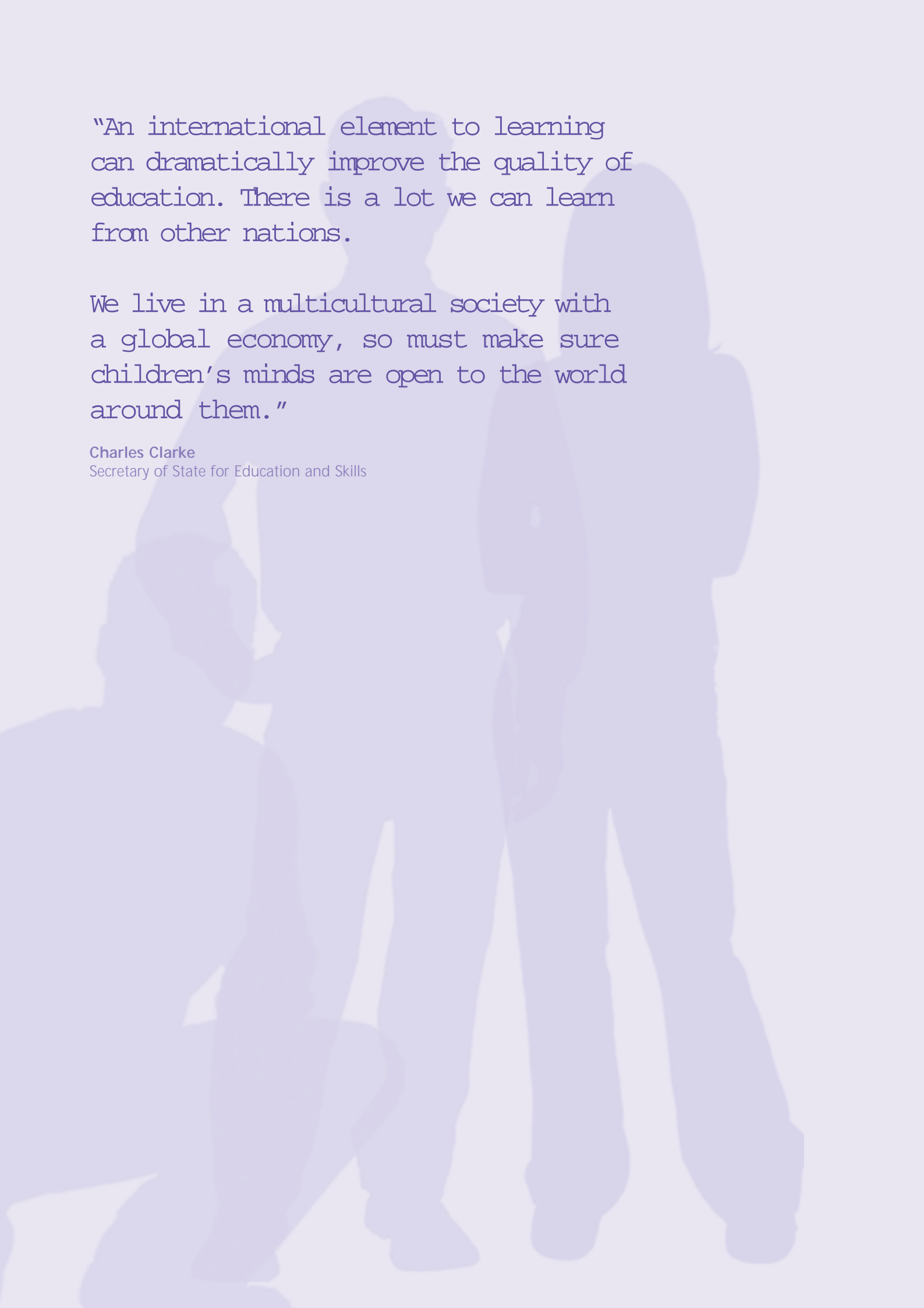


# CELEBRATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY



**CELEBRATING CULTURAL DIVERSITY**  
discover, understand, appreciate through ICT

The background of the page features a light purple silhouette of four people standing in a circle, holding hands. The silhouettes are semi-transparent and serve as a decorative backdrop for the text.

"An international element to learning can dramatically improve the quality of education. There is a lot we can learn from other nations.

We live in a multicultural society with a global economy, so must make sure children's minds are open to the world around them."

**Charles Clarke**

Secretary of State for Education and Skills

There are many ways in which technology can support understanding between people from different cultural and linguistic communities and celebrate our common humanity. This booklet draws on examples of the successful use of new media to support cultural diversity, some of which were celebrated at UK Netd@ys 2003 (see box). These examples come from Europe and beyond, and show the benefits of international and cross-cultural links, and how these links can be made easier by technology. The young people involved enjoyed an enriched curriculum, which gave them opportunities for creativity and fun – we hope to share this enjoyment with you.

Cross-border and intercultural links between young people are becoming increasingly common. This is due partly to ease of communication with fast, affordable and reliable broadband connections becoming more widespread. The support of government and the European Commission for activities to build bridges between young people has also been important. Initiatives like the Global Gateway (see below) are designed to make such links an everyday part of learners' experiences. The European Commission's school twinning programme aims to increase the percentage of schools in Europe taking part in Comenius-grant-funded school partnerships from three to 10 by 2006.

## About Netd@ys

Netd@ys is an initiative of the European Commission to promote the educational use of new media in the areas of youth and culture. It provides an open platform for all those who are willing to showcase their experiences of educational and cultural networking and for those who wish to develop international links.

The initiative culminates in a showcase week – Netd@ys Week – when all the Netd@ys projects participate. In 2003, Netd@ys Week took place in November, and the theme was dialogue involving different cultures. Three aspects of cultural heritage were focused on:

- **Discover it**  
Take time to learn about cultures and traditions in your own country and in others.
- **Understand it**  
Try to have a good understanding of these cultures and traditions.
- **Appreciate it**  
Analyse the benefits and impact of other cultural heritages and compare them with yours.

