

British Council eTwinning

Learning from international collaboration

Report - October 2013

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NB: Please note that this document is a summary of a longer report and a report of case studies.
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Evaluation of the eTwinning programme's outcomes,
longer term impact and obstacles to participation based
on Quality Label applications 2010 - 2013

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Executive Summary

1. Introduction

The eTwinning programme was launched in 2005 as part of the European Commission's eLearning Programme and since 2007 it has been fully integrated into the European Union's Lifelong Learning Programme. The programme promotes collaboration between schools in Europe by supporting projects that enhance pupils' learning. This study examines the benefits to schools participating in eTwinning, and considers in what ways the outcomes support school and national educational priorities in the four UK nations. Obstacles to participation and ways of overcoming these are also identified.

A brief review of the educational landscape, which contextualises the eTwinning programme, reveals a key priority in education that is shared by all UK nations and the European Union¹. This priority is to raise attainment/achievement for all so that each child reaches his or her potential and has the skills, knowledge and understanding to live and work in a rapidly changing world.

Although the means of achieving this objective vary, a number of core issues are common to all the four nations to some extent. These areas provide focal points in the analysis of the eTwinning data.

2. Background to the study

This study analyses schools' applications for the eTwinning Quality Label, which is a voluntary award for successful projects. Over 240 successful Quality Label applications made between 2010 and 2013 have been scrutinised to identify emerging themes using a coding frame. Face-to-face and telephone interviews have been used to cross-check the information and provide fourteen in-depth case-studies.

¹ European strategic framework for cooperation in education and training :http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-policy/school_en.htm

3. Benefits of eTwinning

The study indicates that there are a number of key outcomes and evidence of longer-term impact of the eTwinning projects, as seen in following table:

TABLE 1:

Immediate outcomes	Longer-term impact
<p>Greater motivation as pupils want to share ideas and work with pupils in partner schools in other countries.</p> <p>Improved performance and quality of work, because learning has a real purpose.</p> <p>Enhanced working relationships between staff and pupils.</p> <p>Effective professional development for teachers as pedagogy and skills are shared.</p> <p>Some whole school collaboration.</p>	<p>A greater understanding of the lives and cultures of other people, including class mates from different countries.</p> <p>Improved academic achievement.</p> <p>Improved literacy skills.</p> <p>Development of lifelong skills, such as teamwork, cooperation and independent learning skills.</p> <p>Improved communications skills.</p> <p>Improved ICT skills for both pupils and teachers.</p> <p>Improved language skills for both pupils and teachers.</p> <p>New opportunities for the school and wider community.</p>

4. Outcomes, longer term impact and obstacles to success

The groups of emerging themes from the Quality Labels and the findings from the case studies have been carefully reviewed and systematized into particular areas of interest, which relate to the educational landscape. The analysis provides evidence of the ways in which eTwinning outcomes support educational priorities at both national and school level, which include:

National priorities:

- raising achievement/attainment so that each pupil achieve his or her potential
- closing the achievement gap between the economically deprived pupils and their peers
- establishing a curriculum that equips young people with the knowledge, understanding and skills to be able to enter the world of work
- providing effective professional development for teachers to ensure the national aims are met.

School priorities:

- raising achievement
- narrowing the achievement gap
- creating a curriculum that meets the needs of all pupils
- continuing to improve literacy and numeracy
- increasing young people's knowledge and skills enabling them to work in an rapidly globalising world
- providing continuous professional development for staff to ensure that learning is effective and pupils achieve well.

5. Impact on different groups of learners

The study showed that eTwinning can be especially beneficial for:

- pupils with low self-esteem
- pupils with poor social skills
- pupils with skills relevant to the eTwinning work (e.g. technical, design, foreign language) not normally valued in usual classroom activity; these pupils may be considered 'less academic'
- pupils who do not enjoy usual lessons and can be difficult to motivate
- pupils from backgrounds that do not involve much foreign travel
- those boys who are less good than girls at sharing and communicating in groups.

