide 2026](#)

work that we do can be seen to be making a difference. Working in university-based teams, or as part of collaborative partnerships with external organisations, charities and governments, we continually strive to support education at a regional, national and global level.

EdLines provides an opportunity for us to share what we do and brings together a collection of articles designed to showcase not just our current research projects and publications but reflects the vibrant and diverse research culture that we continue to cultivate. It offers insights into us as a School of Education and invites you to find out more with links to our website, researcher profiles and project pages. The publication is representative of our entire research community and features not only our academic staff activities but showcases the work of our postgraduate and undergraduate researchers too. You will also find information on how we work with community partners and other external organisations and groups so that we can ensure our work extends into wider society.

Through this publication we invite you to engage with us in our continuing research story.

...a commitment to a more equitable world where education plays a pivotal role in enabling individuals, communities, and societies to thrive.

Message from the Director of Research

- Professor Rille Raaper



Welcome to EdLines, our very first issue of annual research news! This magazine is a collaborative effort that celebrates the breadth and depth of our research achievements and activities, as well as people who make this work possible. There have indeed been many research successes in 2024/25 - we have secured several new research grants, totalling over £2 million, and allowing our researchers to lead and co-lead new groundbreaking research in school and university settings (read more on page 09). We have also published over 45 new academic publications, including scholarly books, international journal articles and book chapters. Our recent books have been showcased on page 23.

This issue covers a variety of success stories from our work in local schools and national and international partnerships, to insights into groundbreaking new knowledge that we have generated. We also showcase and celebrate the wonderful work that our early career and student

researchers have been doing, and outline ways in which you can take part in our vibrant research culture.

We hope that you enjoy this first issue, and please join us in celebrating the School of Education research at Durham University.

Research Division

The Research Division supports and strengthens the School's vibrant research environment. We foster excellence across all career stages, from securing funding to enhancing impact. Through collaboration, mentoring, and strategic development, we help drive research quality, innovation, and real-world influence - helping to shape our dynamic research community.



Professor Rille Raaper

Director of Research



Dr William Yat Wai Lo

Deputy Director of Research



Dr Sarah A. Walker

Research Environment Coordinator



Professor Stephen Gorard

Grants Coordinator



Dr Antonia Manresa

Chair of the Ethics Committee



Ashley High

Senior Research Administrator

Postgraduate Research



Dr Sophie Ward

Director of Postgraduate Research



Dr Xiaofei Qi

Deputy Director of Postgraduate Research



Sue Davies

Postgraduate Research Administrator

Thematic Clusters

Our thematic clusters reflect the breadth, diversity, and excellence of our research community. They are dynamic hubs where ideas grow, collaborations flourish, and innovative research practices are developed. Bringing together staff, postgraduate researchers, and global partners, the clusters support both applied and ‘blue skies’ research, foster interdisciplinary connections, and strengthen the links between research and teaching. Through our clusters, we champion inclusive, boundary-pushing research that makes a real-world impact.

Higher and Further Education

Cluster Lead Dr William Yat Wai Lo

This thematic cluster brings together researchers investigating key issues in the higher and further education sectors, including policy and governance, pedagogy, assessment, learning, and widening participation. Our work spans local, national, and international contexts, reflecting the increasingly globalised nature of post-secondary education. Research in this cluster explores themes such as student politics and empowerment, threshold concepts, contextualised admissions, and doctoral education practices across systems. We also examine the internationalisation of higher

education and its implications for students, faculty members, and institutions. Our work draws on a range of qualitative and quantitative approaches and frequently engages with both policy and practice. Cluster members contribute to the advancement of conceptual and empirical research that deepens understanding and informs educational strategies, institutional change, and inclusive access. We are committed to critical and interdisciplinary inquiry that challenges assumptions and supports the transformation of policy and practice in higher and further education.

Psychology and Education

Cluster Lead Professor Jens Beckman

Colleagues in this thematic cluster are interested in describing and understanding human behaviour related to learning and development from a psychological perspective. Learning and development are dynamic, complex, non-linear, and life-long processes of intra-individual change. These processes are impacted by characteristics of the person, the task, and the situation. The complex interplay between learner characteristics, learning content, and learning context is facilitated through social interaction. Research conducted in this cluster utilises but also contributes to

the development of theories and methods from cognitive, personality, social and developmental sciences but also psychometric assessment to describe and explain psychological processes related to learning, with the ultimate goal of contributing to the optimisation of learning and teaching. Psychological research in education is part of the multidisciplinary approaches typical for education as an application-focussed field of study. It uses correlational, longitudinal, and experimental designs to address research questions relevant to education.

Intercultural, International, Comparative Education (IICE)

Cluster Lead Dr Antonia Manresa

Colleagues in this thematic cluster are interested in describing and understanding intercultural and international educational issues through critical, interpretive and comparative lenses. Social, spatial and linguistic inequalities occur across multiple educational contexts that impact educational actors and diverse social groups in complex and differentiated ways. Education actors and systems interact in dynamic and complex ways across formal and informal educational settings impacting individuals, social groups and society in diverse ways.

Exploring these complexities and addressing inequalities lie at the heart of the cluster’s research, which advances both theoretical insight and methodological innovation. Research in this cluster includes but is not limited to critical and interpretive approaches to intercultural communication, critical and de-colonial intercultural education, student mobility, critical race theory. Intercultural and international comparative education assumes a strong interdisciplinary approach making use of ethnographic, comparative and discursive research methods to address relevant educational research questions.

Pedagogy and Curriculum

Cluster Lead Dr Linda Wang

Colleagues in this thematic cluster bridge theory and practice in learning, teaching and thinking across educational and informal settings with the goal of empowering educators and learners. This spans the early years through to further and higher education, and life-long learning. Colleagues in this friendly, diverse cluster have educational practitioner experience and maintain research connections with a range of institutions locally and globally. Our methodological approaches are multi-faceted. They include, but are not limited to, action research, case studies, correlational studies, creative methods, educational design research,

ethnography, evaluation, narrative approaches, (quasi-)experimental designs, and systematic reviews, to address research questions relevant to pedagogy and curriculum.

The cluster advances cutting-edge evidence-informed research in pedagogy and curriculum. This builds on our collective expertise such as in the areas of creativity, digital pedagogy, and innovative technology including AI, to contribute to subject specialist teaching, teacher education, curriculum studies, evaluation, assessment, and thinking competences.

