



Trinity College Dublin
Coláiste na Tríonóide, Baile Átha Cliath
The University of Dublin



Where Imagination Becomes Experience

25–26 July 2026, Trinity College Dublin, Ireland

Celebrating Cecily O'Neill's Pioneering Contribution to Drama in Education



In Association With



Conference- Where Imagination Becomes Experience

Celebrate Cecily O'Neill's extraordinary legacy in drama education. Join us in Dublin for a dynamic, interactive, once-in-a-lifetime conference!



Register Now

<https://tinyurl.com/imagined-worlds>



Conference Details

Where Imagination Becomes Experience celebrates the life and work of Cecily O'Neill, one of the most influential figures in drama education worldwide, marking her 90th birthday as an outstanding scholar, practitioner, mentor and guide.

For more than six decades, Cecily O'Neill's pioneering work in process drama has transformed our understanding of drama as an experiential mode of learning, one in which imagination is 'lived through', negotiated and made meaningful in collective action. Her writing, teaching and international leadership have shaped generations of educators, students and artists, profoundly influencing drama education research and practice across cultures and continents.

In a world marked by uncertainty, inequality, conflict and rapid change, children, young people, educators and communities are navigating profound social, emotional and educational challenges. At such a moment, this conference honours Cecily's legacy by bringing together a global community of scholars and practitioners to celebrate, extend and critically engage with her work.

Cecily O'Neill's scholarship and practice have long affirmed drama education as an imaginative, experiential and deeply human mode of learning, one that invites participants to 'live through' complex situations, to think

ethically, to act collectively, and to make meaning together. Her work has offered educators powerful ways of responding to difficult times, foregrounding empathy, agency, dialogue and hope as central to learning.

This conference is both a celebration and a call. Through keynote addresses, workshops, panels, performances and conversations, participants will reflect on how Cecily's ideas have shaped and influenced the discipline of drama education internationally. We will explore their continuing relevance in the present moment, and re-imagine how her legacy will inform the future of the field.

Marking her 90th birthday, the conference affirms drama education not only as a field of study and practice, but as a vital cultural and pedagogical response to the world as it is, and as it might yet become!

An invitation To Our Drama Community

It would mean the world to us to have as many members of the national and international drama education community as possible gathered in Cecily's country of birth, at this critical juncture in society and education. All delegates will therefore receive a very special and warm Irish welcome!

In the spirit of accessibility and inclusion that has always characterised Cecily O'Neill's work:

The registration fee for full time registered students will be €40 (which includes the conference dinner, lunch and teas/coffees)

The registration fee for employed delegates will be €140 (which includes the conference dinner, lunch and teas/coffees)

We warmly invite participation from all corners of the world.



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How To Get Involved

This conference encourages multiple forms of participation, reflecting Cecily's commitment to dialogue between theory and practice, scholarship and making, reflection and action. Delegates who attend the conference are invited to contribute in one or more of the following ways:

1. Join us in Dublin to attend and participate in this seminal conference.

2. Contribute to an open access Pedagogical Handbook

In the spirit of open access and global knowledge-sharing, the conference will produce an online open access Pedagogical Handbook edited by Cecily O'Neill and some members of the conference committee.

Delegates are invited to submit a short practical chapter illustrating where Cecily's ideas meet practice (1,500-2,500 words). This 'play book' or short chapter should include:

- a short scheme or unit of work with associated lesson plans influenced by Cecily O'Neill's ideas and practice;
- a brief theoretical framing, situating the work in relation to her contribution to drama education;
- a short synopsis or evaluation reflecting on the outcomes of the work.

Where possible, contributors are encouraged to share if/how the work has been trialled with children, young people, students or others within their own geographical and cultural contexts. While prior implementation is absolutely not

required, reflections on lived practice and learning outcomes may be especially valuable to our teaching colleagues, as will practical strategies on how teachers may approach assessing or evaluating the scheme of work.

3. Contribute to an edited scholarly collection (open access)

An edited collection of short scholarly articles (2,000–4,000 words) will be developed in parallel with the conference, focusing on the conference theme and Cecily O'Neill's contribution to drama education.