6. Impact on staff

TABLE 2:

Immediate outcomes	Longer-term impact
<p>Teaching becomes easier as pupils are more motivated and more productive. For example, homework is completed better.</p> <p>More pupils choose the interviewee's subject.</p> <p>The external validation of work (e.g. Quality Label) gives an immediate professional boost.</p> <p>Gain access to a new network of teachers and ideas, both in the UK and across Europe.</p> <p>Develop improved ICT and technical expertise.</p> <p>Improve their own language skills.</p>	<p>Professional profile is boosted (good for CV) through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • becoming Ambassadors • the school being recognised by Local Authority as a centre of excellence • providing CPD for other teachers. <p>Professional skills are increased through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having an improved repertoire of teaching ideas • becoming more open to new teaching ideas • having access to greater support to enable problem-solving and taking on more adventurous projects. <p>Professional standing is formally recognised in school through:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • getting a new job title (e.g. International Partnerships Co-ordinator) • being paid a Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR)² supplement. <p>Personal changes may occur, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • having greater confidence generally (e.g. from travel, responsibility, speaking to large forums) • generating greater enthusiasm for teaching and their job.


² The Teaching and Learning Responsibility points are part of teachers' pay and progression within England.

7. Impact on the school and the wider community

TABLE 4:

Immediate outcomes	Longer-term impact
<p>In some schools, the project’s relevance to the whole curriculum is recognised by the wider school, which leads to more teachers becoming involved.</p> <p>In some schools, the work becomes ‘ghettoised’, being almost entirely the responsibility of one person. This creates barriers that are difficult to break down.</p> <p>Teaching ideas from partner schools can influence teaching methods used in school in general.</p> <p>If some activity is at whole-school level, this can enable peer education to take place (often older pupils working with younger ones).</p> <p>Parents learn more about European countries through their children’s work.</p>	<p>School becomes known and recognised within the profession as one offering good practice for international work.</p> <p>If the work is high profile, eTwinning (along with other international initiatives) is a reason for some parents to choose the school for their children.</p> <p>The Quality Label and other awards, such as the ISA, are important for raising the profile. Both of the latter lead to new opportunities and funding for the school.</p> <p>Some parents have their perceptions and opinions about other countries challenged, leading to less closed attitudes.</p>

8. Sample case studies



Four of fourteen case studies undertaken for this study are included within this summary:

- Yester Primary School (Scotland)
- Velindre Community Special School (Wales)
- St Clare’s Convent Primary School (Northern Ireland)
- Lytham St Anne’s Technology and Performing Arts College (England).

CASE STUDIES

Yester Primary School, East Lothian, Scotland

Context

Yester Primary serves the village of Gifford and surrounding countryside south east of Edinburgh. There are currently about 150 children attending, with seven teachers plus support staff. Class teacher Michael Purves has been involved with eTwinning since 2007 and the school has developed a reputation for its European connections. He volunteered when the head teacher asked the staff in 2007 if anyone would like to investigate international links, and then discovered eTwinning through the LTS23 website.

Why did he volunteer? “Well, my wife’s Russian, our kids are bilingual, we’ve done a lot of travelling in Europe [...] and I had an interest in Europe anyway.” In addition to the first project he set up with a school in Finland, which is still going, the main project that Michael has been running for five years continuously is a primary school version of the Eurovision Song contest, called Schoolovision, involving 41 countries and running at the same time each year as the real Eurovision Song contest. This has involved members of the local community either by performing in the videos (e.g. the village store staff) or by providing local venues (the church, Yester House). The Schoolovision project has gained a great deal of publicity and has even been on television in Scotland, as well as in many of the partner countries too. Yester is also involved in another pan-European project called ‘European

Chain Reaction'. Both have websites containing the video entries from all schools (<http://schoolovision2013.blogspot.com> and <http://ecr2013.blogspot.com>).

The pupils are predominantly from a middle class environment and many experience European holidays with their parents (although there are others who have not travelled very much). This was one reason why Michael chose Finland as his first project – to provide an alternative experience from the usual trips to France, Spain or Italy.

