

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to Leading Learning, the third edition of the newsletter of the Instructional Leadership Programme (ILP). As we commence a new school year, the Steering Committee of the ILP continues to plan for the ongoing support and development of teachers engaging with the principles of the Instructional Leadership Programme.



Last May, a one-day seminar was held for those pioneering teachers and school leaders who constituted the first and second cohorts to engage with instructional intelligence and the research of Barrie Bennett. Some reflections on that worthwhile event and the testimony offered by participants are shared in this edition. Also, we include some updates for interested teachers on forthcoming events and other items of interest. In restating my commitment to supporting all of those teachers who have embraced the programme at local level so willingly, may I also appeal to you to share your stories and experiences with us through our website, new Facebook page and/or through our annual conference which takes place in October. I look forward to seeing you then and extend every good wish to you for the new school year.

*Joan Russell*

Chairperson,  
National Steering Committee of the Instructional Leadership Programme

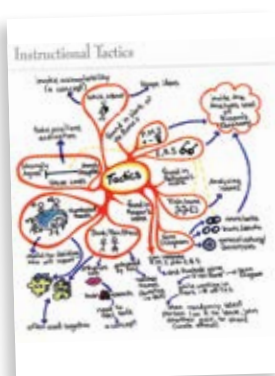
## The Teacher Voice: Reflections on the ILP seminar for Cohorts One and Two, May 2013

The Steering Committee of the Instructional Leadership Programme facilitated a one-day seminar at the Mount Wolseley Hotel and Golf Resort in Tullow on Monday 20 May 2013.

The purpose of the seminar was two-fold: firstly, to provide a forum for participants/ graduates from Cohorts One and Two to meet, exchange experiences and stories, and share ideas and plans for the continuing evolution of the programme in their schools and centres; and secondly, to enable the Steering Committee to hear about the implementation of the programme at local level so that it can plan to respond strategically and effectively to concerns and needs articulated.

The seminar was also timely in that the Steering Committee is currently considering how to proceed with a formal evaluation of the programme. To inform the committee's thinking about the parameters of such an evaluation, a questionnaire was devised and issued to all participating schools, colleges and centres. The questionnaire sought to elicit responses about the impact of the Instructional Leadership Programme in three main areas of the respondent's experience: firstly, the impact on one's own personal development and professional practice; secondly, the extent to which the programme has been implemented across the school/centre setting, and the factors that aided or inhibited that process of implementation; and finally, whether and to what extent the programme has enabled schools to engage with various features of the current educational policy agenda.

The key findings from the questionnaire were presented by Dr Finn O Murchu at the beginning of the seminar before the participants broke into small groups to consider the impact



of the programme in three one-hour long workshops, each devoted to one of the three categories identified in the questionnaire. Each workshop was facilitated by a Steering Committee member who then reported back to the whole group in a plenary to finish the session. In setting the context for the presentation to follow, Finn reminded the audience of Professor Bennett's injunction to teachers to be conscious of the integration of art and science in the practice of effective teaching: "most teachers want to make a difference for students, but too often they get too little time and support to work smart. So much comes at them so quickly...the next new idea. If those ideas are not wisely woven over time, in an environment that values teachers as life-long learners, then the pressure to improve or add innovation is akin to throwing rocks to a drowning person...teachers must be aware of and act on the science within the art of teaching – a challenging task".

In welcoming delegates to the seminar, Steering Committee chairperson Joan Russell expressed the hope that the stories shared in the sub-groups would allow for deeper insights and understanding of the raw data garnered by the questionnaire and so ensure that both quantitative and qualitative feedback would enrich the future evaluation of the programme; in other words, that the stories of teachers' own experiences of fusing the art and science of teaching would be shared and explored. The seminar did not disappoint in this regard.

