

INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR TEACHING AT SECONDARY SCHOOL IN IRELAND: RECENT DEVELOPMENTS

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The paper relates to Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching & Learning leading to the certificate “Postgraduate Certificate at Level 9 of the National Framework of Qualifications”. Entry requirement for joining a course is “Registration with the Teaching Council of Ireland and a minimum of one year’s teaching experience in schools”. Duration of the course is 12 Months, Part-time. minimum qualifications of teachers for such courses is “Possession of qualifications and competencies recognised at Level 8 of the National Framework of Qualifications (for example, a higher diploma or an honours degree)” Number of lessons/duration of practical teaching in schools is 6 module, each worth 5 ECTS (European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System) credits. All modules are taught and supervised by professors and research fellows from Trinity College Dublin.

STRATEGIES FOR EVALUATING THEORY, LESSONS AND PRACTICAL WORK:

The Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching & Learning has been offered in Trinity College Dublin since 2014. This postgraduate qualification is being delivered as part of a three-year partnership programme between Trinity College and Google called “TA21” which aims to affect a significant long term change in STEM (Science Technology Engineering Mathematics) education in Ireland through a range of innovative interventions focused on the second level system. The focus of the course is to give teachers the skills and confidence to embrace technology in the classroom. This is accomplished by utilising a model of learning called Bridge 21. Bridge 21 is a model of 21st century learning that seeks to change the classroom so that students are empowered to teach and learn through technology and teamwork, while the teacher adopts the role of an orchestrator of learning. A range of STEM and Computer Science modules including Digital Media and Literacy, Python and STEM Pedagogy are part of the course with teachers being supported to

develop their own 21st century skills in the classroom (Roche et al, 2015). In order to evaluate the course itself and its impact on Irish education, all of the teachers taking the course are part of a research project that tracks the changes in their teaching and attitudes and compares them with a control group of teachers from similar schools that will not be taking the course. The research aim is to build a base of evidence for national implementation of similar projects. The main aspects of the course that will be evaluated will be: teacher's confidence with technology, college going culture, teaching philosophy, and 21st century teaching practices. The evaluation methodology includes qualitative interviews with the course participants as well as quantitative surveys at the beginning and end of the course each year. The surveys at the start of the year provide an insight into the current culture towards 21st century skills in Irish classrooms. In Figure 1 we show a sample of the initial results from the survey of 126 teachers in the academic year 2014/2015. These include teachers that are taking the postgraduate certificate in 21st century teaching and learning as well as a control group that will not be taking part in the course. It can be seen that teachers are mostly 'confident' or 'very confident' about letting students convey their ideas using media other than paper. While this would appear to be encouraging for the prospects of teachers embracing technology in the classroom, Figure 1 also shows that teachers that engage in this practice weekly or daily represent a minority. In 2014/2015 more than 80 teachers from 16 Irish schools participated in this year-long, part-time study course in a bid to support cultural and pedagogical change within schools and build teacher capacity to leverage technology in creating an active, engaged classroom.

