



PEDAGOGICAL ADVISORY GROUP
REFLECTIONS ON eTWINNING

COLLABORATION AND eTWINNING

ENRICHMENT AND ADDED VALUE
OF eTWINNING PROJECTS

www.etwinning.net

Collaboration and eTwinning

Introduction

Collaboration is an important factor in the scope of school development since it gives more space for independent and self-responsible learning. Collaborative learning is a method for changing organisational, pedagogical and individual processes. Consequently, like all changes when starting collaborative working it will take more time in the early stages.

Over the medium to long term, however, collaborative working leads to a reduction in effort since exchanging information, knowledge and materials leads to mutual support within the team and thus saves time. It may also have important didactical, methodical and pedagogical synergy effects. It can improve the working atmosphere



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and contribute to the well-being of the individual within the group and thus can lead to an increase in school quality.

In many areas of economic activity, working in teams is everyday routine and helps to concentrate and match competencies. Besides technical knowledge, companies require young professionals with strong social competencies, among which 'collaborative learning and working' are key competences.

In order to implement collaboration in schools, teachers should experience for themselves what collaborative learning means and how they can mutually benefit from it. Only if they are convinced of this way of working method, they will be able to use it successfully in their lessons. This needs some time to be spent in training and in experiencing collaborative working. Collaborative learning allows one to look over the rim of the tea cup, to see different possibilities and solutions: it opens and broadens the mind. Thus, collaboration is the basic format for any kind of partnership. eTwinning by itself means collaborative working since at least two teachers and at least two pupils work together on the same subject so that eTwinning provides a framework for training and implementing playful and authentically collaborative learning into the everyday school routine without the need for lots of resources.

Some teachers involved in eTwinning projects, will already be very experienced in international collaboration. In some schools there will exist a culture of collaboration and professionalism. Other teachers will have to learn to work together. It is important to know what experiences the counterpart in a Twin-school has. In this paper, the Pedagogical Advisory Group of the eTwinning project (PAG) will discuss collaborative aspects of teaching and professional development, collaborative aspects of learning and pedagogy and the role of ICT for enhancing and improving collaboration at all levels.

Collaborative Aspects of Teaching

Pre-Condition: A new awareness within the school

Since collaborative learning means a change in the teachers' role towards becoming more moderators of the learning process rather than transporters of knowledge, school managers need to start by introducing a new consciousness within the school. This consciousness should involve everybody – including teachers - within a school as permanently learning (lifelong learning), so that everyone's opinions and culture are respected and communication is open. Only transparency and openness within teams allows for the potential to pursue a common goal and thus to be successful. Consequently, schools have to commit to and to promote collaborative working and learning inside and outside the school.

School organisation

Collaboration can take place on several levels:

- Collaboration between schools: Magazines, letters and ICT ensure communication between other people and their individual or collective experiences: Who knows what? Who can help?
- Schools may have steering committees for monitoring school development measures, among which collaborative working is one method of working.
- Collaboration between teachers: Teachers abandon their self-centred approach to their work and are open for working collaboration inside and outside the school. For example, resources and teaching materials may be produced cooperatively and shared among other teachers and schools. Or experiences from practical lessons may be analysed together. Collaboration means transparency and therefore needs continual communication between the teachers as well as permanent agreements.
- Exchanges may take place informally, in pedagogical conversations, in lesson or class conferences, during congresses and regional meetings. Collaborative working has to become a standard methodology when working on pedagogical concepts and methods as well as when preparing and reflecting on lessons.

- Involvement of the social and economical community around the school. Parents can play an active role and share their experiences and skills with pupils and teachers. Secondly the municipality, the local authorities, companies, industry and shops, other related educational institutes can be involved in the life and activity of the school.

Teachers' professional behaviour

- In order to allow collaborative learning in the classroom and to be able to moderate this process when necessary, it is fundamental that teachers themselves are well-trained and experienced in collaborative learning. Therefore, communication training (e. g. feedback rules) may be useful to help them to start thinking about their behaviour and communication processes and to deepen their confidence in this way of working.
- Team building methods may be carried out by intensive collaborative working days where the school manager and all teachers meet and exchange experiences on pedagogical questions, processes, the use of multimedia as well as basic competencies. Teachers become learners and are confronted with possible learning strategies and are trained by using practical examples that demonstrate the process, before they use them within their own lessons. A systematic professional development programme seems to make sense in order to strengthen teachers' confidence. A steering group might be formed to organise and plan this training. As a result constant change can be enabled in schools.

Collaborative Aspects of Learning

Collaboration between children

Collaborative learning is a social key competence. In teams, relations, conflicts, interests and other factors become evident. This potential can be harnessed for developing pupils; knowledge and experience through collaboration in educational activity.

Research has shown that pupils are more open to collaborative learning, the earlier they are involved in such practice. The older they get, the more they become sceptical and disinterested in it. Therefore, collaborative learning seems to be more effective for motivation and the learning process, the earlier pupils are engaged in it.

