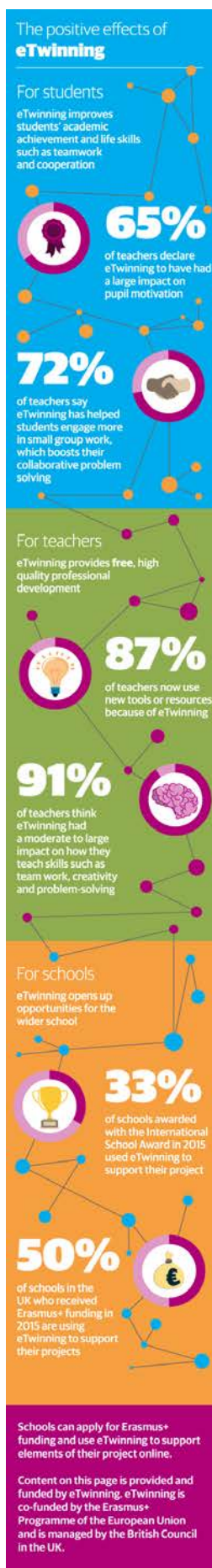




ETWINNING IMPACT GUARDIAN EDITORIALS 2015

GET STUDENTS TO CREATE A BUZZ': HOW TO SHOW THE
IMPACT OF ETWINNING



'GET STUDENTS TO CREATE A BUZZ': HOW TO SHOW THE IMPACT OF ETWINNING

Many schools collaborate with European neighbours online. But with resources tight, teachers need to prove the benefits

More than 341,000 teachers from across Europe have registered on www.eTwinning.net, a programme which [enables schools to collaborate internationally](#) using a safe, virtual environment.

Managed in the UK by the [British Council](#), the initiative has grown in size and impact since it launched 10 years ago, with benefits including improved academic achievement for students – especially around communication, language and ICT skills – and increased motivation for staff and students alike.

But timetables are under pressure and accountability is intense, so proving the benefits of the approach in the classroom is of the utmost importance. As international education co-ordinator, Andrée Jordan, says: “We know that international collaboration leads to improvement of motivation, learning and inspiration, but it’s so hard to prove – and people need proof.”

Here’s how some of the UK’s most successful “eTwinners” have evaluated and communicated the impact of their projects.

SHARE BEST PRACTICE

There was no need to desperately dig around for Christmas-themed lesson plans and a DVD player at [Steeton Primary school](#) in West Yorkshire. An eTwinning project based on the Christmas Truce of 1914 gave pupils the chance to take part in some innovative, yet festive, teaching and learning.

The school was one of 10 from across Europe that collaborated to commemorate the sharing of Christmas songs by British and German soldiers during the First World War by learning the words to Silent Night in each other’s languages. The project culminated in a video conference call which enabled all of the pupils to take part in a Europe-wide carol-singing concert.

In preparation for the event, pupils shared videos of traditional Christmas songs, researched the impact of the First World War in their countries and exchanged information on local Christmas customs. All the work was compiled in an ebook which was shared on the project's [TwinSpace](#). As teacher Diana Linford explains: "The project has been a wonderful opportunity for using innovative ICT tools. The video-conference call is unusual in UK schools and I believe is at the leading edge of primary school learning and teaching."

The success of the project in terms of encouraging international collaboration led to Steeton Primary being awarded the title Best UK eTwinning project 2014-15. Pupils received a letter of congratulations from their local MP and there was considerable coverage in the local press. Since then, Linford has been keen to share the positive impact of the project with others. In March, she presented her first workshop at a British Council UK Ambassadors' conference and she is now mentoring a group of teachers from 12 schools in her local cluster on eTwinning.

USE THE EXCHANGE PROCESS TO AID ASSESSMENT

When setting up the project between special educational needs (SEN) students from [Ysgol Hendrefelin](#) in Neath, south Wales, and [Collège Benjamin Delessert](#) in Saumur, western France, teacher Ruth Sanders' main aim was to help pupils learn a foreign language and build their confidence in using basic language patterns. "Students would write in English and French about themselves, their likes and dislikes, their hobbies and their schools. They would share photos of their cities including famous landmarks," she explains.

