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The Leaving Certificate Applied Experience in Five Case Study Schools

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DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to my father Simon and my late mother, Eily Mai.

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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the delivery of a new senior cycle programme in five schools. The rationale for its introduction was that it would fulfil the needs of students of non-academic ability who show little interest in the traditional Leaving Certificate programme. The modular structure, emphasis on practical applications and active learning methods, work experience dimension, and the use of short term accreditation may encourage the students to complete the programme at a successful level, which might not have been achieved had they taken the Leaving Certificate. Research took place in the author's and four other schools, of different type who were already using the LCA. As such it is a comparative study based on action research, which investigates the effects of the introduction of a new programme on both the students and their teachers.

Topics worthy of investigation were the influence of management in establishing a framework of support, which would facilitate the launch of LCA, and the effectiveness of the programme in generating motivation and promoting positive learning outcomes for the students. In addition, how teamwork was built up and how effective this was in developing the cross-curricular approach to student learning and issues surrounding the work experience dimension. Finally, problems that arose with LCA are discussed and analysed. Arising from the analysis of the findings, recommendations for improvement are suggested.

A highly important point would be that the feedback from the learning experience of the case study schools could feed into the future development plans for LCA in this school.

INTRODUCTION

The researcher's school, referred to as St. Enda's, introduced the Leaving Certificate Applied programme in the academic year 2002-2003. An initial introduction on LCA as part of the HDEM in NUI Maynooth was undertaken and it was decided that particular aspects of the LCA merited further investigation. For this reason, more extensive research was prepared with particular emphasis on the delivery of the LCA in the schools. These questions were directed at both the students and their teachers in St. Enda's while comparative studies were carried out in four other schools.

The key aim of this study was to monitor the implementation of a new curriculum initiative, the Leaving Certificate Applied in St. Enda's and how it has already affected students and teachers in four other schools. This programme is being introduced as an alternative Leaving Certificate option, specifically aimed at students of low academic ability, who are currently struggling with the Junior Certificate programme. This thesis was a comparative study allied to an action research one. The researcher was not a member of the LCA team and this altered the perspective to a more objective analysis. The responses of management to the issues of planning, selection of students, teachers and co-ordinator, timetabling issues and the provision of resources in the school were examined. The responses of the LCA teaching team are emphasised, particularly how they felt students responded. However, the students' voice is also heard through the circulation of quantitative and qualitative questionnaires.

Another issue which was researched was that of the organisation of LCA team meetings. The DES (2000) expressed serious concern regarding the degree of frequency

of team meetings¹. It was investigated whether management in the five case study schools have set aside time during teaching hours for such meetings. This is felt to be important because it would demonstrate the commitment of management to ensuring that LCA objectives regarding cross-curricular integration may be facilitated. The frequency of meetings and the extent of attendance by team teachers would be a way of measuring the commitment of management and staff towards making LCA a success for students.

Briefly, the outline of the thesis chapters, follows herewith. Chapter one examines the background of the researcher's school and the reasons for introducing the LCA now. However the level of success of initiatives within the school such as the Humanities programme, the Vocational Preparation and Training programme, the Transition Year option and the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme are discussed. This is followed by a consideration of the reaction of staff and management in preparation for the introduction of LCA.

The second chapter reflects on the attempts by the DES to introduce new syllabi and active teaching methodologies to meet the challenge of providing for the needs of less academic students. In this regard, mention will be made of the Vocational Preparation and Training programme, the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme and the Senior Certificate programme. The liberal-vocational divide and Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence will be mentioned. A discussion of assessment issues and dissatisfaction with aspects of the Leaving Certificate will be considered. The literature review researches the problems surrounding the liberal-vocational divide in second level Irish

¹ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dublin, Government Publications, p40

schools and considers ways of solving this problem. However, most of the review will be concerned with the Leaving Certificate Applied programme, its rationale, structure and intended delivery at school level. Issues discussed include the possibility that the LCA is an economically driven programme and that it could be seen as a 'soft option'. Also discussed is the limited progression of LCA students to third level education and timetabling issues. LCA seen as a learning process, problems with assessment and the value of work experience will be examined.

The third chapter describes the four case study schools.

The fourth chapter outlines the methodology to be used. Principles of educational research, selecting a research topic, research design and objectives are considered.

Action research, triangulation and issues surrounding the questionnaire and interview are debated. Issues surrounding ethics, bias and negotiating access as well as methods of data analysis are deliberated. Interviews took place with the principal and coordinator, in each school. A random sample of LCA teachers were also interviewed.

Questionnaires were distributed to the LCA students in each school. Seeking feedback from different sources helped to establish a 'triangulation' perspective to strengthen the validity of data collection.

The fifth chapter presents the findings, highlighting key issues that arose. This includes a review and analysis of the findings coming from the interview transcripts with teachers and questionnaires circulated to LCA students.

The next chapter analyses the key issues arising from the research material. The focus is on the reasons why the LCA was introduced in the case study schools and how students and team teachers were selected. The issues of hard work for teachers and problems with team meetings are included followed by the issues of ill-discipline, the management of resources and the challenge of coordination. The final section discusses the problems of students, giving the opinions of students and their teachers.

The final chapter includes a summary of the earlier chapters and makes some recommendations for the improved delivery of the LCA at school level.

The appendices includes a series of tables and bar charts to reflect student quantitative research.

CHAPTER ONE

This chapter considers the background to the researcher's school. Initiatives developed within the school over the years have included the Humanities programme, the Vocational Preparation and Training programme, the Transition Year option and the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme. Examining how these programmes fared within St. Enda's may provide a template for the possible development of LCA which is to be introduced in September 2002. The previous experience of teacher collaboration will be discussed because teamwork is seen to be essential to its success. The reasons for introducing LCA at this time are considered together with the level of preparation made by management and staff prior to its introduction.

BACKGROUND TO THE RESEARCHER'S SCHOOL

St. Enda's is a voluntary, non-fee paying, secondary school, predominantly catering for boys, formerly run by a Religious Order situated in a rapidly expanding suburb in western Dublin. It was founded by the Christian Brothers in 1969, with two prefabricated classrooms and 38 students. By 1978, the new school was built, with numbers continuing to rise to a peak of 650 students and 38 full-time teachers by 1994.

Historically, the school built up a name for academic achievement. However, this tradition has gradually been eroded over the past fifteen years. A Humanities programme and briefly the Vocational Preparation and Training Course, VPT 1 were offered to less academic students. The latter was replaced by the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme, LCVP in 1997. The Humanities programme was aimed at Junior Certificate students and involved project work in English, Geography and History, while the VPT and LCVP, the only one of these still running in the school

provides a partially vocational course at Leaving Certificate Level. In 1987 the first Repeat Leaving Certificate class was introduced which included for the first time, female students. Perhaps the most dramatic change took place in 1989, when a lay principal was appointed and a board of management was established. There followed a more open admissions policy, which in turn, led to a student body of more widely-ranging ability, aptitude and motivation. This has resulted in a decrease in academic achievement and an increase in disciplinary problems.

More recently the school ethos has changed from Catholic to Christian mode, with the acceptance of students of varied nationality and race. For long-experienced teachers, of whom there are a third, this amounts to a challenge to traditional cultural beliefs.

THE HUMANITIES PROGRAMME IN ST. ENDAS

The Humanities programme was introduced into the school primarily to satisfy the needs of academically weak students at Intermediate Certificate level². Most of them had already been receiving a considerable amount of remedial education in English and Mathematics. It was felt that offering them a more student-centred syllabus would motivate them to achieve better. Special textbooks were also provided. This was the first time in St. Enda's that teachers heard the term 'active learning' and there was a considerable amount of project work. These projects were then assessed by their teachers and cross-moderated. This was included as part of their accreditation for the Intermediate Certificate. The three teachers of English, History and Geography were selected because of their interest in the programme and their empathy and patience with these students; indeed one was the remedial teacher. Despite some problems with

² An tAonad Curaclaim, (1981), *An Evaluation of the Humanities Programme of the City of Dublin Vocational Education Committee*, Dublin, An tAonad Curriculum, p16

behaviour and work rate, the outcome was a positive experience for the students and they made substantial gains in terms of self-esteem, motivation and results. The programme was discontinued in 1985 because the new principal felt a need to introduce the recently developed Vocational Preparation and Training programme and it was felt that an insufficient number of teachers would be available to take both programmes. This resulted in sacrificing the Humanities programme in order to make way for the VPTP.

THE VOCATIONAL PREPARATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMME IN ST. ENDA'S

The principal in 1984 in St. Enda's felt enthusiastic about VPTP and it was launched in the school. A small core team of teachers was formed, some of whom had positive experience of the Humanities initiative. A genuine attempt was made to achieve cross-curricular integration and there was plenty of activity-based learning. For instance, cold frames for the horticultural class were made by VPTP students during the woodwork period. To show students the wide variety of plant life, a visit to the Botanic Gardens was arranged. Also, the theoretical side of the horticulture topic included botany, where the plant growth process was studied, showing the cross-curricular dimension. A general air of enthusiasm was apparent among the teaching team, some of which was passed onto the students. Unfortunately, the arrival of a new principal and the establishment of a board of management coincided with the abolition of VPTP within the school. The programme's vocational dimension was considered to be giving the school a different profile locally, one not in keeping with the school's traditional academic image. One criticism of the VPTP was that it kept students presenting discipline problems, in school one year longer. Worse, it was felt that retuning them

back to the Leaving Certificate programme, one year later led to further disciplinary problems. It may be mentioned here that the principal, having consulted the newly-formed board of management and school staff went ahead with the decision to end it. Some murmur of dissent came from the VPTP teachers, but many teachers welcomed the decision. Many of the VPTP teachers, years later, spoke with regret at the passing of a programme which had benefited many non-academic students. Perhaps an opportunity to embrace a vocational dimension was bypassed, which was a loss to future students of non-academic ability within the school.

THE TRANSITION YEAR IN ST. ENDA'S

A brief analysis of the Transition Year, TY is included here because of its similarity with LCA in two respects. These were the widespread use of active learning methodologies and the usage of work experience by transition year students. The LCA teachers were therefore conversant with the briefing process used in assisting students to prepare for work experience. The teachers had in-service support over a period of up to seven years and this benefited the new curriculum initiative in the school.

A discussion at a staff meeting led to the introduction of TY in 1995. One reason for launching it was the staffs' viewpoint that some students entering the senior cycle could benefit from the extra year of maturation. There was concern that some students who were academically weak needed an opportunity to learn extra skills and gain in self-confidence. It was argued that the TY could satisfy these twin objectives. In subsequent years, all students completing Junior Certificate were allowed apply for TY. However, as school policy continued to choose only one class, selection of students was made by management and the career guidance teacher using the criterion of who would benefit

most. In St. Enda's the fact that five teachers with prior experience of teaching Transition Year were chosen as part of the LCA team was justified by the principal on the basis that their familiarity and usage of these active learning methods would benefit the new initiative.

The early inexperience of the teaching team was overcome with the assistance of in-service, indeed some teachers attended summer courses, for example, drama workshops for English class. At one stage, a member of the Transition Year support service was brought in to provide information on active learning methods. Although this was interesting, there was no follow up in school in-service which would have consolidated the learning experience for the LCA team. Fullan's (1992) opinion is that "... one-shot workshops"³ should be avoided and he advocates that sustained in-service is required to help ensure efficient delivery of a new curriculum.

The willingness of teachers to give of their free time to interview and debrief students following work experience was important to the success of the programme. The publicity gained annually for the school has proved to be a positive experience for both students and teachers. The success of the delivery of active learning methodologies with the Transition Year option influenced management when selecting teachers for the LCA initiative.

While TY could be viewed as a positive and worthwhile experience for most students, one criticism needs to be made. The handful of TY meetings which were held did not bring up the issues of planning and interdisciplinary collaboration. These would be

³ Fullan, M. G., (1993), *Successful School Improvement*, Buckingham, Open University Press, p75

issues considered for LCA. Another question arising would be the possibility of allowing transition year students to be considered for the LCA experience. Interestingly, the DES reported that one school provided a special Transition Year which helped prepare students for the LCA⁴. Indeed, one of the case study schools, St. Anthony's developed their own elective modules from the TY experience.

THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME

The LCVP experience also impacted on the introduction of LCA in St. Enda's. The vocational nature of the programme in the link modules and its work experience dimension bears strong resemblance to the LCA initiative. However, its delivery within the school proved to be unsatisfactory as the co-ordinator saw its implementation did not comply with LCVP guidelines. Serious dissatisfaction was expressed in relation to the absence of career guidance and IT teachers from the team. The result in St. Enda's was that the co-ordinator felt that the LCVP was marginalised and that he took three of the four roles, the other being taken by the languages teacher, but these two teachers seemed to work in isolation. He blamed dreadful preparation and poor timetabling for the problem. This raised issues for LCA, including the marginalisation of programmes outside the traditional Leaving Certificate, the accountability of management regarding allocation of teachers to teams, the effectiveness of new initiatives, preparation and timetabling practices. Could this suggest the possibility that LCA could receive similar mismanagement which could marginalise it? Could similar problems arise regarding the introduction of LCA in the school?

⁴ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dublin, Government Publications, p27

A CROSS-CURRICULAR APPROACH:

This study also investigates the ability of teachers from the LCA team to work together and how effective this was in attempting to deliver a cross-curricular approach to the initiative. Cross-curricular integration is highlighted as a core objective of LCA as stated in the DES document.⁵ In common with many schools having an academic tradition, teacher collegiality has generally been absent from schools like St. Enda's. Indeed the process of balkanization is far more likely to be present than the collegial mode⁶. Hargreaves (1994) describes balkanisation as collaboration that divides whereby teachers work together only in sub-groups, insulated from others.⁷ Perhaps more likely to be found in St. Enda's is what Fullan (1993) describes as a school having characteristics of 'isolation', 'protection from outside interference', 'walls of privatism' and 'ceiling to improvement'⁸. Sadly, this sounds fairly familiar in St. Enda's. Could this be the culture that may hinder the development of LCA in the school?

True, contrived collegiality, one imposed from above by school management⁹ has been seen in initiatives such as the establishment of last year's sub committee in St. Enda's on disciplinary matters. In schools where management tends to control and direct teacher collaboration, the preferred option may be to hold impromptu meetings, convened only when planning and decisions have to be made. However, its effectiveness may be debatable because the attendance level may be lower if held during non-school time. This could pre-empt the development of the teamwork

⁵ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dublin, Government Publications, p10

⁶ Hargreaves, A., (1994), *Changing Teachers, Changing Times, Teachers work and culture in the postmodern age*: London, Cassell, p28

⁷ Ibid, p 18

⁸ Fullan, M., (1993), *Change Forces, Probing the Depths of Educational Reform*, London, Falmer Press, p34

⁹ Hargreaves, A., (1994), *Changing Teachers, Changing Times, Teachers work and culture in the postmodern age*: London, Cassell, p17

approach¹⁰ which is highlighted by the DES as an essential prerequisite for the quality delivery of LCA. Instead it could be argued that the convening of meetings at regular intervals during school time would suit the conservative nature of teachers and ensure higher attendance and hence, improved teamwork.

However, the prevalence of teacher isolation with individuals preparing their own lessons suggests that a big paradigm change in teachers attitudes may be required to alter to a system of working together with colleagues in preparing class lessons. Can this school overcome the reluctance of teachers to work together, in other words, can a dedicated LCA team be built up? This is a question which the research attempts to answer.

REASONS FOR INTRODUCING THE LCA IN ST. ENDA'S NOW

There has been an awareness for some time that one class among the four senior cycle groups, have been uninterested in the traditional Leaving Certificate Programme. The academic nature of the content in subjects such as mathematics and English were creating problems in understanding. Certainly, having taught the former subject one was aware of the difficulty in grasping the concepts emanating from the content. Some of these students genuinely tried to learn the material, while others became frustrated and ceased the effort. Most of these students were pleasant to get on with, and thereby filled the Gardner theory of having intrapersonal intelligence¹¹. However, they struggled

¹⁰ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Dublin, Government Publications, p 39

¹¹ Boldt, S., (1998), *Unlocking Potential, A Study and an Appraisal of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, The Leaving Certificate Applied Presentation Family Policy Group, p20

within the linguistic and logical-mathematical forms of achievement¹². This was evidenced in the low levels of achievement in terminal examinations, such as the Christmas house tests in subjects like mathematics and English. Some of these students within the relaxed nature of relationship with this teacher would have asked questions concerning the value of learning a theorem when they leave school. A difficult question for the teacher to answer although the context from which it came is understandable.

As the years went by, it became apparent that students of non-academic ability continued to struggle with these academic subjects particularly those requiring answers in the form of written work. Their frustration with the subjects being taught, and their teachers, caused behavioural problems at classroom level.

It would be true to say that the type of non-academic student has changed in more recent years. They are certainly not passive, and will not tolerate an academic programme, which does not interest them. They could be described as articulate and challenging, and well aware of the requirements of the modern world, which gives the impression that they are intelligent, in terms of having 'common sense'. It seems only fair to them that they be given a non-academic, perhaps more active, programme, at least one which will interest and motivate them to do well in school while also ensuring their retention. One of the problems arising from the Leaving Certificate would be the emphasis on memorising material, such as learning off theorems for the mathematics course for examinations. Most non-academic students that this researcher has taught would have had problems with 'rote' learning particularly when compounded with difficulty in understanding. The criteria for success with the non-academic student seem clear-cut:

¹² Boldt, S, (1998), *Unlocking Potential, A Study and an Appraisal of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, The Leaving Certificate Applied Presentation Family Policy Group, p19

select the content which will interest them, shorten and simplify the course material, and replace the terminal examination with frequent shorter forms of assessment which are preferably, not of a written nature. Fortunately, the LCA appears to fit these criteria.

Within the past two years in this school, feedback from the mock examinations for non-academic students has become most discouraging. Last year, so 'alienated'¹³ were some of them that seven students of Gaeilge and three of history handed up blank sheets at ordinary level three months before the state examinations began. These are worrying trends for this school and such issues need to be addressed immediately which explains the rationale for introducing the LCA now. Would LCA address these problems? This thesis answers these questions.

This study is comparative because the experience of the four case study schools provides a basis for suggested improvements in the researcher's school. The planning process in that school is the subject for action research.

Two years ago within St. Enda's the board of management suggested introducing the LCA. At a staff meeting, the subject was broached, meeting a lukewarm reception from teachers. The possibility of its initiation seemed unlikely at this stage. Staff interest at this time was low being compounded by the A.S.T.I. industrial dispute, which resulted in one day closures of secondary schools, countrywide. Mention was made of the academic tradition of the school and that any dilution of same by bringing in a vocational type programme would ruin the school's image. By contrast, another teacher suggested that because an increasing number of third year students were opting for the foundation level papers in english, mathematics and gaeilge, a less academic course at

¹³ Hannan, D.F., Shorthall, S., (1991) Paper No. 153, *The Quality of Their Education, School Leaver's Views of Educational Objectives and Outcomes*, ESRI p 4

senior cycle, needed to be provided. One teacher said that most of these students were presenting behavioural problems which were not being overcome by disciplinary sanctions and that this problem was due largely to their frustration with the academic nature of the traditional Leaving Certificate programme. Another teacher disagreed, suggesting that these students might create even more difficulty within a new programme. This was suggested because the extra freedom available to students as a consequence of work experience could result in their inability to concentrate the next school day. It was felt that this could lead to discipline problems.

The third time the LCA arose for discussion at a staff meeting, the principal conveyed the wish of the board of management that it be launched during the 2000-2001 academic year, which coincided with research on LCA being done in the school. The reaction to its possible introduction was mixed, with a third of the staff expressing favourable reaction. However, many of these teachers admitted knowing very little about it. In hindsight, the conclusion reached was that support would be insufficient to ensure its introduction during the next academic year 2001-2002. In fairness to the staff, it must be said that part of the negative reaction could be explained by the hostile attitude to the DES response to the ongoing ASTI industrial dispute. This was quite understandable given that those two years have probably been the most traumatic in the school's history

During the past academic year, the LCA issue came up for discussion at three staff meetings, the last occurring in April. Support for the LCA among teachers has grown, with enthusiasm being shown by the younger staff members and those having experience of the active learning methodologies used at Transition Year level.

Nevertheless strong criticism was directed towards the principal regarding the lack of planning for its prospective introduction. At this stage, one teacher was answering the questions on LCA, being directed toward the principal. When reservations were expressed, for instance the possibility that LCA students could fail the examinations, it was explained that ongoing gaining of credits precluded this possibility. This answer resulted in a majority voting to launch the programme for the coming academic year. Surprisingly, nobody suggested that a sub-committee be formed to prepare for the new programme. Such a planning group could have assisted the prospective LCA team, providing information regarding rationale, structure, content, time-tabling, cross-curricular integration, Student Tasks, work experience and assessment procedures. Was it a mistake not to have formed such a group, particularly when considering that industrial action prevented in-service for new syllabi taking place in May? Fortunately, this ban was lifted resulting in LCA in-service taking place during the September-October period, 2002. This in-service was described by the co-ordinator as intensive providing plenty information and handouts for use by the LCA team. Another teacher complained, mentioning that the same information was given at all three in-service courses he attended. If such dissatisfaction is expressed by teachers, it would be important that the LCA support team address such concerns. High quality in-service would be an important part of the preparation of LCA teachers for delivery of the new curriculum at school level.

Staff members raised a number of questions prior to the introduction of LCA. Who will be on the LCA team? Who will be the co-ordinator? Which students will be in the LCA class? There were still no answers to these questions three weeks before the summer recess of 2002 nor was a date been set for the open night for parents of students keen on

taking LCA as next year's option. This level of planning would be imperative to plan for next year's timetabling for LCA teachers. There is a need to know numbers and student names for the school's first LCA class. These students will need to be interviewed regarding suitability and expectations for the programme. By May 2002, the staff had not been informed on these issues. Also, the LCA support team needs to inform the staff about the structure, format, timetabling and resources required while no dates have yet been set for in-service because of the ASTI industrial action directing its members not to take in-service for new curricular initiatives. Yet, the NCCA policy is that a tremendous amount of planning needs to be done by the third term to assist successful implementation for the launch of LCA during the next academic year. There is, as yet, no plan. It was not until June 2002 that an LCA coordinator was appointed, a teaching team selected and the first LCA class chosen for the 2003-2004 academic year.

"In view of its innovative structure, content and assessment modes the introduction and implementation of the Leaving Certificate Applied required a high level of engagement on the part of school management and teachers"¹⁴. There is a need to examine if this occurred in the school

CONCLUSION

This chapter has given a short description of the researcher's school, in terms of its students, size, academic orientation and historical perspective. Briefly, it examined how Senior Cycle initiatives, such as VPTP, the TY and LCVP fared within the school.

¹⁴ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Government Publications. pp 73-74

Finally, the reasons for introducing LCA now and the level of preparation for its introduction were discussed.

The second chapter will look at attempts by the DES to introduce syllabi as diverse as Vocational Preparation and Training programme, Senior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme to Irish second level schools. The divide between academic and vocational education and theories of multiple intelligence will be examined while criticism of the Leaving Certificate programme will focus on assessment limitations.

The formation of LCA, its assessment format, DES funding and ensuring employer awareness of the programme will be discussed. LCA seen as a 'soft option', its limited progression to third level education and timetabling issues will be mentioned. LCA seen as a learning process and the value of work experience will close the chapter.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The chapter opens with a discussion of the Vocational Preparation and Training programme, Senior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational programme. The dilemmas surrounding the liberal-vocational divide in second level schools and ways of addressing this issue will be discussed. Gardner's theory of multiple intelligence and dissatisfaction with the Leaving Certificate will also be considered. The background to the formation of LCA, the rationale for its introduction and its assessment format will be discussed. DES funding for an economically driven programme, the need to inform employers and LCA seen as a 'soft option' will also be mentioned. LCA considered as a limited progression to third level education, timetabling issues, LCA seen as a learning process and the value of work experience will close the chapter.

THE VOCATIONAL PREPARATION AND TRAINING PROGRAMME

The 1970s brought widespread youth unemployment to the EEC. "In response, the EC resolved in 1976 to introduce initiatives to meet the problems of those young people least able to compete on the job market, the early school leavers and especially those who leave school with no formal qualifications"¹⁵. As a result, the first pre-employment courses were introduced to Ireland in 1977¹⁶, although these were unavailable in secondary schools with funding coming from the European Social Fund. Individual schools were allowed flexibility in designing programmes.

¹⁵ McNamara, G., Williams, K., Herron, D., (Ed.) (1990): *Achievement and Aspiration: Curricular initiatives in post-primary education in the 1980's*, Dublin, ASTI p.33

¹⁶ Williams, K., McNamara, G. (1985), *The Vocational Preparation Course, An Educational Appraisal and Practical Guide*, Dublin, ASTI, p 8

Murray¹⁷ (1996) refers to the *Programme for Action in Education* (1984 –87) calling for a restructured senior cycle programme. The new one year course commenced in September, 1984. It was called the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme, commencing with 17,000 students in 380 schools nationwide¹⁸. This was also an attempt by the Department of Education to make provision for the needs of non-academic senior-cycle students. It could be described as a follow up programme to the Humanities project for non-academic junior cycle students. It could be argued that the VPTP was an attempt to introduce a programme having a unified structure demanding a teamwork approach¹⁹.

Over the years, the Post Leaving Certificate Programme became known as the VPTP 2 PLC with numbers rising nationally to 24,900 places in 200 schools and colleges, by 2000 – 01²⁰. “VPTP 2 is distinguished by a much heavier concentration of time on technical skills and work experience”²¹. All the PLC Programmes provide general education, representing the core skills of literacy, numeracy, communications and IT skills. They also provide technical knowledge, depending on the option chosen, be it Computer Studies, Sport and Leisure or Performing Arts. Just like the earlier VPT 1 programme, work experience is provided to help prepare students for working life. These courses are full-time, over a one or two year timespan. The National Council for Vocational Awards, now called the Further Education and Training Awards Council, FETAC²² provides certification. Williams and McNamara (1985)²³ believe that the key

¹⁷ Murray, P., 1996, *Senior Cycle Reform: Grasping the Nettles?* in Hogan, P (Ed), *Issues in Education*, ASTI Education Journal, Dublin, p 31, pp 31- 45

¹⁸ McNamara, G., Williams, K., Herron, D.: 1990: *Achievement and Aspiration: Curricular initiatives in post-primary education in the 1980's* p.34

¹⁹ *Ibid*, p37

²⁰ DES, (2000), PLC Courses – Information Note, <http://www.irlgov.ie/educ>, Oct 2002

²¹ *Idem*

²² *Idem*

to running this type of course is in the school planning and preparation stage, a point which can also be made in relation to LCA. Most graduates (65%) find employment while the remainder go on to further studies²⁴.

THE SENIOR CERTIFICATE

A brief examination of the Senior Certificate will show similarities with the TY option and the LCA. Hyland (1996) reports that LCA was partially developed from the Senior Certificate²⁵. Its principles included the use of active learning within the classroom and the out-of-school environment²⁶. The latter included work experience and the presentation of portfolios. These approaches and the notion of having a team teaching approach under a co-ordinator would also resurface in LCA. Schools could implement it in one of three ways: as a total alternative to the senior cycle curriculum or as part of either the Leaving Certificate or the Vocational Preparation and Training Programme²⁷.

Shannon Curriculum Development Centre were responsible for developing these programmes during the course of the Spiral II EC project²⁸. It was aimed at students “.... experiencing learning difficulties”²⁹ and sought to integrate links between

²³ Williams, K., McNamara, G. (1985), *The Vocational Preparation Course, An Educational Appraisal and Practical Guide*, Dublin, ASTI, p 23

²⁴ DES, (2000), PLC Courses – Information Note, <http://www.irlgov.ie/educ>, Oct 2002

²⁵ Hyland, A, (1996), *An Overview of Developments in Senior Cycle Education 1965-1995*: in Hogan, P (Ed) *Issues in Education*, ASTI Education Journal, p9, pp 1-12

²⁶ Senior Certificate, *Programme Outlines* (1986), Shannon, Shannon Curriculum Development Unit, pii

²⁷ *Ibid* p i

²⁸ McNamara, G. (1992), *The Senior Cycle and the Less Academically Inclined Student* in: *Studies in Education*, Vol 8, No. 2, Department of Higher Education and Educational Research, Trinity College, University of Dublin, p32, pp 27-37

²⁹ Shannon Curriculum Development Unit, (1986) *Senior Certificate, Programme Outlines*, Shannon, Shannon Curriculum Development Unit, pi

school, home and community. Senior Certificate was piloted in 22 schools during 1984-86 in the Munster region and was later extended to 50 schools³⁰.

