Creating links with TCD

Suzanne O’Brien is a Learning Support teacher in St Mary’s NS, Fairview. In September 2009, she became School Teacher Fellow in Trinity College, Dublin. In the following article, Suzanne shares that experience with us.

In 2009 an ad was placed in a national newspaper offering open competition to any teacher with at least five years’ experience to become School Teacher Fellow. The successful candidate would be given the opportunity to become immersed in university life and to create links with TCD and his/her respective primary or secondary school. It was required to submit a proposal detailing an area of interest that the candidate could pursue as a project.

I was one of seven candidates who were shortlisted and was called to interview. I have always had a keen interest in French having studied it as my academic subject whilst doing the B.Ed. I began teaching French to 5th and 6th class pupils in St Mary’s in 2005 and we subsequently went on to win the European Language Label Award in 2006. I was then asked to present this project at the National Conference for Modern Languages in UCC. This experience highlighted the positive benefits that teaching French in primary school can have on pupils with special educational needs. While doing the Special Education Diploma in St Pat’s, I focussed an intervention project on measuring the effects of teaching French to pupils with SEN in primary school. Having shared my interests with the panel at the interview, I was delighted to be told that I was successful and that it was a great honour to receive the Fellowship in Trinity College.

In 2009, I moved into accommodation in the Graduate Memorial Building overlooking Front Square. I was given a gown and each evening had the opportunity of dining at the High Table with other Fellows and distinguished guests of Trinity at Commons. It was a great privilege to experience the tradition and to converse with interesting people from all walks of life.

Being a teacher, I was associated with the School of Education where I attended many interesting lectures given by Dr Ann Devitt on Language learning. I also created links with the Centre for Language and Communication Studies which plays a leading role in piloting new developments in language teaching, the application of new technologies to language learning, Sign language teaching and interpreting, Speech and Language processing and the teaching of English as a second language to non-English speaking pupils in primary and secondary schools. Prof David Singleton was very helpful and kindly asked me to participate in a series of lectures based on language learning. I did so in the Jonathan Swift Theatre which was a great experience. I had full access to the library and indeed all the amenities on campus including the Sports Centre.

From attending debates in The Hist to going to the Trinity Ball, I had a fantastic experience. All that I learned and observed, I brought back to the classroom to the benefit of my pupils. I found my time in Trinity College as School Teacher Fellow both rewarding and enriching and I would recommend the experience to anyone.

Suzanne O’Brien, St Mary’s NS, Fairview, Dublin

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