Outcomes and changes

The immediate benefit for the pupils was their introduction to new ICT methods. “We’re using technologies that we might not normally use from day-to-day, and I’m thinking of web-cam conferencing and making and editing videos for films. These are things that are quite specialised in ICT that we probably wouldn’t be teaching [normally].” Beyond this, the children learned about other countries from their peers. Michael remembered one boy commenting: “That was really cool. I learned a lot of things about Poland and you didn’t actually tell me them.” To him that was really powerful. [...] When children learn something or see something being done by their peers it seems to have a bigger impact on them ... than [learning from the teacher]. If they see this directly from their peers in another country, it has an added value, I think”. In general, eTwinning introduces the pupils to other cultures in a way that their holidays abroad do not. “There’s not much exposure to other cultures [within the school], so all of this international work is like opening new doors for the children. [...] It makes them more curious to find out more [about that culture or about another one].” Michael also feels that seeing what it is like in another school, where things are done differently, helps the pupils become more aware of their own school’s rules, policies and teaching and learning styles. In summary, he feels the pupils have learned new ways to work.

Has it affected some more than others? “I’ve found it has been particularly effective with boys who perhaps haven’t enjoyed planning and collaborating together in class, but when they’re asked [to work on an eTwinning idea], it’s hugely motivating. [...] I think some of the less academic [boys and girls] gain more [than the more academic ones ...] because they see themselves as being equal in a project like this”. He explained that, in general, even the youngest pupils tend to pick up on where they stand in class academically and this can affect their motivation and self-worth, so starting on an equal footing benefits them equal footing benefits them.

What about impact on himself? “Well, I’ve said many times at various conferences that eTwinning gave me a new focus on teaching, completely. [...] It gave me, really, a new dimension. [...] I now feel I have a huge number of colleagues that are actually very good friends but are not resident in this country ... with whom I have dialogue and conversations almost on a daily basis ...” Michael co-organised a “get together” in Prague for all the Schoolovision teachers and has arranged his family holidays around visiting his network of friends across Europe. Obtaining the Quality Label has also been boosting for him, as he feels this is an external recognition of the valuable nature of the work. Professionally, he’s learned much about how people teach and learn in different countries. “Having seen how it’s done in many other cultures, I think I’m much more open to trying things in a different way”.

The school has a great deal of positive exposure through the media and a commendation from the schools inspectorate. The most recent HMIE report identifies four particular strengths of the school, one of which is “International education is supporting children’s knowledge and understanding of the world and Scotland’s place in it “and, as reported by Michael, the Inspector told him that the school was “the best example of International Education he had seen anywhere in Scotland in the last four years”. eTwinning, which has been running for six years, is now embedded in the curriculum and recognised by parents who ask if it will continue. Despite this, sadly Michael feels that if he were to leave, the involvement would end, “and I’ve been asked about that several times ... by Inspectors, [who want to know] if it is well enough ingrained in the [school’s] culture that if I were to up and leave, would it carry on?; and the answer is: it would carry on, but not here – it would carry on wherever I went!” He believes this because the workload is too great on teachers at the moment and they perceive it as extra work. “That’s the trick – to include it in your work rather than seeing it as an extra – integrate it into what you are already doing. [...] It’s ideal for Curriculum for Excellence because everything that Curriculum for Excellence stands for can be covered through eTwinning ... projects can be undertaken in every aspect of the curriculum, but it frustrates me sometimes that people don’t see that.”

Difficulties/barriers

“Personally, I’ve had very few hurdles I’ve had to overcome, myself.” If there have been any questions, he obtained answers either from the partners or from British Council. There were some technological challenges when they first started making videos, but “this was not a barrier, as such – more part of the learning process.”

The future

Michael observed that his pupils and their parents have come to expect the annual Schoolvision and do not want it to stop. Each year, he and his eTwinning colleagues ask each other if they want to continue and have always decided they do. “But that’s also a negative because I spend so much time on these two projects that it ... prevents me doing other, new, small projects; because I have umpteen requests from teachers saying ‘would you like to do a project on such – and – such with me?’, and I have to usually say ‘I’m really sorry, but I can’t do International Education 24/7, although I would love to.’” He feels he’ll continue the two projects for now but “at some point, they’ll have to be retired! ... But I wouldn’t like to put a timescale on that.”