Details about future Netd@ys can be found at <http://www.netdayseurope.org>



## Global Gateway

The Global Gateway [<http://www.globalgateway.org.uk>] was launched recently by Education and Skills Secretary, Charles Clarke, to help schools make stronger links with other countries. He urged every school in the country to do this. Eighteen countries, including Guyana, Latvia, the Philippines, Romania and Serbia, are currently signed up to the Global Gateway, with many more expected to join.

The Global Gateway site, developed by the British Council for the DfES, will enable pupils to learn more about different cultures, and help schools to forge links with countries all over the world. Schools have quick and easy access to a wealth of information on developing an international dimension to all aspects of education. The site also gives teachers the chance to exchange ideas with colleagues throughout the world.

## Growing up in a global world

*"Our children are growing up now in a global world which is far more apparent, far more immediate in every moment of their experience, than anything I, as a 53-year-old, discovered when I was at school. Children know today that they are growing up in a global world in which we are all interdependent in our different ways. I don't think we've done enough in that globalised world to really build the direct understandings of different people, different cultures, different civilisations, between people in different ways.*

*The best way to achieve this is by empowering and enabling individual schools, individual colleges to find individual schools, individual colleges in other countries to come together and make something happen. We have to do what we can to facilitate the actual exchange and actual engagement with people in other countries. And I find this a very exciting and stimulating way of operating and developing, and an important contribution to the future stability and strength of the increasingly interdependent, interconnected world."*

**Charles Clarke**  
Secretary of State for Education and Skills

## Netd@ys conference

The UK Netd@ys 2003 conference, in November 2003, was one of a series of linked events across Europe. Participants from 10 countries, including one from Zimbabwe, joined UK delegates for a one-day conference, hosted by Becta in Coventry, to share experiences in the use of ICT to cross cultural boundaries in UK schools and community organisations.

Among the highlights of a day that one delegate described as "an exciting place to be because the event took risks and tackled issues" were:

- three short video clips of pioneering work in Northern Ireland, showing how communications technology enhances learning for young people across local, national and international boundaries
- video conference links with teachers and students at the British Council offices in Tokyo, St Pius X College in Magherafelt, Northern Ireland, and Lent Rise Combined School in Buckinghamshire, that provided contrasting insights into how ICT is being used to cross time, space and cultures
- a talk, by Niel McLean of Becta, about personalised learning and how it cannot be 'delivered', and about the five steps in organisational transformation, from the lone enthusiast to redefining the very purpose of a school
- overseas visitors describing innovative projects involving young people worldwide
- UK project leaders sharing details of work in progress with ethnic minorities and new ways of celebrating musical cultures
- Sir Robert Dowling, head teacher of George Dixon International School, Birmingham, who gave an entertaining and inspiring insight into school leadership in a multicultural community
- young people whose maturity, confidence and talents were a credit to their school and community, and whose questions were a stimulating challenge to delegates.



## Workshop: young people's questions

Participants' responses to questions posed by young people:

*How can pupils from abroad use ICT to maintain contact with their extended families?*

**Comments included:**

- Communicating abroad is to a certain extent normal – part of everyday life.
- Solar power is an important means of powering ICT equipment in some countries.

**Suggestions included:**

- Schools could be a community ICT resource for all users, whether in the UK, or Zimbabwe and Somalia, where community use of school facilities is normal, or Jamaica, where there is access to ICT, but aged technology.
- Internet access could be provided to newspapers in one's home language.
- Using communication tools like email, satellite, fax, video, web cams, telephone, instant messaging/chat services, radio and digital cameras, while remembering that there is still much value in the traditional post system.
- Making use of software for translating languages, especially Eastern languages.
- Consider using people as a resource for international education, for example visitors, children and teachers themselves.

*How can schools identify individuals and organisations across the globe who could further support the notion of an international education?*

**Suggested methods of identifying sources of support included:**

- search engines for education
- national grids for learning in other countries (see the list of the International Federation for Information Processing [<http://www.edu.ge.ch/cptic/prospective/projets/ifip/contributions.html>] and international school networks like the European Schoolnet [<http://www.eun.org>])
- international project databases iEARN (International Education and Resource Network [<http://www.earn.org>]) and Childnet International [<http://www.childnet-int.org>], UK OneWorld network [<http://www.oneworld.net>], the British Council's Windows on the World [<http://www.wotw.org.uk>] and Montage World [<http://www.montageworld.co.uk>])

*If schools and students want to make greater use of e-learning, who should be responsible for quality control?*

**Suggestions included:**

- Schools, teachers, parents, publishing companies and pupils themselves – "to some extent this must always be under the control of the learner."
- Providers of standard marks, NAACE and NGfL for example.

**Comments included:**

- The European Computer Driving Licence is a measure of quality assurance for ICT skills.
- No specific structure is available for quality assurance.
- There is a need for a nationally acceptable standard for e-learning quality.
- Part of Ofsted's new role is to judge ICT across the curriculum.

*For a variety of reasons, difficulty with literacy and use of English is a challenge facing many students and schools. What contribution can ICT make?*

**Participants suggested that ICT can:**

- help with motivation and can make a wide range of language skills accessible to pupils
- provide: online dictionaries and translation sites, online lessons with native language speakers, talking software, video conferencing as a teaching aid with language teaching
- save costs, e.g. video conferencing is cheaper than paying for a language teacher to travel between schools
- make possible discussion in other languages in preparation for curriculum studies
- enable pupils to practise literacy and language skills through the use of software as a 'personal' tool allowing them to make mistakes without embarrassment
- reduce the language barrier through the use of icons, provided they are clear and make sense to users
- offer access to an international curriculum through global online courses and video-conferencing teaching
- support a varied pace for lessons, so that pupils can experience differentiated work to overcome barriers to learning
- elicit positive responses from pupils more consistently than a 'normal' classroom situation



- provide individually tailored learning; Successmaster-type integrated learning systems, although sometimes mechanical, can be successful
- enable pupils to build on each other's strengths by working in pairs at a computer, e.g. a second language learner with a native speaker.

