Voices of eTwinning

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Voices of eTwinning

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Ayça Oğuz
Foreword

Androulla Vassiliou
European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth

It is a real pleasure for me to present to you this fascinating book in which teachers share their many and varied experiences of eTwinning.

eTwinning was conceived with the aim of linking pupils and teachers across our continent in a network of schools that collaborate with each other. This goal is in line with the European Union’s vision for education: to enhance collaboration and mutual learning between European countries at all levels, while respecting national responsibility for the organisation and structure of educational systems.

The idea was to take advantage of the increasing number of possibilities offered by Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) for widening schools’ horizons and for making it possible to experience Europe without leaving the classroom. At the click of a mouse, pupils and teachers can work with their counterparts in other countries and learn about any subject with and from each other.

eTwinning, now part of Comenius, the EU programme for school education, has undoubtedly exceeded all expectations in terms of rates of participation; this is partly due to its ‘bottom-up’ approach and flexible design, which set no limits on the imagination of those involved. But more than anything else it is due to the extraordinary commitment, enthusiasm and creativity of many teachers and to the desire of pupils to interact with their peers across Europe. eTwinning offers schools an infrastructure for collaboration, support and ideas as well as a whole range of possibilities for teachers’ professional development; but what makes it really special is what teachers and pupils put into it.

eTwinning is a European success story and the teachers who have contributed to this book are part of it. I am sure you will enjoy (and learn from) reading about their experiences as much as I did.
Introduction

The eTwinning Team

This book is the result of a collective endeavour. It has been written by teachers from many different European countries who play an active part in eTwinning and wish to share their enthusiasm, their experiences, as well as their advice and even their warnings about the obstacles they found along their way. Together with their pupils, they are involved in collaborative projects with teachers and pupils from other European countries.

A few months ago, we decided to invite eTwinners to tell us their stories and become the authors of this book. We published a call on the eTwinning Portal, asking who would be interested in contributing. Within just a few days we got hundreds of replies. We had to make a tough selection and identified the 60 teachers who would take part in the adventure.

For actually drafting the book, we set up an eTwinning Group, invited all the contributors and asked them to choose one of the suggested topics. After a while, it was clear that personal commitment would take over. Teachers started not only writing about the chosen topic, but also commenting on others’ and enriching the various contributions. The Group grew to an extent that we had not foreseen and it has not been easy to put together the final text you have before you.

The paths of the various contributors are personal, but they all have something in common. At some stage, they learned about eTwinning and visited the www.etwinning.net portal; they explored the possibilities it offered and decided to register. This gave them the right to access the eTwinning Desktop, the social platform which serves as the meeting point for tens of thousands of teachers from all around Europe. There, they got to know colleagues who share their interests or their professional circumstances, in terms of the age of their pupils, subjects taught or communication language, for instance. Very often, it was also via the eTwinning Desktop that they met the partners with whom they negotiated and put in place their collaborative project ideas. By registering their projects, they gained access to their own TwinSpace, the
secure collaboration environment where they carried out their project activities with their pupils, using the wide range of ICT tools made available to them.

These teachers are all convinced that eTwinning projects have created very rich and authentic learning situations for their pupils. They have greatly contributed to increasing their motivation and openness, improving their communication and team-work skills and helping them to develop cultural awareness and tolerance of differences.

The authors also report on the importance of eTwinning for their own learning, motivation and professional development. Most of them were not computer experts but, through their activities in eTwinning, they gained confidence in the use of ICT for teaching purposes. They got to know other pedagogical approaches and teaching strategies and had the chance to work in multidisciplinary teams. In many cases, they also improved their foreign language skills.

Some of their learning occurred through their participation in organised eTwinning training activities, such as Learning Events, Professional Development Workshops and national online courses and seminars. The most important part, however, took place through their interaction with colleagues and through trying to overcome together the obstacles they encountered in their project work. The eTwinning Desktop also offers a whole range of possibilities for contacting other eTwinners to discuss subjects of common interest (e.g., chats, Teachers Rooms and eTwinning Groups). The authors are in no doubt that eTwinning has become a professional development network.

But let us now give the floor to the teachers. In the following chapters they explain how they got involved in eTwinning (Chapter 1), how they put it into practice (Chapter 2), how they experienced the eTwinning community (Chapter 3) and the projects that they created (Chapter 4). They go on to discuss how eTwinning contributed to their professional development (Chapter 5) and the personal impact of their eTwinning involvement (Chapter 6).
Getting involved in eTwinning

Introduction

Donatella Nucci
eTwinning Central Support Service

eTwinning was officially launched in January 2005 at a large conference in Brussels. Three hundred teachers took part in that conference; a large number but still very small compared to all the teachers in Europe, including over a hundred thousand who have since become part of eTwinning. At the beginning, in 2005, one of the main priorities for the National Support Services (NSS) and for the Central Support Service (CSS) was to make this action known to teachers and schools. All the NSS were busy organising seminars in the different regions of their countries, writing articles on their websites and promoting eTwinning in many different ways. These actions were certainly successful and indeed many teachers report having discovered eTwinning thanks to official communications, training sessions and other initiatives organised both at national and European level. When eTwinning became part of the Comenius programme in 2007, many teachers saw it as a way to continue their collaboration with schools they had worked with that might have otherwise come to a stop.

There are, however, a great many teachers who confess that they arrived at eTwinning by themselves, almost “by accident”, when searching the Internet for something else, or for something that perhaps even they could not yet exactly define. Serendipity? “Chance favours the prepared mind.” Many teachers in fact discovered eTwinning when they were actively seeking a change in their professional life, whether in their relationships with their pupils, in their teaching methods or in the presentation of curricular content – in short, innovation. For some of them the first encounter was not decisive and they returned to eTwinning months or years later when they were ready to take advantage of the possibilities offered by this action.

With all their diversities and personal life histories, all eTwinning teachers appear to share the same view: that meeting with different cultures, with different languages, is an enriching

* From the words of Louis Pasteur, the famous 19th century French chemist and microbiologist: “le hasard ne favorise que les esprits préparés.”
experience for themselves and for their pupils. Language teachers find that eTwinning is an effective way to teach modern foreign languages, providing a real communication context, particularly to those pupils who, coming from a disadvantaged social background or living in remote regions, have fewer opportunities to come into contact with speakers of different languages. eTwinning is also a means of widening the horizon in the teaching of other subjects, from history to biology.

Many teachers decided to get involved in eTwinning because they saw it as an opportunity to develop professionally. For them, one very exciting thing about eTwinning is the fact that participation is not something that gets exhausted in the space of a single project; indeed, the opposite is true. They can aim at successive improvements; they enjoy the challenge of acquiring new skills, trying out different things in eTwinning, getting more and more involved with the life of a community of like-minded teachers.

One of the main reactions from teachers who have become involved in eTwinning is the amazement of finding, behind the door that says “register in eTwinning”, a community of teachers who share very similar concerns and problems. Sometimes the first steps in the community are not very productive for various reasons – wrong time of year, wrong frame of mind, etc. – but nobody is there to penalise you, quite the opposite! Sandra Underwood, our first contributor, describes how she discovered this.
I remember surfing the Web for some teaching motivation at a time of year when things begin to wind down in UK schools and I came across the eTwinning portal. I was amazed to find so many teachers throughout Europe signed up and looking for projects. It was a great opportunity to work in collaboration with other like-minded individuals on something that could motivate pupils in the classroom.

I must admit that it was not easy getting started, and my first attempt at participating in a project failed. This was most likely due to timing as the project was up and running in July, which is the end of the academic year in the UK, whereas in many countries in Europe, August is the beginning.

However, not discouraged, I was reminded of eTwinning some months later when I received an invitation to a contact seminar in Cologne. I eagerly applied, waited and was accepted to attend a seminar in December 2009.

Never in my wildest dreams did I anticipate the outcomes that this seminar would have both for my pupils and for me professionally. The weekend in Germany proved to be a positive experience as I met some very motivated and enthusiastic teachers who were eager to start projects. My project team, which included two schools from Germany, one from Turkey and one from Wales, embarked on a project that would last two terms, from January to July. Since the project’s inception, entitled “Welcome to my World”, we have communicated via email, blog and the “TwinSpace”, with over 160 pupils writing letters and chatting over the Web to each other. I am sure they would all agree that it was an enormous effort to coordinate and organise but would no doubt say that it has been a great success. My pupils enjoyed the experience and I will do it again. The relationships I built with my pupils have resulted in an outstanding effort on their part and teaching and learning satisfaction on mine. At the outset I was somewhat hesitant to become involved in eTwinning, mostly because of the amount of work I thought it would take and the fear of not being recognised for my efforts. I was wrong to think this as my Head Teacher was very keen for the school to get working with other schools locally and abroad. One of the school’s objectives was to broaden the cultural, social and economic knowledge of our pupils in order to help them become more global citizens.
In 2005, a document from the local education authority was circulated in the Lycée. It invited us to participate in the eTwinning action, partnering with a school in the EU. The idea was a bit fuzzy, but after speaking to my colleague teacher of English, we decided to set up a project at the beginning of the school year 2005-2006.

My hard work has been recognised as I was appointed the School Link Coordinator, which has included working on international and national links as well as developing the global dimension within the school as a whole.

My teaching has not so much changed as been enhanced by the new knowledge that I am gaining from my experiences and the courses that I am attending. I am more confident with my teaching and feel rewarded by the pupils’ interest in the partnership opportunities. In a recent call for pupil participation in a workshop designed for pupils, I had an overwhelming number interested in taking part, which shows that pupils want to learn about other people’s way of life.

I certainly feel that there are more opportunities for pupils to learn than just within the classroom. My experience with eTwinning will no doubt lead me to more partnerships either online or via organised trips to local universities in order to show pupils the benefits of and professions available through learning a foreign language. In my school, learning a language beyond the age of fourteen is optional and I firmly believe that the intake of language learners would increase if pupils could meet and talk to other pupils abroad either through email or the Internet; to give them opportunities to use their language skills and to share information about their culture. Given this, they might choose languages as a first option rather than not at all.

Back in 2005 there were not as many examples of eTwinning projects and eTwinning activities as there are today; but some teachers immediately saw the value that eTwinning could have in the teaching of foreign languages, providing a virtual mobility for pupils and a real context for language learning at zero cost, thus bridging the social divide.

Catherine Johannes

School | Lycée Hilaire de Chardonnet
City | Chalon Sur Saône
Country | France

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I teach in the technological section of the Lycée (a small one in the provinces) and the pupils are often unmotivated. They have regularly been told that they are no good at languages, just that! Naturally this is not true and, in addition, pupils often come from disadvantaged social backgrounds and their parents cannot afford to pay for trips abroad.

We thought that a project could be motivating for them and for us: it could give some meaning to the learning of foreign languages, and to ICT. This project would also do away with the boundaries between subjects (English and ICT). Last but not least, this virtual voyage would cost nothing and everybody could “get on board”.

It all began one day in October 2007. I came across an advertisement about an eTwinning course offered by the Spanish Ministry of Education. What was eTwinning? The first part of the course was a bit theoretical, but the second part was much more real. I had to find a twin: I did and in less than ten minutes. Alessandra P., in Monfalcone in northern Italy, replied, inviting me to take part in her project. Everything matched: objectives and age of our pupils (16-17 years). I had to make up my mind quickly. Did I really want to get involved in the project? Was it really worth it? Would my pupils get involved? I knew they were not very hard-working and their level of English was not great... after thinking about it for some time, I decided to join this “European community”.

Marta Pey

School
Institut Jaume Callis
City
Vic
Country
Spain
When eTwinning was launched in 2005, all heads of schools in the Maltese islands attended an eTwinning seminar. Back at school, our head informed us all about it and I decided to register straight away – little knowing what it all really involved. Since then, I have never looked back and my enthusiasm and love for eTwinning seems to be growing stronger year after year.

As soon as I registered, I found myself in the “Partner Finder” section on the eTwinning portal and a primary school teacher from Scotland contacted me. We planned to start a simple project with our respective pupils: “Children from Other Lands.” The children emailed each other and we sent each other PowerPoint presentations and photos to introduce our schools and ourselves.

My pupils were, as I had anticipated, the hardest part. They were very enthusiastic at the beginning but when they discovered that they had to work hard, it was another story. Things were not going well, so I decided to devote more class time to the project and made it part of their grades. I felt frustrated on many occasions, at times on the point of quitting the project, eTwinning and everything else… but what kept me going was the strong relationship I had with Alessandra and the great help I was offered by the NSS in Madrid and by Núria de Salvador from Barcelona. I was convinced that eTwinning was a marvellous tool both for my teaching and for my pupils’ learning.

Involvement in eTwinning can start with a very limited type of commitment: a simple project, just one partner, duration of just a few months. The real “danger” is that once a teacher starts with eTwinning, he or she is likely to want to become more involved, like Maria Antoinette, our next contributor, who, five years after her first project, can count an incredible fifteen projects and partners in many different countries.

Maria Antoinette Magro

School
St Gorg Preca Primary School C

City
Hamrun

Country
Malta

When eTwinning was launched in 2005, all heads of schools in the Maltese islands attended an eTwinning seminar. Back at school, our head informed us all about it and I decided to register straight away – little knowing what it all really involved. Since then, I have never looked back and my enthusiasm and love for eTwinning seems to be growing stronger year after year.

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At the end of the school year, my pupils and I agreed that it was a pleasure to work together as a family. We had learnt so much from our foreign friends that we wanted to try it out again the following year and have continued to do so. During the first five years of eTwinning, I have been involved in fifteen projects with different countries such as Scotland, Poland, Norway, Slovakia and France. Every project was always well integrated into the National Minimum Curriculum and the school year syllabus. Nothing was done outside the curriculum or syllabus, but only delivered in a more stimulating way, which children really enjoyed and where they probably remembered better what they had learned. If the projects were not done, the lessons had to be done just the same with the usual traditional boring method.

Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is certainly an important component but it is definitely not the focus of eTwinning; the interdisciplinary aspect and the collaboration on the horizontal level, among teachers of the same schools and with teachers of other countries, and at the vertical level, between teachers and pupils, are much more prominent features, as we can see in Angelos’s reflections.