Durham University Evidence Centre for Education (DECE)

Cluster Lead Professor Stephen Gorard

The main purpose of DECE is to improve the uptake of trustworthy research evidence in education, and so benefit learners and society. DECE also generates, assesses, synthesises and promotes robust evidence to inform education policy and practice. We take a lifelong and society-wide view of education, with a particular interest in inequalities and educational justice.

We take the wider outcomes of education seriously, looking beyond attainment and cognitive development to outcomes such as mental health, well-being, attitudes and

aspirations, personality, trust and civic participation. We promote, evaluate and monitor the impact of high-quality education research, and help build research capacity. The members of the Centre and their networks provide a rich blend of perspectives - including educational sociologists, psychologists, economists, geographers, health scientists, methodologists, and practitioners.

You can visit the DECE University website by clicking [here](#)

Digital Society and Education

Cluster Leads Dr Cristina Costa and Dr Michaela Oliver

The Digital Society & Education thematic cluster is focused on exploring the intersection of existing and emergent digital technologies, experiences and phenomena in a changing society from various perspectives and settings, with implications for education in its broadest sense. Different research questions underpin the cluster's work and methodological approaches that range from exploring the hows and whys of digital pedagogy to unearthing critical discussions about issues of digital equity and justice about digital scholarship practices, curriculum design, artificial intelligence, digital well-being, digital literacies and citizenship; digital governance as well as other emergent issues in the intersecting context of digital and educational transformations.

The cluster is organised to bring researchers, educators, practitioners and policymakers from

different fields and sectors interested in exploring the relationships between digital technologies, education and societal issues and linking theory to practice.

Guiding the research cluster's direction are four central research questions:

- How do digital technologies shape social, cultural and educational practices?
- What does the digital society need from education?
- What can (digital) education (across the different education sectors) give the digital society?
- How can (digital) education engender a more inclusive society?

The School of Education welcomes new researchers

Our new research active Assistant Professors and Lecturers span a diverse set of backgrounds and interests and have already brought fresh ideas and exciting new research opportunities for the School, and the wider Durham University community. We are delighted to welcome them to our school.



Sarah A. Walker

Sarah A. Walker joins the School of Education as an Assistant Professor, following the completion of her PhD at the University of Sydney. Her research focuses on emotion regulation, interpersonal processes, and the role of AI in social and emotional support. Her recent work explores how extrinsic emotion regulation shapes wellbeing, relationships, and social functioning across both human and AI-mediated interactions.



Michael Priestly

Michael Priestly rejoins the School of Education as a lecturer, having previously completed his BA, MA, and PhD in the department. Working with external stakeholders, Michael's research focuses on developing a whole institution approach to mental health and wellbeing in education settings. Michael's recent work focuses on fostering wellbeing and belonging through pedagogy, curriculum and assessment.



Bowen Zhang

Bowen Zhang joins the School of Education as a Lecturer, following the completion of her PhD at the University of Manchester. Her research focuses on the internationalisation of higher education, transnational university collaborations, and the experiences of Chinese students and academics. She draws on critical sociological theories to explore how global policy discourses and institutional practices shape identity, inequality, and knowledge hierarchies in education.



Jasper Roe

Jasper Roe is an Assistant Professor in Digital Literacies and Pedagogies. With a background in English Language Education, Discourse Analysis, and Sociology, his work explores how AI is reshaping educational and scholarly practices. He has held senior academic roles in Vietnam and Singapore. Jasper is a Senior Fellow of Advance HE and co-creator of the AI Assessment Scale (AIAS).



Harriet Broadfoot

Harriet Broadfoot joins the school as a Career Development Fellow, having undertaken her ethnographic ESRC funded doctoral research here in the department. Prior to this she worked in early childhood education in nurseries, schools and also Montessori settings. Her research focuses on compassion, early childhood education and wellbeing, with interest in early learning environments and connected themes of sustainability.



Research and Knowledge Exchange News

Congratulations to new research grant holders

The School of Education is proud to announce several new social science research awards received in 24/25. These grants, totalling over £2m, are led and co-led by our researchers to support innovative research across a range of educational topics.

Among the grant recipients is Professor Nadia Siddiqui, whose groundbreaking work contributes to the evaluation of The UK government's Opportunity Areas programme, funded by ESRC. Professor Rille Raaper co-leads another large ESRC funded project aimed at exploring the impact, if any, of higher education on students' political views, knowledge and behaviour in the UK.

Working together for our region

- Professor Rille Raaper

We are proud to be working together with Durham County Council and the North East Combined Authority to advance educational and social development in our region.



Led by Professor Rille Raaper from the School of Education and Ms Jane Kennedy from Education Durham at Durham County Council, colleagues from the two organisations have been partnering up to explore and tackle important educational issues, ranging from special educational needs

Dr Cristina Costa's new EPSRC project focuses on the relationship between digital platforms and masculinity, with a particular focus on the impacts of digital environment on vulnerable young men's wellbeing and empowerment. Last but not least, Professor Prue Holmes leads a transnational education project funded by British Council to understand how students from the UK and Brazil engage with the topics related to the United Nations Sustainable Development, using Collaborative Online International Learning.

The School of Education congratulates all the awardees and looks forward to seeing the groundbreaking advancements their work will contribute to educational policy, practice and society more broadly. These grants will play a crucial role in helping them bring their innovative ideas to fruition, shaping the future of research for years to come.

provision at schools, maths education to young people's digital literacy development. This work forms an important part of the Memorandum of Understanding for the Strategic Partnership Between Durham University and Durham County Council signed in 2017.

In 24/25, the School of Education further partnered with the North East Combined Authority and the Education Policy Institute to understand the drivers of educational inequality in North East England.

This work resulted in a series of policy roundtables, bringing together key stakeholders from local communities, policy makers and our researchers. It also led to a new report entitled 'Investigating educational disadvantage and place-based approaches in the North East of England'.

Launching a new global centre for contextual safeguarding

- Dr Rosie Ridgway



In September 2025 Durham University will launch the Global Centre for Contextual Safeguarding (GCCS) to: transform how societies understand and deliver services that safeguard young people beyond their homes;

create systems that look beyond the capacity of parents to protect children; and build sustainable partnerships in which safeguarding is truly everybody's business.

What is Contextual Safeguarding?