The school had started to apply for the International School Award (ISA) many years ago but this was not followed up. “I probably should sit down and actually make the effort to apply – maybe I will.” But to obtain the full ISA, Yester would need to show that international work permeated the school curriculum, which it does not at present. “I’d love every class [in school] to try a very small partnership ... just so they could see not only what they could gain professionally as teachers but what the children could get from it ...”

Last word

Michael’s own written comment about one of his projects captures the essence of the impact of eTwinning. “An inspector from the Scottish HMIE inspection team came to our school and discussed the project with some of the boys who led the work, and afterwards he told me that he had never

seen a group of boys so motivated or fluent in their description about an international piece of work, which was very pleasing for me to hear!" The projects have improved boys' skills to work together, enhanced the self-worth of the less academic pupils and been highly motivational for all pupils and for Michael himself who has gained a very valuable European-wide support network of project colleagues.

Velindre Community Special School, Neath Port Talbot, Wales

Context

Ruth Sanders teaches at two schools, one of which is Velindre Community Special School in Port Talbot, South Wales. It is a small school with four teaching staff and four teaching support staff members supporting 14 pupils aged between 11 and 16 with social, emotional and behavioural difficulties (SEBD). While some pupils have learning difficulties, all are taught within the National Curriculum. 86% of the pupils are entitled to free school meals, which is considerably higher than local and national figures.

Ruth became involved in eTwinning due to her dual interests in Modern Foreign Languages and Information and Communication Technology teaching. It started when she was invited to attend a British Council training day and she quickly realised eTwinning would work well with the pupils at Velindre.

Understanding the circumstances of the school and pupils is important to assess the value of the eTwinning projects. She wrote in one project report "Several of the pupils have not been engaged in education for some time before attending Velindre and others have attended primary education sporadically due to exclusions from their previous settings due to behavioural/attendance difficulties. Such problems have led to them missing out on huge chunks of the education process. We have to offer a mainstream curriculum to our pupils, which at times is difficult for them as learners and us as teachers". She added, "Teaching a mainstream subject like French is even more of an uphill battle. My pupils ... are all bright able pupils who can achieve, but their behaviour hinders progress. I developed a scheme of work and appropriate booklets, but it was difficult to make the pupils see a reason for learning. Bearing in mind their difficulties and the current economic climate, the pupils could not see when or where they would need to use the French language" and observed that "Teaching materials and strategies need to be innovative, stimulating, realistic and achievable in small manageable chunks". Since 2009 she has run many projects with countries throughout Europe though each year there is always a connection with a French school. This was her initial objective – to help her pupils with their French. "It gave a focus for learning! ... They learnt basic greetings, how to introduce themselves and their families, how to ask questions for their pen pals to respond to. It was fantastic! They actually wanted to learn new things! They asked for new vocabulary, phrases! We had made headway!!!"

What is it about eTwinning that differentiates it from other teaching and learning methods that Ruth had tried? Her immediate response to this question was, “They felt somebody valued them!” Pupils at the partner schools responded to the work they did and sometimes the head teacher of those schools thanked them personally. For Ruth’s pupils, this was out of the ordinary. “To hear that their PowerPoint had been used in another school’s assembly was a massive boost to their self-esteem.”

Outcomes and changes

This improved their overall performance in school: seeing they could write a letter or produce a PowerPoint for eTwinning made them realise they could be successful in other subjects also. This was particularly the case for the less academically able or successful pupils because they benefited most from having their confidence raising. But the relationship the pupils have with eTwinning also has a more subtle aspect. Ruth recalled one pupil who refused to write anything towards his Welsh Culture accreditation unit. “He wouldn’t put pen to paper – nothing at all. We persevered for a couple of weeks – nothing. And then I thought, let’s put a little eTwinning logo in the corner of the worksheet – and he got the accreditation.” She explained that he no longer saw it as boring schoolwork, but as writing about Wales for the benefit of his friends. “So he got his accreditation purely by the logo being in the corner!”