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Angelos Konstantinidis

School | Secondary Sport School
City   | Drama
Country| Greece

I consider myself lucky to have participated in the first online seminar concerning the eTwinning action in Greece in 2008. The seminar was entitled “Interdisciplinary projects and the eTwinning action” and it was conducted by three Greek ambassadors.
I learned about it through the eTwinning newsletter and out of sheer curiosity I applied to participate. Sure, I was interested in the area, but I have to admit that I was not an enthusiast of interdisciplinary projects. At that time, I believed that I could stimulate pupils’ active participation only through teaching knowledge of the subject; teaching ICT in my case. Indeed, my pupils were showing interest in my lessons, yet I was not personally satisfied by the results. From time to time some pupils would question the usefulness of certain sections of the curriculum, posing questions like “teacher, why is it beneficial to acquire that skill or learn this?” Needless to say those questions made me feel awkward and it was the incentive for me to consider implicitly held curriculum theories.

The online seminar about interdisciplinary projects was the opportunity that I was looking for to delve deeper into my theories. I realised that the dominant educational model that is generally followed by most educators is not only outdated but also ineffective. Teaching methodologies that are centred on cognitive and intellectual instruction have been seriously questioned and only through the collaborative working model can we accomplish the cultivation of a well-developed personality of the individual in education. ICT plays, beyond a doubt, a significant role in this educational evolution. After that, my whole perspective on teaching shifted; for me it is not any more merely teaching ICT, but teaching via ICT. This new horizon fascinates me and it is my strongest impulse to seek for further personal development in the field.

As we have already said, the concept of collaborating is not new for many European teachers as they have been participating in Comenius Partnerships for many years. But our next contributor found that involvement in eTwinning provided a new rich dimension to his Comenius Partnership activities.

Helgi Hólm

School | I Stóru-Vogaskóli
City | Vogar
Country | Iceland

In early 2007, my school had become a coordinator in a three-year Comenius Partnership project called “The World Around Us” and after a while I started to
Many teachers, although attracted by the idea of working in a European project, dismiss the idea on the grounds that the demands imposed by the curriculum are so many that you do not really have time for something else as well. The secret, as Michelle discovered, is to fit your project into the curriculum with the added benefit of introducing with it a European dimension into your work. Her pupils also discovered it had a relevance for applications for university.
My personal involvement in eTwinning came about from my love of international education, gained from years living and teaching in both North America and Europe. My college became involved in a Comenius Partnership project and I was one of the staff members who volunteered to help plan it. I attended a regional meeting for new Comenius Partnership projects and it was through this that I became aware of eTwinning. It seemed like such a good way of developing pupils’ cultural understanding and so I began to think about how this could be incorporated into my teaching. Although many sixth-form practitioners will understand how limited our teaching time is for A-Levels, I was determined that eTwinning could be used effectively within the classroom. It's also important for me as a historian to show my pupils that history is not just about dead people, but is a living, breathing study, which discovers causes and consequences far beyond the pages of a text book.

In the end I settled to attempt a project with my ancient history class based directly on the knowledge they needed to attain for their exams and set about finding a Greek school to work with. The response I got through the eTwinning portal was very positive and I soon found a willing partner school. My pupils were very excited to find out more about their fellow pupils living abroad, and the consequence of all this is that we have now completed two projects together and I am looking forward to, hopefully, planning a third one soon!

eTwinning for me has opened a whole new world of opportunities. Not only have my skills developed by working collectively with European colleagues, whether in an online project or a Professional Development Workshop, but my pupils too have gained from their colleagues in their partner school. They have learned more about the culture and way of life in Greece and were particularly shocked to find out that one of our potential partner schools had to pull out of a project as the pupils were staging a sit-in!

The pupils’ second project with their partner school was a joint venture proposed by the British Council and the BBC and linked with their “History of the World in 1000 Objects” programme. Although this involved the pupils working extensively on their
own time (and mine!), they were rewarded by seeing their work published on the BBC website alongside their partner schools’ work. This was very exciting for the pupils and has also given them something to discuss in their university applications for next year, which I’m hoping will help them stand out from the crowd!

Following on from this, my principal has asked me to present the impact of eTwinning to the whole staff, not only to raise the profile of both my and the pupils’ work in college, but also to help encourage other teachers to perhaps try a project of their own. In addition I have been asked to join the team of eTwinning ambassadors, which will hopefully open a whole new world of opportunities for me and my pupils. All in all, I would like to stress that eTwinning is not only for younger pupils, it is possible in the 16-18 age range; you just need to be creative!

You do not have to be proficient in the use of ICT to start working in eTwinning, ask somebody to show you how to create an email address if you haven’t got one already... the rest will follow.

Maria Doria

School | Liceo Classico “G. Galilei”
City   | Monopoli (BA)
Country| Italy

I was initially involved in eTwinning because I was looking for a partner school to set up an exchange of pupils, since the school I have been working in for eighteen years has always been interested in those experiences. I hardly believed that eTwinning could be more than that! I realised that partnership was not just the meeting of teenagers aimed at the improvement of their language skills.

This was the core of my first project, “The United Colours of Europe”, which I shared with Irena from Poland. She was my first partner and now is a true friend, always ready and willing to work and communicate.

I worked really hard on these ideas. Sometimes I felt inadequate, since I kept making mistakes, related, above all, to my incapability to handle video making,
audio files, pictures, FlashMeeting and stuff like that. The eTwinning portal seemed to me “an undiscovered country” to unveil step by step. Today I can say that I owe all my ICT achievements (not so great, actually!) to eTwinning. When I attended a Professional Development Workshop (PDW) in Sintra it provided me with an injection of enthusiasm. The theme of the PDW was mobile technologies applied to teaching. Up to that moment, I had only used my mobile for sending and receiving text messages, sometimes taking photos and setting the alarm clock!

At the PDW in Sintra, I was introduced to an undiscovered country made of smart phones, WinRAR, Google Earth, Komposer. I was really struck by the application of them to teaching and project activities. I got practice and I actually applied them later on.

At the end of my first project, when summing up the results and my pupils’ feedback, I started to think that eTwinning could be more than an extra project and could be fully incorporated into teaching. Soon, I realised that eTwinning could be a transversal subject. Since then, eTwinning is the most flexible tool of my teaching that allows my pupils and me to learn, improve, have fun and make friends.

Tautvydė is a Lithuanian teacher, working in one of the European Schools in Brussels. She finds that eTwinning unites her and her pupils with others all over Europe.

Tautvydė Daujotytė Mukile

School
École Européenne Bruxelles II
City
Woluwe
Country
Belgium

When, in March 2010, I discovered eTwinning, it looked like an enormous world, full of many new possibilities, tempting discoveries and promising suggestions. I took to it like a fish to water – a popular Lithuanian saying.

* If you are curious about it, please follow this link: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ykSzlyJ2LOE&feature=player_embedded#
Voices of eTwinning

From the first meeting with eTwinning I couldn’t wait to start. I have to recognise I am totally a self-taught eTwinner and this fact shows indeed how easy the eTwinning portal is if you just have a desire to get to know it.

The very first evening I launched my project idea, it was an unbelievably warm feeling to see how other colleagues from different countries began supporting you and were ready to join to work together. After a while, I got an invitation myself to participate in another interesting project. That was it – my successful beginning. My first eTwinning project is called “Phrases and Sayings – United in Different Ways to See the World”, and thanks to ten partners and their pupils we have discovered a wonderful world of phrases and sayings: it gave us the opportunity to get to know better not just other languages but also our own mother tongue.

My projects are tied with my teaching subject: I am interested in linguistic and cultural projects, as I am a teacher of Lithuanian language. I am sure that even the mother tongue in the 21st century cannot be taught any more as an isolated subject. I work in an international school, but eTwinning helps to unite many different European languages during my lessons. That is what I really like about eTwinning – it makes no difference where you work, you are in the middle of Europe all the time.

Finally, we end this chapter with a little history lesson in some of the activities that led to the creation of eTwinning and the Portal, that demonstrates that from the very beginning eTwinning was a “bottom-up initiative” driven by the expressed needs of teachers interested in working collaboratively on the Web.

Valentina Cuadrado

School | IES Alonso de Madrigal
City    | Ávila
Country | Spain

While participating in an OASIS (Open Architecture and Schools in Society) pilot project in 2002, I had to find partners to finish the experiment with a collaborative activity. Since one of the activities in our programme at school consisted of taking
part in Spring Day for Europe, I contacted a colleague in charge, at that time, of the Spanish section. She helped me to find partners and the result was our first magazine at http://ejournal.eduprojects.net/Museo10/index.php. The same partners from Poland and Romania have since then collaborated with me in eTwinning and Comenius Partnership projects as well.

My Spanish colleague later suggested that I participate in a focus group to gather teachers’ opinions, needs and expectations for a new collaborative site. Of course I accepted; it was the first time in my working life I was being asked to express what I felt and needed for my teaching practice. I was really glad of this opportunity. Nevertheless I did not want to send only my personal answers, so I made a call at school for everybody wishing to participate. The colleagues in the OASIS project and another small group joined me and discussed our points of view. In a way it meant an evaluation of our methods and results. This collaborative site turned out to be the eTwinning portal.

When eTwinning was launched it was easy for us to create our first project “Nature and Human Activity” because we already knew how we wanted to work. We convinced the management at school of the importance of collaboration, participation, and construction of knowledge in partnerships. The degree of active involvement among pupils and teachers is one of the driving forces at school, generating cross-curricular activities, trips, teamwork, participation and a global idea of school. My early involvement in eTwinning meant a personal and school change that has given us a new path in the learning process and three National Awards, which is always good.

Some “golden rules” to get you started! We start with six points Laura Maffei wished she had known from the very beginning.
Voices of eTwinning

Laura Maffei

School | Arnolfo di Cambio
City    | Colle di Val d’Elsa
Country | Italy

1. GETTING IN: when registering, don’t assume you’ll remember your username and password – you won’t. So, write them down. (Appendix to point 1: tell your colleague/friends/family which email address you used. When you forget where you wrote your login data – rest assured, you will – you’ll know at least how to get a new password).

2. SLIDING DOORS: you just registered, excited at entering this new world, when – oops – at your first attempt, you receive some strange error message. Ask for help, but if no expert is in sight, use the digital natives’ magic trick: reset.

3. PANIC ROOM: after resetting, you try to log in but the platform doesn’t seem to work. It happens. Before phoning your NSS/Ministry of Education/Mr. Big, wait and try again later.

4. PERSON WITHOUT A FACE: first thing, put an image under your profile. Nobody talks to a shadow.

5. FINDING THE RIGHT ONE: while looking for the perfect partner, remember the eTwinning community resembles real life – if you don’t contact anybody, nobody will contact you. Conversely, after writing 100 messages, expect to spend your free time answering 100 potential partners. Prioritise accordingly.

6. NOT GOING TO HAPPEN: you believe you have found the perfect partner. Still, if s/he works in a primary school, s/he can’t work on your nuclear fusion project. Set reasonable goals for yourself, partners and pupils to avoid disappointment.
Voices of eTwinning

Chapter 2: Putting eTwinning into practice

Introduction

Christina Crawley,
eTwinning Central Support Service

Deciding to make a change in the way that you teach and learn is never simple. The learning experience can be as simple or as complex as you choose to make it; however, taking the plunge into the unknown in search of inspiration and innovation – that alone is a huge feat. For all eTwinners, the eTwinning experience started from an interest to do “something different”. Whether it is to find new strategies in teaching a certain learning unit or adding an international dimension to the class, eTwinners are brave teachers willing to delve into new challenges – namely in the area of collaboration. Teaching on your own in your classroom is one thing, but what happens when you add another class, another teacher?

The following section gives a number of accounts from eTwinners on how they themselves got started in eTwinning. How they incorporated it into what they were already doing, what they found difficult, what came surprisingly easy and how they developed further after this first encounter with the eTwinning concept.

Where better to start than from a simple idea? Conor explains how he took a simple idea and, together with his partners and pupils, was able to turn it into an entire adventure that fitted perfectly into the course curriculum.
How did I start? It began in September 2009 with an idea: to make a film of a poem. The idea expanded to get pupils across Europe to make films of poems and to comment on each other’s chosen poems and films.

First, I posted my idea on the partner-finding section of the eTwinning Portal and waited for a response. Five teachers in three countries contacted me and from there the project was born.

I learned new skills in digital movie making, digital editing and sound recording; I also improved my skills in Web design, computer networking and proof reading. The teachers involved in the project shared their skills and some video material was sent on DVD for editing and uploading to YouTube where the six films were finally placed.

While the ultimate aim of the project was to create six short films, the pedagogical objective was to get the pupils to approach poetry in a novel and cooperative manner. By allowing the pupils to select the poems they wanted to film and by encouraging them to comment on the various poems and to share their comments in the TwinSpace and on a project website, it enabled them to see how poetry was viewed by their peers.

My one big regret is that the pupils did not collaborate more together. Although I subscribed my pupils to the TwinSpace, they could not use it. I found the TwinSpace restrictive and created a distinct website for the project. I found that a traditional website could handle the materials needed in a visually appealing and accessible manner. I used this website to coordinate all the work the different schools were doing.

In terms of involving other teachers in the school, it was easy since film is a collaborative enterprise. Teachers in my school were very supportive! Some agreed to act, others helped with the casting, the woodwork and the art teachers helped to create the props, the principal and deputy principal arranged my timetable and that of the pupils to enable filming to take place, etc.
Voices of eTwinning

We were delighted when the site won a major national ICT award, a Junior Spider award, for the Best Educational Web Site in Ireland. A Romanian school also created a bilingual website for their film and updated it constantly as the project developed.

Poetry has a significant role in the English curriculum I teach and so, by providing translations of all the poems involved in the project and by viewing and commenting on the films made by their European companions, the pupils got a novel approach to the understanding of poetry.

Web Sites

The Irish website is available at http://www.iol.ie/~kellyc/film.htm
The Romanian website is available at http://strongteam.lispanciu.ro/index.html

As regards the concept behind getting involved in collaborative class work, Ayça reflects on the importance of understanding the pupils’ needs in terms of the use of today’s technology.

