

Step^{Up} Project

School Excellence Fund: Step Up Project

October 2018 - October 2021

School Report:

Castleknock Community College
Carpenterstown Road, Diswellstown, Dublin

Nine schools took part in the Step Up Project. Schools submitted a final report telling the story of their Step Up Project. The reports are descriptive accounts of what happened in school given their unique context and circumstances. The reports are not prescriptive of what should happen in all schools. Reports should be read in conjunction with reading the overall Step Up Project composite report.

Oral Language Development | Our Journey



Oral Language Development

Castleknock Community College

Dublin 15

School Excellence Fund

Step^{Up} Project

- VOLUNTARY SECONDARY
- URBAN AREA
- 107 TEACHERS
- 1168 STUDENTS
- CO-EDUCATIONAL
- ENGLISH, BUSINESS STUDIES, SCIENCE
- 5 TEACHERS IN STEP UP TEAM

Identifying a Focus

'Talk is the sea on which all else floats', Britton.

In recognising the renewed focus on the importance of oral language skills, we endeavoured to move from effective to highly effective practice in terms of assessing and identifying the area of need for students in developing their oral language skills and implementing teaching methodologies that would support and expand their oral language development. This was with a view to supporting students in their levels of confidence with regards to oral language which would also support students in the CBA process.

The approach taken by the college included supporting students in articulation of thoughts and ideas, framing questions and seeking clarification and the use and recognition of tone and verbal, non-verbal cues etc. We recognised the intrinsic links between oral language development and critical thinking and aspired to utilising these connections to further enable students to reflect on their learning and thus engage in peer and self-assessment in a more cohesive and meaningful manner.



Our Co-ordinator, Christina Clarke,
on the focus of our project.

[View Here](#)

True or False Analysis Methodology: The main purpose was to develop their use of economic language and to complete revision on previously completed topics. Business terminology was present and students got to use words verbally that they normally would only use in written answers.

Anne Bennett, Business teacher

KEY IMPLEMENTATION PRACTICES

Our first action was to develop a shared vision of what we hoped to achieve and also a shared understanding of oral language development. This is because it was important from the very outset that we were all clear on what exactly was meant when we spoke about oral language development and that we have an opportunity to explore this as professionals within our context. We achieved this by engaging in reading a collection of journal articles on oral language development and engaging in professional discourse of same.

We conducted a questionnaire for students on their disposition towards engaging in speaking and listening activities.

We completed a questionnaire for ourselves to establish our own starting point.

- explored methodologies that support speaking and listening.
- decided upon methodologies to trial.
- use of rubric for class observation.
- Peer observation of each other's lessons.
- Student reflection.

“ (these methodologies) extended your vocabulary a lot because you had other ways of talking about your opinion
Katie, 3rd Year student. ”

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

1. Established Step Up team:

Assigned roles and established group norms. Selected class groups and timeline for implementation of the project. Started using reflection learning logs.

2. Research:

Journal Articles and resources were sourced and read by all. Professional discourse followed exploring concepts of oral language development until a shared understanding was reached.

3. Questionnaire for students on their disposition towards engaging in speaking and listening activities.

4. Questionnaire for ourselves to establish our own starting point.

5. Use of rubric for class observation.

6. Methodologies:

Explored methodologies that support speaking and listening.

7. Trialled methodologies in class.

8. Peer observation of methodologies.

9. Reflection on trialled methodologies.

10. Trial of additional methodologies.

11. Reflection on methodologies.

12. Repeat questionnaire and student reflection.

13. Engaged with Inspectorate and JCT.

14. Implemented new methodologies & reflected on same.

15. Key learnings shared with all staff.

IMPLEMENTATION NARRATIVE

Over the last two academic years, the team has been involved in creating a shared vision, establishing protocols for working as a team, engaged in research into Oral Language Development, have trialled a range of methodologies with students, sought student reflection and feedback and have engaged in peer observation of classes.

The Team decided upon the domain of Learner Experience (LAOS 2016) as a framework for their work in this project. Using a combination of student feedback from their initial experience with CBAs and teacher observation on student engagement in activities associated with oral language, we used the standards within this domain as a benchmark to move from Effective to Highly Effective Practice.

Key Methodologies Trialled

True or False Analysis

De Bono's Thinking Hats

Tangram Exercise

Throw the Ball Exercise

Group Presentations

Consider All Factors

Walking Debate

Think Pair Share

Self-Assessment Reflection

We set out to move to highly effective practice in terms of assessing and identifying the area of need for students in developing their oral language and implementing teaching methodologies that would support and expand their oral language development.

This would include supporting students in articulation of thoughts and ideas, framing questions and seeking clarification and the use and recognition of tone and verbal, non-verbal cues etc. We recognise the intrinsic links between oral language development and critical thinking and would aspire to utilise these connections to further enable students to reflect on their learning and thus engage in peer and self-assessment in a more cohesive and meaningful manner.

By operating as a community of practice, the group engaged in professional discourse to agree on and articulate a shared vision and plan for their project. They engaged with research and discussed methodologies that explicitly support oral language development. Via a process of distributive leadership, they were enabled and empowered to take charge and lead a process of trialling methodologies and reflecting on how they worked in their classes. They engaged in regular reflection of both the implementation of methodologies but also of the process of working together as a community of practice.



Students discuss their experience of the project.

[View Here](#)



Teachers discuss impact on students' learning. [Listen Here](#)



Teachers discuss how their practice has changed. [Listen Here](#)



Teachers discuss the impact on their Subject Departments and sustainability. [Listen Here](#)



Transition Year Students discuss their experience of the project. [View here](#)



I think these activities came at the right time since we have a lot of classroom -based assessments now in Irish and Spanish and English
Luke, 3rd Year student.



ENABLING CONDITIONS

The following enabled our project to be implemented smoothly and cohesively.

Regular Meetings

Student Survey: this was enabling as it allowed us insight into the starting point for students and helped us plot a way forward.

Small Focus Group: sense of ownership and accountability to each other.

Student Relationships: we were able to trial methodologies that we were unsure of because the students were so open to trying out new approaches.

Parental Support for the project.

Community of Practice: all felt that it was a genuinely safe space as it allowed for trial and error where there was no sense of failure, that rather, it was actually a sign of our own learning.

Consistency in Methodologies and Strategies: methodologies used consistently in their application across the different subject areas meant that all discourse was inclusive and applied to all involved in the group.

Support from Senior Management: this was enabling as the group was always encouraged and supported.

Staff ownership was instilled through collective decision making and operating as a community of practice.

What we Achieved

In the English, Business Studies & Science cohort of students:

Increase in the number of students confident to engage in a speaking activity/ presentation in front of their class.

Students have an enhanced understanding of the components of oral language, including tone of voice, non-verbal cues and body language.

A change in daily teacher practice has been achieved with a correlating increase in opportunities for students to engage in speaking and listening activities in class.

Students have improved their articulation of thoughts and formulation of questions to seek clarity and analyse.

Students engaged as learners.

Students' subject specific vocabulary has been expanded with an improvement in their oral and written expression.

Students have engaged in reflecting on their own learning and how they learn.

Peer observation and support.

Establishment of a Community of Practice.

FUTURE PLANNING

Continue to embed methodologies in future lessons.

Share methodologies and rationale with Subject Departments.

Expand Focus Group on an invitational basis: teachers will be invited to meet and engage in professional discourse on methodologies and educational research.

Link in with Curriculum Development Team.