

Name: St. Leo's College, Dublin Road, Carlow
Strand: Developmental Strand
1. Research question
<p>How might we as a school develop a comprehensive, school wide approach to tracking and monitoring student attainment?</p> <p>We intend to focus on a number of critical areas:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Exploring feedback to students and parents in a number of scenarios: Parent/Teacher Meetings; Formal written Reports; formal feedback to include student reflection and direct guidance – Subject teacher to student; Academic Monitor to student; Year Head to student 2. Firmly embedding AFL across the school community 3. Formal employment of data to track students from entry to exit & which will inform appropriate teaching methodologies across the curriculum 4. Enhancing the traditional format of parent/teacher meetings to directly include the student and simultaneously support the parent's role as a resource in their child's learning. 5. Continue to refine the role of the academic monitor in St. Leo's College.
2. Introduction and background to the research
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Each of these areas interests us hugely as a school and they are all inextricably linked. We are a school committed to ongoing improvement. We have an extremely capable staff and although a very large non-selective school our students work extremely well and achieve above national norms across the curriculum. Successive inspections confirm in particular that our students are eager to learn. Our WSE 2013 recommended the establishment of a whole school assessment policy and this in tandem with the increasing emphasis on School Self Evaluation compelled us to explore this area. Equally, that particular inspection confirmed that our school was ideally positioned in terms of willingness and capacity to take on these challenges. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "St. Leo's College is an open and inclusive school, which values and promotes the principles of respect, personal growth and achievement." Whole School Evaluation - March 2013 • "Teachers are conscientious professionals with the development and welfare of the learner at the heart of their decisions." Whole School Evaluation - March 2013

- “Students’ behaviour was exemplary over the course of the evaluation.” Whole School Evaluation - March 2013
- “The learning atmosphere was characterised by very positive, affirming and respectful interactions between students and their teachers.” Whole School Evaluation - March 2013
- “Both teachers and students exhibited high expectations for learning. An analysis of student outcomes at Leaving Certificate indicated a consistently high uptake of higher-level papers, with many students excelling across all subjects.” Whole School Evaluation - March 2013

2. In terms of research and CPD a number of elements are noteworthy:

- We have always been involved in high quality CPD
- We are a Network School.
- The Principal and Deputy Principal are Associates with JCT. The Principal is also an Associate with PDST (Leadership and Planning).
- As a school we have been working with Jean Geoghegan and Dr Mark Fennell over a number of years on Curriculum Review and Assessment for Learning. We have a Teaching and Learning Committee and a Curriculum Review Group actively engaged in supporting school improvement.
- We engage as a staff in high quality CPD and have invited speakers such as Dr Fergus Heffernan, Dr Anne Looney, Dr Emer Smyth, Marie Celine Clegg and Dr Tony Bates to work with us. We have collaborated with two local post-primary schools to work with Paul Ginnis. Currently three staff are participating in the Instructional Leadership programme with Professor Barrie Bennett and three members of staff and the Principal are working with Graham Powell in developing learning centred school.

3. Our areas of concern/interest centre on cores elements such as:

- How data can be gathered and employed to track individual progress from 1st year to Leaving Certificate. How this data can be understood/interpreted by students, parents and teachers and how it might be incorporated into differentiation and employing appropriate/diverse teaching methodologies – the personalisation of learning.
- The quality and purpose of written reports (extremely limited opportunity to communicate with parents about a child’s progress/attainment), how to assist and support staff in completing reports so that they convey intended messages, assist and support subject departments to reflect on comments and devise appropriate templates/comments which would ensure cohesion across subjects and departments.
- Explore how oral feedback (teacher and peer) could be effectively developed/engineered to formatively assist student progress and attainment whilst ensuring positive relationships are fostered and maintained.
- Explore summative test results and how they might impact on future performance
- Examine the quality and purpose of Parent/Teacher Meetings which in their current format in post-primary schools can be stressful and indeed distressing for teachers, parents and students (if invited to participate). How can we maximise these interactions to ensure parental and student involvement in the learning process.
- We have been working with Dr Mark Fennell for a number of years around AFL and we wish to firmly embed strategies and methodologies across the curriculum
- We have developed an Academic Monitoring system and are eager to refine and maximise this role
- We are anxious to look at homework – assignment, completion, correction/grading and again how solid feedback can be given to improve teaching and learning outcomes.

