The end of the year is looming now, although there's lots to get through before we can head for the hills or turn our minds to summer courses, or even to exam correcting!

The planning for ILSA Annual Conference 2016 is already well under way. The timetable will be completed as soon as possible and there will be a draft timetable on the website shortly.

Members who plan to attend conference will be delighted to know that Fr Peter McVerry has agreed to give the keynote address. For more than forty years, Fr McVerry has worked and fought for the well-being of vulnerable young people in Dublin, and throughout that time he has advocated for the rights of the most marginalised people in our society. We are delighted that he'll be able to be with us to deliver the keynote speech.

The theme Surviving and Thriving in School has been chosen for the conference, and the focus will be on how we can enable all young people to benefit fully from their years in school, not only by developing the skills and learning dispositions necessary to reach their full potential, but also through feeling connected and belonging in their schools.

The ILSA Annual Conference will take place on 23rd and 24th September at Mount Wolseley Hotel Tullow, Co. Carlow.

For the first time for many years the Annual Conference will not be in St Patrick’s College, Drumcondra. Over the past few years we had some problems caused by the on-going building work at the college. This meant that many of the seminars were held in prefabs, which resulted in long walks from seminar to seminar. ILSA members were very patient and good-humoured about these difficulties, which was very much appreciated by the Executive Committee.

Last year, although the conference was held in the new conference centre in St Patrick’s, there were many complaints related to the venue. Most of these were concerned with the lack of parking facilities on the college campus. While we were informed at the time the conference was booked that parking would be available, it was in fact extremely limited. Members arriving for conference were confronted by notices that cars parked on the College campus would be clamped.

Many delegates arrived very late on the first morning of conference, having been delayed by unusually severe traffic disruption due to a fire in Dublin Port Tunnel. While some delegates had to park quite a long distance away, others paid quite substantial amounts elsewhere for parking.

ILSA Committee discussed the problem of parking at length, as well as the difficulty of the ever-increasing Friday morning traffic on the access roads to St Patrick’s. We were informed that the parking facilities would not improve and, while Metro North will eventually improve access, this is not going to help matters in the immediate future. The decision was made to move the conference, for a trial year, to a venue outside Dublin but within reasonable distance.

Mount Wolseley Hotel is a beautiful venue with extensive conference accommodation and unlimited parking. It's on the outskirts of Tullow, forty-five minutes from the Red Cow roundabout. There’s a leisure centre at the hotel, a golf course and lots of other facilities. If you would like to check out the venue, the website address is: http://www.mountwolseley.ie

Full details will be on the website as soon as possible.

Jean Johnston (Ed.)
Irish Learning Support Association
2016 Annual Conference

Surviving and Thriving in School

at
Mount Wolseley Hotel
Tullow
on
23rd and 24th September

KEYNOTE ADDRESS
by
FR PETER McVERREY

Seminars and workshops on:
Literacy, Language, ASD, Critical
Literacy, Maths, Numeracy,
Modifying Behaviour and more...

DES Inspectorate (SEN) will present a
progress report on the pilot project of
the New Model for Allocating
Resources for Students with SEN.

Full Details Shortly on: www.ilsa.ie

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ILSA MEMBERSHIP

• ILSA Membership runs from the beginning
to the end of each academic year.

• Applications for the Annual Conference
must be accompanied by payment of the
membership fee for the academic year in
which the Annual Conference takes place.

• Application for the Annual Conference may
alternatively be made as a non-member on
the Non-Member Application Form.

• There are combined Conference and
Membership forms for both Individual
Members and for Schools.

• Membership Fees for the following
academic year and fees for the Annual
Conference may be paid from 1st May.
Suggestions that may help students to revise more effectively for exams.

How can students revise better? What techniques really work, and which don’t? What can students do to improve their memory, mood and concentration?

1. **Eat breakfast**
   About 27% of boys and 39% of girls skip breakfast some or all of the time. Research has shown that skipping this meal significantly reduces students’ attention and their ability to recall information. Just having a bowl of cereal will give students the concentration and memory boost they need.¹

2. **Put the mobile away**
   Phones can be distracting; they are linked to fomo (fear of missing out). Evidence shows that undergraduate students who spend more time texting and using social media get lower grades. In another study, researchers found that the mere sight of a phone was enough to reduce the ability to focus – out of sight really is out of mind.

