

# Leading Learning

**Newsletter of the Instructional Leadership Programme.**

**Issue 1: September 2012**



## A message from Ms. Joan Russell, CEO Co Cork VEC and Chairperson of the National Steering Committee of the Instructional Leadership Programme

Welcome to the inaugural newsletter of the Instructional Leadership Programme. This project, which I am pleased to say has grown and developed quite dramatically over the last five years, represents the commitment of the Irish Vocational Education Association to the provision of excellent professional development for teachers in leading learning and teaching in the classroom. The purpose of this newsletter is to acquaint the educational community with the key principles underpinning the project and to offer information relating to more recent key developments in the programme's continuing evolution, including the launch of its website, [www.instructionalleadership.ie](http://www.instructionalleadership.ie), its exciting partnership with NUI Galway in the provision of a new postgraduate diploma and the facilitation of the programme's first annual conference. At a time of profound innovation and change in educational policy in Ireland, and also in the context of the realignment of the model of teacher professional development and initial teacher education in Ireland and the increasingly pivotal role of the Teaching Council, I look forward to the Instructional Leadership Programme strengthening its role as a progressive influence on learning and teaching.

*Joan Russell.*

## The Instructional Leadership Programme: The Journey So Far

The tenure in office of the Minister for Education, Mr Ruairi Quinn TD, has been characterised by significant change and innovation in a variety of key policy areas. The National Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy is currently the focus of implementation in schools across the country while proposals for radical reform of the Junior Cycle framework at second-level are also currently under consideration. Guidelines on school self-evaluation and school improvement have been issued by the DES inspectorate while reforms in models of school patronage, including the advent of the community national school, offer further evidence of the changing context of educational policy.

It should be noted that the IVEA has also responded to the challenge of improving the quality of the educational experience on offer in our schools. The Instructional Leadership Programme has emerged as a key provider of quality continuous professional development for teachers in learning and teaching and has established the IVEA as a significant partner in the policy agenda of educational improvement. The following article traces the evolution of the programme to date.



*Pictured at the launch of the Instructional Leadership Programme at the Mount Wolseley Hotel, Tullow, on 5 March 2012: Cllr. Noel O'Connor, President IVEA; Mr. Ruairi Quinn TD, Minister for Education and Skills; Ms. Joan Russell, CEO County Cork VEC and Chairperson of National Steering Committee of Instructional Leadership Programme; and Professor Barrie Bennett.*

## Origins

The Instructional Leadership Programme commenced with the gathering of a group of some 150 teachers from a range of vocational schools across the country at the Mount Wolseley Hotel in Tullow, Co. Carlow, in 2008. Three years later, following six residential training seminars, these teachers, representing the first cohort of educators to complete a training programme in Instructional Leadership with the renowned Canadian academic, Professor Barrie Bennett, received certificates to mark their graduation from IVEA President, Cllr. Noel O'Connor. They are now charged with facilitating workshops for teachers in their own schools and local areas so that the principles underpinning Instructional Intelligence can be disseminated to a wider audience. In wishing the graduates well in their future engagement with the project, Ms. Joan Russell, CEO of Co. Cork VEC and Chairperson of the National Steering Committee charged with directing the project, said that those involved in pioneering Instructional Intelligence in the classroom would be leading "a transformation in teaching and learning" in Ireland.

## Professor Barrie Bennett

Professor Bennett has emerged as one of the world's leading proponents of Instructional Intelligence, having devoted much of his life to researching the ideas and principles that inform the theory as a whole. Professor Bennett has written and lectured extensively on the theme of teacher thinking/learning/action focused on instructional practices - how teachers acquire an instructional repertoire, how they extend it, integrate it, and what effects this practice has on student learning (pre-school to adult). He is also interested in educational change and has argued that the success of Instructional Intelligence as a project depends on systemic change, involving all of the partners including the DES, principals/ school leaders and across the primary and post-primary sectors. But aside from his undoubted academic prowess, the personality and character of Professor Bennett, together with his passionate commitment to the moral integrity of his ideas, have been central to the manner in which teachers have reacted so positively to Instructional Intelligence.