Cecily O'Neill will write the opening chapter to this volume. The collection will be open access, ensuring her work continues to permeate, support and inspire drama education in diverse contexts across the world.

4. Performative and creative contributions

Expressions of interest are warmly welcomed from individuals or groups of participants who wish to perform, stage, or creatively embody their understanding of how Cecily O'Neill's work has shaped and influenced their own practice, research or pedagogy. These will be performed during the conference in Dublin.

These short contributions (5-10 mins) may take a wide range of dramatic, performative or hybrid forms and will be interwoven throughout the conference programme. Cecily is very encouraging of these!

How To Get Involved

5. Echoes of Practice: Research, Policy and Pedagogy Inspired by Cecily O'Neill. An Interactive digital poster carousel

Delegates are invited to submit dynamic and informative digital poster presentations highlighting diverse research, practice, and policy projects influenced by the ideas and work of Cecily O'Neill. Posters should communicate the core elements of the project clearly and accessibly, including (as appropriate): a brief literature or conceptual context, research aims or questions, methods and study design, key findings or insights, and implications for research, practice, or policy.

Rather than printed posters, submissions will be displayed as part of an interactive digital poster carousel, looping on large screens throughout the conference. Following the event, posters will be collated thematically in an online collection to further showcase and disseminate work inspired by Cecily's contribution to the field.



Submission Review And Selection

Short proposals (150-200 words) are welcomed for the performative and creative contributions and should be sent to the conference committee at: **CTREANOR@tcd.ie** Please write 'Cecily O'Neill Conference performative and creative contributions' in the subject line.

Deadline for submission of proposal: 1st April 2026

- Submissions for the Pedagogical Handbook (1,500-2,500 words) and the Edited Scholarly Collection (2,000-4,000 words) should be sent to the conference committee at: **CTREANOR@tcd.ie** Please write 'Cecily O'Neill Conference Pedagogical Handbook or Edited Scholarly Collection' in the subject line. Contributions must be formatted using APA 7, single spaced, with permissions secured for use of data and any images.

Deadline for submissions of completed papers: 31st August 2026

- Submissions for the Echoes of Practice: Research, Policy and Pedagogy Inspired by Cecily O'Neill poster presentations should be sent to the conference committee at: **CTREANOR@tcd.ie** Please write 'Cecily O'Neill Conference posters' in the subject line. Posters should be submitted electronically as a PowerPoint file (.pptx), using a single slide. Posters may include images, text, diagrams, and embedded media (e.g. short video or audio clips), provided these are compatible with PowerPoint. Final specifications (dimensions, duration, and accessibility

guidance) will be provided upon acceptance. Contributors will be encouraged to follow accessibility best practice (e.g. readable font sizes, clear contrast, captions for media).

All submissions, whether for the open access Pedagogical Handbook, the edited scholarly collection, or performative/practical contributions, will be reviewed by the Conference Committee. Submissions will be assessed based on their alignment with the conference theme, their clarity of presentation, and their potential to advance understanding of Cecily O'Neill's work and legacy. While all submissions will be given careful consideration, only those that best exemplify the spirit and objectives of the conference will be included in either the conference or publications which follow.

In addition, the conference is partnering with a number of journals in the field, and there may be opportunities for selected contributions to be developed into formal publications following the conference. These will be announced later.

Conference Format

- **Keynote address and practical workshop**

Cecily O'Neill will offer a keynote address entitled 'Finding Form' on the first day of the conference and will also lead a practical workshop designed to draw as many participants as possible into a shared dramatic process during the second day. In keeping with her lifelong commitment to participatory learning, the workshop will invite collective engagement as ideas deepen and develop through practice.

- **Launch of a feature length documentary on Cecily O'Neill's life and legacy**

The conference will host the launch of a major new documentary entitled: 'Imagined Worlds With Cecily O'Neill'. Filmed over the past twelve months by colleagues from The Joy of Drama in India, the film captures Cecily in conversation, in movement and in reflection, following her across professional and personal spaces. It offers an intimate and moving portrait of her extraordinary philosophy of life and of drama, and stands as a powerful testament to her global influence and enduring impact.

