POSTGRADUATE RESEARCH CONFERENCE IN
CHRISTIAN EDUCATION
SATURDAY 6 JULY 2019
CANTERBURY CHRIST CHURCH UNIVERSITY
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
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<td>09.30</td>
<td>Coffee and registration</td>
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| 10.00 | Biblical metaphors for the God we are teaching  
Dr Margaret Carswell |                                                     |
| 11.00 | Coffee                                    |                                                     |
| 11.30 | Doctoral student presentations  
Five Canterbury Christ Church students will give a brief introduction to their research and answer questions |                                                     |
| 13.00 | Lunch break  
(complimentary vegetarian sandwich lunch provided) |                                                     |
| 14.00 | Showcasing the project work of NICER  
Research staff will give a brief introduction to different projects |                                                     |
| 15.00 | Hesitant Christian Universities in a Desecularising Landscape  
Prof Bob Bowie |                                                     |
| 15.30 | Worldview: A Past Relic or the Future for Thinking about Christian Education?  
Prof Trevor Cooling |                                                     |
| 16.00 | Conference close                          |                                                     |

GUEST SPEAKER

Dr Margaret Carswell

Margaret is Senior Lecturer in the Faculty of Theology and Philosophy at Australian Catholic University. Her doctoral thesis, Biblical Metaphors for God, raised questions about the way we teach Scripture generally and, importantly, what this does to the perception of God we offer our students. Margaret is a consultant at national, Diocesan and local school level in Australia, active in exploring how schools can teach Scripture, rather than use it, in Religious Education. Her work in the UK includes the production of curriculum material to promote the teaching of Scripture using my own pedagogical framework, the Composite Model.
### DOCTORAL STUDENT PRESENTERS

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<td>Sarah Odhner</td>
<td>Spiritual but not Religious: A Critical Analysis of the Nonconformist Swedenborgian Pedagogy of Samuel Wilderspin, 1820-1870</td>
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### NICER STAFF PRESENTERS

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<tr>
<td>Prof Bob Bowie</td>
<td>Director of NICER</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dr Ann Casson</td>
<td>Senior Research Fellow (The Nexus Project)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Katie Clemmey</td>
<td>Researcher (The Hermeneutics Project)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Prof Trevor Cooling</td>
<td>Professor of Christian Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dr Maria James</td>
<td>Researcher (The Teacher Commitment Project)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mike Simmonds</td>
<td>Researcher (The NICER Impact Project)</td>
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### CONFERENCE DETAILS

**VENUE**  
The Old Sessions House, Canterbury Christ Church University *(see weblink for travel instructions)*  
www.canterbury.ac.uk/findus/canterbury

**FEE**  
The conference is free.  
A complimentary, vegetarian sandwich lunch and refreshments will be provided

**BOOKING**  
To book a place on the conference please visit [www.canterbury.ac.uk/nicer-conference](http://www.canterbury.ac.uk/nicer-conference)
DOCTORAL STUDENT ABSTRACTS

Spiritual but not Religious: A Critical Analysis of the Nonconformist Swedenborgian Pedagogy of Samuel Wilderspin, 1820-1870

SARAH ODHNER

Dissenting infant school pedagogues made early childhood spiritual education the centrepiece of moral reform. The Established Church viewed these efforts as a threat to its ideological and social supremacy. In response it set out expectations that silenced non-Anglican beliefs, effectively separating spiritual practices from religious beliefs in dissenting schools. To borrow a contemporary concept, dissenting pedagogies were forced to be “spiritual but not religious”. Samuel Wilderspin (1791-1866) designed a pedagogy stripped of religious ideas to satisfy these requirements. A tireless promoter, he popularized his model by establishing upwards of two hundred schools. By 1870 his playground method was nationally recognized and as it lacked “religious formulario” was adopted under the Education Act of 1870.

The mandate for Wilderspin to separate religious ideas from spiritual practices leaves a gap in the understanding of his approach as he conceived it, and therefore a gap in the founding principles of present-day education. Wilderspin was a member of the New Church, a sect based on the Christian theology of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772). Established religions were sharply critical of Swedenborg’s ideas and shunned clergy and teachers who adopted them. Consequently, Wilderspin scrupulously omitted mentions of his faith, avoided Swedenborgian terminology, and eventually positioned himself as a friend to the Established Church. This paper contributes to discussion of the religious foundations of Wilderspin’s understandings of human heredity, the importance of the early childhood years, the formation of conscience and levels of human development. It also contributes to understandings of the development of societal “spiritual but not religious” identities in relation to Anglican policies separating spirituality and religion in nondenominational schools.

