Accelerating Digital Innovation in Schools through Regional Innovation Hubs and a Whole-School Mentoring Model

iHub4Schools final conclusions

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The time has arrived to announce that the iHub4Schools project is coming to a close. This project has been an incredibly enriching experience, bringing together nearly **1000** individuals including **teachers, school leaders, mentors, researchers, teacher trainers, policy makers, and start-up companies** from five different countries.

Throughout the project, we focused on developing a **School mentoring model** and implementing it in various educational settings. Our goal was to identify aspects that would contribute to the successful adoption and spread of technology-enabled educational innovation. We have discovered that there is **no one-size-fits-all solution**, as educational contexts, policies, and the needs and expectations of the individuals involved vary significantly. However, it is evident that with policy level support, funding, and collaborative programs, significant progress can be made.

A crucial aspect of implementing change in schools is **cultivating a culture of leadership** and garnering the support and willingness of school leaders to embrace innovation.

While a few innovative teachers can act as **catalysts for change**, sustaining and spreading innovation among all teachers is essential for promoting learner-centered teaching practices in classrooms. In our project, sharing good practices and learning from each other's experiences emerged as a vital support mechanism. There are numerous ways to continue supporting these practices, such as fostering co-learning opportunities or establishing platforms for knowledge sharing. In our project, we also focused a lot on research and evidence. We provided schools with solutions that had already been validated in one way or another, and at the same time encouraged school teams and teachers to reflect at different stages on what changes were needed and why.

Our mentoring model played a pivotal role in assisting teachers in adopting new practices. However, it is important to acknowledge that change takes time. To ensure that students benefit from teachers' transformed teaching methods, it is crucial to maintain established forms of collaboration and provide ongoing support for teachers. I remain hopeful that the **Regional Innovation Hubs** we have established will serve as platforms for this continued support and growth.
I would like to thank all the teachers, leaders and mentors involved in our mentoring activities as well as the project partners and other stakeholders involved.

What have we achieved?

Overview of the main results

We identified the characteristics of a schools where digital innovation has been approached in a systemic and pedagogically rigorous way (WP1).

We examined existing networks of educators and investigated the support mechanisms perceived as significant in helping network members generate value from participating in different networks, given their critical importance for network success (WP2).

Proposed the concept of Regional Innovation Hub to scale and sustain innovative pedagogical approaches in certain regional level by including variety of stakeholders (WP2).

Developed and evaluated a School mentoring model: a process model and practical individual methods to support schools in introducing innovative digital approaches for developing school level practices and teachers' pedagogical practices (WP3).

Investigated the experiences of the teachers and leaders (600+) in Estonia, Finland, Georgia and Lithuania to understand how they perceived the changes during the mentoring in various practices and experiences of the mentors to implement the School mentoring model (WP4).

iHub4Schools in a snapshot, have a look on an interactive flipbook

EXPERT ADVICE

The support from the school leadership is one of the main support mechanisms to develop an innovative digital school.

While some schools are engaged in systemic activities that follow a well-developed strategy, other schools may need support to integrate technology effectively.

What is the aim?

Key elements in the mentoring approach

iHub4Schools School mentoring model

The aim of the model is to **foster a sustainable adoption of digital innovation at school level.**
The focus is on teachers' understanding of digital technology and practices to **implement technology in a pedagogically meaningful way.**
The model promotes teachers' professional learning with peers and school management to create the culture and practices for evidence-informed implementation of digital innovation. More information of the model: https://www.ihub4schools.eu/mentoring-model/

- **Evidence-informed process:** the importance of asking questions: where is the development need, what kind of challenges we will solve with different initiatives, what is the outcome of new practices to teachers & students (Toolbox with practices and instruments).
- **Whole-school approach:** setting a clear vision, allocating resources effectively, providing professional development, creating a culture of innovation, and monitoring progress (School mentoring model and methods as part of it).
- **Teachers' digi-pedagogical practices**: pedagogical scenarios that integrate affordances of the technologies, principles of learning and content knowledge (Pedagogical scenarios).