*If schools are to make links across the globe, how best are time differentials dealt with?*

**Suggestions included:**

- Agree a protocol for procedures and times when it is all right to contact each other, and secure everyone's commitment at the start.
- Recognise and work around different times zones: Australia is 12 hours ahead of UK time; California eight hours behind.
- Use email, which is not synchronous, i.e. time dependent, for much communication.
- Use synchronic tools like mobile phones or video conferencing only at suitable times.
- Give deadlines for responding to messages and completing assignments.
- Consider exchange visits; although expensive, they can be motivating.
- Lengthen the school day, with more flexi-time.

## Case studies 1: People – celebrating my culture

A number of examples of projects are described in the following pages. They are divided into those where the emphasis is on understanding people and those with a curriculum focus. The divide is not clear-cut, and it is significant that many projects that began life curriculum- and outcome-related evolve into a looser, more people-focused and culture-based community.

### Global Teenager project

The Global Teenager project is an intercultural virtual exchange programme between students all over the world. Launched in 1999 to bring the full potential of ICT into the classroom, the project is funded by the International Institute for Communication and Development in the Netherlands in partnership with World Vision Zimbabwe.

The aim of the project is to enhance secondary pupils' ICT skills and learning skills while increasing their understanding of other cultures by staging lively global classroom debates in cyberspace. The Global Teenager project unites secondary school pupils from all over the world in a safe, structured virtual environment, thereby helping to bridge the cultural and digital divide between the developing and developed world.

So far over 3,000 pupils from 95 schools in 27 countries are taking part, and the number is rising every month. Learners from 165 classes communicate with each other in a learning circle. The schools are located in four continents:

- Africa: Benin, Burkina Faso, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Senegal, South Africa, Tanzania, Uganda, Zambia, Zimbabwe.
- Europe and the Middle-East: Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, the Netherlands, Romania, Ukraine, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon.
- North America: USA.
- Central and South America: Jamaica, Bolivia, Surinam.

Sithabile Urenje, from Zimbabwe, is co-ordinator of the Global Teenager project:

"I am both a country co-ordinator and facilitator for other countries participating in the project. I guide schools in adopting ICT and work with organisations wanting to adopt schools for the Global Teenager project.

I have been with Global Teenager for the past four years now and have therefore gained an enormous amount of ground experience. Twice a year, clusters of 8-12 classes from different schools link up via email to form virtual learning circles, the main activity of the Global Teenager project. They discuss a theme of their choice for the next 10 weeks and the outcomes of their discussions are posted in real time on the virtual campus."



## myEurope: Cultural diversity through online activities

Petru Dumitru, a Romanian, works for the European Schoolnet and is based in Brussels. He co-ordinates two large projects involving 7,500 schools: myEurope and Spring Day in Europe. He says:

"myEurope has dozens of examples of how the cultural diversity of Europe is brought into the classroom via the internet and how new technologies help pupils break through communication and language barriers, learning together by sharing.

They show how individual contributions to collaborative exchanges help pupils to become aware of the European cultural differences and similarities when integrating local cultural features into a wider European context. By getting involved in such activities, pupils and teachers experience the expansion of their work from the desk to the continent and get a deeper understanding of themselves, their families and their communities. This is a practical exercise to see, assess, understand and appreciate Europe, its cultural diversity, people, events and places through their own eyes."

Two examples of myEurope projects:

### Proverbs

Noemi Lusi, Rome, Italy [noemilusi@infinito.it]

"With my students and with students and teachers from other countries we share our national and regional proverbs, illustrate and explain them and translate them into other languages. I find the activity very effective to show unity in values and cultural diversity in representing the proverbs through words and images using ICT. Have a look at my site and see if you agree!"

[<http://valuesandproverbs.tripod.com>]

### Chats

David Valle Cazorla

[dvalle.lafarga@institutio.org] teaches at La Farga School, near Barcelona, a large school with more than 1,600 students and 110 teachers teaching at different levels: kindergarten, primary, secondary and post-compulsory pre-university studies. Here he describes positive uses of chat rooms.

"In our school we regularly participate in chats with 14-year-old kids promoted by [myeurope.eun.org](http://myeurope.eun.org) in order to promote European awareness. Right now we are participating in the chat 'Enlargement: How to

inform citizens?' using English as a tool of communication. We are also using new technologies in our school with the same objective with schools around the world (Australia and Brazil, among other countries) to encourage students to know a bit better the world in which we live with kids of the same age.

Two official languages are taught in our school: Catalan and Spanish. Some of our classes have English as a third study language, for English and history lessons. The myEurope project provides us with school contacts, European activities and resources. For example, by taking part in the myEurope chats, students realise that English is a language spoken all around the world, and not only a series of grammar rules they have to learn.

I would like to involve my students in the Year of Literature. My pedagogical goal is to encourage them to read books and to write stories in Catalan, Spanish and English. Other plans include doing a Comenius project, and taking part in 'Diada', a day on which the students' families organise lots of entertaining activities.



Our schedule for this school year is full of curricular and extra-curricular activities. The aim is to broaden the horizons for our students who, I am sure, are aware of the efforts we make to improve our teaching and learning methods through new technologies."

## Out of Africa

Henry Warren founded Africa Bookcase in 1997 when just 18. Africa Bookcase started out specialising in recycling educational resources to impoverished schools, providing comprehensive libraries for schools in Africa. In 2000, the charity moved into IT with the invention of Gemini, a software toolset designed to enable pupils in the developed world to communicate and collaborate

"I asked a group of pupils to estimate what proportion of the UK population were asylum-seekers. When they said 40 per cent I felt I had to do something to counteract such ill-informed ideas about other countries.