Subjects included Work and Communication Skills, Food and Agriculture, Social and Cultural Studies and Computer Applications, as well as Mathematics and Gaeilge Chumarsaideach³¹. This shows the provision of general education allied to practical knowledge which would be required in the work place. "Candidates may choose to make a presentation on an item that they have researched, a personal experience or reflections on work experience"³². This is a reference to a three minute interview on audio tape, as part of the portfolio requirement to be assessed. The interview technique would later resurface in the LCA. "Photographs may be used to enhance submission"³³. This portfolio would be handed in before the written examination³⁴. In Food and Agriculture, taking cuttings and planting a lawn would be topics to be included in the folder³⁵. Note the similarity with Horticulture in LCA. In hindsight, the Senior Certificate was a genuine attempt to introduce a more vocational dimension to cater for the needs of less academic senior cycle students.

THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE VOCATIONAL PROGRAMME

A brief mention of LCVP is considered to be important because it has similar underlying principles to LCA. The LCVP was introduced in 1989 responding to the

³⁰ McNamara, G. (1992), *The Senior Cycle and the Less Academically Inclined Student* in: *Studies in Education, Vol 8, No. 2*, Department of Higher Education and Educational Research, Trinity College, University of Dublin, p32,

³¹ Department of Education, (1994), *Senior Certificate*, Athlone, Examinations Branch p 1, pp 1-8

³² Ibid p 1

³³ Ibid p 3

³⁴ Idem

³⁵ Ibid p 5

needs "...of a rapidly changing social, work and business environment."³⁶ By 1999, 35,000 students were taking it in 481 schools nationwide³⁷. Students are expected to develop the ability to take responsibility for their own learning, to become innovative, work well as part of a team and develop their communication and ICT skills, aims which are shared with LCA within a cross-curricular framework³⁸. Three link modules are taken, preparation for work, work experience and enterprise education³⁹.

However, LCVP students also take seven Leaving Certificate subjects⁴⁰. Accreditation is similar to LCA with pass, 50-64%, merit, 65-79% and distinction, 80-100% awarded⁴¹. In terms of assessment, 60% is available for the portfolio of course work with the balance provided by a terminal written examination⁴². The LCVP is acceptable for entry to both university and IT courses⁴³.

THE LIBERAL VOCATIONAL DIVIDE IN SECOND LEVEL EDUCATION

How clearcut is the notion of an academic subject? Many teachers would classify mathematics as an academic subject. Would this be because it involves intricate calculation, the rote learning of theorems and use of complicated formulae? However it may also involve practical everyday applications for instance, adding up the cost of a grocery list to ensure that the correct change is returned when buying items in a shop. Could this section be termed a technical subject? Some teachers might consider woodwork to be a technical subject with its strong emphasis on hand to eye skills.

³⁶ LCVP Action Group (2000), *Implementing the LCVP, Guidelines for Schools*, Navan, Costello Print, p4

³⁷ Ibid, p5

³⁸ Ibid, p6

³⁹ Ibid, p8

⁴⁰ Ibid, p9

⁴¹ Ibid, p11

⁴² Ibid, p10

⁴³ Ibid, p11

However, it also involves much theory. Could the learning of information on different types of woods be considered an academic approach? Perhaps it could be argued that the divide between technical, sometimes referred to as vocational, because they were originally taught in vocational schools and academic subjects, is not that clearcut? Culliton (1992) says that “At the second level, vocational education is being crowded out by the academic stream.”⁴⁴ He feels that there is a need to emphasise vocational education to match the needs of the workplace.

Many authors writing in the educational field speak about the low value placed on technical education in society vis-à-vis its academic counterpart. Burt⁴⁵ cited in Lynch (1992) used the theory of intelligence quotient, IQ which became the standard for selecting students. St. Enda’s use similar tests to stream students at point of entry and these streams remain largely unchanged up to Junior Certificate level. However, this measurement of intelligence was limited to the mathematical and linguistic modes to the exclusion of other intelligences. This resulted in academic achievement taking precedence over practical skills, which were only seen as ‘talents’ rather than intelligences. Pring (1995)⁴⁶ says that “Nonetheless, this major divide between academic and vocational, between education and training, between ‘thinking’ and ‘making’ is deeply rooted in our culture”. While this example refers to the British situation, the same predilection can be detected in Irish second-level schools.

⁴⁴ Culliton, J., (1992), *A Time for Change: Industrial Policy for the 1990's*, Report of the Industrial Policy Review Group, Dublin, Government Publication, p53

⁴⁵ Lynch, K., (1992), *Intelligence, Ability and Education, Challenging Traditional Views in Oideas* 38, p 136, pp 134-148.

⁴⁶ Pring, R. A., (1995), *Closing the Gap – Liberal Education and Vocational Preparation*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, p55

Coolahan (1981)⁴⁷ refers to the perception by parents and the community of the low status placed on “...practical-type...” education compared to “...the more prestigious academic-type education...”. Trant and O’Donnabhain (1998)⁴⁸ agree, when they say that “There is a long standing hierarchy in human affairs which considers the activity of the brain to be superior to the activity of the hands”. Is this true or is it merely a perception? It may be mentioned here that both vocational and secondary schools offer vocational subjects including metalwork, woodwork and domestic science. Pring (1995) says that this belief has serious consequences for students who are “...branded failures and ineducable...”⁴⁹ because they cannot succeed in the academic subjects. Some of these may succeed within the vocational arena but their achievements are less valued than their academically-achieving colleagues. The Catholic hierarchy in 1930 according to Coolahan (1981)⁵⁰ insisted that vocational schools should not be allowed provide an education up to Leaving Certificate level. This decision appeared to discriminate against less academic students, thereby lessening their educational opportunities and possible future job prospects. However, in a much simpler society where more occupations of the manual type were available, this discrimination did not prevent school leavers within the 13-16 year age group getting employment. Hence, the vocational schools, in the period 1947-1967, provided only a Group Certificate qualification, which was deemed to be sufficient to find occupations in the factories and trades category. This discriminatory legislation against vocational schools was not revoked until 1967, the

47 Coolahan, J., (1981), *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, p103

48 Trant, A., O’Donnabhain, D., (1998), *The Way Forward* in Trant, A., O’Donnabhain, D., Lawton, D., O’Connor, T., *The Future of the Curriculum*, CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit and individual authors, p84

49 Pring, R. A. (1995), *Closing the Gap – Liberal Education and Vocational Preparation*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, p134

50 Coolahan (1981), *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, p.134

year that free post primary education was introduced⁵¹. O'Connor (1998)⁵², refers to the fact that the introduction of free post primary education in 1967 resulted in vocational schools becoming part of mainstream second level education. This development would lead to the notion of "The Comprehensive Idea"⁵³ for all second level schools, by offering both academic and vocational subjects. This was an attempt to bridge the historic divide between academic and vocational education at second level in both vocational and secondary schools. However, increasing numbers of students achieving Leaving Certificate success resulted in the devaluation of the Group Certificate. Hyland (1998)⁵⁴, makes the point that the Group Certificate provided many practical forms of assessment and teacher involvement in the assessment of their own pupils. Perhaps its abolition was a loss to technical education? The latter students, after 1972 with the raising of the school leaving age to fifteen were expected to stay in school one year longer, in order to achieve a Certificate at Intermediate level.

It could be argued that because many of these less academic students may not share the school's values they may find it harder to achieve in subjects which do not interest them. This problem has been exacerbated since July 2002 with the statutory introduction of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 which raised the school-leaving age to sixteen. This forces them to remain longer in school, and hence struggle for another year or two to complete the Leaving Certificate which they find to be uninteresting and remain within a system where they feel they do not belong. For instance, reference to

⁵¹ Coolahan (1981), *Irish Education: Its History and Structure*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, p 195

⁵² O'Connor, T., *The Impact of the European Social Fund on the Development of Initial Vocational Education and Training in Ireland* in Trant, A, O'Donnabhain, D. Lawton, D. O'Connor, T. *The Future of the Curriculum*, CDVEC Curriculum Development Unit and individual authors, p65, pp 57 –76

⁵³ Department of Education, (1969), *Ar ndaltai uile- All Our Children*, Dublin, Rialtas na hEireann, p23

⁵⁴ Hyland, A. (1998), *Assessment Issues for the 21st Century* in McCormack, T., Archer, P., *Inequality in Education; The Role of Assessment and Certification*, Catholic Organisation for Religious in Ireland, CORI, pp 106-107, pp 101-117

the 1991 Leaving Certificate examination shows that at Ordinary Level on average over all subjects, 10% received a grade E; 5%, grade F; 1%, NG. These were in real terms, 18, 512, 9,555 and 2,407 candidates respectively⁵⁵. This issue makes it most imperative to come up with a curriculum which will interest students having a non-academic orientation. This issue would be addressed at European level by the development of pre-employment courses in the mid seventies with resources coming from the European fund.

However, the divide remains in the minds of teachers, still speaking of students, who struggled academically, as being more suited to doing woodwork and metalwork, because teachers felt that these were described as practical subjects, being more suitable for less academic students. In fact, this may only have been occasionally true. It may be important to remember that the majority of second level teachers have qualified themselves because they have achieved success within the academic field. This may surely make it more difficult for them to identify with the needs of non-academic students. Unintentionally, these teachers may also place a higher value on academic achievement than on the remaining 'intelligences' which were postulated by Gardner cited in Boldt (1998)⁵⁶. Less academic students are smart enough to become aware of this lower value rating from teachers, other students and parents. By internalising such beliefs they may also value themselves less well, which discourages them from trying for academic success. The NCCA (1995)⁵⁷ states that students who experience failure predominantly within the academic subjects learn to accept it. How can this problem be

⁵⁵ Martin, M.O., Hickey, B.L., (1992), *The 1991 Leaving Certificate, A Review Of Results*, Dublin, Educational Research Centre, St. Patricks College, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p49

⁵⁶ Boldt, S, (1998), *Unlocking Potential, A Study and an Appraisal of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, The Leaving Certificate Applied Presentation Family Group, pp 19-20.

⁵⁷ NCCA (1999), *The Junior Cycle Review*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p55

overcome? Perhaps this can be done by providing more active learning style methods in the classroom. This was the intention being addressed by the replacement of the Intermediate Certificate with its counterpart, the Junior Cycle Programme. More particularly, the Junior Certificate Schools Programme was an intervention strategy targeting students who are socio-economically disadvantaged to help prevent them leaving school early⁵⁸. The NCCA (1995)⁵⁹ states that short term goals used in the JCSP affect motivation better than a terminal examination. The cross- curricular perspective suggests that schools providing the JCSP may possibly be in the best position to deliver the LCA programme, because of their familiarity with this perspective. Conversely, could it not be suggested that a school like St. Enda's, with its academic tradition, may find teacher team building and cross-curricular integration difficult objectives to achieve?

MULTIPLE INTELLIGENCE THEORY

A brief discussion of Gardner's multiple intelligence theory is felt to be justified because Boldt (1998) argues that it is used as a philosophical basis for delivery of LCA in the Presentation family schools⁶⁰. Gardner readily admits the existence of eight forms of intelligence, which he classifies as multiple, being known perhaps for centuries, although some previously unnamed. MI Theory consists of linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, spatial, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist. His viewpoint is that these eight forms may not be exhaustive, indeed he admits the possibility of the existence of other intelligences which have yet to be named if not already identified.

⁵⁸ NCCA (1999), *The Junior Cycle Review*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p 72

⁵⁹ Ibid, p 76

⁶⁰ Boldt, S, (1998), *Unlocking Potential, A Study and an Appraisal of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, The Leaving Certificate Applied Presentation Family Group, p20

The problem with these myriad forms of intelligence would be the criticisms by empirical researchers of the lack of valid measuring instruments and the logistics of trying to measure them, particularly by the continuous assessment method. Would it involve excess manpower? Would this make it too costly? Are Departments of Education and Finance wary of them for monetary reasons? Boldt (1998) readily acknowledges Gardner's theory of intelligences when he says: "In the light of Gardner's theory, there are many implications for education and schooling in terms of curriculum, pedagogy, methodology and assessment."⁶¹

It seems that the Leaving Certificate Applied has incorporated many of these implications into its programme. Boldt's (1998)⁶² enthusiasm for the LCA is based on his belief that a programme which is prepared to recognise the value of the six lesser used forms of Gardner's multiple intelligences theory is worthy of support.

Boldt (1998) believes that M.I. may be used to develop interest, motivation, confidence and skills in students who had previously performed poorly in terminal State examinations because testing was in the linguistic and mathematical modes⁶³.

ASSESSMENT ISSUES

McCormack and Archer (1998)⁶⁴, report that: "The present system reinforces and accentuates the strong academic bias in second level schooling." They argue that the

⁶¹ Boldt, S, (1998), *Unlocking Potential, A Study and an Appraisal of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, The Leaving Certificate Applied Presentation Family Group, p20

⁶² Idem

⁶³ Ibid p27

⁶⁴ McCormack, T. Archer, P (1998): *Inequality in Education: The Role of Assessment and Certification* p.21. pp.13-46

emphasis on academic learning discourages non-academic students from working: some may perform poorly in state examinations, while others leave school early. The emphasis on terminal examinations which are dominant in the linguistic mode would also be a factor in poor performance. McCormack and Archer (1998)⁶⁵ agree when they state, "...that the system of assessment and certification plays a major role in keeping this narrow curriculum in place". This may be interpreted to mean that the linguistic form of assessment may be unsuitable for such students. In this sense, there appears to be discrimination against non-academic students, not only in the subject choice provision at senior cycle level but also the virtual absence of alternative forms of assessment. Another criticism would be the limited teaching methodologies used in the classroom⁶⁶, which tends to make non-academic students feel bored, and hence, less inclined to learn⁶⁷. Flynn (1998) says that "Those who are successful in our present system are those who excel in written, language and logic."⁶⁸ This indicates the impression that less academic students are not being catered for due to the limited scope of assessment available in Ireland. The OECD Report (1991)⁶⁹ was highly critical of assessment: "It is widely agreed in Ireland that a major reform of assessment, examining and credentialing is long overdue". These issues were considered to be worthy of attention by the NCCA in relation to the development of the new LCA programme. An interesting development could be that the provision of varied assessment procedures used in the LCA be considered also for the Leaving Certificate examinations. However,

⁶⁵ McCormack, T. Archer, P (1998): *Inequality in Education: The Role of Assessment and Certification*, p.16, pp 13-46

⁶⁶ Hannan, D.F, Shorthall, S, (1991) Paper No. 153, *The Quality of their Education, School Leavers' Views of Educational Objectives and Outcomes*, Dublin, ESRI The Economic and Social Research Institute, p6

⁶⁷ Boldt, S, (1998), *Unlocking Potential, A Study and an Appraisal of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, The Leaving Certificate Applied Presentation Family Group, p27

⁶⁸ Flynn, M, (1998), *Changing Views, Changing Assessments: Intelligence, Inequality and the Need to Even the Score*: in Hyland, A, *Innovations in Assessment in Irish Education*, p 174, pp 173-183

⁶⁹ OECD (1991), *Review of National Policies for Education*, Paris, Organisation for Economic Co-Operation and Development, p72.

that issue belongs to another arena of research. Hyland (1998)⁷⁰ mentions a criticism of the Irish Examination system: “They only recognise a fraction of the multiple intelligences described by Gardner”. This is a serious criticism of the Leaving Certification assessment procedure, an issue which was addressed when developing assessment for LCA students.

Hyland, (1998) suggests a solution to this problem, when she refers to the authentic forms of assessment which are used in the United States. She says that: “It is based on actual forms of what we want the pupils to be good at...”⁷¹. What a refreshing point of view, the notion of trying to get the best from students, regardless of having any preconceived notions regarding their ability. Again the notion that “It acknowledges more than one approach or right answer,”⁷² sounds most encouraging. It may indicate that a fairer form of written examination might recognise that value be given for several ‘right’ answers, allowing students an opportunity to have their creativity rewarded. This is precisely what the LCA assessment encourages. This would be good preparation for the world of work where there may be several solutions to the one problem arising.

The Green Paper (1992)⁷³, refers to the 15% of students who failed the 1991 Leaving Certificate Examination, that is to say they failed to achieve five Grade D’s at Ordinary level. This amounts to 30,474⁷⁴ students failing to graduate at the first attempt. This

⁷⁰ Hyland, A. (1998) *Assessment Issues for the Twenty-First Century in Inequality in Education, The Role of Assessment and Certification*: Dublin, CORI p. 110.

⁷¹ Idem

⁷² Idem

⁷³ DES, (1992), *Green Paper, Education for a Changing World*, Dublin, Government Publications, p97

⁷⁴ NCCA, (1992), *The 1991 Leaving Certificate, A Review Of Results*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p49

failure rate has been consistently high in recent years with 12% failing in 1994⁷⁵. Various suggestions have been made as to why so many students fail the Leaving Certificate Examination. Murray (1996)⁷⁶ thinks that public examinations take place within too short a time frame to suit some students. It could be suggested that a Certificate examination format which squeezes two year's workrate into a handful of short terminal tests may not allow non-academic students sufficient flexibility to achieve their full potential. Furthermore, the singularity of examination format, with only testing allowed in the linguistic and mathematical modes, tends to strongly favour the academic student⁷⁷. Pring (1995) agrees, when he speaks of "...standards defined entirely in terms of academic excellence..."⁷⁸. This can be verified by their superior performance in written tests compared to less academic students. Again, the excess emphasis on memory work; that is to say, learning facts, is often criticised by such students who sometimes wonder: what use this will be when they leave school. Teachers familiar with these students will mention that they are often highly articulate, occasionally superior in verbal expression to academic students. Murray(1996)⁷⁹ suggests that "...continuous and terminal, school-based and external, written, practical, oral and aural.", be introduced in school for assessment purposes. Why, then, cannot such tests occupy a more central role in public examinations in all subjects at certificate level in Ireland?

⁷⁵ Granville, G., (1996), *Long Term Perspectives On The Senior Cycle Curriculum* in: Hogan, P. (Ed), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, ASTI, p16, pp 13-21

⁷⁶ Murray, P. (1996) *Senior Cycle Reform, Grasping the Nettles* in Hogan, P., (Ed) *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, ASTI, p32, pp 31-45

⁷⁷ Lynch K, (1999) *Equality in Education*, Dublin, Gill and MacMillan , p280

⁷⁸ Pring, R.A. (1995), *Closing the Gap-Liberal Education and Vocational Preparation*, London, Hodder & Staughton, p134

⁷⁹ Murray, P. (1996) *Senior Cycle Reform, Grasping the Nettles* in Hogan, P., (Ed), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, ASTI, p34, pp 31-45

The Junior Certificate Review (1999)⁸⁰ has a similar criticism to make regarding Irish public examinations : “Furthermore, the range of assessment techniques in use remains highly restricted”⁸¹. The previous positive experience with the Senior Certificate and the lack of variety in assessment procedures in the Leaving Certificate clearly influenced the assessment strategy for the LCA. In this respect, creditation of the ongoing-assessment variety was chosen by Gleeson and Granville in 1993 when developing the LCA initiative⁸².

Coolahan (1994)⁸³ stated that the LCA should “....correct some of the disadvantages suffered by lower academic ability pupils....”. Perhaps it has already done so during the past number of years since it was introduced.

DISSATISFACTION WITH THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE EXAMINATION

The issue of norm-referencing⁸⁴ was highlighted in relation to the Leaving Certificate whereby students’ results are compared against the average. By contrast, it could be suggested that the LCA provides a criterion-referenced⁸⁵ approach whereby students gain credits as a result of continuous completion of Key Assignments and Student Tasks. Pring (1995)⁸⁶ says that “....second, examinations have traditionally been norm-referenced, that is, measuring each person’s performance against the ‘norm’ for the

⁸⁰ NCCA (1999), *The Junior Cycle Review*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p31

⁸¹ Idem

⁸² O’Donnabhain, D, (1998), *The Work-Related Curriculum* in Trant, A, O’Donnabhain, D, Lawton, D, O’Connor, T,: *The Future of the Curriculum*, Dublin, CDVEC, Curriculum Development Unit and Individual Authors, p 48, pp39-56

⁸³ Coolahan, J. (1994), *Report on the National Education Convention*, Dublin, Stationery Office, p111.

⁸⁴ Hyland, A., (1998), *Assessment Issues for the Twenty-First Century*: in McCormack, T, Archer, P, *Inequality in Education: The Role of Assessment and Certification: Analysis and Options for Change*, CORI, Education Commission, Conference of Religious of Ireland, Dublin, p110, pp 101-117

⁸⁵ Idem

⁸⁶ Pring, R.A. (1995), *Closing the Gap, Liberal Education and Vocational Preparation*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, p 19

group as a whole;". This criticism could be directed against the Leaving Certificate examination because the marking scheme designed by examiners is preset to fit a certain pattern of 'average' results. Allowance is not made for the teacher to make a professional judgement regarding assessment of students. Is this really a fair system? Interestingly, the decision of the NCCA to allow teachers to assess their own LCA students presenting Student Tasks was an attempt to address this issue because "...the initial design of the programme envisaged school based assessment...."⁸⁷. However, the objections mentioned by teachers unions prevented in-school assessment being introduced. It could be suggested that this was a retrograde step in that it precluded the possibility of bringing in a 'fairer' examination system and of progress being made on the issue of the professional development of teachers. Clearly these criticisms are being leveled at the Leaving Certificate Examination.

The students in St. Enda's handing up blank answer books in the 'Mock' examinations now fall into context. Are these students so 'alienated' from the subjects that they are willing to reject the notion of what a Leaving Certificate means to them? Hannan and Shortall (1991)⁸⁸ report that "The early leavers - appear to be so alienated from schools as institutions that they do not intend to go back for second chance education," This is surely a sad reflection on their lack of engagement and perhaps also on the purpose and style of teaching of the subjects. One wonders to what extent this 'alienation' is brought about by a neglect of active teaching methodologies and the absence of a multi-faceted assessment procedure.

⁸⁷ O'Driscoll, S. (1996), *Assessment in the Leaving Certificate Applied*: in Hyland. A., (Ed) *Innovations in Assessment in Education*, Cork: Multiple Intelligences, Curriculum and Assessment Project, Education Department, University College Cork, p79, pp 75-84

⁸⁸ Hannan, D.F., Shortall, S (1991), *Paper Number 153, The Quality of their Education, School Leavers' Views of Educational Objectives and Outcomes*, Dublin, Economic and Social Research Institute, p4

This section examines the level of satisfaction rated by Irish past pupils who had left school in 1982 and were measured by an ERSI report in 1987. An observation here would be that these were the views of those who had now become adults which may further validate their opinions. Forty questions were asked corresponding to six types of educational objective: “The results showsomewhat lower satisfaction with preparation for work and other adult roles”⁸⁹ When examined on a comparative bar chart, the rating is low enough to cause concern regarding the value of the Leaving Certificate experience with a 21% rating for “Increased Chances of Getting a Good Job” and only 14% for “Helped you to Apply Good Values in Life”⁹⁰.

Unsurprisingly, the report shows that the most dissatisfied were those who had left school without taking any examinations. The ESRI (1991)⁹¹ report demonstrates the high level of dissatisfaction expressed by those who left school five years earlier, particularly in the areas of preparation for work and other adult roles. For them, it shows that the senior cycle experience was a relatively negative one. The study goes on to state that earlier intervention is required to “reduce the high alienation levels and failure rates amongst early school leavers”⁹².

Various questions arise from an analysis of this study which apply to the year 1991 rather than now. What was it about the nature of the Leaving Certificate programme as then constituted that influenced some students to feel so negatively about it? Was there an excess emphasis on the academic dimension vis-à-vis its vocational counterpart? In this respect, is there undue emphasis on the learning of facts rather than on the

⁸⁹ Hannan, D.F., Shortall, S (1991), *Paper Number 153, The Quality of their Education, School Leavers' Views of Educational Objectives and Outcomes*, Dublin, Economic and Social Research Institute, p.2.

⁹⁰ Ibid, p.3.

⁹¹ Ibid, p 2.

⁹² Ibid, p4.

understanding of material? What changes needed to be made in the programme to provide a higher satisfaction rating among students, particularly in the preparation for work and adult life contexts? Perhaps the development of Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) and pre-employment courses had partially but not entirely addressed these issues during the interim period. One could safely suggest that these problems still loomed large in 1993 and would have influenced decision making by NCCA personnel in relation to the development of the LCA programme. This is validated when the NCCA (2000)⁹³ states that the LCA is intended to prepare students for adult and working life, with a focus on cross-curricular integration of topics. If this can be achieved at school level, therein may lie a solution to the problems highlighted in the 1991 ESRI Report.

Colleagues working in the IT sector testify to the lack of understanding by first year students of mathematical concepts, even by students who have achieved Grade C on higher level Leaving Certificate mathematics papers. The inability to understand the concept of area in relation to length and width would be testament to this lack of understanding. This is a serious criticism of the purpose, content and teaching methods used to develop a love of mathematics, “What is certified is the quality of the performance rather than the quality of the learning”⁹⁴. While this statement was applied to the assessment procedure in use for the Junior Certificate Examination, perhaps it could equally pertain to the Leaving Certificate examination?

⁹³ NCCA (2000) *Leaving Certificate Applied: Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p8

⁹⁴ NCCA (1999), *Junior Cycle Review, Progress Report, Issues and Options Development*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p35

By contrast, mathematical applications in LCA would emphasise that the floor area of a room be calculated by students measuring the length and width by pacing the room with their feet. Once the floor area was calculated, this would be divided by the area of a tile to ascertain the number of tiles required to tile the floor. Allowance would be made for tiles needing to be cut at the edges of the room near the walls. This would ensure that sufficient tiles, but not overmuch would be purchased, while stocks of that particular tile type lasts in the shop.

BACKGROUND TO THE FORMATION OF LCA

Culliton (1992) says that “At the second level, vocational education is being crowded out by the academic stream”⁹⁵. He feels that there is a need to emphasise the vocational perspective to match the needs of the workplace. He further suggests that: “What is needed is a parallel stream of non-academic vocationally-oriented education at second level which commands widespread recognition, respect and support”⁹⁶. Involvement of industry will be crucial, -....”. This brings up the notion of an alternative Leaving Certificate which was to become the LCA initiative. “Subsequently, under the aegis of the NCCA, a team headed by Jim Gleeson and Gary Glanville merged it [the Senior Certificate] with the Vocational Preparation and Training (VPT) to form the Leaving Certificate Applied”⁹⁷. Hyland (1996)⁹⁸ tells us that the LCA was developed from the earlier VPT -1 and Senior Certificate initiatives. Hence it would be true to say that the LCA’s vocational dimension has a twenty year tradition. This would indicate a

⁹⁵ Culliton, J (1992), *A Time for Change, Industrial Policy for the 1990's, Report of the Industrial Policy Review Group*, Dublin, Government Publications, p53

⁹⁶ *Ibid*, p54

⁹⁷ O'Donnabhain, D, (1998), *The Work-Related Curriculum* in Trant, A, O'Donnabhain, D, Lawton, D, O'Connor, T,: *The Future of the Curriculum*, Dublin, CDVEC, Curriculum Development Unit and Individual Authors, p 48, pp39-56

⁹⁸ Hyland, A (1996), *An Overview of Developments in Senior Cycle Education 1965 – 1995 in Hogan, P., (Ed) Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, ASTI, p 9, pp 5-12

reasonable research period for implementation, evaluation and improvement to take place. Not only were the VPT- 1, VPT- 2, LCVP and Senior Certificate developed for use in schools but their degree of effectiveness were also measured and evaluated. The LCA may be described as an improved version of VPT and Senior Certificate because the drawback with the VPT was that it was only a one year course, without certification⁹⁹, which meant that achievements made by students could not be shown to an employer. Another initiative, the LCVP, by contrast, with its 60% available for a portfolio and 40% for terminal examination, is certifiable, not for itself, but as part of the Leaving Certificate examination and is acceptable for entry to higher education¹⁰⁰. The LCA differs from the LCVP by providing a wider vocational dimension, besides it is a Leaving Certificate which stands alone¹⁰¹. However, the LCA will not allow a student direct access to higher level education, but he/she can proceed to PLC courses “....through NCVA Level 2....”¹⁰² which the original VPT also provided. The fact that ITs and Universities will not accept LCA students could suggest that the LCA may be seen as a less credible senior cycle qualification than the traditional Leaving Certificate. However, this may not always be true because ordinary level Leaving Certificate students will not be accepted onto IT or University courses, either.

⁹⁹ Gleeson, J, Granville, G, (1995), *The Case of the Leaving Certificate Applied in: Irish Educational Studies Vol 15*, Dublin, Educational Studies Association of Ireland, p 125, pp 113- 132

¹⁰⁰ LCVP Action Group, (2000), *Implementing the LCVP, Guidelines for Schools*, Navan, Costello Print, p 10

¹⁰¹ DES, (2000), *Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, p8

¹⁰² Gleeson, J, Granville, G, (1995), *The Case of the Leaving Certificate Applied in: Irish Educational Studies Vol 15*, Dublin, Educational Studies Association of Ireland, p 125, pp 113- 132

THE RATIONALE FOR THE LEAVING CERTIFICATE APPLIED PROGRAMME

The LCA programme aims to prepare senior cycle students for adult and working life while emphasizing literacy and numeracy skills¹⁰³. The LCA programme was developed by the NCCA staff in 1993 and piloted in 53 schools for 1995-96 academic year involving 1,200 students¹⁰⁴. By 2002, 6,500 students in 288 schools and 32 youthreach centres were taking LCA. This shows its increasing acceptance nationwide.

