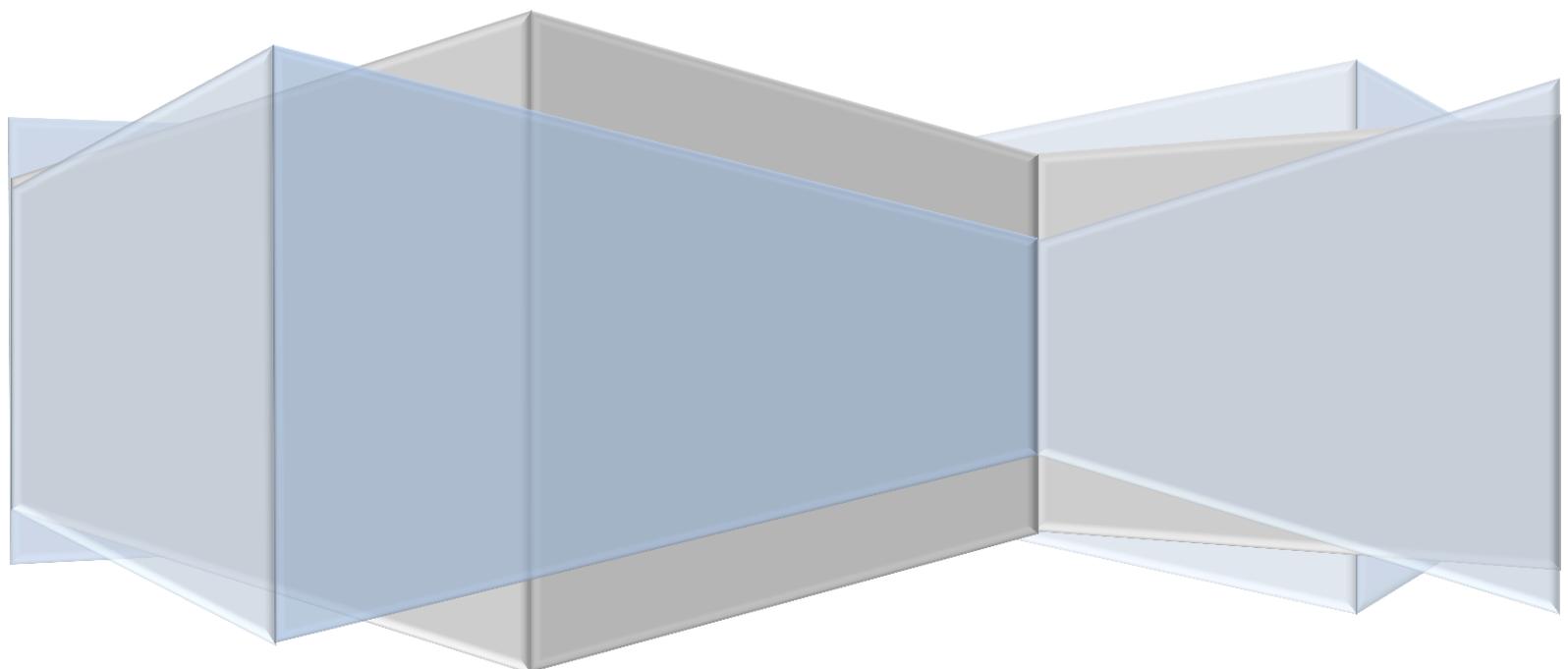**St Munchin's College**

# The Dissemination of Professional Learning Amongst Teachers in a Post-Primary School

## The Learning School Project 7

**September 2016**

**www.stmunchinscollege.ie**

## Section 1: Context and Rational

### 1.1.   Context

St Munchin's College is the Diocesan College for Limerick located on the banks of the River Shannon at Corbally. It has a current enrolment of 630 boys and a teaching staff of 44. The school was founded in 1796 and has seen many changes in its long history. Recently the school's first ever lay Principal was appointed and the school has completed an €8 million redevelopment project. The school has been active in developing its curriculum with the recent introduction of Technology and the Leaving Certificate Applied. It is actively engaged in the promotion of literacy and numeracy and school self-evaluation. A number of staff are currently studying for or have recently graduated with Masters qualifications in a variety of education related fields. The school currently operates a policy of mixed ability at first year. Classes are divided using the results of the entrance assessments which is the Drumcondra Reasoning Test. Mixed ability is maintained for most subject to Junior Cycle. The exceptions to this are Maths, Irish and Business Studies. At the end of third year students can choose between three routes:

