



## Innovative Teacher: Bartholomeus Verswijvel, Belgium Project: “TeacherAid”

When Bart Verswijvel decided to have his students teach ICT to his fellow teachers for his project, **TeacherAid**, some colleagues thought it may be risky to put kids in charge. He said they asked: “Isn’t a bit dangerous that you have teachers having to listen to pupils?”

As Bart’s students embarked on the project, not only did they help their teachers close the digital gap between themselves and their tech savvy students. They were visited by tech industry insiders who wanted a closer look at the project. They were even invited to the Royal Palace of Belgium to present their project. “It was a success story. It was all over the papers,” says Bart, “My students were proud, they belonged to something important.”

### Project: “TeacherAid”

**TeacherAid** was born when Bart Verswijvel’s school, Immaculate Instituut in Belgium, got two SMART Boards that nobody used. “Many of the teachers want to change, they want to use ICT technology, but they are a bit afraid,” he says. Bart decided to launch his project with a presentation by his students to the teachers at the school, using the new SMART Boards. “All of the pupils presented their digital world, what do they do with their computers when they’re at home.”

The students then gave the teachers catalogues of what they had just been shown, and asked them to pin point the features that they wanted to learn. They would study at in-service training sessions during school lunch breaks, taught by Bart’s students.

Despite the potential ‘dangers’ of pupils teaching teachers, 70% of Bart’s colleagues took part in the sessions. “It really worked,” he says. For example, a lot of teachers simply didn’t know how to use the remote control, or the ‘beamer’ for the SMART Board. The kids taught them how to freeze the screen, or mute it. “They were so happy that they could do it, it gave them confidence.” Bart’s talking about the teachers here, though he adds that teaching these concepts reinforced learning in the students as well.

In addition to helping teachers get comfortable with new hardware, students trained teachers on Microsoft Excel, Windows Movie Maker, and enhancing Microsoft PowerPoint presentations with audio. Everyone benefited, adds Bart. “It’s a win-win for both groups, for the teachers, and for the pupils, also for the school as a whole.”

*“In earlier days it was a piece of paper, a task, you handed it in to the teacher, he marked it and gave it back. That was it. But you can do more I think, with your teaching.”*

- **Bart Verswijvel,**  
**Teacher**



## Microsoft® Partners in Learning

Bart's students utilize the following software applications on a regular basis:

- Microsoft Excel
- Microsoft PowerPoint
- Windows Movie Maker



### Results and Benefits

In addition to national media attention in Belgium, and a visit to the royal palace, **TeacherAid** is now being used by other schools. Bart's students are continuing to teach; now they're working with 1<sup>st</sup> graders. He believes tech savvy students are an underutilized resource. "There is so much knowledge of technology present in the school, which could be used better. Also pupils can offer something, in every school you have ICT smart pupils that have some things to offer."

During the project, the students did more than teach. They blogged about the experience, made a website, created manuals, and had online discussions about the role of technology in schools with foreign friends in their social network. Bart recalls one topic that generated a lot of discussion: Would it be good to remove all books from schools and just use laptops?

Bart felt the role reversal, and the networking, added up to a bigger world view for his students. "The thing is your pupils are happy, and they have the impression we belong to something which goes outside our school. They go home and they can tell a story about it. And they're really interested in things outside school, in other countries."

### Peer to Peer Learning

As he's become more involved in using ICT to teach his students, Bart Verswijvel has realized the importance of learning from others in his profession. "Microsoft Partners in Learning network is really great, I have found some very good online colleagues, and we share ideas, and that's the best in-service training there is. It's life-long learning, which I really need."

Bart belongs to an e-training network in Europe that has 100 thousand teachers registered, and he likens it to a virtual laboratory, and feels that the collaboration is essential to the job of teaching today. He also finds he needs to learn from his network of colleagues to stay on top of the requirements of his students: "I have to challenge them every day because I'm teaching ICT students. They want new stuff and they're really interested in stuff they don't know yet."