The following aspects of collaborative working were mentioned by pupils who took part in collaborative training (the school did not play any important role). Collaborative working...

- changes individual attitudes and behaviours by communicating, respecting and also adapting;
- is an advantage for the individual learning process: common help and several ideas lead to increased output;
- has positive social effects by an unproved communication: helps for building teams and to get to know each other better;
- is important for living and working outside the school, i. e. for the future profession;
- needs rules in order to function;
- is more fun than working alone.^[1]

[1] Berlin Institute for Schools, <http://www.pse-berlin.de>, Evaluation of 1907 students from 20 schools, training days for team development in model schools
For more information refer to: <http://www.lisum.de/go?SmartLink=10635>

Possible methods for collaboration

- Collaboration within the classroom: students talk to each other, decide through consensus, criticise each other and change things together.
- Working groups for training in cooperation: a small group takes on a task, the pupils distribute the tasks or working steps and thus train solution-centred communication for solving a problem.
- All methods that train independent and self responsible learning are helpful for collaborative learning.
- Projects or authentic learning environments such as those provided through eTwinning help teams to work in authentic environments.



Commissioner Figel',
Elizabeth Gehrler, Austrian
Minister for Education and
eTwinning Prize winners at
the eTwinning Conference
in January 2006

Learning partnerships are also an ideal method for promoting a culture of collaboration^[2], such as experimental days within companies, secondments for teachers within companies, training of applications or language training with companies or other schools, experts coming into lessons (virtually or in person), common projects between several classes or subjects.

[2] Also see www.teamarbeit.de

Authentic audience

Students often collaborate in groups in the classroom but rarely with peers in other classrooms either in their school, or town let alone in other countries. Certainly evidence suggests that when students work with other students the interactions are markedly different than when they work with a teacher. These situations create real audiences for their work and a real possibility of intellectual co-operation with peers in pursuit of joint projects. When students prepare work in the normal classroom there is an expectation that there will be mistakes and the teacher will correct it. Although a student may try hard to reduce the errors, the audience is the teacher and the culture provides a set of expectations that includes permission to make errors. When students prepare material for a different audience, in this case students in another country, the task takes on a new meaning and more care is taken in the execution of the task to reach the desired goal. The task is more authentic in that there is a real audience who will have to act on the information the students send, so there is willingness to invest extra effort to convey meaning in as correct a way as possible. Many classroom-based activities involve students writing for different audiences, but so often this audience is fictitious. In the case of email and other online collaboration, or developing a web site the audience is real.

Sharing tasks and critiquing students' work

The Internet can be used as a vehicle for students publishing and sharing their work, or working collaboratively on a joint multimedia production. Many young people write fiction with others over a wide inter-continental network taking on a persona and writing a collaborative piece of fiction. Another form of collaborative work could therefore be students using ICT to jointly composing a story, a play or a poem, or art work. They can also become critics for each other's work.

In order to facilitate collaborative activities the students - together with the teacher - need to agree on what it is they would like to convey and how they want to convey it. Will it be an article to seed discussion? Will it be a set of questions to try to ascertain some aspect of the culture of the other country? Will it involve developing a questionnaire or assigning the

task to a small group of students? All of these activities will involve class collaboration and prepare the students for working with the students in another country others in the same way and they can be developed using ICT.

Peer teaching

Peer teaching is another form of collaboration where one group of students teaches others. Research has shown this can be very effective for both groups of students and retention rates in both student and 'teacher' are high.

The Role of ICT and eTwinning

ICT has been heralded as a tool that will change the face of society, not only educationally but also socially. Education has been caught up in this maelstrom of change with much debate about the positive and negative impact of ICT on the role of the teacher, the learning style of students and the institution of school itself. The integration of ICT into teaching and learning activities has been slowly formulating over many years from the use of tape recorders and language laboratories in language teaching, to the use of television and video material in all subject areas. The last twenty years has witnessed the invasion of computerised technology into all aspects of our lives, from banking to shopping and of course, education. This has led to the notion of Lifelong Learning, where the formal education process is no longer viewed as something that happens only within the solid walls of formal educational institutions.

New models of learning environments are emerging: community based learning centres; home based education delivered through high speed cable connection to an interactive digital TV screen; public information kiosks; WAP mobile information services; wireless environments which permit the use of portable devices literally anywhere. These together with the phenomenal growth of the Internet means that teaching and learning tasks are being broadened in ways unimagined twenty, ten or even five years ago. The use of new

technology is now seen as a means of encouraging a more personal style of learning in which the student is actively involved in seeking out knowledge and the answers to specific (and their own) problems. At the same time, he or she is adding to their skill base by learning how to manipulate the tools of technology itself. Side by side with the individualisation of the student's learning environment is the disparate area of the development of collaborative learning environments. At first glance, it would appear that there is a direct dichotomy between the two, however this does not have to be the reality. A student may be involved in a group project that enables him or her to carry out individual research, which is then evaluated, modified and incorporated by the group.