> 1. Participate in the optional Transition Year Programme. This is the route selected by approximately 75% of the student cohort each year.
>
> 2. Participate in the Leaving Cert Applied Programme. This route is selected by a minority of the cohort, typically about 10%.
>
> 3. The remaining students progress directly to fifth year and the Leaving Certificate Programme.

### 1.2 Background

During the academic year 2014/2015, The Learning School Project Team in St. Munchin's College predominantly focused on questioning in class with the aim of facilitating independent learning, critical thinking, collaboration and increased engagement in lessons among a core group of fifth-year students. It also aimed enable the teachers involved to become critical thinkers and learners, and to become more reflective and collaborative in both planning and practice. The main recommendations of this report suggested that given the overall positive effects of the process on the aforementioned areas, it would be a natural progression for us as a team to strive towards disseminating the experience to a staff-wide level beginning in the next academic year (2015/2016).

## 1.3 Focus of Project

The focus of the Learning School Project during 2015/2016 was on the following areas:

- Making staff aware of the LSP process during 2014/2015
- Informing the staff of the findings and recommendations of this report
- Disseminating the processes used to a staff-wide level
- Incorporating into the project the learning of the LSP Team with regard to the workshops facilitated by Mike Hughes during the 2015/ 2016 academic year
- Allowing principles rather than strategies to drive our practice
- Encouraging a culture of peer observation
- Trying to foster a culture of collaboration such as peer learning, encouraging and supporting professional dialogue, encouraging reflection on teaching and learning among staff and students which complemented the already-existing good practice and ethos of our school

## Section 2: Methods

## 2.1 Knowledge Development

- The project team developed knowledge and understanding through the support of the PDST. Grainne Dennison visited our school allowing the project team got to share ideas and concerns. The team were given a lot of support and advice on the area of collaboration and dissemination.  Grainne shared her expertise, helped lead us in the right direction and helped us focus on achievable targets.
- The project team attended three of Mike Hughes' Workshops in Kilkenny. Mike Hughes theories are detailed in his book 'The Magenta Principles' which are based on his work with Whitley Bay High School.
- There were weekly meetings amongst the project team which took place during one class period. Here the team members got to share their thoughts and reflections. It also gave us a chance to make plans and create goals.
- Members of the project team read published articles in relation to overall teacher development, dissemination and collaboration. One of the members has written two personal reflections on Cosán and on collaboration amongst staff. (Appendix 5 and 6)

## 2.2 Methods Used
- We included a Learning Schools workshop in each of our two staff days.
- Each member of the project team worked with the same group of teachers throughout the two years and led workshops with them.

*Workshop One*

- The project team designed a case study which helped stimulate conversation and discussion amongst the group about teaching and learning (see appendix 4)
- The main focus of this workshop was to get staff thinking and talking about teaching and learning in our classrooms. It also created time for self-reflection. It gave the staff opportunities to share their experiences.
- At the end of the workshop, group members filled out a feedback form. (see appendix 3)
- The groups were encouraged to use one strategy as discussed in the workshop in their own practice and reflect on it. They were given a prompt sheet to help with this. (see appendix 1)

*Workshop Two*

- The strategy the project team used as a basis for this workshop was called speed dating. The principle of this strategy was to allow staff to share their experiences in a structured manner and also to live through a learning strategy that could be used in the classroom. (Appendix 7)
- This involved each member of the group chatting to a new person every three minutes approximately.
- The question posed was 'what have you been doing?', a reflection on the work that they have been doing in their classroom since workshop one. This gave everybody the chance to express their experiences on a broad spectrum and to learn from others.
- The main goal of the facilitator was to allow space for collaboration in a set, organised manner and to use bounce questions' that prompted debate and reflection.
- Members filled out a feedback form at the end of the session. ( Appendix 3)

*Other*

- The project team kept their own personal reflections in a reflection diary. These proved very useful when it came to collaborating in our weekly meetings.
- A group email was set up for each facilitator. This enabled the project team to forward on any useful resources and feedback throughout the year.
- The project team purposefully arranged informal conversations amongst their groups. This was to generate some professional dialogue amongst the staff, create a chance for anyone in the group to ask questions, share some anxieties, share feedback on strategies the have been using, etc. In effect, members of the LSP team acted in a mentor-role to group members.

