
Sharing Science Across Ireland (or Science on ICE): using science to address mutual understanding

This project focuses on teachers exploring ways of making science teaching more Innovative, Creative and Exciting. It is also International, Cross-community and Enjoyable.

Why Sharing Science Across Ireland (SSAI)?

The model brings together teachers, pupils and others who share a common interest in science and can use this focus to improve their learning experiences, as well as make new contacts beyond the scope of their normal community experience. One of the central aims of SSAI is to help increase the uptake of science studies to higher levels in schools, further and higher education and to help pupils see the relevance of science to their future employment.

This project is funded by the European Programme for Peace and Reconciliation, under Measure 5.5 Education, Cross-border School and Youth Co-operation (European Structural Fund). It is supported by the Department for Education (DENI), the Department for Education and Science in the Republic of Ireland, the Association for Science Education (ASE), the Irish Science Teachers Association (ISTA) and the five Education and Library Boards in Northern Ireland.

SSAI was launched at a joint ASE/ISTA conference in The Dundalk Institute of Technology in March 2004, and involves 52 primary and 29 post-primary schools from Northern Ireland and the six border counties of the Republic of Ireland. Schools are clustered in groups of three to five, with each cluster having cross-community and cross-border representation.

All clusters have attended one of eight days at W5, during

which the pupils worked together on the exhibits and enjoyed a demonstration given by W5 staff. Their teachers met together to plan future joint activities.

Each cluster works on an agreed theme or topic with a science and/or technology aspect, exchanging findings and communicating by email or teleconferencing. Themes include healthy eating, energy saving, recycling, thinking skills, captivating starts to lessons, creative practical activities and many more.

The project aims to explore ways of making the science experiences for pupils more Innovative, Creative and Exciting, whilst giving them and their teachers opportunities to broaden their range of contacts in the science community.

In parallel with this, there are opportunities for links to be made between 'key players' in science education. Over one hundred teacher trainers, university science faculty heads, advisory and support staff attended the launch conference in March 2004, engaging in a range of seminars on topics of common interest.

All clusters are already sharing experimental outcomes using ICT, while others have arranged events, some involving parents, such as environmental trips, activities at leisure centres and exchange visits between schools. One school in each cluster will host a science show attended by the other schools, providing another opportunity for meeting to talk about science.

Some schools are hoping to exhibit their projects at events such as 'Express Yourself', 'Young Innovators' and EsatBT in January 2006, as well as in local libraries, shopping centres and other venues. It is hoped that all schools involved will carry their

joint project work forward into 2005-6 and beyond.

One obvious way to extend SSAI is through the Science Across the World project. A fee of £20, or €30, for life membership provides opportunities to exchange project findings with schools in over a hundred other countries. As a prelude to this, the SSAI schools will all participate in a pilot version of 'chalkbytes', a web-based resource for exchanging information and views throughout Ireland and South Africa.

We hope to extend the project from February 2006 to June 2006 and close the funding phase with a celebration of achievement and exhibition during the last few months.

Relevance to general audience

The model could be applied in any situation where community disharmony needs to be addressed, whether the tensions are of race, colour, class, religion or cultural identity. Early indications suggest that it works.

Key outcomes

With less than a year remaining, the focus will be to build the legacy of the project; that is, pupils engaging in more exciting science activities and pursuing science studies to higher levels, teachers continuing to be innovative and creative in their teaching, key players sharing their views on the strategic development of science education throughout Ireland and everyone benefiting by networking with a broad range of contacts. It is hoped that, not only will the schools remain in contact, but that they will continue to make science exciting and encourage pupils to study the sciences to higher levels.

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