

Learning for Life and Work

Personal Development

Case Study

La Salle Boys' School, Belfast

Introduction of Personal Development Programme in La Salle Boys' School, Belfast

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During the school year 2006/07, every Key Stage 3 and 4 students in La Salle Boys' School experienced a comprehensive Personal Development Programme.

Learning for Life and Work (LLW) is a compulsory GCSE subject in our school, with all students receiving three hours LLW in both Year 11 and Year 12.

All Key Stage 3 (KS3) students receive one 40-minute period of Personal Development (PD) per week. The current KS3 programme is the product of quite a long process dating back to 2002.

School Context

La Salle Boys' School,
Belfast
Founded 1966
All boys
All ability
1,200 students
85 teaching staff

The Early Development of Personal Development in La Salle

Prior to 2002, PD was delivered as one element within the 'Form Teacher' period and was one 40-minute period per week. The programme involved topics related to Personal Health, Study Skills and the wider range of Pastoral Care issues.

Impetus for Change:

The position of PD within the school was significantly enhanced in September 2002, when the Board of Governors created a new position within the Senior Management Team. The specific remit of the new SMT member was 'the development of a revised PD programme for KS3'.

One of the first actions of the PD co-ordinator was to join cohort 1 of the BELB '**Health Promoting Schools Initiative**'.

The initiative aimed to:

'enable schools to provide an environment where the physical and mental wellbeing, health and safety of staff and pupils was supported and developed, in partnership with family, community and external agencies'.

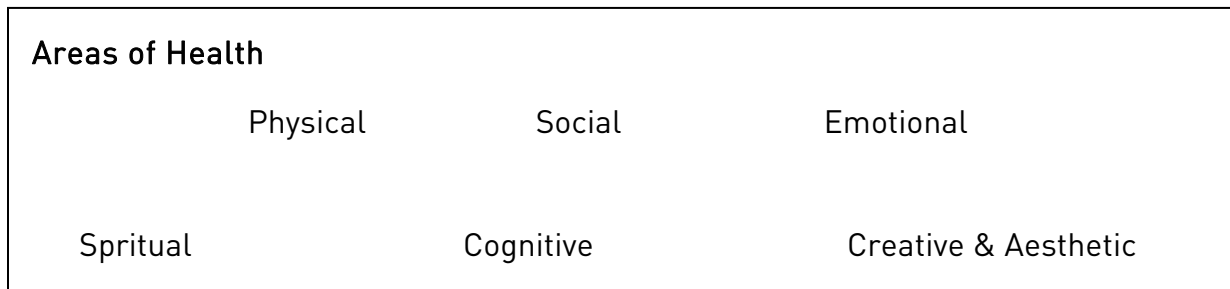
The influence of the school involvement in the 'Health Promoting Schools' initiative cannot be overstated as it provided an ideal framework on which to hang so much of what was important and integral to Personal Development:

- Actively promoting the self esteem of all students
- Recognising the importance of the social ethos of the school in supporting a positive learning and working environment
- Recognising that school and pupil achievement is built on the existence of healthy relationships and a commitment to the emotional wellbeing of pupils and staff
- Encouraging pupils to develop responsible attitudes towards health and the acquisition of the appropriate skills to maintain it
- A commitment to developing effective working relationships and partnerships with community groups and external agencies.

The Development of the Revised PD Programme

Adhering to the principle that Policy should always come before Action, the 1st Term of 2002/03 was spent developing and writing the **PD Policy Document**.

The policy was predicated on the belief that PD is fundamentally about 'Health Education'. For our own school purposes we defined 'health' as having six components.



Such a holistic view of 'Personal Health' had a particular resonance with our own school ethos which seeks to develop the whole child. We as teachers in La Salle, are fully committed to the pursuit of academic excellence and to the promotion of 'human formation: 'educating the mind and touching the heart'.

The PD Policy Document is perhaps the singular most critical piece of work developed in the pilot years as it provided the touchstone and a constant point of reference for all involved in the work of Personal Development within the school.

The Policy contained the following sections:

- 1 Definition of PD.
- 2 Rationale for the inclusion of PD in the curriculum.
- 3 Aims of the Revised PD programme.
- 4 Specified the Learning Objectives in terms of:
 - Knowledge and Understanding
 - Skills

- Values
- Attitudes

- 5 Advice on the Classroom environment for PD.
- 6 Guidance on Child Protection/Confidentiality/Dealing with sensitive issues.
- 7 Guidance on the appropriate use of External Agencies.
- 8 Dealing with children with Special Needs in a PD Environment.
- 9 Staff Development.
- 10 Assessment of PD.

Organisation and Management of the Revised PD programme 2003/05

An Inset Day was taken to launch the policy. At the outset it was made very clear this was a 'draft policy' and the Staff Day was the beginning of a process of full consultation with staff and parents.

