

INSTRUCTIONAL LEADERSHIP CONFERENCE 2012

The inaugural national conference of the Instructional Leadership Programme was a very successful event, marked by a large attendance of participants from the various cohorts that have undertaken training with Professor Barrie Bennett since the inception of the programme five years ago.



Dr Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector with the DES, delivers the keynote address at the ILP National Conference.

The conference, held at the Mount Wolseley Hotel (ILP's spiritual home!) in Tullow, Co Carlow, on 12/13 October, was intended by the Steering Committee to be the first such event whereby graduates from Cohort One would be reconvened. Attending to Cohort One graduates in such a structured fashion was seen by the committee as particularly important given the stated emphasis of the project on promoting a model of sustainability to ensure that systemic change can be effected. In this context, delegates gathered so as to progress the key objective of sharing best practice and promoting collaborative endeavour. Participants from Cohort Two also gathered, as well as many teachers who have encountered Instructional Leadership at local level, where schools and centres have experienced the successful 'cascading outwards' of the very rich experiences of teachers at the actual in-service sessions with Prof. Bennett.

The theme of the conference was "Opening Classroom Doors-Instructional leadership: Nurturing Excellence in Teaching and Learning." This theme was chosen in the context of current policy developments in Irish education, including the increased

focus on robust school self-evaluation. In her opening address, themed 'The Big Picture', the chairperson of the Steering Committee and CEO of Co Cork VEC, Ms. Joan Russell, reminded delegates of the extent to which the programme dovetailed neatly with the proposed self-evaluation model, particularly in relation to the emphasis on teachers in schools learning from and with each other, as peers and as teacher educators. This point was echoed by Dr. Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector with the DES, who spoke in his keynote address of the need for teachers to take responsibility for each other in refining and enhancing schools as genuine sites of learning. In guiding delegates through the rationale for self-evaluation, Dr. Hislop lauded the ILP model as an appropriate vehicle for transmitting to schools the benefits associated with successful school self evaluation and pointed to the associated benefits to schools of team teaching also.

A number of workshops took place on the following day, each of which was facilitated by Cohort One graduates. A presentation on the ILP website, www.instructionalleadership.ie, demonstrated the various features of the site that are designed to assist the implementation of the programme at local level, including a range of video clips, PowerPoint presentations and related resources focused on the application of various skills, tactics and strategies in the classroom. This was followed by a workshop where participants were divided into two groups- one for classroom teachers, facilitated by Gerard O'Sullivan from Davis College Mallow, and one for school management, jointly facilitated by Breda Sunderland of Athy College and Rosaleen O'Neill, Principal of Avondale CC, Co. Wicklow. In each of these settings, delegates reflected on their experience of instructional leadership in their school settings, reflected on some case studies and shared ideas and best practice. The final session presented a choice to delegates, with a workshop focused on Instructional Leadership and Team Teaching,



Delegates attending workshop for school leaders during the ILP National Conference.

led by Sarah Buckley and Maire Ni Laoire of McEgan College, Macroom; and one based on exploring further the relationship between Instructional Leadership and School Self Evaluation, led by Eugene Power, Principal of St. Declan's CC, Kilmacthomas, and Carmel Kelly, Principal of Listowel CC.

A plenary session concluded a successful and well-received conference, the first but certainly not the last of its kind as we continue to develop structures to support teachers in engaging with the Instructional Leadership Programme.

RELATIONSHIPS OF LEARNING... BUILDING CAPACITY

Dr. Finn Ó Murchu is an Inspector with the DES with a particular interest in SEN and inclusion, and is a member of the ILP Steering Committee. He attained a PhD for his work on team teaching, a methodology he strongly advocates, and is a close friend of Barrie Bennett. Here, he offers some thoughts on the continuing development of ILP

In attending the successful first National Conference of the Instructional Leadership Programme last October, I found myself reflecting upon the journey travelled to date and the possibilities that awaited us all involved in teaching and learning. As discussed with Barrie and Joan before and after the conference, it was noteworthy that the collective and ever-maturing relationship of learning among us here in Ireland allows us all to engage successfully with one another in the absence of Barrie. Though, if truth be told, while Barrie may not have been present he was in our hearts and minds, giving us the confidence to venture forth. Indeed Barrie, as the good teacher he is, has always defined the success of his relationship with us by the degree to which we can adapt our learning to meet our own context on our own terms.

Over the course of the two-day conference I was also struck by the quality and ability of teachers to fuse their experiences and insights with a repertoire of skills, tactics and strategies to provide and participate in workshops on a range of instructional topics. These workshops give expression to the concept of professional learning communities and to Chief Inspector Harold Hislop's observation, during his opening address at the National Conference, where he referenced school self-evaluation in the context of teachers taking responsibility for each other.