Pupils communicated through the secure eTwinning portal, called the [TwinSpace](#), and Sanders saw a huge improvement in teaching and learning. Children learned a lot of new skills by creating presentations, recording short video clips, using movie-making software and researching their home countries on the internet. They lost their fear of speaking French and were keen to show their partners what they could do.

But it was through the process of exchanging her students' work that she could assess the impact of the project. She says: "When certain language patterns have been covered in class I ask the pupils to put them all together in a short paragraph which allows me not only to assess their knowledge and understanding (assessment for learning) but also provides me with a document that I can upload to the TwinSpace so that it can be seen by their French peers."

The project has also led to Ysgol Hendrefelin receiving an [International School Award from the British Council](#). This is essential for highlighting and communicating the effectiveness of the project to parents and other stakeholders in the school community.

GET STUDENTS TO CREATE A BUZZ FOR YOU

The [Royal Belfast Academical Institution](#) traditionally took a “chalk and board” approach to teaching Latin until teacher Christelle Bernard suggested making greater use of ICT as part of an eTwinning project with schools in France and Germany. Her aim was to make Latin more relevant by developing the digital skills of teachers and students. Activities included getting-to-know-you exercises, a logo-design competition, the composition and illustration of stories, vocabulary tasks and the research of Roman heritage in the partners’ countries. The project made extensive use of ICT applications, including [Voki](#), [Thinglink](#) and [Quizlet](#), to motivate students and encourage collaboration.

With such clear aims, Bernard was able to measure impact in three ways: the subject’s reputation in school, her colleagues’ use of ICT and student achievement.

“This project had a huge impact as it enabled me to revitalise my subject and encouraged colleagues to use ICT more in their practice,” Bernard says.

The effect on students was clear: “Motivation with the lower-ability pupils was increased, and attention to detail was more important as we were exchanging work with a real audience. Translating and writing in Latin became a game and pupils have already suggested ideas for next year. “The icing on the cake was probably to hear students describing the project as ‘fun’ which is not traditionally the adjective used to describe Latin work.”

As with many eTwinning projects, Bernard didn’t have to struggle to gain cut-through with the rest of the school for the project – the buzz created by students did the work for her. “As we progressed, pupils started to talk about it in other classes and colleagues approached me to get involved,” she says. Further proof was provided by the renewal of the school’s International Schools Award, presented to settings which have clear international education policies. As with Ysgol Hendrefelin, the award gave great profile to the project among key stakeholders in the school community.

SHOW THE PROJECT IN ACTION

Over the last two years, The [Royal Masonic School for Girls](#) (RMS) in Hertfordshire has worked on a project with schools in Denmark, Spain, Austria, France, the Czech Republic, Turkey and Italy to create a set of values that students across Europe believe are important. Drew Buddie, head of ICT at the RMS, wanted students to become “good citizens”. Teaching methodologies focused on collaboration, values-based education and active learning that is relevant to the real world. Students engaged in a variety of activities – from art and photography to web design.

The impact of the project was such that it was awarded a British Council eTwinning Quality Label, then a National award for best use of eTwinning in a Comenius* project, which it had then successfully [secured funding](#) for. Further to these awards, the

project received a European Quality Label and the succession of accolades means that this project, alongside 30 other UK eTwinning projects, are in the running for a prestigious [European Prize in 2016](#). But Buddie didn't let the award speak for itself – he spread the word about the success of the project far and wide, at conferences and on social media.

“We have spoken at conferences including BETT 2015 to an audience of more than 400 educators. We have met local dignitaries and discussed the potential wide-ranging impact of our project on the local communities. We use social media to tell others about what we have done and we have been featured in lots of newspaper articles.”

So, as Jordan says, the proof that eTwinning is beneficial is there – the challenge is to encourage others to get collaborating around the world.

NOTES: [Erasmus+](#) replaces the former Comenius European Union programme. Schools can apply for Erasmus+ funding and use eTwinning to support elements of their project online.