Ruth chuckled as she remembered another particular pupil in Year 11. “He always said that he couldn’t read ... then we got letters written in English from a school in Turkey and he was sitting at his desk reading and I said, ‘Oh, J _____, I thought you said you couldn’t read’ and he replied, ‘This isn’t reading, Miss, it’s just a friend.’

She pointed out that her pupils are extremely socially uncomfortable and they found communicating with their peers through the eTwinning tools to be a safe way of sharing information and photographs/videos of themselves.

Another benefit in Ruth’s opinion is that it enables her pupils to get a personal insight into another country. Many of them would not normally travel abroad and this gave them an experience that was first hand; “it’s real, not from a text book!” She also feels it has made them more accepting of different cultures. “Their outlook can be quite prejudiced and they can have quite strange outlooks on other people who they perceive as being different from them.” But this is broken down by the personal contacts, especially noticeable with the work they did with Turkey on Islam.

Ruth feels she has gained from eTwinning also. Apart from it helping to make her work with the pupils easier, as she had explained, she has found her own confidence rising. She had to travel to Berlin on her own and speak to large audiences at conferences – both things she found difficult but overcame. She has also learned more ICT techniques for her teaching and she has made good contacts with teachers from other UK eTwinning schools – especially those for SEBD pupils.

She believes all the eTwinning projects she has run have made some general, sustained differences. Her pupils are more socially confident and literacy levels have improved across the school. She also thinks that the pupils use a greater variety of ICT methods – not just PowerPoints. At whole school

level, eTwinning has brought recognition from parents, the local press and authorities. She was invited to meet the Mayor, and the Director of Education and the Leader of the Council visited the school for the first time and Velindre is now considered a flagship school within the Local Authority. The Quality Label is also a form of recognition, and this is felt and appreciated most by the pupils who have received so little praise before.

The school has not had an Estyn inspection since eTwinning started, but Ruth is certain that the changes will be noted by inspectors and that they will recognise the special value that the partnerships have for SEBD pupils. “There’s a definite improvement when they’ve got a real audience – definitely, without a shadow of a doubt. When they know they’re doing work for either another school in general, or in particular for one of their peers, their attention to detail is astounding. They don’t want to make a mistake. They want to write and they want to be perfect.”

Difficulties/barriers

But what are the downsides? What problems or barriers has Ruth had to face? “There haven’t been any”, she responded. After some thought she remembered that there were some slight technical difficulties early on, but these were quickly resolved by the support team at British Council. The only barrier was that it was difficult at first to locate appropriate Special schools as partners. Although partnering mainstream schools works for Velindre because it encourages her pupils to produce higher quality work, she believes the pupils themselves prefer to work with peers who are in similar settings. For the other school in which she works, Ysgol Hendre, she has now located a SEBD Special school in France.

The future

Looking to the future, she was keen to clarify that developments so far mostly apply to her own lessons and that it could not, yet, be assumed that the impact was felt in all. This is the area she wants to develop more. After a period of change, the school management is now more settled and she feels it might be possible to get more of the other staff involved and to make it more of a whole-school approach. The school has obtained the Intermediate International School Award and she intends to achieve the full ISA, but in order to do so she needs to broaden the work across other subjects. She also wants to introduce eTwinning projects in her other school.

Last word

Ruth’s own words best sum up her experience with the eTwinning programme. “My pupils, due to their SEBD, have limited concentration. They do not focus on anything for long. They are extremely difficult to engage in a work-related activity that involves effort and putting pen to paper! They have been told that they have failed so many times in their lives that they are scared of failing again! eTwinning [makes] learning fun!! They can engage in a non-threatening manner, build up friendships and knowledge of different cultures.... Their work is not just filed for parents/carers and inspectors to see. It has a purpose – it is sent somewhere and somebody else looks at it and uses it! Their films and

videos have been shown in assemblies in Europe. Their letters have been read and responded to! [They have obtained qualifications and the school has met targets.] Everybody has gained!

