



WIDEN YOUR NET



Organising a video conference between 30 European schools might sound like a recipe for a nervous breakdown, but with the help of eTwinning, this kind of ICT adventure might not be as far fetched as you think...

What sound does a dog make in Russia? We'll give you a clue; it's not 'woof, woof'. This was the discovery made by Michael Purves, a teacher at Yester Primary School in Scotland, whilst telling his young son about the different animal noises. "The dog says 'woof, woof,'" Michael explained confidently, before being quickly corrected by his Russian wife. "Don't be silly. They say 'guv, guv'!"

This curious discrepancy gave Michael an idea. Wouldn't it be interesting to conduct an investigation with his class to find out what noises dogs and other animals are thought to make in countries all across Europe? And not just by spending hours trawling through Google, but by actually speaking to children in different parts of the world.

This might sound on the ambitious side, but Michael had good reason to be optimistic about the project's success. The previous year his class had linked up with a school in Finland and children from both nations took part in writing a blog discussing the similarities and differences between their cultures.

The Scottish/Finnish partnership was formed through the eTwinning website (www.etwinning.net), a free service provided by the British Council that supports online based projects between schools from two or more European countries. All Michael had to do was register, sign in and search through the list of schools around Europe looking to collaborate with a class in the UK.

When it came to setting up his 'woof woof' project, he simply returned to the eTwinning website to repeat the process, but this time recruited 10 schools who all wanted to get involved in what turned out to be an award winning enterprise.

European union

However, 10 countries wasn't enough for Michael: "I wanted to do something bigger and better, so I set myself the challenge of finding a way to involve every single country that takes part in eTwinning." It wasn't long before he came up with the ideal format, either. What better model for European unity than the Eurovision song contest?

Now, you might be wondering how this glitzy, sprawling and

utterly bemusing festival of camp translates into life in the classroom, but it has all the essential ingredients for a successful cross curricular project. At its heart you'll find music, drama, geography and MFL, and since the entire project is played out over the internet through verbal and written communications, you can add speaking and listening, writing for a real context and, last but not least, ICT to the list.

And so, at the start of 2009, the first ever 'Schoolvision' was launched. It would involve schools from 30 different European countries, who would each create their own music video, upload it to the project's website and then take part in live web cam vote to decide on the winner.

The tricky bits

"A lot of people have asked me, 'how on Earth did you get 30 different partners?'" said Michael. "But it's actually quite easy. When you visit the eTwinning website you can search for schools by country, so it was just a matter of writing lots of emails and hoping I would get a favourable response. In the end, I was turning people away."

However, while there was no shortage of enthusiasm for the project, when it came to the technical logistics, ICT skills were a little thin on the ground. Many of the partners had never uploaded a digital video to the internet, so the learning process started early as Michael walked the technologically infirm through the early stages.

To check that everyone had grasped the basics, all 30 schools then took part in a mini-challenge to prepare for the main event. They each had to produce a test video showing viewers around their school and then upload this to the Schoolvision blog. As it turned out, this section of the project turned out to be valuable in itself. "We had all these videos from right around Europe, which every partner sat down to watch and learn about the different cultures – from Iceland in the North West to Turkey in the South East," explained Michael.

How to set up an eTwinning project

1. REGISTER FREE WITH ETWINNING

Log-on to www.etwinning.net and create your own profile page on your eTwinning desktop. Be creative but honest in your descriptions of you and your school. Make your eTwinning profile 'attractive' by uploading some nice photos of your school or area.

2. FIND A PARTNER

Use the available partner finding tools on the desktop. Post a message on the Partner Finding Forum – use good 'netiquette' and reply to your messages. Remember to check your desktop inbox for any eTwinning emails from teachers.

3. CREATING YOUR ETWINNING PROJECT

Have a look at the ready made Projects Kits and Modules on the website. You and your partner (or partners) can work on any subject but the British Council would recommend that you try to fit it into your curriculum for that term. Involve your pupils – what would they like to do?

4. WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE!

Be clear and concise in the language you are communicating in - don't use any UK education jargon (e.g. Key Stage) or slang as you may not be understood. Many schools across Europe use English in eTwinning though you can use any European language you are confident in as the website is available in 20+ languages!

5. IT'S A TWO WAY PROCESS

Be open, honest and flexible about what you expect from the project and your partner school. Communicate regularly to keep up to date with new ideas and project activities. This will also ensure a successful working relationship between you and your partner school.

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The next step was to rehearse the live web cam conference, the one section of the Schoolvision project that everyone felt nervous about. "The first tests took place with teachers' communicating via web cams from their own homes," said Michael. "This gave us a chance to become friends and share ideas on how the project might develop. Once we were comfortable with the technology, we moved it into the classroom."

Getting technical

By the time Michael's class conducted their final web cam test with Cyprus, they had trialed the process 10 times and it was beginning to become second nature. Teachers' and pupils' ICT skills had improved and the children were much more savvy about internet safety. For example, they now knew not to use their own names when making comments on a blog and had all become accustomed to creating aliases.

