



### INTRODUCTION



*Colleagues,*

Time is moving very quickly; it is hard to believe that we are in single digits in terms of the number of weeks in looking forward to the summer holidays.

We have had a busy year in the Instructional Leadership Programme, celebrating our 10th Birthday in October, we hosted the National Conference *Instructional Leadership Programme; Supporting Practice and Policy*, we celebrated with Cohort 9 on their graduation in October 2018 and we welcomed Cohort 12 in March 2019. We were delighted to work with our colleagues in five teacher education centres, as part of a pilot programme to introduce the ILP to the primary sector.

We are currently finalising the plans for the Senior & Middle Leaders Conference on June 17th & 18th, *The Dialogic Classroom: Instructional Leadership Activating Learner Voice*. Dr Paula Flynn, Assistant Professor DCU, will present on student voice through the lens of inclusion, Dr Domhnall Fleming, UCC, will present to us on student voice and Irish educational policy. Mr Norman Emmerson, Director, NCCA will tell us about the European Project he spearheads, Bridge to Learn, and we will launch our Learner Voice Project, in partnership with the NCCA. Places are limited to 120, so be sure to book early at [admin@instructionalleadership.ie](mailto:admin@instructionalleadership.ie)

I hope you enjoy this edition of the newsletter, packed with reflections, articles and photos.

I wish to thank all who have contributed to this edition of the newsletter and congratulate you on the leadership you are showing in leading teaching and learning. As always, we welcome contributions for the newsletter, be it an article or photos. The next edition will publish in the autumn and all contributions can be forwarded to [newsletter@instructionalleadership.ie](mailto:newsletter@instructionalleadership.ie)

Wishing you all a happy and safe summer,

Le meas,

*Joan Russell*

Chairperson National IL Steering Committee  
Director for School Support Services (ETBI)

## Complexity of Teaching and Learning

In this brief article I will start by illustrating the complexity of the teaching and learning process and why being an effective teacher is one of the most complex, demanding and important occupations. From that illustration, I'll then argue the extent to which we should be somewhat skeptical of our classroom and system-wide assessment/evaluation data.

**Classroom Complexity** Every day, 20 to 30 plus students walk through our classroom doors and they bring with them variables over which we have no control. For example, their genders, their culture, their race, their socio-economic status, their different intelligences, learning styles (in terms of being visual, auditory, tactile, kinesthetic learners), the extent our students live in at-risk environments. I know in Canada, medical research reports that about 1 in 6 students live in at-risk environments (they experience one or more of the following...mental abuse, physical abuse, sexual abuse, witnessing violence, drug and alcohol abuse, being a child in a home with a single parent, living in poverty, in subsidized housing. The issue is not the single parent. The issue is the merging of all three. Some may have autism, may be gifted and gifted with autism, have fetal alcohol syndrome...and I can go on, but I'll stop. You get the idea. What other occupation has to deal with those issues for seven hours a day plus plan and mark after and before those seven hours? My guess is that Ireland would be very similar to Canada.

**Trusting Assessment/Evaluation Data** Now if we add having to teach say between 300 and 400 outcomes in about 180 days while dealing with the variables in the paragraph above (and dealing with classroom management) we must ask ourselves as professionals, "How effective am I in the design of powerful learning environments?" Few occupation are as complex, demanding and important as teaching students...on an on-going somewhat relentless time frame.

My guess is that you all agree that you'd want your own children (if you have one or more) to have effective teachers. Most parents do not want a mediocre teacher (and we most likely don't want a mediocre electrician, eye surgeon...or even a mediocre cup of coffee or hair stylist.) So I will ask, "Do you believe students should, at times, work in groups? Do you have your students working in groups?" Research on effective group work shows

that if done properly it is one of most effective approaches to push higher level thinking; if done improperly it is one of the least effective approaches. So if you believe working in groups is worthwhile, how would you know your group work is effective? If you don't know, then is it possible you are designing group work that is less effective. Don't feel bad here...if you want to be good at the violin...take lessons and practice; effective group work is no different.