Gemini is in use in projects in some 11 countries around the world. It's a set of innovative software tools available to enable UK pupils to work online with their peers in the developing world. They include drag-and-

on curriculum-based projects with pupils in the developing world. Henry won the Royal Society of Arts' and British Youth Council's 'Young Leader Award 2003' and was, last month, commended as a 'Pioneer of the Nation' at Buckingham Palace by Her Majesty the Queen.

Here Henry describes his projects:

drop video/audio conferencing, threaded discussion forums, meeting rooms and email, all available to make curriculum-based links quick and easy for teachers to implement. New prototype software has been created in conjunction with Ultralab.

Amongst the many projects currently running in 106 schools worldwide is Trading Places. It is designed to fit into Key Stage 3 schemes of work (ages 11-14) for

English, citizenship and geography. Pupils use the tools to show what it is like to live in their respective lands. Elements such as religion, sport, culture, food and schools are all covered. Pupils are then asked to create a tourist brochure for the town or city they have been hearing about, drawing on the information from the partner school. The whole project is purposeful and helps overcome prejudice."

## A Turkish perspective on international projects

"We believe that nothing can be achieved without social, co-operative activities where every individual has responsibility to collaborate rather than to compete. We start from the point of view that school should be a cultural centre for society in addition to being an education institution, we aim to establish good relations with society, families and other schools, while at the same time encouraging our students to improve their ICT skills. That means we need to run projects internationally, and so we are very enthusiastic to share teacher resources on the net using the European Schoolnet's special events and services.

Both of our institutions, elementary school and high school, were partners in the British Council Connecting Futures initiative, involving 30 students and eight teachers from schools from Ankara, Cairo,

England (Rotherham in Yorkshire and Tower Hamlets in London). Our students were responsible for developing thematic and generic questions about education and government and obtaining answers from other students in the project, resulting in the final product: a website. It was a great experience for our students and teachers.

Now we are planning a preparatory visit to Perugia, Italy, to start a Comenius 1 school project about science and astronomy, with the support of the Turkish National Agency, Ankara University Faculty of Science and some consultancy from private ICT firms. The project aims to help students develop liberal and scientific thinking and opinions that respect human rights, and their motivation and curiosity in science and English.

Such projects help students develop their literacy and ICT

skills in Turkish and English as well as help them to reflect on the different cultures they encounter. They also create valuable and appealing resources which are used with other pupils and in schools throughout the country.

At first, our lack of experience caused problems in using the time efficiently, especially as everything is done as part of our normal jobs, and we would advise schools to arrange the timetable of teachers according to the plan of the project otherwise they run out of energy."

Hüray Löker is Schools Project Co-ordinator, Ankara University Foundation Development Schools.



## Multilingual multimedia books

"It was getting a DFES Best Practice Research Scholarship that started me off" says Sheilagh Crowther, a full-time peripatetic teacher based at CIRCLE, Gloucestershire's Ethnic Minorities Achievement Service. "I used the scholarship to look at ways ICT could support English as an additional language (EAL) in schools. My research led to the development of a project that extended previous initiatives at CIRCLE, adding an ICT dimension to them: this encompassed the topic of journeys, and also children making bilingual stories for other children to read. Once I started, other staff helped, in particular Sarah Owen, a primary advisory teacher at CIRCLE, and Dee Russell-Thomas, an advisory teacher for secondary schools.

The project [<http://www.irespect.net>] provides bilingual pupils with an opportunity to use their home language for a real purpose, which is not always possible in schools. "Pupils create multimedia materials that support literacy in both English and the home language," explains Sheilagh. "They make resources - in hard copy as well as CD-ROM and web-based - drawing on their own experiences in their home country and in the UK, incorporating photos and visual material alongside their own words." Some 20 community languages have so far been involved, including languages as diverse as Kurdish, Tagalog, Chinese and Croatian. "For me the main achievement - apart from the project receiving a European Award for Languages in 2003 [<http://www.cilt.org.uk/euroaward/booklet2003.pdf>] (page 7) - is the fact that making the materials develops pupils' literacy and ICT skills in both languages as well as helping them to reflect on the different cultures to which they have access. They also create valuable and very appealing resources which are used with other pupils and in schools throughout the county."

Sheilagh is honest about problems:

"As a peripatetic teacher I had to use the resources at my disposal. I tried using the recording features on my laptop computer, but the sound recording quality was particularly bad. Now I am using a mini-disc recorder costing about £200, which gives much better results."

Many pupils' languages used a non-Roman script which can cause problems that are not easily overcome. Sheilagh found it quite time-consuming to produce the final version of the book, and advises others not to be too ambitious at first. She is now looking into video clips in addition to digital still photographs.

For practical help on making multimedia books, see: [http://www.becta.org.uk/teachers/teachers.cfm?section=1\\_3\\_1&id=620](http://www.becta.org.uk/teachers/teachers.cfm?section=1_3_1&id=620)



## Festivals and celebrations

A class of pupils from Ganton School, Hull - a special school for pupils with specific learning difficulties - is working with special needs classes in a school in Vilanova, Spain, using email along with image, word-processed and presentation software files to find out which festivals and public events are celebrated.

Vivien Mariau [[vmariau@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:vmariau@yahoo.co.uk)] explains:

"We were surprised to find as many differences as similarities in the celebration of Christmas. We celebrate St Valentine's Day in Hull but not in Vilanova, and there is a carnival week in Vilanova but not in Hull, and so on.

The teenage students have been helped to send and receive word-processed documents with image files showing how the various events have been celebrated. The Spanish pupils are helped to write in their language, and the English are helped to read and translate it into English, and vice versa. The two groups of students have also exchanged recipes, cards and gifts. We have plans to use sound files to record Easter songs from the two schools.

Strong friendships have formed between the two groups, and though we have not met we feel we now know each other very well."

Some of the students' work can be seen at [<http://www.symbolworld.org/Bits+bobs/aboutme/03/ganton/index.htm>].