Their knowledge of Europe had also been greatly expanded. "My pupils loved asking questions to children in other countries and learning from them, rather than a teacher or a text book. It's very powerful," Michael enthused. "The children have discovered some unusual things," he continued. "One of the questions they came up with was 'what do you call your country in your own language'? When they put this to our Greek partners, their answer was 'Ellada'. Little things like this make quite an impression on the kids and it's what makes the project entertaining."

Perfect partners

ETWINNING AMBASSADOR, KIMBERLY FARRALL, TALKS ABOUT HER MOST SUCCESSFUL INTERNATIONAL PROJECT...



Teach Primary: What has been your favourite eTwinning project to date?

Kimberly Farrall: My favourite project was called Eco Food. It was our first partnership with Portugal and Italy and it's when we realised eTwinning's potential for enriching our curriculum. We created a blog and exchanged eco-related ideas in the form of photographs, videos and pictures. We discussed composting, healthy eating, recycling and other environmental topics. You can view the blog at www.eco-food.blogspot.com

TP: How does eTwinning fit into your time table?

KF: At St Edward's, we incorporate eTwinning into ICT and our creative curriculum, we don't view it as something that gives teachers more work to do. To help us plan ahead, we start searching for suitable partners the half term before a project commences. When our Y6 pupils had to create multimedia presentations, we planned a unit of work with a school in France that involved exchanging PowerPoint shows about our class, town and country.

TP: What do the children learn from being involved in an eTwinning Project?

KF: eTwinning provides real life learning opportunities and it allows children to find out about different cultures and languages. They are able to see what is happening in other classrooms in Europe and it makes their learning exciting! It increases motivation and enhances ICT skills.

Kimberly Farrall is Eco Coordinator at St Edward's CE Primary School

Going live

Four months on from its launch, Schoolvision reached its climax on the 17th May. In the end, not every partner was able to take part in the live voting, but an impressive 23 countries logged in. The rest sent their marks by email. As project coordinator, Michael adopted the Terry Wogan role - minus the oversized glass of Baileys - and kept things running smoothly. He also fielded questions from Scottish Television, which was filming the event.

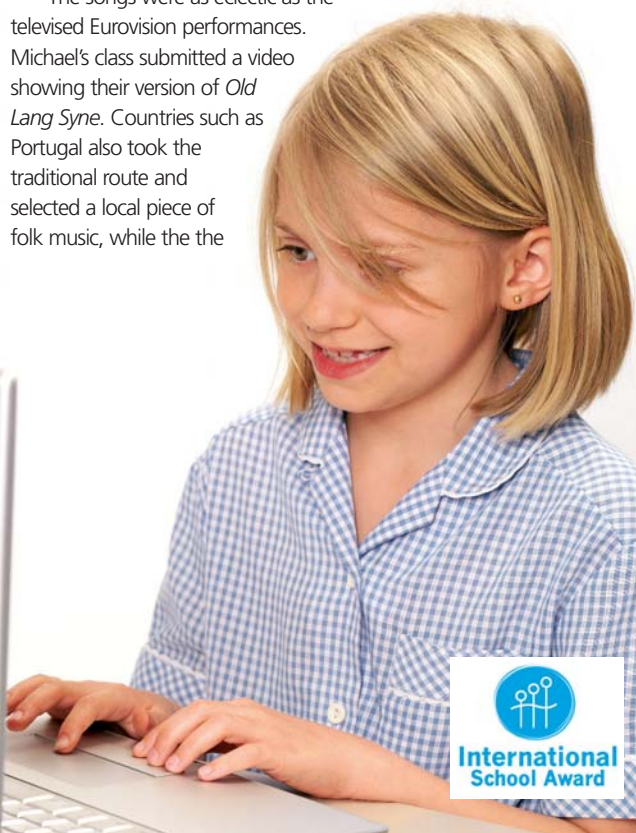
The songs were as eclectic as the televised Eurovision performances. Michael's class submitted a video showing their version of *Old Lang Syne*. Countries such as Portugal also took the traditional route and selected a local piece of folk music, while the the

French children plumped for Katy Perry's *Hot and Cold*.

Voting took a little over one and half hours and, having totted up the scores, a winner was announced...the Czech Republic! Michael's class achieved a respectable 13th and Hungary did their part by receiving the customary 'nil point'.

Not all eTwinning projects are this complex and Michael's advice for teachers who are new to international partnerships is to start small - perhaps with an exchange

of ideas about the cultural differences between two countries. However, Schoolvision demonstrates the scope of what is possible. For Michael, it has been a revelation. "I came across eTwinning by chance, and in many ways it has completely changed my teaching career. It has given me the incentive to try things I would never have tried before. A year ago, I would have never imagined I would be coordinating a project with 30 partners across Europe. It's a powerful way of opening up new learning for teachers."



Global Appeal

Why not apply for the DCSF International School Award (ISA), which celebrates its 10th birthday this year?

The Award provides schools with a very accessible and useful framework (www.globalgateway.org) around which to build, develop, support and celebrate the increasingly important international dimensions of teaching and learning.

All young people now have to operate in a globally inter-dependent environment and think and act as global citizens. Connecting people and ideas across the globe has been at the heart of the work of the British Council since its inception and they are proud to support the very creative and innovative range of international activities undertaken daily across UK schools.

By applying for the ISA, schools can also address issues of community cohesion by promoting a greater understanding of cultural and linguistic heritage.