We also know that the more complex the thinking, the longer students retain information. Additionally, most students also prefer questions that push more complex thinking (like analysis, synthesis and evaluation); they do not enjoy recall/comprehension level questions. That said, recall and comprehension are very important...but if we leave it at that level thinking, then we working against more effective learning. So thinking of your classroom questions do you own a taxonomy of thinking such as Bloom's or Solo? (I prefer Bloom's as all outcomes in the industrialized world tend to be designed around Bloom and colleagues work.) Are you aware of the complexity of questions you ask; do your students understand the different levels of thinking? Tangentially, we also know that giving students time to think before asking them to share their thinking increases the length of their response, the complexity of their response and their feeling of being safe. They are also more likely to experience success publically if they get a chance to share with a partner before being asked to share publically. Primary students and my doctoral students all prefer time to think first and to share with a partner before being asked to share publically.

**In summary**, given the complexity of the teaching and learning process, and the need for us to be highly competent in the classroom, then how many variables can we afford to 'take for granted' before we question the extent to which our assessment/evaluation data may be somewhat suspect? Ineffective group work, low-level questions, no wait time, not engaging all students to think when framing questions, low levels of safety etc., etc., would certainly suggest we take a closer look at how we design and enact powerful learning environments. Perhaps we need to focus more on teacher self-regulation/self assessment (where we start to assess ourselves) and not only the current focus on student self-regulation/self assessment.

*Professor Barrie Bennett*



Pictured above is Cohort 12 who started session 1 of the programme in March 2019.

## What Twitter is saying about ILP

Taking Instructional Leadership to the digital space! Placemat and Fishbone Diagram through IT



Great end to session 3 of the @ILProgramme today getting to share best practice with colleagues through delivering our lesson plans! Thanks to @ETBInland and Barrie Bennett! #collaboration #bestpractice #peerlearning #instructionalleadership #bloom #equalityvoice #equalparticipation



What does effective group work look like -- sound like -- and feel like to Rang Caoithe? @Kingwoodcote Students used a T Chart to explore all of their ideas! #groupwork #collaborate #JCEnglish #ILProgramme #JitEnglish



A group of our staff continuing their training at the Instructional Leadership programme in Carlow. Lots of collaboration and learning going on! @ILProgramme @ETBInland



@ETBInCC @GetVisualArt @ILProgramme Great Mindmaps from First Years on the Art Elements #Creative



Putting a fun spin on revision with a Teams Game Tournament on 'Romeo and Juliet' @ILProgramme merging cooperation and competition for a fun filled lesson! @StOliversCC



Students using think-pair-share for placemat, fishbone and Venn diagrams to learn about rock types this morning in Learning Support! #GeographyRocks #teamwork @ILProgramme



Milling to Music from @ILProgramme Get students out of their seats, reflect on questions silently -- pause -- and share thoughts with partner nearest them. Share to group! Thanks @Hozier for the soundtrack!



Working on co-operation and teamwork while having lots of fun on a gray Thursday morning

@ILProgramme @WeAreGunguis @manshi00year





## A reflection of a PME graduate of the programme

*Niamh was an undergraduate in UCC when she graduated from cohort 6 in 2016. She is currently in her second year of a PME.*

I am currently a second-year student in the Professional Masters in Education (PME). At the time of engaging with the Instructional Leadership Programme I was a second-year student in my primary degree of History and Economics. Not long out of the post-primary school setting as a student!

My initial thoughts when I was first asked to be involved in a 'pilot' with the Instructional Leadership Programme were ones characterised by trepidation! I was one of two undergraduates offered the opportunity, and I didn't know the other undergraduate, Ciara, at all at that stage. However, on reflection I think the biggest worry was how would I deal with being in a room full of teachers, my only experience of teachers at that stage was as a student in a student to teacher relationship, and now I was expected to engage with teachers at a whole new level!

I remember going to the first session in Carlow and the first fear dissipated quite quickly, Ciara felt exactly as I did so we were kindred spirits and very quickly became firm friends. However, the fear of working at this new level with teachers took much longer to manage, I didn't have the experience of teaching, I didn't have the language of teaching and I knew I wouldn't have the opportunity to practice what it was that we were learning in Carlow and the 'teachers' would! How would I keep up!