## Travel Buddies

Try a Travel Buddy project with younger children. Travel buddies are soft toys or puppets that travel the world as representatives of your class. They may go on a cultural exchange with a single school or travel widely on a path chosen by those who forward him to friends and relatives in other places. They go instead of sending the children, an expensive and unrealistic proposition for most schools. Pupils look after the buddy, taking and exchanging digital photos of it in lessons, at play and at home, before sending it on its travels.



Angie Probert-Jones sent this to one of Becta's teachers' forums:

"We have had many highly successful exchanges with schools in America, Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania and the UK. and the children have really taken the travel buddies to heart! The journals that they produced detailing the exploits of these soft toys were great - we ran it as a computer club after school one term and the year 6s were as enthusiastic as any. The projects can be set up very quickly and ours (nearly) always ran very smoothly."

The Travel Buddies project website is at <http://rite.ed.qut.edu.au/oldoz-teachernet/projects/travel-buddies/how.html>  
Pictured: Koala Chris, Bundamba State School, Australia.

## Contrasting schools

Hundreds of schools are registered for video-conferencing projects with Global Leap [<http://www.global-leap.com>]. However, schools do not have to be far apart for differences to be striking. Thirty-four languages are spoken by pupils at Fulham Primary School in London; just two at Clawton and Ashwater Primary schools in Devon, 40 miles from the nearest large town. The three schools were linked by video

conferencing after a term's work that included phone calls, letters and emails. During the video conference pupils shared experiences of school and daily life. The Devon pupils showed skateboards, archery equipment and a kayak paddle, and the London pupils showed an African drum, a Somali wedding dress and a Muslim prayer mat. The link ended with the children singing an African song together.

## Cultural diversity and race equality in Warrington

St Barnabas CE School has the largest proportion of ethnic minority children in Warrington's primary sector, and lies in an area of economic disadvantage. The school aims to be a focus of community cohesion, both for ethical and religious reasons (it is an Anglican school) and for practical teaching and learning reasons. Of particular interest in this project is how the school has made resources and planning documents arising from the project freely available to all at <http://www.wgfl.org.uk/barnabas/home.htm>

Project champion Anna Hyet explains:

"We took a document produced by Sheffield LEA, 'Achievement for all, achievement from all' (£34.99) [<http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/education/lea-services/emas/documents-from-emas>], and, using some Standards Fund money to buy further copies, undertook a whole-school exercise to establish how to achieve our intention to embed cultural diversity within the life of the school.

[life from classroom practice to parents and governors. We looked at curricular issues, staff development and dealing with instances of racism.](#)

[Planning sessions took place in staff meetings and during subject team meetings, and we involved parents, helpers and classroom assistants. We aimed to encompass and acknowledge what the school already did routinely - much of the exercise comprised building around these strengths and taking them further. For example, a periodic visit from a US church group was built into the project.](#)

[Evaluation and review are built into the project: it is still running and updated information will be built into the online version next year. The impact of the project can be seen at the 'Developments in action' section of the website: <http://www.wgfl.org.uk/barnabas>](#)

[/10.htm](#)

[Funding, staff time, the willingness of volunteers and the quality of volunteers and support staff have been the main considerations for this project. The school used everyday resources within its local community to bring about the project, and technical support has been provided by the content development manager at Warrington LEA. Lack of funding limited and defined the project from the outset.](#)

[The web pages attract local attention as a good example of this type of project. The school had expressed concern that it might receive negative attention from extreme political groups as a result of these materials being online. This was discussed and measures were taken to dissuade abusive interest and protect the school, e.g. web contacts being made to the LEA not the school; an overt statement that page users are tracked online."](#)

We looked at all aspects of school

## Case studies 2: Enhancing the curriculum

### Ethnic minority attainment (EMA)

As the Birmingham LEA's e-learning manager, Jane Langfield's responsibilities include the co-ordination of e-learning projects, among them the EMA website.

"EMAonline [<http://www.emaonline.org.uk>] is a DfES funded project to provide an online resource base for teachers and others supporting black and minority ethnic pupils in Birmingham, Leeds and Manchester. It is spearheaded by Birmingham Learning and Culture Directorate in partnership with Manchester LEA and Education Leeds.

In the past two years, EMAonline has conducted scoping studies across schools and supplementary schools across the three lead cities to determine the range of digital and paper-based resources currently used by teachers of English as an additional language (EAL). Interviews with practitioners have been conducted to determine what online resources and services they require. In addition, EMAonline has supported a number of school-based content-creation projects in approximately 40 schools.

The website aims to go beyond advice, guidance and/or rhetoric. Its purpose is to build a database of contributed digital resources that a teacher or learning mentor could use to support groups or individual pupils, thereby raising attainment. It also seeks to ensure that learners are visible within the curriculum they study, hence raising self-esteem and expectations and promoting race equality and mutual respect.

In addition, EMAonline provides access to innovative online tools. The real-time virtual classroom (provided by Learn Linc) will shortly be available in five community languages. The English version is fully operational and has been successfully used for Europe-wide conferencing. The Key Visual tool – an online interactive whiteboard – has been built by Actis, and although still in the early stages of development, has clear potential for supporting EAL learners."

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### Geography: a virtual fieldtrip of Rathlin Island

On a sunny day in June 2003, 980 students from Mantua Elementary School in Fairfax, Virginia, USA, took part in a virtual fieldtrip to Rathlin Island off the Northern Irish coast, thanks to new developments in video conferencing developed by the North Eastern Education and Library Board. The virtual fieldtrip was led by pupils of

St Mary's Primary School, Rathlin, and a local expert. Wireless technology was used to link the school to the seashore, over a kilometre away, allowing two-way video and audio communications between the pupils at the seashore in Rathlin and those in several classrooms in Mantua.

## Science: GCSE and A level

Martin Wedgwood, Thomas Alleyne High School, Staffordshire describes how international links have enriched the learning of science:

"We met our current partner schools while working on a project for the Young Reporters for the Environment Scheme. A later Comenius project had the advantage that financial support was provided.