The European Commission's initiative on eTwinning for schools in Europe has been envisioned against this emerging background of increased interest in collaborative educational activities between partners geographically removed. It is ideally poised to take advantage of the growth of computer availability and increasing Internet bandwidth to promote productive and meaningful partnerships between schools in Europe. Central to the practice of such partnerships must be collaborative pedagogical activities and in order to do this teachers must have access to collaborative learning tools. Some of these tools, Virtual Learning Environments, (VLEs), will be discussed here in the context of eTwinning as well as considerations as to how easy is it to achieve true collaboration.

EUN Community Tool

One of the essential forerunners to the eTwinning concept has been the development of community platforms that are freely available and widely used by the various actors in this process. One such community platform was launched alongside the eSchoolnet Portal for teachers^[3] in October 2001 which started with four communities. Now that number has grown to 400+ with a total membership of 20,000. What is most interesting is the range of activities that these communities cover including the involvement of the partners in the national networks, teachers, and researchers^[4].

[3] <http://www.eschoolnet.org>

[4] <http://community.eun.org>

The tools incorporated into the EUN Community Tool include a mail service, bulletin board, chat, forum, membership tracking, and the facility to upload and download files. It is a sophisticated tool, which provides an excellent environment for collaborative activities. Such is its success that an advanced model has been incorporated into the eTwinning Portal^[5] itself in the form of the TwinSpace; the area reserved for schools forming an eTwinning partnership. Within this space partners may access all the tools necessary for planning and working together online, including a repository of resources and project plans.

Advanced Learning Environments

While the community tools available to the teachers involved in an eTwinning partnership are more than adequate for planning and executing a collaborative project, there will be some teachers who may seek to use more pedagogically advanced Learning Environments. There are free virtual learning environments that facilitate collaborative learning, most of them are built on the constructivist idea of teaching and learning. These environments usually do not have any content but provide for building content through collaboration and communication, and most of them are available in many languages. The source code is open, anyone can improve or localise them.

BSCW, Basic Support for Collaborative Work (bscw.gmd.de), is a tools designed in Germany. It is free to use for educational purposes. It enables and supports for working in groups. The outcome of joint efforts can be arranged in folders, comments can be added. Resources can be uploaded to work with them. All group members including the teacher can follow the development of the task. This VLE is accessible through the Internet but for closed and safer use it can be downloaded to the school server. Using BSCW-t online^[6] needs registration^[7] but it is an easy, 5 minutes process.

[5] <http://www.etwinning.net>

[6] BSCW: <http://bscw.fit.fraunhofer.de/GettingStarted.html>

[7] Registration to BSCW: <http://bscw.fit.fraunhofer.de/pub/bscw.cgi?op=rmail>

Synergeia (<http://bscl.fit.fraunhofer.de>) is a further developed version of BSCW. It offers logged, closed chat options and tools for visual communication (mind mapping). It was developed for school use in an EU-project, named ITCOLE^[8]. Synergeia is the combination of a synchronous MapTool^[9] and an asynchronous BSCL^[10] (Basic Support for Cooperative Learning) tool. This VLE also can be used without downloading directly from the Synergeia Webpage^[11] of the ITCOLE project. The teacher registers^[12] first and he or she registers the students data. It needs some expertise to download and set the system on the school server, but there is detailed help at the website in English. This VLE has quite a lot of tools and features dedicated to serve as a good tool in constructivist or active ways of teaching and learning.

FLE3^[13] (<http://fle3.uiah.fi>) is a pedagogically advanced learning environment, with a pedagogic base firmly rooted in the principals of constructivist learning theory. This was also developed as part of the European project called ITCOLE.

The Fle3 environment was developed on pedagogical theory including Computer Supported Collaborative Learning (CSCL), Progressive Inquiry Model (PIM) for collaborative knowledge building, Jigsaw, and Problem Based Learning. The environment makes use of all these methods and a teacher may choose to lead their students gradually though a project exercise using these methods.

This VLE is very friendly and fits the style of the younger generation (6-12). It has really good interactive communication tools. It must be downloaded to a school server but more schools can collaborate this way, even if the others do not set up the software. When using within the school, it does not need the web.

[8] Information about ITCOLE: <http://www.euro-cscl.org/site/itcole>

[9] http://bscl.fit.fraunhofer.de/en/about_maptool.html

[10] http://bscl.fit.fraunhofer.de/en/about_bscl.html

[11] Synergeia webpage (ITCOLE project): <http://bscl.fit.fraunhofer.de/en/about.html>

[12] Registration Synergeia: <http://bscl.fit.fraunhofer.de/en/register.html>

[13] Future Learning Environment; <http://www.fle3.org>

In FLE3 work is going on in closed, teacher created 'courses' that are maximized to 40 members. This VLE was also built on the basis of the constructivist theory. Students build their knowledge via analysing sources, finding information, communicating and collaborating with each other. They work in a structured forum-system where for example they must decide before saying something if it is a fact, question or opinion. The system provides possibilities for brainstorming, voting and many other things.