Ayça Oğuz

School  Hasan Kağnıcı İlköğretim Okulu
City   Bağcılar/İstanbul
Country  Turkey

eTwinning is an “educational ocean”. Young people are curious about the Internet and this can lead them to revelation and inspiration, or conversely, it can engulf them in the pursuit of irrelevant information and keep them in the dark. We as teachers must ensure that when we transform this tool, which they see
as meant for amusement, into a multi-purpose educational tool, we are precise
and direct in order to avoid information pollution. Learning must be positive and
direct, with clear, measurable results and productive outcomes. When I first
heard about eTwinning, I was looking for a safe, secure online platform where
my pupils could spend their time.

My school is in a suburb of Istanbul. Most of the parents have low education and,
to their regret, they cannot give many opportunities to their children. When we
began to produce some projects in eTwinning, they noticed their children could
get out of their “vicious circle” and move into the international arena. The impact
was dynamic and motivating. I have 47 pupils in my classroom. It’s impossible
to interest pupils one by one. With the help of this motivation I divided pupils
into workgroups and gave them responsibility in the projects. The impact was
an increased emphasis on learning creatively and finding innovative solutions to
problems.

eTwinning is an amazing platform for this, giving teachers and pupils many
opportunities. However, there was one problem: my nine-year-old pupils needed
to be moderated and needed constant help in terms of their second-language
skills. With the help of a Learning Event, I began to use the Internet in a more
effective way and got enough courage to get my own online domain. I soon found
myself creating a website using open source software and put simple translation
modules into it to help the pupils. Thus, it became a lovely safe harbour in the
Internet that opened to the eTwinning “ocean for my pupils”. In terms of safety
and security, I gave the responsibility to some of the parents to act as moderators
on the website. My pupils can now share there on their own, make use of the
TwinSpace’s “Pupils Corner” and meet with their project partners. eTwinning has
many options that can be used in many ways.

My pupils shared their thoughts with other pupils who were born in different
countries but who live almost like them. They discovered and learned to value the
differences as something which makes us richer. The impact was understanding
of diversity and the knowledge that we all share common values.

Our school had never been in any international project before. When our School
Management saw our eTwinning projects, they brought a PC and a projector
to the classroom and support us in many ways. Some of my colleagues joined
eTwinning too. Suddenly Europe became very close to us.
Margarida speaks about the challenge of promoting eTwinning in her region and how the fifth anniversary provided an ideal platform for launching news about eTwinning projects in the school and the wider community.

Margarida Barbieri Figueiredo

School | Agrupamento Vertical de Escolas de Pinheiro
City   | Penafiel
Country| Portugal

When I first brought up the eTwinning Project in my area, in September 2009, at a meeting with teachers of all the different levels of education, I spoke as the coordinator of the pre-school department. While I was speaking, I had the impression that I wasn’t being taken seriously.

Supported by my colleague Cristina Gonçalves (who is a very experienced eTwinner), I didn’t give up and took up the challenge of helping all the other pre-school teachers with the task of getting involved in partnerships with other European schools.

The 5th anniversary of the eTwinning Project provided a unique platform for spreading the project throughout the educational community. With the work and support of both the children and their families, it was possible, among other initiatives, to launch balloons, compose a song, sing “Happy Birthday” and plan and build an exhibition about the projects under development at our school.

“eTwinning – A Challenge”, the workshop we promoted, targeting all the teachers in our schools, raised awareness and interest in the project among other levels of education.

The engagement of the community in such a transnational project, which promotes ethnic diversity and the exchange of personal experiences, is certainly a major step in the construction of a solid and fully engaged Europe.

I believe that we should turn our attention to future generations, as a key to solving the great challenges of our time.
Marilina Lonigro

I teach English as a second language to pupils aged 11-13 in Italian state schools. Since my first project back in 2005, I have tried to make eTwinning projects more and more present in my teaching practice. When I first started as a teacher, I felt that all my strategies had ended in failure, particularly with pupils who were having difficulties. I started to wonder why, despite all my efforts, my pupils were not learning enough and seemed to be reluctant to complete their homework.

Lo and behold, my first eTwinning project provided some answers: it was a matter of motivation. I was teaching a foreign language to pupils who knew I could speak their language and no matter how hard I tried to speak in the classroom and encourage them to do the same; any interaction in the language acquired a halo of artificiality. Any assignment was irrelevant to most pupils and some did not make an effort to accomplish the assigned tasks. Too young to look ahead and see just how important English can be for them in the future, learning English communication skills – verbal interaction, written production – without any real immediate need for it wasn’t interesting to them. And so I decided that eTwinning projects were a great resource to stimulate real interaction, particularly in writing. I could immediately see the effect of these projects, particularly on struggling pupils who were very curious about the pupils from the partner country and thus made every effort to respond in English.

As time passed and the eTwinning platform evolved, I began asking my pupils to try to use their verbal skills in order to learn about their friends on the other side. This was brilliant! They were rehearsing in the classroom what they would ask their friends and the possible answers they could expect. When thinking
Voices of eTwinning

of starting a new eTwinning project, I now identify one or two topics from my curriculum and I look for partners with the same interests. Instead of developing these topics on my own, I develop them as a joint project and the exchange with the other teachers helps a lot in my lesson planning: we share the tasks and as a result, my lessons constantly benefit from new perspectives and activities contributed by my partners. It makes teaching and learning a lot more fun!

Collaboration with other schools in Europe is something that teachers, especially language teachers, have known for a long time, even if in its simplest form: correspondence; exchanges etc. It is less part of the tradition of teachers of other subjects: it is less immediate for them to discover the benefits that participation in a European project can bring. The first contribution comes from one of those non-language teachers, a biology teacher who recounts how she approached eTwinning very sceptically but subsequently changed her mind when she started using the eTwinning Portal and its tools, and is now confident to pass the knowledge onto her colleagues.

Paulien du Fossé

School | CSG Willem van Oranje
City | Oud-Beijerland
Country | Netherlands

When I first heard of eTwinning, it was just a vague concept to me – making connections with foreign schools? I did not see the need for that and I disregarded it. I am a biology teacher and did not easily see any connection with my subject at the beginning. However that soon changed.

When I registered for eTwinning, no one on my school was able to tell me how it worked. So, I just started pushing some buttons on the eTwinning Portal and gradually I made my way. Within a short time I not only found partners for my own project, but I also joined some already-running projects.

Then I decided to start an environmental project to investigate the quality of the water in a ditch near our school; I thought it would be nice to look at the quality of the water in other countries too.
A new world opened up to me! It was very easy to find not only other people from other European countries who were interested in my water project but also many other projects that fitted into my lesson programme perfectly. Within a very short time I joined different projects and my pupils were just as enthusiastic as I was.

When you know how, the Portal is user-friendly and an easy way to make contact with teachers from all over Europe. I wanted to make my colleagues enthusiastic too by showing them the results of several projects and, as a result, we will use the recipes from different European countries (from a project about eating habits in Europe) in a school-wide project.

So, building on my own enthusiasm, other teachers in my school got indirectly involved with eTwinning. As the pupils like this way of getting to meet other young people from all over Europe, I expect it won’t take long before the first colleagues ask how they can find a partner or project on the eTwinning Portal themselves. I will gladly tell them which buttons to push, how to get in touch with others, and hopefully their enthusiasm will spread from one teacher to another. More and more teachers will get involved in eTwinning. As the first eTwinner of our school, I feel proud to have laid the foundation for that.

eTwinning adds something extra to the lessons: not only do you get to know about the way of life and the habits of other countries, but you also feel that you have made new friends and that you are in contact with each other on a regular basis. When you add to this that making contact is very easy and that the projects are easily integrated into the lesson programme, I just don’t understand why many teachers don’t dare to take the first step. Just take that step: I promise you won’t regret it!

Adam Stepinski from Poland describes how through involvement in eTwinning he has not only developed his own technical skills but also managed to explore a number of deep and relevant topics of cultural and historical understanding with his pupils.
Voices of eTwinning

Adam Stepinski

School | Liceum Ogólnokształcące im. Mikołaja Kopernika
City | Tarnobrzeg
Country | Poland

Once, at an eTwinning conference in Warsaw, I heard a wise statement about eTwinning projects. They were described as the keys which open the doors to Europe. These words describe my eTwinning experiences very well.

I started my first project with my Italian friend, whom I had known for quite a long time. Shortly afterwards we invited a teacher from Russia to join and at that very moment I felt that an invisible bridge truly connected the western part of the Old Continent with its eastern part. During the second year, when we worked on our next project, two other schools expressed a desire to co-operate with us. One of them is a school from Monzon, Spain, and the other is from Belfast, Northern Ireland. To me it had a hidden meaning: we had managed to link the South with the North. When I talked with my pupils who took part in the two projects, I tried to explain to them the historical background of many misunderstandings and conflicts among the four parts of Europe. It was a nice coincidence that Poland, my homeland, had a metaphorical role. It acted as the connecting element in our multinational undertaking.

As for the improvement of my computer skills, I must admit that I had been e-illiterate before I decided to join eTwinning. Of course I had been familiar with MS Office and some basic Internet tools, but co-operating with my wonderful partners forced me to learn dozens of things: numerous Web 2.0 tools; social networking applications and various conferencing sites.

It wasn’t difficult to integrate our eTwinning activities in the curriculum. It was possible thanks to our common goal: we wanted to make our projects as close to pupils’ everyday experience as possible. In our project “What matters in your life?”,

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we discussed things such as: friendship, love, family, peace, solidarity, conflicts, wars, etc. The pupils from the three countries eagerly got engaged in the activities as they could exchange opinions about issues that play a significant role in their life. In our project “Can history be a teacher of life?” in turns we constructed the phases by expanding the topics of discussions. Having started with the stories of pupils’ lives, we continued with the histories of particular families and the histories of the local communities. Next year we are going to focus on the chosen elements of the histories of the participating countries and world history.

All the teachers who take part in our eTwinning projects agree: it’s crucial to inform the school communities about the successes (but also the failures) of our activities. Last year our Italian partners organised a whole-day event during which the participants presented our project, its stages and ways of co-operation. This year in July my school prepared an eTwinning birthday concert. It was a great occasion to celebrate and promote eTwinning on the local scale. My deputy headmaster concluded it saying that eTwinning, being a five-year-old child, must develop and improve successfully in the future.

As a special needs teacher, Pasi talks about how easy it was for him to get started in eTwinning and how his enthusiasm was then picked up by his colleagues.

Pasi Siltakorpi

School: Pääskytie school
City: Porvoo
Country: Finland

I got involved in eTwinning accidentally. In 2005, I attended a workshop on translating school Web pages, where I also registered for eTwinning. At first, I got several contacts from schools that wanted to have a Comenius school partnership project. I was looking for a school with Special Needs pupils the same age as my own. Luckily Anne Jakins from Sackville School in East Grinstead, UK, contacted me by email. We soon found out that we had the same interests. When ICT teacher Nick Falk got involved, we had a very functional group. Both Nick and Anne had a lot of experience with international projects.
Corina describes how she first got involved in an eTwinning project with two other partners. Since then, her involvement and work has grown and the benefits to her pupils have been manifold.
My first “meeting” with eTwinning took place in 2008, when I became part of a project together with schools in Portugal and Poland. The aims of this project, “The Legends of Europe”, were to exchange ideas about other cultures, to motivate pupils to learn a foreign language and to become familiar with a range of ICT tools. Pupils were invited to collect legends of their country, to send them to their partners in order to be illustrated by their peers. They had to exchange their impressions by email and upload their results on a blog (http://legendsofeurope.blog.com/).

Pupils worked enthusiastically from the very beginning as they had to learn to communicate, make decisions, evaluate materials, accept their peers’ way of thinking and appreciate other cultures. It enabled our schools to incorporate ICT in classroom activities and develop techniques of working in groups.

At present we run a Comenius School Partnership project, coordinated by our German school partner. I met this partner via the eTwinning Portal too, and it gave me another opportunity for working in an international partnership. In this case, my eTwinning cooperation involves twelve schools from eleven European countries and Turkey, through which all the teachers and pupils have a real audience. Most of the teachers in this project are well experienced in international cooperation and they show that there is a culture of collaboration and professionalism in their schools.

This partnership uses the TwinSpace, the eTwinning portal being a central point of communication. Our tools are the various TwinSpace tools for our project activities, including wikis, blogs and the forum. To support their communication, pupils use PowerPoint, chat conferences and email. Pupils also work independently with their peers, during school days and at home. They keep contacts and develop friendships with their partners. Their performance has measurably improved since the start of the project, which has had a positive impact on their involvement and motivation.
As a coordinator of the English bilingual section of her school, María Jesús explains how she was able to get many pupils working on their English skills through eTwinning rather than a traditional school exchange and how now it forms part of the school’s core curriculum.

Maria Jesús Bayonas

School | IES Alfonso X El Sabio
City | Murcia
Country | Spain

I am in charge of organising exchanges for groups in my school. As we have many more pupils than spaces available for exchanges, an idea that came to mind was to do this through eTwinning. So far I’m involved in several projects. When we started planning an exchange with an English school I suggested to the English teacher that we could create a project through eTwinning parallel to our bilateral association in a Comenius school partnership project. While I was trying to keep up with these three projects I got several emails from other schools inviting me to participate in their projects. At first I thought that it could be too much work and I turned it down. However, the teachers insisted that I could manage it. That made me change my mind and I accepted to take part in a project in which 31 teachers are involved. And I could manage working in the TwinSpace thanks to other European colleagues who helped me a lot in overcoming difficulties. Once, when I got into trouble and sent an SOS message, I got the solution to my problem straightaway.

To set the aims in each project was easy; each member in it suggested ideas. One common aim is that pupils must feel they are part of the project. So they must introduce the school, family, friends and surroundings, for which they had to use PowerPoint presentations. In my school none of the teachers were familiar with eTwinning and I started to encourage them to join in. In just one year, the pupils are happy about being members and my colleagues are aware of the possibilities which it might offer them as teachers.

The projects have been presented to both parents and the managing board at school. They didn’t know that such a school network existed and they were
overwhelmed when they saw the children’s work published in eTwinning. At the beginning of the year I had to include, where possible, eTwinning projects in the School Core Curriculum. At the moment I might say that 70% of the school community have learned what eTwinning is like. I feel glad when my pupils say in a very natural way: “Teacher, I’d like you to create an eTwinning account.”