For our first Comenius project 'Aqua Vitae' we linked with schools in Lyon (France), Hanau (Germany) and Roskilde (Denmark) to look at the impact of man on the environment, centred on the theme of water. Over the three-year project, each school took a different aspect of the theme depending on their own curriculum and interests. At Alleyne we took topics that fitted in with the science curriculum at GCSE and A level.

Although each school was working largely independently, co-operation was important. To enable this we exchanged pen portraits of the pupils involved. Each school then produced a questionnaire on its own topic, and these were circulated between the partner schools. This enabled each school to see how the other European countries viewed their particular area of research.

In year 1 we looked at the importance of water to man and man's impact on water. In year 2 the emphasis moved to the impact

of agriculture and forestry, and in year 3 the importance of water in urbanisation. Activities that our students were involved in included working with the Environment Agency monitoring water pollution, case studies on a range of local farms, and researching the importance of the river Trent on the development of Burton-upon-Trent and Stoke-on-Trent.

During the project we have all managed to hold planning meetings in our respective countries and these have been most enjoyable and instructive for all concerned. Our last meeting in Roskilde in 2002 was, thanks to the change in Comenius funding policy, the first in which pupils travelled as well. This proved to be very motivational for the pupils concerned, and really broadened their horizons.

At the end of the three years, each school sent its finished work to us here at Alleyne. This work was then combined with images music and poetry from the respective countries into a CD-ROM as a permanent record.

At the end of our first project it was decided that we had all got so much out of the experience and forged such strong links that we must continue to work together. As a result we all met in Lyon in

January 2003 to plan another project themed around food and drink. Additional schools intend to join the project from Sweden, Finland and the Czech Republic if they can obtain national approval. In the project, pupils use email to discuss food advertising and to research local foods. At a meeting attended by five UK pupils in Germany (the first time abroad and first flight for some), they shared local foods like Staffordshire cheese, oatcakes and black pudding. A project that began with science now covers modern languages, art and music.

The project has had a good effect on A level results in science and modern languages. The staff too have benefited: some staff are now learning a foreign language.

Apart from email, the one item of technology we have found most useful has been a digital camera. The most frustrating thing was the fact that different CD formats made the final CD not as tidy as it could have been - web publishing might be a better option. Logistical problems were ensuring teachers and pupils met deadlines and problems with interruptions for examinations.

My advice for others: go for it. Link globally, and involve more school departments to make it a



## Long-term twinning between schools

Ringwood School in Hampshire and L'Ermitage near Paris could be considered prototypes for 'e-twinning' as set out in the European Commission's e-learning programme. The link began through a chance meeting at which teachers discussed the decline in the numbers of Year 9 pupils wanting to take part in French exchanges in the county. The Inter@ction project was set up initially to allow pupils to get to know

their partner school in a non-threatening way over an extended period. The KS3 ICT Strategy provided an impetus to embed the project into pupils' ICT lessons as well as their French classes, so that they learnt to email their partner school and produce leaflets and PowerPoint presentations about themselves and their school. As a result, numbers taking part in the subsequent visit to France were much higher.

"It became evident, however, that the two schools in the earlier exchange had little in common and, learning from the experience of the first link, the school found a new partner school and made a conscious effort to pair more departments. For example, the geography department changed from teaching about Italy to centre its work on France in Year 7. In Year 8, pupils will use ICT Strategy units to reinforce their links with l'Ermitage and spend a long weekend in France with their peers, practising their French and learning about French culture. Half-day trips are being planned to explore local and global industries to tie in with their work in geography, and in future years a visit to a tidal power station as part of a renewable energy study unit. Areas of the curriculum that could be incorporated into the project and vice versa are continually being identified, for example Unit 9.2 of the Key Stage 3 ICT Strategy about global communication, which involves pupils co-operating to carry out a survey - naturally pupils will work with their French peers rather than having to contrive partners for the project. Next year there may be a joint walking trip to Scotland, and during the summer pupils at l'Hermitage are organising a rock music festival and have invited bands from Ringwood to go over to Paris and take part.

Ringwood is now waiting for l'Ermitage to acquire a web cam so that pupils and staff can talk to each other. Timetabling constraints in both countries make discussions during lessons difficult, but times have been identified during the lunch break and after school when pupils can talk to each other in a French club. A very large proportion of the Year 7 group has chosen to take part in the residential aspect of the project.

The school now has a permanent link with a French school and can draw on this as a resource in all subject areas."

If the plans succeed, then Ringwood will be well on the way to offering pupils mobility across Europe, as older students are entitled to through the Erasmus programme. It is but a small step to imagine pupils from one school following virtual or blended lessons in another country, as school twinning goes beyond simple exchanges to integrated curricula - who knows?



## The school as a multicultural hub

Shireland College in Sandwell has integrated the international dimension into all areas of the curriculum. As a specialist language college, the school offers an international curriculum with each subject having a cultural aspect set into it. All pupils are expected to study two languages (from Mandarin, Japanese, French, German, Urdu, Punjabi and Spanish).

Lesley Hagger-Vaughan, manager of the City Learning Centre explains:

"PE, for example, covers international sports, and all Year 7 pupils take part in the Multilingual Olympics, studying the rules for sports like boules, kabaddi and völkerball, and their performance is judged by Year 9 and 10 mentors."

Teaching respect for other cultures permeates the school curriculum, to the benefit of everyone. It has not been plain sailing, however. For example, video conferencing came to a temporary end when the ISDN line of the partner school in Cologne's was removed, and other projects stopped when the teacher involved left the school. Lesley's advice is

"Do not spend too much time of one project but do embed what you do. Sustainability should not depend on one person. Personal contacts are vital."