EXPERT ADVICE

Expert's TALKS about iHub4Schools

This webinar is part of the Beyond Networking MOOC on EUN Academy

Mentoring for digital innovations in schools - some principles

- **Schools should genuinely benefit from mentoring and the development activities should be based on the needs of schools. Schools and teachers are the best to define the needs and benefits themselves.**
- **The implementation of digital innovations in schools does not seem to take place without external support, as it often also requires changing pedagogical practices, not just the use of some technological tool or solution.**
- **Teacher collaboration and peer-learning are effective means to develop teachers' practices but good examples, scenarios and models are, of course, important.**
- **Mentoring should be based on the evidence of teachers' current digital skills and pedagogical practices as well as the status of the school.**
- **The effect of mentoring must also be evaluated realistically and honestly.**



iHub4Schools Stakeholders Engagement

RESOURCES

The recording is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sd-o_MiVMw

iHub4Schools Final Conference

On the 25th of April the iHub4Schools final event took place. The **Conference of Innovative Education: Fostering Sustainable Digital Innovation in Schools** was organised in Tallinn (at Tallinn University) and was attended by policy makers, teachers and school leaders and researchers. The main objective of the event was to share iHub4Schools main outcomes; to support the discussion about the culture of innovation and experimentation in schools, encouraging teachers to try new pedagogical approaches with digital tools & to encourage collaboration and communication among teachers, and staff to foster a sense of community and shared ownership of digital innovation in the school.

The recording is available on YouTube: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6sd-o_MiVMw

Mentoring methods as supporting mechanism to foster digital innovation in teaching & learning: webinar with the European Training Foundation

The webinar took place on the 23rd of May, it was conceptualized as a final event concluding a set of activities under the umbrella of DIGI ENE ETF Network for Excellence. The webinar was attended by educators, experts and policy makers from 16 different countries. More

Engagement with stakeholder on national level

Finland: e.g. webinar for tutor teachers and city coordinators in Päijät-Häme region; Digimarket (Digitori) event in the Faculty of Educational Sciences, UH

Georgia: iHub4Schools Conference in Georgia presenting all project's results with the Ministry of Education and Science

Lithuania: involvement of schools and teachers on the local level

Estonia: „DigiKiirendi“ programm

**samples of activities/the full list are included on the website*



Regional Innovation Hubs

Regional Innovation Hubs established in the project will promote the expansion of digital innovation and are built upon existing/ emerging initiatives and networks involving schools, universities, and industries in the field of educational and digital innovation.

An additional objective of the consortium is to incorporate the project's outcomes into a comprehensive set of policy recommendations to ensure that the findings of the project are utilized in the decision-making process at the national policy level. This package will include a toolkit that outlines the process of establishing Regional Innovation Hubs and implementing a school-to-school, whole-school mentoring model in countries with differing educational policies, socio-cultural contexts, and levels of digital maturity.

Scaling up digital learning

Heli Aru-Chabilan, HARNO, Estonia

Four participating countries in this project exhibit notable diversity, encompassing disparate educational systems, varying degrees of national wealth available to invest in their respective education systems, and varying levels of maturity in using digital technology in schools. Nonetheless, despite these varieties, we also have identified numerous shared challenges, uneven level of teachers' digital competences been cited as one of the most important one. Very often on a policy-making level investments in hardware, software, and internet connectivity, are taking priority and the crucial aspect of cultivating digital practices get overlooked. **Our practical work with teachers, and interviews with different stakeholders**, however, **confirm that to ensure lasting and impactful changes, it is essential for teachers themselves to be motivated and interested in utilizing digital technology.**

The main recommendations that emerged from our work were following:

Make improvement of teachers' digital competences a national level focus and make sure that respective initiatives are meaningful for teachers themselves.

It is a complex topic with many interwoven themes such as assessment practices, leadership or availability of digital learning materials. These initiatives need to be embedded in whole-school developmental processes and integrated into subject teaching with emphasis on how digital technology supports the learner's learning and how to make students ready for the digital society.

Make sure that teachers have easy access to professional development programs.

Mentoring schemes to support less experienced teachers, opportunities for more experienced teachers to share their experience to scale up best practices, different training schemes to further teachers' personal as well as school teams' competences.

Support teachers' expert networks for learning and sharing best practices to keep up with the rapidly changing digital world.

Led by experts of the field these networks can be sources of inspiration and sharing. Networking events, training and online communities of practice, mentoring and opportunities for school-to-school collaboration, all can be occasions for educators to connect with peers who share similar interests and challenges, exchange ideas, and collaborate with digital projects.

Prioritise school leadership issues and value school autonomy.

Clear vision, common understanding of goals and aims, collaborative culture and skillful management are crucial for sustaining a school innovation. Provide school leaders with education, guidance, and mentoring to understand and manage methods for promoting sustainable digital innovation within their schools.

Provide tools for evidence-based competence development.

Openness and transparency about competences and practices are very important. Headmasters and teachers should be equipped with the skills to work with assessment tools collaboratively, valuing collective reflection and shared understanding that guides improvement practices. School owners must incorporate assessment information into broader management practices and support improvements through various means.

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iHub4Schools supports the creation of

Regional innovation Hubs

fostering the scaling of the digital innovation

Join us! You can be part of this change!

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