The active co-operation of management and school staff allied to the support of parents is believed to be essential in ensuring successful initiation. In-service support is provided by a dedicated support staff at the Curriculum Development Centre (CDC), CVDVEC in Dublin and CDC in Shannon under the auspices of the LCA Support Service¹⁰⁵.

LCA has a modular structure, with four sessions being held over a two year period, involving the completion of forty-four modules¹⁰⁶. It consists of Vocational Preparation and Guidance, Vocational Education and General Education¹⁰⁷. Students are briefed by an LCA teacher before embarking on Work Experience, and are subsequently debriefed. Core characteristics of the programme are to be the same for all schools¹⁰⁸. These include, close teacher student relationships, a continuous assessment procedure and credits being gained after completion of each module. A module involves 30 hours class

¹⁰³ NCCA (2000), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p8

¹⁰⁴ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p14

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid*, p 18

¹⁰⁶ NCCA (2000), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p12

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid*, p 9

¹⁰⁸ Bray, N., (1996), *The Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hogan, P., (Ed), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland, p 107, pp 101-109

attendance¹⁰⁹. To gain these credits, 90% attendance must be achieved and four key assignments completed for each module¹¹⁰. This places the onus on students to work well while the ongoing accreditation encourages them to make a similar effort for the next module. O Driscoll (1996)¹¹¹ says that “As well as boosting self esteem, this assessment, recognition and feedback acts as a motivator for future endeavours.” This means that the gradual accumulation of credits encourages students’ motivation to work well. “New courses which promise a sense of immediate success to students are very attractive”¹¹². What better than immediate positive feedback to encourage further achievement?

Interdisciplinary collaboration among teachers is encouraged by having frequent LCA team meetings, which is seen to be of paramount importance by the NCCA. “The establishment of a core planning group of teachers in a school would facilitate the ongoing development of the Leaving Certificate Applied.”¹¹³ This would be helpful in developing a teamwork approach among LCA teachers. The research design intends focussing on the relative success of this approach in the case study schools. The redesigned format for the 2000-01 academic year included four elective modules chosen by each school¹¹⁴, which provides the opportunity for local school initiative.

¹⁰⁹ Bray, N., (1996), *The Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hogan, P., (Ed), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland, p 12, pp 101-109

¹¹⁰ *Ibid*, p 17

¹¹¹ O Driscoll, S., (1998), *Assessment in the Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hyland, A., (Ed), *Innovations in Assessment*, Cork, U.C.C., p.78, pp.75-84

¹¹² Tuohy, D., Doyle, E., (1994) *New Directions in Irish Secondary Education, some consequences of New Programmes at Second-level in Studies*, Vol.83, No.332, Dublin, p.442, p. 436-446.

¹¹³ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p41

¹¹⁴ NCCA (2000), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p17

LCA ASSESSMENT FORMAT

Each student is expected to complete seven Student Tasks over the four sessions, involving a maximum of seventy credits, while the modules accumulate a possible sixty-two credits. This means that only sixty-eight credits (34%) remain for the Final Examination¹¹⁵. Students' stress levels are eased as most of them have already achieved a pass level by the time the final examinations begin.

The Student Tasks are cited by O Driscoll as "...the most rewarding and tangible aspect..."¹¹⁶ of the Leaving Certificate Applied programme. Perhaps it is the most positive innovation ever introduced in Ireland. Reduced from nine to seven under the new format, they may involve the development of a product, the investigation of an issue, the provision of a service, the performance of an action, the staging of an event or personal reflection¹¹⁷. Each task is expected to take 10 hours of class time. Gleeson and Granville (1996)¹¹⁸ say that "...it gives those who have been achieving poorly on the traditional criteria for up to eleven years of schooling, a chance to succeed."

The Leaving Certificate Applied will be awarded at three levels:

PASS	120 – 139 CREDITS	60-69%
MERIT	140 - 169 CREDITS	70-84%
DISTINCTION	170 - 200 CREDITS	85-100% ¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵ NCCA (2000), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p 18

¹¹⁶ O Driscoll, S., (1998) *Assessment in the Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hogan, P., (Ed) *Innovations in Assessment*, Cork, University College Cork, p.76, pp.75-84

¹¹⁷ NCCA, (2000), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p25

¹¹⁸ Gleeson, J., Granville, G, (1996), *The Case of the Leaving Certificate Applied in: Irish Educational Studies*, Vol 15, ESAI, Educational Studies Association of Ireland, Dublin, p 127 pp 113 - 132

¹¹⁹ NCCA, (2000), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p21

LCA ASSESSMENT

O Driscoll (1996) is highly impressed by the innovative assessment procedure being provided: "It is the first time in a state certificate examination process that students have been able to accumulate credit and receive the feedback on their performance before they reach the end of the programme"¹²⁰. The programme has a modular design with on-going credits being accumulated each time a module is completed which may encourage motivation as these credits get them nearer the pass result. Students may present their work as a report, in video or audio format or as an artifact. This may be supported by an opportunity to talk about what they have made or done at an interview. The opportunity to improve their interview techniques will arise because this will be repeated for each of their nine Student Tasks. The terminal examination at the end of the two year programme will use oral, aural, video, practical and written formats. Crucially too, this wide variety of assessment procedures may give students' who have in the past fared poorly in written tests an opportunity to gain credits in the other assessment formats. The LCA programme was updated for the 2000-2001 academic year to include four school elective modules among a total of forty-four¹²¹. This gives schools the opportunity to design their own modules to reflect student needs. Each student, to gain credit for the satisfactory completion of a module is expected to attend out- of-school activities, complete four key assignments and have a 90% attendance record¹²². The latter is included to encourage student retention and will dovetail neatly with the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act (2000) which came into effect at school level in July 2002.

¹²⁰ O Driscoll, S., (1998), *Assessment in the Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hyland, A., (Ed), *Innovations in Assessment in Education*, University College Cork, p.77, pp.75-84.

¹²¹ NCCA, (2000) *Leaving Certificate Applied: Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*. Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p17

¹²² NCCA, (2000) *Leaving Certificate Applied: Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p17

PROBLEMS WITH LCA ASSESSMENT

One problem that arose with assessment was the unwillingness of teachers to assess their own LCA students; clearly, teacher unions were against the notion. O'Driscoll (1996) states that: "While the initial design of the programme envisaged school based assessment of these tasks the external assessment has proven extremely effective"¹²³. While the latter statement may be true, it could be argued that teachers assessing their own students might have been a fairer system: it would certainly have made the DES' work that much easier. It could be suggested that teachers would be more conversant with their pupil input into the Student Tasks in terms of planning, gathering of information and presentation of findings. The counter argument would be that teachers could be open to accusations of bias, in giving credits to students. Clearly, this was the teacher unions viewpoint and the DES reluctantly acquiesced to their demands.

"The preparation for, and implementation of external examination of nine Student Tasks, now seven with the release of up to 200 teachers is certainly an administration headache, both from a Department and school perspective"¹²⁴. Yes, it is highly unsatisfactory causing further school disruption, the other being in-service and an organisational workload for the DES. Indeed, it may be a situation in need of review in the future, which would be dependent on acquiescence from the teacher unions.

¹²³ O Driscoll, S., (1998), *Assessment in the Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hyland, A, (Ed), *Assessment in Education*, University College Cork, p.79, pp.75-84.

¹²⁴ Ibid, p.83, pp.75-84

DES FUNDING

Positive encouragement from the Department of Education and Science comes in three forms of funding, £125 extra capitation for each LCA student, an extra ½ teacher for each group of 20 students, for the 2000-2001 academic year and a once off allowance of £13,000 for computers and £4,000 grant for other equipment¹²⁵. This shows the commitment of the DES to making it a success; one wonders how much of an incentive the extra funding is in motivating schools to take up the programme. However, Tuohy and Doyle (1994) offer a caution: "... the danger is that the curriculum will be driven by the availability of funding, rather than the needs of the students."¹²⁶ Analysis of the case study schools may provide illumination on where the priority lies.

The underlying principle of the LCA would be that "... it is intended to meet the needs of those participants who are not adequately catered for by other Leaving Certificate programmes ..."¹²⁷. Teachers may interpret this statement as referring to the non-academic students they have taught who are now about to enter senior cycle, those who are not engaged by written work or rote learning and often presenting discipline problems. The use of a variety of teaching methodologies is to be supplemented by out of school learning in the local community provided by day trips and work experience. Clearly, this is a programme providing variety and moves the learning process beyond the school province.

¹²⁵ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p45

¹²⁶ Tuohy, D., Doyle, E., (1994) *New Directions in Irish Secondary Education, some consequences of New Programmes at Second-level in Studies*, Vol.83, No.332, Dublin, p.444, pp. 436-446.

¹²⁷ NCCA, (2000), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p8

THE LCA: AN ECONOMICALLY DRIVEN PROGRAMME

An important aspect of the LCA worth examining would be how employable such students will be when they leave school. The signs look positive. Quite apart from the need to provide a syllabus which will interest non-academic students and help retain them in school to complete a senior cycle programme, would be the necessity to match skills learned in school to those required in the modern workplace. In this context, the DES (1995)¹²⁸ mentions that "...with the consequent diversification of the range of abilities and to prepare students more fully for life, work and further education – is a necessary investment in social and economic well-being". This gives the impression that the LCA is an initiative with an economically-driven thrust. This seems unsurprising, given the more recent changes being made in the workplace, particularly in relation to the globalisation effect being brought about by the development of information and communication technologies. "As information and communication technologies have become such a major feature in knowledge production, access and dissemination, most European countries have greatly increased their interest in integrating them with school life, in recent years".¹²⁹ Clearly, ICT has revolutionised the nature of work, a revolution which may in time surpass that of the industrial revolution. Recognising these changes in the workplace and the increasing probability that frequent occupation changes will be a future pattern of employment, the NCCA has incorporated strategies to meet such challenges. These include making ICT mandatory for all LCA students and providing funding.¹³⁰ The question will be asked in the case study schools if these grants are adequate to meet the needs of LCA classes.

¹²⁸ DES, (1995), *White Paper, Charting our Education Future*, Dublin. Government Publications, p.70.

¹²⁹ Coolahan, J, (2001), *Teacher Education in Ireland and Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis in Irish Educational Studies, Vol 20*, Dublin, Educational Studies Association of Ireland, p 351, pp 335-368

¹³⁰ LCVP Action Group, (2000), *Implementing the LCVP, Guidelines for Schools*, Navan, Costello Print, p 18

Skills demanded in the modern workplace include effective communication, decision-making, problem-solving, independence and interpersonal skills. O'Hare (1996) says "This is the rapid shift in the nature of the world of work, where the ability to do things is becoming more important than the mere ability to know things"¹³¹. The flexible nature of the LCA programme hopes to develop these qualities in students. LCA may also give students the skills being demanded by prospective employers which will make them more employable. The commitment of the Department of Education and Science to develop the LCA and to continue updating it in the light of on-going work changes shows the intention of making it a success.

THE NEED TO INFORM EMPLOYERS

It has been suggested that many employers have insufficient knowledge regarding the LCA and its preparation of students for employment. If this be true, then surely the best advertising for the LCA can be achieved by publicising the achievements of LCA students. In this regard, highlighting the successes of students' both on a national and local level could prove effective. Responsibility surely lies with the DES to highlight the programmes merits nationally and that the skills gained by students through the LCA experience are transferable to the workplace and valued by employers. An example of the former was provided in Kilmainham hospital in 1997 when LCA students were presented with their certificates. However, the display of projects, artefacts and crafts highlighted to the public the creative talent resulting from the LCA experience. In this respect, this writer agrees with Houghton cited in Boldt (1998), who says that greater publicity needs to be generated nationally through the use of

¹³¹ O'Hare (1996), *Multiple Intelligences Three Challenging Implications for Irish Education* in Hogan, P., (Ed) *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, ASTI, p.137 pp. 135-140

newspapers, radio and television specials¹³². Nevertheless, the potential to provide such media coverage remains as an untapped potential for the future.

Increased contacts with prospective employers by LCA teachers during the work experience stages of the programme are already increasing the profile of the LCA students and the programme's merits. The increasing recognition of the LCA has already been highlighted by the Garda Siochana accepting LCA students at merit level¹³³. One is reminded here of a student highly articulate yet weak academically who according to one teacher, faced a bleak outlook. Not so because five years later, his mother boasted that he was now an assistant manager in a computer firm. Perhaps, this highlights that employers quickly recognise the value of intra-personal intelligence in the workplace. Quinn (1998)¹³⁴ says that a good guide for recruiting young people onto his business was "...how readily they smiled in the interview!"

That he was right to select such candidates is validated by the success of his multi-chain supermarket business. Quinn achieved success in his company based on the competitive advantage which came from providing a superior customer service, as indicated by the helpfulness and friendly smile of his employees. It may be stated here that Quinn was not only the first businessman to champion the LCA Programme and encourage other entrepreneurs to do the same, he was also the first chairman of the LCA. The opinion of employers regarding the LCA will be important to ensuring its success. If they lack knowledge about it, then surely it is the responsibility of the NCCA to launch a positive

¹³² Boldt, S, (1998), *Unlocking Potential, A Study and an Appraisal of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, The Leaving Certificate Applied Presentation Family Policy Group, p50

¹³³ Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service, (2001), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Opportunities Update*, Shannon, McNamara Printers

¹³⁴ Quinn, F., (1998) *A Viewpoint from the World of Business* in McCormack, T., Archer, P., (Eds) *Inequality in Education, the Role of Assessment and Certification*, Dublin, CORI, p.122, pp.118-133.

publicity campaign to highlight it's merits and how students gain the skills which will make them more employable.

THE LCA SEEN AS A 'SOFT OPTION'

The argument that LCA may be seen as a 'soft-option' can hardly be ignored in this review of the literature. Teachers, students and parents will realise that only non-academic students will be taken onto the new course and the perception of many of these people is that they may be seen as having less intelligence. These people reason that because schools offering the LCA only take what they see as 'weak students', then it follows that it must be a 'soft option'.

Which of these beliefs is more widely held, that it be seen as a soft option or a syllabus involving hard work by teachers? If it is seen as a soft option, then this may weaken the delivery of LCA in the eyes of the community and probably, too, in the eyes of prospective employers. By contrast teachers certainly do not see it as a soft option. Indeed teachers readily admit that a great deal of time goes into the preparation of class lessons in a syllabus not having set textbooks. Bray (1996)¹³⁵ agrees: "Very few of the teachers involved in Leaving Certificate Applied regard it as a soft option for themselves or for their schools". This is a strong argument, which may hold true when considering that teachers conversant mainly with traditional didactic pedagogy will have to make a huge effort to learn the active learning methodologies for classroom practice.

¹³⁵ Bray, N., (1996), *The Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hogan, P., (Ed.), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland p.104 pp.101-107.

How LCA is valued as a programme by teachers, be they members of the LCA team or not and by students, be they taking LCA or not, would surely be significant in promoting its success. This brings up the issue of the criteria that can be selected to measure its value within a school? This issue will be addressed in the research design.

How can the LCA hope to compare with the established Leaving Certificate which has been in existence for decades? The latter is seen to have a 'proven' track record by parents, teachers and many students while employers have accepted it for job applications and all third level institutions use it as a measuring instrument for entry requirements. Surely, this places a new Leaving Certificate programme at a disadvantage? Interestingly, Boland and McNamara (1994) say that "It is being asserted that the points system which decides entry to third level education is affecting senior cycle students without aspiration...."¹³⁶ in that direction. In this sense, it could be suggested that 'the points system' has a distorting effect on delivery for non-academic students.

However, Gleeson and Granville (1994)¹³⁷ say that: "The Spiral 2 experience was that employers often preferred to employ Senior Certificate students to Leaving Certificate ordinary level students because the experience of the programme had matured them and given them the self-confidence and communication skills not associated with Leaving Certificate "graduates". If this is true, then this could be most encouraging for the LCA programme which has a similar rating structure, vocational dimension, work experience,

¹³⁶ Boland, J., McNamara, G., (1994), *The Reform of Senior Cycle Educational Provision in the Republic of Ireland: A Proposal for Radical Change in Irish Educational Studies, Vol 13*, Dublin, Educational Studies Association of Ireland, p180, pp 180-195,

¹³⁷ Gleeson, J., Granville, G., (1994) *The Case of the Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hogan, P., (Ed), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, ASTI p 122 pp. 113 – 132.

teamwork approach and assessment procedure to the senior certificate and from which it was developed¹³⁸.

Boldt (1998) makes reference to the presentation at Kilmainham Hospital in April, 1997 of certification to LCA students. "Students, teachers, parents and principals were actively involved in the seminar. The seminar exemplified many of the strengths of the Leaving Certificate Applied"¹³⁹. It became an impressive showcase for the best projects, artefacts, reports and crafts from LCA students countrywide. This was a positive experience which highlighted the talents of LCA students from all over Ireland. Many employers would have also have seen students' organisation and presentational skills and the trust that was placed in them to organise the event. This emphasises the gains being made by LCA students.

This might be a way forward for the NCCA to generate enthusiasm for the LCA among employers. It would provide greater publicity regarding students who have had noteworthy successes as a result of completing the LCA. It may be argued that if the NCCA can achieve positive publicity at national level and schools can advertise the success of their students in school newsletters at local level, then the future may look most promising. One form of publicity may be seen to augment the other. This is believed to be essential, especially as LCA is a recent innovation, which may compare unfavourably with the established Leaving Certificate which has been in existence for decades.

¹³⁸ Hyland, A (1996), *An Overview of Developments in Senior Cycle Education 1965 – 1995* in Hogan, P., (Ed), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, ASTI, p 9, pp 5-12

¹³⁹ Boldt, S., (1998) *Unlocking Potential, A Study and an Appraisal of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, The Leaving Certificate Applied Presentation Family Policy Group, p. 49.

LCA A LIMITED PROGRESSION TO THIRD LEVEL EDUCATION

O'Donnabhain (1998) says that "Limited progression to the PLC route is a serious drawback as it implies that Leaving Certificate Applied students are inferior to other Leaving Certificate students"¹⁴⁰. Is this really true? When judged exclusively on the IQ/academic scale, they may rate at the lower end of the spectrum. Once again, this brings up the complex issue of how LCA students may be rated at DES level by new multi-faceted techniques at certificate level. By contrast, they may be measured on the terminal academic scale of Leaving Certificate by many third level institutions and hence not be considered eligible for entry requirements because their results do not meet academic set standards. How many prospective employers may hold a similar measurement criterion or bias? The end result would appear to be that the problem of exclusion, which in the past affected Group Certificate students may now hold true for LCA 'graduates'. Pring, (1995) suggests a possible solution when he says that "In that sense, there is a need to vocationalise the liberal ideal – to question the dualisms between thinking and doing, between theory and practice, between the world of education and the world of work, between education and training which for too long have impoverished the educational experience of many"¹⁴¹. Fine words, perhaps even revolutionary ones coming from a person who may hold an ideal for the future where liberal and vocational education are finally reconciled. However, pragmatism suggests that until, and indeed, unless agreement about such sentiments are agreed on by employers, second level schools, third level institutions and the introduction of a

¹⁴⁰ O'Donnabhain, D., (1998), *The Work-Related Curriculum* in Trant, A., O'Donnabhain, D., Lawton, D., O'Connor, T.,(Eds), *The Future of the Curriculum*, CDVEC, Curriculum Development Unit and individual authors, p 50, pp 39-56

¹⁴¹ Pring, R. A. (1995), *Closing the Gap – Liberal Education and Vocational Preparation*, London, Hodder & Stoughton, p 193

multifaceted assessment procedure for the Leaving Certificate is introduced, then Pring's hopes are merely aspirations.

TIMETABLING FOR LCA

LCA is a modular programme involving sub-division into Vocational Preparation, Vocational Education and General Education. As a result of this complexity, the Leaving Certificate Applied Support Service have published a guideline to assist schools with LCA timetabling¹⁴². To this end they provide a template for a possible school timetable. "The timetable should be planned initially for two years, in order to make sure that all 44 modules are covered."¹⁴³. The quantity of modules and the need for a two year plan would surely make the planning of the timetable unusually difficult at school level. They advise that the block arrangement for weekly work experience will allow for the possibility of the greatest number of class periods for each module. They also suggest that single periods are unsuitable because of the demand for practical work.

"Blocking double or triple periods can minimise disruption for out of school activity"¹⁴⁴. It is argued that schools which have taken the one day per week option of work experience may encounter more school disruption than those taking the one or two week block option. Efficient timetabling for LCA suggests the need for blocking double and triple periods to minimise school disruption. In theory this sounds fine, but the practice of taking double or triple classes of LCA hardly sounds attractive to either teachers or students and could influence teachers to drop-out. This is an important viewpoint to be borne in mind, particularly by schools like St. Enda's which are new to

¹⁴² LCA Support Service, (2000), *Suggestions for Timetabling in Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, DES,

¹⁴³ Leaving Certificate Support Service (2002) *Suggestions for Timetabling in Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, NCCA, p.1.

¹⁴⁴ Idem

the programme. Was the LCA Development Officer contacted in relation to the timetable before the completion stage in St. Enda's?

“Extra access to computer room may be required to facilitate assignments and tasks”¹⁴⁵. The presentation of hand-written, often illegible, work is now seen to be out of date when computer keyboard skills will provide a legible and neater piece of work. The extra demand for computers would explain why the DES made available extra funding for computer equipment¹⁴⁶. It is also helping students to prepare for the modern workplace, where the usage of computers has become so commonplace, as to be considered inevitable.

The LCA Support Service recommends that a smaller teaching team can assist communication between the co-ordinator and the team. More particularly the NCCA (2000) recommends that “A core group of about five teachers within the team including the co-ordinator, should meet frequently so as to ensure that the key aim of curricular integration within the programme is best achieved”¹⁴⁷. This would involve teachers working together in the preparation and planning for classwork. The DES (2000) are concerned that curricular integration needs to be highlighted to ensure effective delivery of the new programme in schools¹⁴⁸. It could be argued that the convening of team meetings at frequent intervals during school hours could meet this need. Would there be class periods made available on the timetable for these meetings? The case studies research will attempt to answer this question.

¹⁴⁵ Leaving Certificate Support Service (2002) *Suggestions for Timetabling in Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, NCCA, p.1.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid*, p.4.

¹⁴⁷ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p 35

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid*, p.76.

LCA: A LEARNING PROCESS

Bray (1996) says that “One of the first things a Leaving Certificate Applied school has to realise is that it is in a learning process of exploration and adaptation wherein planning, decision-making and evaluation are carried out in a recurrent fashion by the principal together with the teaching team”¹⁴⁹. In this sense, teachers are being asked to be self reflective regarding their own classroom performance in the light of the usage of active learning methodologies. The willingness of teachers to be open to this learning process may be recognised as an essential requirement if the LCA experience is to improve over time. This is research in action, which will be discussed in the methodology chapter.

The commitment of the NCCA to facilitating this process has been illustrated by the provision of quality in-service for co-ordinators, and LCA team members. Furthermore, these are not just one off in-service efforts, because they are supported by cluster meetings. Again, just like the LCVP initiative, a support service is available at the end of a telephone line, should problems arise.

THE VALUE OF WORK EXPERIENCE

“Offering young people an experience of the working world, while they are still at school, can make a powerful contribution to their learning and development”¹⁵⁰. This reference from the 1992 Green Paper could be applied to the LCA work experience dimension three years before its pilot launch. While these words could also be applied

¹⁴⁹ Bray, N., (1996), *The Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hogan, P., (Ed.), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, Association of Secondary Teachers Ireland p 138, pp 101-109

¹⁵⁰ DES, (1992) *Green Paper, Education for a Changing World*, Dublin, Government Publications p. 108

to the TY option, the important difference is that the TY work experience is not certifiable on the subsequent Leaving Certificate but it is on the LCA certificate¹⁵¹. This makes the latter more valuable. The LCA Support Service suggests that schools advise their LCA students to attempt a variety of work experiences, which may provide a pointer for their future employment prospects¹⁵². At the end of each work placement they receive feedback from each employer, which includes comments regarding desirable qualities for employment. It was pointed out that work experience could strengthen the links between schools and employers in terms of developing the skills required for the workplace¹⁵³.

The White Paper (1995) sums it up well by seeing the need for “.... improving the co-operation between providers (schools, institutions and teachers) and employers in the identification of the present and future skills and competencies that are required for economic growth and development”¹⁵⁴. Culliton (1992) agrees on the need to “....combine on-the-job training with a strong back-up from vocational and technical schools”¹⁵⁵. However, the latter viewpoint may be emphasising the divide between vocational and secondary schools. It could be suggested that LCA may be viewed as an economically driven programme.

¹⁵¹ NCCA, (1993), *Curriculum and Assessment Policy Towards the New Century*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p37

¹⁵² DES (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, p 61

¹⁵³ DES, (1995), *White Paper, Charting our Education Future*, Dublin, Government Publications, p76

¹⁵⁴ *Idem*

¹⁵⁵ Culliton, J (1992), *A Time for Change, Industrial Policy for the 1990's*, Report of the Industrial Policy Review Group, Dublin, Government Publications, p 54

CONCLUSION

This chapter has examined the Vocational Preparation and Training programme, the Senior Certificate and the Leaving Certificate Vocational Programme. The liberal vocational divide at second level, multiple intelligence theory and assessment issues were also discussed. Dissatisfaction expressed in relation to the Leaving Certificate, background to the formation of LCA, the rationale for its introduction and its assessment format were analysed. DES funding, the LCA considered as an economically driven programme and the need to inform employers were considered. Also raised were the possibility of it being considered a 'soft-option', limited progression to third level education and timetabling issues. Finally, the LCA considered as a learning experience for schools and the value of work experience for students was discussed. The next chapter will profile school types in Ireland and the four case study schools.

CHAPTER THREE

SCHOOL TYPES AND SCHOOL PROFILES

This chapter will profile the school types and school case studies. This section will examine how the non-fee paying post-primary school types are owned and managed. This description is deemed necessary because it will help clarify the nature of the schools in which the research was carried out. One school was selected from each of the listed categories and in close proximity to the researcher's school for convenience of access.

SCHOOL PROFILES

SECONDARY SCHOOLS

These are described as voluntary secondary schools, the majority of which are non-fee paying. They cater for over two thirds of second level pupils¹⁵⁶. Most of the subject options would be of academic nature, although they offer more vocational subjects, in recent years. The majority are denominational and were founded by various Religious Orders. They were managed by them often including both a principal and manager. During the past decade, many of the religious have withdrawn from management duties remaining in the background as trustees. The Education Act (1998) now requires the setting up of a board of management¹⁵⁷. Parents, teachers and trustees are represented on these boards. Teachers are now employed by their boards of management although their salaries are fully paid by the DES.

¹⁵⁶ Coolahan, J. (1981) *Irish Education: History and Structure*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, p. 215

¹⁵⁷ DES, (1998), *Education Act*, in *The Acts as Promulgated Vol 2*, Dublin, Government Publications, p1190, pp 1177-1218

VOCATIONAL SCHOOLS

The vocational schools were established as a result of the 1930 Vocational Education Act¹⁵⁸. Thirty-eight Vocational Education Committees were set up, one for each county, and some for cities and towns, which managed the vocational schools under their jurisdiction¹⁵⁹. Each VEC has a chief executive officer who implements policy. The schools are usually co-educational. During the first four decades of the state, they emphasised technical subjects, their purpose being to prepare students for the trades and manual labour. Not until 1967 were they allowed provide a senior cycle programme. Since 1974, management boards have been appointed by some of the VEC's¹⁶⁰. Representatives of parents, teachers, and the community are on these boards. In recent decades, these schools are offering a balance of both technical and academic subjects. They also emphasise a strong community dimension by providing evening classes for the Autumn/Winter season¹⁶¹.