## What is Instructional Leadership?

So what is meant by the term “Instructional Leadership”? The term relates to the extent to which teachers can lead learning in the classroom through being “instructionally intelligent”. In its literal sense, this notion relates to the extent to which teachers are “intelligent” about their instructional behaviour; or in other words, the manner in which teachers consciously or overtly modify their instructional actions so as to maximise the impact on student learning. More broadly, the theory may be defined as the conscious and deliberate utilisation by the teacher of a range of interventions or teacher actions categorised as skills, tactics and strategies that impact positively on student learning in the classroom, based on extensive research into how students learn. In addition, the theory fosters in teachers a greater awareness of how their actions can impact on critical factors or concepts that affect student learning, such as motivation, novelty, authenticity, safety and accountability. Furthermore, teachers who are instructionally intelligent are acquainted with the extent to which learning may be affected by a range of instructional organisers such as diverse learning styles, multiple intelligences, brain research, ethnicity, gender or “at risk” environments.

Collectively, the integration of skills, tactics, strategies, concepts and organisers may be defined as pedagogy. While skills, tactics and strategies may be classified or defined as discrete groupings, the ability of the teacher to weave these processes together in a thoughtful manner so as to create a more powerful learning environment constitutes what Bennett characterises as the art of teaching. In order to develop a greater appreciation of the potential of Instructional Intelligence, it may be useful to look at each of these categories in more detail.

## Instructional Skills

Skills may be classified as those instructional actions that a teacher uses to enhance learning that are not, of themselves, complex or research-based, but serve to increase the chances that more complex instructional processes are successful. Let us consider some examples. Asking questions is a skill that teachers engage in constantly. Yet research indicates that many teachers do not frame questions effectively. As Bennett argues, by choosing a respondent from a group of students who raise their hands to answer a question, the teacher can only be sure that the student who responded knew the answer, and cannot be as sure about those who did not raise a hand. A more effective approach is to ask students to think about a question before discussing it with a partner. Such an approach involves every student, thus heightening accountability, while also enabling them to rehearse an answer, thus increasing safety. By choosing students randomly, having allowed them time to think, teachers can “check for understanding” (also a skill) more confidently. Other skills include allowing students appropriate wait-time as they formulate answers to questions, sharing the objective of lessons with class groups, and linking learning with students’ past experiences.

## Instructional Tactics

Tactics are more powerful interventions than skills. A tactic may be defined as an action used to enrich or strengthen the application of a strategy. Examples of tactical interventions include the employment of “Think-Pair-Share” or “brainstorming”, but a particularly powerful tactic is the employment of a graphic

or visual organizer to enable students to learn. For example, the use of a Venn diagram might be thought of as traditionally the preserve of the Maths class. Yet, as a means of helping students to understand the similarities and differences between Hitler, Stalin and Mussolini in a History lesson, it can be a very effective visual device. Many different types of graphic organisers exist which can be applied to various subject areas and enable students to go beyond text or notes-based resources to learn effectively.

## Instructional Strategies

Strategies represent the most powerful and complex teacher-led intervention in the classroom. While skills drive tactics, skills and tactics together drive strategies. Strategies are usually grounded in theory and research and involve a number of related steps. Examples include co-operative learning/groupwork, concept attainment and team teaching. It is instructive to observe that while many teachers try to incorporate a form of groupwork into their lessons, Bennett observes that teachers should be aware that there is extensive research into the effectiveness of groupwork that suggests that the strategy can be counter-productive if applied wrongly. He cites the work of brothers Roger and David Johnson of the University of Minnesota who have devoted many years to the theme of co-operative learning.

## Instructional Concepts

Bennett contends that tactics, skills and strategies constitute what teachers “do” in the classroom. Concepts and organisers cannot be done, but by bearing them in mind and understanding their importance, teachers can do things to make them come alive. Let us consider the notion of concepts first. Concepts may be defined as “lenses” that enable teachers to understand how, when and where to apply and integrate skills, tactics and strategies. For instance when teachers frame questions effectively (skill) and use tactics such as “Think-pair share”, they are invoking such concepts as student accountability and safety. When teachers take time to relate the learning to students’ experiences (skill), they are helping to make the students’ learning more novel and authentic, as well as promoting student motivation.

