



Sharing good practice

Living Schools Lab (LSL) is a project involving three primary and three post-primary schools working together here in Ireland and also on a pan-European basis with teachers and schools in 12 European countries. It aims to develop a sustainable, growing network of schools where teachers can showcase best practice and share ways to successfully embed the use of technology in teaching and learning across the whole school. It operates nationally first and foremost, with a European online Community of Practice available for broader sharing between participant countries/schools. The project started in 2012 and is co-funded by the European Commission.

Within the Ireland LSL primary grouping, there is one Advanced School and two Advanced Practitioner primary schools taking part. An Advanced School is a school where technology is embedded in teaching and learning across the whole school. An Advanced Practitioner school is one where technology is embedded in 'pockets', with just one or two teachers making innovative use of ICT within the school.

Irish primary schools

Scoil na gCeithre Máistrí in Athlone, Co Westmeath is the Advanced Primary School representing Ireland. Gearóid Ó Duibhir, ICT co-ordinator of the 16-teacher Gaelscoil, says their involvement in the project has given great impetus to the ICT agenda among the staff. Although highly innovative with the use of special laptops for children (*Fizzbooks*) and other technologies already, Gearóid emphasises that the school's eLearning Plan underpins much of their work. The school has an eLearning team, comprising one teacher from each class level, Gearóid and the school principal. They meet every second Wednesday for 45 minutes. The team members then meet with the other teachers from their class level to disseminate ideas, policy, feedback and training. They are careful not to focus too much on equipment or particular tools, instead ensuring that their use in teaching and learning remains to the fore.

Over in Tuam, Co Galway, Ciarán Kennedy from St Patrick's Primary School has progressed something similar within his school since getting involved with the project (an Advanced Practitioner school in LSL). An eLearning team has been established among the staff, and *Edmodo*, a free online



Living Schools Lab in Action

learning environment, was introduced to a small number of teachers. This has proven so popular with pupils that more teachers have been drawn into the project.

The other Advanced Practitioner primary school in the project is St Corban's BNS in Naas, Co Kildare. Nigel Lane teaches fifth class and his focus is on the introduction of tablets (iPads) to support active learning methodologies. This involves planning for their use, using them to enhance students' learning, as well as logistical practicalities and meeting the CPD needs of the other teachers.

Benefits

Involvement in the LSL project for the three primary schools has provided some very tangible benefits for the schools and teachers involved. The opportunity to share best practice, to gain a greater understanding of what others are doing, why they're doing it and how they are getting on has been of great benefit. This naturally encourages innovative practice in the classroom as well as leading to ideas for how things can be done better. For example, Ciarán (St Pat's in Tuam) was able to discuss his proposed *Edmodo* implementation with Sarah-Jayne Carey, a post-primary teacher involved in the project who has been using *Edmodo* for a few years.

Although a post-primary implementation may seem like a very different scenario, in fact there were many useful tips and considerations that Sarah-Jayne could share prior to any decisions being made. At a very practical level, she presented a webinar showing step-by-step how she set it up for students and other staff members in her school. She outlined how it was being used to engage students in their learning across various post-primary subjects and, crucially, she offered to answer any questions that might pop up during implementation.

Getting involved

The LSL project is currently expanding and open to new schools who wish to join the network. To get involved email lsl@pdst.ie with your name and school roll number. The project offers teachers opportunities to enhance their teaching practice and confidence through peer exchanges with other schools and teachers. It also offers online professional development opportunities – upcoming themes include collaborative learning and 1:1 devices – and there are short online learning events ('Learning Snacks') where ideas are generated and considered in the context of real classroom practice.
Web: www.lsl.eun.org and www.irelandliving-schoolslab.wordpress.com

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