COMPREHENSIVE SCHOOLS

The first comprehensive schools were opened in 1966, with complete funding by the state. They "...combine academic and practical subjects in one broad curriculum..."¹⁶². "Most of the comprehensive schools are managed by committees, ..." ¹⁶³ representing religious orders, the vocational education committees and the Minister for Education. The schools are denominational with co-educational status. After 1974, no more comprehensive schools were built.¹⁶⁴

¹⁵⁸ DES, (1998), *Education Act*, in *The Acts as Promulgated Vol 2*, Dublin, Government Publications, p1190, pp 1177-1218

¹⁵⁹ Idem

¹⁶⁰ Coolahan, J., (1981), *Irish Education, History and Structure*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, p 220

¹⁶¹ Idem

¹⁶² Ibid, p 218

¹⁶³ Idem

¹⁶⁴ Idem

COMMUNITY SCHOOLS

These schools were established by the Department of Education in the 1970s. Their purpose is to provide comprehensive second level education. Again, they are co-educational schools, but also provide adult education classes during the Autumn/Winter season¹⁶⁵. “They are expected to provide youth and adult education services and to be seen as structures through which recurrent education can be provided”¹⁶⁶. In this respect, they are expected to reflect the needs of the local community. They have boards of management, which have representatives of teachers, parents and religious orders¹⁶⁷.

Since 1978, some VEC’s have established community colleges under their jurisdiction¹⁶⁸. All these schools are co-educational and provide both technical and academic subjects. “These are second level and similar in conception to community schools but with a different management structure under the aegis of the VEC’s”¹⁶⁹.

THE RESEARCH SCHOOLS

A shortlist of four schools was selected, from a list provided by the LCA support service, all within commuting distance to the researcher’s home and school. The initial contact was made by letter and subsequent phonecall and an arrangement to meet the principal was made. There now follows a description of the four case study schools.

¹⁶⁵ Coolahan, J., (1981), *Irish Education, History and Structure*, Dublin, Institute of Public Administration, p 219

¹⁶⁶ *Idem*

¹⁶⁷ *Idem*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid* p. 220

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid*, p. 221

ST. ANTHONY'S COMMUNITY COLLEGE

St. Anthony's Community College is located in a growing suburb in the greater Dublin area. It is co-educational, having eight hundred and thirty students and fifty teachers. Five years ago, the LCA was introduced to provide for the needs of non-academic students and has been a successful innovation. More recently a second LCA stream was introduced.

ST. DAVID'S SECONDARY SCHOOL

St. David's secondary school is located in a provincial town, near the greater Dublin area. It is co-educational, having over seven hundred and forty students and forty four teachers. The LCA initiative was introduced six years ago to cater for non-academic students and has been a successful venture.

ST. SERENA'S COMMUNITY SCHOOL

St. Serena's is a community school situated in a growing suburb within the greater Dublin area. It is co-educational, having over seven hundred and twenty students and forty four teachers. This is the third year of the LCA initiative in the school.

ST. ITA'S SECONDARY SCHOOL

St. Ita's is a girls' secondary school situated in a provincial town quite near the greater Dublin area. It has almost six hundred and eighty students and forty one teachers. Formerly this was a convent school, with a strong academic tradition, but a few years ago a board of management was established. The LCA was introduced two years ago to cater for the increasing number of students of less academic ability.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE METHODOLOGY CHAPTER

The previous chapter profiled Irelands' school types and provided a brief description of the case study schools. This chapter opens with a brief look at underlying research principles and the selection of a research topic. Issues related to the literature review, research design, and identifying research objectives are considered. Action research and the need for triangulation are also discussed. Issues surrounding the questionnaire and interview are examined as well as ethics and related concerns. The chapter ends with a discussion of access issues, how a sample was chosen, the importance of reflexivity and methods to be used for analysing the research data. The reading of a number of texts on educational methodology have highlighted the extraordinary complexity of the tasks to be faced. For this reason, it was decided to include only aspects of educational methodology relevant to this particular research.

SOME UNDERLYING PRINCIPLES OF RESEARCH

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) say that: "Epistemological questions surround the question of *knowing* and the nature of knowledge".¹⁷⁰ Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) argue that research combines reasoning and experience in the search for truth¹⁷¹. In particular they discuss two contrasting ways of approaching research. One is the scientific method, which follows the principles of experimentation where variables can

¹⁷⁰ Hitchcock, G., Hughes, D., (1995), 2nd Edition, *Research and the Teacher*, London, Routledge, p 19

¹⁷¹ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p 5

be controlled. Comte called this, positivism¹⁷² which argues that human actions are predictable¹⁷³. Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) suggest that natural sciences and social sciences are very different¹⁷⁴. A criticism of positivistic social science is that it fails to take account of unique individual interpretations of reality¹⁷⁵. By contrast, the anti-positivist approach makes allowance for human choice and freedom¹⁷⁶, where variables in social settings cannot be controlled¹⁷⁷. Another perspective is the phenomenological approach which highlights "...the subjective aspects of people's behavior". Bogdan and Biklen (1982) state that "Many anthropologists operate from a phenomenological perspective in their studies of education"¹⁷⁸. One of these was referred to as the ethnographic or case study approach. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) say that ethnographic research has developed from the anthropological tradition¹⁷⁹. They say that "Recently, educational researchers have used the term *ethnography* to refer to any qualitative study, even within sociology"¹⁸⁰. It could be maintained that the latter approach better fits educational research because it accepts the complexity of human settings, such as schools, where decisions are influenced by both rational and emotional perspectives. It could be claimed that anthropology, using participative observation, would be an effective means for educational research in schools. This would suit on-going, long term research, of a qualitative nature. The drawback in this study would be the limited timescale and the lack of participative observation available for this particular study. Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) state that "...the interpretive paradigms strive to

¹⁷² Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p 8

¹⁷³ Hitchcock, G., Hughes, D., (1995), 2nd Edition, *Research and the Teacher*, London, Routledge, p 22

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p 23

¹⁷⁵ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p 19

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid*, p 17

¹⁷⁷ *Idem*

¹⁷⁸ Bogdan, R.C., Biklen, S.K., (1982), *Quantitative Research for Education, An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, Boston, Allyn & Bacon Ltd., p 28

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p 29

¹⁸⁰ *Idem*

understand and interpret the world in terms of its actors.”¹⁸¹ In this study, it would attempt to understand how the LCA was implemented in the case study schools and how it affected the students and teachers.

SELECTING A RESEARCH TOPIC

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight, (1996) state that selecting a research topic is the most important decision to make¹⁸². Selecting a topic for research was perhaps the easiest decision to make. The earlier research completed for the Higher Diploma in Educational Management at N.U.I., Maynooth University, suggested that much more investigation on the LCA was required. Besides, LCA was about to be introduced into the researcher’s school, hence this topic had even greater relevance by April, 2002. These twin factors strongly influenced taking LCA for research purposes.

THE LITERATURE REVIEW

Delamont (2002)¹⁸³ advises that “A permanent record of what has been read is necessary.” Full biographical details and good note-taking are essential requirements, particularly when making reference to texts. Reading the literature on the LCA and associated issues is believed to be essential to gaining an understanding of the contexts involved in the introduction of a new syllabus at school level. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) give reasons for reading for research purposes. These include: formulating your ideas, legitimising arguments and to learn more about research methods¹⁸⁴. These were beneficial because accruing knowledge gave direction to the research topic as well

¹⁸¹ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p 28

¹⁸² Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham, Open University Press p. 22.

¹⁸³ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p23

¹⁸⁴ Blaxter, L, Hughes, C, Tight, M (1996), *How to Research*, Buckingham, Open University Press, p 93

as providing insights into how educational research is carried out. In particular, they advise returning to the reading during the course of the research process¹⁸⁵. It could be argued that just as reading may illuminate points requiring research, the process may also direct the need for reference material to qualify the research context.

THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Many questions arose when making decisions on the research design. The most important one pertained to the focus of the research and the designing of questions which would provide answers to this focus. “What needs to be the focus of the research in order to answer the research questions?”¹⁸⁶ Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) agree when they suggest that “Defining the key concepts, ...” will assist the research focus¹⁸⁷. It was estimated that a minimum number of ten visits to each school would be required to carry out the research. Careful management of time would be required to achieve completion of school research by Eastertime. The ensuing few months would involve coding and recording of data collected, followed by the writing up of a report providing interpretative analysis answering the key objectives.

IDENTIFYING RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

A primary objective was identifying the effects of LCA on students in the case study schools. The input of management into timetabling, particularly for LCA team meetings and the selection of coordinator and an LCA team would be examined.

Another objective was finding out how effective LCA team meetings were in assisting cross-curricular integration and how teamwork was built up. Bell (1991) advises that

¹⁸⁵ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p 115.

¹⁸⁶ Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison, K (2000), *Research Methods in Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, p. 75

¹⁸⁷ Blaxter, L, Hughes, C, Tight, M (1996), *How to Research*, Buckingham, Open University Press, p 36

when the objectives are clear, it is timely to “...draw up an initial project outline to establish a framework within which you can work”¹⁸⁸.

Some notions regarding the objectives of the research on LCA were crystallised at the thesis proposal stage. However, these objectives were further illuminated and altered during the review of the literature phase. The research purpose would be to gain insights into the LCA practice in five schools with a view to improving practice in the host school, which would also be the action research aim.

ASPECTS OF ACTION RESEARCH

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) speak about the anti-positivist approach of action research.¹⁸⁹ Elliott (1991) says that “The fundamental aim of action research is to improve practice rather than to produce knowledge”¹⁹⁰. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) agree that “It is well suited to the needs of people conducting research in their work places and who have a focus on improving aspects of their own and their colleagues practices.”¹⁹¹ This shows that there is general agreement regarding the benefits of action research at local level. Within the context of school research on LCA, this may be interpreted to mean that teachers on the LCA team would be asked to be self-critical regarding their current classroom practices, with the intention of experimenting with altered methodologies, leading to improved classroom outcomes. This suggests a link between teaching processes and student learning outcomes. This would mean noting practices that worked well in the other case study schools, with a

¹⁸⁸ Bell, J. (1991) *Doing Your Research Project*: Philadelphia, Milton Keynes, p.14.

¹⁸⁹ Hitchcock, G., Hughes, D., (1995) 2nd edition *Research and the Teacher*, London, Routledge p. 29.

¹⁹⁰ Elliott, J. (1991), *Action Research for Educational Change*: Philadelphia, Open University Press, Milton Keynes: p.49.

¹⁹¹ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996), *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p.64.

view to disseminating this knowledge to the LCA team in the host school “Action research is a powerful tool for change and improvement at the local level.”¹⁹² This would highlight the belief that action research is an underlying principle of the investigations.

Elliott (1991) suggests that the inside researcher, such as this one, needs to “...take on the persona of the outside researcher...”.¹⁹³ Perhaps this partially explains why management made the decision not to place the researcher on the LCA team? This may subsequently have had the effect of depersonalising the data collection process in the host school. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) say that that “ Action researchers believe that objectivity is related to your integrity as a researcher and the honesty with which you report what you find.”¹⁹⁴ The approach adopted was that a genuine attempt was made to be both objective and honest¹⁹⁵ especially in regard to matters of a sensitive nature to the school.

To protect knowledge about individual teachers’ practice, the inside practitioner might be tempted into an avenue of ‘safe’ research, emphasising a quantitative approach, by concentrating solely on the use of questionnaires to both teachers and students. This was rejected as it was felt that a qualitative method, such as interviewing practitioners would provide more accurate data. Elliott (1991) suggests that: “The assumption that qualitative case studies are low in generalizability is derived from the empiricist

¹⁹² Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p.226

¹⁹³ Elliott, J. (1991), *Action Research for Educational Change*: Philadelphia, Open University Press, Milton Keynes: p.63

¹⁹⁴ Bogdan, R.C., Biklen, S.K. (1982) *Quantitative Research for Education, : An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, Boston, Allyn & Bacon Ltd.p.217.

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, p. 65.

tradition which has dominated the academic culture of educational researchers”.¹⁹⁶

Effectively, this argues the point that quantitative research, which relies on numerical analysis, is held in higher esteem by empirical researchers. However, Bogdan and Biklen (1982) state that: “Both qualitative and quantitative methods can be used in action research.”¹⁹⁷ Ultimately, both methods were combined in the case study schools.

TRIANGULATION

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) describe triangulation as the use of two or more methods of data collection.¹⁹⁸ Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996)¹⁹⁹ and Elliott (1991)²⁰⁰ agree. It is believed that if different methods yield fairly similar results, then the data collected could be described as valid. Validity is seen to be an essential requirement in authentic educational research²⁰¹. Secondly, triangulation is felt to be essential because participative observation was not used due to not being a member of the LCA team in the school. In this study, methodological triangulation will be used whereby different methods will be selected for study²⁰². One method will be the use of tape-recorded interviews with key personnel in five different schools. Persons to be interviewed will include principals, deputy principals, LCA co-ordinators and a random sample of LCA teachers. The second method chosen would be a questionnaire given to LCA students in five schools, the first section to include an opinionaire having a provision of varied

¹⁹⁶ Elliott, J. (1991), *Action Research for Educational Change*: Philadelphia, Open University Press, Milton Keynes: p.65.

¹⁹⁷ Bogdan, R.C., Biklen, S.K., (1982) *Quantitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon Ltd, p.215.

¹⁹⁸ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2000), *Research Methods in Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, p.112

¹⁹⁹ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996), *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p.77.

²⁰⁰ Elliott, J. (1991) *Action Research for Educational Change*, Milton Keynes: Open University Press, p82

²⁰¹ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, p. 85

²⁰² *Ibid*, p. 113

responses to be measured on a Likert attitude scale²⁰³. The remaining questions would be of the open ended variety allowing the possibility of individual response. Using both methods would be felt to strengthen the validity of the findings. Cohen, Mannion and Morrison (2000) advocate the use of rating scales: "...for they combine the opportunity for a flexible response with the ability to determine frequencies, correlations and other forms of quantitative analysis"²⁰⁴. The reasons for keeping these to a minimum would be the restriction on the length of this paper. Delamont (2002) suggests that triangulation may take place at the analysis stage. She says that when a developing idea emerges, the formal interview transcripts can be checked to see if data supports the idea²⁰⁵.

THE SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) state that: "Frequently, the postal questionnaire is the best form of survey in an educational inquiry"²⁰⁶. This is very high commendation. However Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) offer a caution, saying that: "Postal surveys are likely to have lower response rates...." than face-to-face surveys, which "... are more time-consuming for the researcher"²⁰⁷. It was decided that a higher rate would take precedence over time constraints. For this reason, it was decided to select the face-to-face survey option. The target group would be LCA students surveyed within a classroom situation. This would initially require the permission of parents to allow their children to answer a questionnaire. In this respect, getting the permission of each school

²⁰³ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2000), *Research Methods in Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, p.253

²⁰⁴ Idem

²⁰⁵ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p181

²⁰⁶ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2000), *Research Methods in Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, p 262

²⁰⁷ Blaxter, L, Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p. 160

principal was crucial in allowing said permission to be sought. The next step would be the posting of stamped-addressed envelopes to the parents' addresses, which were kindly provided by each principal. A covering note identifying the researcher and the purpose of the survey was also enclosed. The next step was arranging a time convenient to the particular teacher for circulating the questionnaires, which were filled in by the students and collected at the end of class time. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) suggest that the researcher select questions which begin with how, who, what, when, why and that they could provide key questions for the research project.²⁰⁸ This advice was followed when designing questions for interviews and questionnaires. For reasons of time, just four open-ended questions were included. In addition, the advice to "...mix positive and negative questions..." was followed in the student questionnaire²⁰⁹.

The literature advises the use of a pilot study, even in the case of small-scale research. A pilot questionnaire was circulated to five colleagues in the school, teachers who would not subsequently be used for the main research. As a result of the feedback, minor adjustments were made to the questionnaire, which entailed the deletion of one question and the alteration of two others. The revised version was felt to be better accommodate the research objectives.

THE INTERVIEW

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) say that "The purpose and procedures of the research should be fully explained to the subjects at the outset."²¹⁰ To this end, interviewees were told that the interviews' purpose was to find out how LCA had fared

²⁰⁸ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p. 36

²⁰⁹ *Ibid*, p. 162

²¹⁰ Cohen, L., Manion L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p. 71

in the school, the research to be analysed for a Master of Education Thesis in Maynooth University, NUI. However, it was explained that coding would be used to preserve the identity of the school name and the names of teachers partaking in the research. This was repeated after each interview. “The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity.”²¹¹ As part of the ethical code, it was mentioned that subjects had the choice of refusing to be interviewed²¹², although few teachers took this option.

The qualitative approach was emphasised. To this end, some open-ended questions were constructed, with the purpose of seeking information, which could be analysed at a later time. It was decided to tape record the answers and subsequently play them back and annotate them in their entirety. This would be for the purpose of objectivity. Subsequent playback would feed into reflection from which valid analysis could be made.

It was felt that taperecording entire interviews would give more complete feedback than note-taking. Not possessing shorthand skills, points could be missed, because persons speak faster than an interviewer can take notes. The drawback would be that a less accurate response could be forthcoming due to the realisation that the voiceover will be played back by the interviewer afterwards.

Bell, (1991) suggest that “A skilful interviewer can follow up ideas, probe responses and investigate motives and feelings, which the questionnaire can never do.”²¹³

²¹¹ Cohen, L., Manion L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p.61

²¹² Ibid, p. 71

²¹³ Bell, J., (1991), *Doing Your Research Project*, Philadelphia, Milton Keynes, p70

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) agree.²¹⁴ Undoubtedly, doing interviews demands more work, time and concentration, but the benefit is that it creates the opportunity to prompt and probe, when feedback is unclear, to illicit lucid responses.

SEQUENCING OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

It was decided to retain the same sequence when asking questions at the post-pilot stage.

It was felt that this would assist the researcher at the coding and analysis juncture. A drawback with this method would be that it does not allow flexibility during the interview, which may curtail the search for knowledge. To overcome this possibility, it was decided to provide prompts to encourage respondents to speak further on issues of particular significance.²¹⁵ Hitchcock and Hughes (1995)²¹⁶ and Bell (1993)²¹⁷ agree with this viewpoint.

THE INTERVIEW SAMPLE

For Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) the best way to approach the problem of deciding who will be interviewed is by answering some questions: “What kind of sample will be required?” and “How to achieve a representative sample (if required)?”

²¹⁸ Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) provide a list of thirteen sample strategies under three headings: probability, non-probability and other kinds of sampling.²¹⁹ Bell (1991) says that “A random sample will give each of the individuals concerned an equal chance

²¹⁴ Cohen, L., Manion L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p. 278

²¹⁵ Idem

²¹⁶ Hitchcock, G., Hughes, D. (1995), 2nd edition, *Research and the Teacher*, London, Routledge, p.157

²¹⁷ Bell, J. (1991) *Doing Your Research Project*: Philadelphia, Milton Keynes, p.70

²¹⁸ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p. 86

²¹⁹ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p. 79

of being selected.”²²⁰ Based on her principle of equity, this was the method of sample selected. Bogdan and Biklen (1982) say that with either qualitative or quantitative data, a representative sample is needed.²²¹ Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) mention that “When quota sampling is used, a specified percentage or quota from the categories of people identified in a population is interviewed.”²²² The population identified in each case study school would come from the LCA teaching team, coordinators, deputy principals and principals.

THE RESEARCHER’S ROLE, ETHICS AND BIAS

Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) say that it is difficult to reconcile one’s role as an ‘insider’ with that of working as an ‘outside’ researcher.²²³ An awareness of this problem first arose when seeking permission from the principal to carry out research in the school. Bell (1996) advises that: “If you are an inside researcher, you will have to live with your mistakes, so take care.”²²⁴ This advice would apply here because it is the intention to continue teaching in the school. This brings up the dilemma of including information which could hurt the school’s reputation. “Judgements about whether behaviour conflicts with professional values lie on a continuum that ranges from the clearly ethical to the clearly unethical”.²²⁵ Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) agree when they cite Cavan who says: “Ethics say that while truth is good, respect for human dignity is better,…”²²⁶ The latter advice was followed in each instance of doubt. Bell

²²⁰ Bell, J., (1993) *Doing your Research Project*, 2nd edition, Philadelphia, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, p.74

²²¹ Bogdan, R.C., Biklen, S.K., (1982) *Quantitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon Ltd, p.95.

²²² Hitchcock, G., Hughes, D., (1995) 2nd edition, *Research and the Teacher*, London, Routledge, p.155

²²³ Ibid, p.48

²²⁴ Bell, J., (1993) *Doing your Research Project*, 2nd edition, Philadelphia, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, p.47

²²⁵ Cohen, L. Manion, L., Morrison, K., (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London, Routledge Falmer, p.56

²²⁶ Idem

(1991) says that “It is easier to acknowledge the fact that bias can creep in than to eliminate it altogether.”²²⁷ An awareness of this problem will hopefully eliminate any such bias. Another issue would be when Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) speak about “...the researcher’s responsibilities towards the subjects”. This creates another dilemma which needs to be considered. Delamont (2002) maintains that the initial approach is made in person, by telephone and by letter²²⁸. The letters requesting access are included in appendix C.

NEGOTIATING ACCESS TO THE SCHOOLS

Firstly, permission was sought from the board of management of St. Enda’s to carry out research in the school. Permission also came from individual teachers while letters were sent to the parents of LCA students in the school allowing their opinions to be sought. In the other case study schools, permission to carry out investigations was initially sought from principals by formal letter and follow up phone calls and meeting arrangements were made. Again, permission was sought from individual teachers. This adhered to Blaxter, Hughes and Tight’s (1996) advice that: “Simply because one person has said ‘yes’ does not mean that their colleagues cannot say ‘no’.”²²⁹ This suggests that once initial access has been achieved, ongoing access will still be required. Patience, tact and flexibility were required in arranging times for interviews with teachers. Courtesy was essential, thereby increasing the likelihood of co-operation, because a favour was being requested.

²²⁷ Bell, J., (1993) *Doing your Research Project*, 2nd edition, Philadelphia, Open University Press, Milton Keynes, p.73

²²⁸ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p97

²²⁹ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p. 145

THE IMPORTANCE OF REFLEXIVITY

Delamont (2002) says that “Reflexivity is a social scientific variety of self-consciousness.”²³⁰ This may be interpreted to mean that there needs to be an awareness of the effect the researcher has at all stages of the work, the reading, the fieldwork, theorizing, analysis and the conclusion stages. She elaborates by highlighting that “....good research is highly tuned to the inter-relationship of the investigator with the respondents.”²³¹ The quality of the relationships formed with respondents may ultimately effect the quality of the research data collected. She argues that the capacity to be reflexive will ensure reliability and validity.²³²

ANALYSING THE DATA

Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) say that: “Analysis is about the search for explanation and understanding, in the course of which concepts and theories are likely to be advanced, considered and developed.”²³³ They suggest five techniques for managing the data: coding, annotating (writing marginal notes), labelling passages, selecting significant items and summarising interview feedback.²³⁴ Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) say that “Analysis involves discovering and deriving patterns in the data”²³⁵ They advise the use of a highlighter to colour code data which helps the process of analysis.²³⁶ Delamont (2002) says that “Coding can be done by hand or using one of the computer programs”²³⁷. The former advice was followed with coloured markers being

²³⁰ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p8

²³¹ Idem

²³² Ibid p9

²³³ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p.185

²³⁴ Ibid, p. 184

²³⁵ Hitchcock, G., Hughes, D., (1995) 2nd edition, *Research and the Teacher*, London, Routledge, p.295

²³⁶ Ibid, p.299

²³⁷ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p174

used to identify categories for both the interview transcripts and student questionnaires. She advises that it is better to have too many categories²³⁸. What transpired was that as a result of re-reading, new categories continued to emerge, which was assisted by on-going analytical writing. These categories were filed and analysed using the Excel spreadsheet program on the computer. This was felt to be important because she advises not to let material build up un-analysed²³⁹. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1995) suggest a means for interview analysis: "If you have recorded and produced transcripts of your interviews, and have the facilities to input these on to a computer, there are an increasing number of computer software packages available to assist your analysis ...".²⁴⁰ Bogdan and Biklen (1982) say that "While it is difficult to throw away data or categories, analysis is a process of data reduction."²⁴¹ They suggest that after coding, an abbreviation or number should be assigned to each code.²⁴² Furthermore, they state that "Analysis continues into the writing stage".²⁴³ Hitchcock and Hughes (1995) put it somewhat differently "The researcher moves backwards and forwards between description and explanation."²⁴⁴ They state that "...data analysis is about moving from chaos to order, and from order to chaos, often simultaneously".²⁴⁵ This highlights the complexity of the analysis process and the time commitment involved. Delamont (2002) says that "Transcribing [interview tape recordings] is very time-consuming"²⁴⁶. That this was the case quickly became apparent with transcribing taking place within a few

²³⁸ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p175

²³⁹ Ibid, p171

²⁴⁰ Ibid, pp 190-191

²⁴¹ Bogdan, R.C., Biklen, S.K., (1982) *Quantitative Research for Education: An Introduction to Theory and Methods*, Boston, Allyn and Bacon Ltd, p.183.

²⁴² Idem

²⁴³ Ibid, p.186.

²⁴⁴ Hitchcock, G., Hughes, D., (1995) 2nd edition, *Research and the Teacher*, London, Routledge, p.174

²⁴⁵ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p. 175

²⁴⁶ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p177

days following the interviews to ensure an accurate and authentic reporting.

Regarding questionnaire analysis, Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) mention that:

“Many small-scale research studies which use questionnaires as a form of data collection will not need to go beyond the use of descriptive statistics and the exploration of interrelationships between pairs of variables.”²⁴⁷ This advice was followed because this was a small-scale research study. This meant that the construction of tables and related bar charts using the Excel software package, had the effect of enhancing presentation and easing subsequent analysis.

An important process is explained by Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996): “Interpretation is the process by which you put your own meaning on the data you have collected and analysed, and compare that meaning with those advanced by others.”²⁴⁸ While this ‘higher order thinking’ skill was employed in the ‘Review of the Literature’ chapter it will also be applied to the ‘Analysis of the Research Findings’ chapter. In an effort to achieve a ‘dispassionate’ frame of mind, they suggest: “Taking some time out, perhaps a week or two, before you come back to your analysis can increase the strangeness or foreignness of your data, and lead to a livelier interpretation”²⁴⁹. Perhaps the resultant interpretative analysis could also become more accurate? This advice was followed. Blaxter, Hughes and Tight (1996) mention that interpretation brings up four related concepts. These are: *Significance*, which “...refers to the likelihood that a result from a sample could have been found by chance.”²⁵⁰ and the second *Generalizability*

²⁴⁷ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p 194

²⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 197

²⁴⁹ Ibid, p. 198

²⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 200

which refers to the possibility that the findings could apply beyond this study.²⁵¹ The remaining concepts are : *Reliability*,²⁵² which refers to the likelihood of another researcher coming up with the same results for the same study, and *Validity*²⁵³ which considers whether the methods measure the issues identified.

Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2000) suggest coding the interview data and interpreting the qualitative data.²⁵⁴ They propose listening to the recording and reading the transcripts several times to extract meaning.²⁵⁵ In this context, using both senses, hearing and seeing, may improve the interpretation. They also advise summarising the interviews²⁵⁶ and that coding be also used for each answer to a questionnaire.²⁵⁷ Delamont (2002) says that “Themes and categorizations are extracted during these recurrent readings.”²⁵⁸ The latter point was considered to be important with continual re-reading taking place following the transcribing of each interview schedule.

²⁵¹ Blaxter, L., Hughes, C., Tight, M., (1996) *How to Research*, Buckingham: Open University Press, p 200

²⁵² Idem

²⁵³ Idem

²⁵⁴ Cohen, L., Manion, L., Morrison, K. (2000) *Research Methods in Education*, London: Routledge Falmer, p. 282

²⁵⁵ Ibid, p. 285

²⁵⁶ Idem

²⁵⁷ Ibid, p. 265

²⁵⁸ Delamont, S., (2002), *Fieldwork in Educational Settings, Methods, Pitfalls and Perspectives*, 2nd Edition, London, Routledge, p170

CHAPTER 5

RESULTS OF THE CASE STUDY RESEARCH

The focus of the previous chapter was on the research methodology used in assisting the development of research questions for teachers and questionnaires for students regarding LCA. This chapter will focus on the results of research carried out in five schools during the initial four months of 2003. This involved interviewing three principals, two deputy principals, five LCA coordinators and twenty LCA teachers. A questionnaire cum opinionnaire was also circulated to sixty-four students in the five schools. This section will consider the opinions of teachers who were interviewed in the five case study schools.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter examines the reasons why LCA was introduced into the case study schools, the selection procedure for students and give opinions on the in-service provision. The opinions of management, LCA coordinators and team teachers on meetings are considered. An altered approach to learning in a course without textbooks is detailed. The next section reports on the hard work involved for teachers and the turnover of staff. Teachers viewpoints on the assessment procedure, discipline problems arising, the 90% attendance requirement and the need for more practical subjects are discussed. Suggestions for improving LCA and teachers feedback from parents will be mentioned. Specific questions in relation to the election of a coordinator and team formation, resources and funding in the school new to the programme will be discussed. The next section considers the opinions of teachers on how students have developed self-confidence with an easing of drop-out, an improved attitude and the development of

classroom and life skills. The results of quantitative and qualitative questionnaires coming from students are also reported.

WHY INTRODUCE LCA?

In St. Anthony's a strong reason for bringing in LCA was that some students were doing a poor Leaving Certificate with reduced job prospects. Why not bring in a good LCA?