Think.com^[14] is an Oracle tool but free for any registered school world wide. This is only available in English but very much user friendly and students of any nation can use it in two minutes. The teacher and the students can initiate topics and groups around them. There are a lot of interactive tools like a role game where 5 different roles can be taken up to discuss an issue. Any media file can be uploaded, so that students really can 'build' knowledge there.

Using this VLE there is a long project going on called WebPlay^[15]. In the UK Think.com projects are monitored and awarded continuously. See Mirandanet 'Project of the Month'^[16].

Finally we briefly mention **Lams**, which is a constructivist VLE in its design and use.^[17]

Bulletin boards, online forums and instant messaging

Other types of collaborative activity involve an online bulletin board using collaboration tools e.g. FirstClass, on which students post questions and ideas for discussion. Any student (or teachers) can respond and pose new ideas for debate. The asynchronous nature of forums mean that students can take their time in composing replies and this can be especially useful when they re corresponding in a language that is not their native one.

[14] Angol honlapja: http://www.think.com/en_hu/

[15] Casting the Web. A project angol ismertetiCEje.

http://www.think.com/en_us/about/news/cases/WebPlay/WebplayCase.shtml

[16] A Think.com legjobb angol projektjeinek honlapja: http://www.mirandanet.ac.uk/news/project_month.htm

[17] See: www.lamsinternational.org

Instant messaging e.g. AIM and MSN can also be used for such discussion between pairs of students or between small groups of students

Voice and video collaboration

Collaboration does not always have to be in text and there are ample opportunities for voice and video discussions between students that can culminate in a shared piece of multimedia in which, for example, they can compare living and studying in different countries using tools like MSN, Yahoo Messenger, Skype and Google Talk.

Wikis

Wikis have become increasingly popular and a 'wiki' can be created on any aspect of the curriculum which students can add to and develop. A wiki is a web application that allows users to add content, as on an Internet forum, but also allows anyone to edit the content. Wiki also refers to the collaborative software used to create such a website (see for example Wikipedia).

Considerations for Professional Development

Let us go back to collaboration and professional development. The main consideration for professional development must be to what extent the teachers involved in eTwinning are ready to utilise the tools of collaboration? Obviously the answer to this is that there will be advanced, moderately experienced and novices involved in this. From a professional development point of view it will not be difficult to train teachers in the use of tools, and to initiate them into the pedagogical possibilities afforded by their use.

A much more fundamental question is whether the success or uptake of this approach to learning is based in any way within a cultural context. Gilleran(2001)^[18] queried the need for

[18] Gilleran, A. (2001). Virtual bridges, links to the future: An Examination of the Impact of ICT as a Tool for Change In A Social and Cultural Context. Dublin: Trinity College.

developing a 'culture of collaboration' with a school or learning environment while Illomaki et al (2003)^[19] describe it as a 'culture of pedagogical collaboration'. In both these studies it was found that in schools where collaboration was part of the fundamental practice of the school, then teachers found it much easier to involve themselves in project work.

In a recent study carried out by EUN with teachers using the Fle3 environment^[20], the comments of the teachers involved suggested that the technical barriers were not the most significant ones but rather the challenges posed through none cooperative peers and systems, and cultural contextual issues. It seems that the participants accept that there will be always problems with the technology, but find it much harder to accept the non-cooperation of their colleagues, or the rigid approaches of their educational systems in which national curriculum and school timetabling can really impose a barrier to the implementation of collaborative pedagogical approaches and the adoption of collaborative pedagogical practice to the daily practice of teachers, it may be argued that the culture of both the school and the national educational policy plays a significant role.

Indeed some European countries have already perceived this and have integrated this thinking into the national strategic plans. For example Finland, in their most recent National Plan 'Education, Training and Research in the Information Society. A national Strategy for 2000-2004'^[21], aim their strategy at 'reshaping the role of learning within, and outside the school system'. A similar approach was taken in Sweden where the National Plan (2000)^[22] placed the emphasis on the social aspects of learning. It approached the development of ICT skills and practice by integrating the socio-cultural and constructivist views of learning into the school curricula. "Learning in groups is important. The knowledge acquired by different individuals becomes an asset to group work."^[23]

[19] Illomaki L, Lakkala M, Paavola S, Hakkarainen. (2003). Development of Teacher Communities during Intensive ICT projects.