Keywords: Spirituality, religion, pedagogy, dissent
Singing the Lord's song in a strange land?: Christian perspective to STEM Education in a Post-Christian culture

OLADELE OWODUNNI

This paper presents exploratory investigation into how to achieve STEM education from a Christian perspective. The exploration is presented using the metaphor of Psalm 137. The first part of the paper presents the background as if responding to introductory movements of that psalm as follows: (1) “By the rivers of Babylon where we sat ..”: double challenge of post-Christian culture and STEM; (2) “when we remember Zion”: Historical recall of when Christian perspective was acceptable in STEM education. The second part of the paper in presented as if in response to the next movement in the psalm that raised the question “How shall we ..?”, suggesting the following as possible ways: (i) appropriate paradigmatic position(s) (ii) plausible research methodology (iii) over 100 related contributions of opinion papers as well as empirical studies; (iv) exploratory systematic synthesis identifying key themes in the field; The includes noting that as many as 7 approaches have been suggested in the body of knowledge for looking at Christian perspective in education. These approaches vary from the “STEM education is value-neutral” to the more philosophically demanding end that attempts to uncover the fundamental presuppositions of STEM with the aim of reconstructing Christian presuppositions; (v) implications of the exploratory synthesis could have on practice; (vi) preliminary formulation of a framework for using the result in creating instructional materials; (vii) exploratory test of the instructional material for personal reflection in a range of STEM education setting ranging from STEM education to primary school students and STEM education at higher education level. The exploration seems to suggest that it may be possible after all to sing the Lord’s song in the doubly "strange land” of STEM education and post-Christian culture.

Exploring children’s understanding of prayer: a Godly Play approach

JANE SOUTHWARD

“This research investigates how year 3 children (aged 7 and 8) in a church school conceptualise prayer. Drawing on interpretivist critical realism and Trinitarian Christianity as a theoretical lens and dialogic partner, a video-based method utilising the Godly Play pedagogy was employed to elicit what the children think prayer is. Godly Play is a method for teaching children aspects of Christianity and relies heavily on wondering questions to help the children access deeper meanings which they interpret themselves. This is in distinct contrast to previous research which has focused on the quantitative or psychological aspects of prayer and which have used methods strongly rooted in a positivist theoretical perspective. The sample was a convenience sample drawn from year 3 selected with the school’s input and worked with in groups of 5 or 6.

In this paper it is argued that Godly Play pedagogy, here adapted as a video-based research method, can help understand how children conceptualise prayer as this approach allows for freedom of response by the children given that the adult’s role is as acknowledger rather than director. Some preliminary results will be shared and discussed with the focus on how the Godly Play symbolism helped the children talk about their ideas.
Christian education ethos development in a Free School and a Church Academy: A study of the perspectives of leaders and pupils

CAROLINE THOMAS

This presentation explores the development of a Christian education ethos in a newly-opened secondary Christian Free School and an established primary Church of England academy. The research follows a ‘revelatory’ case study design (Yin, 2009). I use interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2009) to interpret the school leaders’ experiences of developing the Christian education ethos and some pupils’ experiences of their education within that ethos. This research contributes new knowledge concerning Christian school leadership. Both case studies provide rich insights into the complexities of leading Christian education.

The headteachers’ values were significant in developing the school’s education ethos, but they encountered challenges in their deployment. Leaders made assumptions about the nature and purposes of Christian education. In the Christian Free School, the headteacher faced challenges from the governing body in negotiating a vision focused on ‘excellence’, ‘justice’ and learning in a Christian manner. The headteacher linked Christian pedagogy to the school’s Christian education ethos. In contrast, the governing body’s vision focused on ‘Christian nurture’ and education about Christianity. In the Church Academy, assumptions about the nature of Church of England values differed between school leaders and the SIAMS inspector. The findings provided insights into the effects of the SIAMS process on leaders’ autonomy.

In both schools, there was alignment between the headteacher’s espoused vision and value system, and pupils’ experiences of the ethos. Pupils identified with the school values, Christian artefacts and school practices. Pupils understood what their schools stood for and the expectations placed on them. The values influenced their learning aspirations, sense of belonging and identity formation. Pupils responded creatively to draw-and-write tasks and photo-elicitation, acting as co-researchers. The thesis contributed an inclusive and practical methodology, which school leaders could adapt to investigate the alignment between espoused values and the pupils’ experienced education ethos.
An Exploration of the Interrelations between Children, Adults and Natural Environments from a Froebelian perspective

TANSY WATTS

Froebel established the first kindergarten in rural Germany in 1837, and its pedagogy has influenced the subsequent development of early years practice globally. Many original Froebelian ideas have endured, however their underpinning roots within a philosophy of ‘Life-Unity’ have been lost to awareness, and this research seeks to explore the value of a contemporary reconnection with this. Froebel described ‘Life-Unity’ as an “all-pervading, energetic, living, self-conscious, and hence eternal Unity” (Froebel, 1887, p1) and that “This Unity is God” (Froebel, 1887, p1). Froebelian pedagogy aimed to support the expression of this within the developing individual, in harmony with their surroundings, and through a continuum of relations between child, family, community, nature, culture and society. One of Froebel’s most emphatic messages was to “Come, let us live with our children” (Froebel, 1887, p89), and to pay attention to their relations with the natural world which they experienced as “a unit”(Froebel, 1887, p56). This research has sought to engage with this message through Preschool organised family trips to nature sites in which children have worn GoPro cameras. This has offered the means for gathering an intimate portrayal of a young child’s experiences and relations, and the opportunity to reflect on these with parents and carers. Emergent findings are demonstrating the ways in which experiences in nature with young children can draw adults into shared moments of sensory, exploratory and storied relations with them. The significance of these are now being considered in relation to contemporary conceptions of human-nature connection (Mayer and Frantz, 2004) and the potential development of a sense of ‘Life-Unity’.