## Section 3: Results

### 3.1 Feedback from Staff Day 1:

As part of the staff day we asked teachers to fill up an evaluation sheet and to pass comments that we as a group could learn from and to rate recommendations. This feedback was qualitative in form. The feedback in general was extremely positive and people really enjoyed the experience. The positive comments could be divided in two categories - those comments relating to the new strategies and principles that were discussed and those relating to collaboration by learning from colleagues.

- It was generally appreciated that there was time given to discuss educational matters among colleagues. There was an atmosphere of honesty and openness. People found solace in the fact that other teachers were experiencing the same difficulties and struggles as themselves. In the past this may have been viewed as a sign of weakness to admit such challenges. This new sharing of stresses and worries has led to a new sense of enjoyment amongst staff. There is a motivation among group members to think about new approaches in teaching and learning.
- Within the groups the level of experience varied but experiences and ideas were equally shared.
- It was felt that the new strategies allowed staff to bring variety to their lessons. They allowed for differentiation.
- Assessment for Learning was proving a cause of concern for some staff. Strategies discussed seemed to provide a gateway in addressing such concerns.
- It was felt that time was a major issue. Staff felt that it was rushed at times and that management should have given more time towards this worthwhile initiative. Due to time constraints not every teacher had sufficient time to explain their ideas and concerns.
- There was a feeling that some strategies might be subject specific and certain teachers wondered about the benefits for their subjects. A number of teachers would like to see the strategies in practice to see how they could be adapted to their subjects. In this regard, staff felt that peer observation would be useful and maybe that the mentor of each group would try out the different strategies with members of the group.
- There was a concern that the meeting would become just another initiative another tick the box exercise. Staff looked for regular feedback and the opportunity to meet again in the near future.
- Staff felt that newly qualified teachers had huge energy and possessed knowledge of the latest innovations in terms of technology and pedagogies.

## 3.2 Feedback from Staff Day 2:

- While all members of the group were in agreement that listening to the variety of approaches used by colleagues was of huge benefit to all concerned, teachers felt that more time needs to be given for collaboration, mentoring and the sharing of ideas.
- Teachers saw benefit in taking the Learning Schools idea to their subject planning meetings. This would provide the subject teachers with an opportunity to demonstrate an idea and have real discussion around the strategy used and the principle involved.
- There was a call among the groups for peer observation. Whether this was through micro teaching, videoing of classes or attending each other's classes there was a real desire to see the different strategies in action.
- In an effort to add substance and cohesion to the groups there was a feeling that if we created a group email, communication would be continued electronically and this would help create a bond within the group. Each time a person tried a new strategy they would share it and their feelings on how it went and how they might improve it would be available for all.
- Some teachers felt that while the meetings and strategies were an effective use of time but given the constraints placed on teachers by the curriculum and current assessment methods, these new strategies could be viewed as a waste of class contact time. Some saw their role as teachers who have to get their students through an exam and get them the necessary points to get to college.
- Teachers saw it as a forum to learn new strategies, share successes and discuss difficulties. They received solace in the fact that other teachers had the same difficulties and developed confidence in learning new ways of teaching. A positive peer pressure existed which ensure that work was done and that strategies were tried out.

## 3.3 Teacher Reflection-Mike Hughes Workshop

Each of us on the project team was given the opportunity to attend a workshop given by Mike Hughes. In the past, Mike has worked as a teacher and as head teacher in Whitley Bay High School in the UK where teaching was described as exciting and innovative by the OFSTED. He now travels the world giving workshops to teachers and those in leadership positions in schools. The main areas of his presentations relate to teaching and learning, leadership and developing leadership for learning and coaching teachers on best practice. He did not come to tell us what to do just to share his many years of experience working in education and to encourage us to try out these new ideas in our classrooms. These ideas were not tricks or some mad new initiative but just building on current practice, putting icing on the cake as it were.