Traditional approaches to safeguarding focus on identifying individual children who are at risk of harm and then intervening to protect them. Contextual Safeguarding (Firmin, 2013) takes account of the wider context in which a child or young person is living, including their relationships with peers, community or places where they spend time; this allows for a broader understanding of harm and a broader scope for response.

What will the Centre Do?

The aim of the GCCS is an interdisciplinary effort to cement an emergent field of research. It will implement that research in collaboration with industries beyond traditional safeguarding partnerships and will reform policy, legal frameworks and shape practices across sectors and around the world.

What is the School of Education Contributing?

Dr Rosie Ridgway (Co-PI Education) from the School of Education will be leading on the development of education and training programmes within the GCCS working with interdisciplinary colleagues (Professor Carlene Firmin- Co-PI Sociology, Professor Pablo Munoz- Co-PI Business & Enterprise) as we develop our online training and professional development offer to improve understanding and practices around safeguarding of young people where they are. We will be working with schools, colleges and young people to develop our partnership and practices in the field of contextual safeguarding, and we will announce opportunities to participate and partner with us as the centre grows.

The Narrative Practices Lab, Discovery Research Platform for Medical Humanities

- Dr Laura Mazzoli-Smith



The Discovery Research Platform for Medical Humanities, funded by a Wellcome Trust Discovery Research Award that runs from 2023-2030, is configured around six 'methods Labs' and three

non-academic sites. The aim of this structure is to support innovative, risky, creative, and collaborative research in the medical humanities - a structure that particularly excites me about working as a Co-I on this award. The Narrative Practices Lab, which I co-lead with Veronica Heney in Sociology, looks at

critical questions concerning the role, function and scalability of stories of health, and mental health, in research and wider cross-sector activity. We envisage the Labs as spaces which support experimental and innovative research, enabling researchers and cross-sector partners to come together and find the opportunity to think differently - and in particular critically - about what we may have come to take for granted about the function and meaning of stories in a variety of contexts. Challenges concerning scale, as well as what counts as evidence with respect to health narratives, are also a key focus.

The Lab supports particular researchers, including ECRs on bridging fellowships, practitioner-researchers and visiting scholars, to explore such challenging issues further – for instance in decolonial narrative practice, with user-led groups, and through drawing on archival holdings of health stories. In acting as an interdisciplinary research-practice hub, the Lab also promotes

external-facing and collaborative workshops and supports the development of bids and pilot studies.

[Do subscribe to our newsletter to hear more!](#)

Young people and Durham researchers collaborate to launch picture books on digital literacy

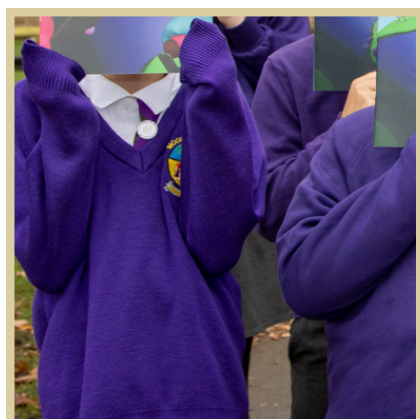
- Dr Cristina Costa and Dr Michaela Oliver

As part of the ESRC Festival of Social Science, Dr Cristina Costa and Dr Michaela Oliver from the School of Education welcomed a group of primary school students to Durham in October 2024 to launch three picture books they co-created on digital literacies. Developed through workshops on social media use, digital safety, and online footprints, the project highlights the importance of co-producing knowledge with young people.

The picture books, featuring artwork by the students and adapted by a professional illustrator, are [freely available online](#) alongside learning

resources for schools and communities. Dr Costa and Dr Oliver are now working on a sustainability plan to embed discussions of digital literacy into schools, homes, and wider community spaces.

This collaborative project exemplifies how research, education, and community engagement can work together to empower young people and foster critical conversations about digital experiences. Future developments, including a broader digital literacy programme linking university students, schools, and communities, are planned for launch.



Research Spotlight

Educationalist Steve Higgins retires after 18 years with the School

Steve worked in the School of Education from 2006 to 2024. Before working in higher education he taught in a liberal arts college in Vermont and in primary schools in the North East where his interest in children's thinking and learning developed.

What research question has been most important to you throughout your career

Although my early research focussed on the use of digital technologies in schools, I've always been interested in the relationship between research and practice and the role of both theory and evidence in understanding this. Perhaps because of my background in classical philosophy, I was never happy with the primacy of theory over practice. In education this always felt like putting the cart before the horse. I liked Kurt Lewin's maxim 'there is nothing so practical as a good theory' but also the corollary, if it's not practical, it's not a good theory. I think this is what drew me to the thinking of the North American Pragmatists, especially John Dewey and Charles Saunders Peirce. Theory helps us understand the particular, the here and now, so we can act, not the other way around. In terms of evidence I was interested what research meant for practice and what its warrant for action was. What can we reasonably infer from this research finding? It is this last question I have tried to hold onto, what should we do differently, and how should we do it differently, on the basis of evidence from research.

What do you see as the most interesting question in education right now?

I think the most important question in education right now is a philosophical one: what is education for? Over my working career we have seen the foregrounding of the needs of society and the needs of the educators, especially at the school level, that has pushed those being educated, children and young people, into the background. I hear schools talking about "their results" as if this

mattered more than the actual learning that the individual pupils had achieved. Education seems to have become a means to an end (results and qualifications), not necessarily something of value to the learner at the time. For me education is a complex concept, with multiple goals and multiple beneficiaries but learners should be at the core of this, their needs and their aspirations so they see learning as a both a skill and a tool to develop over their lifetime. This will enable them to shape their own lives, but also to respond as the world around them changes both politically, socially and physically. This has profound implications for curriculum, pedagogy and assessment and I feel we have lost sight of this.



As the opportunities for the use of technology, and particularly AI, increase in education I think we need to review what the purpose of education is, rather than hope AI will help us achieve the current aims more efficiently.

What project/s are you most excited to continue working on?

I am still working on a number of projects, all related to my core interest of evidence and practice. I am still working with the Education Endowment Foundation and their partners on evidence synthesis and the Toolkit. I'm interested in the difference between evidence and its implications (or 'warrant') at the macro-level and the micro-level (in a classroom). In this latter area I'm working with one of my former PhD students, Wayne Harrison and the company WhatWorked to run micro-RCTs. The aim is to support rapid evaluation to see if interventions and innovations are working here, now. As I mentioned above, education is complex and I'm also working with Professor Peter Tymms and some colleagues on variation to explore the limits of predictability in education, particularly in relation to teaching practices and the application of evidence to support effective change.

