



PARTNERS IN LEARNING (SCOTLAND) - INNOVATIVE TEACHER WORKSHOP, OCT 06

This note describes the workshop held to launch the Authority Innovative Teacher Project.



Ten local authorities in Scotland have bought into the Microsoft Innovative Teacher programme, determined to develop exciting and effective practice within their schools. Engaging with disaffected boys, promoting interactive learning, developing personal projects and building a strong video conferencing system are just a few of the projects identified. Over the next two years, each will be developed to suit the needs of Scottish schoolchildren, their teachers and the education system as a whole.

Within each authority, an experienced teacher has been seconded to the programme for one day a week for the lifetime of each project to help drive it forward. Their remit will be to ensure innovation is encouraged and shared with other teachers. But they face the challenge of ensuring those who are innovating are confident enough to share. Microsoft believes one way is to create a community of practice.

Before each project began, Microsoft brought together the secondees and their education authority managers at a residential conference in Glasgow to create a cohesive community that could support one another. It was also an opportunity to hone those skills needed to engage, motivate and communicate with other teachers by seeing first hand how to create a strong community.

"It is part of Microsoft's Partners in Learning initiative," explains Bob McGonigle, education skills officer Scotland at Microsoft. "We have linked up with the Scottish Qualifications Authority to show how ICT and education can make a real difference. And to help our secondees we brought over Étienne Wenger (pictured above), who was the first to coin the phrase 'communities of practice'."



To facilitate their own community and help them to create communities of innovative teachers within their authorities, Mr Wenger spent two days discussing what a community of practice was and how it could help them build upon innovative practice.

"Homogeneity is no longer the glue of a group," he told delegates. "Enquiry is the new glue and we have to find ways to encourage it."

Etienne Wenger is as a leading expert on communities of practice, a new line of research that focuses on the social nature of learning and its connection to communities, social practice, and identity. Between 1987 and 1992 Mr Wenger, an artificial intelligence expert, was a member of the Institute for Research on Learning in California, where he worked with anthropologist Jean Lave to develop a learning theory centred on the concept of community of practice.

The aim is for innovation to filter through the latticework of the communities created by those involved in the programme, including the Partners in Learning: Microsoft and SQA; the education authorities; the project coordinators; the teachers and the learners. The entire project is to be evaluated by Walter Patterson (pictured above), an ex-HMIE inspector and now a much sought-after consultant.



During the conference, the participants were able to learn what the other projects were, and were able to offer advice to one another. They were also able to see what sort of community was possible, thanks to a report from East Ayrshire, where an innovative teacher pilot has been under way for the past year.

Eileen Speirs (above left), depute head of Galston primary in East Ayrshire, has been working with partners in her local authority on ways of encouraging teachers to use IT innovatively. One day a week she meets with those beyond the walls of her own institution to promote good practice and identify new ways of being innovative. Over the past year, 11 teachers have produced Virtual Classroom Tours (VCTs), revealing how they are innovative in their classrooms. The aim is for the other projects to encourage their innovative teachers to produce useful and informative VCTs over the next two years. These will be made available to teachers across Scotland on the Innovative Teachers website.

West Dumbartonshire is well placed to encourage the penning of VCTs. It has appointed two individuals, one from the primary sector and the other secondary, to lead its project to develop the skills and reach of its Glow mentors. Drew Murray and Andy O'Shea will each spend 20 days a year creating a community for the mentors, where they can learn about good practice and build their confidence.

Falkirk should also be ready soon to produce advice for other teachers as it has chosen to extend an existing project in the authority aimed at engaging with boys who are at risk of failing or dropping out of school. Lynne Ferguson, an English teacher from Falkirk High, has been working on strategies for this group for some time, but the opportunity to develop a community of innovative teachers keen to share practice and ideas has given it an extra boost.

In North Lanarkshire, Stephen McCrossan, an IT teacher from St Andrew's secondary school in Coatbridge, will be setting up and developing a Marratech video conferencing system to enhance teaching and learning in the authority. He is already using the system to deliver the curriculum remotely to one group of higher students, and the aim is to roll out the system to other schools and other subjects.

Craft, design and technology is to come under the spotlight in Dumfries and Galloway, where Larann Foss, a technical teacher from Lockerbie High school, is charged with building a community among other CDT teachers that will facilitate best practice and increase their involvement in curriculum development and support. CDT teachers will be encouraged to join the CDT forum, where threads will be encouraged on any relevant issues and which will hold additional online resources.

In Dundee, Theresa Mungall, who is a staff tutor in early years, plans to build on the Early Years (EY) MasterClass programme to create a vibrant EY community online. The original five Masterclassers will participate, but the eventual goal is to have staff from all of Dundee's 12 freestanding nurseries and all the nursery classes from the 21 primary schools with EY's provision involved. Among the topics covered will be transition to primary and ways of assessing the impact of ICT.

Addressing the need to involve students in lengthier forms of study is the focus of a project in East Lothian, where pupils from primary six to second year at high school, will create personal projects. Although it will be drawn from an area the child finds interesting, the project will incorporate at least three curricular subjects. The Innovative Teacher Programme secondee, Emma Griffiths, from Stoneyhill primary, will be supporting those teachers who volunteer to be involved.

In Aberdeenshire, an initial plan to stimulate further use of interactive voting systems has been refined to consider more focused interactive learning. Led by Anna Rossvoll, depute head at Meldrum primary, the project will begin with an audit of interactive learning.

Critical skills and the development of thinking skills will be developed in Angus, which is already well down the road to implementing a cooperative learning approach across its schools. Mary Logue, education support officer for science in the authority, will draw on teachers' expertise to create a supportive network where ideas can be shared and where cooperative learning training will be maximised.

Finally, Glasgow is hoping to set up a vibrant online learning community for teachers determined to improve their ICT skills in relation to the learning and teaching process. Initially, 12 teachers will belong to the community, and they will be provided with a laptop, a whiteboard and a data projector, as well as a suite of development and productivity software.

By the end of the programme, Microsoft and SQA hope to have encouraged the development of some outstanding practice and to have gathered together a wealth of resources, including VCTs, to share with other teachers across Scotland.