## Impact of the ILP on the personal development and professional practice of teachers

*The impact of the programme on individual teachers' personal development and professional practice was overwhelmingly positive. Among the main findings in this area was the view that engagement with the principles of the ILP allowed teachers to acquire the confidence that it was acceptable to "try and retry" different interventions, integrating and stacking various skills, tactics, strategies, so as to aid student learning.*

This view echoes a key recommendation of Professor Barrie Bennett from the Tullow sessions, where he urged participants "to play with" the various ideas explored in their own context to see what worked. One respondent stated that "the programme has helped me in all aspects of my teaching" (indicating a common feature of the responses); through enabling teachers

to acquire a common language or vocabulary through which they could articulate their practice, the programme was enabling teachers to become more consciously aware of the interventions they practised, and equally importantly, why they practised them. As one teacher observed, "it (the programme) has placed a language/framework on my practice...it affirmed my belief in the individual as learner". A principal praised the programme's role in facilitating exploration of the "how and not just the what" of effective practice. Another respondent reflected that "I am teaching a number of years and this was the first time I was taught the art of teaching...I try not to be the performing rabbit". On an important related note, it was also evident from responses that this common language was providing teachers with a platform or network through which they could communicate and share with others. Words such as *energy, collaboration, enthusiasm, experimentation, and awareness* were among those noted in feedback here.

Notably, respondents voiced their view that the programme was a positive influence on teachers' perceptions of the professionalism of their roles. It was evident that the acquisition of the common language referred to earlier was enabling deeper reflection about the power of the teacher to affect learning through extending and deepening the instructional repertoire available to them. It is interesting to observe that respondents highlighted the significant extent to which they accessed aspects of their learning in the programme on a regular basis. A strong message in this regard is the shift in the perception of the teacher's role from the traditional *lone ranger* model, where the classroom was the teacher's private domain with little or no outside perspective on the learning taking place; according to one respondent, "the shift from learning being an individual pursuit to an interactive, social activity has changed everything".

A significant aspect of the programme's impact on the individual teacher relates to the enhanced professional profile of the teacher educator. Numerous participants mentioned their role in disseminating the principles of the programme to their own staff groupings through in-school in-service programmes. While many initially felt quite daunted at the prospect, there was considerable satisfaction gained for those who took such a leadership role in their schools. Many expressed a sense of satisfaction and accomplishment that they had spearheaded a refreshed culture of continuous professional development in their schools, a timely development given the advent of important teaching and learning developments at national policy level. It is noted that a number of graduates have gone on to pursue further study through post-graduate programmes, whether at the level of the Postgraduate Diploma in Leading Learning at NUIG, or through various Master's programmes in other universities.

ACTICS / SKILLS  
CONCEPTS

## Impact of the ILP on the school/centre setting and at systemic level

*Much positive feedback was offered from participants on the impact of the programme in their particular setting. A significant number spoke of its impact on a daily or even hourly basis, where aspects of the programme infuse the teacher's entire working life.*

This is evident in such areas as, for example, structuring lessons, engaging/ collaborating with colleagues, interacting with/ offering feedback to students, participating in staff meetings and setting up teaching and learning committees. Tellingly, it is clear that the acquisition of the language of learning has empowered many teachers to engage in meaningful reflection and insight into their practice, thus making their work less stressful and instilling in them a greater sense of confidence and professionalism. Stories were shared of such initiatives as a "Lunch n' Learn" club where teachers shared practice; of special duties posts devoted to IL (or the creation of the position of 'lead teacher'); of the integration of the programme with team teaching strategies and behaviour management programmes; of collaboration at local level with primary educators; of the drafting of a dedicated school booklet—all examples of the continued cascading of the programme at school level.

Reflections were also shared on *how* best to sustain the positive impact identified. Barrie's frequent references to 'change wisdom' were invoked as participants shared their experiences. The critical role of school management in supporting the programme and the need to provide adequate time to do so was raised, as was the role of the particular people from schools who undertook the Carlow sessions. Provision for the fostering and development of relationships forged in Carlow was identified as important (and it is to be hoped that the various strands of support offered by the steering committee, including the website, newsletter, national conference and Facebook page may be of value here). The establishment of local networks was also lauded as positive, with such arms of support emerging in Kildare, Wicklow and Cork recently, promoting collaboration and reflection among teachers from the various sectors. Some participants reflected on the need to pursue change in a strategic, measured way to ensure sustainability, pointing to the value of focusing on a particular year group initially as a useful stratagem for creating awareness of the programme. The hope was expressed that other relevant agencies would demonstrate commitment to the principles of the programme, including the Teaching Council,

the various support services, the teacher unions, the new ETBs and the initial teacher education (ITE) providers, for example; equally, much satisfaction was expressed at the extent to which the programme has emerged more prominently (and positively) in DES inspectorate subject inspection and whole-school evaluation reports.