3. **Start early and spread it out**
   Athletes don’t just train the day before a match. To absorb material and to understand it well takes time. Spreading out revision on a particular topic over several days is more effective than trying to take it in and remember it all in one go. This effect, known as *spacing*, helps because it allows the information to be stored into long term memory and to be recalled several times. This strategy has been labelled as ‘one of the most robust across the entire history of experimental research on learning and memory’.²

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Suggestions for Exam Revision
(continued)

4. Test yourself
Self-testing also helps as it checks for any gaps in knowledge. Practice papers provide a good starting point, as well as self-checking at the end of each revision session.

5. Teach someone
After self-testing, teach the material to someone else. This has been found to help memory and recall – it’s known as ‘the Protége Effect’. Teaching another person requires the teacher to learn to organise his/her knowledge in a clear and structured manner.

6. Think twice about using highlighters
Research suggests that highlighters don’t work very well. People learn and recall information better if they connect it to other pieces of information. Highlighters do isolate single pieces of information. Students may end up highlighting large sections of text. This may look impressive, but it has been shown to be of very little use to learning.

7. Don’t listen to music
Students who study in a quiet environment can recall more than those who revise while listening to music. Extroverts, and those with an exceptional ability to control their attention, are not negatively affected as much but it doesn’t help. At best, for these students, it just doesn’t hinder them as much as everyone else.

8. Get some fresh air and exercise
Revision has to be about quality, as well as quantity. Going outside and getting some fresh air helps students to feel refreshed and more able to focus afterwards. Taking some exercise helps students under pressure to deal better with stressful situations and it reduces anxiety and increases self-esteem.

9. Sleep
Students are encouraged to revise a lot before their exams. However, there comes a time when they need to stop and go to sleep. Knowing when can be tricky. There is a link between being a perfectionist and struggling to sleep. If a child is falling asleep within five minutes of their head hitting the pillow, they should probably be going to bed earlier. Other sleep tips include having regular bedtimes, not being on your mobile phone in bed, but if you are, turning down the backlight on it.

Revision time can be challenging, as it often requires students to monitor their own behaviour when working independently at home. By informing them about what helps improve their memory, mood and concentration, we can better equip them to meet the challenges and stress of intensive study.

(Adapted from an article in theguardianTeacher Network: http://www.theguardian.com/teacher-network/2016/apr/19/students-revise-exams-revision-science)

Jean Johnston
For those of us involved in teaching at all levels, time has become a major issue. Time to read, time to reflect, time to plan, and time to listen is essential for effective engagement in the classroom.

As mentioned in our most recent eZINE, I will be recommending a number of TED Talks which may be of interest and give you a moment to stop, think and reflect.

In this edition, the following two talks are recommended:

- The author J.K Rowling’s address at Harvard University in 2010 on “The Fringe Benefits of Failure”
- The teacher and poet Taylor Mali’s Ted Talk entitled “What Teachers Make”.

You can find the above and many other inspiring talks at [http://www.ted.com/talks](http://www.ted.com/talks).

Noel Fox

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**Engaging and Learning Outdoors**

*Engaging and Learning with the Outdoors* – The Final Report of the Outdoor Classroom in a Rural Context Action Research Project – very convincingly shows the positive benefits of working and learning out in open, natural spaces.¹

The succinct and well-researched arguments made in an information booklet from North Carolina State University’s *Natural Learning Initiative* are listed below here.² These details, which are based on information from *Annotated Bibliographies of Research and Studies*, Volumes 1 and 2 (2007), show the findings of some of the extensive research that has been carried out on children working and learning outside in natural surroundings.³ This research shows that regular opportunity to work out-of-doors:

**Supports multiple development domains:**

- Nature is important to children’s development in every major way—intellectually, emotionally, socially, spiritually and physically (Kellert, 2005).

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¹ [http://www.bath.ac.uk/cree/resources/OCR.pdf](http://www.bath.ac.uk/cree/resources/OCR.pdf)
² [www.naturallearning.org](http://www.naturallearning.org)
³ [www.childrenandnature.org/research](http://www.childrenandnature.org/research)
Supports creativity and problem solving:
• Studies of children in schoolyards found that children engage in more creative play in the green areas. Play was also more cooperative (Bell and Dyment, 2006);
• Play in nature is especially important for developing capacities for creativity, problem-solving, and intellectual development (Kellert, 2005).

Enhances cognitive abilities:
• Proximity to and daily exposure to natural settings increases children’s ability to focus and enhances cognitive abilities (Wells, 2000).

Improves academic performance:
• Studies in the US show that schools that use outdoor classrooms and other forms of nature-based experiential education support significant student gains in social studies, science, language arts, and math. Students in outdoor science programs improved their science testing scores by 27% (American Institutes for Research, 2005).