[20] Oasis, available from the European Schoolnet, 61 Rue de Trèves, Brussels, Belgium

[21] Finnish Ministry of Education. (1999). Education, Training and Research in the Information Society: A National Strategy for 2000-2004. Helsinki: Ministry of Education
<http://www.minedu.fi/julkaisut/information/englishU/welcome.html>

[22] ItiS. (1998). Swedish National Action programme for ICT in Schools: 1999-2001. Stockholm: Ministry of Education and Science Delegation for ICT in Schools. <http://www.itis.gov.se/english/ITISEng.pdf>

[23] Further information on the ICT educational policies of various European countries is available on the European Schoolnet at <http://insight.eun.org/policy>

Best Practice

It is worthwhile to touch on two difficult concepts in the utilisation of ICT for collaboration in eTwinning, the concept of innovation and the concept of what constitutes 'best practice'.

If we explore the question, what is the innovative use of ICT in an educational and pedagogic sense in a European context, the picture which emerges will be a very uneven one as so much of innovation is contextual, relying on the ingenuity and imagination of teachers to make the most of the resources they have available to them. So a school doing a simple email project within one country where there is limited resources in terms of bandwidth, internet access and computer availability may be just as innovative as a school that is very well equipped in a high speed connection zone doing projects involving video streaming and live conferencing.

In the same sense the concept of 'best practice' is also contextually dependent. However if, through eTwinning, a community of practice is established where these teacher practitioners, work together across Europe, involving their school colleagues in collaboration and sharing with each other their practice and resources, then we will truly begin to have the foundation of communal innovation and growth.

Conclusions

Collaboration is a key issue in nowadays education. It is important that schools recognize the value of collaboration between teachers inside the school and between teachers of different schools. Engaging in this collaboration between teachers can reflect the potential for possible collaborative work between pupils and schools. The European dimension can give this collaboration unforeseen new drivers and challenges.

ICT is viewed by many as a tool or set of tools that enable communication, but it is argued that ICT is more than just a tool. It is a means of interaction and communication that has never been possible up to this point, in that it enables interaction, construction of knowledge, collaboration and social activity in a way never conceived before. 'One of the most interesting aspects of ICT is its 'a-cultural' nature, it is not of itself rooted in any culture, but can enable the transmission of culture in a meaningful way.' (Gillera 2001)

Collaborative learning may take place in any school. However, ICT helps pupils to organise themselves and to facilitate a continuous communication between them. Moreover, team work also means not to always work together in the same classroom but in different places. The challenge for independent learning and motivation are increased: ICT makes lessons more vivid and motivates pupils through experimental and active learning.

eTwinning can contribute to all of this and provide a ready-made audience for collaboration by means of ICT and ICT tools. It can provide a reason to collaborate around European cultural similarities and differences as well as general understanding.

Enrichment and added value of eTwinning projects

Introduction

The eTwinning initiative of the European Commission is a great success. By July 2006, over 13,000 schools have registered across all 25 countries of the European Union and they are all trying to find a partner for a collaborative project. These schools are confident that eTwinning will give them added value to their educational process.

But there is still a lot to gain. First of all there are thousands of schools not participating. Secondly, the majority of the registered schools has not yet found a partner school. Thirdly, schools who are working on a project are often doing so on a rather small scale: one subject, one project, over a short time scale and with only one or two teachers and classes involved.

If the ambition of eTwinning is to engage a large number of students in European collaboration so as to improve the quality of their education, to stimulate cultural exchange, and to raise innovative developments, then we have still a long way to go. Therefore it remains profitable to explain the enrichment and added value an eTwinning project can bring to a school. The Pedagogical Advisory Group has discussed the benefits of eTwinning since the project began.

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We have given presentations at workshops and we asked the participants themselves to tell us what the benefits are for them.

In this paper we give an overview of the arguments and goals for e-twinning which can be used by everyone. Schools and teachers who have not yet registered will be motivated to do so by the myriad of benefits and added value we present.

Schools and teachers who haven't yet been able to find a partner will renew their efforts after reading the arguments and ideas we present. Who knows? Perhaps they will be able to see even more possibilities for collaboration after reading the paper.

Finally, we hope that schools that are already collaborating in a project will be challenged to broaden the scope of the project or to increase its range to a more 'whole school' approach.

Enrichment through eTwinning

There are five main areas of added value to education through eTwinning projects.

Authentic learning

Students are motivated when learning is authentic i.e. they believe the problems they are solving or the questions they are asking are their own. An eTwinning project can place educational content in a frame of authentic learning. Collaborative projects are usually motivational because of their context, fitting into the multi-media and international culture that learners of today are familiar and comfortable with. Topics like the environment, cultural differences, local history and geography, issues in society can be authentic if the context in which they study them is with real people who can answer their questions from first hand experience. Working modes like writing an email or chatting online to students in the country of study, or practicing a foreign language with a native speaker over a video or telephone conference can place learning in a natural perspective. Sharing images and videos can also bring the situation being examined to life and keep students interested and keen to find out more than the minimum required by the task set by a teacher.