Throughout the day attendees acquired opportunities to discuss and collaborate with teachers of varied disciplines and experience. This in itself was refreshing and enjoyable. I can sometimes feel that there is a perception that if teachers are not teaching they are not making a contribution to the educational economy. This cross curricular sharing of methodologies was enlightening. Just to hear how the art teacher approached her teaching and how the science teacher shared principals was refreshing.

Hughes' philosophy is that learning should be both exciting and engaging. In order to make sense of information students must relate to it and use it. Students must do something with the information they encounter in class. Reduce it, assemble it, add to it, squeeze it, classify it, and so on. His philosophy encourages that the teacher deepens the student's understanding for real learning to take place. He believes that the world is changing rapidly and that old ways of schooling will not serve the future needs of the next generation of students.

This philosophy is underpinned by what Hughes refers to as the Magenta Principles. These are a range of ideas that seek to promote engagement and depth in lessons. He believes that learning is a consequence of thinking therefore we must make students think; language is central to learning therefore our job is to help students talk and that learning is an active process.

Mike exposed teachers to many new ideas and encouraged us to explore them in the context of our own classroom. He stressed they are principles not strategies. "Principles to adapt rather than strategies to adopt". The aim for teachers is to understand how the principles work. Another area that really caused us to reflect was when he spoke about the difference between the teacher as a facilitator and as an instructor. We were challenged by examining real video footage to uncover the difference between instruction and facilitation. We explored the use of reflective strategies and through observation, debate and discussion, concluded that if teachers are not allowing principles to be the driving force behind our strategies, then effective learning might not happen.

There was a lot of time spent on discussing questioning and strategies to promote such engagement and learning. Effective questions in class lead to dialogue, increased engagement and improved understanding and learning. He exposed us to the idea of question quadrants and blooms taxonomy. In order to engage with the more able students we must challenge them with higher order questions. In order for that to take place preparation of questions must take place.

Our minds were opened to many new strategies that we have since mirrored in our classrooms. Some worked; some require further work to be effective. A few we have tried and shared with colleagues are where the teacher poses a question at the start of a lesson. Students are required to think about this question throughout the lesson before answering it at the end or for homework. Having tried this in class we found that it helps to focus students and teacher straight away. Students ask for relevant and probing questions in the lesson and it also helps the teacher stay on task and not drift off the point. We were also introduced to the concept of the exit pass. During the lesson each student receives a "post it" from the teacher (the exit- pass). This can be used by the student to write information such as the part of the lesson that they found challenging, what questions they have not

been answered yet, the part of the lesson that are useful for their learning etc. This can be an effective and simple tool in our strive towards assessment for learning.

 Another suggested strategy that worked really well was when students were asked to design their own questions and to share the success criteria with the class. This was extremely effective at end of lessons. It allowed students to reflect on a topic while at the same time anticipate what might be asked in an exam. This increased student engagement and helped create a more democratic classroom.  There was insight given into how students are learning and the progress of the class. The students also provided a basis for critical reflection on their learning and our teaching.

As  a group we feel that this was a hugely effective and beneficial mode of CPD.


### 3.4 Feedback on the Reflective Diary

As mentioned previously each member of the LSP team led a group of staff at a recent staff CPD day. Here each team member discussed some of the strategies that they had been using and shared their experiences from their own classroom, from being part of the LSP team and from workshops that they had participated in which were led by Mike Hughes. Following the staff CPD day each team member kept a diary as they interacted with the teachers that were in their group and as they reflected on the process. The following themes emerged from the diaries:

Staff CPD Day

- LSP team members despite having led presentations at previous meeting were apprehensive going in to the staff day. Their principle concerns centred on the fear of a lack of engagement from teachers, that teachers may simply engage in chat which was unfocused and unrelated to the task at hand, that they may be viewed as colleagues "telling" others what to do or that the strategies that they planned to discuss may be viewed as "gimmicks" which lacked any real substance.
- Team members decided to use some of the strategies that they planned to discuss as part of their facilitation of the CPD day. As discussion on the strategies unfolded the focus became the principles behind the strategy rather than the strategy itself. This focus emerged through discussion prompted by bounce questioning facilitated by the LSP mentor. One teacher commented that this made them "think" about their teaching indicating a critical engagement with the CPD material.
- Engagement of the student was seen as being of crucial importance in learning and understanding.
- By allowing discussion there was an opportunity for teachers to share their practice. This professional dialogue was focused on student learning and heightened critical reflection amongst teachers. While acknowledging that many of the strategies that were discussed were already taking place there emerged a desire to question how effective they were and to seek evidence of this.

