Teaching matters

Articles and opinions on primary teaching, with tips and ideas for the classroom

Digital technologies in my classroom

I am a teaching principal in Cloghans Hill NS, a one teacher school in Co Mayo. We have 12 pupils ranging from senior infants to sixth class with a full time SNA and 20 hours SET.

In terms of technology we operate a BYOD (Bring Your Own Device) policy as well as having an interactive whiteboard and access to eight laptops.

It is a challenge to teach the curriculum and engage all the different class levels and abilities and achieve curricular aims and objectives but digital technologies play an important role in helping me to do this.

A lot of work in a small school with four levels of multi-class groupings is thematic and project-based, allowing you to differentiate learning aims and objectives and match them to outcomes which are age, class and ability appropriate. When working on a project I will often give children a choice of media in which to present their learning, including creating a poster or comic book, a Google Slides presentation, a Scratch project, a Book Creator book, a Green Screen presentation or a stop motion animation. Independence in their choice of presentation and options for them to work in both the same and mixed ability groups allow the children to personalise their own learning.

A typical lesson in maths might look like this:

• One group/class level engages in online work, on Khan Academy or Studyladder. These free programmes allow me to set work for the children based on the topics and themes we are covering. At the end of each day, I can look at how they got on, see where they had problems and then address these in the next lesson or in a quick review with an individual child.

• Another group/class level works with concrete materials with prompt cards or tasks to complete. I often source these cards online, make my own or ask the children to make task cards for each other using QR codes. These are very simple to make and add into a table on a Word or Google document.

• A third group completes independent book work while the fourth group works with me.

• All groups then rotate to allow me to work with each one, while the others work independently.

Monitoring and assessment of this work can take many forms, including teacher observation and conferencing as well as reviewing completed online tasks. I use an iPod or iPhone to record the activity of some groups so I can see where help might be required.

I use this station teaching model for many curricular areas and find it really useful for multi-class teaching.

The use of our school website, Skype and in particular social media, like Twitter has allowed us to make virtual friends with lots of other schools and make our school seem a lot bigger than it is!

We engage with other schools in both Ireland and further afield and have learned about cultures and school routines in other countries as well as engaging online with scientists, astronauts and engineers.

Getting ideas from art works or musical creations in other schools is invaluable, as you need a large and varied bank of resources when you have a child in your class for eight years in a row!

Teaching in a multi-class setting can be challenging but I have found that using digital technologies has really helped me to improve my teaching and to engage my pupils in so many ways that I can’t imagine teaching without it.

Written by ISEULT MANGAN, Cloghans Hill NS, Co Mayo.

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⇒ See a video of some of the ways Iseult uses digital technology in this video on the PDST Technology in Education Good Practice page http://bit.ly/2CFfNMS
⇒ Check out http://TeacherCPD.ie and contact your local education centre for information on PDST Technology in Education courses for teachers.