It might be of interest to readers that my first meeting with Barrie in 2001 centred on an EU project, which focused on the development of quality indicators for school self-evaluation. I was SDPI coordinator in my school in Carrigaline, Co. Cork and attended a DES-supported summer school in Germany,

where Barrie presented. We struck up a conversation over a beer (just the one) and he gave me his business card, which I still have. Initially we concentrated our chat on initial teacher education and teacher mentoring, which I was then grappling with in my school. We all have our own conversations with Barrie and mine eventually, as a cigire, led me to visit him at work in Toronto in 2005 and 2006, and invite Barrie to Ireland in autumn 2006 and well the rest...the rest is your story.

So why tell this story? I tell the story because I see the value of Barrie's work across a number of dimensions and in a way that is even more relevant than I had the capacity to think of or imagine at the time we first met. There was no great master plan here when first engaging with Barrie, but I now see more clearly that if you focus on learning and teaching, for both teachers and students, for administrators and cigirí; you have a chance of making a positive contribution to the learner and to the learning experience.

As Joan highlighted recently, there is no national or local initiative or policy goal that is not addressed by our work and the reason is that we are focusing on teaching and learning and on good teaching being, exactly that, good teaching. We see instruction as generic and leadership as a verb, where both are applicable to anyone (including students) in any setting. We now have, and continue to develop, a deeper understanding that we need a language for reflection and implementation (both individually and collectively).

This emerging language, literacy for teaching, combined with increased understandings around change and how to successfully implement change, position us to build capacity within our schools and across our educational system.

However, we also have an additional advantage which is our social capital and the way we treat each other. Relationships of learning and building capacity are also dependent upon attending to our affective domains and are based on relational trust, respect, patience and at times forgiveness. They are central to professional engagement and to professional experimentation. Indeed to be a professional asks that we constantly seek better ways to support learning, including our own learning and that of those around us. However, as with the student, we all need to constantly ensure that our learning environment is a safe place to learn and a safe place to be ourselves and reveal our potential.

In this regard you all have your own stories about capacity building.

ACTICS / CONCEPTS / SKILLS

From my perspective as a school inspector visiting schools I have seen some wonderful examples of schools implementing their learning as a result of engaging with Barrie and with each other;

Staff meetings and board meetings that use placemat to conduct aspects of school business; team-teaching a new learning such as academic controversy; subject departments developing lesson design and/or peer observation; principals being invited by teachers into classrooms to see what is happening; teacher mentors using their knowledge to induct student teachers, newly recruited and returning teachers; teaching and learning committees being set up to 'lunch and learn' or organize 'pop up workshops' during school day to share an idea around teaching and learning. Capacity building among our students is also happening in that they are learning the language and practices also, and it's cool to hear students comment on 'wait time', 'lower and higher order thinking/questioning', or invoke Johnson and Johnson's fifth element of cooperative learning and their levels of accountability for their own learning and that of their fellow students. The development of student literacy around learning and teaching supports student self-evaluation. This in turn grafts back onto learning to learn and the focus on school self-evaluation. As was recently pointed out to me by a teacher, just as we have teachers on the Instructional Leadership Programme now in senior management positions, soon we will have students, who sat in classes when we first played with this programme, joining the teaching profession. Capacity building takes many forms and I look forward to hearing your stories.

So where to next? Plans are afoot to revisit cohort 1 (2008-10) before the summer and see how their relationships of learning are building capacity within and across schools. The role the programme can play across the continuum of teacher learning continues to be developed (for example, take note of Teaching Council European Presidency Conference 2013). Ways of assisting my inspectorate colleagues to engage in the programme and for Barrie to further engage with the inspectorate will continue to be explored. Finding ways to assess our progress and communicate with one another across schools, school sectors and various cohorts via the website, the NUIG course and other methods will require our attention. I'm sure you have your own ideas on how we should best progress, but above all, I'm sure what we are doing is making a considerable difference to the quality of learning for all involved. I look forward to the continued successes that will emerge from our ongoing relationships of learning.

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Breda Sunderland, Deputy Principal of Athy College, is a Steering Committee member and graduate from Cohort One. Here, she reflects on her school's experience of the programme to date in the last year.

Athy College's Instructional Leadership journey during 2012 has been a roller-coaster ride.

In December 2012 we invited the entire staffs of three adjacent primary schools to join us for a pre-Christmas "gathering". All four schools - Scoil Phadraig Naofa, Gaelscoil Atha I, Athy Model School and Athy College –are recently built on a shared campus. Our aim was to build collegial relationships with fellow professionals. A 'deVries Teams Games Tourmanent', in which teams consisted of staff from each school, achieved our aims in a fun way and also created a platform from which to cascade IL between the sectors. (More of that anon!)

