



## PARTNERS IN LEARNING (SCOTLAND) - INNOVATIVE TEACHER PROJECT, NOV 06

This paper details the workshop held as part of the Authority Innovative Teacher Project.

### Background



The Microsoft Innovative Teacher initiative in Scotland moved a stage further recently when the secondees from the ten local authorities involved got together again to compare progress and begin writing their detailed project plans.

Following on from the residential earlier in the year, the group has been developing its own community of practice via its online forum, but it was recognised by the organisers (the Scottish Qualifications Authority and Microsoft) that a face-to-face meeting would help make the group even more cohesive and give them an opportunity to share good practice.

Gathered together in a hotel in Falkirk, the group began the session with a roundup of how each of the ten local authorities were progressing, bringing all the secondees leading the projects up-to-date with each project. They were also shown the new Partners in Learning Scotland Resource CD to help encourage innovation, and were given an opportunity for small group discussions on how each was progressing with selection of candidates, support systems and resourcing for their projects.

But the main focus of the day was presentation by three participants, to show how they were doing.

### Dundee

First up was Dundee. Its project aims to build on experience gained by Dundee teachers in the national Early Years ICT Masterclass forum, which was hosted and managed by Learning & Teaching Scotland. Led by secondee Theresa Mungall, a staff tutor for Early Years ICT, the original twelve EY Masterclassers will be joined by other interested staff and encouraged to work as a community to develop ideas for innovative practice concerning the role of ICT in transition from nursery to primary education. The project has been boosted by the previous experience of ICT Development Manager, Rosetta McLeod. She was able to explain to those at the workshop about her involvement in COMPASS, a European project which brought together head teachers from seven European countries to compare competencies for effective school leadership. Following three years involved with this, she is well-versed on how to develop and sustain a relationship with others separated by geography. Similar to the community of secondees, the main methods of communication and comparison were email, video conferencing, online bulletin boards and chat. But as Mrs McLeod explained to the secondees, a model was developed for the Compass online discussions based on both synchronous (real-time) and asynchronous communication. Accordingly, the group became expert at precise and effective communication centred on the agreed topic for discussion, and various relevant documents were posted in the forum in advance so that prior preparation could take place either by individuals or by groups. Each conference was time-contained; for example 2 hours of real-time discussion, followed by another few weeks where further contributions and reflections could be posted. A summary of each conference was then produced. "The whole process was tightly managed with the topics agreed in advance and relating to national and local initiatives about school leadership in the partner countries," she explains. COMPASS proved to be an efficient and informative approach that used ICT to bring together individuals with a shared agenda of using international links to drive improvement.



### North Lanarkshire

In the afternoon, North Lanarkshire spoke of how they will also be making use of video conferencing, using the Marratech system. Stephen McCrossan is the secondee leading the project to explore the potential for running classes remotely along the cooperative learning model. He is currently running a higher ICT class at his previous school, helping six pupils develop the appropriate academic, ICT and social skills necessary to pass their exam. Throughout the life of the innovative teacher project, he plans to explore the use of the cooperative approach in a remote setting.

As he explained to the group of other secondees, the immediate issues he faces are managing the motivation of pupils, made more problematic by his own remoteness; differences in maturity and learning styles; and unique to this situation, the implications of students coming from two different schools following an earlier amalgamation. To facilitate he has allocated roles to two of the pupils: a coordinator/motivator to gee up the other students and ensure they attend classes and log on to the group forum, and an expert to ensure pupils have local support should they need it. The students meet together for sessions but also communicate with one another via email, a forum and blogging. The group has gelled well, and the approach is working. Mr McCrossan is now looking at expanding the programme to other topics within the local authority, such as modern languages.

### West Dumbartonshire

Meanwhile, West Dumbartonshire is progressing with its project to build up a community of Glow mentors who will coach teachers on how to get the best out of the portal, which is due to come on line in 2007. The mentors have been recruited and the two secondees, Drew Murray and Andy O'Shea, are encouraging them to access and contribute to the closed forum they have established. As the pair explained to the other secondees, the prerequisite for becoming a Glow mentor was to undertake a project using ICT and which Mr Murray and O'Shea hope to publish in similar form to Virtual Classroom Tours, as used within the Partners in Learning initiative. Some of the areas being investigated by the mentors include online homework, animation, mindmapping, smart notebooks, podcasting and school websites.



### Project Plans

Besides hearing from the three main contributors, the workshop also focused on community building within the group by giving the secondees an opportunity to work in groups to air any difficulties they were encountering. Most were facing challenges, and being able to explore them in the small group discussions allowed for others to suggest different approaches or to simply lend a sympathetic ear.

The final section of the day was given over to beginning detailed project plans that will be completed by the secondees over the next few weeks. This will show how each authority plans to progress to the next level. Jacqueline Campbell, the project manager at SQA hopes that by early next year there will be some VCT ready in time for the UK Innovative Teacher Awards in February, and to encourage this she plans to visit any authority that would like further support on how to develop them. And by the next meeting of the group at the end of February there will be an opportunity for more participants to showcase their projects.