Students do need authentic settings when they try to make themselves and their arguments understood. They cannot carry out the task and cannot produce a common outcome if there is no understanding. This gives an authentic surrounding for practising foreign language or – in case of shared language – practising argumentation skills.

Collaboration

An eTwinning project requires collaboration between students and between teachers. Also the school as a whole and the local community can be active in the collaboration. This can work in two ways. At first the collaboration is a skill, a competence for children, which in many countries is an objective within the curriculum. Secondly collaborative learning is a way for improving learning results. Provided that the collaboration is well structured in time, place and results, it can be stimulating and fun and therefore add to the desired learning effect.

Collaboration takes place among students in local settings, and this collaboration can grow over the classes and into more classes. Or in one class more teachers can collaborate in planning and carrying out a project. This collaboration is a basis to reach out and collaborate with another school, another set of students and teachers. Collaboration takes place on many levels.

| | Teachers School A | Teachers School B | Students School A | Students School B |
|------------------------------|---|---|---|---|
| Teachers School A | Planning and carrying out an interdisciplinary project in a class | Adjusting aims planning intercultural, international collaboration, working together | Within school, teachers and students plan and work together on an international project | Teachers can collaborate directly with students from other countries if the plan allows |
| Teachers School B | Adjusting aims planning intercultural, international collaboration, working together | Planning and carrying out an interdisciplinary project in a class | Teachers can collaborate directly with students from other countries if the plan allows | Within school, teachers and students plan and work together on an international project |
| Students School A | Within school, teachers and students plan and work together on an international project | Teachers can collaborate directly with students from other countries if the plan allows | There are higher level and broader aims of collaboration within class | Students can collaborate in direct and indirect ways within an intercultural context |
| Students School B | Teachers can collaborate directly with students from other countries if the plan allows | Within school, teachers and students plan and work together on an international project | Ss can collaborate in direct and indirect ways with intercultural context | There are higher levels and broader aims of collaboration within a class |

It is really important to provide students with the real experience of international collaboration. Some projects go locally and only the teachers share the results via digital communication. It is a much bigger value when students from different countries work on the same task and produce something as the result of their collaboration.

Collaboration goes by communication, making plans and agreements, making choices and decisions together, by reasoning and making compromises. This is a great possibility to learn international (and national) collaboration. This way of working is close to real life and prepares for similar tasks of adulthood.

European dimension

It is obvious that an understanding of structure and policies of the European Union will become increasingly important for European citizens, both now and in the future. European countries have a shared history, a common set of norms and values, politically and humanitarian as well as a rich diversity in language and cultures especially as membership grows. European countries face substantial challenges both economically and socially, and the call for innovation and creativity is enormous. An eTwinning project can by its very nature address the European dimension; implicitly by bringing pupils and teachers in mutual contact and explicitly by choosing topics that are important for the broadening of mutual understanding. European projects foster tolerance and understanding and ways can be found to present the EU in a positive light with the consequences that it should lead to a better life for all member states and their people.

There are European countries that know very little of each other and can get closer by an eTwinning project. Also, there are countries with a long and sometimes stormy history in common, a collaborative project may help to clear up the situation and understand what happened in the past and what is going on now between those countries.

ICT-use

One of the main objectives for eTwinning is to promote the use of modern information and communication technologies (ICT) in education. By using email, web-pages, blogs and vlogs, videoconferencing and internet, etc, the students' and teachers' ICT skills will be developed and used in a relevant and natural way. So far, European collaborative projects have been carried out by some schools by visiting each other, writing letters and sending photographs. ICT provides an inexhaustible variety of ways to structures and perform a collaborative project with professional and rewarding results that speed up letter writing and the sending of photographs and make face to face visits more rewarding and worthwhile by the ease with which the visit can be planned and extending the contact afterward easily.



Experience shows that most international projects use few possibilities of digital communication and collaboration, teachers are not brave enough – or do not have enough help – to explore tools that they have not used yet. Broadening the ways of communication and collaboration can be one of the most important tasks of the national and international workshops.

Participants at the
eTwinning Conference
in Linz, Austria,
January 2006

Professional development of teachers

An important side-effect of an eTwinning project can be the implicit professional development of the teachers involved. By sharing knowledge with others and cooperating, discussing and working towards set goals teachers are indeed stimulated. Many report their satisfaction from this kind of collaboration and the learning effect they experienced.

There are many levels and areas of teacher professional development possibilities in eTwinning. Even in-school cooperation can be new to the teachers who are used to work in isolation, 'behind the classroom doors'. A multidisciplinary project stimulates professional discussion and cooperation among local teachers.

In many countries, cooperative and collaborative ways of learning lag behind: still the instructive methods dominate. eTwinning can contribute to the long-wished paradigm shift in those countries. Collaboration between methodologically more advanced countries (schools) and those of practising instructive teaching can have a big effect on the latter.

