PASS/PAL Leader Conference 2017

The Power of We

The 8th Annual PASS Leader Conference was held from the 3rd-5th of November in Cork, Ireland, at the Cork Institute of Technology. The theme of the conference was The Power of We: Collaborative Learning in PASS (also called PALS at some universities). We’re Hattie and Erin, and we attended the conference this year—we’d like to share what we did and what we learn with all the Bristol PASS leaders.

On the Saturday we took part in four different sessions. We’ve included a brief description of each, and highlighted the main things we took away from these sessions.

You are not the answer, you are the question.

This session highlighted the importance of asking questions, how we can redirect questions and how you can ask different types of questions. We listened to a traditional Irish fairy tale and then did some activities based around it.

- Questions are important because they help us to develop ideas, as well as realise what we don’t know.
- Competitivity often increases enthusiasm and participation.
- It can be very beneficial to discuss something you’ve listened to/watched/read (e.g. a lecture) with other people before you start to ask or answer questions about it.

The use of different question types (true/false, summarise, explain, analyse, etc.) can act as scaffolding – the questions can get progressively more difficult/analytical and the scaffolding helps to build up to this.

Learning & Thinking Diversity

This session was about different learning styles. We completed a questionnaire to find out our preferred style and then worked in groups with people who preferred the same style. This helped to highlight how having a mix of styles can really help in completing a task effectively.

- The four styles are: Activists, Reflectors, Theorists and Pragmatists.
  - Activists tend to involve themselves fully, they tend to act first and then think later.
  - Reflectors like to stand back and observe from different perspectives. They like to get a feel for a situation before contributing to it.
  - Theorists adapt and integrate observations into complex but logically sound theories. They think things through in a step by step way.
  - Pragmatists are keen to try out new ideas to see if they work in practice. They like to get on with things quickly and are very practical.

- The questionnaire can be accessed by searching ‘Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire’ and downloading the PDF.
- It could be an idea to consider the different learning styles within your PASS group and use this when doing group work.
In this session we talked about the different ways people might react to conflict, as well as how some people tend to be more introverted or extroverted, more intrinsic or extrinsic.

- Different people have different motivations and these could be intrinsic or extrinsic. Intrinsic motivators include curiosity, learning and meaning while extrinsic motivators include rewards, competition, and fear of failure or punishment. It could be useful to consider this in your PASS sessions when trying to motivate your group.
- There is evidence to suggest that transformational leadership is more beneficial than the traditional leader-follower design. This means that leaders should aim to inspire people, investing themselves emotionally to do this. This is important for PASS sessions because it shows how we should act as facilitators, and not teachers, to allow the students to be inspired to work out the answers for themselves. For this to work a level of social intelligence is required from the leader, this includes self-awareness, self-management, social awareness and relationship management. These are important to consider when leading your sessions.
- There are different ways in which people will react when they are annoyed or angered by something. This may be obvious – in that they will be visibility angry or they say that they are. Or it may be subtler – such as being passive aggressive or just not saying anything at all. As leaders it can be very difficult to notice the latter but we do need to give the students in our sessions the opportunity to discuss anything they might not be too happy with. There are different ways to do this – anonymous questionnaires/feedback sheets can help or allowing some time at the end of a session for students to talk about anything they feel could be better.

Are you and your PASS sessions well-being balanced?

This session was very similar to the well-being aspect of the PASS training. We talked about the six ways to well-being and discussed how we can include well-being in our sessions. We’ve listed some of the ideas that were mentioned.

- You could have a session on well-being – talk about ways to improve/maintain well-being and why this is important.
- Having the students move around during the session can help to keep them involved and interested.
- In a survey carried out by Unite Students, 85% of students said they were most likely to talk to course mates or flat mates if they were struggling with their well-being. By being at a PASS session, students have the opportunity to help each other, and this can help maintain well-being, so encouraging this during your sessions is useful.
- It can help to have a balance of activities, some focused on academic works whilst having others that are more informal to allow students to chat.

On the Sunday we had two interactive workshops that have given us some ideas to include in our PASS sessions.

**Art & Creativity Workshop**

In this session we worked in groups to create different models that represented the key concepts of PASS. (Collaboration, teamwork, discussion, etc.)

We had very limited resources but this made us realise that even if you don’t have much with you for you PASS session, this doesn’t have to limit what you can do.

We also used a space that didn’t have chairs and we noticed that people seemed to be paying more attention – so this could be something to consider for PASS session.
PASS/PAL Leader Conference 2017
The Power of We

Poster Competition
Before arriving at the conference each university was asked to design a poster which summed up the PASS scheme at their university, the successes and challenges their scheme has faced, and what makes their scheme unique, for a competition. We’ll leave you with the poster we made—which and took home the trophy for Bristol!

We both had a fantastic weekend in Cork and at the conference in general. If any of you are PASS leaders next year, we definitely recommend going—it’s really informal and interactive.