In this school one teacher did a Masters degree on it, which encouraged staff discussion, while in St. Serena's the introduction of LCA was largely staff driven. Some students were considered unsuitable for the Leaving Certificate programme. By broadening the curricular base, LCA would show a respect for their needs which is referred to in the school mission statement. A staff meeting was followed by a parents' information evening to explain LCA. In St. Anthony's the extra resources were a minor factor in starting LCA, the students' needs being the prime consideration.

In St. Ita's the mission statement highlights a strong commitment to disadvantage which helped give LCA its impetus. It was initiated by the staff and supported by the board of management. The on-going assessment procedure was welcomed by teachers because it would take pressure off the terminal examinations for students. The work experience dimension was also an initial attraction, while the gain of one teacher extra over the two-year programme would allow greater flexibility in timetabling.

In the case of St. Anthony's which has had six years experience of LCA its introduction was facilitated by the existence of a compulsory transition year programme. The TY team devised its own modules which would be used by the LCA team as elective modules. Perhaps this highlights the flexibility to allow local initiative to be recognised.

In St. Enda's, the impetus came from the board of management in recognition of the

increasing diversity of the student body, a growing number of whom were struggling with the Leaving Certificate programme.

In each of the five schools a half day seminar led by the second level support service preceded its subsequent acceptance at staff meetings. In St. Ita's feedback from the seminar was sent in a letter to parents at the end of the third term including LCA as a Senior Cycle option for the forthcoming academic year. In St. Enda's a further information day seminar was held in the school in the autumn followed by immediate in-service to equip teachers for the skills needed for the new initiative.

SELECTION OF STUDENTS

The deputy principal in St. Anthony's described the selected students as non-academic and non-troublesome, who were unsuitable for the Leaving Certificate course. LCA would provide them with a practical option. A decision was made by staff to allow third year students a choice between doing the TY programme or LCA. They are interviewed in the presence of a parent or guardian and it is explained that hard work and good behaviour are expected. According to the coordinator this spoken contract is likely to become a written one next year, which places the onus on students to be responsible for their behaviour and class work.

The principal in St. David's identified a specific type of student who needed a changed format and a non-academic syllabus with less homework and less examination pressure. In St. Ita's those deemed suitable were encouraged by the career guidance teacher to take LCA. Interested students filled out an application form and were interviewed by the career guidance teacher and LCA coordinator. In St. Enda's in May 2002, students were

informed that LCA was being launched. Selection was based on the recognition of an academically weak cohort group for whom it might be suited. Each prospective student was interviewed.

TEACHER IN-SERVICE FOR LCA

Some teachers complimented the in-service provision. The Principal in St. David's said that the in-service for Principals concerned with management input, was of high quality. One principal praised the in-service which may be interpreted to mean that principal's received helpful advice on the selection of suitable teachers and how best to facilitate regular scheduled team meetings through efficient timetabling. A teacher in St. David's said that "refresher in-service is required" to keep teachers updated with new developments.

However, one teacher in St. Anthony's said that "the in-service was better before the second level support service was established" and this was because it was focused exclusively on the LCA programme. A colleague mentioned that the recent changes made to the social education specialism was confusing to experienced LCA teachers. It also meant extra lesson preparation time because it was like teaching a completely new subject. Two teachers, one each in St. Davids and St. Ita's suggested that the in-service needed to address the issue of student indiscipline, which was holding back LCA. A teacher in St. Enda's felt that the school meetings were more beneficial than the in-service he attended. This may be the case because the teamwork approach allows the focus to be placed on the uniqueness of the school situation in terms of the selection of students and specialisms. The principal in St. David's hoped that future in-service would help train teachers in conflict resolution skills to ease classroom disruption. The deputy principal in St. Ita's agreed. A teacher in St. Enda's said that clearer guidelines

on curricular objectives and more assistance for teachers with lesson preparation are required.

TEAM MEETINGS

FEEDBACK FROM MANAGEMENT

The principal in St. David's said that a large team was unavoidable due to the wide choice of specialisms being offered which led to communication problems among LCA team teachers. However, the granting of a forty minutes time slot on Thursdays by the board of management resulted in meetings being held every five weeks. He admitted that only three meetings per year involving the full team were held which was insufficient for good planning. However the board of management recently granted a half day to appraise school activities, which could encourage the team to meet more often. In St. Serena's, the principal explained that the granting of extra time by the board of management has resulted in LCA team meetings being held once every five weeks for an eighty minute duration. In St. Ita's, the deputy principal admitted that "the biggest problem is creating planning time for LCA meetings." However, sub-group meetings are held when Student Tasks are due for completion, which involve the LCA coordinator, career guidance teacher and deputy principal, which takes account of feedback from students. These may be described as core-group meetings. The principal in St. Enda's explained the reason for the difficulty in making time available for meetings during school hours. "The introduction of LCA resulted in reduced fifth year options which made timetable blocking difficult for freeing all teachers for LCA meetings."

FEEDBACK FROM LCA COORDINATORS

The coordinator in St. Anthony's said that meetings are helpful because they "create a link between different subjects" but that insufficient meetings are held, which involves a core group of year heads, class tutors and both coordinators. Having a large team creates communication problems as it is difficult for the coordinator to contact other LCA teachers, which is done outside of class time. Similar problems arose in the other schools. The coordinator in St. David's sees a need for weekly meeting time to assist the implementation of activities. A colleague said that "meetings are too rushed because they are held within a short time frame with too many issues being covered." The coordinator in St. Serena's said that meetings are held too infrequently to effect cross curricular integration, while the large LCA team creates communication problems. This means that teachers meet informally at other times. The coordinator in St. Ita's said that infrequent meetings resulted in many teachers still working on their own. One teacher said that the meetings are very good, "for instance the discipline problem has improved since we tried a teamwork approach." A colleague says that the meetings are vital in helping to understand the ability of the students in relation to the new curriculum. The coordinator in St. Enda's says that the meetings are poorly attended because teachers are not free simultaneously. "Contingency meetings are held when disciplinary problems arise". She says that the team is too large, suggesting that five on the team would be ideal, which would necessitate teachers being timetabled for three specialisms each.

FEEDBACK FROM LCA TEACHERS

The opinions of teachers was similar to that of coordinators. An LCA teacher in St. Anthony's says that there is definitely a need for more meetings although they are helpful for planning purposes. A colleague says that problems which arise in the

classroom, completion dates for Student Tasks and planning for excursions can be discussed. A teacher in St. David's said that they provide an opportunity "to discuss student progress, link up specialisms, to share ideas and plan ahead". There was unanimous agreement that the LCA team meetings were helpful but there were too few of them held during the academic year.

AN ALTERED APPROACH TO LEARNING

A teacher in St. David's has gained new insights into student learning by becoming more aware of their limited understanding. A teacher in St. Ita's said that he found it more interesting because there is greater variety involving different aims and approaches. A colleague says that less homework is given which means that most of the work is done in class. A teacher in St. Enda's says "the approach is less book work and more action, less use of the blackboard and more project work. A colleague says that there is a more practical approach, for instance the bringing in of guest speakers.

A COURSE WITHOUT TEXTBOOKS

A teacher in St. David's found lesson planning very time consuming due to the absence of textbooks. She said that it was a student-centred approach which means working with them rather than setting exercises. A teacher in St. Ita's admitted that despite the teamwork approach she often used her own initiative in coming up with approaches to get students interested in religious education. Another teacher, new to LCA, found the need to move at a much slower pace and that expectations levels had to be lowered. By contrast an English teacher in St. David's said that she had no problem coming up with suitable material from newspaper articles and books from her home library. A teacher in St. Serena's said that his few years experience of using active learning methods for the

TY programme was good preparation for LCA. A teacher in St. Enda's said that teaching languages represented a huge work load for him. He spent much time searching for material in newspapers, books and the internet, pitched to their level of understanding. A colleague said that LCA represented a radical change for the teachers in his school. As a history teacher, he admitted that in terms of lesson preparation, it was the hardest year that he had ever put in. He found it harder to gain the students focus due to the absence of a textbook. He said that a textbook would create a focus point for the lesson, "You need to be well prepared beforehand with material photocopied for them and sometimes having the computer room booked in advance".

HARD WORK FOR TEACHERS

A teacher in St. Anthony's said that he used his own initiative to devise different approaches which he hoped would help student understanding. As a teacher of mathematics, a visit to the local snooker hall helped students to develop an understanding of angles. "I frequently bring in real life situations". A teacher in St. David's admitted that these students needed plenty of variety in the classroom as their concentration was often poor and that they easily became bored. This meant coming up with a variety of teaching styles, such as group work and active learning. However, there is a good LCA handbook provided which gives ideas for lesson plans. A colleague was critical of the lack of resources and said that it was difficult to come up with suitable material for them. She felt that a resource library available locally would facilitate lesson preparation.

In St. Enda's one teacher mentioned that lesson preparation was no different than for other classes and had used active learning methods for many years. The general consensus that teaching LCA was very challenging, was admitted in all five schools.

TURNOVER OF LCA TEACHERS

In four schools there was a small turnover of LCA teachers in recent years. Co-ordinators were very concerned that this represented a major loss of skills because these were experienced LCA teachers, which the team could ill afford to lose. It also meant that teachers new to the programme would be inexperienced and that it would take them a few years to become conversant with the required skills. It also makes coordination more difficult. However, a recent positive development was that a few male teachers have joined the previously all female team which provides a good role model for students. The recent retirement of a co-ordinator creates a continuity problem and that it would take a few years for any replacement to become proficient at co-ordinating duties. The coordinator in St. Enda's said that next year teacher drop out could arise as some teachers have expressed dissatisfaction with LCA.

TEACHERS' OPINIONS ON THE ASSESSMENT PROCEDURE

There was a generally positive response to the introduction of a modular course, with credits being gradually accumulated, over the two year time frame. At least one teacher in each of the case study schools believed that it was the main reason for students gain in self-confidence. A teacher in St. Anthony's said that the feedback from the Student Tasks in the form of gained credits, boosted their self-esteem and kept them focused on the work to be done. However, the coordinator in St. Serena's was critical of "the complicated assessment procedure" which some teachers found confusing and felt that

it needed to be simplified. A teacher in St. Ita's suggested the compilation of a Key Assignments book on a national basis would result in a common assessment approach. The coordinator in St. Enda's said that students were recently videoed to hone their interview skills and that the first Student Task gave them a maximum 5% of their overall qualification, which improved their motivation levels.

This brings up the issue of the unwillingness of some teachers to welcome a changed assessment procedure but surely the gain for the student is the central issue here. It can be argued that if the three tier modular assessment procedure encourages improved work rate and self-confidence levels, then surely it is a welcome innovation? Furthermore, it may be good preparation for third level education where the modular basis for assessment has become increasingly popular.

SPECIFIC FEEDBACK FROM ST. ENDA'S

Two additional questions were asked of the principal in St. Enda's because this was the introductory year for LCA in the school. The first enquired how a coordinator was elected. The reply was that the position was made a post of responsibility. Two teachers applied for the position, which involved a formal interview procedure. The interview panel consisted of a board of management representative and a principal each from the local school and this one. The selection made was based on previous leadership experience within the school and a procedural knowledge of LCA.

The second question enquired how an LCA team was chosen. The reply was that the selection was based on the choice of subjects being made available, with particular emphasis on the practical subjects domain. This meant that information technology and

art were chosen this year. However consideration was given to the openness of teachers taking on a new curriculum and the realisation of the hard work involved.

Four additional questions were asked of the coordinator in St. Enda's. The first of these enquired if adequate funding or resources was provided. She said that the once off grant of £500.00 for the two subject specialisms, Art and IT, were inadequate provision for the resource establishment. The same complaint was mentioned in regard to the €120.00 capitation per student as this was quickly spent on books, pens, markers and the cost of excursions for some students.

The second question concerned the allocation of LCA resources. She admitted that the storage space, used for student records, is very limited. She says that this space has the lowest possible priority, being shared with ancillary staff for cleaning purposes. She argues that there needs to be a person, probably a teacher, exclusively in charge of LCA resources and the storage room. This is important because student records need to be retained until the end of the two-year appeals period. According to the DES (2000) this task would be made the responsibility of the coordinator.²⁵⁹

The coordinator also suggested the need for separate storage space for teachers' resources and a separate telephone line for the coordinator, who is frequently in contact with the DES, the second level support service, employers, parents and students.

The third question asked if timetabling allowed sufficient access to IT facilities. She said that computer facilities are inadequate due to the demand coming from the TY

²⁵⁹ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p41

group. She maintains that a second room for computer facilities needs to be exclusively available for the LCA group who need priority because they are an examination class.

The final question asked how supportive the board of management were in relation to LCA. The coordinator hoped that finance could be raised to improve the shelving space for student and teacher resources and extra computers, exclusively for LCA usage.

TEACHERS' FEEDBACK ON PARENTS' ATTITUDES

While the Deputy Principal in St. Anthony's says that parents are slow to accept LCA and that it is hard to sell it to them, the coordinator maintains that most parents are happy with it. In St. David's, the attitude of parents is generally positive, "certainly more so than with the TY programme". The coordinator agrees. The principal and coordinator in St. Serena's agree that parents feel positive about it because they see its benefits for the students. The Deputy Principal in St. Ita's says that while "parents feel positive about their children's achievements they are also worried about their future employment prospects". In St. Enda's, the principal says that most parents are positive, but other still do not engage with the school. The coordinator agrees, mentioning that some parents still do not attend meetings nor do they reply to school letters. She says that these parents believe that disciplinary matters "are the sole responsibility of the school"

TEACHERS OPINIONS ON HOW LCA STUDENTS ARE PROGRESSING

There are two sources on how students are faring with the LCA programme. One of these represents the opinion of teachers who notice the improvement in most students' attitudes from the previous year, while the other opinion comes from the students themselves. This section will consider how teachers see their LCA students coping with the programme. It regards the positive outcomes as a result of doing it and will also reveal that a minority of students do not improve either in attitude or work rate.

DEVELOPMENT OF SELF CONFIDENCE

The opinion of the deputy principal in St. Anthony's is that "it has been of huge benefit to weaker students", a sentiment shared by the coordinator in St. Serena's who says that "it is a terrific programme because it has developed their self worth." The St. Anthony's deputy principal believes that "it gives them good training and wide experience of the working world." A teacher in St. David's spoke about the increased level of self-reliance and independence gained by the end of second year. A teacher in St. Ita's and the coordinator in St. Enda's said that their self confidence had improved as a result of delivering speeches in front of the class. A teacher in St. Enda's insists that they are happier because the class work interests them, which has improved their motivation levels. In this respect, she feels that "LCA is tailor-made to their needs".

EASING DROP-OUT

A teacher in St. Serena's spoke about better attendance, improved punctuality and less disruption in class. These are significant gains. A colleague says that seventeen of the twenty students in first year had stayed in school, which was remarkable considering past trends. She maintains that improved attendance has resulted from the onus being

placed on them to complete their Key Assignments on time, which develops their sense of responsibility. The coordinator in St. Enda's is under the impression that LCA has improved the students attendance levels.

IMPROVED ATTITUDE

Teachers in all five schools mentioned an improvement in student attitude.

A teacher in St. Anthony's mentioned the tremendous achievement of one student who was the first in his family to complete a Leaving Certificate programme. A colleague suggests that their attitudes to school have improved because they are now being treated more like adults. A teacher in St. David's said that students seem to be happier and that there is increased classroom involvement. A colleague said that "There is less confrontation because I am not demanding as much work from them as last year". She also admits that some students have not improved. A teacher in St. Ita's says that there is much better student-teacher rapport and that they feel less isolated. A colleague has seen a dramatic improvement in most students' attitudes in the sense that they are more cooperative within the classroom. Another teacher suggested that this was due to their realisation that teachers are there to help them. A teacher in St. Enda's has seen a development in terms of their ability to meet deadlines for Key Assignments and Student Tasks. However, it can be difficult to get Key Assignments in on time from a few students. A colleague says that "their attitude has become more positive as they realise it is possible for them to achieve a Leaving Certificate which they previously did not envisage".

IMPROVED CLASSROOM SKILLS

The coordinator in St. Serena's says that LCA has had a positive influence on most students. She mentioned that their communication skills had improved, particularly for second year students, as a result of experiencing nine interviews. A teacher in St. Serena's said that these students had become more outgoing and happier this year. Another teacher in the same school maintains that students gains have developed in the areas of research skills, the ability to plan ahead and taking personal responsibility for their own work. Their ability to meet deadlines shows that students have matured and become more independent. A teacher in St. Enda's made reference to leadership skills being developed as a result of completing the physical education coaching module.

IMPROVED LIFE SKILLS

The mathematics teacher in St. Anthony's said that students see the relevance of the classroom to work situations, for instance the use of the wage slip. They become more aware of what is available for them outside school and he says that "It is great for the weaker student, as they become more aware of what is available for them outside school." The coordinator in St. David's mentioned that students have developed their computer skills through preparation of curricula vitae while the work experience has benefited their life skills. A teacher in St. Enda's reports that their organisational and decision making skills have improved.

FEEDBACK FROM STUDENT QUESTIONNAIRES

This section will consider the results coming from the student questionnaires. These were circulated to 64 students in five case study schools, with no distinction being made between first year and second year students. The first was a multiple choice question of

a quantitative nature and used the Likert scale of responses. Each of the ten subsections sought one of four responses: Strongly Agree, Unsure, Disagree or Strongly Disagree. By contrast, the remaining four questions were of a qualitative nature, which sought individual impressions experienced by students. The results coming from the student questionnaires will be taken in sequential order.

QUANTITATIVE STUDENT FEEDBACK

It was decided to simplify the quantitative student data by presenting them in tabular form and constructing bar charts to represent the distinctions between schools. For this purpose, the numbers were converted to percentage form with the 'Disagree' and 'Strongly Disagree' categories combined. Each student was asked to tick one of four responses to each subsection, namely Strongly Agree, Unsure, Disagree and Strongly Disagree. The responses are analysed in Chapter six.

QUALITATIVE FEEDBACK FROM STUDENTS

This section will be a report on the feedback coming from students which may provide a rich source of data for subsequent qualitative analysis.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE BEST ABOUT THE LCA?

The most popular response was that there are no books to be brought in and no study or homework to be done. A student in St. Anthony's mentioned that the mathematics being done is for living which he liked. Another referred to having less written work to do. They enjoy the work experience, especially if it is held on Friday as in St. David's. In St. David's many students enjoyed the computer work. Indeed in St. Enda's spending more time out of school and getting experience of the working world was favoured.

These were the most popular answers. Some students find LCA a creative experience and liked the practical classes. Students in three of the five schools enjoyed the teamwork in class and see LCA as an opportunity to make friends. In St. Serena's, LCA was seen as less stressful because credits are gained through classwork done for Key Assignments which can be enjoyable while in St. Enda's reference was made to having no worries about State Examinations.

WHAT HAVE YOU DISCOVERED ABOUT YOURSELF SINCE YOU STARTED THE LCA?

The most popular response was working well as part of a team. In St. David's, the ability to get on well with others in class and an improvement in communication skills were popular responses. By contrast in St. Anthony's a few mentioned that they worked better on their own. For many students there was an increase in confidence levels. In St. Ita's a few mentioned being able to do things they did not think they could while others in St. David's gained confidence through work experience and improved computer skills. One student in St. Anthony's spoke about having more freedom than doing the normal Leaving Certificate while another in St. Serena's mentioned being able to give his own opinion in class. Many found out that they were good at working with their hands such as a student in St. Anthony's who enjoyed Engineering, Art and Home Economics. One student in St. Anthony's some spoke about being able to meet deadlines for the Key Assignments, while a classmate said that he had learnt about the need to work hard to get what he wanted. This appeared to be a sign of developing maturity. A student in St. Enda's spoke about finding out that he liked plumbing as a result of doing his work experience. Sadly, within the same school one student admitted to having learnt very little about himself.

DID THE LCA EXPERIENCE CHANGE YOUR ATTITUDE TOWARDS YOUR TEACHERS?

The feedback in this regard was generally positive. The most popular response was that they got on better with their teachers because there was less work pressure as exemplified by a student in St. Anthony's. One student in St. David's said that teachers were able to provide more time being helpful because it was a smaller class group, while a classmate said that teachers spent less time giving out to them. In St. Ita's many students said that there was greater mutual respect, that teachers treated them more like adults and trusted them more. A student in St. Serena's spoke about how some teachers talked about their hobbies which added to the relaxed classroom atmosphere. In St. Anthony's a student said that his gain in confidence owed much to teachers treating him with respect, while a classmate admitted that he could talk more easily now because he had become less shy. In St. Serena's a few mentioned that there were more discussions in the classroom where everyone gave their own opinion. One student in St. Enda's reported that he feels more relaxed in class and finds it easier to work with his classmates.

WHAT DO YOU LIKE LEAST ABOUT THE LCA?

The area of greatest complaint was that of doing project work and that there was too much written work. In St. Ita's many admitted that the deadlines appeared to be too short for having the Key Assignments in and this was a source of pressure. Others mentioned disliking the interviews for the Students Tasks, particularly one student in St. Ita's complained of having to record himself for the oral examination. A number of students in St. Serena's find LCA boring. An area of major complaint was the poor perception that other Leaving Certificate students had of them. A student in St. Serena's

spoke about being verbally abused for being less intelligent because they don't do tests or homework. A few students in St. Anthony's felt that LCA has a bad name because people speak about it as only being suitable for 'stupid' students and that they are felt to be not intelligent enough for the normal Leaving Certificate. Many students in St. Anthony's complained about the minimal attendance requirement, while others were unhappy about not having a say in the choice of subjects taken. This is something that they would have an option on had they decided to do the Leaving Certificate. Some students expressed a dislike of a particular subject. An example of this was where leisure pursuits was disliked in St. Anthony's because it was felt to be a waste of time while in St. Serena's there was mention of a dislike of French and Music. In this sense, there may be a lack of flexibility on specialisms choice for LCA students. In St. Enda's the Student Tasks are seen to be repetitive.

A minority of students could find nothing to complain about. One student in St Ita's said that it was perfect for her while a classmate said that it was one of the best things she ever did. In St. Enda's one student chose LCA because it was a good course for the type of job she wanted.

PROBLEMS WITH LCA

DISRUPTION DUE TO IN-SERVICE PROVISION AND EXCURSIONS

The coordinator in St. Anthony's admits that substitution problems arise which creates disruption in school when LCA teachers take students on excursions. Meanwhile, the principal in St. Serena's spoke about the universal problem of providing cover for teachers during LCA in-service which arise in all schools. This is an issue that needs to be tackled by the DES through provision of immediate teacher substitution.

DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS ARISING

The principal in St. David's said that the greatest problem was misbehaviour, particularly one student this year who suffers from ADD (Attention Deficit Disorder). Very little support was forthcoming from the board of management. A teacher in St. Serena's suspects that some students may see LCA as a softer option which may explain their lack of motivation and indifferent attitude.

The Deputy Principal in St. Ita's maintains that sometimes the wrong students are selected for LCA. She says that discipline problems may arise whereby teachers expect too much from students, who can become alienated. In this respect, alternative teaching methods and approaches to discipline could benefit the entire school. The work experience presents problems of poor organisation and punctuality levels for some of them. She says that some new teachers give excessive assistance to students for the Student Tasks which may foster a sense of dependency by students.

THE 90% ATTENDANCE REQUIREMENT

A teacher in St. Anthony's says that the 90% attendance requirement is too vague for this school to follow, particularly in relation to doctors' certificates. It is explained to students that if they miss too many classes they may lose credits. A teacher in St. Enda's says that there is a lack of continuity from one class to the next because of the high absenteeism rate by a few students. This results in students falling behind in their work. There needs to be a structured approach to the absenteeism and discipline issues.

THE NEED FOR MORE PRACTICAL SUBJECTS

A teacher in St. Davids sees the need for subjects like photography and physical education, while more guest speakers would give them greater variety. A teacher in St. Enda's says that there is a need for more practical subjects and that these should be timetabled for the afternoon and feels that this format would ease the problem of their being troublesome at that time. A colleague insists that a weakness of LCA is the insufficient amount of work experience provided for them.

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

A teacher in St. Anthony's reported about the need for more planning in advance of trips away, because some students see them as a "waste of time". There is a need for smaller class sizes, according to a colleague which would make group work more manageable. The interpretation here is that group work will only be effective with a smaller class, perhaps ten students. A teacher in St. Serena's mooted the idea of pooling ideas between subject teachers in other schools which could make lesson preparation easier. A contacts book, listing names and phone numbers for guest speakers would be most helpful. The coordinator in St. Enda's referred to a need for earlier timetable planning with a greater emphasis on practical subjects. A colleague suggested that one year of LCA is sufficient and that more work experience is needed to prepare students for real life work situations. Another said that students need more time out from the classroom such as more trips.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has reported on why LCA was introduced into the five case study schools and how student selection was made. Opinions on team meetings from the point of

view of management, coordinators and teachers were detailed. This was followed by a report on the altered approach to lesson preparation in a course without textbooks.

Teachers opinions on assessment, discipline issues and the need for practical subjects were discussed. Areas for improvement and parents perceptions were mentioned. The principal and coordinator in the school new to the programme were asked specific questions in relation to the election of a coordinator, formation of an LCA team, funding and resources. This was followed by the opinion of teachers reporting considerable gains for their students. Finally, the results of questionnaires circulated to LCA students were reported.

The next chapter will consist of an analysis of issues arising from the results presented here which will include the reasons why LCA was introduced and the hard work involved for teachers. Communication problems arising from having a large team and the outcomes for students considered from both the teachers and students perspective will be analysed. A conclusion section will include discussion on an altered role for teachers, the learning experience involved, the possibility of DES cutbacks and recommendations for the future improvement of LCA in the researchers school.

CHAPTER SIX

ANALYSIS OF THE RESULTS

While the previous chapter outlined some of the more important findings coming from the research data, this one will consist of in-depth analysis. With this in mind, key issues will be identified to be worthy of discussion, involving reference to contrasting opinions by teachers both within and between schools. This will also apply to students, whose opinions are felt to be crucial in determining the success or otherwise of LCA.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter will focus on why LCA was introduced in the case study schools and how students were selected followed by a reflection on the hard work involved for teachers in a course not having textbooks. Communication problems arising from having large LCA teams and the attempts by principals to make meeting time available will be discussed as well as problems with teacher isolation and cross-curricular integration. Suggestions for increasing the frequency of meetings, discipline problems arising and the challenge of LCA coordination will be considered.

The next section will consider the outcomes for students' taking the programme both from teachers and students' perspectives. Teachers opinions on the development of self-confidence, improved attitude, the development of classroom and life skills and the easing of student drop-out will be analysed.

Issues discussed from the students' perspective will include improved communication and self-responsibility, creativity, problem-solving and confidence in social skills. The areas of preparation for work, awareness of opportunities, skill in the use of ICT, improved teamwork and awareness of the local community will also be reviewed. The responses to what students liked best about LCA, things they learned about themselves, improved relationships with teachers and negative perceptions will also be analysed.

In the conclusion section a discussion on an altered role for teachers, the learning experience involved, the possibility of DES cutbacks and recommendations for the future improvement of LCA in the researchers school.

WHY INTRODUCE LCA?

On reflection, the reasons for introducing LCA into these schools may be more important than how it was brought in. In this sense, the needs of the students were considered to be more important than the extra resources being provided by the DES. In two schools, the mission statements facilitated its introduction, in one school the commitment to the needs of all students regardless of their aptitude or ability was mentioned, while the other school referred to a commitment to the needs of disadvantaged students. In the case of the remaining three schools, there was a growing recognition that a increasing minority of students were not coping with the academically orientated Leaving Certificate programme. The LCA appeared to be an attractive alternative for them.

SELECTION OF STUDENTS

Among the case study schools there was general consensus regarding the selection of students for LCA. They were identified as students likely to struggle with the Leaving Certificate, of low academic ability, but unlikely to present discipline problems.

In St. Anthony's the students are interviewed in the presence of a parent or guardian. A colleague says that the verbal contract involving a promise to work hard and behave well gives them a sense of ownership and input into their school work. Next year, this contract will become a written one. A teacher in St. Serena's said that the careful selection of students by interview ensures that messers are omitted. In St. Ita's those deemed suitable are encouraged by the career guidance teacher to take LCA. In all five schools, LCA was only made available to a restricted group, those considered to be weak academically. A recommendation here would be that a careful selection process is essential in identifying the target group.

SELECTION OF TEACHERS

It could be suggested that in St. Enda's management's attempt to provide a wide selection of specialisms appeared to take precedence over the need to select appropriate teachers. While the effect of such a preference may remain unclear, there is a possibility that it could impact negatively on outcomes for students. This could be the case, because such a preference could result in the selection of teachers who have little commitment to either a teamwork approach or a willingness to teach students of low academic ability.