- Teachers agreed to try at least one strategy for an extended period with at least one of their classes. Over the following weeks there was evidence of this taking place in the diaries. As LSP members discussed progress with individual teachers they offered encouragement and support. This often extended to LSP members inviting teachers to their classroom where they were using the strategy. This emergence of peer learning was part of an increasing culture of professional dialogue and sharing that began to emerge over the course of the project.

Students & Classes

- From the diaries there is evidence of several teachers trying strategies with students during class time.
- While some did not try any of the 'new' strategies encountered at the staff CPD day they did discuss some strategies that they were using. They drew connections between these and those that had been introduced by the LSP team.
- Adaptation was a common feature where an individual teacher began to use a strategy but then tweaked it to better suit their needs or those of their students. For example one English teacher described how he had begun to use the 'Exit Pass' but adapted this to a 'Question Box' where students were encouraged to drop in their questions throughout the class. Another teacher gave students a blank card along with their usual homework. Students were then required to reduce what they had learned in class to a specified and limited number of key points.
- Some strategies were described as "non-invasive" meaning they could be introduced and used with little forward planning others required pre-planning to allow them to be used effectively. One teacher described how before introducing group work she got to know" her students for about a month. This allowed her to strategically form groups based on ability and the subject matter being studied.
- Where strategies were reported as being most successful teachers referenced an increase in student engagement as being a common reason for the success.
- Some teachers reported the emergence of flatter and more equal classroom culture that enabled the student voice to be heard and valued. One teacher reported that she changed her practice to giving students the homework towards the beginning of the lesson as students frequently felt the end of lessons was rushed as she tried to assign homework.
- Many of the strategies allowed for a greater focus on Assessment for Learning. Because there was more dialogue the quality of feedback, both to students and to teacher were better.
- A tension emerged where teachers began to introduce new strategies and the required to ensure that content was covered. Some teachers reported difficulties in marrying both, brought about by large class sizes.

- Despite apprehensiveness around the area of leadership LSP team members did find themselves leading change beyond their classroom. As evidenced by diary entries they frequently engaged in conversations around classroom practice with colleagues, offered support and encouraged, engaged in troubleshooting where needed, and extended invitations to others to sit in on their own classes.

- Over the course of a number of weeks team members began to see their roles as evolving moving from that of transmitter of their own experience to facilitating the growth of others through their own experiences.

- Professional dialogue, sharing of knowledge and learning and mutual support were seen as particularly critical in the process. For team members this took place not only in weekly meetings but at many other times such as over coffee and in each other's classrooms.

- There was an increasing engagement in reflective practice. One LSP member noted "OK, I finally did it - I videoed a class!". She then describes how she used this to look at her classroom practice.

- There continued to be a willingness to experiment and to try new things. This was supported by sharing the experience with other teachers. As the focus was on student learning the notion of 'failure' was replaced by a desire to seek out successful ways of engaging and enhancing student learning and a realisation that experimentation was necessary in order to achieve this.

## Section 4 – Findings and Outcomes

### 4.1 Perspective of the Project Team

**Positives**

- As a team we have been working together for the past two years. We are extremely comfortable working as a team where respect is shown and successes and struggles are shared equally.

- It has proven a very worthwhile form of CPD with members' self-confidence really growing. Members of the team came from different backgrounds, different stages in their career as well as different subject backgrounds. This brought great variety to discussions and diversity of experiences.

- Through the sharing of experiences with our colleagues a culture of sharing and collaboration is emerging.

- At the end of each session our colleagues provided constructive feedback to us on their experiences of the day and also on our role as facilitators. This was extremely beneficial for our own personal development as well as the group.