St Clare's Convent Primary School, Newry and Mourne, Northern Ireland

Context

The introductory page of St Clare's website displays 'welcome' in many different languages with the eTwinning logo shown among other Awards, including the International School Award (ISA) and Eco-Schools. It is also a Rights Respecting School. Situated near the centre of Newry, Northern Ireland, St Clare's serves 203 pupils (mostly Catholic, but not all) of mixed ability, with about 36% entitled to free school meals and 20% whose first language is not English (mainly Polish). Elayna Duffy is the Primary 5 teacher with various other 'hats', including ICT and the ISA.

Because of the presence of Polish children in her class, Elayna started eTwinning three years ago and at the same time applied for the foundation ISA. At the beginning, she did not realise that eTwinning and the ISA were different. There have been four projects with schools in various parts of Europe, though all involving schools in Poland. Fortunately for Elayna there was, and still is, a Polish language assistant, Aneta Palis, in school, who is multi-lingual and helps Elayna with eTwinning communication.

The rationale is thoroughly explained in the school's International Policy. Through the inclusion of an international focus in St. Clare's Convent Primary School, we are able to offer to our children, a range of experiences that will enhance their learning and raise awareness of their national and international identity.

Purposes

- To provide an informed awareness of countries, cultures and languages other than our own
- To encourage greater involvement in environmental issues
- To develop curiosity about other cultures
- To enable our children, staff and governors to experience daily life in other countries
- To promote the use of ICT in meaningful contexts for the development of communication skills
- To provide an added opportunity for the promotion of equal opportunities, racial equality and Citizenship.

By having an international dimension as part of our ethos, we can provide children and staff with a wider variety of experiences both within, and in addition to the National Curriculum:

- Develop links with schools in other countries in Europe
- Welcome to our school teachers and pupils from other countries (both physically and via etwinning.)
- Raise awareness of environment issues other than those in our locality through joint projects

- Encourage interest and motivation through the provision of first hand experiences of life in another country
- Promote communication through writing letters and emails to friends abroad
- Provide staff with opportunities to compare different teaching and learning styles
- Raise awareness and appreciation of other environments and what is happening in the world
- Develop cross-curricular activities with an international theme for all children.

Outcomes and changes

Elayna feels eTwinning has helped to raise the standard of work done by her class. For example, they did a project requiring the pupils to research answers to questions about their country set by the pupils in partner schools. “If I just had created those questions myself, you know I don’t think the children would have generated the interest, but because [...] of the partnership and the standard set by their peers [...] their self-esteem went up, they were very proud of their work.” She also found it helped with group work of mixed ability pupils. While the more academic children were better at researching the answers, other children might have had better ICT skills and so they could contribute to the task equally.

eTwinning has also been an equalising influence for the Polish children with poorer English. “It gave them a heads up, they were no longer maybe at the bottom of the class, because they could speak Polish – they could translate while the rest of the class were relying on them, so they could take leadership... and build up self-esteem.”

At a deeper level, Elayna believes the project work is opening her pupils up to the wider world. “We’re stuck on a wee island, here in Ireland, and [my pupils ...] come to understand that maybe they’re not that different from people in Spain and so on ... it helps the children to understand that racism is wrong.” Although Elayna does not think racism is a problem in school (in her class there are Polish, Russian and Afro-Caribbean children and an emphasis on acceptance), there have been incidents of attacks on members of the Polish, Black and Chinese communities around Belfast and regionally “and children do come in and question, ‘why are they being picked on?’ [...] so we’re just trying to keep things positive while we can, while we still have an influence over children ... teach them how to be a better citizen”. As a school generally, staff as well as pupils, “we have to get out of our wee bubble ... just see the world isn’t as big as we think it is.”

Elayna has found a great overlap with the school’s work on being a Rights Respecting school. While recognising similarities between themselves and their European peers the pupils also notice differences; and where this relates to lack of opportunities or resources this is dealt with using a Rights approach. eTwinning enables the school “to alert children, you know, that this child is bright but may not show it [in the usual way], therefore we’re all different but we’re all capable of being great in our own way – we all have talents – so we’re constantly trying to promote a positive aspect of any child.