The young teacher in St. Enda's who speaks of the need for less blackboard work and more action realises this concept which may be facilitated by the fact that he is a physical education teacher. In this sense, he guides them in the learning process, which is largely self-directed. He describes the classroom approach as one of allowing students to do most of the work. Furthermore, teachers in all five schools reported on the need for more practical subjects and out of school activity. Their advice needs to be heeded by managements when selecting specialisms.

A COURSE WITHOUT TEXTBOOKS

Uniformly throughout the five case study schools, there was agreement that preparing lessons for LCA classes was hard work. According to one teacher in St Serena's this was felt to be largely due to the absence of a set text book for students. A languages teacher in St Enda's said that his workload had increased and that he sought material from newspapers and the internet. A teacher in St. Enda's had this to say: "The presence of a text book for students would make it easier for the teacher, as it would create a point of focus for the class. Without one I can no longer tell students to open a particular page which makes it harder to engage them. In this context, very experienced teachers like this are faced with the dilemma of switching from a traditional text book-orientated method to a more active student-centred approach. It may be argued that such teachers may struggle to challenge their own long-held beliefs on classroom practice. This suggests that in-service provision needs to address this dilemma being faced by teachers.

An interesting contrast was provided by the attitude of some LCA students, who were asked what they liked best about LCA. The fact that "no books to be brought in" was

the most popular response seems to suggest that they may be operating from a different perspective to many of their teachers. This has the potential, where LCA teachers fail to accept the validity of students' beliefs in this regard, to lead to classroom conflict. By contrast, the teacher who accepts the LCA challenge of a non-text book orientation may effect better learning outcomes for the students. In this respect, careful selection of teachers by management seems essential. One wonders how many schools take this into account.

In St. David's, six students welcomed the fact that no books were needed and nine students were grateful that no homework was required. A student in St. Enda's said that : "I don't have to study for this Leaving Certificate". The research presented here indicates that the closely associated issues of bringing in books and being expected to study and do homework hold a negative connotation among many LCA students. This appears to indicate that LCA involves a student-centred approach, as the omitting of a textbook requirement partially satisfies their needs.

Yet surely the ethos in schools accepted by teachers is the belief that students come to school with books, engage in classroom 'academic' work and be given homework to do. Perhaps this belief needs to be challenged by staff. Of significance here is the reality that many of those who teach LCA also have top-stream academic classes. It surely represents a paradigm shift to make the switch from a text-book orientated approach to a student-centred one! Hardly surprising to hear a teacher in St. David's say "I find it very challenging to prepare lessons without having set textbooks".

PREPARATION EASIER FOR PRACTICAL SUBJECTS

The research suggested that practical subjects may be easier to teach because they involved less preparation time for teachers. The woodwork teacher in St. Anthony's said that his approach to engaging students attention was little different to that of other classes. The IT teacher in St. Serena's said that he found it easy because some of them had computers at home and were already interested anyway. There was no change in the teaching style but the standard was lower than for other classes. The physical education teacher in St. Ita's felt that the challenge was manageable because it is a practical subject and the students are keen on physical activity. The conclusion seems to be that teaching practical subjects was no harder than with other classes, but that teaching other subjects involved a greater input into lesson preparation.

COMMUNICATION PROBLEMS ARISING

In all five schools, the size of the team resulted in communication problems arising between teachers because timetabling restrictions prevented the full team being available at the same time. This was felt to weaken the teamwork approach. The DES (2000) recommends that "A core group of about five teachers within the team, including the coordinator should meet frequently" ²⁶⁰ to ensure curricular integration of subjects. The deputy principal in St. Anthony's admitted that "a large LCA team was unavoidable due to the wide variety of subject choices" being provided. Frustration was expressed by all five coordinators regarding the infrequency of meetings held during school hours and the shortness of impromptu meeting held after school time. The coordinator in St. David's said that she was forced "to meet teachers at

²⁶⁰ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p76

odd times to communicate plans and activities". This was felt to be highly unsatisfactory because there were always teachers unable to attend such meetings. The overall viewpoint is that meetings are helpful but are held too infrequently to be successful.

MANAGEMENT ATTEMPTS TO FACILITATE TEAM MEETINGS

This section will analyse the attempts of school management to build up a teamwork approach. LCA involves a wide selection of subject choice provision to cater for a cohort group of wide-ranging ability, aptitude and interest. However, within the limitations of timetable provision, this means that most schools have a large team of teachers involved in its delivery. In St. Anthony's, it was admitted that the attempt to provide a wide subject choice provision resulted in having a large LCA teaching team which led to communication problems between teachers. However, arrangements to hold regular meetings every five weeks of forty minutes duration was facilitated by the board of management. The principal in St. David's faced similar problems. The wide choice of specialisms can be seen as an attempt to satisfy the underlying principles of LCA regarding students' preparation for adult and working life²⁶¹. Timetabling constraints meant that only a minority of the team are free to meet at the one time. He said that "This creates planning problems for the LCA team which weakens the teamwork approach". He admitted that having only three meetings per year involving the full team was insufficient for planning purposes.

He maintained that this was partially due to less demand for team meetings in recent years, which contrasted with excessive demand during the first four years of LCA. The

²⁶¹ NCCA, (2000), *Leaving Certificate Applied, Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p8

principal seemed disappointed that there was no longer a demand for team meetings in recent years although he was unsure why this was so. However, having recently completed another in-service for principals, he felt a renewed enthusiasm for LCA. He believed that the recent granting of a half-day by the board of management to appraise school activities, could create the time for more frequent meetings and rekindle an enthusiasm and demand for more meetings.

CROSS-CURRICULAR INTEGRATION

Closely allied to the problems of having a large team and infrequent meetings, is the knock-on effect of having difficulty integrating specialisms. The coordinator in St. Serena's said that "There is definitely a need for more planning time, as it is insufficient for cross-curricular purposes." A teacher of languages admitted that his subjects do not lend themselves to integration, while a colleague admitted that little time was spent on integration. Indeed, the principal in St. David's admitted that LCA teachers have a problem understanding what is meant by cross-curricular integration. What emerges is that cross-curricular integration is relatively misunderstood at second level and that if it is to be properly developed, then more frequent school meetings will need to be held. The fact that some teachers do not understand the concept of cross-curricular integration highlights the need for in-service to assist them in the development of forming linkages between specialisms.

Emerging from the research data is the conclusion that in all five schools a large team was unavoidable. This appeared to create the twin problems of timetable constraints leading to infrequent team meetings, and weakened communication between team

teachers. This seems to run counter to the strong teamwork approach which is advocated by the DES.²⁶²

TEACHER ISOLATION

The indicator here may be that unless team meetings are held more frequently within school time, teachers will take the option of working in isolation thereby sabotaging the team work approach as advocated by the DES (2000).²⁶³ This highlights the weakness of teamwork in schools where meetings are held infrequently, particularly when attendance is only partial, as admitted by the coordinators in all five schools.

A teacher of business studies in St. Serena's worked in isolation in preparing class lessons, editing ideas from "an excellent book by Jim Marsden". The coordinator in St. Ita's mentioned that "teachers still work on their own". A colleague used her own initiative in lesson preparation for the religious education module. Meanwhile, the physical education teacher in St. Enda's prepared lessons alone using a UK theory book for the GSE qualification. The possibility arises that teachers may prefer to work alone, as this has long been school tradition. Hyland (2000) speaks about "The strong identification of second-level teachers with their subject area..."²⁶⁴ results in difficulty regarding cross-curricular integration. For this reason it may be difficult for teachers to change to a teamwork approach.

²⁶² DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p41

²⁶³ Ibid, p39

²⁶⁴ Hyland, A., (2000), *Multiple Intelligences: Final Report, Curriculum and Assessment Project*, Cork, Education Department, University College Cork, p 99

IMPROVING THE FREQUENCY OF TEAM MEETINGS

The feedback from school management indicates that the attempt to provide wide subject choice provision results in having a large team of teachers. Unfortunately, this curtails the number of times during the year, which can facilitate fully attended team meetings. In three of the five schools, permission was sought from the board of management to create extra school time when such meetings could take place. This demonstrates that school managements are trying hard to facilitate a teamwork approach but need the support of understanding board of management members to create time for team meetings. The proactive attempt by management to encourage LCA teachers to meet more frequently can be viewed as an effort to build up a teamwork approach. Guidelines for principals attending in-service may also be required to assist them in providing the framework for the holding of more frequent team meetings.

The NCCA (2000) mentions that "...in many schools the regular meeting time was not scheduled for Leaving Certificate Applied teachers to facilitate planning and cross-curricular integration."²⁶⁵ The reference suggests that the difficulties being faced in creating scheduled meeting time in the case study schools may be a microcosm of the problems faced nationwide.

Closely related to the issues of having a large team and infrequent team meetings are those of problems with teacher communication and the development of cross-curricular integration. The DES (2000) says that "The establishment of a core planning group of teachers in a school would facilitate.... the co-ordination of cross-curricular integration

²⁶⁵ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p75

and in-school review.”²⁶⁶ In this respect, two of the five schools reported having a small core team.

A suggestion that may be made in relation to increasing the number of meetings taking place during the year would be that some of them be held after school time. In St. Enda’s, contingency meetings in regard to discipline problems arising are occasionally held outside school time. However, one wonders how many LCA teachers would be willing to sacrifice their time to attend such meetings. The alternative would be for management to occasionally use the final class period for meetings to encourage better attendance.

Since all five case study schools experienced similar problems in relation to the holding of meetings, it could be proposed that contact be made between schools in a locality to offer mutual advice on how more frequent meetings could be arranged. Additionally more advice on timetabling could be provided by the second level support service while annual in-service for principals would also be helpful. It will be argued here that if teamwork can be strengthened among LCA teachers, the benefits to both their professional development and empowerment could prove worthwhile while improving learning outcomes for students.

The impression arises that having a small number on the team could ease timetabling restrictions thereby allowing more frequent structured team meetings to be held during school time. This would improve communication and cross-curricular integration between specialisms thus improving the learning outcomes for students.

²⁶⁶ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p41

DISCIPLINE PROBLEMS ARISING

Discipline problems had arisen with a few LCA students in all five case study schools. Could this be partially due to their spending more time in out of school activities such as excursions? Where does this leave troublesome students? In this respect, the concern was expressed by a teacher in St. Enda's that "LCA could be seen as a dumping ground for badly behaved students". Surely this needs to be avoided to help prevent LCA getting a bad reputation? In two other schools, there was admittance that discipline problems had arisen, of a serious enough nature to warrant one teacher in either school suggesting the need for outside support regarding conflict resolution with students. The co-ordinator in St. Enda's pointed out the requirement for a better selection procedure for identifying appropriate students because three students this year had disrupted the learning for others in the class. Furthermore, she felt a lack of support from management in trying to resolve such discipline issues. Similar problems had arisen in both St. Serena's and St. Ita's. An effective proactive disciplinary procedure needs to be established before LCA is introduced. One particular school, St. Anthony's, had put in place a system involving a contractual obligation on the part of students to behave well and to do their work. The co-ordinator had for the first time recently made this a written obligation. By contrast, St. Ita's have developed a teamwork approach to discipline problems arising. In either case, the proactive approach has proved effective in easing the problem.

Teachers in all five schools felt the need to enforce the same discipline code for LCA students as for others. The perception may be that LCA students are being allowed too much leeway. This is vindicated by the coordinators in St. David's and St. Ita's who

speaking about the presence of students who cause disruption. A teacher in St. David's said that the selection of appropriate students needs to be reviewed in the light of discipline problems arising

This is a major issue, as indisciplined students were found in LCA classes in all five schools. Conflict resolution skills could be learned at in-service which would help resolve the problem. However, in-service can only provide advice, in the final instance the support of management and the board of management in dealing proactively with ill-disciplined students seems essential. How can management take a proactive approach to ill-disciplined students? In this respect, there would appear to be a need to build up a positive relationship with parents, particularly those who do not engage with the school from an early stage, prior to the arrival of negative feedback. This may apply mainly to schools that do not have a home/school liaison officer and would be the responsibility of management personnel, including the school guidance counselor. Such early contacts could have the effect of preventing misunderstandings between parents and teachers, as well as easing classroom disruption.

THE CHALLENGE OF LCA CO-ORDINATION

In three of the schools the time allowance weekly was only two hours, which was felt to be insufficient. The coordinator in St. David's said that more time was needed for all the paperwork associated with LCA. She also mentioned that the large turnover of new teachers makes her task that much harder. Furthermore, there is a loss of skills to the team, because it means that new teachers have to be trained. Co-ordinators in the other case study schools felt overwhelmed by the work load and that many tasks were carried out after school hours. They suggested that the position needs to be a post holders one,

to create the extra time allowance, which would ease the time pressure for completion of coordinating duties. In St' Ita's, the creation of a new Assistant Principalship post looks after the work experience which, has eased the time pressure considerably. There is one coordinator for each year group which makes coordination more manageable.

The claim could be made that coordination needs to be made a post of responsibility in all schools. Indeed the DES (2000) recommends that a dedicated time allowance be given for coordination duties "...in order to promote consultation and teamwork amongst staff..."²⁶⁷ to ensure cross-curricular integration. In two schools where the coordination role was elevated to assistant principalship level, there was an impression that LCA was running more smoothly. Such a post may also elevate the status of LCA. The allocation of a four hour weekly time allowance was felt to ease the time pressure on planning and contacting employers, guest speakers and parents and keeping students records updated. This was verified by the coordinators in both St. Anthony's and St. Serena's who commented on being under less pressure to fulfil their duties. Therefore the recommendation is that the dedicated time allowance be allowed in all schools for LCA.

OVERCOMING NEGATIVE PERCEPTIONS OF LCA

The negative perception that some of their peers had of LCA students is an issue in need of redress. Perhaps some schools like St. Anthony's are already doing something about such bias by ensuring that LCA students are mainstreamed into all school activities. In this context, the deputy principal said that staff ensured that LCA students were involved in debating, sporting events, the student council and other activities. He said

²⁶⁷ DES (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, Department of Education and Science, p76

that this had the effect of making LCA students feel a welcomed part of the school community. It may also have the effect of helping other students respect those in LCA thereby easing prejudice.

TEACHERS OPINIONS ON HOW STUDENTS ARE PROGRESSING

Perhaps the most important findings emerging from the school research are the gains being made by students as a result of the LCA experience. Teachers in the five case study schools reported that LCA has been enormously beneficial to students in the area of self-confidence, increased maturity and improved classroom and life skills.

DEVELOPMENT OF SELF CONFIDENCE

The opinion of teachers in the case study schools is that many students have improved their self-confidence levels. In this respect, the deputy principal in St. Anthony's believes that "it has been of huge benefit to weaker students". Teachers in two schools said that this improvement was related to the delivery of speeches to their classroom peers. This is verified by the high percentage of students in four of the five schools who strongly agree that they can communicate better. This confidence was gained through completion of the Student Tasks while others benefited from the group work approach in the classroom, which boosts their self-esteem and gives them motivation to keep on working. Their sense of personal responsibility, the ability to plan ahead and to meet deadlines for the Key Assignments have shown improvement for most students. Perhaps these gains are largely due to the provision of a course which interests them and a modular design involving continuous accreditation.

AN INCREASED LEVEL OF MATURITY

There was consensus among teachers that over time there was a gradual improvement in attitude amongst students. This was verified by the coordinator in St. Enda's who spoke about a huge improvement in the maturity levels of some students. A teacher in St. David's said that some of them have developed a greater level of self-reliance and independence, particularly those nearing the end of their second year. The opinion of a teacher in St. Ita's is that there is an increased level of co-operation which is due to the teamwork approach. The increased level of mutual respect has resulted in an improved working relationship with them. Indeed some students see the teachers are there to help them, a point which is verified by the students themselves. A teacher in St. Enda's says that their increased sense of responsibility is shown by their ability to meet deadlines for the Key Assignments.

The inescapable conclusion appears to be that most students have shown considerable gains in terms of maturity levels as shown by an increasing degree of independence, self-reliance, self-responsibility, motivation and initiative. The evidence presented here appears to be conclusive proof that these gains are due mainly to the influence of the LCA experience.

However, it is the opinion of a number of teachers in all schools that there was only a marginal improvement in a minority of students. The indication here is that this minority do not properly engage with the LCA experience, which is verified by students in St. Enda's who admitted to learning nothing about themselves during the year. This problem needs to be addressed, possibly by an alteration in the format of the syllabus itself or through a changed approach at school level.

IMPROVED CLASSROOM SKILLS

The development of many skills within the classroom emerged from the teachers reports. In this respect, the reference was made by the coordinator in St. Serena's to an improved ability to plan ahead and decision-making skills in relation to report writing for the Student Tasks. Meanwhile, a teacher in St. Enda's referred to the development of leadership skills as a result of completing the physical education coaching module for which they received a certificate.

Increased levels of creativity were shown by a number of students. In this context, there was a tremendous sense of pride apparent when the principal in St. Serena's displayed a beautiful piece of craftwork, a timber rocking horse moulded by an LCA student who had come close to expulsion. Quite sensibly, the student made the most of being given a second chance and made a beautiful artefact. The point may be made that some students deserve to be given another chance to prove their worth despite their undesirable behaviour.

The research coming from teachers indicates that the students have become multi-skilled within the classroom as a result of doing LCA. The coordinator in St. Serena's maintains that the improvement in communication skills has been greatest for second year LCA students and has been helped by their experience of doing rehearsal for nine interviews over the two-year time frame.

There was agreement among teachers in all five schools that the dimension of research skills often showed dramatic improvement. Related to this was an improvement in

organisational skills. A teacher in St. Enda's spoke about the area of project work being new to them as they learned how to put things together in an organised way. Another area of major improvement was that of IT skills, which the coordinator in St. Anthony's said was due to the preparation of curricula vitae. Related to this was the development of presentation skills for the writing up of reports for Student Tasks. The latter skill will be helpful when they decide to seek employment or pursue further education because IT skills are an essential requirement.

IMPROVED LIFE SKILLS

A teacher in St. Anthony's says that some students can see the relevance of classroom activity to out of school situations as a result of doing work experience. He says that the work experience and excursions make them more aware of opportunities that exist for them, a point which is verified by the students themselves. In this regard, there is the opportunity to integrate the community dimension into the school.

EASING DROP-OUT

The DES (1995) aims to increase Senior Cycle completion to 90% by the year 2000;²⁶⁸ it is possible that the LCA may assist the achievement of this objective. That this is being largely realised in the case study schools is a substantial achievement. Three of the five schools report an easing of the drop-out problem. In St. Ita's this satisfies the schools' mission statement which mentions a commitment to social disadvantage. The best experience was that of a student in St. Ita's who had intended leaving school after the Junior Certificate but remained on to complete and enjoy the LCA programme. A teacher in St. Serena's said that seventeen of the twenty students who started LCA had

²⁶⁸ DES, (1995), *White Paper, Charting our Education Future*, Dublin, Government Publications, p44

stayed on to complete the programme this year, which was quite remarkable considering past trends in the school. The evidence shows that LCA has helped to ensure a longer and more worthwhile educational experience for many students. A teacher in St. Anthony's says that the easing of the drop-out problem in his school dovetails nicely with the requirements of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. In the context of easing drop-out, a teacher referred to the extraordinary achievement by one LCA student who became the first in his family to complete a Leaving Certificate. It may be argued that the provision of LCA within the school made this possible. It may also set a precedent for his younger brother and sister to emulate the same achievement.

QUANTITATIVE STUDENT FEEDBACK

Analysis of the ten subsections in question 1 circulated to students will show the comparative responses for the five case study schools. These will be presented on comparative horizontal bar charts to facilitate the process of analysis. In addition, by combining the total number of students, sixty-four, for the five case study schools the cumulative percentages are presented for further analysis.

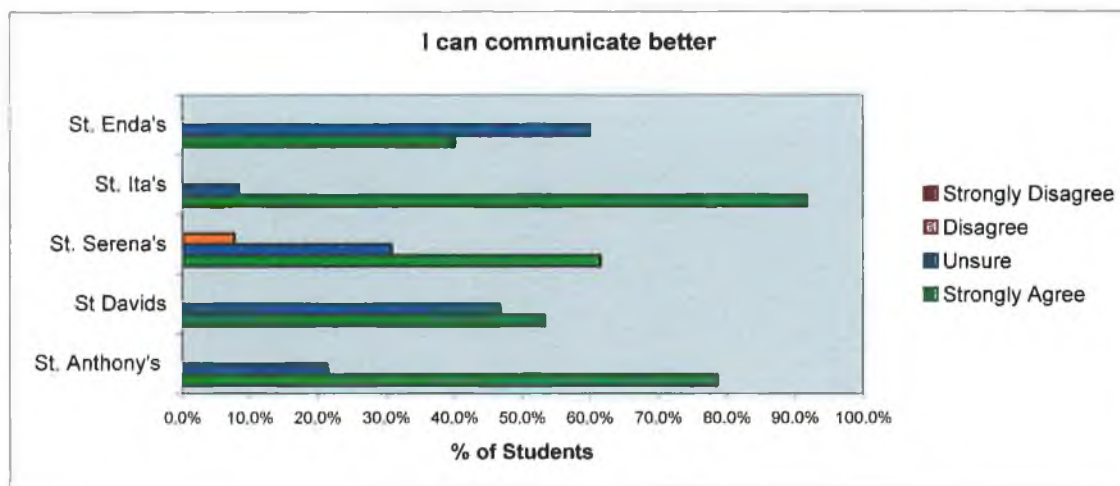
BETTER COMMUNICATION

The area of improved communication showed substantial gains in four of the five schools. St. Ita's, at 91.7% in the strongly agree category showed the most positive response, which may suggest that the delivery of LCA has facilitated this result.

However, concern may be expressed concerning the lower result of 40% in St. Enda's. Encouragingly, the disagree category surfaced in only one school, St. Serena's and even then it was as low as 7.7% (One student).

Just how much this contrast may be due a varied level of preparation beforehand in the two schools and a more careful selection of team teachers, it is difficult to say.

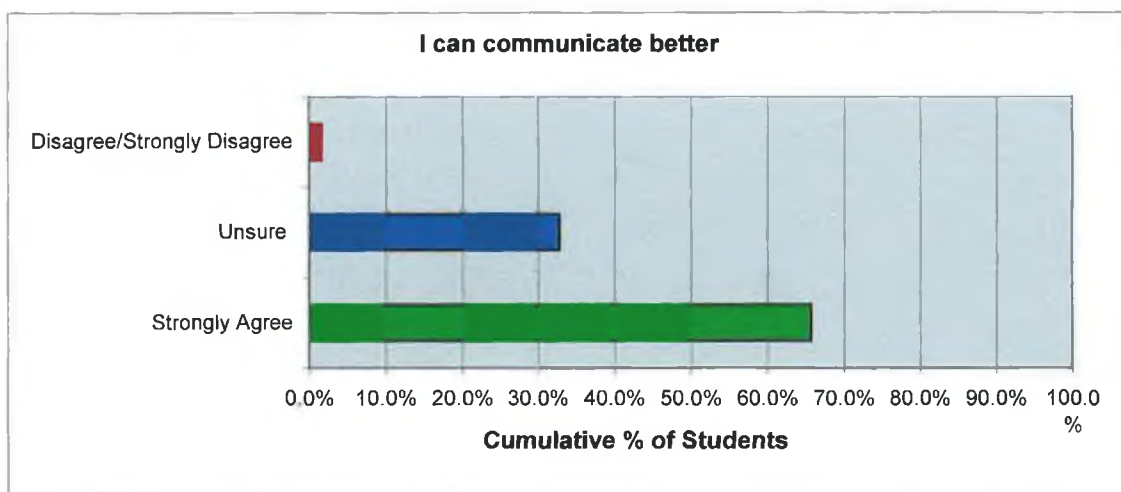
However, the deputy principal in St. Ita's mentioned at interview that careful consideration was given to LCA in the context of the school mission statement's commitment to disadvantaged students. This shows that there appeared to be a strong commitment level from the entire staff, not just those who were selected to be part of the team. This may be crucial in facilitating positive classroom outcomes. It may also be partially due to a less careful selection of team teachers although the evidence is uncertain. Interestingly, the coordinator in St. Enda's at interview volunteered the information that some team teachers felt unhappy about doing LCA and wished to drop-out next year. While this evidence may be inconclusive, it may indicate that team selection was made in an ad hoc manner.



In regard to planning, the coordinator in St. Enda's complained that LCA was introduced without prior initial preparation. This appears to be a critical viewpoint because the introduction of a new Senior Cycle syllabus surely requires a strong commitment from the entire staff and a lengthy period of preparation to allow team teachers to become conversant with it. That this appeared not to be the case in St.

Enda's may have militated against a possible better response from students. This would appear to indicate that students in the former school benefited the most from the improvement in communication skills. This surely makes LCA a worthwhile experience. However, all five schools showed that students believed that they had improved in this dimension.

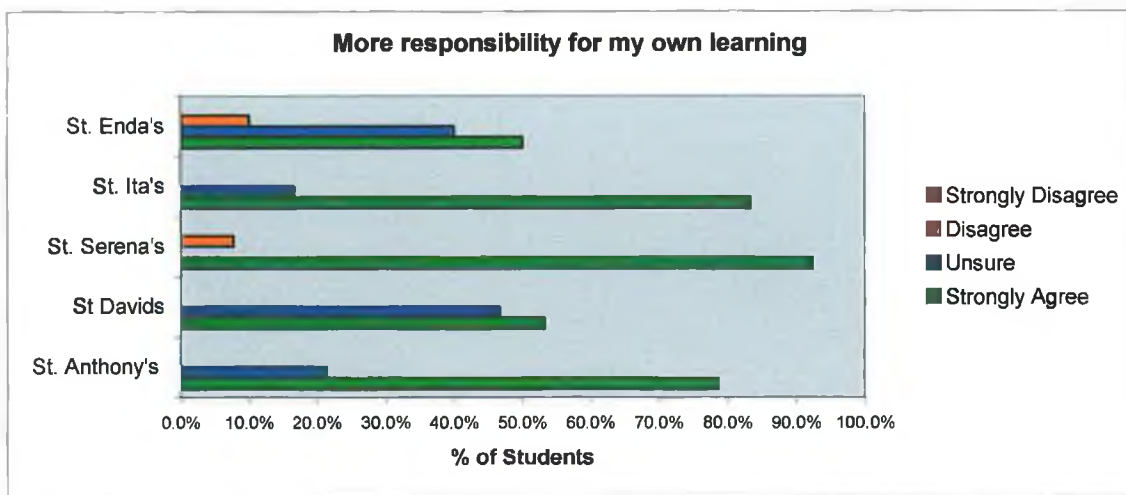
The cumulative result shows that the strongly agree category at 65.6% is very favourable. However, the unsure response is surprisingly high at 32.8%. This presents the possibility that approximately one third of students are uncertain about the possibility that LCA benefited their communication skills. It may indicate that it is a dimension in need of review with a view to its future improvement.



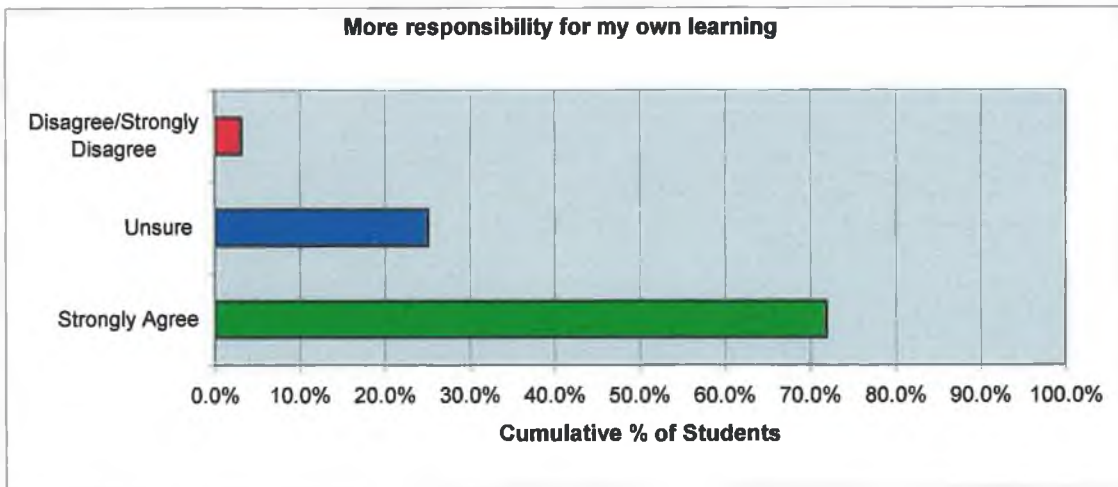
IMPROVED SELF RESPONSIBILITY FOR LEARNING

It could be said that the high percentage level of positive responses to better taking responsibility for their own learning by students shown in three of the five schools may be a direct outcome of the LCA experience. Just two of the schools, St. Enda's and St. Serena's showed that a marginal percentage, at 10% and 7.7% respectively, disagreed.

