



Glenart College: Promoting Learner Voice to Impact Cultural Change

WB Yeats describes teaching as “not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire”. The traditional perception of the student as a passive recipient in the educational process no longer fits the twenty-first century model of teaching and learning or educational purpose.

When our school first embarked upon our journey with the Learner Voice project we were determined that our mission would be to remain true to the title concept and give meaningful voice to all learners within our school community, both staff and students alike. Providing space and opportunity for learner influence in the educational process were the key goals.

Within the Framework for Junior Cycle and Looking At Our Schools 2016 we identified an opportunity for the achievement of these goals. We decided to focus on teacher/student co-creation of success criteria. This presented an ideal platform from which to develop classroom practice providing for genuine student input in the teaching and learning process.

The Instructional Leadership Programme has been pivotal in the development of pedagogical practice at Glenart in recent years. Our stage in this journey lends itself ideally to the embedding of the facilitation of learner voice. The pedagogical toolkit, various skills, tactics and strategies, that we have developed through the programme, amply supports the facilitation and encouragement of learner voice in the classroom.

Our target group were first year students and their teachers. During the launch stage of the Learner Voice Project, we conducted a survey. Following an analysis of the data we identified specific goals; to give meaningful voice to all learners within our school community; to provide space and opportunity for learner influence in the educational process.

Through discussion we had previously identified that collaboration is an essential cog in the wheel of teacher support. A culture of peer observation has already been established in Glenart College, our IL graduate teachers make themselves available to observe and/or be observed in the use of specific IL strategies. This project is travelling as similar journey. We collaborated and supported teachers through the facilitation of IL workshops and through individual teacher support, provided by the school’s IL team. We set up an online staff reflective journal where teachers share experiences, observations, concerns and advice with colleagues. We have found that this tool also helps with maintaining the energy and momentum of the project and of course is in line with the best practice of professional reflection.

For us, this project represents the beginning of what we hope will give rise to a sustained change in culture in our school where learner is given space, voice, audience and influence (Lundy) . The challenge is considerable. We are conscious of a tendency towards tokenism when promoting student voice in education, but we are determined to avoid this outcome. We are influenced and inspired by Jesse Jackson, “Inclusion [of learner voice] is not a matter of political correctness. It is the key to growth”.

We are in the early stages but thus far the response has been positive from both teachers and students alike which is both encouraging and energising as we look ahead to the next phase of the project.