The ethnic disproportion of teachers and students in England: why does it matter and what can be done about it?

Stephen Gorard, Beng Huat See, Feyisa Demie, Nadia Siddiqui, Antonina Tereshchenko, Yiyang Gao, Wenqing Chen

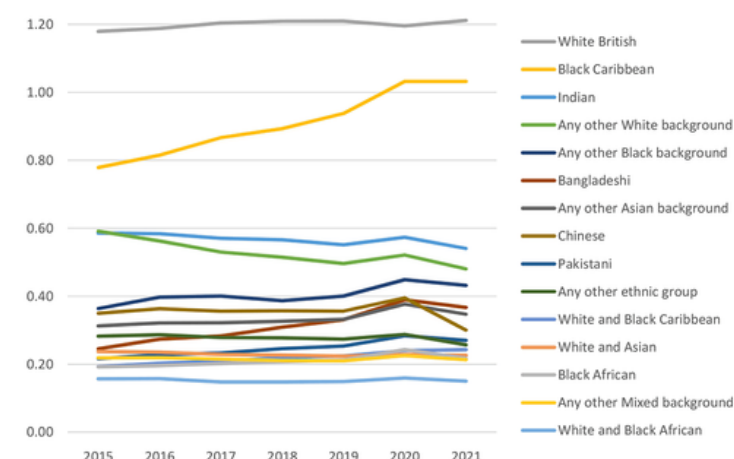


Leading a team at Durham University, Professor Stephen Gorard's research, funded by the ESRC Education Research Programme, investigates teacher supply, development, and retention, with a particular focus on diversity and equity in England's schools. Through systematic reviews, national surveys, secondary data analysis, and case studies, the project explores how factors such as ethnicity, leadership, and school environments shape teacher recruitment, retention, and pupil experience.

Our project is funded as part of the [ESRC Education Research Programme](#), with a focus on teacher supply, development and retention. We have so far completed three systematic reviews, secondary analyses of linked School Workforce and National Pupil datasets, a national survey of 5,000 serving teachers, 30 follow-up interviews, and six in-depth school case studies observing and interviewing governors, leaders, teachers, parents and pupils. Our next steps include a national survey of pupils' career intentions, further school case studies, and an analysis of the pipeline to teaching - using HESA data.

As shown by our re-analysis of [secondary data](#), there are proportionately many more ethnic minority pupils at school in England than there are teachers, and this disproportion is unbalanced regionally, and locally. The situation is worse for Black African, Pakistani and Chinese origin pupils, and when considering the ethnicity of school leaders and their pupils. This means that some pupils will [never encounter a teacher](#) of the same ethnicity.

Trends in disproportionality of all teachers and pupils, by ethnic minority group, 2015-2021



This might matter to the ways in which pupils are treated, and so how they experience schooling.

One of the reasons for the discrepancy is the markedly lower acceptance of minority ethnic applicants to initial teacher training, despite the prevalence of applicants. This could be discrimination, and we are investigating it further. Minority ethnic teachers are also more likely both to move schools and eventually leave teaching altogether. Pay is not a key factor. Black African and Black Caribbean teachers are [paid noticeably more](#) on average. Variations in pay between ethnic groups can largely be explained by other factors (age, region, qualifications).

Our reviews [assessed the trustworthiness](#) of each piece of prior work included in the syntheses. As with most areas of education, the existing evidence on this topic was largely weak. Very little of the work offered evidence of a causal nature - most is descriptive, and without a comparator.

The evidence from our secondary data analyses, and reviews, suggest that there is [no relationship](#) between the ethnic congruence of teachers and students, and student attainment, once other factors are [accounted for](#). The main predictors of attainment in England are prior attainment, SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability) and FSM eligibility.

In the US, there is clear evidence that congruence between the ethnicity of teachers and students is related to attendance, aspiration, enrolment in advanced courses, and entry into gifted programmes, for Black and Latinx students. This may be due to having role models, shared language, racism, or something else. There is no clear link between ethnic matching and improved staff: student relationships, or punishments like exclusions from school. In England, pupils' suspension from school is primarily associated with having special educational needs or disabilities. There is no obvious minority ethnic element. For example, White British pupils generally have more suspensions than other ethnic groups, and Indian pupils have the fewest.

Ethnicity	Total Fixed Exclusions
Any other ethnicity	1.57
Asian, any other	1.45
Bangladeshi	1.37
Black-African	1.40
Black-Caribbean	1.56
Black, any other	1.54
Chinese	1.67
Indian	1.24
Mixed, any other	1.69
Null, not obtained, or refused	1.86
Pakistani	1.53
Traveller/Gypsy/Roma	1.98
White British	2.01
White and Asian	1.85
White and Black	1.79
White, any other	1.75
Total	1.89

Percentage of pupils with school exclusions. KS4, 2019

Headteachers are more likely to hire teachers of the same ethnicity, and there is some evidence that school leaders can improve their decisions through bias training. More importantly, ethnic minority teachers are more attracted to schools with a diverse teacher and student intake. Having a diverse staff and student body in schools may be more important than the precise congruence of staff and students. So, anything that can be done to prevent the ethnic or other segregation of staff or students between schools should be done. Where proportionality is not feasible, better training of teachers in multicultural, inclusive, and special education may have similar benefits.

Early years conversation project evaluation study

- Dr Xiaofei Qi and Dr Victoria Menzies



How did the Early Years Conversation Project come about? How does it relate to the wider work you've been doing?

The Early Years Conversation Project (EYCP) Evaluation Study is a three-year research project funded by the Education Endowment Foundation (EEF) as part of the EEF-Department for Education's Stronger Practice Hub collaboration in 22/23. Developed and delivered by early years professionals from East London Research School, the EYCP programme aims to develop staff interactions with children to improve the language skills of two-three year olds. The EYCP evaluation study is EEF's first funded

early years trial working with two-year olds in nursery settings, and it expands on Dr Xiaofei Qi's previous programme evaluation work in the early years such as the Math Champions Evaluation study and pilot evaluation of the Talking With Tales for Children (TWITCH) programme both working with school and private nurseries.

What do you aim to achieve with the project?