Crucially, again St. Enda's showed a fair positive response at 50%, but was this time joined by St. David's on 53.3%. These values appear to be a bit low compared to the three other schools but also seem low compared to the more favourable responses for the nine other sub questions in question 1. The increased level of student responsibility was also mentioned by a number of teachers in all five schools, verifying the student response.

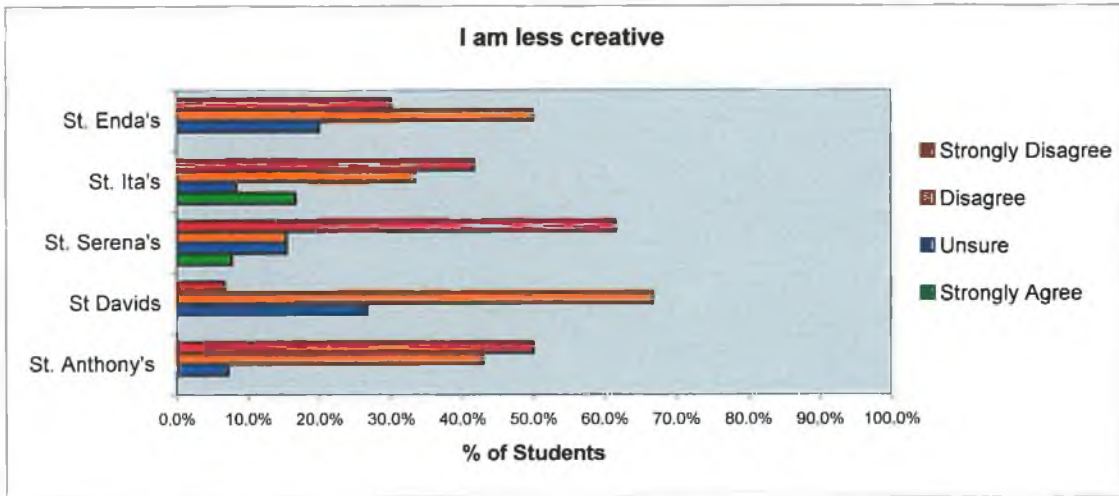


Taking the cumulative total, 72% of the students strongly agree which suggests that the aspect of self-responsibility for learning has shown improvement due to LCA is most encouraging. It indicates that most of them are showing increased maturity. However, there are a substantial minority, 25%, who feel unsure. For them, it suggests that LCA appears to have not developed this important aspect. The deputy principal in St. Ita's made the observation that some new teachers put excessive input into the Student Tasks, which could foster a sense of dependency in students. Could this be partially instrumental in failing to allow them to develop responsibility for their own learning? If this be the case, it would be important that teachers be wary of this danger and to avoid being over helpful.

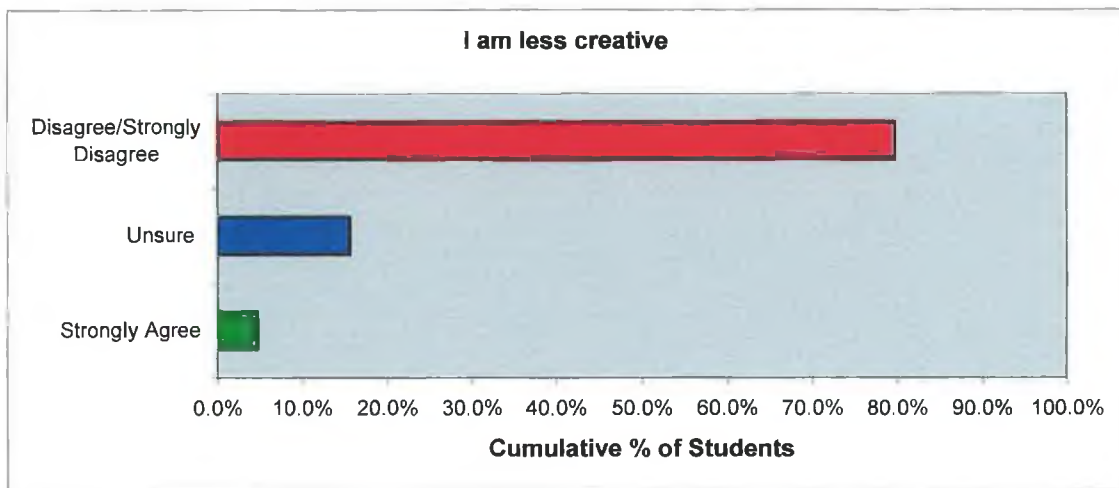


LESS CREATIVITY

The third subquestion asked students if they had become less creative as a result of doing LCA. A very high percentage of students in all five schools disagreed showing that they had become more creative. This represents a tremendous achievement and shows that the majority of them have made the most of the varied creative opportunities that LCA has presented. Encouragingly only two schools, St. Ita's at 16.7% and St. Serena's at 7.7% showed that students had become less creative although these values are quite low. The point could be made that these may be students who have a negative perception of LCA and probably of school anyway. This may be borne out by a few students in either school who reported that they had learned nothing about themselves.



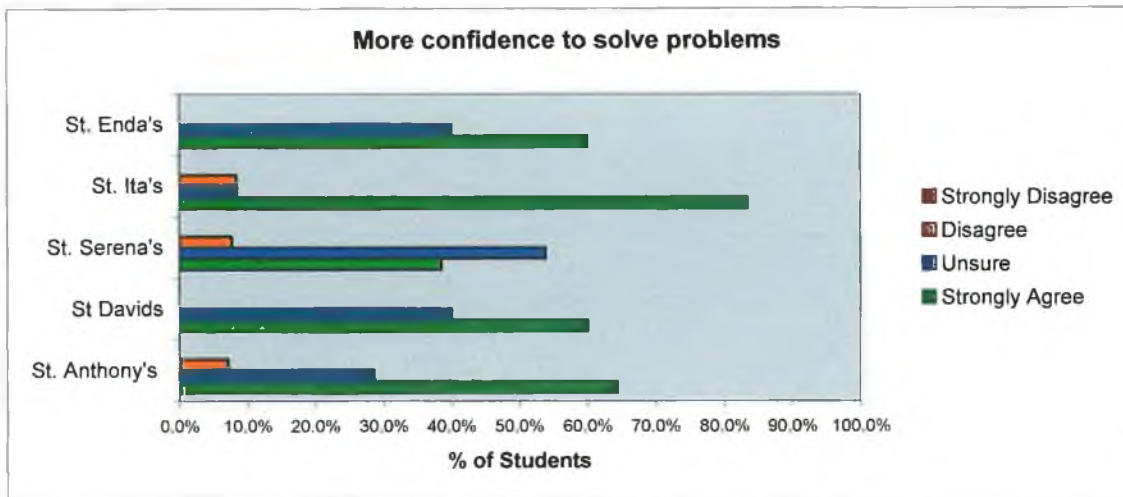
For the cumulative totals, 79.7% disagreed while only 15.6% felt uncertain.



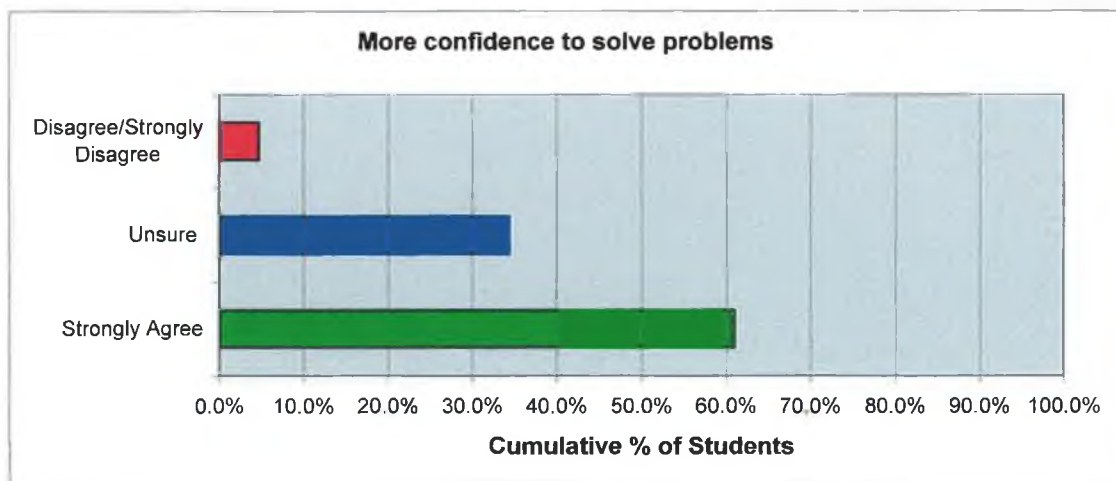
PROBLEM-SOLVING ABILITY

Students were asked to rate how confident they felt about their ability to solve problems. In four of the five schools, a high percentage answered in the affirmative, the highest being 83.3% in St. Ita's. The only disappointing result was in St. Serena's with just 38.5% in strong agreement. Three of the five schools recorded disagreement but these values were low at under 10%. The overall impression is that the LCA experience appears to have been crucial in giving these students confidence in this particular dimension. One of the requirements of the post-modern workplace is the ability of the employees to show problem solving skills. It may be argued that the positive response

felt by students in the case study schools may prove rewarding for them when faced with the challenges of the workplace in years to come.

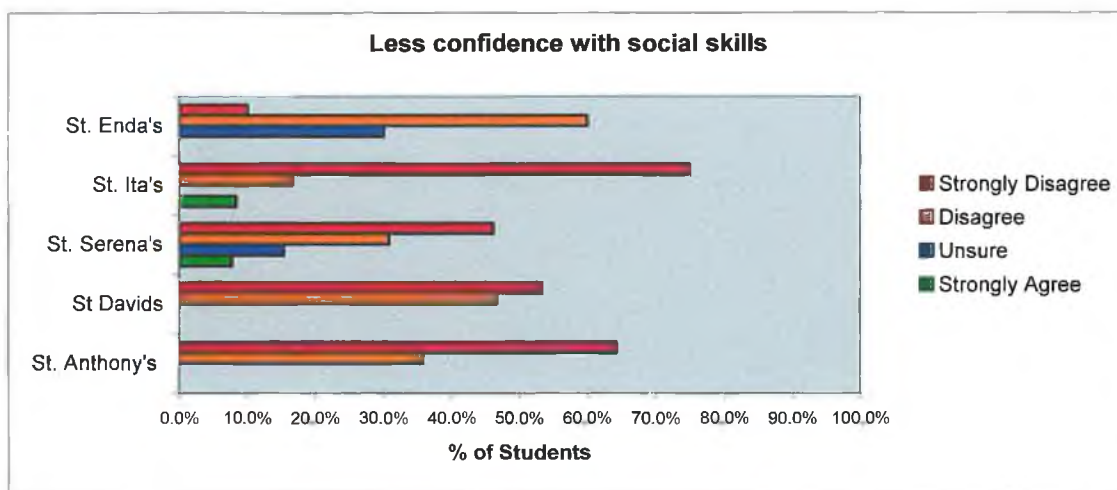


The cumulative results show that the ability to solve problems is registered by 60.9%, which is more than half the total number of students. Rather worryingly, the percentage of those who feel uncertain is high at 34.4%, which indicates that the development of this important life skill has by-passed a third of the students. It would be important that the second level support service be aware that this dimension may be in need of review with a view to future improvement.



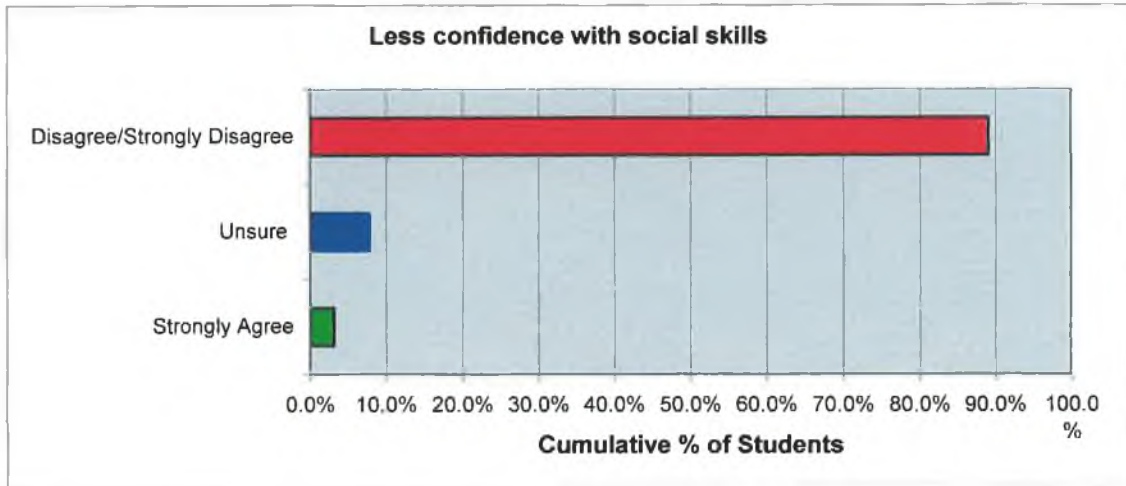
LESS CONFIDENCE IN SOCIAL SKILLS

Students were asked if they felt less confidence in their social skills as a result of doing LCA. In all five schools, students disagreed, showing that a very high percentage, about 90% in both St. Anthony's and St. Ita's felt that their social skills had improved. In two schools, St. Enda's with 30% and St. Serena's with 15.4% students felt unsure. In just two schools, St. Ita's on 8.3% and St. Serena's on 7.7% were negative responses recorded, values which are quite low. The overall viewpoint appears to be that the majority of students have improved their social skills through doing LCA. Some students had developed the ability to get on well with others in class while others admitted that they now had a better relationship with the teachers. In this context, the opportunity to deliver speeches in front of their classmates, as mentioned by the coordinator in St. Enda's, may have been helpful. It may be argued that good social skills are crucial in successful adult living, which means that a gain in this dimension may improve the quality of their post-school experience.



This dimension registered the highest cumulative total at 89.1%. This appears to show that of the ten aspects examined, it may be the most successful from the students' viewpoint. Mention was made by teachers of the altered classroom methodology to one of group work which allows teamwork to flourish. This presents the opportunity for

students to talk more than they would in a conventional classroom setting. It could be this approach which is mainly responsible for their increased confidence in social skills. Another area which could be helpful could be the opportunity to talk with others, particularly adults, when they do their work experience.

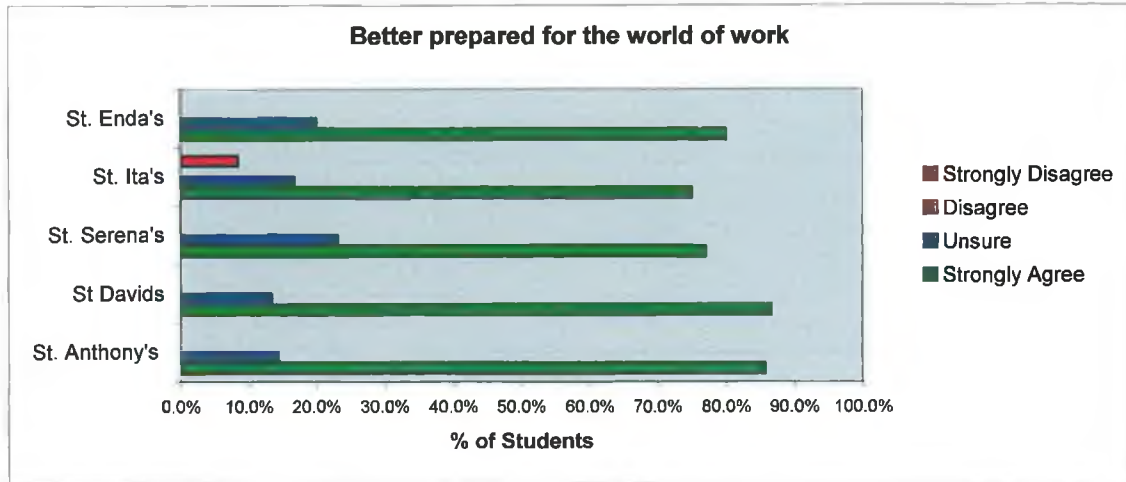


BETTER PREPARATION FOR THE WORLD OF WORK

According to the NCCA (2000), LCA is a syllabus largely designed to prepare students for the world of work²⁶⁹. In this perspective, it seemed appropriate to enquire about LCA students' opinion on this issue. Very high percentages, none less than 75%, were recorded in all five schools giving a favourable response. This seems hardly surprising considering the substantial proportion of time, averaging one school day weekly, allocated to work experience. Only in St. Ita's was there a strongly disagree response, although this was low at 8.3%. The favourably high response appears to indicate that this dimension has proven to be one of the most successful aspects of LCA. The DES (2000) say that "Work experience provided a morale boost for students who were successful in gaining employment....", as well as increasing their possibility of gaining

²⁶⁹ NCCA, (2000), *LCA Programme Statement & Outline of Student Tasks*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p8

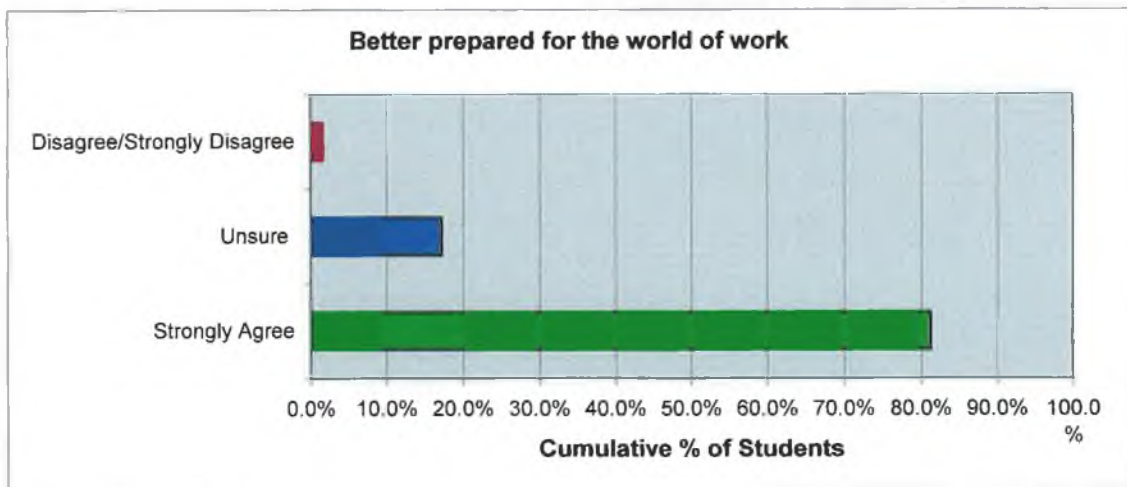
full-time employment.²⁷⁰ This seems appropriate, when considering that a substantial number of these students will be seeking full-time employment immediately following completion of the programme.



The combined total shows that at 81.2%, this dimension recorded the second highest percentage positive response. This seems hardly surprising considering that one of the main underlining principles of LCA is the preparation of students for the working world. Important in this regard is the substantial amount of time, averaging one day weekly, devoted to work experience.

However, a sizeable minority, 17.2% feel uncertain. This may suggest the need for a longer duration of work experience, a viewpoint which is iterated by a teacher in St. Enda's. He maintains that this would prepare student better for real life work situations. It is a recommendation which may need to be implemented.

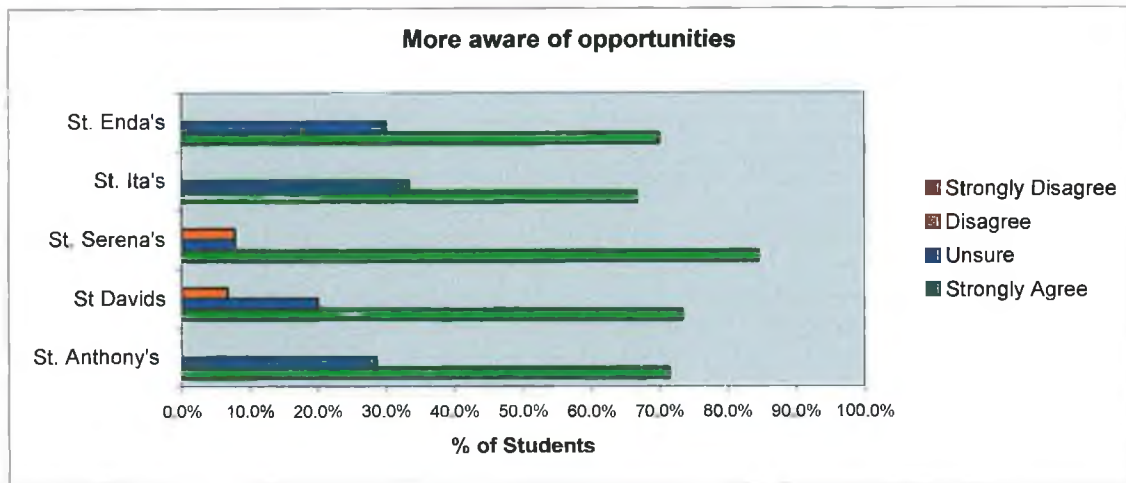
²⁷⁰ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, p64



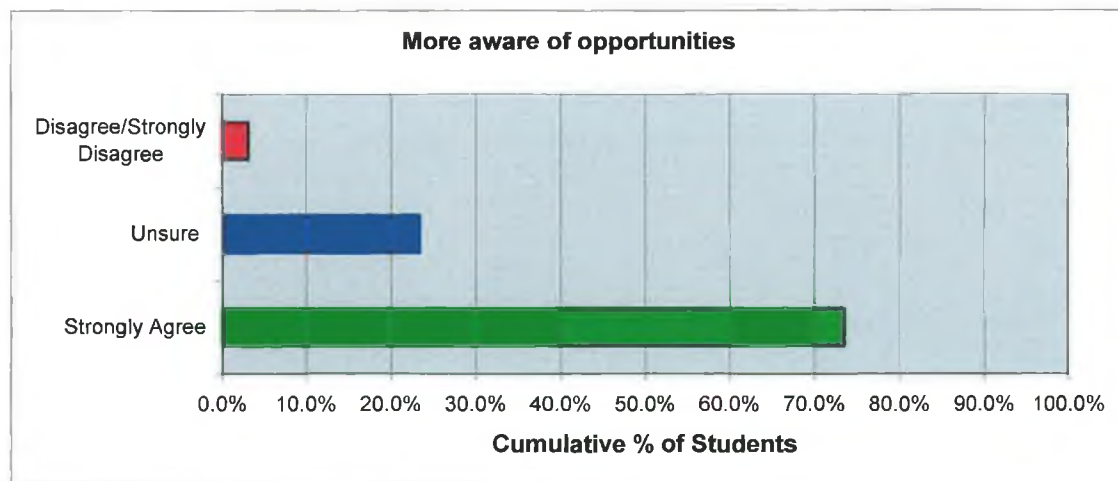
AWARENESS OF EXISTING OPPORTUNITIES

Students were asked if their level of awareness concerning opportunities which may exist for them had increased due to LCA. Very high positive responses, surpassing 75%, were reported in all five schools. In only one school, St. Ita's on 8.3%, although this was low, was disagreement expressed. It becomes apparent that LCA has helped most of these students to an increased awareness of out of school opportunities which may exist for them, which may help them to make plans regarding further education or future employment. It may be argued that the ability to plan ahead is an adult response, which indicates that LCA has assisted this maturation process. It is possible too, that being treated in a more adult fashion, which is reported by students and teachers alike, may be helping to increase their adult responses.

Cumulatively a high percentage of students, 73.4% believe that LCA has helped to increase their awareness of out of school opportunities which may exist for them. This highlights that the underling principle which attempts to relate the classroom activity to the out-of-school arena appears to have been largely successful.



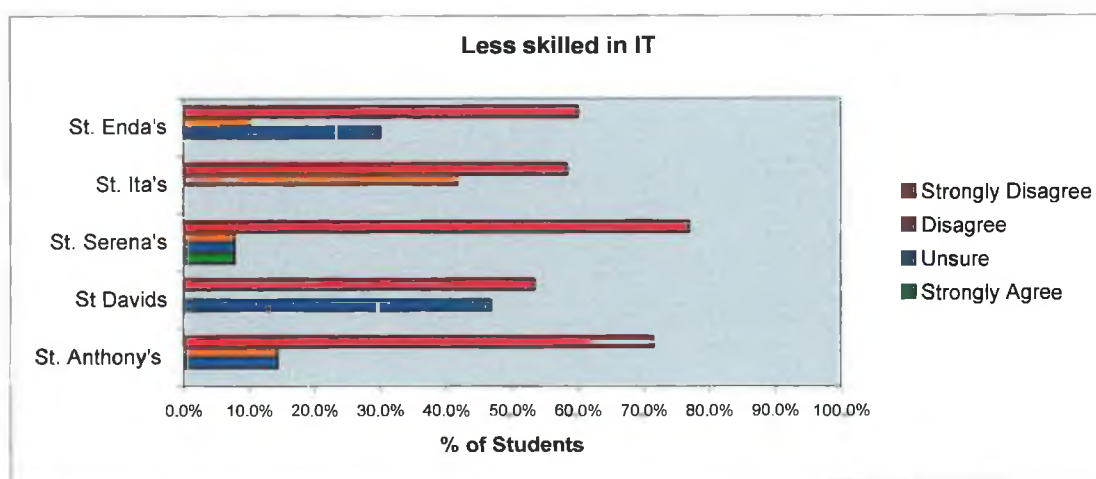
However, a large minority, 23.4% feel unsure about this, which may suggest that students need to spend more time outside the classroom, a viewpoint which is expressed by a teacher in St. Enda's. It may be a wise recommendation which would allow them to travel on more outings. However, the caution here would be that of a teacher in St. Anthony's who saw the need for more planning for trips away, to provide a definite purpose for them.



LESS SKILLED IN THE USE OF ICT

This subquestion asked students if they had become less skilled in the use of ICT. A very high percentage of students disagreed, in three of the five schools, with an exceptional 100% recorded in St. Anthony's reporting that they felt more skilled in ICT

as a result of taking LCA. Indeed, in only one school, St. Serena's, was agreement expressed, although this was quite low at only 7.7% (One student). The uncertain category was recorded in four schools, with substantially high percentages, 46.7% in St. David's and 30% in St. Enda's which may suggest that the ICT dimension may be in need of further development. In this context, the DES (2000) reported that some schools sought additional facilities for ICT in order to improve the presentation of Student Tasks. A sufficiently high level of availability of ICT for LCA classes, is recommended by the DES (2000).

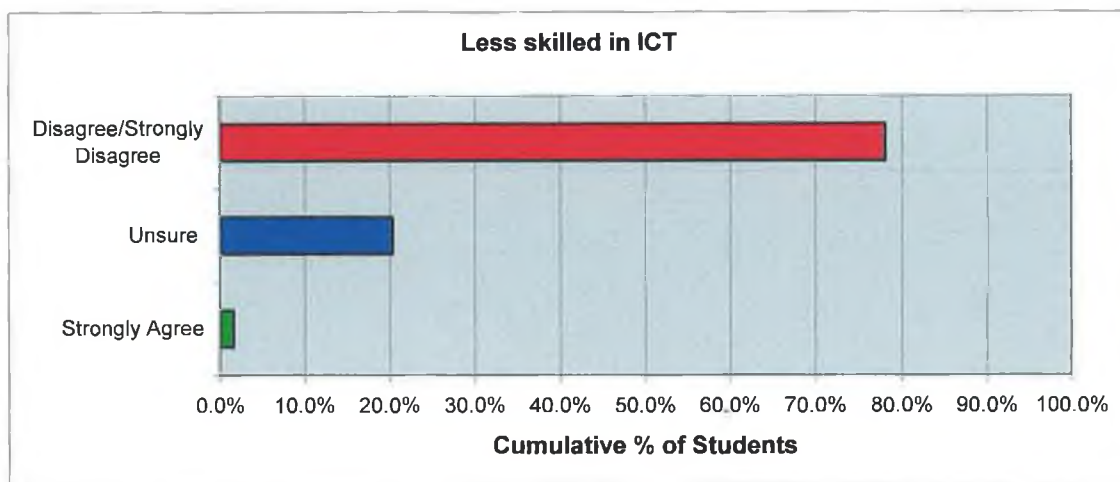


A final point worthy of discussion would be the possibility of making ICT a subject in its own right in all schools²⁷¹. This seems reasonable when it is realised that ICT has become virtually a mandatory requirement in the workplace. Gardner, Kornbahr and Wake (1996) argue that computer technology and globalisation will demand the need for "...abstraction, inference and procedural reasoning..." for work²⁷². The past decade has seen a technological revolution with the introduction of ICT which has worked its way into the workplace. A qualification in this dimension is now virtually mandatory

²⁷¹ DES (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, p74

²⁷² Gardner, H., Kornbahr, M.L., Wake, W.K., (1996), *Intelligence: Multiple Perspectives*, New York, Harcourt Brace, p 298

for most occupations²⁷³. LCA students have the opportunity to gain experience in this work skill through their presentation of curricula vitae and reports for Students Tasks. That many students enjoy working with computers will facilitate this learning process.