- Qualitative research has proven very valuable. *"Qualitative researchers can do much with themes to build additional layers of complex analysis."* (Knight et al. p.189)
  As a research method, it proved highly suitable as such research *''entails immersion in the everyday life of the setting chosen for the study ; the researcher enters the informats, perspectives and meanings''.* (Marshall and Rossman, 1989)

**Negatives**

- Time has proven a major problem for us as a team as well as the whole staff. With all members on a full timetable it has proven difficult to get time to meet and have the energy for the workload involved with such a project.
- As a group we sometimes felt isolated and removed from staff. There was a perceived secrecy around the group to a degree. Some felt we were the selected few and led to a tension with certain staff members.
- More training on how to develop good research skills was required. Our data was all qualitative and there was doubt around having no quantitative data.
- Given the increased demands placed on teachers there is a need in the group for more members with new energy and enthusiasm.
- The workload involved is proving very demanding for four members.
- While we did receive some help from outside agencies we felt as a group there is need for a lot more in terms of CPD, monitoring of the project, help with facilitation and general support.

**Challenges**

- As mentioned previously time is the greatest challenge facing the group. Unless more time is granted by the department for collaboration one wonders if the project is sustainable. CPD is needed to educate members to become better leaders and how best to facilitate meetings.
- It was unnerving at times for new teachers to speak in front of more experienced teachers. As each teachers confidence grew this became less of a concern.
- During our staff meetings it became obvious that a small number of staff members became disengaged and lacked interest and motivation.
- Going forward the team felt there is a need for some form of quantitative data.

**Positives**

- Staff found solace in the fact that other teachers were experiencing the same difficulties and struggles as themselves.
- The chance to meet up has developed professional dialogue amongst staff.
- Staff found it interesting to try new ideas and strategies and the willingness of people to reflect on and discuss practice was refreshing.
- There was an appreciation from the staff for the time given to simply collaborate.
- The staff seemed to like the structure of the staff days and were happy that everybody had a voice and got a chance to share their experiences.
- There was an understanding amongst staff that aspects of the Learning Schools Project could be helpful in their subject plans at the beginning of the school year.
- The staff found this form of CPD relevant to them as it was coming from colleagues within our school.
- The staff was grateful to have time to reflect on their practice.
- A lot of the strategies shared by all were deemed very useful in class.
  For example:
  - By allowing students to correct their own work or by students engaging in peer - assessment, students took ownership of their grade and became acquainted with marking schemes. A lot of teachers emailed the work to students and some used Moodle as a means of communicating with students. Students appreciated the level of trust placed in them and enjoyed being part of the assessment process.
  - Some teachers tried the "Hot Seat" approach where a student was placed in the hot seat and the other student asked questions of him. This allowed students get into character as it were and become part of the play or time in history. While it worked better with Junior Cycle, students were engaged and demonstrated real understanding of the material been covered.
  - Bounce questioning was a very common tool used. This allowed for all students to be kept on task, was of particular benefit to the less able students and allowed for differentiation of learning. Many teachers found question construction extremely useful, where students used the material that they had covered to design their own questions as a means of showing understanding. This allowed for lively discussion and debate within classes. They were used as quiz time and also as homework. This allowed students to create questions using language that they were comfortable with.
  - The use of "Picture Cards" was commonly used by teachers. Teachers would show the students a picture based on the topic been covered. This focused the students on task while at the same time allowed for debate and discussion. Teachers felt that a lot of material was covered in a short space of time and was a very useful revision tool.
- The staff agreed they felt motivated after the group session.

**Negatives**

- Staff found the staff days a little rushed as time was limited.
- There was a feeling that some strategies might be subject specific and certain teachers wondered about the benefits for their subjects.
- Some teachers felt that while the meetings and strategies were an effective use of time but given the constraints placed on teachers by the curriculum and current assessment methods, these new strategies may be viewed as a waste of class contact time.
- Staff felt that more CPD is needed in certain areas and felt they were missing out on some of the opportunities that the project team were given.

## Section 5- Recommendations

- More outside training is needed to help teachers become a good researcher, to help teachers confidentially analyse their findings and to help teachers develop knowledge of research literature.
- The project team feel that more CPD would be helpful especially in the area of facilitation within your own school. This the team feels, is very important, given that Cosán advocates the necessity of effective CPD in teaching and learning.
- A link to be created with a third-level institution as part of such CPD to broaden the scope of teaching and learning to a local context.