Reduces Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) symptoms:
• Contact with the natural world can significantly reduce symptoms of attention deficit disorder in children as young as five years old (Kuo and Taylor, 2004).

Increases physical activity:
• Children who experience school grounds with diverse natural settings are more physically active, more aware of nutrition, more civil to one another and more creative (Bell and Dyment, 2006).

Improves nutrition:
• Children who grow their own food are more likely to:
  o show higher levels of knowledge about nutrition (Walczek, & Zajicek, 2006)
  o continue healthy eating habits throughout their lives (Morris & Zidenberg-Cherr, 2002).

Improves social relations
• Children will be better able to get along with others, healthier and happier when they have regular opportunities for free and unstructured play in the out-of-doors (Burdette and Whitaker, 2005).

Improves self-discipline
• Access to green spaces, and even a view of green settings, enhances peace, self-control and self-discipline within inner city youth, and particularly in girls (Taylor, Sullivan, 2001).

Reduces stress
• Green plants and vistas reduce stress among highly stressed children. Locations with greater number of plants, greener views, and access to natural play areas show more significant results (Wells and Evans, 2003).

The evidence is convincing. Clearly one or two outings a year to a local forest or park is not sufficient! Perhaps consideration should be given to creating natural, ‘wild’ spaces on or near to school grounds, so that all young people – at both primary and post-primary level – may have regular access to natural areas, so that they may enjoy the benefits of these spaces on a daily basis.

Jean Johnston

Further reading:
In order to learn, students are continually presented with challenges that require thinking. It is interesting to note that they generally prefer questions which require them to predict, create, theorise, compare, analyse, criticise and so on, rather than those that simply ask them to recall facts and other information through tests of memory. In other words, they prefer to use higher level thinking skills. That said, it seems that recall/memory testing is the most common level of thinking required in the average classroom. Ironically, this is the one that has the least positive effect on learning!

Of all the theorists who have tried to identify and categorize thinking operations into their various levels, the most familiar to us is likely to be Benjamin Bloom. His taxonomy of six levels of thinking is regarded by most people as a very acceptable hierarchy:

1. Remember: recognizing and recalling facts......................(Recall)
2. Understand: understanding what the facts mean................(Comprehension)
3. Apply: applying the facts, rules, concepts and ideas............(Application)
4. Analyze: breaking down information into component parts..(Analysis)
5. Evaluate: judging the value of information or ideas..................(Evaluation)
6. Create: combining parts to make a new whole....................(Synthesis)

While the vast majority of teachers encountered Bloom’s work in college, only a minority have ever consciously integrated it into their lesson planning over the following years. There are many benefits in doing so. For example, it allows one to respond to a wide variety of student needs, especially in the context of trying to individualize learning. It is a fact that students learn far more successfully when operating at the higher levels of thinking, i.e., analyzing, evaluating and synthesizing, primarily because a high degree of processing of information is required.

Despite the fact that rote learning is seldom to be encouraged, due to its position at the most basic level of the thinking process, i.e., recall, there are those who argue that Maths tables, the odd poem or speech, or various lists could be “learned off”. In time, it is argued, these will make sense. Perhaps there is merit in this point of view, but the sooner patterns are identified, connections are made, contexts are developed and so on, the better for all involved.

It is generally accepted that, when a new skill is learned, it should be applied a number of times in order to demonstrate competence. However, therein may lie a trap. It is not uncommon to find students “getting the right answer”, for example, in a new area of Maths, when they actually do not understand the operation(s) that they have just completed. They have simply memorized the process without actually understanding very much. This relatively common occurrence is a clear case of application by simply using recall – with a total absence of any understanding!

Any demonstration of a newly acquired skill should be accompanied by an explanation by the student of what is being done. One may argue that such a measure is impossible to implement in a classroom of 25-30 students. Not so, if classrooms are regularly structured for students to work in groups of three or four. It can be a far more productive setting – and much safer in regard to someone who is having difficulty, as their failure is less public and help is immediately at hand. The Johnsons’ five basic elements of successful group work are well worth checking out to ensure that this happens.

In order to encourage students to think at an appropriate level, we teachers are obliged to understand the cognitive demands of the tasks that we set – and of the questions that we ask. In examinations, for example, is it fair to have
“Mmmm. Now, let me think” (cont.)

students presented with the task of responding to analysis-level questions when they have only dealt with an issue at comprehension level in class? What about the quality of the learning experiences of students who seldom are given an opportunity to respond to questions other than at recall and comprehension levels?

