

In June 2005 I was awarded the Northern Ireland Headteacher of the Year in a Primary School. Following the National Awards ceremony in London the Teaching Awards Trust offered me the opportunity to attend the Leadership In Management Programme at The Leadership Trust, Herefordshire. With the GTCNI Professional Development Bursary, which helped towards financing part of the costs involved, I was in a position to accept this placement.

The Leadership Trust (LT), founded in 1975, has grown to become a major force with an enviable reputation as one of the country's premier leadership development establishments. They are the first, and only UK-based organisation, to focus purely on the subject of leadership.

The Leadership in Management (LM) programme is an intensive five-day course aimed at identifying and exploring the fundamental aspects of good leadership, communication and team-building.

We, in Northern Ireland, are about to embark upon a journey of immense change – the implementation of the Entitled to Succeed education reform programme. Sustainable change in schools greatly depends on the quality of educational leadership. At the heart of any successful change is the impact of effective leadership.

As a result of completing the LM programme, I believe the most effective leadership stems from personal power not authority power. Leadership development, therefore, starts with building self-awareness of our own personal power and then applying it to improve our own and other's performance. This requires high levels of both the will and the courage to know ourselves, and to then control our behaviour in order to enable, empower and hence lead others.

Everyone has personal power, and needs to learn to use it as effectively as possible in any relationship, both in and out of school. This includes leading staff, working with peers and getting the best out everyone for a common purpose.

Once we are able to lead ourselves, we can then win the hearts, as well as the minds of others. For me in my day-to-day work at school this means balancing my time and focus on developing staff's enthusiasm, the challenges they face, as well as on the processes and systems they use.

The LM programme is designed to develop leadership skills of those at director and senior management levels. 'The Leadership Trust Spectrum ©' model was the central focus of the programme. This working model required me to reflect and identify my personal leadership strengths and needs, and analyse the impact my leadership behaviour has upon the staff, pupils and all associated with school. Areas of focus included Levels of Communication, Observing and Reviewing, Team-building, Strategic Roles and Responsibilities, and Staff Development and Leadership.

The LM programme was mentally taxing and enabled me to develop my self-awareness, self-control and self-confidence so that I can use my personal power to be more effective as a leader. Personal power is unique to each and every one of us and hence the course provided me a very personal experience that will help to reinforce and identify the steps I need to take to gain personal growth as a school leader.

In addition to improving self-awareness I also benefited from:

- Clear insight into how to approach and solve problems through focusing on objective strategy and planning;
- Recognition of the critical balances between people and task focus, strategy and details, planning and action, doing and delegating;
- Clarification of how to build strong relationships both one-to-one and as a team;
- Understanding of how different styles and approaches can impact on individual and team performance;
- Increased emotional and mental resilience;
- Improved ability to cope with change, conflict and pressure;
- Additional ideas on how to communicate with and inspire others by recognising and applying the unique positive triggers that energise them; and
- Learn and practise how to translate reactive into proactive behaviour.

The testimony to the success of the LM programme is how I translate this learning into practice at school. It will require prolonged effort but one that I am prepared to follow-through with, as it will undoubtedly be of benefit to my colleagues at school and in turn have an impact upon the quality of education provision being offered to the children at school.

There are many training courses in the public domain that we, as school leaders, attend. There are very few that one can avail of that withdraws participants from their place of work for a week so that they can totally immerse themselves in the programme and reflect upon their leadership style. It has been a journey – a soul-searching journey. One that has made me be more self-aware of the impact my leadership style has on the effectiveness of the school. It has been a ‘once-in-a-lifetime’ opportunity for me, and one, thanks to the GTCNI bursary, I was in a position to accept. I believe all associated with educating the youth of today, should be given the opportunity to take ‘time-out’ to reflect, analyse and update oneself with relevant training so as to come back to work refreshed and re-energised to continue shaping the adults of tomorrow.