The eTwinning programme [enables us] to create that environment.” This approach extends to dealing with sectarianism, which is not tolerated within school.

One of the ways the school builds on eTwinning is through an interesting language-learning programme. “The whole school in September does Russian, then in October ... we do Polish, then we change to Lithuanian and then we do Bengali, and we do French, we do Spanish ... and for every month in our school we do a different language – March is Irish because of St Patrick’s Day.” In the appropriate month, any children who speak the language go around the school and help with pronunciation.

For Elayna herself, she was delighted to get the Quality Labels. “It was great to get some positive feedback [...] an official stamp of approval [...] My head teacher is delighted – she has it all [the logo] on her paperwork.”

A particular success for Elayna is that all nine teachers in school have been or will be soon involved. “Although maybe a couple of classes will not officially have a project, [next year] we’ll try to incorporate them in some way”.

Difficulties/barriers

The biggest problem faced has been caused by limitations of the school internet system in Northern Ireland (C2k), which has made using the Twin Space difficult or impossible and they have not been able to use Skype. “I can do [eTwinning communication work] on my computer at home – no problem – but in school it was a difficulty [...] Some of the projects [work put on by the other schools] the children could see, but others were completely blocked – very frustrating.”

This problem is beyond the control of the school or British Council, but the C2k system is being redesigned and Elayna hopes the new system, to be completed before Christmas, will be easier to use.

Elayna has also experienced some frustration over not being able to locate projects being offered by other schools that fit with her curriculum. In a similar vein, she has found some of the partner schools who initiated the project to be rather possessive of the work generated, limiting what Elayna could do with it. To solve this, she intends to devise her own projects that can help her and staff colleagues deliver their core work, and in more depth, and over which she would have more control. She needs to investigate how to do this because she has not so far been able to use the website to do so.

The future

The problem with the C2k system has seriously limited what Elayna and the school have been able to do and she is very hopeful that much more will be possible in future. She hopes new projects will be more related to their curriculum and that she can develop a partnership that will be sustained. Previously, partners have wanted to move on after project completion and meet other partners, as has Elayna. “But it would be nice to be able to say ‘can we do a different project next year together?’ – so far that hasn’t happened.”

Both Elayna and the head teacher, Mrs Michelle Monaghan, would like to see all classes having face-to-face communication with partner schools, and they are very hopeful about what can be achieved.

Last word

eTwinning fits well with the inclusive, multicultural ethos of St Clare's and marries happily with their Rights Respecting School and other work. This has led to many of the school staff being involved, despite serious technical limitations caused by the internet platform in Northern Ireland and, once those problems have been solved, the future for eTwinning in St Clare's is bright.

Lytham St Anne's Technology and Performing Arts College (LSA), Lancashire, England

Context

Visit the head teacher's welcome on the LSA's website and you will see that being an International school is one of the key aspects of this large mixed gender 11 – 18 secondary school.

It is clear that two of the British Council's 'International School programmes, eTwinning and the Comenius project, are an important part of their British Council International School Award (ISA). Seven eTwinning projects, of various lengths and with schools in countries including France and Germany have obtained the Quality Label since 2009, and more are intended. There is also a partnership with a school in Badulla, Sri Lanka and LSA has previously been part of the DFID-funded Global School Partnerships programme.

Arriving at the school a sign above the front door and a display in the foyer about the International School status are very prominent. The driving force behind these initiatives is Modern Foreign Languages teacher, Sandra Underwood, who is the School Link Co-ordinator, for which she gets a TLR payment and some time released from her curriculum duties.

eTwinning took off after she attended a partner-finding conference in Cologne. She wanted her MFL teaching to be more interesting and to offer the pupils more than what they could get from textbooks and classroom teaching alone.

Outcomes and changes

Since starting eTwinning in 2009, Sandra feels she has gained considerably in her professional ability to integrate twinning into her MFL teaching and she uses digital technology in the classroom much more. In fact, she now conducts webinars herself on eTwinning. "I absolutely love eTwinning", she enthused. Her motivation came initially when she found that her pupils were more interested in her lessons when they were connected with the project. She also found the contact she gained from eTwinning teachers in other schools and the support and positive feedback obtained from the British

Council team extremely valuable and inspiring.