As with most fields of endeavour, learning is a many-faceted operation. While this short discussion will do little more than raise consciousness in regard to levels of thinking, it is a really important consideration when trying to improve the quality of the learning that we generate. Undeniably, there are several other elements as well. But, if we are to be as effective as we can be, consciously paying attention to the kinds of thinking that we encourage in class, as we design tasks and pose questions, is essential.

Joe Flynn

More Courses From Future Learn

FutureLearn is a massive open online course (MOOC) learning platform, founded in December 2012. It is a company launched and wholly owned by The Open University in Milton Keynes, England.

All courses are free. Many universities from Ireland, UK and Europe provide these courses, which cover an enormous variety of topics. They are designed to take from two to six weeks to complete. Depending on the course, the hours required per week are between two to four.

Many of the courses are suitable for extension exercises for able students. Many are very useful for teachers. One of the joys of these courses is that there is no advertising – although occasionally the university providing the course will give an outline of other courses that may be done through their institution.

Anyone can join these courses while they are running and it is not necessary to finish a course within the allotted time.

Interaction with other learners is part of all the courses and it’s good to be able to share thoughts on the courses. There are always more postings and interactive communications while each course is on-going.

Courses that will start in the near future include:

- Teaching Literacy through Film (The British Film Institute)
- Understanding Anxiety, Depression and CBT (University of Reading)
- Caring for Vulnerable Children (University of Strathclyde)
- An Introduction to Screenwriting (University of East Anglia)
- Introduction to Italian (Universitá per Stranieri di Siena)

All courses are accessible at www.futurelearn.com

Open Evening
The Trinity Centre for People with Intellectual Disabilities

are having an Open Evening to introduce a new Course named

‘Arts, Science & Inclusive Applied Practice’
(formerly known as ‘the Certificate in Contemporary Living Course’).

Date: Tuesday May 17th 2016
Location: Room 4.02, 4th Floor, 3 College Green, Dublin 2
Time: 5.30 – 6.30pm

Please note that this course is pending accreditation approval.

RSVPs by Email should be sent to Ms Sheila Mc Groarty at: ciid@tcd.ie to confirm attendance on the Evening
A 2013 report on research that was carried out on common study techniques by Professor John Dunlosky and his colleagues at Kent State University makes very interesting reading for teachers who support exam classes or who are teaching study skills.¹ The researchers found that ‘...techniques vary widely with respect to their generalizability and promise for improving student learning’.

They reported that two techniques were found to be of very high value. These were:
- practice testing;
- distributed practice (i.e. practice spread out over a prolonged period of time).

These techniques received high utility assessments because they were found to benefit learners of different ages and abilities and were shown to boost students’ performance across many criterion tasks.

Three other techniques were found to be moderately useful:
- elaborative interrogation;
- self-explanation;
- interleaved practice (i.e. moving from one topic or sub-topic to another while studying, rather than concentrating fully on one topic until it is felt that it is completely learnt, understood and remembered).

However this research also revealed that five commonly-used techniques were found to be of little value to revision for examinations:
- summarization;
- highlighting;
- keyword mnemonics;
- imagery use for text learning;
- rereading.

The final technique here, rereading, was found to be beneficial for a second reading but further readings were of little or no benefit. The researchers reported that there were numerous reasons why these these techniques were rated as low utility.

The full report of this research is available for free download at:

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David Hyerle does not claim that these organisers constitute a comprehensive view of thinking, but says that they represent eight fundamental skills that underpin thinking and learning. They are most useful when all teachers in a given school are supporting their use, and when all students and teachers can use them as a common language through which to express and communicate thinking.

These maps are drawn by the students themselves and all may be expanded as far as the student wishes. Hyerle points to a special aspect of these tools – when the creator has gone as far as s/he can, s/he draws a box around the map and with that records her/his thoughts about the map or other relevant information. So, in the box around the Analogies Map above, the Relating Factor is identified in the box drawn around the map.

Hyerle points out that many of the graphic organisers that we use may tend to restrict the user, containing thought rather than allowing it to develop in an unrestricted manner. This is evident in, for example, the A4-sized K-W-L grid which has room for a limited amount of information or the Venn diagram used for comparison. The student using these kind of graphic organisers may, unconsciously, limit her/his thinking to fit the space available. This is not the case with Hyerle’s maps.

This book is one that I am pleased to own, and that I will consult frequently.

Jean Johnston

Don’t forget to check the ILSA website for full details of the 2016 ILSA Annual Conference

www.ilsa.ie