But 'keep up' I did, as I progressed through the sessions I made some good friends who helped me, equally the opportunities that we were given to plan and deliver lessons, as part of the programme had a significant impact on my confidence and afforded me to more fully engage with the learning.

I am certainly not saying that it was easy, it was hard going right throughout the four intensive sessions, as I developed new pedagogical skills, engaged with the science behind effective pedagogy and developed a new language that allowed me to reflect and share my experience and my ideas.

As I progressed to become a first-year PME student the

IL Programme stood as an invaluable source of comfort and support to me. As a student teacher I stood in front of a class group in September 2017 feeling confident in knowing that I could plan an effective lesson, I understood effective group work, I had a deep knowledge of many of the fundamental Educational theory's such as Blooms Taxonomy or Maslows Hierarchy of Needs thus allowing me to further develop my implementation of these theories into my classroom practice, I could effectively frame a question and I had a 'toolkit' of pedagogical tactics from which I could draw from to make lessons more engaging and less passive.

I found the *Madeline Hunter Lesson Plan* Template (7 Steps) as espoused by Professor Barrie Bennett of immense assistance when it was my turn to create my own lesson plans I was able to pull from college lectures but also notes in which I took during my time completing during the IL conferences. Other aspects of IL such as the appropriate uses of different forms of graphic organisers and the large number of situations in which they can be implemented in quickly and easily was of immeasurable assistance to me, not just in my teaching, but also as a PME student.

I also found that talking to other teachers throughout my time completing the course was highly beneficial as I was able to see what they were using in the classroom and find out more about how they are implementing what they are learning throughout the IL programme. I seemed to be learning formally in the workshops, but also learning in the social settings in the evenings.

The whole experience gave me invaluable knowledge and skills that have made my first year of the PME so much easier, the language being used in lectures and in tutorials was familiar to me and the confidence I developed assisted me in opening up other opportunities to develop my teaching skills and enhance classroom experiences for me and for my students.

I know that having completed this course will most certainly stand to me during PME 2 but also in my future as a teacher. It was a truly wonderful and meaningful learning experience.

*Niamh*

PME Student, Year 2,  
University College, Cork



**Senior & Middle School Leaders Conference 2019**  
**Monday 17th & Tuesday 18th June 2019**  
**Mount Wolseley Hotel,**  
**Tullow, Co. Carlow.**

## **The Dialogic Classroom:**

### **Instructional Leadership Activating Learner Voice**

The role of students as active agents in their own learning is to the fore in educational discourse, nationally and internationally. This conference will explore theory, policy and practice to embed a culture of authentic student voice and create rich learning experiences in the classroom.

#### **Agenda**

##### **Monday 17th June**

|         |   |
|---------|---|
| 9.30am  | Registration  |
| 10.00am | Session 1: An Overview of the Instructional Leadership Programme<br><i>This session is for Senior &amp; Middle School Leaders that are not involved in the IL Programme</i> |
| 10.30am | Welcome and Opening Remarks<br>Ms. Joan Russell<br>Director of Schools (ETBI) & Chairperson of Instructional Leadership Steering Committee                                  |
| 11.00am | Keynote and Workshop<br>Dr. Paula Flynn<br>Assistant Professor in the School of Inclusion and Special Education in Dublin City University (DCU) Institute of Education      |
| 1.00pm  | Lunch   |
| 2.00pm  | "Bridge to Learning" - Overview of Programme<br>Mr. Norman Emerson<br>Director of Assessment National Council for Curriculum and Assessment                                 |
| 4.15pm  | School Presentations<br>Followed by Panel Discussion<br>Closing Remarks   |
| 7.00pm  | BBQ   |

#### **Agenda**

##### **Tuesday 18th June**

|         |  |
|---------|--|
| 9.30am  | Registration   |
| 10.00am | Policy and Student Voice<br>Dr. Domhnall Fleming<br>Followed by Panel Discussion   |
| 12.30pm | Invitation to Participant in a Project on Student Voice, Facilitated by the Instructional Leadership Programme in Partnership with NCCA<br>Ms. Joan Russell<br>Director of Schools (ETBI) & Chairperson of Instructional Leadership Steering Committee |
| 1.00pm  | Close of Conference and Lunch  |