The EYCP evaluation study intends to find out if the EYCP programme can improve two-three year old children's language and communication skills over an eight-month intervention period under the best possible condition. It aims to add to the evidence base on the benefits of a language programme that supports staff working with two-three year olds, an area where there is currently an evidence gap. It also aims to look at how the EYCP programme is implemented and received by staff in the participating nurseries.

As the core focus of this project is on evaluation, what methods and techniques do you use to conduct the evaluation?

The EYCP evaluation is designed as a two-armed cluster randomised controlled trial (RCT) with randomisation at the nursery level. It utilises a waitlist-controlled design with 102 nurseries across London taking part in the intervention across two cohorts in 2024/2025 and 2025/2026. It also has complementary mixed methods implementation and process evaluation running alongside the RCT to look at how the EYCP programme is being delivered.

Are there any findings that you can already share? If not, when do you expect to have any findings?

The project is currently running the Cohort 2 evaluation across 58 nursery settings in London areas between 2024 and 2025. The project's final report will be published in the summer of 2026.

Who else is involved?

The evaluation team is led by Dr Xiaofei Qi and Dr Victoria Menzies, alongside co-investigators Professor Nadia Siddiqui, Dr Rachel Oughton (Department of Mathematical Sciences), Dr Akansha Singh (Department of Anthropology), and Nashwa Isamail (until September 2023). Our research officers are Dr Laura Chambers, Dr Dandan Chen (until Jan 2025), and Dr Rowan Van-Muysen (until September 2024).

Why does this project matter? How does it support the wider education practice/policy development in the UK?

Co-funded with the Department for Education's Stronger Practice Hubs, the EYCP evaluation study is part of the EEF's increased focus on support for the early years sector in the UK; This independent evaluation research will contribute to the existing early years evidence base and support early years professionals to access high-quality, evidence-based professional development programmes in early years. The findings from the evaluation are expected to influence early years educational policy decisions.

From phonics to comprehension

What trainee teachers know (and don't know) about teaching reading

- Dr Johny Daniel



Supporting children to become confident readers is essential to their academic success and long-term wellbeing. In a recent study, we investigated how well trainee teachers in India and England are being

prepared to teach English reading skills. We surveyed trainee teachers to assess their knowledge of key reading skills such as phonics, vocabulary, and reading comprehension.

Participants were also asked to self-report their confidence in supporting struggling readers in inclusive classrooms.

Our findings revealed cross-national differences. Trainee teachers in England demonstrated stronger knowledge in areas like phonics instruction and reading fluency, which aligns with England's national focus on systematic phonics instruction. In contrast, most trainee teachers in India self-reported higher confidence levels, yet scored lower on knowledge assessments of teaching phonics and other reading strategies.

Interestingly, both groups of future teachers showed limited knowledge about how to teach new vocabulary words, an area critical for helping students understand and enjoy what they read. Given vocabulary's vital role in comprehension and overall literacy, this finding underscores the need for enhanced vocabulary-focused training for trainee teachers.

Overall, our study highlights the importance of evidence-based national policies in shaping effective teacher education. England's

systematic approach to phonics instruction demonstrates the benefit of aligning teacher preparation with scientific research.

For India, while benchmarks for student achievement are established, there is a clear need to develop robust policy guidelines specifically targeted at equipping trainee teachers with comprehensive, research-informed strategies to effectively support children's reading development, particularly in linguistically diverse classrooms.

Child of the North: Building a fairer future after COVID-19

- Professor Lynn Newton

Following the report *Child of the North: Building a fairer future after COVID-19*, (2021), there were three all-party Parliamentary groups (APPG) reports, exploring *Child Poverty and the Cost of Living Crisis* (2023), *Addressing Education and Health Inequality* (2023) and *Children in Care in the North of England* (2024). This work triggered funding to provide evidence based plans for actions in the form of a sequence of 12 reports with the overarching focus on *A country that works for all children and young people*.

The 12 reports form a joint piece of work through collaboration between:

- the [Northern Health Science Alliance](#) part-funded by Research England;
- the [N8 Research Partnership](#);
- academics from the Northern NIHR Applied Research Collaborations (ARCs) from North East and North Cumbria, Greater Manchester, North West Coast, and Yorkshire and Humber); and,
- NIHR School of Public Health Research; UK Prevention Research Partnership Collaboration; ActEarly; and, the Medical Research Council (MRC).

Many Durham University colleagues provided commentary and evidence for the different reports, eight of which were from the School of Education: Cristina Costa,



Douglas Newton, Lynn Newton, Xiaofei Qi, Catherine Reading, Beng Huat See, Harriet Broadfoot, and Sophie Ward.

The initial report, the three APPG reports and the 12 evidence reports can be accessed at: [The twelfth and final report was published in March 2025.](#)

The executive summary of the project captures the essence of what groups of colleagues from a range of collaborating organisations and institutions have been doing over the last 18 months. Gathering evidence from many sources, 12 reports have been produced, published successively each month, and each focussing on a different aspect of the evidenced inequality gap, and each accompanied by webinar.

Why focus on the Children of the North?



Children in the North are more likely to live in poverty than those in the rest of England – and increasingly so. Poverty is the lead driver of inequalities between children in the North and their counterparts in the rest of the country, leading to worse physical and mental health outcomes, educational attainment, and lower lifelong economic productivity. The COVID-19 pandemic has made this situation worse. Although the full impact is not yet known, modelling suggests that, without intervention, the outlook is bleak. To address the North-South productivity gap we must tackle the stark inequalities evidenced [in these reports], put in place a child-first place-based recovery plan, and enable the children of the North to fulfil their potential.



The Final Report

The twelfth and final report was published in March 2025.

In the foreword to the twelfth report, the former Children's Commissioner for England, Baroness Anne Longfield, and Camilla Kingdon, President of the Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, wrote:

“We need to be bold in our ambition to develop a truly inclusive education and support creativity across all schools for all children and young people in all subjects.”

The final report was brought together under the leadership of the late Professor Simon James (Department of English) colleagues from the CoTN group as well as other Durham academics who had been involved in the work of the Durham Commission on Creativity and Education. The Commission was a collaboration between Arts Council England and Durham University between 2017 and 2019. The report itself was launched in Westminster in late 2019.