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## Video conferencing with Germany

Shireland Language College has a long established link with Holweide Comprehensive School in Cologne. This link has taken the form of exchanges of letters, videos, and exchange visits for groups of students at Key Stages 4 and 5. A recent development has also been the introduction of a work experience element into the programme, and last year three students from Holweide School completed work experience placements at Victoria Park Primary School and Metsec Plc in Oldbury.

Since December, the partnership has developed rapidly through the use of video-conferencing. In December, a Poly Span video conferencing unit accompanied the traditional exchange visit to Cologne and was lent to Holweide School by Shireland Language College. Having set up the video-conferencing unit in the Holweide library, initial tests were made to ensure connectivity. Since January 2003, Shireland has been running a pilot project with Holweide to trial methodology, develop ways of virtual working and establish a model for development of international video conferencing. A weekly staff meeting between teachers involved with the video-conferencing project in England and Germany takes place to discuss the focus of future conferences and methods of working. By also using email, the teachers are able to plan for these international conferences and ensure that students are able to make the most of the opportunity to communicate on a range of subjects in the foreign language they are learning.

Younger students have shared information and photos of their family, while older students have discussed their favourite types of music and also discussed issues of common concern. Older students have compiled questionnaires for each

other which have been discussed during the video-conferencing sessions. Other students were able to share the Cologne carnival when they found their friends in Germany dressed up for their carnival celebrations. Students preparing a presentation for their GCSE course were able to talk to their partners in Germany about places to visit, local specialities and the ups and downs of Bayer Leverkusen! Some of the older students will be discussing the film *Bend it Like Beckham* – with the friends they made during the German exchange visit.

Video conferencing provides an excellent opportunity for student learners to communicate with native speakers and to work collaboratively through a virtual environment. It also provides an ideal vehicle for international teacher co-operation.



## English: Author Online

Author Online aims to encourage pupils to become independent learners, change attitudes to reading and promote the concept of learning through enjoyment. For example, children in a primary school in Steelstown, Derry, communicated online with the author of a book they were reading in the class, about their opinions of the novel and their ideas for development of the story. The pupils were in constant contact with their peers in other parts of the world (West Cork, Ireland; western Pennsylvania, USA; and later with children in South Africa) who were reading the same book. The international dimension enriched their enjoyment of the book and gave them the opportunity to express their opinions and see the reactions of people from other cultural backgrounds to the same story.

## Music: Sound City 2

Sound City 2 showcases, through the Excellence in Cities (EiC) Gifted and Talented programme, celebrate the diverse musical talents of the young people of Birmingham. All the young people performing have been identified from a series of local gifted and talented showcases across the city involving over 1,000 people. Those selected have been chosen to celebrate the diversity of musical talent of the young people of Birmingham.

Sound City 2 is the result of a partnership between the EiC's gifted and talented partnership co-ordinator, Birmingham's music service, Arts Education, Sound it Out Community Music, and the City of Birmingham Symphony Orchestra.

## Science: GCSE and A level

Since 1999, 300 teachers and over 3,000 pupils from 121 schools from the north and south of Ireland have participated in the Dissolving Boundaries project [<http://www.dissolvingboundaries.org>]. Pupils have used text and video conferencing to work in small cross-border teams on agreed topics embedded in the curriculum, including literacy, the environment, science, history, music, art and citizenship. A spirit of joint enterprise has enabled pupils to develop a better understanding of each other. As one participant put it:

"Dissolving Boundaries helped me to get to know people more and not judge them by their history and appearance."

Roger Austin [[rsp.austin@ulster.ac.uk](mailto:rsp.austin@ulster.ac.uk)] explains:

"Northern Ireland is the place where Ireland and Great Britain meet; its citizens are pulled in different political directions, and on the island of Ireland itself there are barriers, not least of which is the boundary that separates the north from the south. There is still a substantial amount of suspicion by people, and in some cases a reluctance to cross the border – although there are very few police checks since the Good Friday Peace Agreement of 1997, the border is still present both psychologically and politically.

In 1998, the two departments of education in Belfast and Dublin agreed to support a project that would link student teachers across the border using ICT. After their time studying at the University of Ulster and Maynooth, the students carried their new ICT skills into the schools where they were doing teaching practice so that their pupils could work together to create a joint website based on curricular collaboration. This project evolved into a more ambitious scheme called Dissolving Boundaries through Technology in Education [<http://www.dissolvingboundaries.org>].

There are now 121 schools in total, half in Northern Ireland and half in the Republic of Ireland, working as partners on a range of educational topics. Pupils and teachers are using both real-time video conferencing and asynchronous computer conferencing to work together, and the results of their collaborative activity are often presented using presentation software or through

the construction of a website. The project team has evaluated the work of this project since 2001, and three key conclusions should be underlined.

First, the impact of video conferencing has been very strong, partly owing to the attractiveness of the visual dimension for pupils. All schools have been provided with ISDN lines and video phones. As broadband reaches schools, IP-based video conferencing will bring costs down significantly. Video conferencing has made the link across the border more real for pupils, giving support to the theory that learning is a fundamentally social phenomenon. It makes learning authentic and meaningful and the presence of a distant audience gives the pupils the chance to express their understanding to their peers. How different from asking pupils to write individually something which will be read only by the teacher?

Secondly, the optimal conditions for effective interaction and learning occur when the children in each school work in groups of four to six children. Each group is linked to a group in the other school for planning work, sharing information and working towards an end product. Children are not overwhelmed by too many superficial contacts, but neither are they limited to a one-to-one link. The focus of learning is on collaboration within each group and between the two distant groups working together. Each linked group has its own folder with two discussion areas, 'pupil café' and 'work in progress'. Most messages

are in the pupil café rather than the more serious 'work in progress' discussion area. Rather than worry that pupils are reluctant to work, let us celebrate the willingness of these young people to ignore the border between them and simply get on with chat about everyday life.