**€180 pp**

**Conference Details**  
**120 Places available**  
**Cost includes full access to the Conference,**  
**resources, lunches, 1 x night B&B and**  
**BBQ on Monday 17th June**



**Registration Details**  
**To Register your interest and to**  
**request an application form**  
**please email [admin@instructionalleadership.ie](mailto:admin@instructionalleadership.ie)**

[www.instructionalleadership.ie](http://www.instructionalleadership.ie)



**@ILProgramme**



## Instructional Leadership and Learner Voice

The term ‘student voice’ has come to the fore in recent discourse about education in the Irish context. On a broad level, this relates to ideas about the rights of young people, participatory democracy and active citizenship. An important basis for this stance is the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, which stipulates that children have the right to express a view and the right to have the view given due weight. In a report on PISA findings in relation to student wellbeing, the OECD noted in 2017 that ‘schools are the first place where children experience society in all its facets, and those experiences can have a profound influence on students’ attitudes and behaviour in life’. In this regard, school plays a vital role in the cultivation in students of positive attitudes and values relating to democracy and citizenship. The recent public demonstrations about climate change by students across Europe provide evidence of how school can provide a space for student to articulate their developing views about politics and society- to give voice to their concerns and views.

However, the discourse around student voice is also related to learning and teaching in the classroom. Various definitions posited by researchers point to features such as dialogic teaching, student consultation and reflection, student agency, active and participative engagement by students, and co-construction by students and teachers of learning in the classroom. Much of the commentary on the theme of student voice argues that the genuine embedding of a culture of student voice in a school must begin with classroom experiences where students feel that they have a meaningful voice and sense of agency in attending to their own learning. In this way, student voice in schools moves beyond a form of student voice that is merely decorative or tokenistic towards a culture where young people’s voices are listened to, where their views are considered and where they are involved in decision-making processes.

The emergence of student voice as a topical issue in Irish education is not co-incidental- in many ways, it reflects the aspirations that inform the Framework for Junior Cycle (2015), which provides for an enhanced sense of agency for students. The Framework states that ‘the Junior Cycle will be underpinned by the further integration of formative assessment as a normal part of teaching and learning in classrooms. Formative assessment involves teachers and students reflecting on how learning is progressing and deciding next steps to ensure successful outcomes’ (Framework, p.29). The Framework also states that teachers will use the learning outcomes provided by the subject or short course specification as a starting point for planning a unit and to develop learning intentions and success criteria to be shared and discussed with their students.... As part of their daily practice, teachers will continue to assess students’ learning by observing and listening as students carry out tasks and by considering how they respond to questions. Teachers will use the learning intentions and success criteria as the basis for providing feedback to help students plan their next steps in learning. Students will also be encouraged to reflect on how they are progressing in their own learning and provide feedback to their teachers. In developing the capacity for self-management and self-awareness, students will approach their learning more confidently and will be better prepared to meet the challenges of life beyond school.’ (Framework, p.36). These excerpts from the Framework, with the emphases on allowing for student voice (highlighted in my italics), demonstrate how the Junior Cycle classroom is envisaged as a place where learning, teaching and assessment are grounded in the meaningful realisation of student voice and agency.

These aspirations depend on teachers having a conviction at heart that student voice is central to effective pedagogy and having the necessary pedagogical or instructional repertoire to facilitate that voice being heard and acted upon. In this regard, those teachers engaged with the Instructional Leadership Programme are well-placed to meet the challenge of fostering learning environments where student voice can flourish. Many of the skills, tactics and strategies which teachers have explored and modelled over the last ten years since the inception of the programme are implicitly focused on enabling and activating student voice. Such interventions as ‘think-pair-share’, negotiating the learning intentions of a lesson, checking for understanding, framing questions effectively, responding appropriately to different types of student responses to questions, allowing ‘wait-time’, designing different types of co-operative learning opportunities, structuring lessons around ‘concept attainment’ or ‘concept formation strategies’ are all designed to allow for student voice to be realised. Equally, much of the conversations that have inspired so many teachers at Instructional Leadership courses and conferences are animated by discourse that relates to student voice- such as how to make students accountable for their learning while ensuring that they feel ‘safe’; what brain research can tell us about how students learn; how ‘inductive’ and ‘deductive’ thinking can inform how we shape learning; and how research such as Gene Hall’s ‘Concerns-Based Adoption Model’ can help us approach changes to our thinking and practice, among many other themes.