## Instructional Organisers

Organisers are frameworks or bodies of research that assist teachers in organising an array of skills, tactics and strategies into a coherent set of teaching methods. They are the lenses that clarify or enhance thought about how we instruct. Organisers increase teacher wisdom about the teaching and learning process, based on the needs and inclinations of the learner. For example, by appealing to students’ intelligences other than the traditional logical-mathematical and linguistic, teachers can devise tactics and strategies that can powerfully influence student learning. Similarly, emerging research on the human brain and on diverse learning styles can also inform approaches to more effective instructional practices.

## Why investigate Instructional Leadership?

Therefore, it is the conscious and informed integration of these five areas that constitutes instructional intelligence. Bennett argues that teachers need to move from being tacitly skilled in a limited number of instructional methods to being explicitly skilled in a higher number of instructional methods so as to

increase learning and to facilitate teachers in differentiating their instruction to meet diverse students' diverse needs. He cites David Perkins: "It is an everyday observation that often people do not develop robust intelligent behaviours in areas where they have a great deal of experience. We do not automatically learn from experience, even extended experiences. For instance, people play chess or bridge for years without ever getting better at it". Bennett characterises as a "tragic flaw" the notion that our deep knowledge and passion for our subject is all that we need to foster effective learning. He refers to such a view as naïve and urges teachers to rethink their instructional repertoire in terms of how they engage students, arguing that there is an ethical imperative on teachers to lead learning more effectively by being more conscious of their instructional intelligence.

## Recent Developments

Professor Bennett has now commenced work with two further cohorts of teachers who will, over the next two years, explore the ideas briefly outlined in this article and attempt to apply them in the classroom. For the first time, those schools participating include some from outside the vocational sector. Youthreach centres and Further Education colleges are also involved from within the sector. As Bennett strongly maintains, the successful implementation of Instructional Leadership in the classroom can only be realised by structured, systemic process of change, thus necessarily encompassing other partners in the education process in Ireland. The formulation of a Steering Committee under the astute guidance of Joan Russell, who has done so much to give vision and leadership to the project to date, has worked hard to provide a framework to support the foundations laid by Professor Bennett to date. This group has distilled the key principles of Instructional Leadership into a syllabus comprised of fourteen modules. It is intended that these modules will enable graduates from the IVEA-led training sessions to lead the introduction of Instructional Leadership in a structured manner at local level, whether in their own schools or on a regional basis. It is envisaged that the empowerment of graduates to facilitate the engagement of other teachers with the programme will be a model effective continuous professional development in the future. It is further intended that the programme will be extended to teachers in the primary sector so that the full richness of the programme will impact on student learning across the full spectrum of the student's school experience.

## The Launch of the Instructional Leadership Programme



Minister Quinn chats to students from Athy College and their teacher, Ms. Deirdre Murphy, at the launch of the ILP project.

A further key feature of the Steering Committee's work has been the development of a website, [www.instructionalleadership.ie](http://www.instructionalleadership.ie). This website hosts support material for each of the fourteen modules in the programme, as well as a range of other resources, including video clips, lesson plans, PowerPoint presentations and articles. The website will be constantly updated and developed and will remain a key resource for teachers. A particular highlight of the development of both the programme and the website to date has been the recognition and acknowledgement afforded to it by the Minister himself who formally launched the website and module descriptors document at a memorable ceremony in Tullow in March 2012.

## IVEA partnership with NUI Galway: Post-Graduate Diploma in Leading Learning

Third level providers of initial teacher education have also expressed interest in how the programme can benefit their sector. The School of Education in NUI Galway have been particularly active in that regard and have collaborated with the Steering Committee in producing a template for a post-graduate diploma which will be offered from autumn 2012. This diploma will be based on the key principles espoused in both the Professor Bennett-led training seminars for teachers and the modules prepared by the Steering Committee and launched by the Minister. This development is a source of particular satisfaction for the Steering Committee and offers further confirmation of how well regarded the programme in the sector is as a means of genuinely improving learning and teaching in our schools.