The reason she believes the pupils enjoy the work more is that they get to apply what they learn in class in a real world context; “it personalises their learning, they have ownership of something and there’s a purpose”. This is especially beneficial for those who come from families that perhaps cannot afford trips abroad. It is also very motivating for the pupils. Sandra talked about the effect of pupils knowing that their work is being used by their peers elsewhere. She wrote “The most outstanding result is the motivation of the pupils. They have shown enthusiasm and determination to write letters and are equally enthusiastic to receive them. They are always asking when the next letters will arrive! They are looking forward to the video conferences and are using their language skills without being shy. Their efforts have been recognized by appearing on the school website and in the local paper! It’s all great motivation and the learning has never stopped in the classroom ... rather it has been a personal achievement for me as a class teacher that students have improved their German skills and are very keen to speak to others in another country and culture. Getting some students to complete homework tasks [can be difficult], but when they are told that a letter will go to a pen friend ... every child submits their homework!” Sandra is convinced that the quality of their foreign language ability has improved and that they achieve more. “I found, when I did these projects connected to eTwinning, they were more enthusiastic and more willing to write and put in the work. I can only speak for my own subject, but I think that the kids who did these projects with me have [achieved more in their language learning].” She noted also that more pupils are choosing to study German this year than previously.

What are the longer-term impacts on her pupils? “I think it makes them better global citizens [...] It bridges borders and stereotypes of what they think of other people.” She finds her pupils start to reflect on the differences and similarities of their eTwinning friends and of the context of their education and country – the languages they speak and those they learn, and how learning languages facilitates more effective communication.

In terms of sustained impact on the school as a whole, eTwinning has been an important part of the formalisation of its International School status. In 2009 the school already had a number of initiatives with an international dimension such as regular school trips and some school links.

Sandra was asked by the deputy head teacher to explore whether the school could achieve the International School Award (ISA). She had recently started eTwinning, which together with subsequent Comenius projects, other global school partnerships and involvement with British Council’s Connecting Classrooms programme, enabled the achievement of the full ISA. External recognition in the form of the ISA and eTwinning Quality Labels is valuable for the school as it promotes it to parents and the community at large and provides a stimulus for pupils and staff. As Sandra pointed out, getting external validation for one’s work in school is welcome.

Difficulties/barriers

Using TwinSpace was found difficult at first, but this has now changed and Sandra finds it really user-friendly. After more thought, she commented on the difficulty sometimes of getting responses from

the partner school.

“I keep trying, and if they don’t get back to me, I try somebody else because there are so many [schools interested in getting involved]”. Perhaps the biggest challenge is spreading interest within school. “That’s probably the hardest part. [At an eTwinning conference I attended] someone titled his workshop ‘The Lonesome Cowboy’ and I thought it was so perfect and appropriate because sometimes you feel that way. You’re the one who’s inspired and motivated to do it and it’s sometimes hard to bring others on board. ... It is time consuming, but for the benefits, it’s worth it.”

The future

The main hope for Sandra is that she can get more of the teachers in school involved. “With eTwinning would be great, but even with the global school partnerships [to] bring the classroom to life by adding in that element of real life.” She is full of ideas for introducing more technology into the classroom. “Ultimately, I’d like to have each student with a laptop on their work tables, logged into eTwinning, chatting to somebody else.”

For herself, she would like to extend the work she does to promote eTwinning to others. She is already an eTwinning Ambassador and is invited to run workshops and training sessions, and wants to undertake more twilight seminars for teachers from other schools.

Last word

LSA wanted to formalise its international work by gaining the International School Award. eTwinning played a major part in achieving the Award. “Having the eTwinning projects [...] made us slightly more global [as a school] ... We weren’t just about taking kids on a trip. We became about giving kids an opportunity in the classroom, and I think that’s what was key – linking it to the curriculum. [...] It also enhanced the progress and engagement of my students.”