The following contribution provides teachers with a number of rules, tips and suggestions when considering how to incorporate eTwinning in the classroom. Elena Pezzi gives us some advice on how to get started – how to get past those first barriers and to go confidently into an eTwinning activity with pupils.

Putting eTwinning into practice will be an exciting adventure for you and your pupils. Problems and challenges are just part of the fun. Take it easy, relax and enjoy the journey.

Elena Pezzi

School
Istituto Magistrale “L. Bassi”

City
Bologna

Country
Italy

It’s very difficult to summarise the best steps to follow to put eTwinning into practice, so I’ll try to give you some ideas that have always led me and that I consider absolutely positive:

1. **ALWAYS MAKE YOUR PUPILS AWARE:** from the very beginning of the project – even before, from the very first idea about the project. They’ll
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astonish you! Moreover, you’ll discover you’ve realised something so good as to be internationally awarded!

2. GIVE GREAT AUTONOMY TO YOUR PUPILS: assign them important roles both in projecting and administering; they’ll show you unexpected qualities, always positive.

3. DEVELOP YOUR PLANS COLLABORATIVELY: don’t think of “launching” yourself until you’ve got everything perfectly clear; begin to experiment, ask for help, share your doubts with colleagues; the success of a project arises from sharing ideas and steps to follow.

4. GO STEP BY STEP: always choose a project that can fit well into your curriculum; it will be easier and outcomes will enormously increase.

5. TAKE IT EASY: your partners are there for you! You can neither do everything alone, nor complete the project as you planned at the very beginning. It will be the best for you: you’ll get better results and you’ll enjoy much more.

6. INVOLVE AS MANY PEOPLE AS YOU CAN IN YOUR SCHOOL: at the beginning they may watch you as strange people, but at the end I assure you they will begin to work this way. Your pupils will be your best ambassadors: they’ll tell their parents and your colleagues how motivating it can be learning by tasks!

7. ORGANISE INFORMATION SESSIONS FOR YOUR COLLEAGUES: run an “eTwinning session” to explain to your colleagues (and head teacher) what you’re carrying out and how to get involved: don’t keep secret what you’re doing. The worst thing that could happen to you is your headmaster calling you “My dear ambassador...”, but it’s not so bad at all... Well, to sum it up: being alone is so sad... BE A TWIN(NER)!
Introduction

Santi Scimeca
eTwinning Central Support Service

Over the past years, eTwinning has evolved from a project-centred platform to a virtual place where thousands of teachers can meet, communicate, collaborate, get together and ultimately feel part of a community. Indeed, teachers have been faster than the platform itself: even in the early days, the communication tools we offered (internal messaging, chat rooms) were used beyond merely the preparation for projects. It happened that teachers found each other via the partner-finding tools, started communicating on a potential project and realised that there was much more to share: practice, examples, ideas, or maybe simple informal support. All was done in a safe, relaxed and constraint-free environment. Many contacts led to projects; many others led to friendships and informal collaborations. All certainly led to a better understanding of the role of teachers in a society based on life-long learning.

In 2008 eTwinning finally adopted the paradigm of community building and incorporated a more social approach* by providing new tools and features more apt to help teachers team up, communicate and share. Nowadays, some 10-15% of eTwinners already regularly use the eTwinning Desktop as a professional development learning space, with a twist of social networking and a virtual cafeteria. Some 15,000 teachers login every day and find out that they are not alone.

One thing we know now: once you understand the potential of eTwinning as a community of teachers, there is no way back. You become part of it. Our contributors to this section clearly demonstrate how much they have gained from their active participation in the growing eTwinning community.

We start by exploring the topic of the eTwinning Community with a reflection from a newcomer to eTwinning, Adriana Maris. She describes how she almost instantly felt at

home and discovered many different ways to involve herself with the support of colleagues she found through eTwinning.

Adriana Maris

School | Colegiul National Coriolan Brediceanu
City | Lugoj
Country | Romania

I became an eTwinner only six months ago, but I feel as I have I belonged here forever.

A colleague showed me the eTwinning portal last February and what she had done there, so I decided to join this community of smart, modern-thinking European teachers. And from starting that day, I feel I have gained many, many friends.

I got involved in a very interesting project. At first, I was afraid that I would not be able to accomplish all the tasks, because of my lack of eTwinning and computer experience, but the other partners helped me a lot, not only by telling me what to do and how to do it, but by their attitude, their confidence in my undiscovered skills and their habit of always being there when I needed them.

I learned a lot in this project – scientific facts, new, interesting methods of teaching, ways to build attractive presentations – and I also improved my ICT skills.

Of course, I discovered the Learning Lab and I applied for two Learning Events. In both of them, the presenters not only taught the information and assigned tasks, but also answered our questions and helped us overcome the obstacles. The themes were very interesting, very relevant and attractive, and the other participants were so smart and eager to improve their professional development.
Chapter 3 : Experiencing the eTwinning Community

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Since becoming an eTwinner, I have experienced this feeling: it’s so good to see other people who, just like me, are interested in communicating, collaborating with each other, improving their teaching methods, attracting pupils to study and getting involved in the community. It’s so good to see you’re not alone!

Elena Pezzi from Italy describes how she has found soul mates through eTwinning, teachers like herself, eager to try new ways to approach the teaching and learning of their pupils.

Elena Pezzi

School: Istituto Magistrale “L. Bassi”
City: Bologna
Country: Italy

Do you remember when I said that I felt like an extra-terrestrial in my own school? Well, I sometimes still feel the same (I’ve been working in the same school for many years and I’m “trapped” in a specific role...), but I’m sure I’ve found my own planet as Extra-Terrestrial (ET) did (ET = eTwinning!!).

Belonging to the eTwinning community I’ve discovered there are a lot of “ETs” eager to meet their peers to experiment with new ways to teach, learn together, try... Being a teacher today is a great challenge and one of the best ways to meet it is by sharing ideas, projects, skills, competences....

So, I tried: I’m one of the two eT ambassadors of my region (very few people in a very big region, but the enthusiasm is really strong!) and together with my regional supervisor we organised a workshop to involve headmasters and teachers. The workshop was really successful and I think the most relevant aspect has been the involvement of “very normal people” in showing projects and ideas.

Nor is it always easy. For instance, in one of my first projects none of us (we were four partners) was completely aware that the strongest point of eTwinning is collaboration and cooperation; every one of us, from time to time, uploaded...
something in the platform (and it was something really nice, well done, accurate...) and positively commented on others’ products... we did not work collaboratively on one outcome.

Or, on another occasion, I took part in an already settled project and I couldn’t understand how to manage it, as the purpose and the realisation seemed to belong to two different worlds. I think each one of us has been ditched at least once while developing a project (or even we have ditched a partner) for a lot of “good” reasons: teachers or pupils went on a long strike, one of our partners hadn’t got any more time to spend on the project; the computer room was suddenly closed for a long time; our partners were participating in as many as five projects at the same time and they were overloaded.

However, there’s only one thing I can say with absolute certainty: none of my pupils felt unmotivated or didn’t want to participate in any project. If we firmly believe that we are working on a worthwhile project, our pupils too will think that way and will work with enthusiasm. It is not necessary to be an ICT super expert or a very fluent language speaker; all you need is to believe in it and to try to do something: things will happen (you can even win a European award as happened to Angela Riccomi, a colleague in our region who was awarded during the Seville conference).

Silvije Devald from Croatia is another relative newcomer to eTwinning. His experiences began at a Comenius contact seminar, which led to a teacher and pupil exchange; this, in turn, led ultimately to an eTwinning project where contacts made during the face-to-face exchange could continue virtually.

I first heard of the Croatian National Agency (AMPEU) at a teachers’ assembly in September 2009. My headmaster read out their invitation to apply for grants for teachers and other school staff. Another English teacher and I applied and we were granted funds to go to a contact seminar.
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I went to Oulu, Finland for a contact seminar on Sustainable Development and ICT. The experience was amazing. I had never had much contact with my European colleagues and there were 48 teachers from 15 countries. I made valuable contacts there. With a group of teachers I started planning a Comenius multilateral project, which we applied in February 2010.

Another person I met there was a school manager from Romania. We decided to exchange English teachers for a week. The exchange took place in March 2010 and it was something really new for our pupils and colleagues alike. They were all forced to speak English as it was the only language of communication and the exchange improved their communication skills, but also broadened their horizons regarding different cultures and reduced prejudices we may have had about the “other” culture. After the exchange we started an eTwinning project, “Experiencing (ex)change” as a follow up to the actual exchange where pupils and teachers can upload their files produced during the exchange and some new ones illustrating their everyday work in learning English as well as using English as a medium for learning about other school subjects.

Using eTwinning I managed to find other teachers interested in the idea and we are already planning a similar exchange for the next school year, since the first one proved to be a real success.

A more experienced eTwinner, Nuria de Salvador from Spain, describes how she has found friendship through eTwinning both in the virtual and real sense. She also reflects on the fact that things do not always work out in working with others but in eTwinning one can always try again.
I don’t have a thousand friends, but I can claim eTwinning has given me quite a few in the last five years. Some I met when I was part of the Central Support Service (CSS). There are others who belong to my own National Support Service (NSS) in Spain. Some are eTwinning teachers. These friendships were not built on virtual communities, as one would expect from most friendships made through eTwinning, but we are part of different virtual communities, and still learn from each other.

Cristina Grau, with whom I shared the project “Like a Bird”, is not a “virtual friend” either, although we chat regularly. The other nine members in the project are “virtual”, although I met Joanna Juda from Poland when she came to Barcelona, because she has started a Comenius project with Cristina. Susana Alcalde, a young teacher in my school, is not a virtual friend either. Thanks to her cooperation, I was not alone at my school working on “Like a Bird”.

My best ICT friend in eTwinning is undoubtedly Basia Kapusta, a teacher from Zespół Szkół w Przecławiu, Przecław in Poland. We created “my Present, my Past, my Future” together. I met her through the eTwinning forum and we have coped with Moodle chats, forums, blogs, virtual timelines, Google questionnaires, Flickr galleries, YouTube videos and wikis; several of these tools have caused us very real headaches. But we are still together!

Sadly, there was a third partner in our project who had to leave because she started working on a Comenius partnership. And this was not my only disappointment in the eTwinning community. I spent the whole first term trying to find someone who would like to twin with my Business Administration and Finance pupils and did not succeed.

But I have not mentioned the greatest of my small successes so far. As I write these lines, I have just learned that a group of 16 year olds have uploaded our latest Twinning task, a video about their school trip to Majorca, into their Facebook account. I guess that makes me and eTwinning part of their community, too. An eTwinning end of term task on a teenagers’ Facebook… Who can ask for anything more?
Anna Szczepaniak describes how, over the years, she has increased her skills and expertise as a teacher through contact and communication with other members of the eTwinning Community.

Anna Szczepaniak

School  
Szkola Podstawowa nr 9

City  
Dzierzoniow

Country  
Poland

I have been an eTwinner for almost 5 years and I have experienced a lot as a part of the eTwinning community. My first experience in 2005 was great. I was a beginner and I found a partner who was a little bit more experienced, Cristina Silva from Portugal, and she helped me a lot. We both discussed the project and she taught me how to register and describe the project plan in detail.

Some months later I was considered the experienced one and I was asked to teach other teachers at a regional eTwinning conference in Wroclaw – this event motivated me a lot and in a few weeks I learnt more about using ICT tools than in years earlier.

Half a year later I was the organiser of workshops for our district teachers. After these events many teachers asked me for help and it was great to have the opportunity to share my experience with other teachers.

I learnt everything step by step but there were situations when I couldn’t manage with something and then I asked the eTwinning ambassador or the NSS members. They always helped me at once.

Last year I found a new partner school in Greece and it has been the best eTwinning experience so far. Thomais Kartsiotou from Kavala is a head teacher and teacher trainer and she taught me a lot. However she is also a great pupil – I shared with her my new experience after taking part in eTwinning Learning Event and it was my first project where we both created the wiki and did everything in common. Earlier I was the one who created blogs and taught others how and what to do.
In conclusion, I have to say that eTwinning community is a great opportunity for us teachers: we have the chance to meet people, to exchange our experience and to learn more and more. And that’s what it’s all about!

On a slightly different note, Ingrid Keller-Russell describes how eTwinning has helped her find partners to match her own strong criteria for her pupils’ needs in preparing for a Comenius partnership. She describes how the teachers availed themselves of funding opportunities to meet face to face to carry out their preparations.

Ingrid Keller-Russell

School | Integriete Gesamtschule Hannover-Linden
City   | Hannover
Country| Germany

My activities on eTwinning represent long and short-term classroom involvement. Criteria to follow up a contact are based on my classroom’s needs, for example, pupils’ age groups, opportunity to meet peers from a background comparable to my pupils’ own world, and curriculum requirements.

As a model, I would like to describe the stages of my last international school project: In January 2008, a year before the general deadline for Comenius Applications, I advertised my project idea on the eTwinning Forum.

Five months later, seven schools had come together, matching the criteria for a balanced partnership, which were as follows: Secondary pupils of the age group twelve to sixteen / communicative experiences of English, to be used as “lingua franca” / classroom ICT access / cross-curricular implementation of goals into regular teaching / intercultural focus within the school’s profile.

The next step was the organisation of a “Preparatory Meeting” at my German school, for which all the partners asked for funding from their National Agencies. In October 2008 our meeting took place and we began to develop the concept of the two-year partnership. For the design of our teaching modules we used some
of the ready-made project Kits on eTwinning, which were of substantial support in shaping our learning ideas.

By the time our Comenius application was finally approved in July 2009, it included twelve schools, as we had decided to strengthen the participation of new EU member countries and Turkey.

Our chosen website option for organising the partnership was eTwinning, and its new TwinSpace, as these were safe for pupils’ use across Europe, allowed every pupil to be registered, were accessible to all EU countries and associate members, and were usable without any software fees for the school. At present 44 teachers and 450 pupils are registered with our TwinSpace. In the first project year our pupils uploaded more than 600 presentations, about which they had regular chat meetings with their peers.

Joanna Stefańska describes how she began using the computer as a typewriter but has progressed in the eTwinning community to being a trainer and guide for other teachers in their eTwinning journeys.