Appendix 1

## Staff Day - December 8th 2015
## Teacher Feedback Form on the LSP Section

We would appreciate to hear your honest thoughts and feedback on the Learning School Project section of today's staff day. We will also use to identify resources that we may be able to provide to you in the coming week.

1. How useful was this section to your practice (if you feel it was useful please tell us why / if not then please also tell us why)?

2. If you had to identify one thing that you would take away from this section of the day what would it be? Please tell us why this.

3. How could this section of the day have been improved?

| Strategy | Outline | Subject Used In |
|---|---|---|
| **Bounce Questioning** | Students discuss an answer given by another student immediately after hearing it with no intervention from the teacher. This contrasts from a 'Ping-Pong' approach where a teacher asks a question, it is answered, the teacher then asks another which is answered and this pattern is then repeated. | Maths English |
| **Exit Pass** | During the lessons student receive a 'post-it' from the teacher (the exit-pass). On this the student writes information such as the part of the lesson that they found challenging, what questions they have that have not been answered yet, the part of the lesson that was useful for their learning, etc. As the student leaves the lesson they hand the exit-pass to the teacher. | Chemistry English |
| **No Hands Rule** | The teacher does not allow students to raise their hands in order to answer a question. Instead the teacher asks a question to the entire class and then chooses one (or a few) students to answer it. | Business Maths |
| **Open-Ended Questions** | The teacher deliberately asked more open-ended questions. These are question that do not have a simple 'yes', 'no' or one word answer. Typically they encourage a full, meaningful answer using the students own knowledge and/or feelings. Often they are phrased as a statement to which a student must react. | Business Chemistry |
| **Peer Correction** | The success criteria for a piece of work are shared with students. They then assess each other's work against the success criteria. | Maths |
| **Place Mat** | Student work in groups (usually of up to four). A large sheet of paper is used by the group – each student has one section. Each student writes their responses to a question in their section. When all members have done this they share what they have written. Finally a group response is agreed upon and this is noted in the centre of the sheet. | Chemistry |
| **Pre-Planning Question** | The teacher plans questions that will be asked prior to the lesson. Often the teacher restricts themselves to a small, set number of questions. This then emphasises the need to ask probing questions that will support student learning. | Chemistry Maths |
| **Question at Start of Lesson** | The lesson begins with a question. Students are required to think about this question throughout the lesson before answering it at the end or for homework. | Business |
| **Shared Reading** | An article is divided between a number of students. Each reads a different section. They then come together as a group and share what they have read with the rest of the group. Finally the group discuss the entire piece with the class. | English |
| **Student Designed Questions** | Working in groups students reflect on a piece of work or a topic. They then design questions related to this and share them along with the success criteria with the class. | English |
| **Think, Pair, Share** | The teacher poses a question to the class. Each student reflects on the question individually before sharing and discussing their response with one other student. When each pair agree upon a response this is shared with the entire class. | English |
| **Wait Time** | The teacher poses a question to the class. They then wait to allow all students to reflect on the question and then formulate a response to it. The teacher then asks one or more students to share their response with the class. | Chemistry Business Maths |
| **TABLE 2: Strategies used** | | |