Enrichment for the participants

One can also look at added value from the perspective of the people involved. eTwinning has the potential to address students, teachers, head teachers, parents and the local community. Understating the benefits for target groups can be useful too. Sometimes it may be necessary to convince a colleague to participate in a project, or one has to give a presentation to parents at a parents' evening about the reasons for undertaking projects with a school in a distant country. Of course school principals are very important; they have to be fully convinced of the benefits because it is their job to find funds to support the project or perhaps convince other less motivated teachers in the school to get involved.

Sometimes it will even be necessary to convince students. They are very keen on using ICT and can be excited about working together with 'foreign' friends, but since ICT has less novelty value nowadays and that 'foreign' friend could be less interesting than appeared at first sight, it is not unthinkable that one has to convince even students of the added value of an eTwinning project.

We now briefly address the different target groups and summarise the different benefits derived from participation or involvement in an eTwinning partnership and project in each of the above areas. We printed keywords in bold and hope the reader can use these arguments for his own purposes.

Students/pupils

Authentic learning, content

- eTwinning allows to combine formal with **informal learning** that is often more effective. It allows learning about life.
- International projects are stimulating, **motivating and fun**, provided that they are well structured, time limited and results based.
- eTwinning combines traditional and new media and gives students the opportunity to **use ICT** (multimedia and communication tools) in a natural and open way.
- It can broaden the **perspective of learning**: authentic, real life situations, within a rich context and as a result, improve the learning outcome. Thus, students learn to see things from a different point of view.
- Dependent on the subject it can contribute to achieve **curriculum objectives in** geography, foreign languages, mother tongue, history, sciences, etc.
- It offers to **learn a foreign language** in an authentic context and not only from school books. Students learn to communicate in a foreign language with real people, very often non native speakers, with whom they have to make themselves understood. Talking to people of the same age and with similar interests makes them more brave in using foreign languages. They will become less afraid of making mistakes.
- The contacts offer a chance for realistic **intercultural learning situations**. Pupils will learn about friendships and different views, habits and cultural characteristics within a different culture.

Communications, collaboration and other related skills

- eTwinning helps to develop **cross-cultural competencies** by building a cultural bridge between students of different nationalities living in different countries. Thus, students may make friends, become tolerant and accept differences, they learn to adapt more easily, they learn "new ways" for solving a problem, and they share their culture. This broadens the students' mind and leads to a better understanding.
- It improves **cross-cultural communications** and can develop the students' confidence in communicating with their peers from another country through finding out and learning about another country and using another language for communication.
- It addresses **management skills** such as co-operation, planning, responsibility, making choices.
- The international contacts help to develop the students' **personality** and to broaden their horizons both as individuals and as future professionals.
- eTwinning raises pupils **self esteem** and gives pupils **confidence**.
- International projects are stimulating, motivating and **fun** for the students.

European dimension

- eTwinning can give a **broader view** on the European dimension and it improves mutual understanding over borders: culture, habits, religion, similarities and differences.
- Contacts with students from other countries might lead to **business contacts** later on and Contacts between fictitious firms on an international level are possible.
- It helps young people to get to know the **history** of other European countries and their peoples, so it can smoothen stormy elements in history and exploiting the common grounds.

ICT-use

- eTwinning can develop information and communication skills: e.g students may create a weblog and website and use the TwinSpace on the eTwinning virtual desktop.
- It supports and recognises a new digital youth culture.

Teachers

Authentic learning, content

- eTwinning can cover (parts of) the curriculum or certain objectives (e.g. international co-operation). Furthermore, international projects, that are part of the curriculum, can be carried out more easily.
- **Subjects** that are taught in English can be enriched by international contributions.
- International projects and using ICT contribute to the **appeal of lessons**, so students become more attentive. Thus, teaching becomes easier and more efficient.
- It can cause **motivation** by the personal work style which can be used, the change of perspective and fun with ICT.
- It can **stimulate** teachers who coach their pupils to broaden their minds by using ICT as a tool to access and improve their European knowledge.
- It broadens the way teachers work in the classroom **in real time** (I have to adapt to another class!).
- It helps integrating different pedagogical approaches and contents (personally and culturally dependent) in the **daily school lessons**.
- International projects are stimulating, motivating and **fun** for the teachers.

Collaboration and professional development

- eTwinning can stimulate **collaboration** with colleagues within and outside the school.
- It can improve the **relationship** between students and teachers.
- It provides **powerful learning** for the teachers by working with others from other cultures. It stimulates the **exchange of ideas** and makes the sharing of educational knowledge and know-how possible.
- Teachers can **contact experts directly**, if they need something for their lessons.
- It can stimulate teachers to develop **learning materials** in co-operation.
- It helps **exchanging material** that has been tested by colleagues elsewhere.