## Conference

On the weekend of 12/13 October 2012, the first annual conference of the Instructional Leadership Programme will be held in the Mount Wolseley Hotel in Tullow, with the theme of the conference being: "Opening Classroom Doors – Instructional Leadership: Nurturing Excellence in Teaching & Learning." Amongst the guest speakers will be the Chief Inspector of the DES Inspectorate, Dr. Harold Hislop, while the focus of the conference will be on the role of Instructional Leadership in advancing and complementing school self-evaluation and the methodology of team teaching. It is to be hoped that the conference will become an enduring feature of the support offered to teachers by the Steering Committee, with plans for a future international conference also currently being considered.

## Conclusion

The vocational sector can be justifiably proud of its role in spearheading this pioneering project. Not only has it responded to the need for provision of sustained and high quality Continuous Professional Development to the teaching community, but it has done so in the context of radical systemic change focused on how students learn.

The opportunity to extend that vision and achieve systemic change must not be missed. The current context of change in education policy provides an opportunity for Instructional Leadership to flourish, not least because its core focus on improvement in learning and teaching dovetails neatly with the current educational policy agenda at government level. The mission of transforming teachers from a state of, to paraphrase Bennett, "accidental adequacy" to "conscious competency" is a worthy one. The vocational sector is well placed to continue on this mission.



# Post Graduate Diploma in Leading Learning

*IVEA has partnered with NUIG to offer you the opportunity to undertake a Post Graduate Diploma in Leading Learning.*

Applications are now invited for the two year programme, commencing in October 2012. Participation is restricted initially to Graduates from Cohort 1 of the Instructional Leadership Programme. The cost of the Diploma in Leading Learning is €1,500 per year.

## COURSE CONTENT

Module 1	Learning Theories
Module 2	Facilitation of Learning
Module 3	Collaborative Practice
Module 4	Teaching & Learning
Module 5	Leading Learning
Module 6	Enquiry based practice

*These modules will take place in NUIG on the following dates:*

### Weekend 1

19th October 2012	7.00pm – 10.00pm
20th October 2012	9.30am – 3.30pm

### Weekend 2

16th November 2012	7.00pm – 10.00pm
17th November 2012	9.30am – 3.30pm

### Weekend 3

25th January 2013	7.00pm – 10.00pm
26th January 2013	9.30am – 3.30pm

### Weekend 4

22nd February 2013	7.00pm – 10.00pm
23rd February 2013	9.30am – 3.30pm

### Weekend 5

22nd March 2013	7.00pm – 10.00pm
23rd March 2013	9.30am – 3.30pm

## Assessment:

Learning will be assessed through portfolio work, case studies and presentations. Participants will also be required to engage in on-line learning through [www.instructionalleadership.ie](http://www.instructionalleadership.ie)

## National Conference – Instructional Leadership

**"Opening Classroom Doors – Instructional Leadership: Nurturing Excellence in Teaching & Learning".**

**Mount Wolseley Hotel, Spa & Golf Resort, Tullow, Co. Carlow  
12th & 13th October 2012**

### PROGRAMME:

#### 12th October 2012

- 5.30pm Tea/Coffee & Registration
- 6.00pm Steering Committee Presentation – "The Big Picture" – Ms. Joan Russell, Chairperson of the IL National Steering Committee
- 6.30pm Key Note Speakers – "Driving the Effective School – IL as the foundation for Self Evaluation & Team Teaching" Dr. Harold Hislop, Chief Inspector, DoESk. Followed by Plenary Session
- 8.30pm Dinner

#### 13th October 2012

- 9.00am Registration
- 9.30am Accessing the Instructional Leadership website & Moodle
- 10.15am Workshop – "Reflecting on Instructional Leadership in our Schools" Concurrent Workshops a) for teachers b) for school management
- 11.15am Tea/Coffee
- 11.45am Concurrent Workshops - Instructional Leadership & Team Teaching\*\* Instructional Leadership & Self Evaluation\*\*
- \*\*Participants are required to choose the workshop of their choice at time of booking of Conference
- 1.00pm Lunch
- 2.00pm Workshops – continued from the a.m. Participants will attend the same workshop in the morning and afternoon
- 3.30pm Plenary & Close of Conference

## CONTACT DETAILS:

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