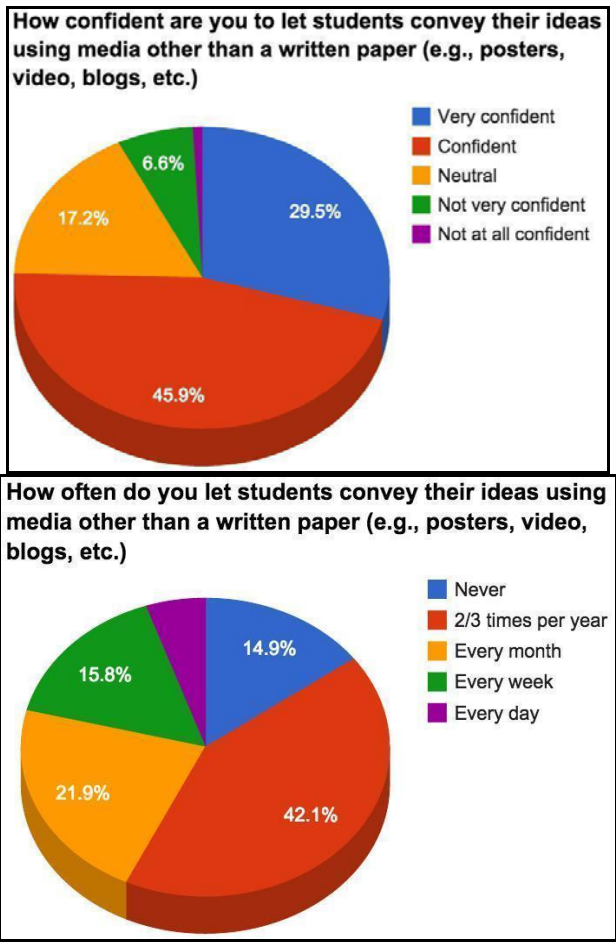


Figure 1: Teacher responses to the initial survey at the start of the Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching & Learning. The sample consists of 126 participating teachers, of which 64 are in the control group. Source: TA21 Project, Trinity College Dublin (2015).

DISCUSSION

The driving force behind the implementation of the Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching & Learning is the need for a modern approach to teacher training in Ireland. More emphasis is being placed on students learning

key skills in the classroom, with the Irish government keen to prepare young people to live and work in a rapidly changing society (Quinn, 2012). These key skills, or “21st Century Skills” as they have come to be known (Figure 2), are the skills that learners need to develop in order to fulfil their potential during their time in school. They include, but are not limited to; information processing, critical and creative thinking, working with others, communicating and being personally effective (NCCA, 2009). An education system that places priority on 21st century skills will, in turn, fit within a European society that strives for innovation, particularly in the areas of science and technology. The European Commission strives to facilitate the growing of educational reform that will drastically improve science and technology-literacy in European society. Funding available for research in Europe will continue to prioritise science and technology issues seen as strategically important (Stilgoe et al, 2014). The European Commission’s Science in Society work programme highlights that “Societal challenges can only be tackled effectively if society is fully engaged in science, technology and innovation”. While educational reform in Ireland will need to address the need for key skills and making education more relevant to the challenges of 21st century living, as well as empowering students to think critically, communicate effectively and work collaboratively (Johnston et al, 2014), the Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching & Learning has provided a starting point to bring about that reform.

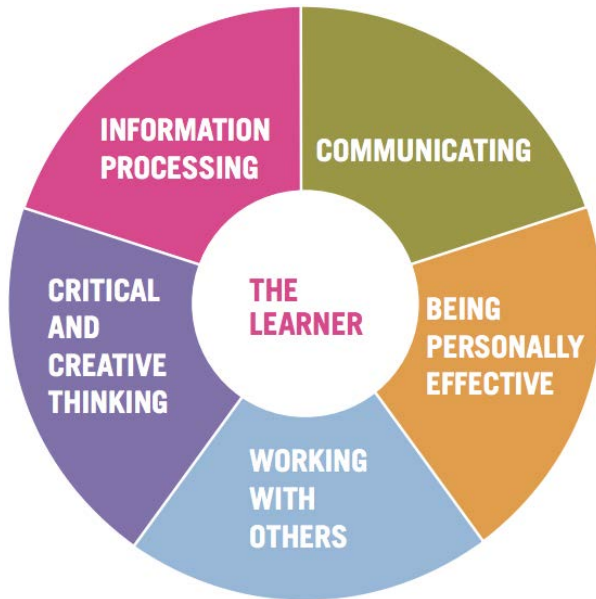


Figure 2 (Left): The “Key Skills” identified by the Irish National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) as being essential in a 21st century society. Source: NCCA. “Key Skills Framework Document” (2009).

FURTHER INFORMATION

Applications can be made here

<https://www.tcd.ie/courses/postgraduate/az/course.php?id=DPCED-TCTL-1P09>

CONCLUSION

The Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching & Learning is a significant development in teacher training in Ireland as it has the capacity to help bring about educational reform while providing training and professional development for Irish teachers. The inbuilt research element of the course will provide fresh insight into teaching and attitudes over the coming years. Already it can be seen from a preliminary analysis that teachers are confident about embracing non traditional teaching practices in the classroom but are eager to develop their own 21st century skills as well as facilitating the development of their students’ skills in the classroom. It is clear that Ireland hopes to position itself at the forefront of the movement to bring 21st century

skills into the classroom and with the Postgraduate Certificate in 21st Century Teaching & Learning it has the means to do so.

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