

Athy College

Athy

Co. Kildare

THE TL21 TEAM

Mr. Richard Daly (Principal)
Ms. Breda Sunderland (Deputy Principal)
Ms. Deirdre Murphy
Ms. Natalie O'Neill

OUR TL21 JOURNEY

Athy College, a Co. Kildare VEC school, has travelled the TL21 journey with Laois Education Centre since September 2010. The team initially consisted of two teachers and the Principal and Deputy Principal. We've since discovered that a key strength of the TL21 initiative is its intentional focus on training a team of teachers and managers.

Deciding on a TL21 initiative for Athy College proved easy. The team had previously been involved in the NCCA Keyskills Pilot Project and then moved into the Instructional Leadership (IL) Programme, pioneered by Prof. Barrie Bennett, in 2008. So, we decided through the TL21 initiative to implement the Instructional Leadership Programme in Athy College during the academic years 2010-2011 and 2011-2012. The team initially trained was the Deputy Principal, an English teacher, and 2 teachers whose subjects are J.C. Science, Biology, Chemistry, Maths, I.T., P.E. and C.S.P.E. We could immediately see the huge potential of TL21 for building the skills, tactics and strategies to make learning and teaching intentionally excellent. It works!

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We initially played with some of the strategies in our own classrooms and used them at staff and planning meetings. The TL21 team organised to meet for 40 minutes each week to cascade the project - a seriously pleasurable "free" class. The response of staff continues to be receptive and encouraging, having management involvement ensured that the TL21 initiative was prioritised. We held an in-school session of peer professional development (daunting!). Since then these 2 hour sessions have been held twice yearly.

The staff response was such that we began by setting up a Teaching and Learning Club (TLC for short) which during the first year met after school every 3 weeks for 20 minutes (a timer is set). Now these meetings are integrated within the Croke Park hours which have proved beneficial for structuring in-house CPD on Teaching and Learning. At each meeting another skill or tactic or organiser is shared. This was an ideal forum to share input from the sessions we attended in Laois Education Centre. Teachers give feedback on how the innovations are going in their classrooms and bring samples of student work, reflective practice in action. During the first year we even had a DES inspector join us one evening during a subject inspection. She was really impressed. Since then we've had an MLL and the TL21 focus on Teaching and Learning and the dispersed leadership it fosters came in for high praise by the DES/MLL inspectors.

Most important the student response to their experience is that learning is more fun because it's active. They register that skills learned in one classroom - e.g. placemat, graffiti, teams games tournament, group work, snowballing, think/pair/share, mind maps, concept maps, 4 corners, PMI, academic controversy etc- are transferable to other classrooms. Students' social and co-operative learning skills are perceptibly enhanced. Recently, students were delighted that some of their graphic organisers were featured on the Project Maths website.

In December 2011 we took things a step further and invited 3 primary schools, which are on-campus with us, for a 2-hour training session in co-operative learning, using deVries' Teams Games Tournament. It was genuinely great fun. After Christmas we were invited to give a presentation on how Athy College had rolled out the Teaching and Learning Initiative to the Principals and Deputy Principals of Co. Kildare VEC. The CEO and the Education Support Officer attended also. The journey on which we embarked seems unstoppable. Most recently, Deirdre Murphy - who, incidentally, is working on a Master's degree on Teaching and Learning with NUI Maynooth, has been invited to teach a class using the IL/TL21 skills, tactics and strategies, for the Minister of Education, Mr. Ruairi Quinn, T.D.

The TL21 initiative, which facilitated rolling-out a whole school approach to teaching and learning, continues to make our classrooms come alive.

If you would like more information we'd love to talk to you.

Breda Sunderland
Deputy Principal, Athy College

SOME STUDENT COMMENTS ON THEIR EXPERIENCES:

"I like think-pair-share because sharing ideas can help you to get the answer by different methods, they can be easier and shorter. I like think-pair-share because you get to work in groups and if you don't know something you can ask someone."