Celebrating our early career and student researchers

Early career network & career development

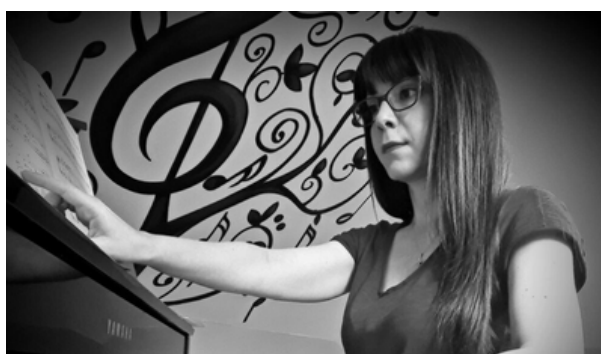
- Dr Michael Priestly (ECR Representative)

As the ECR representative, my role is to represent the views of early career researchers on matters across the School. Together with Dr Sarah A. Walker, the Research Environment Coordinator, we coordinate the Early Career Researcher (ECR) network. The ECR network provides a supportive and collaborative space for all those who identify as ECRs - including research assistants, postdoctoral researchers, lecturers, and assistant professors. It offers opportunities to connect with colleagues, ask questions, and contribute to positive initiatives that support ECR development within the School. The network currently meets monthly. Looking ahead, we are expanding our activities to enhance career support, with a particular focus on grants, fellowships, and funding opportunities. In response to member feedback, we are developing a calendar of ECR-specific opportunities, a writing group, a mentoring system, and a series of workshops and training events to further strengthen the research environment for early career colleagues in the School.



“...the [ECR] network provides an opportunity to connect, ask questions, and inform positive changes that can support the development of ECRs within the School”

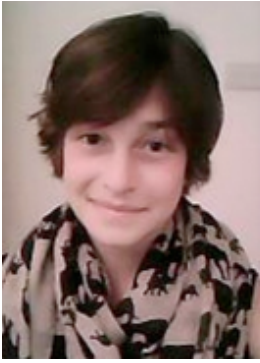
ECRs on the International stage



As part of global celebrations for Theodorakis Year, **Dr Maria Athanasiou**, an early career researcher from the School of Education delivered an invited seminar for the Greek Community of Melbourne.

Her talk explored the work of Mikis Theodorakis and his influence on the development of the Greek art-folk song. The event, held on 27 March 2025, was warmly received by an international audience.

The Career Development Fellowship (CDF)



The CDF scheme is a strategic initiative supporting the next generation of research leaders at Durham University. Designed to provide structured academic career pathways, the Fellowship offers early career researchers dedicated mentorship, research support, and teaching opportunities within a thriving research environment.

We are delighted to welcome **Dr Harriet Broadfoot** as our first CDF appointment at the School of Education. Her practice background and research on compassion and early childhood education strengthens our interdisciplinary expertise and enhances our research culture. Through initiatives like the CDF, the School invests in building long-term research capacity and shaping the future of educational scholarship.

Congratulations to Anas Nazim Almassri

A PhD candidate in the School of Education, Anas Nasmi Almassri, has been awarded the 2025 Dr. Harold Josephson Student Award for Professional Promise in International Education by the Association of International Education Administrators (AIEA).

Anas was recognised for his outstanding research on equitable access to study abroad, particularly the experiences of Palestinian students in conflict contexts. His work has already produced six manuscripts, including four published articles. Alongside his research, Anas teaches at Durham and serves in editorial roles for leading journals. He was honoured at the AIEA Annual Conference in Houston, Texas, in March 2025.



This award is special to me. It recognises the culture of academic excellence at the School of Education that has meant a PhD student can publish, teach, and serve at an internationally recognisable level. I owe much of the success in securing this recognition to the constant support of my exceptional supervisors: Prue Holmes, Oakleigh Welply, and Carly Beckerman (SGIA). I am also very grateful to NINE DTP, without whose generous financial support I would not have been able to build the network and portfolio that led to this recognition.

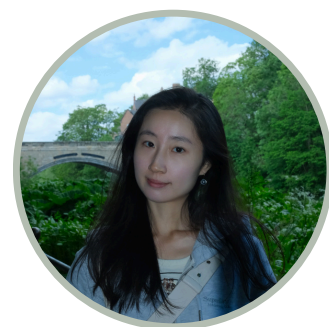


From curiosity to commitment: my path from Master's to PhD at Durham University

- Yiwen Zhang

When I started my MA in Education, I didn't come with a plan to pursue a PhD. In fact, it wasn't until my first term that the idea even occurred to me. But sitting in those classrooms - surrounded by passionate discussions and thought-provoking readings - I began to feel a spark I hadn't felt in a long time. There was a kind of intellectual excitement that made me want to go deeper.

Several modules were particularly foundational in shaping my research journey. Psychological Perspectives on Learning opened up a whole new dimension for me. I was fascinated by constructs like intelligence, motivation, and self-efficacy - ideas that gave me a richer lens to understand how learners think and behave. At the same time, Design and Methods in Education Research and



Conceptual Perspectives, Theories and Frameworks in Education helped me build the skills and confidence to approach research systematically and critically. These courses laid the groundwork for what would eventually become my doctoral path.

During the dissertation phase of my MA, I initially leaned toward a "safe" topic. But my supervisor, Dr Antonia Manresa, challenged me to pursue what I really cared about. Her support was transformative. I had always been intrigued by metacognition - how learners become aware of and regulate their thinking - especially from my years teaching academic English to Chinese students. With her guidance, I dived into the topic with renewed energy. That experience solidified my decision to continue this line of inquiry into the PhD.

Now, in the first year of my doctoral study under the supervision of Professor Jens Beckmann, I feel more intellectually fulfilled than ever within

the Psychology and Education cluster.

The interdisciplinary approach, coupled with a supportive research culture, has made all the difference. I love the quiet focus, the freedom to follow ideas, and the feeling that I'm learning something meaningful every single day. It's not always easy, but it's deeply rewarding.

Looking ahead, I hope to bridge the gap between theory and practice to help learners become more reflective, strategic, and empowered, whether through research, teaching, or programme design. Looking back, this journey has been about trusting curiosity, embracing challenge, and finding joy in thinking. I'm grateful for the academic environment at Durham University that made space for that, and I'm excited to see where this path will take me next.

Our newly minted doctors

Congratulations to all our PhD candidates who successfully defended their theses in the past 12-months.