But perhaps the culture that has been fostered by and among ‘Instructional Leadership’ teachers is what empowers them most to engage with student voice in the classroom- a culture where all teachers perceive themselves both as learners and leaders of learning, in their classrooms and in their dialogue and collaboration with colleagues, both in the classroom and the staffroom, both formally and informally, where the classroom door is open and where the inclination to learn with and from other teachers is informed by a professional and ethical imperative to ensure that the diverse needs of diverse students are met as fully as possible.

The forthcoming conference for senior and middle school leaders will represent a further departure in the evolution of the Instructional Leadership Programme, where the alignment of ‘Instructional Leadership’ and student voice will be explored through the focus of ‘the dialogic classroom’. The conference will include presentations and workshops with some prominent experts and advocates in the field of student voice. Dr Paula Flynn, Assistant Professor in the School of Inclusion and Special Education in the Institute of Education (Dublin City University), will provide a keynote address and act as a ‘critical friend’ to the proceedings of the conference. As well as her general interest and research in the field of student/ learner voice and children’s rights, Paula has a strong commitment to inclusion in education and society, and was the lead author/ researcher on an NCCA-funded national study from 2014 to 2017 aimed at determining how to embed a culture of listening and a sustainable response to student voices both in schools and education discourse nationally, which included a consultative process with students at post-primary level in the development of opportunities for curricular development. Paula’s research findings include reference to the impact of student voice on, among other factors, enhanced student-teacher relationships, more positive sense of association with or belonging to school and enhanced sense of student agency or power in terms of participation in school life, leadership and commitment to active citizenship. Paula’s elaboration on these and other themes should be of great interest to school leaders.

Furthermore, Norman Emerson, Director of Curriculum and Assessment at the NCCA, will facilitate a workshop at the conference relating to how Junior Cycle can support and give effect to student voice in the classroom. In addition, Norman will discuss his experience of a joint NCCA/ JCT Erasmus Plus collaborative project on the theme of student voice with teachers from Cork and Cavan Monaghan ETBs and colleagues from other European jurisdictions and will outline how the nature of that project and the experiences and insights gained by participants can help frame an approach to embedding student voice in schools. Norman will also explore how other aspects of the Framework, including the Key Skills and Wellbeing, relate to student voice. Dr Domnall Fleming of the School of Education at University College Cork will also present at the conference- as well as many years as a senior inspector in the Department of Education and Skills, Dr. Domhnall Fleming completed a doctoral thesis on the theme of student voice and is leading a module on the theme in UCC’s Master’s in Education programme. Domnall will frame his research findings in the context of policy developments over recent years from early childhood through to post-primary, thus providing a useful overarching frame of reference for student voice at system level.

It is to be hoped that the contribution of these speakers will lead to much reflection and discussion on how student voice can be harnessed to support powerful learning environments in our schools and classrooms, while also enhancing teachers’ sense of their own professional identity. The conference will also explore how the Instructional Leadership Programme can work towards ensuring that student voice will be sustained and supported so that it becomes more than just another policy ‘add-on’ but an integral part of practice. As a postscript, it is worth noting that the current NCCA-led senior cycle review entailed a nationwide series of focus group consultations with students over the last year as part of its school-based review phase. In this time, the views of some 2,000 students were elicited, with students in schools throughout the country engaged in vibrant discussions about how they learn, what aspects of junior and senior cycle they like most and least and what features they would like to see added or changed in any future model. It was a privilege to witness at first-hand the richness and honesty of the observations and insights offered by students and a timely reminder of the power of their own voices in shaping conversations about issues that affect them greatly- such as their own learning, their agency and their wellbeing. This power should usefully inform how we as teachers, school leaders and policy makers respond to ensuring that voice is heard.