- It allows teachers to implement **new ways of teaching practice** (grouping, methodology, motivation...) and leads to pedagogical innovation.
- Teachers develop **intercultural communications skills** by using ICT in a realistic way.
- It helps to develop **cross-cultural and management competencies** and helps strengthen teachers' **personalities**.
- The teachers' eTwinning community and the more playful approach help them to **use ICT-Tools** in specific learning.

European dimension

- Meeting together and conferencing with the other 25 countries of the EU helps to build a **European Education** in the field.
- eTwinning can be the start of a longer co-operation with other teachers. It opens ways for **continuous collaboration** and developing **real partnerships**, professionally and personally.
- The eTwinning community strengthens the teachers position and helps them to develop **intercultural projects** within their schools.

ICT-use

- The projects have a relatively low threshold because of all the support and support tools: it is relatively easy to join in.
- ICT tools on **www.etwinning.net** do not involve complex skills of teachers; there is the benefit of making it easier, not harder to use ICT.
- The active involvement of **students' as experts** helps the teachers to acquire ICT knowledge together with their students.
- ICT tools help them for **differentiating** their lessons.

Schools

Authentic learning, content

- eTwinning will bring international projects and co-operation into **daily practice**.
- It could have a major effect on **school policy** towards the teaching of certain aspects of the curriculum.
- It delivers **realistic contents** and students are more curious to learn. Thus, the learning quality in schools is enhanced.

Collaboration and other skills

- It gives a **kick** for finding the desired partner school(s).
- It gives schools the opportunity to become part of an **intercultural collaborative learning community**.
- It helps to develop a **new learning and communications environment** based on openness, exchange, interaction and fun.
- The school community may experience **social cohesion** with others and it may strengthen the whole school collaboration: between head teacher and teachers, teachers and teachers as well as between teachers and students. It also gives the opportunity to involve parents, local authorities, local companies and others.
- eTwinning projects can create **constructive friendships** and relations as well as new networks that bring communities and cultures together.
- It gives the opportunity to develop the teachers' **professional competencies**. Thus, it helps to develop the teachers' ICT, management, communications and personal skills such as flexibility in thinking and **changing perspectives**.
- It prepares young people for living and working in an **open Europe** and therefore contributes to a world based on openness, tolerance and fairness.
- eTwinning projects can become the starting point for a **Comenius project**.

European dimension

- It creates a **good image** for the school and is a recommendation for parents. The eTwinning label stands for openness, the quality label stands for efficient learning. A school can even gain an international reputation.
- It develops a European dimension for studying **citizenship** including empathy, and religious and ethnic tolerance.
- It provides relatively **easy ways** of participating in international projects (e.g. relatively few administrative procedures).
- It can be the start of a longer and sustainable co-operation with another school.
- It creates a European "**feeling at home**", flexible, wandering around.

ICT-use

- Because of the national and international support and support tools there is a certain **quality assurance** built into the project.
- The ICT use is a **driver** to get to know each other's culture, other countries and other people, independently of whether ICT is used formally or informally. The intercultural aspect of the partnership, vice-versa, is a driver for learning how to use ICT tools in specific situations.

Parents, local community

Authentic learning, content

- eTwinning can stimulate, by its authentic nature, the **involvement** of parents and the local community and give them a participative role, preferably as experts in a particular knowledge domain.
- International projects are stimulating, motivating and fun for parents.

Collaboration and other skills

- It involves parents and the community in the **educational process**. Of course, this can be done through local projects, too, but a European project with another (foreign) school is more challenging.
- Parents with intercultural experiences or language, management, communications and ICT skills may be integrated and recognized as experts.
- Parents who do not work actively any more, may find a link to reenter "business life" and work as **coaches** or trainers for the teachers and students.

European dimension

- It will provide a common base for European **mutual understanding** particularly among older people whose view of Europe is substantially different from those of young people.

ICT-use

- If parents are really involved and have a role in the project they can also benefit from developing their own **personal use of ICT**. For some parents that is an outstanding opportunity to develop their own ICT-skills.

Acknowledgement

The PAG has brainstormed on the benefits and added value of the eTwinning partnerships several times. From that we derived the list presented. At a workshop in Linz at the annual eTwinning conference 2006 we asked the participants to give their own view on the benefits of eTwinning projects. These comments were added to the list. Finally we added the benefits that were presented by Michael Huber-Kirchberger, Business College Linz.

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The Pedagogical Advisory Group (PAG) set up within the framework of the Central Support Service (CSS) for eTwinning is composed of experts coming from teacher training, school inspection and pedagogical research. The role of the PAG is to analyse, reflect and comment on the eTwinning activities and develop a theoretical framework for the eTwinning action which will ensure the lasting pedagogic value of the eTwinning activity in schools.

This series of books aims to elaborate on the outcomes of the work of the PAG.

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