Dr Tatiana Bruni for a thesis titled [A teacher-student partnership as democratic laboratory for developing capabilities for critical cosmopolitan citizenship.](#)

Dr Martina Diehl for a thesis titled [Hope for Poetry: An exploratory and poetic approach to students' creative and critical engagement with and through poetry lessons in England and The Netherlands \(ages 14-17\).](#)

Dr Keji Fan for a thesis titled [A study of the impact of the infusion method of critical thinking on Chinese students' critical thinking and academic attainment.](#)

Dr Kunchen Guo for a thesis titled [Exploring Intercultural Teaching in International Chinese Language Education: A Qualitative Study at a Chinese University.](#)

Dr Sou Cheng Leong for a thesis titled [Exploring New Frontiers of Affinity Spaces - Learning by Observing and Pitching In in Online Classrooms.](#)

Dr Emma Maslin for a thesis titled [Commuting to class: an ethnography of commuter students' experiences of UK Higher Education.](#)

Dr Anne Outram Halstead for a thesis titled [Re-Thinking School Discipline: Towards an Ethical Approach.](#)

Dr Hao Pang for a thesis titled [An evaluation of the large-scale senior secondary science curriculum reform in China.](#)

Dr Sophie St Clair Jones for a thesis titled [Action research as a Model for the Professional Development and Learning of Teachers: A case-study of the implementation of the R&D Programme in an Essex independent school.](#)



Undergraduate voices in research: spotlight on our undergraduate summer scholar

- Chen Su (Undergraduate Student)



Each summer, the School of Education welcomes undergraduate students into active research projects through our competitive Summer Research Scholarship scheme. These experiences not only provide valuable early

exposure to the research process but also reflect our School's commitment to fostering a vibrant, inclusive, and supportive research culture at every level. In this interview, we speak with one of this year's scholars about their experience. We talk with Chen Su about everything from project insights to academic mentorship and aspirations for the future.

What sparked your interest in getting involved in research over the summer, and how did you come across this opportunity?

Before this internship, I had previously explored an administrative role within the university during another break, but I also wanted to gain experience in the academic side of higher education to see if it might be something I'd enjoy and potentially pursue in the future. When I saw the call for summer research scholars shared by the School of Education, it felt like the perfect opportunity to explore this side of university life in more depth.

Can you briefly describe your research project and what excited you most about it?

My project was a systematic review and meta-analysis on how different emotion regulation strategies relate to procrastination in students. We focused on both internal strategies, like mindfulness and cognitive reappraisal, and external ones, like seeking support or distraction, to see how each might influence procrastination in different educational settings. What excited me most was working on a topic that felt relevant to real student experiences. I also enjoyed learning how to approach research in a structured and methodical way, especially during the early stages of shaping the research questions and reviewing existing studies.

What's something valuable you've learned about how research is done in the School of Education?

One of the most valuable things I learned was how much planning and structure goes into research. I was introduced to the process of developing a research protocol, which helped me understand how important it is to have a clear and transparent plan from the start.

I also gained hands-on experience with the steps involved in a systematic review, including building search strategies, identifying relevant databases, screening studies, coding data, and organising findings. Beyond the technical skills, I also learned a lot about academic writing. The whole experience gave me a much deeper appreciation for the rigour and detail involved in producing high-quality educational research.

Has this experience influenced how you think about your future studies or career?

Yes, this internship at the School of Education has strengthened both my academic and professional skills, but more importantly, it helped clarify what I want for my future. It gave me a much better understanding of what research actually involves, and it confirmed my interest in pursuing more academically focused roles in the future. If I have the opportunity after graduation, I would love to work in a research position within a university setting.

Being selected by Dr Sarah A. Walker to work with her on her summer research project from among many candidates also gave me more confidence in my abilities. Her trust and mentorship made me feel that I am capable of contributing meaningfully to academic work, and that's been incredibly motivating.

Best undergraduate dissertation

Alice Roberts received the highest mark for their BA Education Studies undergraduate research dissertation this year. Their project, **Queer Erasure in the Classroom: A Retrospective Analysis of LGBTQIA+ University Students' Secondary School Sex and Relationship Education**, offers a powerful and timely exploration of inclusion, identity, and educational experience in UK classrooms.

Congratulations, Alice!

Join our vibrant research culture

Strengthening research culture through writing and collaboration

Our School's writing group brings together researchers across all career stages, from undergraduates to emeritus professors, for weekly online and monthly in-person sessions. Using a "shut-up-and-write" approach, we combine focused writing time with space for conversation, support, and idea sharing. The group has become a valued part of our research culture, helping to build momentum, foster collaboration, and sustain research activity across the School. Below, members reflect on the difference the writing group has made to their research journeys.



The writing groups are an extraordinary horizontal environment, I've not only learnt about other's work, which I may not have done otherwise, but I've also and more importantly shared a little in that process of production, which clearly is an emotional one.

Knowing and sharing our own moments of frustrations, doubts and joy is a great space to be part of and want to thank all those that have taken part in ensuring the continuation of this valuable group space.

- A Manresa

The writing groups have been a real anchor for my research. Having regular, supportive space to focus has helped me draft three papers (now published), shape four grant applications, and spark new project ideas through conversations with colleagues. It's a reminder that steady progress and shared encouragement really drive research forward.

- M. Priestly

I always look forward to Writing Group. Being with supportive colleagues during busy teaching terms helps me to focus on my research - I don't think I would have made the submission deadline for a recent book chapter without the group!

- S. Ward

Welcoming researchers from around the world: our visiting scholars programme

Each year, the School of Education hosts a number of visiting scholars from around the world. Stays range from one month to a full year, during which scholars pursue independent research while collaborating with Durham academics in related fields. Visitors are encouraged to participate in the School's research seminars and may access shared office space, library facilities, and selected taught courses.

My visit directly enhanced my publications, teaching, and policy work - ideal for scholars seeking rigorous academic exchange with measurable career benefits.

- Dazhi Zeng (Hunan Normal University, China)

[Click here for further information and application process](#)

School of Education Seminar Series

Our weekly research seminars offer an invaluable opportunity to stay engaged with the latest educational research across a wide range of disciplines and global contexts. Held every Wednesday during term time, these sessions give staff and students a chance to explore emerging ideas, discover potential for interdisciplinary collaboration, and connect with scholars both within and beyond Durham.