| Strategy | Teacher Feedback |
|---|---|
| Bounce Questioning | • Allows students to learn from each other.<br>• Ensures that every student is involved in the lesson.<br>• Allows for differentiation using Blooms taxonomy.<br>• Generates debate & discussion.<br>• Can be used in conjunction with other strategies.<br>• Ensures a focus on higher order questions. |
| Exit Pass | • Give the teacher an insight into how students are learning and the progress of the class.<br>• Provides teacher with a basis for critical reflection. |
| No Hands Rule | • Keeps students on their toes.<br>• Ensures that all students take part in the lesson.<br>• Allows for differentiation as it allows the teacher to tailor questions to specific students. |
| Open-Ended Questions | • Allows / permits student to think outside the box.<br>• Allows for deeper understanding.<br>• Pushes higher achieving students.<br>• When asked at the start of a lesson it can provide students with a focus / goal.<br>• Allows the teacher to engage more effectively with student and to identify gaps in understanding.<br>• Forces the teacher to put more thought and preparation into classroom questions. |
| Peer Correction | • Allows students to reflect on their learning.<br>• Allows mistakes to become an opportunity for future learning. |
| Place Mat | • Did not work effectively immediately. Students needed support and guidance on how to use the method.<br>• Allows students to engage more deeply with their own learning.<br>• Allows for differentiation.<br>• Promotes literacy as students must use subject specific terminology.<br>• Allows for a greater level of teacher observation of students work and learning. |
| Pre-Planning Questions | • Takes time to plan on the part of the teacher.<br>• Provides students with a goal for the lesson.<br>• Allows the teacher to identify students who have grasped concepts and those that have yet to.<br>• Allows for differentiation in the lesson. |
| Question at Start of Lesson | • Focuses students.<br>• Students ask more relevant and probing questions in the lesson.<br>• Focuses the teacher – prevents drifting off point. |
| Shared Reading | • Gives each student greater ownership and responsibility of their learning.<br>• Prevents students from opting out. |
| Student Designed Questions | • Effective when used at the end of a topic.<br>• Allows student to critically reflect on a topic.<br>• Allows students to anticipate what may be asked on exams such as the Leaving Cert.<br>• Creates a more democratic classroom environment.<br>• Increases student engagement. |
| Think, Pair, Share | • Limited success with target fifth year group but very effective with Junior Cycle students. |
| Wait Time | • Effective only when students are asked to write down their thoughts.<br>• Increases student engagement.<br>• Students expand their answer to give a greater level of detail or to improve on the quality of their initial answer.<br>• Helps prevent the teacher from answering the question 'for' the student. |
| **TABLE 5: Teacher feedback on strategies used** | |

**Staff Day - December 8th 2015**
**Teacher Reflection & Planned Strategies**

Thank you for your participation. We hope that you found the issues raised were of some use. We would love you to take some of the ideas encountered and discussed today and to use one or some in your classroom – we suggest selecting one class group as your target and begin to experiment with some of the strategies. Once you have adapted them to suit your needs and you have gained experience and confidence in using them you might like to use them with other class groups. The questions below might be useful:

1. What is the difference between occupied and engaged? Thinking of your target class, are students predominantly occupied or engaged? Why?

2. What is the difference between knowing and understanding? How do you know that the students in your target class understand the material which is being taught?

3.  Identify one strategy from today's session that you are prepared to experiment with and try in your target class. How will you use it? What tweaks do you need to make before using it?

4.  After trying the strategy with your target class for a period of time –
    1.  How do you feel it has worked?
    2.  What changes and tweaks are necessary?
    3.  How is it impacting on your students learning?
    4.  What challenges do you now face and what are your concerns?

## Case Study – Learning Schools Project

Eamon is an experienced teacher working in a large all-boys secondary school. As a professional, he is highly motivated in striving to achieve the best in terms of outcomes for his students. With his current fifth years, a mixed ability class of 24 students, he is making progress through the Leaving Certificate and is on schedule. His students are well behaved during class, but a little too quiet in terms of responding to questions and engaging in class participation. Eamon regularly sets written and learning homework for his class.

He recently carried out an evaluation of teaching and learning in his class through way of anonymous class survey. Although the majority of students expressed that they were delighted to be making progress through the course, a sizable amount stated that they did not feel that their lessons were relevant to their lives. The majority reported that they were not always engaged in class, 'switching off' when the topic was uninteresting to them.

1. What is Eamon doing well?
2. What issues does Eamon face?
3. What strategies could Eamon use to ensure that learning is being done in his class?

Appendix 7

## Speed Dating Strategy

➢ Teacher chooses focus question.
➢ Each student given a number.
➢ Students sit in chronological order in a circle.
➢ Round One – Odds turns to evens.
   Evens speak, answering focus question.
   Odds write down answers.
➢ Round Two –Evens speak as in last round.
➢ Depending on class size, around four alternating rounds are suggested.
➢ Students who have been absent should be given an odd number, so at least in round two they can speak about information they have picked up in first round.