The third conclusion is that ICT has enabled links to be made between young people with special needs that it would be difficult to make otherwise. In one link, pupils in schools for children with hearing impairment on two sides of the border are using video conferencing to communicate through sign language. In another, pupils from a school for children with hearing impairment in the Republic of Ireland are linked to pupils in a mainstream school in Northern Ireland, and are using computer conferencing to investigate the topic of imperialism. ICT is sustaining working and personal links between young people who would not otherwise be brought together, and is the catalyst for encouraging social inclusion.

The evidence from the Dissolving Boundaries project suggests that when collaborative work is successfully planned and implemented using ICT, this 'virtual' contact has an effect on attitudes and contributes to mutual understanding. Importantly for us, it helps young people to 'respect and co-operate with others' and to 'manage and resolve conflict', in the words of the Northern Ireland curriculum for history.

# Making cultural understanding projects work

## Whole-school issues

Here are some tips:

- A good project provides many benefits and should not be seen as an inconvenient add-on. Projects that began in one subject expanded to whole-school involvement, greatly increasing the impact.
- Seek Comenius funding – available for projects that involve schools in at least three countries in the EU [<http://www2.britishcouncil.org/socrates/>].
- Take advantage of chance opportunities. Many of the projects described here came about as a result of a meeting, a course, or through networks. In the EU, one project leads to another as people get to know others at project meetings and decide to submit new proposals.
- Although time-consuming, seek sponsorship in kind or in cash from businesses, for example local employers. Many projects found it easier than was first thought. You may have more success from the company's partner office, for example one school received support for a link with Japan from Hitachi Japan.
- The partnership may not work for technical or cultural reasons, for example there may be too many differences in working practices and attitudes between schools, or new regulations about teachers' workloads may come into force, so manage expectations and consider an exit strategy that harms neither side.
- Do not invest all the school's efforts in one project or in sustaining links with one person in another country (who may change jobs); start other projects and ensure that all are embedded in overall school plans.

## Digital video

Affordable video and still cameras and easy-to-use software can bring international links to life. Here are some tips:

- Take and share photos with a digital camera – it helps to break down the barriers and make links real and personal.
- Consider basing all work on internet technologies. Projects that aim to produce CDs or DVDs, for example, often encounter difficulties with production and distribution that impede the educational aims.





## Setting up a successful project

Successful international email projects often have common features. They:

- have clear expectations: it is important to discuss in depth when the project will start and finish and what its aims and expected outcomes are, which language will be used when, and matters such as delays between receiving and responding to email
- have a clear topic in mind and a visible need for communication and information exchange
- are supported, from the start, by management, teaching and technical staff, pupils and parents
- are co-ordinated by one person with project-management skills; the European Schoolnet's 'Teachers' Guide to Collaborative Projects' provides helpful advice [[http://myeurope.eun.org/eun.org2/eun/en/myEurope Schools/content.cfm?ov=29041&lang=en](http://myeurope.eun.org/eun.org2/eun/en/myEurope%20Schools/content.cfm?ov=29041&lang=en)].
- match the abilities of partner groups: in language projects in particular, learners' ages and their proficiency should be matched carefully
- start with face-to-face meetings, especially in the planning stages: these can help avoid misunderstandings later on. A social evening together over a meal and drinks may well be more effective than several days of formal meetings – according to some, this may be one cultural difference between countries that the work-oriented British do not appreciate!
- recognise cultural differences between countries: different holiday dates, school working days and times of access to email, as well as approaches to innovation and working outside the school day.

## Making video conferencing work

The most successful video-conferencing sessions are those when the technology works so well it is invisible, and the link becomes a natural part of school life. Video conferencing over ISDN has been around for a long time; however, call costs are high and many projects have not continued once the initial enthusiasm and funding come to an end. Video conferencing over the internet (IP video conferencing and using software like MSN Messenger) using web cams is much more affordable. However, image and sound quality are only really acceptable with a broadband connection, many schools have experienced firewall problems, and the chat facilities offered by MSN Messenger may not be allowed for child safety reasons.

Here are some tips:

- Learn from others' experience, described in, for example, 'Video Conferencing in the Classroom', Tim Arnold et al., Devon County Council, 2002 (details at <http://www.devon.gov.uk/dcs/a/video/>).
- Make use of the video-conferencing services operating over the national education network that are being developed by the 10 regional broadband consortia; quality and price should be unbeatable
- Be well prepared. Test your equipment by dialling automated test numbers provided by Global Leap, for example (+44 20 8868 8963 for ISDN or 80.68.35.5 for IP video conferencing).
- Ensure partners agree on the time of the session, taking into account time zone differences.
- Provide partners with a seating plan and people's names so that conversation is easier.
- Exchange mobile phone numbers before the session so that partners can keep in touch regardless of the video-conferencing link.
- Try the link before the session and ensure the cameras pick up a suitable view and that the audio is clear – always more difficult than the video side!
- Ensure people's faces can be seen by adjusting the lighting.
- Encourage children to speak clearly and think about what they say.
- Avoid distracting background noise like air-conditioning, bells or building noise.
- Follow up the session with a note of thanks, possibly with some feedback on how the session went.



## Useful links

In addition to links given elsewhere, here are some useful websites:

- Global Gateway [<http://www.globalgateway.org.uk>] – information on how to develop an international dimension in education.
- iRespect.net [<http://www.irespect.net>] – information and resources relating to active citizenship, cultural diversity and positive tolerance.
- Hands on Europe [<http://www.pioneer.cwc.net/Home.htm>] – information about a joint educational project linking four primary schools in Europe.
- Windows on the World [<http://www.wotw.org.uk>] – British Council resource for schools seeking international links.
- British Council Learning [<http://www2.britishcouncil.org/learning.htm>].
- European Schoolnet [<http://www.eun.org>] – a partnership between European ministries of education providing activities, information and support for teachers and pupils to find partners and work together,
- Socrates (The British Council) [<http://www2.britishcouncil.org/socrates/>] – details of the Socrates programme, which supports European co-operation in education.
- ICT4LT [<http://www.ict4lt.org/en/index.htm>] – information and resources for language teachers.



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