Joanna Stefańska

School
Gimnazjum nr 18 im. Armii Krajowej
City
Wrocław
Country
Poland

eTwinning enchanted me from the very beginning. I felt its potential and tried to encourage other teachers to get involved, promoting it in my school and among friends at first. In 2006 I took part in a 10-week training programme organised by the NSS, and I have to say it kept me occupied. I was computer-literate to some extent but I used mostly Microsoft Office. As the course had tasks aimed at different areas and requiring varied activities, by the end I not only got to know the eTwinning platform and the tools offered, but also developed my own computer skills.

One of the tasks was to establish a link with someone advertising on a forum. I was lucky, and my first contacts (Norway and Italy) proved to be permanent.
I personally gained a lot in the area of implementing ICT into teaching practice (I teach English), but first of all my pupils got a chance to use English for real live conversation with peers from other European countries and it’s been highly motivating. My Norwegian partnership led to personal contact and laid the foundation for further cooperation and pupils’ mobility. The Italian partnership inspired me to introduce Italian as another foreign language taught in our school, and that resulted in a bilingual programme launched last year!

Two years ago I started working in the in-service teacher training institution and soon became a promoter of the programme. I’ve run several courses so far, and my job was not only to get teachers registered but we also to help them practice using the eTwinning tools (I invite participants to my own TwinSpace). It works well: one of the participants exclaimed: “It’s better than Nasza Klasa!” and it was the best reward for my hard work. I try to develop all the time and the Learning Events were an invaluable source of inspiration. I participated in two and, even though I wasn’t the most committed one, I learnt enough to be able to pass on my new skills to others. Most teachers are still not courageous enough to use ICT in the classroom or to cooperate via the Internet. I set an example, as I started from using the computer as a typewriter and now I’m able to use Web 2.0 applications, thanks to eTwinning.

Inge De Cleyn from Belgium is a teacher of Special Needs pupils and also an eTwinning ambassador. Her emphasis in the community is to assist other teachers to find partners and to use the eTwinning tools to the best advantage for their pupils.
Inge De Cleyn

School | Sint-Janshof
City | Mechelen
Country | Belgium

Last year the Belgian NSS asked me to become an eTwinning ambassador for special needs. For me it was a chance to meet new people and to create new opportunities.

Twice a year we have a meeting with the Belgian ambassadors where we plan seminars, discuss some issues and exchange experiences.

This year I had a two-day seminar with the ambassadors from the Netherlands and Belgium. It was a great opportunity to make plans for projects together, to exchange ideas and to discuss some subjects.

As an ambassador I tried to convince some of my colleagues to start an eTwinning project next year. I explained to them how eTwinning works, showed them the modules for inspiration and told them about my experiences. They were very enthusiastic about the eTwinning community and they want to start a project about art next year.

I want to make time to give them support to find a partner and to use the tools they need. I hope we can create a beautiful project that inspires more colleagues to use eTwinning as a tool for very nice lessons.

Patrick Carroll from the UK describes how involvement in eTwinning can help teachers discover their hidden talents and develop the art of true collaboration. He sees the eTwinning community as a unique place for teachers to “be” with each other.
When you are introduced to the eTwinning community you obviously feel like an outsider; it is new, it is different. However, due to the openness, the help and the relaxed atmosphere it is amazing how quickly you become part of the team and become acknowledged as an important member of the community. In no time at all it is not you asking for support from the scary people. Instead you are supporting them because they have recognised the qualities that you have to offer, the qualities that you haven’t even acknowledged. eTwinning is amazing at discovering hidden talent, your talent.

My latest project wouldn’t be the success it has been without the advice and support of the eTwinning community. Last year at the awards ceremony the idea was conceived after I had seen a fantastic array of projects and attended a wonderful mixture of workshops. Each session highlighted the latest technology, the most effective collaborative tools and the best practice. Alongside that there were discussions with colleagues about how to structure the project, how to set a realistic timescale, how to coordinate true collaborative tasks and, most importantly, who to work with so that the project was successful.

The great thing with eTwinning is the variety of activities that are available for you to be a part of, due to the new ideas, new discussions and new contacts that are being made all of the time.

I usually work with a colleague or two on an ambitious year-long cross-curricular project, such as our partnership with Almasskolan, Gothenburg, which focussed on different aspects of the Vikings – from myths and legends to settlements. Then there is Crescendo with St Martin de Porres National School, Dublin, where we have explored how to create music in bands using the Nintendo Wii.

However, during the year I am invited to join an array of short, inventive tasks that involve a wider community. For example, I have worked on projects encouraging the children to take photographs of their locality and share them with friends across Europe. There have also been those projects where we have individually created a small section of a larger design. This type of venture is...
Voices of eTwinning

always so rewarding because everyone involved correctly regards the finished collaboration as a masterpiece.

If you look through a window again and again it gets boring because you pick out the same things; by opening up that view to people across Europe it gets a lot more interesting because through them your eye is drawn to new features. You begin to acknowledge hidden gems and you suddenly recognise the true quality that is surrounding you. The eTwinning community isn’t here to mould you into something new and different; it is here for you to mould it into something new and special.

Continuing on the theme of community, Alessandra Cannelli describes how being a member of the eTwinning community has not only given her access to a wide range of like-minded colleagues who, as she does, enjoy the challenges of trying out new approaches to their teaching, but has also allowed her to experience a change of attitude towards a country and people historically regarded as enemies.

Alessandra Cannelli

School
IC Largo Castelseprio Scuola media

City
Rome

Country
Italy

eTwinning for me means developing and increasing my professional abilities. I started being part of the community of teachers right from the beginning and it has been a fantastic adventure, which is still going on.

At school I sometimes feel like an outsider, as I am particularly committed to finding new ways and many of my colleagues look at me as if I were a poor creature. I need to be enthusiastic about my work and I feel my pupils have the same need to learn in a personal way. eTwinning allowed me to enter a community of teachers similar to me.

The experience I found most interesting was a PDW in Slovenia. This workshop was significant both personally and professionally, as Slovenia has not had good relations with Italy, for historical reasons, and I could feel it, but Europe has to
overcome ancient grudge and we did so, learning together. I met very skilled teachers who explained to me about distance didactic cooperation, the use of videos and other shared documents and sites in class, virtual classes and videoconferencing, and what I learnt there has been the basis of my following professional development, the first step to improve my grasp of the use of ICT in class together with a deep European identity, overcoming the past.

Siv Grete Stamnes reflects on the challenge that involvement in eTwinning presents to teachers and school leaders. However, she finds it a challenge that leads to an enrichment of the educational experience.

Siv Grete Stamnes

School  Moster skule
City      Mosterhamn
Country  Norway

Using eTwinning opens a lot of new doors, not only for the pupils, but also for teachers and school leaders. My learning process using eTwinning has given rise to discussions both at my school and among other school-leader colleagues in my community. Using eTwinning in a school project is challenging. It challenges us to develop new ways of teaching and to learn how to use ICT, and it challenges our ways of thinking, reflecting, and sharing.

This new practice, using eTwinning in our teaching, increases complexity. Not only the complexity in the way of understanding other people and cultures, but also digital competence, and the understanding of leadership and teaching for the future. It has to do with technological and pedagogical understanding and competence, and it also has to do with willingness and a competence for embracing change. Schools with the competence for change are better able to process new trends and “other” ways of learning.

Three attributes may describe the most challenging aspects in the new world of community and communication through eTwinning: omnipresence, spontaneity,
Voices of eTwinning

and immediacy. This combination is not always very welcome among teachers and school leaders. Some teachers and leaders may feel that this is a field where they have no control, and feel wary that the pupils are better qualified than them. You just need to let it happen, try it out and you will certainly experience that you win more than you lose.

The learning environment and the participation in eTwinning, with its social and academic practice and community spirit, give us several new dimensions. It brings us a lot of new possibilities for learning and new directions. My and hopefully also my pupils’ learning process is more motivating, inspirational.

eTwinning contributes to a culture of sharing. Pupils, teachers and school leaders are given the opportunity to share experience, pedagogical ideas and different ways of lifelong learning.

The final word in this chapter rests with the Italian eTwinning ambassador, Laura Maffei. She touches on the core of what is meant by a community and captures the essence of the richness of the eTwinning Community.

Laura Maffei

School: Arnolfo di Cambio
City: Colle di Val d’Elsa
Country: Italy

I came to eTwinning driven by curiosity. My first phase was that of eagerness: I was impatient to try out all the tools, exploit all learning opportunities, negotiate and create projects, play and learn with my partners and pupils. It was a restless period of having fun and learning together.

Then a second phase came: when “together” suddenly became the core word of my eTwinning experience. Over the years, I had built a net of connections, of partners/friends who had grown with me as teachers and eTwinners. With them, I got the idea of creating projects for teachers – small communities in
the wider eTwinning community, virtual cafés where we could meet, discuss our profession, strategies, issues. It’s not that we aren’t interested in working with pupils anymore (“traditional” projects still go on); we just want to share our experiences, thus seeing them from different perspectives. You can lend and borrow ideas and even projects, nothing is stolen – on the contrary, it’s incredible how your own idea can grow in beautiful unexpected ways in someone else’s hands. Sharing is fertile.

Almost at the same time, eTwinning changed as well, and it was in our direction. The “eTwinning goes social” campaign wasn’t just introducing a new Desktop: it was a shift from tool to community. Now asking and answering questions, meeting teachers/pupils all over Europe, comparing teaching styles or discussing different national curricula, are not the first steps to a successful project: they actually are the project. eTwinning is a place of individuals, not simply of countries: and that’s much more personal, thus much more involving for teachers and pupils.

But of course, the eTwinning world doesn’t revolve around teachers, but around pupils. And a pupils’ community – if you believe such a thing can actually exist – is a very special microcosm. It has to be nurtured, as teachers can help in its building but can’t create it: pupils do.

Once a pupils’ community is born, you can bet on an incredibly fast increase in the pupils’ competences. That’s what I saw in my best projects: eTwinning can actually turn groups of pupils into communities of pupils. Places of mutual exchange, growth, interest, where learning is not a structured pause in life (“school”), but part of it. Places where you choose to be, not must be.

I can remember the warm feeling experienced during a History lesson, when one of my pupils suddenly came up with a bunch of questions “What are they doing now? Are they studying this as well? The same history as us?” A reflection started from there and has never stopped since.

Awards, conferences, meetings came through the years – our work was recognised and rewarded not only by the eTwinning world but also by the Ministry
Voices of eTwinning

of Education and other learning agencies. My teaching developed and widened, as I met and shared ideas with lots of teachers, experts and also pupils.

You can’t enter a community and remain unchanged, and this applies to the pupils as well. An isolated pupil/teacher is bored, while in a community you’re never alone. Keeping members involved is the core point here – while it’s fine in a teachers’ project to have members coming and going, I can’t allow myself to “lose” any of my pupils. In my experience, for both pupils and teachers the effects of the eTwinning community last in time, long after the end of the projects. Shared experiences generate learning: and they generate personal bonds as well. I’m an Ambassador now, and I still believe “together” is the magic word. And sharing – the simple process of giving and taking (information, advice, instruction, inspiration...) – is the force that keeps the eTwinning world in motion.
Introduction

Christina Crawley
eTwinning Central Support Service

For as long as eTwinning has been in existence, its main aim has been to provide teachers and pupils across Europe with a platform for project collaboration and development. The simple idea of connecting two teachers, from two countries, through the eTwinning platform was the first step; developing a project plan and registering the project on the platform’s “Desktop” was the second; and finally, working together with pupils on the platform’s “TwinSpace” and/or other online tools to carry out a project was the last step.

Since that simple idea – register, connect, work – eTwinning projects have grown in their quality and variety. Through thousands of projects registered each year on the Desktop, projects vary in length (from two weeks to two years) and in the number of partners (from two to sometimes forty or fifty partners). Because of this, the wealth of projects varies in their structure, complexity and aims; however, what they all have in common is a determination to work together and do something different. Contributing to one’s professional development in terms of the approach to teaching, including an international dimension to the curriculum, and finally enriching pupils’ educational experience, eTwinning projects bring dynamism and creativity to classrooms across Europe – and in some cases beyond those borders.

The following contributions are from teachers who have been involved in one to many eTwinning projects. They discuss the challenges and strengths of eTwinning projects, how they can be incorporated in the curriculum and how they can bring many positive elements to teaching and learning. Our first contributor, Mudrīte, explains how, starting a two-partner project with a simple theme, she has got involved in a new eTwinning project every year for the last three years. While keeping the aims of the project within the curriculum, Mudrīte and her pupils made virtual journeys across Europe and learned about new tools every step of the way. She found eTwinning projects fitted perfectly into the curriculum as well as providing an opportunity to “expand” the eTwinning community!
I would like to tell you about my first steps in an eTwinning partnership. To improve my pupils’ motivation, foreign language and IT skills and to make the learning process more interesting, I decided to search for foreign partners for collaboration. The partner-finding forum provides great possibilities because of thousands of great ideas for eTwinning projects.

I chose a school from Gdansk, Poland, and after exchanging some e-mails for clarification purposes we started our eTwinning project about spring. This topic was a matter of current interest in class 5 where the pupils learned about the seasons in English lessons. It was interesting and easy to put all our new skills together to make good project. The pupils took photographs of spring in nature, they made PowerPoint presentations, they wrote comments in English, and they improved their computer skills. At last, they simply enjoyed being together, pupils were keen on doing such new and interesting things and it was a successful project.

In 2008/09, the curriculum for pupils of class 6 demanded that they be taught about interests, hobbies, popular people, etc. I found partners from a language school in Prague and my project covered all the curriculum topics in an interesting way.

eTwinning projects are exciting, useful, fascinating, optimistic and very positive. It is rather unbelievable but all my eTwinning partners ended our cooperation with new members arriving in their families. This is the reason why we didn’t continue our cooperation in other projects. A new daughter, Maria, arrived in Polish teacher Grzegorz’s family when we finished our project “Spring is here”; teacher Lenka from Prague now has a daughter, Linda. The headmistress of my school took part in our projects as a photographer and she has got the best reward – a son, Jacob. Our last project is over. We sometimes exchange e-mails with my partner from Poland but our common colleague Elen from Romania keeps silent. Is she going to have a baby? eTwinning projects are really very optimistic.
Chapter 4: My eTwinning projects

Voices of eTwinning

Julie from Denmark describes how she and her Spanish partner extended their eTwinning project to a full exchange and, in doing so, involved parents and the whole school.