*Gerard O’Sullivan*

Education Officer

National Council for Curriculum and Assessment



## Primary School Teachers Graduate From Instructional Leadership Trainers Programme

10 primary teachers attended but only 9 graduated the programme. Facilitated by Carrick on Shannon Education Centre, Cork Education Centre, Donegal Education Centre, Kilkenny Education Centre and Limerick Education Centre, these graduates form a pilot cohort which will promote the introduction of Instructional Leadership in primary schools throughout the country. Currently, they are developing a Summer Course for primary teachers, which will be delivered in July 2019.

The revision of the Junior Cycle at second level has generated a natural opening for IL in the primary sector. Primary teachers are eager to develop skills in their pupils that will prepare them for the project work, group interactions and presentations that presently characterise assessment in post-primary schools. Meeting with second level teachers of Cohort 10 during the stay in Carlow enabled the primary participants to understand the needs of teachers at second level and share professional ideas for future collaborative practice. Both sets of teachers were afforded the opportunity to show off their pedagogical chops when they taught IL-designed lessons to one another. Ideas were shared and many professional learning conversations were sparked over presentations as diverse as STEM Roller Coasters and Women in Sport in Ireland.



The graduation followed a second residential week of the Instructional Leadership course. Facilitators included Sarah Buckley, Tadhg Long and Maria O'Sullivan. Their infectious enthusiasm and effortless professionalism proved inspiring. Participants shared positive reports of integrating Instructional Intelligence methodologies and lesson design garnered from the initial week of the course in October 2018 to their current practice in primary classrooms. Interactive and child-centred tactics such as *Mill-to-Music* and *Snowball* had slotted easily into the primary teacher's repertoire, promoting an excitement for learning even among the youngest children.

Three sessions with Professor Barrie Bennett were enlightening. He introduced the participants to the 'Bump' system for classroom management. Professor Bennett also navigated the primary teachers through concept attainment and shared the delightfully whimsical *Weeple People*, which has been training the participants' pupils in inductive thinking ever since.

The participants were particularly taken with the IL instructors willingness to share content and resources, especially Professor Bennett. Making presentations, video lectures and publications freely available underlines the collaborative nature of IL as it





spreads through the primary system and will most definitely enhance the Summer Course.

Dr Carmen Druyen and Pierre Monier were on hand on the final day of the **Train the Trainers** course to guide participants through workshop preparation. The facilitators had spent many months in their native Germany shaping their presentation to cater exactly for the needs of the primary trainers. They shared tips on active learning approaches, developing competencies and effective time management. Their detailed workshop, interspersed with burst of humour, was greatly appreciated.

The graduates' challenge now is to adapt the Instructional Leadership Programme to the specific teaching and learning requirements of primary level. All course facilitators offered suggestions to this end, from introducing De Bono's Thinking Hats to Infants to integrating Bloom's Taxonomy while



framing questions to young children. Some graduates have already reported positive feedback from using tactics and strategies during staff meetings to enliven discussion around mandatory topics.

A further focus of the Summer Course will be policy integration using Instructional Leadership. Conor Mellon of the Teaching Council delivered a session to participants on the **Cosán** framework for Continuous Professional Development and the importance of reflective practice. These elements will be central for primary teachers moving towards conscious competence using IL methodologies. The **Looking At Our Primary School 2016** policy framework challenges all teachers to assume leadership roles. No doubt the Instructional Leadership Summer Course will provide primary teachers with the language, skills and confidence to become effective leaders of learning in their schools.

The parting sentiments of Professor Bennett reinforced this sense of teacher agency. He humbly described himself as as collector of educational ideas, which he imparts to teachers to make their own at their own pace and in their own way for the good of all learners. Spoiled by the hospitality of **Mount Wolseley** and the **ETBI**, the graduates now go forth with their respective Education Centres to enthusiastically follow his example.

*Sarah Larkin*

Milford National School













## Cohort 13

The Instructional Leadership Programme and the new cohort, Cohort 13 was scheduled to commence in October 2019. A decision was taken to defer the date of commencement of Cohort 13. Cohort 13 is now scheduled to commence in March 2020.

*Do you want to travel down memory lane  
and/or learn about the journey of the  
Instructional Leadership Programme?*

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