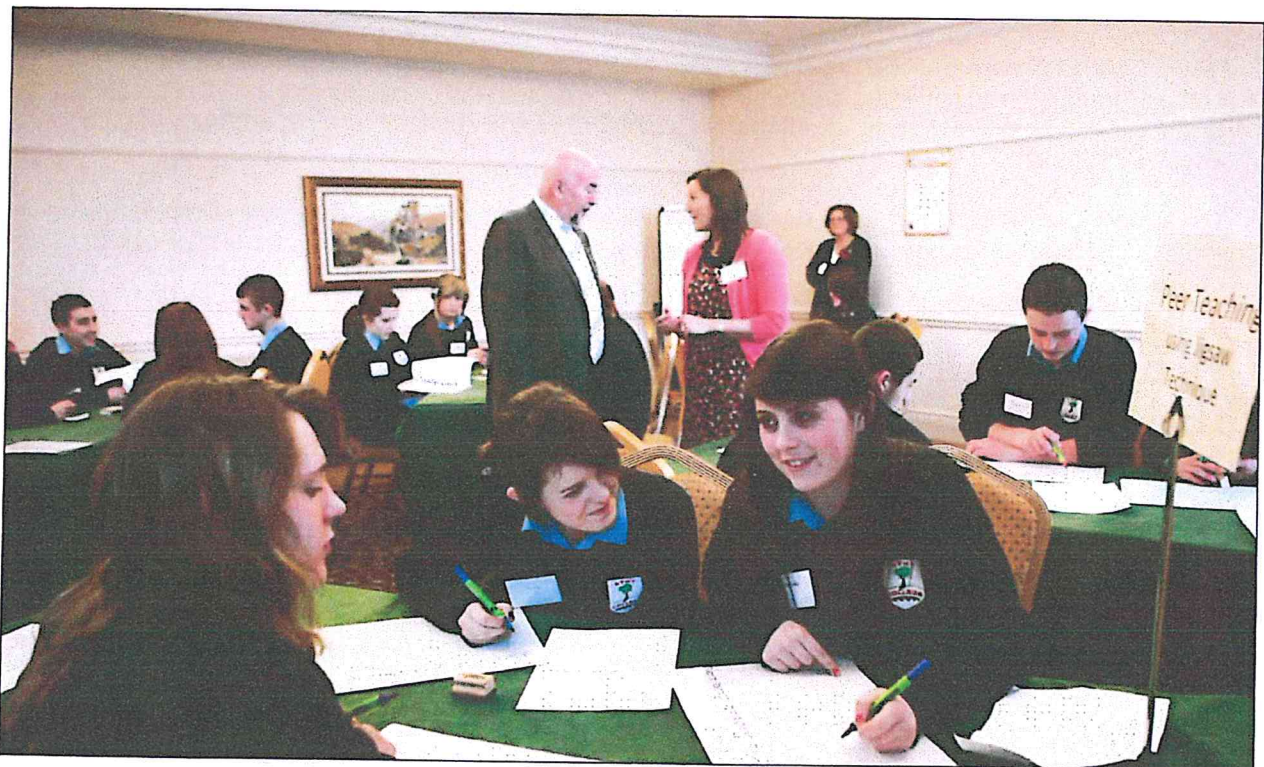
"I like placemat because you get to solve or try the problem yourself first and then check it with your group to make a decision and you get to see where you went wrong."

"I like placemat because everyone shares their ideas and we all work together."

"I love playing the teams-games-tournaments, it's a fun way of learning. Teams-Games-Tournaments are great fun and you learn as well!"

"I like teaching using Jigsaw, it makes it easier to revise and gives time for you to ask questions about different topics and other people in your group can help you. We learn from the experience and it makes us more confident."

"I think Mind Maps are useful as they teach us to extract the main points of a subject. Mind maps help me to remember everything and make it easier while doing homework or studying for the exam."



Second year students from Athy College displaying a variety of teaching and learning strategies for Minister of Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn T.D. at the launch of the Instructional Leadership Programme in Mount Wolsey, March 2012.