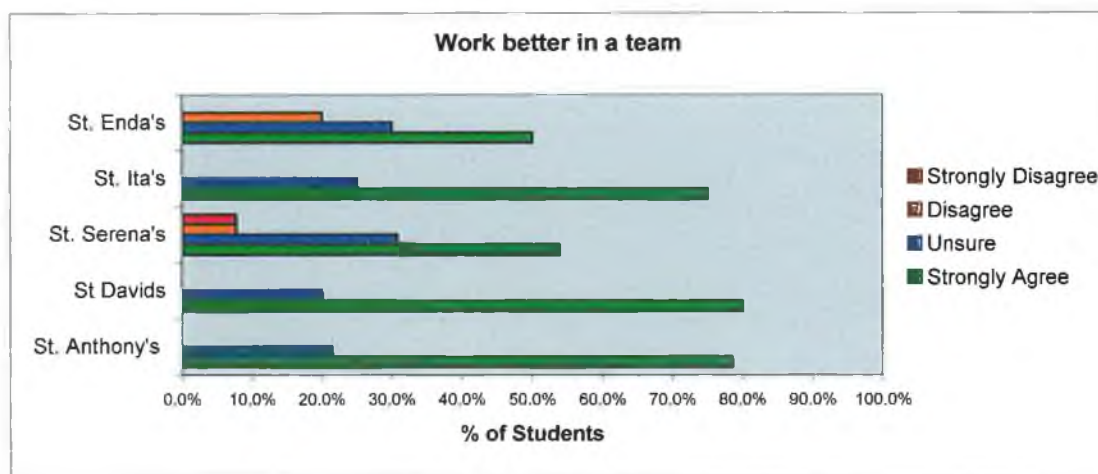
For the combined total, there was strong disagreement expressed, 78.1%, which shows that most students viewed LCA as an opportunity to develop their ICT skills. However, that a substantial minority 20.3%, felt unsure about this, may indicate two possibilities arising. Firstly, a teacher in St. Enda's complained about the insufficient availability level of the computer room which indicates that students get insufficient opportunity in school to develop their ICT skills and suggests that more ICT facilities need to be made available. Secondly, some students may not have computers available at home.

IMPROVED TEAMWORK

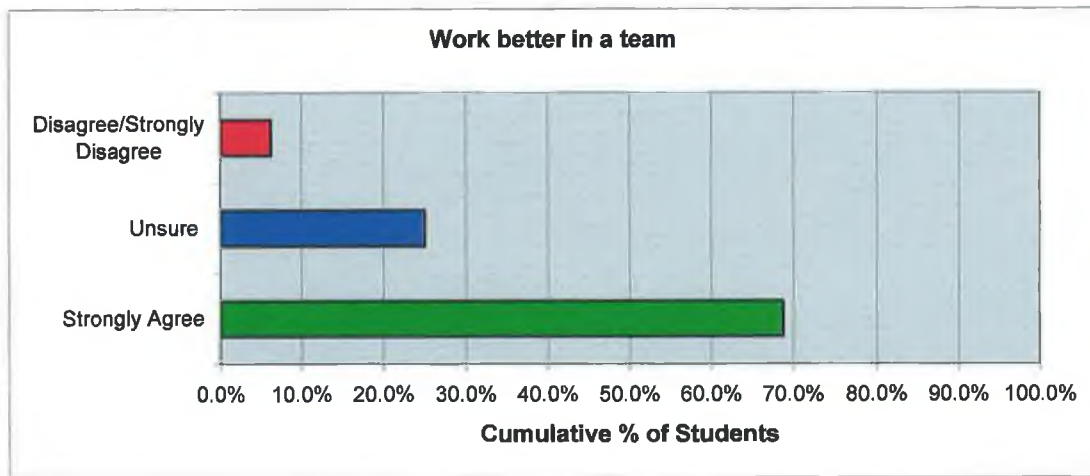
As teamwork is seen to be a prerequisite requirement in the modern workplace, it is pertinent to ask if students now work better as part of a team? The response was very positive in three of the five schools, where it exceeded 75%. Rather worryingly, the level of agreement was low at 50% in St. Enda's and 53.8% in St. Serena's, the latter school also showing 7.7% disagreement, the only school to do so. It is difficult to

²⁷³ Coolahan, J., (2001), *Teacher Education in Ireland and Western Europe: A Comparative Analysis in Irish Educational Studies Vol 20*, Dublin, Educational Studies Association of Ireland, p351, pp 335-368

surmise why the level of teamwork among students in the aforementioned schools is somewhat low but it would be important that management and the LCA team become aware that there is a problem that needs to be addressed. It could be suggested that where the level of teamwork is high among the team teachers, it may have a concomitant affect among LCA students. In this respect, teamwork appears to be central to LCA, both from a student and teacher perspective. That the opportunity to work as part of a team and the ability to get on well with others were popular responses indicates that they value relationships more than they value books.



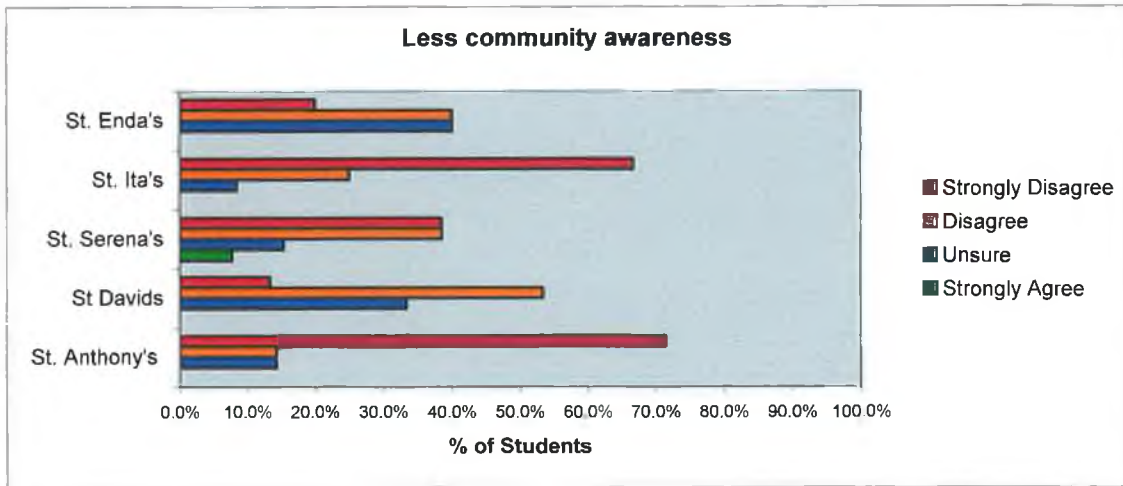
A substantial cumulative percentage, 66.8%, of students strongly agreed that they work better as a member of a team. This is also verified by their responses when asked what they liked best about LCA. The teamwork dimension may be closely related to that of improved social skills. The groupwork classroom approach presents the opportunity for teamwork to develop. However, a substantial minority, 25% feel unsure about this, which may indicate the possibility of insufficient group work in the classroom. More likely, however, may be the possibility that some students prefer to work alone, as reported by some of them when asked what they had learned about themselves.



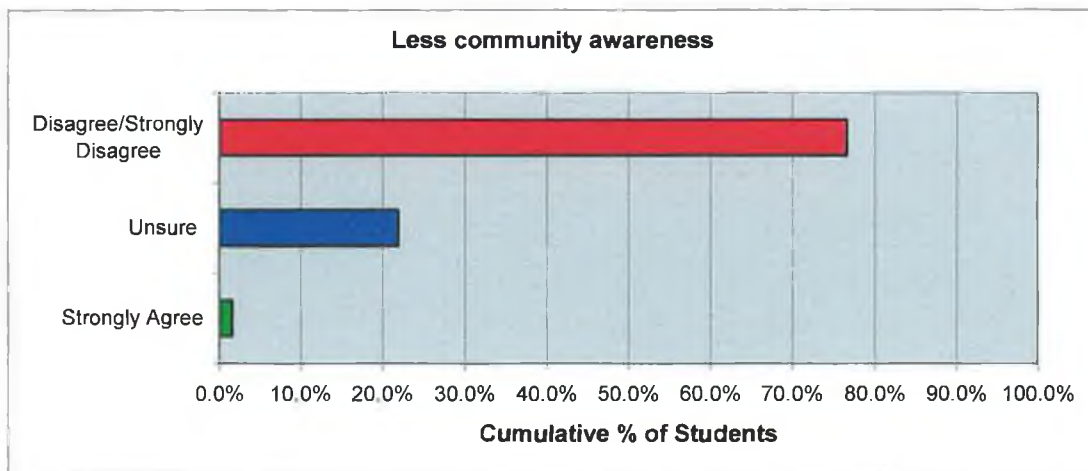
LESS AWARENESS OF THE LOCAL COMMUNITY

Students response to the possibility that LCA resulted in less awareness of their local community was contradicted by the high percentage who disagreed. However, in two schools St. Enda's on 40% and St. David's on 33.3% showed an uncertain response, while only one school, St. Serena's on 7.7% showed agreement with the question. That the uncertain category seems slightly high in the former two schools, may indicate that the community dimension of LCA has yet to be fully exploited. It may also indicate that schools may remain somewhat remotely distant from the local communities from which they draw their clientele. Crucially, the DES (2000) agrees, pointing out that school-community links need to be strengthened in many schools.²⁷⁴

²⁷⁴ DES, (2000), *Report on the National Evaluation of the Leaving Certificate Applied*, Dublin, Government Publications, p57



A very high positive cumulative percentage, 78.1% felt that LCA provided them with an increased awareness of their local community. The opportunity to go away on trips, some of them to local factories or associations, may be fruitful in this regard. Nevertheless, the 22% registered in the uncertain category, may suggest that this aspect has yet to be fully exploited. Perhaps it is time for schools providing the LCA option to increase their contacts with organisations in the local environs. This could also have the affect of increasing students' awareness of their locality as well as increasing their knowledge of opportunities which may exist for them.



QUALITATIVE STUDENT RESPONSES

WHAT STUDENTS' LIKED BEST

Students were asked what they liked best about LCA. That the absence of books, study and homework were the most popular responses gives the impression that a less academic course may best suit them. Their preference for practical subjects and spending more time out of school suggests that they are more fruitfully occupied when using their hands and would prefer to be working rather than remain in school. The efforts of schools to adapt curricula that cater for the needs of students of varied aptitude, ability and motivational levels shows a commitment to preparing their future

Students generally found LCA a stress free experience because there was no big examination to be faced which made school a more enjoyable and relaxing place. This appears to be related to the introduction of a cumulative accreditation system over the two years and has been widely welcomed by students. Many liked the idea of gaining credits through doing Key Assignments and Student Tasks. The point may be emphasised that by easing the pressure on the terminal examination through the introduction of on-going assessment, school has become a more enjoyable experience for LCA students. It may also be suggested that easing stress levels helps these students to overcome their dislike for school and teachers. Indeed, consideration is being given to its introduction for the Leaving Certificate by the DES²⁷⁵.

THE LCA – AN OPPORTUNITY FOR SELF DISCOVERY

The sense of freedom engendered by the LCA experience in the classroom can have positive outcomes for students. One student reported that teachers “trust us more

²⁷⁵ NCCA, (2002), *Developing Senior Cycle Education, Consultative Paper on Issues and Options*, Dublin, Government Publications, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, p46

because we are older” and that they are given an opportunity to give their own opinion. Being treated more like adults by teachers has the potential to increase students’ sense of responsibility. A few students had learned of the requirement to work hard to get what they want. This realisation could be interpreted as a sign of increasing maturity and a growing level of self-responsibility.

The fact that a minority of students appeared to have learned little about themselves and had failed to engage with LCA indicates a need for a school response to overcome the problem. It is possible that an alteration in the format of LCA allied to a proactive approach to parents in the presence of their children could be helpful.

IMPROVED STUDENT-TEACHER RAPPOR

LCA may be seen as an opportunity to enhance teacher-student relationships. The ability to get on well with teachers was reported by many students in all five schools. A student in St. Anthony’s explained that this was due to their being less pressure to do work, while a classmate reported that they were treated more like adults. Teachers seemed to be less strict than last year and in this sense, there was a more relaxed classroom atmosphere.

WHAT STUDENTS LIKED LEAST

That LCA is a new syllabus with dimensions in need of improvement is borne out by the feedback coming from students. In this respect, the areas of greatest complaint were excessive written work and the deadlines to be faced for Key Assignments, which were felt to be too short and were a source of pressure for many students. Another complaint

was in relation to interviews for the Student Tasks, particularly the oral examination. Perhaps this dislike suggests a lack of preparation beforehand as well as highlighting the lack of confidence many of these students feel and the need to find ways to develop it.

A more worrying complaint was that some students found LCA boring while others found the Student Tasks repetitive. The point being made here is that Student Tasks may be in need of greater diversity. Could this be the result of insufficient planning by the DES or inadequate delivery at classroom level? Whichever be the case, it is an area which may be in need of review and further improvement.

A few students were dissatisfied that they did not have a choice in the selection of subjects for LCA. This is something they would have an option on had they decided to do the Leaving Certificate. In this context, reference was made to the dislike of particular subjects. In this sense, there may be a lack of flexibility on specialisms choice for LCA students. It may be an area in need of consideration, although it is difficult to see how this may be accommodated at school level due to timetable restrictions encountered by managements in all five case study schools.

The impression received is that written work is strongly disliked by these students. Perhaps consideration needs to be given to increasing the emphasis on practical and oral presentations to help ease the pressure on written work. A second reason for doing this would be to match the requirements of the workplace where action and decision making are more important than written work.

On a more positive note a minority of students were delighted with LCA. One student in St. Ita's said that it was perfect for her, indeed it was the best choice she had ever made. Another in St. Serena's said that it was a good course for the type of job she wanted. The overall impression is that while LCA has proved a positive experience for many students, there are some areas in need of improvement which need to be reviewed and addressed.

CONCLUSION

Over the years, in St. Enda's genuine attempts had been made through the introduction of the VPTP, transition year option and LCVP to cater for the needs of less academic students. The discontinuation of the earlier programmes meant that only TY and LCVP remained. While TY worked well for some of these students, it did not offer them a certificate provision, only the LCVP could do that. While the latter did provide variety and some work experience within the link modules, the problem remained of the compulsion to do seven academic subjects. Increasingly, it was felt that LCVP was proving unsatisfactory, which suggested that LCA might provide a better alternative for the non-academic stream.

It may be suggested that introducing a new Senior Cycle course, particularly one of certificate stature, may be a high risk venture. How will students, both those due to take it and their peers, view the new course? What attitude will staff, both the LCA team, and their colleagues take to its introduction? Will some teachers take the view that it will weaken the school's 'academic' status? The implied reaction may be that the 'better' student will go elsewhere if LCA is introduced here. What attitude will parents take? Will they be suspicious regarding its value to their sons and daughters in terms of

their employment prospects or progression to further education? Will employers be aware of the new course and its value in terms of preparation for work?

AN ALTERED ROLE FOR TEACHERS

The recommendation is that schools need to challenge the passive and sedentary role expected of students to a more active dynamic one allowing them the opportunity to be creative and allowing greater individuality. Perhaps the most important factor in the development of decision-making, problem-solving, independence and interpersonal skills in students will be the transformation of the teacher's role to being one of facilitator rather than that of didactic classroom instructor. Such a classroom transformation can only be effected if teachers are willing to challenge their own long-held conceptions. To achieve this in the classroom would require students to be treated like adults where they become more independent and responsible for their own learning. An example of this would be where the teacher allows his or her first name to be used by students while still being able to subtly direct the learning focus.

In this sense, there will be a "...need for a new kind of professionalism among teachers."²⁷⁶ This may also require a loosening of the "...power relations between teacher and students...."²⁷⁷ This will surely involve a huge paradigm shift for those on the LCA team. For this reason, it could be argued that only teachers who are willing to do this will be effective within the classroom. It further suggests that careful selection of team teachers would be required to achieve this intention.

²⁷⁶ Young, M.F.D., (1998), *The Curriculum of the Future*, London, Routledge Falmer, p87

²⁷⁷ Ibid, p43

Only teachers of special quality may be capable of doing this and suggests that great care needs to be taken by management when selecting the LCA team. This implies that school managements need to consider that team teachers need to be selected more on the basis of their special qualities of patience and willingness to trust students as adults rather than the subject choice provision.

LCA: A LEARNING EXPERIENCE

Bray (1996)²⁷⁸ mentions that schools new to the programme are at the exploratory stage and need to evaluate their progress over time. One of the five case study schools St. Enda's was at this stage. In this respect, both the coordinator and a team teacher admitted that LCA represented a major learning experience for the team. That mistakes are likely to be made in the first year, in terms of teachers attempting an active learning approach within the classroom and the efforts to develop a team teaching style, seem inevitable. For these reasons, the evaluation and review within the school province could prove beneficial to the subsequent development of LCA. It may be argued that it is only through evaluation review that suggestions for improvement may be put in place, which according to the action research method need to be re-evaluated the following year.

LIKELY DES CUTBACKS

It was admitted that the in-service was of a higher quality when it was exclusively focused on LCA. This was no longer the case since the second level support service replaced the LCA support service. One suspects that this has come about due to cut backs in the DES budget in which case the generous grants being provided for LCA

²⁷⁸ Bray, N., (1996), *The Leaving Certificate Applied* in Hogan, P., (Ed), *Issues in Education, ASTI Education Journal*, Dublin, Association of Secondary Teachers in Ireland, p108, pp 101-109

resources, student capitation and teacher in-service could be curtailed. This could have serious consequences not only for the continuation of LCA in existing schools but also for further take-up in other schools. The interpretation here could be that the LCA support service ought to have been retained to ensure that the skills particular to LCA would be reinforced by teachers through quality in-service.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

In summary the following recommendations are suggested for the improvement of LCA in the researcher's school as this was this papers action research principle.

It is recommended that:-

- A positive relationship with parents needs to be built up to highlight the value of LCA.
- Contact be made between schools in the locality to offer mutual advice.
- The post of coordinator be elevated to an Assistant Principalship one.
- Care be taken in the selection of team teachers by school management.
- Team meetings involving the coordinator and a core group of teachers be timetabled during school hours on a regular basis.
- A procedure be put in place to ensure the careful selection of students
- A flexible approach at school level is required to encourage prospective students to take the course.
- A proactive discipline system needs to be in place to overcome some students reluctance to engage with LCA.
- Students be allowed a greater choice in the selection of specialisms for LCA.
- Sufficient access to ICT facilities be provided to enhance the presentation of reports for Key Assignments and Student Tasks.
- Continuous review and evaluation take place involving input from employers and the wider community.

APPENDIX A

PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PRINCIPAL

1. Why did your school decide to offer the LCA Programme?
2. How was LCA initiated in your school?
3. Have you undertaken LCA in-service for Principals?
4. How many teachers constitute the LCA team?
5. Does the existence of a large LCA teaching team (more than ten?) create problems in terms of cross-curricular integration?
6. What efforts have been made to overcome this problem?
7. Has a small core team (five or six) been formed to assist teamwork who will meet on a regular basis?
8. Were arrangements made to ensure that LCA meetings are held during school hours?
9. What criteria were used to elect an LCA Coordinator in this school?
10. Were teachers allocated to LCA on the basis of their willingness to do it or on the basis of the widest possible subject choice provision?

11. Of your students, for whom is the LCA suited?

12. Are the students who have taken up LCA chosen by school management on the basis of being weak academically?

13. How many students are in the LCA 1 group?

14. Were all prospective LCA students interviewed?

15. Were they given advice regarding consequences of non- completion of key assignments or misbehaviour?

16. In what ways do you feel the programme has benefited students?

17. What are the attitudes of parents to LCA?

18. Were increased resources in terms of teacher allocation and grants for equipment and ICT important factors in deciding to offer the LCA?

19. What difficulties have arisen in implementing the LCA programme?

20. Were there timetabling problems in facilitating the introduction of the LCA?
Please specify?

21. In what ways do you feel the programme has benefited the school?

PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE LCA CO-ORDINATOR

1. Have you undertaken inservice for the LCA programme?
2. How would you rate the quality of the inservice provision?
Very good Good Fair
3. How often do the LCA team meet?
4. Is this attended by all LCA teachers or by a smaller core group?
5. Do you believe that this gives sufficient time for planning and and curricular integration?
6. Have you been given less pupil contact time to allow you time for your coordinating duties?
7. In what way has teaching LCA altered your teaching methodology?
8. How challenging do you find preparing class lessons in a programme not having set textbooks?
9. Do you sometime find the demands made on you as a coordinator excessive?
10. What skills do you see being developed in LCA students?

11. In what respects have student's attitudes to school and teachers improved since taking LCA?
12. Who organises the work experience?
13. Is it difficult to find work experience placement for students?
14. Is it school policy to allow students find their own experience or do they find their own experience or do they receive assistance from an LCA teacher?
15. Is there a module in guidance counselling?
16. Are students debriefed following their work experience?
17. Are students encouraged to find work experience which is not related to their part-time work?
18. Are students encouraged to find different types of work experience?
19. What complaints if any do teachers have about the LCA?
20. What aspects of LCA needs changing?

PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LCA TEACHERS

1. Have you undertaken inservice for the LCA Programme?
2. How would you rate the quality of the inservice provision?

Very good Good Fair
3. Are you a member of the LCA core group? How effective do you find the core group meetings in terms of planning and curricular integration?
4. In what way has teaching LCA changed your approach to classroom methods?
5. What skills do you see being developed in LCA students?
6. In what respects have students attitude's to school and teachers improved since taking LCA?
7. How challenging do you find preparing class lessons in a programme not having set textbooks?
8. Did you have previous experience of active learning methods within the Transition Year Programme?

PILOT QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LCA STUDENTS

1. Based on your experience of the LCA please indicate with a tick ✓ your level of agreement with the following statements:

As a result of my experience of the LCA.....	Strongly Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) I can communicate more effectively	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) I am better at taking responsibility for my own learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) I work better as a member of a team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) I am more confident in my ability to solve problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) I have more confidence in my social skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) I am better prepared for the world of work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) I am more aware of job/career opportunities traditionally/ usually associated with the opposite sex	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) I am more aware of opportunities available to me for further education and training	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) I am more aware of opportunities which exist for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j) I am more innovative and enterprising	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

- k) I am more skilled in the use of
ICT (Information and Communication
Technology)
- l) I see the relevance of the Vocational
specialisms to the world of work
- m) I have an increased awareness of my
local community

2. What do you like best about the LCA?

3. What have you discovered about yourself since you started the LCA?

4. How do you get on with your LCA teachers?

5. What do you like about the LCA?

APPENDIX B

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE PRINCIPAL

1. How many years has the LCA programme been in the school?
2. How many teachers are on the LCA team?
3. How many students are there in LCA? Year 1 Year 2
4. Why did your school decide to offer the LCA Programme?
5. How was LCA started in your school?
6. Have you undertaken LCA in-service for Principals?
7. How would you rate the quality of the in-service provision?
Very good Good Fair
8. Of your students, for whom is the LCA most suited?
9. Are all third year and transition year students given the option of choosing LCA?

10. Were increased resources (improved teacher allocation and grants for equipment and ICT) factors in deciding to offer LCA?

11. Does the existence of a large LCA teaching team (more than ten) create communication problems?

12. Have timetabling arrangements been made to ensure that the LCA teaching team meet regularly?

13. How often does the LCA teaching team meet?

14. Has a small core team (five or six) been formed to assist the planning of LCA activities?

15. What difficulties have arisen in implementing the LCA programme?

16. In what way has the programme benefited students and the school?

17. What are the attitudes of parents to LCA?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR THE PRINCIPAL IN ST. ENDA'S

In the case of St. Enda's, two additional were asked of the principal because this was the school's initial year of LCA.

18. What criteria were used to elect an LCA coordinator in this school?

19. Were teachers allocated to LCA on the basis of their willingness to do it or on the basis of the widest possible subject choice provision?

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR THE LCA CO-ORDINATOR

1. Have you undertaken in-service for the LCA programme?
2. How would you rate the quality of the in-service provision?

Very good Good Fair
3. Have you been given a time allowance for your co-ordinating duties? Is this sufficient?
4. How often do the LCA team meet?
5. Do you have an LCA core group?
6. Are meetings attended by all LCA teachers or by the smaller core group?
7. Does the existence of a large LCA teaching team (more than 10) create communication problems?
8. Is there a drop-out of LCA teachers from year to year? What problems does this create?
9. Do you believe that there is sufficient time for planning?
10. Do you find the demands being made on you excessive?
11. What skills do you see being developed in LCA students?
12. What suggestions would you make for improving LCA within the school?
13. What are the attitudes of parents to the LCA?

ADDITIONAL QUESTIONS FOR LCA COORDINATOR IN ST ENDAS

Four additional questions were asked of the LCA Coordinator in this school because this was the introductory year for the LCA in this school.

14. Is the finance that the DES provided sufficient for the selected subject specialisms?

15. How supportive have school management been in allocating resources for the LCA?

16. How cooperative have management been in allocating sufficient time for IT facilities?

17. How helpful have the BOM been to the introduction of LCA in terms of funding?

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LCA TEACHERS

1. Have you undertaken in-service for the LCA Programme?
2. How would you rate the quality of the in-service provision?

Very good Good Fair
3. How effective do you find the LCA meetings in terms of planning and curricular integration?
4. In what way has teaching LCA changed your approach to classroom methods?
5. How challenging do you find preparing class lessons in a programme not having set textbooks?
6. What skills do you see being developed in LCA students?
7. In what respects have students attitude's to school and teachers improved since taking LCA?
8. What suggestions would you make for improving LCA in the school?

FINAL QUESTIONNAIRE FOR LCA STUDENTS

1. Based on your experience of the LCA please indicate with a tick ✓ your level of agreement with the following statements:

As a result of my experience of the LCA.....	Strongly Agree	Unsure	Disagree	Strongly disagree
a) I can communicate better	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
b) I am better at taking responsibility for my own learning	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
c) I am less creative	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
d) I am more confident in my ability to solve problems	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
e) I have less confidence in my social skills	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
f) I am better prepared for the world of work	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
g) I am more aware of opportunities which exist for me	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
h) I am less skilled in the use of Information and Communication Technology	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
i) I work better as a member of a team	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
j) I have less awareness of my local community	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

APPENDIX C

XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX
XXXXXXXXXX

John Lynch
Freffans,
Trim,
Co. Meath

10TH January, 2003

Dear Principal,

I am a second level teacher, currently studying for a M. Ed. Degree at University College, Maynooth. I am carrying out school research for my thesis which focuses on the Leaving Certificate Applied programme.

I am asking your permission to do research in your school which involves interviewing the principal, LCA co-ordinator and LCA teachers, as well as circulating a questionnaire to LCA students. This will take place before Eastertime.

The information received will be coded to ensure anonymity.

Your assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Yours sincerely,

John Lynch

Chairman,
Board of Management,
xxxxxxxxxx,
xxxxxxxxxx,
xxxxxxxxxx.

Mr. John Lynch,
Freffans,
Trim,
Co. Meath.

24th January 2003

Dear xxxxxxxx,

I am requesting permission from the Board of Management to undertake research in the school over the next few months as part of an action project on the Leaving Certificate Applied, for a Master of Education degree in NUI Maynooth.

This research will involve interviewing the principal, the coordinator, LCA team teachers and circulating a questionnaire to LCA students. All information will be coded to ensure confidentiality.

Thanking you

Yours sincerely

John Lynch

XXXXXXXXXX,
XXXXXXXXXX,
XXXXXXXXXX,
XXXXXXXXXX,

Mr. John Lynch,
Freffans,
Trim,
Co. Meath

18th February 2003

Dear Parent/Guardian,

I am a teacher in XX. XXXXX school and I am doing an action project on the Leaving Certificate Applied as part of studies for a Master of Education degree in NUI Maynooth.

With the consent of the principal, I am asking your permission to ask your son/daughter to fill in a student questionnaire as part of research for a thesis.

I enclose a copy of the questionnaire for your consideration and assure you that all information will be coded to ensure confidentiality. If you have any objection please contact me at the above address or the school principal.

Thanking you

Yours sincerely

John Lynch

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