It was noted that the programme dovetails neatly with a range of policy developments at official DES level, not least in terms of school self-evaluation, junior cycle reform and literacy and numeracy development. It is to be hoped that the ILP can be integrated with such developments so that the concept of the school as 'a site of learning' might be realised meaningfully. In this regard, Michael Fullan offers encouragement to all of us involved in the ILP in declaring that 'systems don't change by themselves. Rather, the actions of individuals and small groups working on new conceptions interact to produce breakthroughs...and synthesize the forces of moral purpose and change agency (1993)'. This valuable and timely conference offers reassurance that the teachers who collaborate in promoting the Instructional Leadership Programme across our schools and centres continue to be powerful agents of such positive change.

### Noticeboard:

*Some updates on the work of the Instructional Leadership Programme*



### Annual Conference

The second annual conference of the Instructional Leadership Programme takes place in the Mount Wolseley Golf Club, Tullow, Co Carlow, on Friday 11 and Saturday 12 October 2013. The theme of this year's conference is **Let's talk about Learning: IL creating the culture to enhance professional conversations along the continuum of teacher education**. This theme has been developed in response to feedback from teachers at the May conference, where the promotion of teacher professional conversations was identified as an important need. Also identified was the issue of leading and managing change, a theme which will also be addressed at the national conference. The Director of the Teaching Council, Tomas O Ruairc, will deliver the keynote address on the Friday evening while workshops on Saturday will explore the role of the ILP to support teacher professional development in schools and centres. Please refer to [www.instructionalleadership.ie](http://www.instructionalleadership.ie) to register your interest.

## Evaluation of the ILP

The Steering Committee is currently considering how to proceed with an evaluation of the programme to date. It is considered timely to conduct such an evaluation so that the sustainability of the programme into the future can be safeguarded. Further information will be posted online and in the next edition of the newsletter and the contribution of interested graduates/ participants will be appreciated. Watch this space.

## Show the ILP logo on your school's website

Arising from a suggestion at the May seminar, the logo of the ILP is available for placing on your school's website as a means of identifying and promoting your participation in the programme. Please visit the website for details on how to access the logo and play your part in profiling the work that we do, as well as profiling your own school/ centre.

## NUIG Postgraduate Diploma in Leading Learning

The Diploma in Leading Learning is facilitated by the Education Department of NUIG and has been developed in consultation with the Steering Committee of the ILP. Graduates from the first two cohorts of the ILP are the first participants in the two-year Diploma course, which began in October 2012. Feedback from participants has been most positive and the Steering Committee is pleased to confirm that the Diploma will be offered once again to interested teachers in October 2014. The vision and commitment of the Education Department of the university, particularly Mary Fleming and Andrea Higgins, is to be commended and we wish them and all participants every success in the second year of the course. A number of the current participants will act as facilitators at our October conference. Teachers who wish to find out more about the course should visit our website for further information.

## Cohorts Four and Five meet Barrie in Tullow

Cohort Four participants return to Tullow from Monday 4 to Wednesday 6 November to engage with Barrie, while a fifth cohort will commence on Wednesday of that week. We wish Cohort Four every success and look forward to welcoming Barrie to Ireland again. Places on Cohort 5 are still available and interested school leaders/ teachers should refer to the website for further information.

## The ILP and Facebook



Share your stories and maintain ILP relationships by visiting our new Facebook page.

## Instructional Leadership: sharing our story

The Instructional Leadership Programme will host a stand at the forthcoming FEILTE event (Festival of Education in Learning and Teaching Excellence), which is being hosted by the Teaching Council on Saturday 5 October to mark World Teachers' Day. This event will involve the showcasing of a number of innovative teaching and learning projects from schools around the country and we look forward to playing our part. Meanwhile, the History Teachers' Association of Ireland hosts its annual conference in Ballinasloe on the same weekend, where one session of the conference will explore how the programme can promote effective teaching and learning in the history classroom. We welcome the opportunity to explore the value of the programme in a subject-specific setting and wish the conference well.

## Finally: an appeal!

We wish to ensure that our website is a valuable reference point for teachers engaging with the ILP. Please forward any items of interest that you may have-articles, reflections, case studies, lesson plans, resources, exemplars of student work. The spirit of collaboration and sharing is central to the mission of the ILP. Visit the website and play your part in spreading good practice.

www.instructionalleadership.ie



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