Julie Ashby

School: 10. Aabenraa
City: Aabenraa
Country: Denmark

Our school is a 10th grade school of 16 year olds. I run the international class and these are the pupils who decided to take part in eTwinning. We have been working with IES Carlos III school in Aguadulce, Spain, for the past 4 years. Two years ago we decided to do an exchange project called “Face to Face”.

My Spanish partner and I felt that the two previous eTwinning projects needed some form of closure. We found out from the pupils that they would have loved to meet their partners in person and not just on the eTwinning portal. We also believe this is a great way of culminating an eTwinning project and maybe it was the first one to involve an exchange with two countries. The first exchange was in 2008 and it was a great success; our latest exchange took place this year (2010). We incorporated the exchange into our school curriculum in the week when all the other pupils in the school were on their school trips. The pupils paid for the trip themselves and a teacher from my school came too. This also involved close collaboration with the parents and other colleagues at our school who had to teach the Spanish when they came to visit. We involved other institutions of higher education by getting them to interview the Spanish partners in Spanish!!

The exchanges enabled the pupils to round off the project entirely and experience, first-hand, the day-to-day life of a Spanish/Danish teenager, by living with their partner’s family. In this way, they learnt about the true identity of that country, not as a tourist but as a part of the community. I think the overriding quality in an eTwinning project is that we are opening the minds of young people to other cultures. The eTwinning project site enables the pupils to have direct contact via ICT to their partners and it’s easy for them to get instant results. In our case, we are giving our pupils a unique opportunity to round off a project by physically
Teaching a language is always related to other subjects because a language is not acquired by simply learning the grammar. Consequently, one of the best learning methods is communication, which is at the centre of the philosophy of eTwinning, as it pairs your school with others in Europe who are all anxious to communicate with one another in English.

As my colleagues and I wanted to connect our classrooms with schools from abroad, we registered with eTwinning as soon as we had learned about the communication platform some years ago. My first project started from the simple phrase “Let’s talk about the weather”, which was suggested by one of the pupils during a lesson. This invitation was announced in the eTwinning “Partner-finding” section and we soon found partners to start the project “Environment”. It lasted a month, during which we were regularly in touch using the TwinSpace and emails. Pupils not only communicated with partners, but also worked in groups or individually preparing a variety of material related to environmental issues. They uploaded their results onto the TwinSpace and discussed them with their peers.

All correspondence is in English and it has been a delight, as a teacher, to watch my pupils’ self-confidence and fluency expand during these projects.

Our next contribution is from a language teacher in Lithuania whose project developed from a pupil’s suggestion in class. This project also extended not only throughout the school, but also to the local community and involved outside experts in the classroom, a truly varied approach.

Asta Liukaitiene

School | Kalvarijos Gimnazija
City   | Kalvaria
Country| Lithuania
The project was fully integrated into the curriculum, though some extra-curricular activities were also included, for example a “School Environment Day” or a meeting with the National Hydro-meteorological Institute. Our school management and colleagues were briefed about the project and supported the organisation of ICT classes and events.

After completion of the project, there was a presentation to the local community during the school’s “Open Day”. The project results were used in my school for further teaching and learning activities. The experience gained by teachers and pupils in ICT communication was used not only in further projects but also in general school work. This project was awarded the “National Quality Certificate” and included in the section of best-practice examples on the NSS website.

Aimi from Estonia describes her favourite project, which involved online conversations in German between the pupils from the two schools involved.

Aimi Jõesalu

School  Põlva Keskkool
City  Põlva
Country  Estonia

The “German Live Online” project is now my favourite eTwinning Project! During the international workshop Practice Web 2.0 in Vienna in autumn 2007, my Norwegian colleague Astrid B. Petersen and I came up with this project idea. Thanks to our foreign language live online training which takes place on the DaF-Community (a community for teaching German as a foreign language http://dafnet.web2.0campus.net/) we felt confident to begin work.

The project was registered as an eTwinning project on 29/01/2008 and had some excellent results including two live online meetings (the teachers moderate, the pupils make their presentations, chat, ask questions and respond to the questions). One of the great benefits is that the pupils have overcome their fear of
Ágnes writes about discovering new ways to do the things she had done in teaching for many years, describing the impact on both herself and her pupils. She talks about how the pupils researched the conditions for working and studying in other European countries.

“The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeing new lands but in having new eyes” (Marcel Proust).

When I joined eTwinning in 2007 it changed my life and my teaching methods at once. The creative use of new technologies led my pupils to acquire new knowledge and skills in positive learning environments. Since then my pupils and I have taken part in four projects. We joined the “Mountain Europe” project in 2009 and it continued as a successful collaboration with eight European (Romanian, Czech, Greek, Polish, German, Estonian, Bulgarian and Slovakian) schools.

The pupils produced a PowerPoint presentation of their school and the town where they live, the mountains and festivals of their own country, which they shared on the TwinSpace. The specific aims of this project are for the pupils to research the possibilities and conditions of studying or working either in their home country or in another European country.
Our pupils benefited in various ways through their involvement in the project. They improved their skills in ICT, English and geography. Of course, they learnt how to work together in teams and last but not least they developed their creativity, their critical thinking and respect for others. I think we have learnt from each other’s experience and knowledge. We became familiar with technologies we hadn’t used before, and most importantly we have been a part of a big European school family.

It’s worth working together: http://desktop.eTwinning.net/index.cfm (Mountain Europe).

It is said that music is a universal language, and the project described by Theodor demonstrates that not only do the pupils share a love of music, but they have succeeded in making musical notation readable in another language, Braille, which enables visually impaired persons to read musical scores.

Theodor Tsampatzidis

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<tr>
<th>School</th>
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*eTwinning is our project and a lovely destination*

*All we have to do is work together for an everlasting relation.*

*Day and night I dream of eTwinning*

*The splendid thoughts of friendship*

*Our countries connect with sea,*

*But our hearts connect eTwinning.*

(eTwinning Hymn)

The Music School of Thessaloniki, Greece, in collaboration with five other schools has created a Music Library with access for pupils with special educational needs.* Our objective in doing this is to create a digital European music library

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* http://my.twinspace.eTwinning.net/musiclibrary?l=en
  http://new-twinspace.eTwinning.net/web/p16740

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Laurence Altibelli has had a rich eTwinning life. She describes her various projects, ranging from very short-term ones to full year projects, and has written some short rules for using the TwinSpace.

with access for pupils with visual impairments and developmental disorders. We also aim to produce and present original musical material for use in school celebrations and events.

This eTwinning collaboration gives, for the first time, an opportunity to pupils with special educational needs by creating electronic Braille music files. A special electronic code has been conceived so as to transcribe all kinds of music scores, even Byzantine chant notation; pupils learned how to transcribe music in Braille for their classmates.

We also created special presentation worksheets for pupils with autism by applying Relationship Development Intervention and the Irlen method, taking photosensitivity into account. Pupils with visual impairments learned to use sign language and created a digital film about St Paul. The pupils created multilingual music presentations, containing music compositions, paintings, musical scores and drawings. The digital library has been enhanced by the production of digital educational films. We should mention also that through this collaboration we achieved the active participation of our school alumni.

The highlight of the cooperation of schools was the production and presentation of the eTwinning hymn in several languages and arrangements (soundtrack, children’s choir, youth choir, traditional, classical and jazz arrangements).

We presented our project in an official ceremony at a meeting in Italy, which was organised by the Municipality of Ferrandina. Our eTwinning project was presented at the Greek Ministry of Education (Excellence and Innovation in Education 2010), at educational meetings, conferences and in the press.

Our next plan? It is the creation of the eTwinning orchestra with members from different schools who will collaborate electronically via digital multi-track recordings or simultaneous telematic rehearsals.
“Lycée Jules Verne and Wellington School”, my first project, was a very classic one for a foreign language teacher – to have electronic exchanges and correspondence between English and French pupils. We mainly used the forum of our TwinSpace to communicate in written productions by alternating these two languages. The interaction between the pupils was so fruitful that our project won 3rd prize in the French eTwinning Awards in 2007.

This bilateral project, which lasted about two school years, led me to pedagogical reflections on the use of the TwinSpace. Even if you work with upper secondary pupils, you very soon realise they do not know how to use the tools of their TwinSpace correctly and cleverly.

Since then I have been involved in many projects; “Hall of Mirrors” is my masterpiece and was awarded the European Quality Label. It is both a Comenius and eTwinning multilateral project involving six countries. “Culture in a box” is another bilateral project, but a short-term one this time. There were about three months of virtual exchanges between Austria and France. We used an eTwinning kit whose final outcome was the production of a PowerPoint presentation on the partner country’s cultural heritage. The pupils I decided to involve learned English and German, which enabled them to practice these two foreign languages. “Magic but real experiments” was a multilateral project gathering ten countries during a school year. It was above all composed of physics and chemistry teachers. We worked in English on short chemistry experiments resembling magic tricks. “Bla... Bla... Bla...” is a multilateral project during which we only had chat sessions with FlashMeeting to train pupils in spoken interaction in authentic situations and in accordance with the Common European Framework of Reference. During these
chat sessions, we communicated in English, French and Italian, having some pupils who played the part of translators.

In all my projects I have used the TwinSpace to some degree and have come up with some simple rules for its efficient use:

Calendar: Keep up to date with dates in English, French... (birthdays, public holidays, school holidays, exams...).

Forum: This is a place for discussing, reflecting and exchanging ideas. You should therefore write paragraphs of about 40 to 50 words in reply to a certain thread. Teachers will tell you which language to use: if the topic is in French you will write in French, for example.

Mailbox: This mailbox allows you to send messages to all members of your team, including teachers. Conversely teachers can also send you messages.

Chat: For the pupils, pick a time to chat with your European friends out of lessons and invite your teachers!

You should try to write as correctly as possible. Some smilies and abbreviations can be used. You should try to correct others’ mistakes – they will do the same for you – and correct yourself. The aim of this school project is to help you improve a foreign language, to help one another and to exchange ideas in order to get to know one another better.

Tip: Adapt these rules according to your projects and have them translated into different languages by your eTwinning partners if you decide to develop an interlingual eTwinning project.

Five years later, I have added over 150 contacts I regard as European colleagues, with whom I only communicate virtually. And this is exactly what I like in this programme – weaving an electronic pedagogical web across Europe.

Science teachers often have trouble seeing how eTwinning can fit well with their subject. Manuel overcame this challenge and describes how the project took off and was managed almost entirely by the pupils themselves.
In 2009, we started our project, “Magic but real experiments”, involving schools in Romania, Portugal, Lithuania, Poland and Spain and we had four key objectives: making physics and chemistry experiments with everyday materials, practicing languages, using ICT and promoting cultural exchange among our pupils.

When developing the project, the teachers first of all agreed on a list of experiments that could be made with common materials. Pupils formed working groups of two or three people and chose one of the proposals. They were responsible for seeking the materials needed, preparing their experiments at home and then presenting them in class. This presentation was recorded on video and uploaded to the Internet.

The TwinSpace platform was the key tool for communication and project development throughout the year. We placed there some presentations, photos and videos for schools; we created discussion forums to encourage contact between pupils and each country wrote up their experiments. These contents are also shared in an external blog created specifically for the project “Magic but real experiments”.

For pupils the work brought a small revolution as they became the main protagonists of the work. It happened in a traditional education in which the teacher explains and pupils listen, bringing a new model in which the pupils themselves are responsible for teaching their peers.

The work was recognised with the eTwinning Award 2010 in the special category of maths and science, which meant an extra motivation to continue working on new projects.
In my very first eTwinning project, each of us (we work at kindergarten level) collected material to make a presentation about the school, its pupils, local identity, region and history and it provided the children with the chance to have contact with other languages and customs.

Our teaching method was based on the inter-scientific approach and cooperative learning with active involvement of children, which is part of the kindergarten curriculum. The subject was to explore universally used stories (Perrault, Andersen, etc.). We agreed on a story that was to be presented in every kindergarten, and split into several chapters. Each child produced a picture with the use of several agreed techniques.

The activities have been mainly collaborative through the internet, with the use of several multimedia tools. The children have learnt to use ICT tools, managed to publish this material, and participated in teleconferences with their partners. In this process we received the substantial and continuous help of the NSS, which was appreciated a lot by our teachers and pupils.

In another project we used a cooperative mathematical activity “Half collages”, based on the Cooperative Learning Method at a distance. We cooperated through the eTwinning platform, using all the range of tools on the TwinSpace; we used Windows Live for chatting and teleconferences and exchanged material through sharing folders and Skype.

In this way we managed to embed ICT in the educational process. We also developed important friendships and exchanged visits. Our project’s blog gave
a dimension of never-ending communication and friendship to teachers, children and their families. This blog won the 1st prize for an “educational blog” in the National Competition 2009.

Through the project the school had an “opening” to the wider community with active and enthusiastic participation and collaboration of parents and the project itself has been widely presented by the various teachers in national and international scientific conferences (Athens, Lisbon, Volos, and Crete).

Vincent from Belgium is a teacher who has always had a strong desire to open up Europe to his pupils. When eTwinning came on the scene it added an extra dimension to his work with great success for him and his pupils.

Vincent Dupont

School
Institut Notre Dame des Hayeffes
City
Mont-Saint-Guibert
Country
Belgium

Several years ago, before the creation of eTwinning, I was already interested and involved in introducing the pupils to the European dimension. With a colleague, we created the first European classes in our school, and organised a school exchange. For a week, the pupils were welcomed into a French family in Le Havre and then Caen. We visited Normandy and, in the evening, the pupils returned to “their” families. It was a magnificent experience!

When I heard about eTwinning, I was reminded of that time and I proposed the project “I visited for you”. The purpose was for the pupils who took part in a school visit to serve as guides or reporters for the pupils who could not do the same visit.

It was thanks to this project that I was contacted by a French teacher who wished to collaborate with me for an eTwinning project. I accepted very gladly and for four years we have been working on eTwinning projects. An Italian teacher and...
Lessons from experience: Alessandra and Laurence have teamed up to give some advice when getting started in eTwinning. If things seem difficult, well, just give it a chance – great things may be ahead! eTwinning is positive and productive in all its aspects, but online cooperation has some difficulties we must be aware of:

1. **GET TO KNOW EACH OTHER:** before starting a project, it's important to establish a personal relationship with your partners so that you feel linked not only out of duty.