3. Research/ project plan

We will use Action Research primarily as it will allow us to work formatively in cycles and most importantly facilitate us as individuals and as a school to improve our performance. Action Research is the most suitable methodology for this purpose as it “...encourages

change in schools, empowers individuals through collaboration with one another, encourages teacher reflection, and examines new methods and ideas” (Gay and Airasian, 2003). Equally Elliot proposes that *‘The fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice.’* (Elliot, 1991: 49) Most simply put, Calhoun asserts that Action Research encourages teachers to say *“let’s study what’s happening in our school and decide how to make it a better place”*. Essentially we wish to improve practice across the whole school community – practitioners, students and parents in order to improve learning outcomes for all.

In terms of research tools, we are looking at a number of areas and thus we will employ a range of methodologies. We intend to facilitate a number of focus groups with students and staff; conduct

surveys with students, teachers and parents, peer observation and reflective practice sheets. The focus groups with students will be filmed and shared with whole staff in order to contextualise the work but also to ensure that we hear the voices of our own students. This will be supported by work from Black and Wiliam, Dweick, Hattie and Kluger and DeNisi.

We have invited a retired practitioner to work with us in developing a range of tools to assist in tracking student progress and attainment e.g. comment banks for reports as well as template schedules for conducting feedback sessions with students – key questions, reflective handbook for mentoring students, post-examination, reflective templates for students and teachers.

4. Progress to date

The current Industrial Action has had an impact on our progress. Equally, this is really a five-year plan and whilst only in the initial stages in some areas we are clear of the path and potential of our work.

In the context of AFL for example our progress to date includes:

- Teachers in our AFL Working Group continue to meet on a regular basis and are committed to exploring and trialling AFL methodologies in their own classes. All members of the group are encouraged to share new knowledge and information with colleagues in their subject departments and to work collaboratively on adapting AFL methodologies for use in their own subject areas.

Dr Mark Fennell has worked with the whole staff in August 2015 and worked with the Teaching and Learning committee in October 2015. Our focus for this meeting and

subsequent meetings has been:

1. Effective feedback-both oral and written, for students and parents
2. Effective questioning to encourage increased student talk

Dr Fennell will meet with this group again in May 2016

- A copy of Robin Alexander's book 'Accountable Talk' was purchased for our staff library and all staff encouraged to read it.
- An individual copy of the NCCA booklets on Learning Intentions and Success Criteria, Effective Questioning, Formative Feedback, Students Reflecting on Learning has been furnished to prepared for all I staff members. These lend themselves not only to further embedding AFL practices in our classrooms but also to our SSE focus of tracking and monitoring student attainment. We are currently planning staff inservice for May and these booklets will be distributed
- A Bloom's Taxonomy poster to support questioning containing ideas on how to frame questions in order to extend and deepen thinking and learning has been printed for each classroom.
- Many classrooms have a separate Learning Outcomes Board
- Several members of our AFL Group participated in a research study pilot programme carried out by a PhD researcher under the direct supervision of Dr. Damian Murchan, Assistant Professor and Director of Postgraduate Teaching and Learning at Trinity College Dublin. This research is investigating innovative approaches to continuing professional development through a virtual learning environment that aims to support the implementation of AFL within the classrooms of teachers at Junior Cycle. The purpose of the study is to provide teachers with a virtual collaborative community of practice where teachers are able to generate, share and engage with practices related to their assessment practice. As participants of this study teachers engaged in a CPD programme that encouraged their exploration of practices and techniques to support ongoing assessment throughout the academic year.
- AFL features on the agenda for all staff meetings. A SWOT analysis of our current practices in relation to tracking and monitoring student attainment was carried out during our December staff meeting. The results of this will form the starting point for our in-service in May 2016

- We are currently drafting suggested comments for reports. These will be shared with colleagues and subject departments will then devise subject specific comments/questions/guidance to ensure consistency of practice.
- We are piloting post-examination reflection sheets and experience will be shared at staff inservice in May. (Please see attached)
- We are finalising a mentoring handbook for Academic Monitors to use when working with a target cohort of students. (Please see attached)
- Currently composing interview schedule for use in focus groups with students around feedback.