

e-Twinning and International Connections

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e-Twinning is a new European flagship programme, which is the main thrust of the European Union's e-Learning strategy. It promotes the use of ICT to support international school cooperation, sharing and developing materials and pedagogical exchange opportunities across the EU. These activities are particularly useful within the context of supporting second language teaching as partnerships can be focused to develop real and motivating language opportunities with native speakers in Europe. The programme is also extremely cost effective for schools, as teachers and pupils use the Internet to work together across borders to establish long or short-term links with partner schools.

The programme is very inclusive and teaching staff in all sectors of education (3-19 year olds), headteachers, librarians and other staff can set up partnerships with schools in the European Union, Norway and Iceland. There are no specific requirements with regard to the aims, duration or scope of the activities, except the pedagogical relevance of the project to the school and its pupils and the use of ICT.

Projects can take many forms. For instance, within our school, we have a number of projects currently running. Some are short duration projects and others are developing into one-term (and longer) projects. One infant class is involved in a project called 'Chocolate and Chips' which involves sharing and exchanging materials and lessons based on the topic of 'Healthy Lifestyles' with a Mediterranean theme. As well as the teacher developing joint planning and lessons with her Maltese partner the pupils are exchanging emails, digital photos and short digital video clips. The Maltese children are teaching our pupils how to name healthy fruits and vegetables in Maltese and our pupils are sending digital video clips of 'healthy' action songs in English for them to try out and learn. Another of our e-Twinning projects in the upper Primary, entitled 'Virtual Visits', involves a number of European partner schools exchanging information about their local area using appropriate soft toys.

As well as giving pupils an external audience for their class work, the e-Twinning approach gives pupils first hand knowledge and understanding, which come directly from their peers, about current life in the European countries they are studying. The opportunities for language exchange and development, particularly through Digital Video, audio clips using MP3 created by the pupils, help to develop an 'ear' for the language and provide a real context for learning. Second language writing skills are also developed through the exchange of email or texts with European partner schools.

e-Twinning can also be used to support children and families who have arrived recently in the UK by building a connection to a school in their

home country. Such interactions help all the children in the class understand the cultural and linguistic challenges faced by their new colleague, and enable the new child or children to make a special contribution to the curricular work of the class. Parents of these children can help with translations and provide direct information about their partner school's country, thus pulling the family into the school community.

There are over twelve thousand schools registered and looking for partners from across Europe and beyond. The eTwinning website provides the tools, ideas and safe working space on the net to get you started. There are ready-made projects that you can adopt or adapt to meet your needs or you can put your own project idea forward for partner schools to join. The potential benefits to pupils as well as the enrichment and motivating development of the present curriculum is enormous. For teachers the opportunity to expand links and friendships as well as share and develop pedagogy is available as never before.

Visit www.etwinning.net and browse the site, then register and a whole new borderless classroom will open up.