With a team of our staff simultaneously involved in NUI Maynooth's TL21 initiative, it was, perhaps, inevitable that their school project was "Embedding IL in Athy College". Their work resulted in a presentation on IL to eight second-level schools in Laois Education Centre. This in turn generated sufficient "buzz" that Laois Education Centre filmed 2nd year students being taught Maths by Deirdre Murphy. The DVD was subsequently profiled at the NUIM Colloquium on Teaching and Learning in June 2012 and generated a lot of interest. In March the same class group demonstrated a selection of IL skills, tactics and strategies for the Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn T.D., at the National Launch of the ILP.

A few weeks later the NCCA nominated Athy College to represent developments in pedagogy in Ireland as part of a UNESCO sponsored international project. So when another film crew arrived, it was the turn of a Leaving Certificate class, who had experienced IL from its introduction to Athy College five years ago. Add to that a school visit from Professor Barrie Bennett and you get some sense of the pace of developments.

So, as a team, looking forward to 2012-2013 we knew it was time to get back to the basics of classroom management. We identified our professional development priority as embedding conscious, intentional competence when leading learning in classes and situations where challenging students, often with special needs, are more demanding. This academic year a series of CPD sessions for all teachers is taking place based on the Classroom Management Bumps Model as detailed in "Classroom Management: A Thinking and Caring Approach" (Bennett and Smilanich). In addition, the Teaching and Learning Club (TLC), which we established in 2010, now meets for thirty minutes each Tuesday evening. This is entirely voluntary. Yet often more than half the staff attends on any given evening. The TLC has also become a vehicle for much

of the mentoring of newly appointed staff and thus ensures that the cycle of embedding IL is sustainable.

Each TLC meeting has a pre-planned learning outcome aimed at expanding our professional repertoires. It is generally led by one of two teachers currently completing final year M Ed action research projects on aspects of Teaching and Learning.

Honing our skills by sharing our experience often results in robust discussion, real day-to-day classroom examples, reflective practice and lots of laughter. It's genuinely difficult to call "time up" – but we insist.

Sessions thus far included effective paired and group work for JCSP classes; understanding the goals of misbehaviour; sharing reflective journals; creating safe environments where students belong through winning over, positive cohesive bonding and inclusiveness.

The next step planned for 2013 is to develop the concept of a cross-campus Teaching and Learning Group to build on the very successful joint CPD mentioned earlier. Early in 2013 a team from Athy College will present on IL to teachers in the three primary school on campus. Invitations will then be issued to any teachers who wish to join a cross-campus Teaching and Learning Focus Group. The model of a campus approach which spans primary and second levels is groundbreaking and we are really excited about the initiative.

Athy College is officially an Instructional Leadership school!

RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN ILP

A number of graduates from Cohort One have commenced further study with NUI Galway's Post Graduate Diploma in Leading Learning, developed in association with the ILP Steering Committee. This represents a very welcome and significant stage of the continuing evolution of the programme. Furthermore, Joan Russell, Breda Sunderland and Gerard O'Sullivan will represent the Steering Committee at the Teaching Council's forthcoming EU presidency conference entitled "Integration, Innovation and Improvement – the Professional Identity of Teacher Educators", scheduled for Dublin Castle on 18/19 February 2013. They will present a reflection on the ILP in a workshop dealing with the theme of leadership in education.

CALLING COHORT ONE

A one-day workshop for Cohort One graduates is proposed for Monday 20th May 2013. The aim of the workshop is to support graduates, evaluate the impact of ILP on the classroom/school and consider future developments. We look forward to a positive response from graduates.

NEW CORK IL NETWORK

A new county wide cluster of IL teachers is being set up in Co Cork, following similar developments elsewhere. The first meeting will take place on the evening of Thursday 21 February 2013 in Yeats House, Co Cork VEC HQ. This development will assist in furthering the process of 'cascading' the programme at local level and will also ensure that systemic change can be supported and sustained in schools, colleges and centres of learning throughout the county. Good luck to all concerned!

COHORT THREE TO GRADUATE, COHORT FOUR TO COMMENCE

Barrie Bennett returns to Tullow on the week beginning 4th March, where Cohort Three will graduate and a new cohort will commence. We wish both groups well on their ILP journey!

FINALLY: WE WANT YOU TO SHARE YOUR ILP EXPERIENCE!!

Please note that the inaugural ILP conference proceedings were video recorded for posting on:

www.instructionalleadership.ie

Visit the site to access resources and information. Please forward any resources/ experiences/ case studies that you wish to share by visiting the website or by emailing:

ccreedon@instructionalleadership.ie

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