2. **REMEMBER TO ALWAYS ANSWER,** as the terrible fact that so often happens is we don’t receive any reply and we can’t do anything against that.

3. **GET A FEEL FOR COMMUNICATION:** If a partner is too slow answering you when you get acquainted, it will probably be the same once you’ve twinned up.

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**Alessandra Cannelli**

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a Romanian teacher joined us later and we have been working well together exchanging, sharing and collaborating, involving not only the pupils but also the teachers. I hope we can go on for many years with this collaboration.
4. **UNDERSTAND CALENDAR AND CULTURAL DIFFERENCES**, ask and explain yourselves before starting.

5. **PLAN PROJECT ACTIVITIES** in detail, deadlines and who must do what – exchanging charts, schemes, text documents...

6. **CLEAR WORKING PERIODS**, tasks, how often you plan going to the computer room, what day in particular... to make the project’s life easy and get regular interaction between your pupils.

7. **TEST YOUR ICT EQUIPMENT** without your pupils, e.g., if you plan a chat session, test it beforehand to make sure your school server isn’t filtered or behind a firewall.

8. **BE PREPARED TO FACE UNEXPECTED SITUATIONS**, e.g., you booked the computer room, but it’s needed for exams, formal events...

9. **BE UNDERSTANDING**, tolerant, allow changes and don’t be too demanding.

10. **ONCE YOU’VE FOUND THE ONES** with whom you get on well, don’t lose them; your eTwinning partners might even become European friends.
Introduction

Anne Gilleran
eTwinning Central Support Service

eTwinning has offered professional development opportunities from its inception, with European Professional Development Workshops and national workshops both face-to-face and online. Over the past six years these opportunities have continued to grow, as can be seen in the figure below, with the growth of national online training schemes, regional workshops involving two to four countries and the arrival of the centrally organised Learning Events. In 2009 over 21,000 teachers had a professional development experience through these means.

However, as our contributors point out, formal organised professional development is not the only means by which teachers learn and grow; there is also the phenomenon of
the informal contact and exchange between teachers, one teacher explaining to another how things work, how to do this or that; in short the sharing of experience. Some offer suggestions for the themes of future professional development opportunities. Others speak about a significant moment, such as an inspirational speaker at a conference or some words an eTwinning colleague has shared with them.

This is why the eTwinning Community is such a rich environment for teachers to find and exchange with like-minded colleagues. One point stands out in the contributions, the feeling of not being alone in the journey towards improving skills and approaches. Some contributors also write about the development of the skills and understanding of their pupils, a rich backdrop indeed to the topic.

We begin with a contribution from Irene Pateraki, who describes the impact that both the PDWs and the Learning Events have had on her professional development and how, through them, she has made contact with so many other eTwinners.

Irene Pateraki

School | 1st Kindergarten of Palaio Psychiko
City   | Athens
Country| Greece

Although travelling is not a key issue in eTwinning, the Professional Development Workshops are very important because there you can make personal contacts and meet your eTwinning colleagues face to face. I have also enjoyed small workshops where new applications, etc., have been presented; this is how I got involved with FlashMeeting for videoconferencing and I have been using it regularly.

I think that good discussions with your colleagues are as important as the presentations and one of our projects started after this kind of discussion. It is also important to spread the word... In my own school and hometown I have told my colleagues about these opportunities and they have applied and attended. It is important that other teachers know what is going on during these eTwinning events. Programming in PDWs and seminars is usually very tight and after long days and travelling you feel tired, but happy!

Learning Events are another special chapter in my eTwinning experience. I think that Learning Events are an enjoyable learning experience that helps teachers
improve their skills and meet other teachers, although I feel the number of attendants is too small. I know that they are so popular that places are filled within some hours. I always remind myself, by computer, of the date that registrations open, to click on the refresh button for the eTwinning webpage, again and again, waiting for the link; stressful moments!

I have taken part in a few Learning Events so far and had the opportunity to learn many interesting, useful tools that I have implemented in my projects, shared interesting ideas for activities and met interesting people. I enjoy the learning events experience so much that I now suggest them to my colleagues who register in eTwinning to have this opportunity. Sometimes this is not good for me; for example in a recent Learning Event, a friend of mine registered earlier than me and was accepted for the event while I, who suggested she do so, was rejected!

If my recommendation compels my friends to register early and to get a place over me...!

I found particularly interesting the last learning event, “Tools for eTwinning”, as our tutor used several applications to present our reading material, which made the course attractive and interactive. At the end, our tutor created an online pedagogical guide with all the activities that participants proposed. I believe that it is a good idea as it is a kind of recognition for the work that teachers did during the learning event and a guide we all can refer to when we are looking for specific material in our projects.

The next contribution, from Lorena Mihelač, also describes how she gained so much from her attendance at a Professional Development Workshop in Slovakia. She had been disappointed by some workshops for teachers that she had attended in the past and felt she gained a lot from this workshop.
In 2008 I had for the first time the possibility to attend an eTwinning workshop, in Bratislava in Slovakia. I must admit that I was a little bit sceptical about this workshop, as I had attended other workshops before, the purpose of which was to gain new knowledge, to widen horizons, to get another view on a specific area, etc. Maybe I am too ambitious as a person; maybe I expect too much, but unfortunately, some workshops I have attended did not fulfil my expectations.

The eTwinning workshop organised in Bratislava, however, was in my opinion a real surprise, not only because of the high level of organisation, but also because of the content. It was really a workshop, with different tasks, different venues, a feeling that everything is happening based on a rich interaction between the organisers, speakers and us eTwinners.

I grew in my knowledge through this workshop. I understood that it is very important to enrich my teaching with new material, with a constant awareness of the currents flowing in our society and especially in the area of school education.

It makes no sense if we have the knowledge and do not know how to impart it to our pupils. The workshop in Bratislava was a fantastic experience for me personally and I hope that each teacher interested in upgrading their knowledge and experience will have the opportunity to join similar workshops.

Maria Georgiadou discovered that through participation in the eTwinning Learning Events she has met colleagues willing to discuss and share knowledge freely with other eTwinners.
Voices of eTwinning

Maria Georgiadou

School | 6th Gymnasium
City   | Rhodes
Country| Greece

I learned about eTwinning thanks to a colleague in 2006 and I decided to involve myself, too. I worked with several teachers from several countries who participated in the contest; we also got a national award. But what has impressed me most is the Learning Events that I discovered this year! It was fabulous, I learned a lot of things and words such as ‘podcasting’ or ‘web tools’ have ceased to be a mystery to me!

Now, after several Learning Events, I’m doing really well. I want to continue to learn: there are so many things to discuss and it’s great to be able to do it at home, coming into contact with other colleagues who want to share their knowledge! I also lived the experience of videoconferencing with four colleagues at the same time and I found that amazing. To do that with the pupils is really very useful! My next dream is to participate in professional meetings at European level; I imagine it would be a crucial moment in my career. Finally, eTwinning has really offered me the opportunity to get to know so many interesting people!

Anna Krzyżanowska from Poland describes how she has made use of all the Professional Development opportunities within eTwinning and reflects that in working on an eTwinning project, teachers gain enormously in their professional skills.

Anna Krzyżanowska

School | Przedszkole nr 48 z Oddziałami Integracyjnymi
City   | Zabrze
Country| Poland

Honestly, I can’t even imagine eTwinning without Learning Events, conferences, workshops and PDWs! I got to know about the eTwinning world from my school
principals, who had participated in a regional eTwinning conference. I discovered more about it for myself by attending another conference and personal workshops prepared by one of the eTwinning ambassadors.

Together with my partner from Greece, we took part in a PDW for pre-school teachers, in Warsaw, Poland in 2009. That was an unforgettable opportunity not only to meet people but also to find other partners for future collaboration, and certainly to know more about ICT tools suitable for kindergarten projects! Recently we attended the “Tools for eTwinning” Learning Event. The variety of tools presented, and the chance to learn and practice them was invaluable.

I have not yet mentioned everything that we can experience as teachers with eTwinning. I jump at every chance! eTwinning Groups have just been announced – why not join?

Are children the only ones who benefit from eTwinning projects? I don’t think so. Our pupils are lucky to attend schools with European projects organised by their creative teachers, but I think it is safe to say that teachers also benefit enormously from the experience.

In the next contribution, Eva Luptáková from Slovakia describes how much she gained professionally from two different types of eTwinning professional development experiences, one a Learning Event and the other a Professional Development Workshop.

Eva Luptáková

School | Stredná odborná škola
City | Nové Mesto nad Váhom
Country | Slovakia

An event which I consider one of my best learning opportunities was a Learning Event in April 2010 entitled “Tools for eTwinning”, led by Ioanna Komninou from Greece. I found an offer to take part in this event on my eTwinning Desktop. I expected it could provide me with the necessary information and tools effectively to run my eTwinning projects.
Voices of eTwinning

The course referred to the new pedagogical theories that contributed to the development of interactive projects and to the tools that could positively contribute to the pedagogical innovation of projects. The objectives were formulated clearly, training study material was web-based, learners created interesting content and reflection was the part where participants could write their thoughts and discuss their views with the others. The presenter used tools which could be used either by ICT experts as well as those with little command of ICT tools, in order to cover all levels of participants’ skills. For those who were interested in learning more about tools, Maria Tentzeraki, ICT and pedagogical expert from the Pedagogical Institute of Sydney, Australia, presented Interactive tools for eTwinning projects in WiZiQ – a place to teach and learn online.

I experienced very challenging online teamwork here. I collaborated with people whom I met for the first time. We had to form groups according to our pupils’ age, decide on a common topic, plan the outline of a project, agree on tools enhancing collaboration and interactivity, and describe in which phase we were going to use them. “My” team created a website on Environmental Issues*, presenting all our common work.

Thanks to this event, I managed to learn more about the learner’s perspective and to be better prepared to educate my pupils!

Another interesting experience for me was when I took part in the Mobile Technologies PDW. The main goal of this PDW was to enable teachers to use mobile technologies in education and shift from a position of the media follower to their creator. Participants were learning how to use mobile technologies in the area of environment, cultural and historical heritage, natural heritage, and language education. I took part in Workshop IV led by Adelina Moura, a Portuguese language teacher – Mobile Technologies and Web 2.0 tools. We discussed enhancing educational activities with mobile devices, the impact of Web 2.0 technologies on mobility and we created our own mobile websites, collaborated on Digital Narrative methodology, and finally created an eTwinning project (in my team it was the project “Let’s Share”).

I agree with Adelina Moura that e-learning supported by mobile technologies is an emerging pedagogical model, which requires new forms of teaching and learning. I only hope I can help spread the workshop ideas among Slovak teachers, and implement them into the eTwinning project activities of my pupils and colleagues.

* http://eTwinninglabtools.spaces.live.com/
Christine Kladnik, a teacher of children with special needs, reflects on the positive effects that eTwinning has on the mastery of foreign language skills, where both teachers and pupils gain confidence and understanding through their collaborative work.

I have found that eTwinning opens up opportunities for the advancement of children’s learning, especially in the field of language and intercultural learning. However, it is still very important to point out that not only the children learn! Participation in eTwinning projects, workshops and annual conferences has strengthened my own language skills a lot. It was really a challenge at the beginning to communicate in English or French, or read reports and requests to write in English; whereas now it’s going much more smoothly. It’s also fun for adults to discover a song such as “Brother John” in 20 different languages.

It may also be said that intercultural education is not limited to children. Educators learn from each other, and develop an understanding of cultural differences, discovering that they have much more in common than the things they imagine separates them! A linguistic challenge is the accurate description of a project for participation in national or European competition, and the evaluation of the projects. To do so is already a challenge in one’s mother tongue so it’s not always easy to do the whole thing in English. A really big step in life-long learning!

Before the advent of eTwinning, language courses were central to the promotion of children with very special needs. Speech and communication is one of the most important skills we try to support in our everyday school life with our special pupils. They often do not “speak” even their own language because of their handicaps, but they communicate with face, hands and voice. And so do their project partners in
the different countries. Together they use the same skills to communicate and they understand each other! In our school it is not the policy to teach foreign languages to our special needs pupils and a few years ago no one thought about doing this.

With eTwinning we detected the delight of our children on hearing, using and understanding words in foreign languages. They like to sing and hear the birthday song in English or “Brother John, Are you sleeping...?” in many different languages. They get a feeling for languages and they have fun using them in their very special way!

The pulses through eTwinning have increased the motivation of the educators and teachers, as well as the children; these pulses create a completely natural learning trigger, excite the curiosity of children and strengthen self-esteem and confidence, not just of the children but of the teachers too.

We conclude this section with the contribution by Helena Serdoura, who reflects on how Professional Development in eTwinning could help language teachers to focus on the cultural as well as the linguistic elements of their work in the classroom. She then goes on to present the challenge of how the current eTwinning platform could help pupils to plan, monitor and assess their work and progression, in an interactive way.

Helena Serdoura

School | Agrupamento de Escolas de Eiriz, Ancede / Escola Básica 2,3 de Ancede, Eiriz
City | Ancede
Country | Portugal

My reflection aims to explore how eTwinning professional development could answer some challenges that teachers of languages are facing nowadays.

Until recently, foreign languages were taught in terms of linguistic competence; training of language skills and culture would come as a 5th skill*, most of the time based on national stereotypes.

But times have changed; it has become commonplace to refer to the emergence of world population mobility and the fact that technologies have enhanced

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a virtual mobility among people, as some of the reasons behind the rise of new challenges in teaching. In terms of language teaching, the European policies emerged with an alternative vision to find answers to the doubts and challenges language teachers were to solve.

As I became involved with eTwinning, I soon realised that the native-speaker approach was no longer enough to answer all the cross-cultural and linguistic dimensions we have to live and act in. Researchers like Byram have suggested that teachers have to lead their pupils and future citizens of the world to develop the competences to become intercultural speakers, in order to collaborate in a truly lingual and cultural melting pot, to respect diversity and difference and to contribute to a more democratic vision of the framework they live in. At the same time I believe, by my own personal and professional experience, that in getting to know the language and the culture of others, one also gets a more insightful sense of one’s own identity and belonging. eTwinning has also showed me it can be a key tool to provide teachers with authentic and meaningful cultural-language settings in the class, as long as they are aware of its full dimension.