- **Panels, dialogues and scholarly exchange**

Panels will bring together new and emerging students, teachers, scholars and well known

established figures in the field, each charged with pinpointing the theory-into-practice dimensions of Cecily O'Neill's work, exploring what influenced them, how it shaped their thinking and practice, and why it continues to matter. Cecily accompanied by key figures in the drama education field will respond creatively, critically and constructively to these panels, inviting engagement from the audience in a dynamic, interactive Q&A format that includes panel contributors and participants alike, fostering a collaborative and participatory exploration of her legacy. The panel themes as chosen by Cecily will explore the following:

1. Aesthetic experience in process drama
2. The use of pretexts
3. Modes of reflection
4. Process drama and movement

Conference Format

- **Performative and creative contributions**

Dramatic, performative and creative responses will be interwoven throughout the programme, offering participants multiple ways to share how Cecily O'Neill's work has influenced their own practice, research and pedagogy.

- **A living, dynamic conference experience**

This will be a highly interactive, critical and creative conference, offering a very different format for scholarly engagement, one that reflects the values at the heart of Cecily O'Neill's life and work. The daily programme will invite active participation, dialogue and shared meaning-making, welcoming voices from all corners of the world. A celebratory evening meal and social event on Saturday night will offer time to honour Cecily and reconnect with both old friends and new. This is included in the conference fee.

Join us in Dublin, 25–26 July 2026, to celebrate the extraordinary life and legacy of Cecily O'Neill! Connect with an international community of educators, practitioners, and scholars in a dynamic, interactive conference of workshops, panels, performances, and discussion. Experience the power of drama to inspire, teach, and transform, and be part of a once-in-a-lifetime tribute to a true pioneer.

Early booking is advisable. To register, please [click here](#):

All queries should be directed to Ciarán Treanor at: CTREANOR@tcd.ie Please write 'Cecily O'Neill Conference' in the subject line.

Indicative Conference Schedule

(The final version featuring all contributors will be emailed to registered delegates in May.)

Saturday 25th July 2026

9.00am - Registration and Tea/Coffee/Water

9.30am - Performative and creative contributions

10.15am - Cecily O'Neill keynote address: 'Finding Form', followed by audience Q&A

11.15-11.45am - Tea/Coffee/Water break and 'Interactive digital poster carousel'

11.45am - Panel 1: 'Aesthetic experience in process drama', followed by response and engagement from Cecily O'Neill, key figures in drama education, and audience discussion

1pm-2pm - Lunch and 'Interactive digital poster carousel'

2.00pm - Performative and creative contributions

2.30pm - Panel 2: 'The use of pretexts', followed by response and engagement from Cecily O'Neill, key figures in drama education, and audience discussion

3.45pm-4.15pm - Tea/Coffee/Water break and 'Interactive digital poster carousel'

4.15pm - Screening of 'Imagined Worlds With Cecily O'Neill', a new documentary celebrating Cecily O'Neill's life and legacy (created by The Joy Of Drama, India)

5.15pm - Visit to the Book of Kells exhibition (optional) / Free time

6.30pm - Conference evening meal and celebration

Sunday 26th July 2026

9.30am - Panel 3: 'Modes of reflection' and 'Process drama and movement', followed by response and engagement from Cecily O'Neill, key figures in drama education, and the audience.

10.30am - Performative and creative contributions

11.00-11.30am - Tea/Coffee/Water break and 'Interactive digital poster carousel'

11.30am - Practical workshop led by Cecily O'Neill

1.00pm - Closing reflections and looking ahead with Cecily O'Neill and the conference organisers

1.30pm - Farewell and departure

We look forward to welcoming you.

Carmel O’Sullivan, Conference Director

(On behalf of the conference organising committee: Carmel O’Sullivan, Cecily O’Neill, Susan Kennedy-Killian, Ciarán Treanor, Shashwat Srivastava, Susanne Colleary, Elaine Clotworthy, Erika Piazzoli, Louise Heeran Flynn, Vaishali Chakravarty, Wang Wei and Cao Xi)



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Photo Credit: Shashwat Srivastava. Photos shot at the Dorothy Heathcote Now Conference 2024, University Of Aberdeen and Drama-In-Education Summer School 2025, Trinity College Dublin

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