This year's programme reflected the diversity and reach of our research culture. Topics ranged from deepfakes in education, mental health in universities, and multiculturalism, to inspections policy, social inequality, and the experiences of LGBTQIA+ students. Across the year, we hosted over 20 external speakers - including international scholars from Australia, New Zealand, China,

Denmark, Austria, and Canada alongside colleagues from leading UK institutions such as Cambridge, UCL, Bath, Manchester, and Edinburgh.

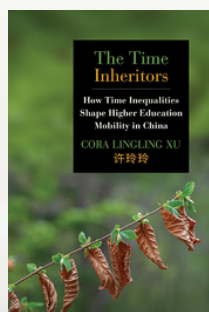
With invited talks from early-career researchers to established international leaders, the series continues to be a space for intellectual exchange and shared curiosity. We are grateful to the many staff who contributed by inviting speakers and facilitating discussion, and we look forward to building on this momentum in the year ahead.

All are welcome to attend our seminars in person or online. [More information about our seminars and other events that are held throughout the year can be found here.](#)

New books from our academics

A number of books have been published recently by researchers across the School, reflecting the breadth and depth of our academic work - from early childhood and education policy to psychology and social justice. Below, you'll find a selection of these recent publications.

Click on any cover to learn more or visit the publisher's website.



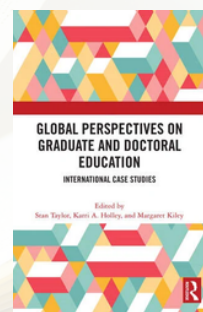
The Time Inheritors
How Time Inequalities Shape Higher Education Mobility in China

By Cora Lingling Xu



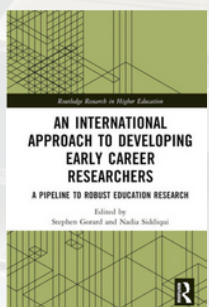
The Research Supervisor's Bibliography

Stan Taylor



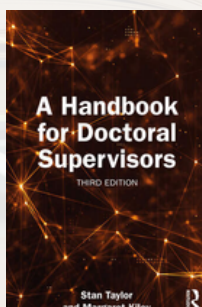
Global Perspectives on Graduate and Doctoral Education
International Case Studies

Edited by Stan Taylor, Karri Holley, Margaret Kiley



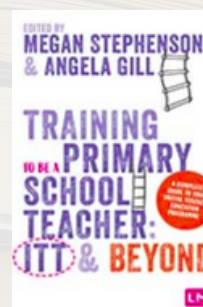
An International Approach to Developing Early Career Researchers
A Pipeline to Robust Education Research

Edited by Steven Gorard and Nadia Siddiqui



A Handbook for Doctoral Supervisors
3rd Edition

By Stan Taylor, Margaret Kiley



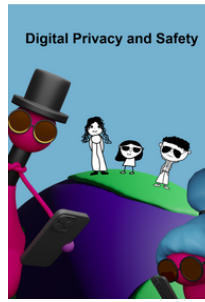
Training to be a Primary School Teacher: ITT and Beyond

Edited by Megan Stephenson and Angela Gill



**Social Media
(picture book for
and by young
people)**

by Cristina Costa
and Nicole
McIlvaney



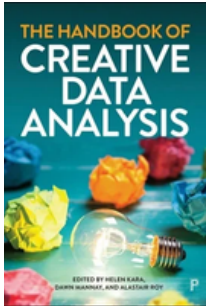
**Digital Privacy
and Safety
(picture book
for and by
young people)**

by Cristina Costa
and Nicole
McIlvaney



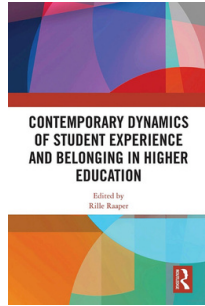
Digital Footprint

by Cristina Costa
and Nicole
McIlvaney



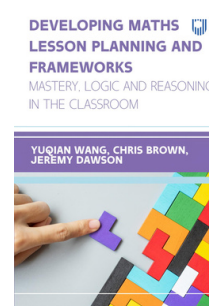
**What can creative
data analysis using
word clouds tell us
about student
views of learning
something new?**

Chapter 5 by Louise
Gascoine, Steve
Higgins



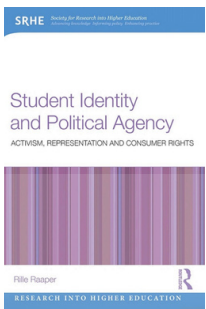
**Contemporary
Dynamics of
Student
Experience and
Belonging in
Higher
Education**

Edited by Rille
Raaper



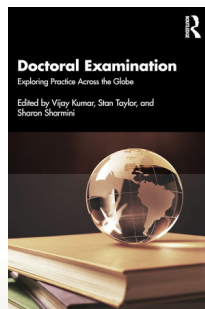
**Developing Maths
Lesson Planning
and Frameworks:
Mastery, Logic and
Reasoning in the
Classroom**

By Yuqian Wang
and Chris Brown



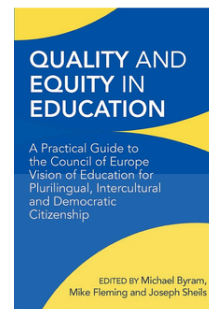
**Student Identity
and Political
Agency: Activism,
Representation and
Consumer Rights**

By Rille Raaper



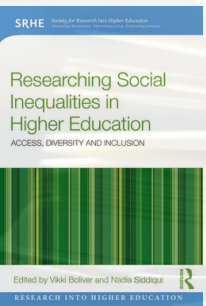
**Doctoral
Examination:
Exploring
Practice
Across the
Globe.**

Edited by Stan
Taylor



**Quality and Equity
in Education: A
Practical Guide to
the Council of
Europe Vision of
Education for
Plurilingual,
Intercultural and
Democratic
Citizenship**

Edited by Michael
Byram



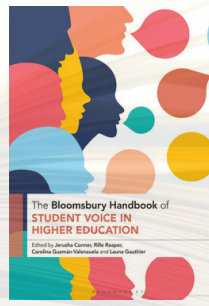
**Contemporary
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Higher Education**

Edited by Nadia
Siddiqui



**The First Year
at School: An
International
Perspective**

Edited by
Peter Tymms



**The Bloomsbury
Handbook of
Student Voice in
Higher Education**

Edited by Rille
Raaper

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