Whole School/Whole Staff Responsibility

Of particular importance was the need to establish agreement on one key fundamental:

'every teacher in school is a teacher of PD'

The Policy stated that the promotion of personal, social and health education will occur throughout the school in:

- The quality of relationships
- Every subject lesson in the school day
- Every extra-curricular activity
- The application of the School Pastoral Care system

Provision through Teaching and Learning in Other Subjects

The value of cross-curricular support for elements of the Revised Programme was not under estimated. Planned opportunities were mapped for contributions from Religious Education, Science, Technology, English, Drama and P.E.

The Discrete 'Personal Development' Period

The Policy acknowledged that because of the very specific Knowledge, Understanding, Skills, Values and Attitudes and the particular methodology to be employed that PD would be given, 'one single class period of 40 minutes per week'.

Class Size

Given the nature of the material under consideration and the required methodology, the maximum Class Size in PD would be limited to 20 students.

Teaching and Learning Strategies in a PD lesson:

'Skills, Values and Attitudes cannot be taught by conventional methods
but rather by memorable experiences'

Teaching PD is concerned with the acquisition of knowledge, skills, values and attitudes that have implications for behaviour. In order to address these issues the school supported and encouraged the adoption of an open and facilitative teaching style and participative and experiential methodologies.

The teaching method chosen depends on which Learning Outcome are being emphasised with very different activities planned for a Knowledge based outcome as opposed to a values and attitude outcome.

Much work was also done during the Pilot years 2003/05 in developing what now are the 'Thinking Skills and Personal Capabilities'.

Who Will Teach the Discrete PD Lesson?

Not every teacher is comfortable or indeed effective in working in a Personal Development environment. All teaching is challenging but it was the view in La Salle that teaching PD is a particular challenge, demanding a range of skills and a high degree of empathy and sensitivity.

It was therefore agreed not to assign a teacher to teach PD without prior consultation. There was to be no coming back in September to find it on your timetable!

It was further agreed:

“that teaching of the discrete PD period would only be delivered by a small team of teachers, who while remaining firmly rooted in their own subject discipline, would also be committed to the ethos, aims and methodology of PD.”

The Use of Community Groups and External Agencies:

The establishment of support networks and partnerships was regarded as fundamental to the outworking of PD in the school setting. However, the use of any outside group is never a stand-alone activity but only ever as part of a planned and co-ordinated programme designed by the school. Visiting speakers and support agencies only operate in concert with the aims, objectives and values of the school ethos and Pastoral Care system. Parents/guardians are always given advance notice of any visit by an outside speaker to the school/classroom.

External Partners:

Health Promotion Agency

Action Cancer

Heartstart U.K.

Falls Community Council

Lisburn YMCA/SHARAP Project

Love for Life

N&W Belfast Trust: - Mental Health

- Sexual Health

BELB Advisors

N.I. Fire Service

The La Salle Personal Development Programme in 2006/07

Positive Outcomes:

- A growing confidence in the relevancy of the KS3 Programme in terms of the content/topics being considered
- Improving quantity and quality of resources
- Positive feedback and high level of pupil engagement
- Improving confidence and competency of teachers
- Strong partnerships forged with a wide range of external agencies
- Increasing ability to map PD across other subject areas/school experiences
- Improved status and credibility of PD within the curriculum

Issues:

The question of assessment within the area of Personal Development remains an issue to be resolved satisfactorily. There remains an expectation (especially from parents) for a mark or grade in PD at the Christmas/Summer test.

It is hoped the move towards **Assessment for Learning** will remove this issue as

‘not all that counts can be counted
and not all that can be counted counts’ (Einstein)

Perhaps the single greatest issue concerns ‘staffing’ in the area of PD.

While individual members of staff volunteered to join the small team of 6-8 specialist PD teachers for KS3, they also remained firmly rooted in their own 'home' department. This greatly added to their personal workload in terms of attendance at planning meetings and other meetings for staff development.

Also in May of each year, Heads of Department could call staff back to their 'home' department to meet the curriculum needs of that department for the year ahead i.e. GCSE and Advanced Level etc.

Consequently the concept of a small dedicated and highly trained team of PD specialists has been difficult to realise in practice.

However a recent school based initiative may be about to address this thorny staffing issue. A decision was taken in September 2006 to build the Year 8 Curriculum around the idea of a '**base class**' and a '**base teacher**'. The initiative aims to facilitate the smooth transition of Primary 7 pupils into Year 8 and to raise standards by supporting pupil learning. In the programme, the Base Teacher delivers a wide range of subjects to his/her Form Class including, PD, Citizenship, R.E. and ICT. Contact with the Form Class can range from 10 -12 lessons per week. The new Curriculum model for PD may look like a retreat from the delivery model espoused during the Pilot 2003/05 (i.e. specialist PD teachers).

The essence of the new model however, is to support pupils in their ability to learn by placing the form teacher at the very heart of the pupil's teaching and learning experience.

Critically, it is our belief that pupil achievement is less dependent on focusing on outcomes, less dependent on teaching or assessment but much more dependent upon the 'process' of education: it is the quality of human relationships within the classroom which ultimately engages the student and helps prepare him/her to participate effectively in daily living.