

St David's Secondary

Instructional Leadership - A Case Study - St. David's Co-Educational Secondary School, Greystones, Co. Wicklow

St. David's was one of the first voluntary secondary schools in the country to join the National Instructional Leadership Programme when the ETBI, or IVEA as it was back then, first invited JMB schools to participate. In 2011 the Principal and two teachers signed up as members of Cohort 3 and graduated in March 2013.

As participants in the programme we found ourselves to be deeply engaged with the material from the very beginning of the course. From day one a fascinating delivery on fishbone diagrams and their potential as graphic organizers, by recent graduates, had us hooked! The course facilitation by Barrie Bennett was truly inspirational and we eagerly digested all the material. Despite an enthusiasm to begin 'playing' with the IL skills we were acquiring, we took on board the sage advice to spend the necessary time considering and reflecting on the use of the skills before eventually beginning to put them into practice with our students.

Following advice from Barrie Bennett we tentatively began by doing a presentation on Bloom's Taxonomy. This was done according to IL principles using group work and placemats with two of our own classes. The students participated with enthusiasm and this gave us more confidence to begin preparing lesson plans in our subject areas using the concepts of accountability, inclusion, safe environment and mutual respect. We narrowed our focus to the use of the tactic Think-Pair-Share and the strategy of the five basic elements of effective group work as the basis of our approach. We also began to pay more attention to our framing of questions and to our effective use of wait time when asking questions of our students. As time passed we came to reflect on how our preparation for class had changed, how we were now more conscious of the quality of our teaching and our students' learning in class. This just seemed to come naturally with what we were doing. Most of our conversation outside class, in the canteen and staffroom was now taken up with the IL programme. This drew more of our colleagues into the process as the sense of curiosity with 'this new programme the lads are on about', gained momentum. We now found ourselves regularly visiting each other's classroom when the timetable permitted and observing and analysing. The geography of our classrooms had changed also, no longer straight lines of desks but now a permanent layout of combined desks that facilitated Think-Pair-Share and small group work. We now felt we were moving CASE STUDY from being mechanical users of IL in the classroom to being more practised. As our confidence grew we decided to do something different from the IL programme; we did a Teams Games Tournament with one of our classes. Twelve students participated and we also invited four of our teacher colleagues who were eager to see IL in operation to The Instructional Leadership Team who graduated in 2013 Ciarán Ó Muirgheasa, Mary O' Doherty (Principal) and Gerry Maloney participate. Thus we had four teams of four with a teacher in each group, taking part. Collectively we all agreed to do this outside regular school hours in order to give ourselves plenty of time for the first attempt. The outcome was very positive with both students and teachers commenting favourably on how good a Teams Games Tournament was for purposes of revision. In the aftermath of this we started to plan for our first CPD presentation on Instructional Leadership to our teacher colleagues.

This took place at the end of the 2012/2013 academic year. It followed the same outline as a presentation, which we had initially made to incoming Cohort 4 students in March 2013, last assignments as students in Cohort 3. It was an overall introduction to Instructional Leadership, modelled on and using in as far as possible, Instructional Leadership techniques. The level of engagement by teacher colleagues was excellent and was followed up by requests for more information. With the generous permission of Barrie Bennett we were able to make all of the material from the IL Course Sessions as well as digital copies of 'Beyond Monet' and another IL Textbook 'Classroom Management' available to our teacher colleagues via our shared folders on the school server. At this point also we started an IL library by purchasing a number of textbooks which we began to lend to colleagues following IL 'drop in' sessions which we continue to run after school on Thursdays. This was followed at the start of the 2013/2014 academic year with another presentation to teacher colleagues on Bloom's Taxonomy. This presentation was also attended by primary teachers from some of our feeder schools and a member of the PDST. The response to this presentation was again positive and encouraging and the material from our presentations to colleagues was also made available on the school server.

We then became a little more structured with our planning for the delivery of the IL Programme. In the last academic year we made a presentation to all first year classes on Bloom's Taxonomy and gave a follow up pack to all first year teachers where by Bloom's Taxonomy could be made subject specific and integrated into the teaching and learning process in classrooms. The feedback has been very positive, with many students commenting on how understanding the level of thinking required to answer a particular question, helped them with time management and gave them greater insight into the depth and quality required for answers to different questions. As our contribution to open night last year we staged a Teams Games Tournament, featuring a second year Business Studies class. Our next step is to include a number of Three Step Interviews.

We have introduced a module for our Transition Year students with the working title of 'Learning to learn – an introduction to the Instructional Leadership Programme', covering topics such as Collaborative Skills and Effective Group Work, Bloom's Taxonomy, Different types of Thinking, the Three Step Interview and finally Graphic Organisers, across different subject areas, with particular emphasis on Ranking Ladders and Fishbone Diagrams.

In addition to the above, as our delivery of the IL programme has become more structured, we have asked all teacher colleagues to focus on framing of questions and effective use of wait time as an IL priority in their classrooms. The physical layout of classrooms has changed to facilitate the use of constructive group work. Co-operative learning skills as well as social skills are reinforced in lessons. Teachers have purchased class sets of 'show me boards' for use as place mats. Posters setting out the levels of thinking in Bloom's Taxonomy are displayed in classrooms as are posters on the effective use of 'wait time'. IL resources are now shared with colleagues from other second level schools in our area who are graduates of the IL Programme and exchange visits with these colleagues in the other schools have also began to happen. Our most famous IL guest to date has been Professor Bennett himself who visited St David's during a private holiday to Dublin in March 2014.

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