Believing that language teaching goes far beyond just training skills, I strongly feel that eTwinning professional development training programmes should aim to present ways that teachers could explore further the Inter-Culture dimension within the eTwinning programme. According to Byram, this dimension brings out a new paradigm of being European teachers; the above priorities could and should be developed along with the need to get European teachers involved in educational values, in moral and political education and in the promotion of democracy... in other words, the eTwinning programme could and should become a key instrument to create tolerant citizens and a better world!

Since the eTwinning Conference 2009, in Prague, something has kept buzzing in my ear... It was consensual that although eTwinning provided the pupils with an authentic learning environment and helped them to learn in a meaningful way, it was also brought into discussion that much of the mediation and collaboration work done in the platform was secured by the teachers and not so much by the pupils.

Keeping this idea in mind, several pedagogical questions arose and I believe they can be the object of further reflection and analysis through eTwinning professional development:

** Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, 2001, and others.

*** Intercultural speaker: someone who can cross borders and mediate between two or more identities; who can develop skills as a cultural intermediary between different ways of perceiving and interpreting the world (M Byram, Teaching and Assessing Intercultural Communicative Competence, Multilingual Matters, 1997).
How can the platform enhance the pupils’ “Learning to learn”™ competence in order to:

- raise the learners’ awareness of the learning and teaching process in which they are participating?
- encourage the learners to reflect on their learning and share it with the other intercultural speakers?
- increase the learners’ responsibility for their own learning by processes of self-regulation and self-assessment?

According to Holec™ autonomy is the ability “to take charge of one’s learning, and to take responsibility for all the decisions concerning:

- determining the objectives;
- defining the contents and progressions;
- selecting methods and techniques to be used;
- monitoring the learning process; and,
- evaluating the learning process.”

In fact, much of the work visible in the platform refers to the results achieved by all the partner schools, their pupils and teachers but there’s no space, within the platform, to help the pupils to plan, monitor and assess their work and progression in an interactive way.

The challenge I bring here is how can this friendly platform evolve to become a tool for learners to develop a “self-directed learning”, reinforcing the eTwinning learner-centred principle?

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**** Key competences for lifelong learning: “learning to learn” is related to learning, the ability to pursue and organise one’s own learning, either individually or in groups, in accordance with one’s own needs, and awareness of methods and opportunities.


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eTwinning provides a wealth of professional development opportunities. What are the golden rules in relation to this aspect of eTwinning? They are very simple:

- Keep up to date with all the news and professional development opportunities for your country on you national eTwinning portal. Consult it on a regular basis.
- Log in to your Desktop every day. Here the links for the application to the Learning Events appear. Don’t hesitate, apply immediately as places fill up very quickly.
Voices of eTwinning

etwinning: the personal impact

Introduction

Donatella Nucci
eTwinning Central Support Service

There is no doubt about it, teachers enjoy eTwinning; some even warn about the “danger” of it becoming “addictive”. It is remarkable how they talk of their personal experience in really affectionate terms, attaching to eTwinning really positive feelings and memories particularly relating to the person they have met and worked with and with whom, in some cases, they have become close friends in their private lives as well. This is not to say that they are reticent in recognising the difficulties and the obstacles they have encountered; part of the satisfaction comes exactly from doing something they did not regard as too easy.

The eTwinning experience from the perspective of personal development has represented for them a real milestone, in a way that almost transcends eTwinning itself. They all posed themselves a challenge in doing something new and in trying to master new skills. Some teachers took the plunge in using a foreign language that was not familiar to them; others tried to master the basics of ICT; others posed themselves the problem of how they could teach differently. Teachers soon realised that other colleagues were exactly in their same position, all faced the same problem, namely, how to teach differently in a changing world. Putting themselves to the test and overcoming difficulties has given them a boost in self confidence that in many cases has allowed them to embark on new adventures that will afford them even more personal and professional development.

It is said that, most of the time, teachers work alone, behind doors, and not many people get to see the good work they do in their classroom. Teachers participating in eTwinning agree but say that in eTwinning, by contrast, their work did not go unnoticed, a fact which also resulted in high visibility for their school, when they were awarded a Quality Label or a prize by eTwinning. Some teachers talk of the recognition coming from their colleagues, from their school head and from parents. Some have taken up new responsibilities in their school as coordinators of international initiatives, or as mentors for other colleagues; some have received recognition from the eTwinning community, becoming eTwinning Ambassadors in their country.
One of the problems most teachers face nowadays, not only in Europe but in the whole world, is the difficulty in communication with their pupils; schools in recent years have become progressively more and more distant from young people’s experience of life outside of school and the ways in which they communicate with their friends through digital technologies. For most teachers, eTwinning has been a means to recover communication with their pupils, providing them with a way of learning that their pupils enjoyed and, most important, proved really effective. To see their pupils learning with motivation and interest perhaps has been for all teachers the greatest satisfaction.

The first contribution in this chapter comes from Michael Purves, a teacher from Scotland. He has had much personal recognition through eTwinning, but the aspect he has enjoyed the most has been finding, as he says, “like-minded teachers” who, in some cases, have become very close friends.

**Michael Purves**

**School**
Yester Primary School

**City**
East Lothian Scotland

**Country**
United Kingdom

I have been a teacher for the last 15 years. In all that time, the one single thing that has had the most influence on my teaching has been joining eTwinning. Why?

When I discovered eTwinning, in May 2007, there were around 28,000 registered members on the portal. I found that I immediately had access to like-minded people, who wanted to link their pupils right across Europe, in a way that was simpler than any I could ever have imagined previously. Creating a partnership was simplicity itself – write to some potential partners with a proposition, and wait to see their (usually very quick) response! This simple way of linking gave me in itself a confidence that I had never expected! Discovering others’ ways of working, their cultures and their wishes is a powerful way of enhancing how you yourself work and learn - and this is equally true for the pupils – and the teachers! The encouragement and support from highly trained and skilled NSS and CSS staff leaves teachers in no doubt that they are part of a caring and forward-thinking network. Recognition for what you do allows teachers and pupils to feel valued and fosters further ideas to enhance what you have already done.

In my case, I have found and worked with an ever-increasing network of really outstanding individual teachers in all eTwinning countries, many of whom are now
very good personal friends. I have always worked with the following philosophy when engaged in eTwinning projects – teachers are all highly professional people, but many have different skills – so it’s important to try to foster these skills in any project you develop.

One of my current projects, “Schoolovision”, highlights this idea nicely. I wanted to find a partner from a primary school in every eTwinning country when I started the project, and to run the project along the lines of the Eurovision Song Contest. Finding 30 or so partners actually proved surprisingly easy, as the topic of Eurovision proved highly stimulating for many. However, the skills to be used were quite challenging, initially, for many of the partners.

As we developed our project, we found that the partners had wonderful skills that we didn’t know about. The German partner has fantastic video editing skills, so he used these to create videos for the whole team (pupils and teachers) to enjoy. The Polish partner has brilliant graphic skills, and has taken over with the design of the blog header images we use. Using the (sometimes latent) skills of your team can help you to achieve better results than you yourself had hoped for, and can help you maximise the time element available in your project. This has definitely been my experience, as I have found others keen to help when time has been short.

This networking has given me new confidence to do things that I could never have imagined doing previously: if someone had said to me 3 or 4 years ago that I could think up, co-ordinate and collaborate a project with more than 30 different European partners, I’d have said they were crazy. But, with eTwinning, it’s not only possible – it’s simple!

The benefits to the teacher of this are twofold: not only do you have new ideas constantly emerging in the way you plan and implement your own teaching, but you develop close bonds with your eTwinning partners; bonds that lead to visits to each other and even new family friendships, whether through PDWs, Annual Conferences, or through personal visits to see your new friends. This summer (2010) on our family holiday from Scotland, I will visit teachers and spend time in

Alessandra Rebecchi

I have been a teacher for nearly twenty years now and teaching has become absolutely embedded in my life. I believe teaching is like a voyage of mutually enriching discovery both for us and our pupils. During my career as a teacher I faced the ICT revolution moving from fax to email and getting from the portal for nerds to be: eTwinning. I guess these changes, along with the curiosity to learn, cast a spell over my teaching methods and improved them especially in terms of getting pupils motivation.

It is amazing to have the possibility to test and share all the opportunities eTwinning offers, and it is an excellent model for the delivery of 21st century learning: encouraging young people to link with young people overseas to develop their citizenship and curricular skills. My pupils are always eager to join European projects and learn through eTwinning, they enjoy being an active part of a shared community, which brings learning to life and celebrates success, gives them a purpose for their studies and offers new possibilities for interaction using current technologies.

Thanks to eTwinning and joint Comenius actions, I entered a new world, took part in international workshops, gathered funding to enable me to work-shadow colleagues in my eTwinning Austrian partner school and in the UK, developed curriculum work, being awarded the European Quality Label for the BoLeCom CLIL project, joined several projects, gained more visibility for the school I teach in and involved sceptical colleagues.

Need a tip? Share your passion for what you are doing and step onto the learning
Chapter 6: eTwinning: the personal impact

Voices of eTwinning

Carlos is a Head Teacher in Portugal. He describes how his responsibility was to promote and coordinate Comenius activities, including eTwinning in his school and what happened when he went to visit his partners.

Carlos Trincão

School: Templários Primary School
City: Tomar
Country: Portugal

My first eTwinning Project was created inside a Comenius Schools Partnership, which means that, for two years, the projects converged to one single purpose. Nevertheless, each one’s singularities provided different approaches: The Comenius school partnership had specific goals and activities suitable for work “inside” school; the effect of eTwinning was immediate, spreading through the partners who communicated about what was being produced.

eTwinning became the permanent link for discussions concerning weekly activities. As Head Teacher, I do not have a class under my direct responsibility but coordinating and organising Comenius Partnership and eTwinning activities at school has led, over the past two years, to a debate on international school commitment on a regular basis, at our monthly teachers’ pedagogic meetings.

Pupils knew that they were working with foreign peers: they danced for them; they painted for them; they wrote legends for them; they also recorded at the local radio station for them. When the possibility of travelling to Irish and French schools was no longer a wish but something real, then each and every drop of previous international work and knowledge of partner schools that I possessed became the main guideline for the organisation of the lessons I was supposed to teach (6 classes in France during one week and 10 classes in Ireland during two weeks).

My school knew that I was its representative abroad. And I knew that being a Portuguese teacher in Portugal would not be the same as being a teacher...
abroad because of cultural and social “nuances”. When in Rome, do as Rome does. But I survived!

So what were the consequences at my school? A new project for all classes at school is coming next year.

eTwinning is a path to projects, it is also in many cases a path to friendship. Sari describes how she has gained personal satisfaction as a teacher from her involvement in eTwinning and also made close personal friends.

Sari Auramo

School  Ohkolan koulu
City  Mäntsälä
Country  Finland

I’ll start with a quotation from a card I got from a wonderful Japanese teacher, Natsuki, who worked in my school for three months earlier this year:

“Your international lessons made my so surprised... now your lessons are my model as a teacher. I am going to keep studying English and someday I want to use the skills for my pupils like you. I learned so much from you...”

I’m very happy that I was able to show Natsuki many different eTwinning projects and working methods with my pupils. It clearly impressed her. My pupils were also proud of themselves when they got so much appreciation from someone who had come from so far away. I work in a very small school in the middle of the countryside and my pupils don’t really meet any foreigners in their everyday-life. But through eTwinning they have a big bunch of friends all over Europe. My 5th grade pupils were clearly more outgoing with our visiting Japanese than the 6th graders! Especially the project “Let’s talk and learn English” has strengthened their ability to small-talk in English. It’s so great to watch them using their skills!

I’ve always been anxious to try out new things and this certainly applied to getting involved in eTwinning back in 2005. I got to know the platform and found my first partner in just a few hours after placing a message in the Desktop forum. I was lucky to start my first project with an already-experienced eTwinning teacher from Greece and since then I’ve found many new contacts and have even met quite
a few of them personally. Some of the projects I've been working on have been small and the pedagogical objectives may have consisted simply of “let’s get to know each other and have some fun while doing it!” The longer projects have been more carefully planned. The more experienced I get as an eTwinning teacher, the more I want to make sure that the curriculum is integrated in my projects.

Personally I've liked the connections I’ve made with teachers and other eTwinning persons from other countries especially much. What a treat it is to be able to exchange ideas and experiences with someone with whom you have a lot in common (at least eTwinning, if nothing else), but from whom you can still learn new things. I've made friends and have also met some of them outside eTwinning. Who would have thought that I would climb up the Acropolis when it was 42°C with Mary who was my very first project partner (Blue-White friends) and later that evening sit in a restaurant in Athens harbour with a group of Greek eTwinning ambassadors? Or that Elena whom I met in Prague would invite me with my husband to her wonderful house close to Thessaloniki. What a night there! Or that I would talk about our project (Fingerm-the fish) in front of a big group of people in Germany with Ulrike and that we had met 15 minutes earlier for the first time! And Michael (A Snapshot of Europe) will stop for some coffee this summer while travelling in Finland with his family. And the nice Skype-talks with Ole-Flemming (A Snapshot of Europe and Let’s talk and learn English)...eTwinning has brought a lot of wonderful people to my personal life!

The same message comes from Fani in Greece, who urges all European teachers to get involved.

Fani Smixioti

School | 5th Gymnasio Trikalon
City | Trikala
Country | Greece

All teachers should get involved in eTwinning!

My eTwinning registration gave my pupils and me the chance to taste a great experience and I would like to discuss the impact the eTwinning involvement had
Justyna has been involved in many projects. She speaks about stepping back as a teacher and handing responsibility for the project over to her pupils. She also speaks about the importance of having the support of the School Head in successfully continuing the work.

Pupils as well as the teachers of our school involved in eTwinning projects have experienced a lot of positive impressions while cooperating with their foreign partners on six eTwinning projects. Every task was challenging and motivating for them. I, as a teacher, had to learn to become a facilitator rather than an instructor for my pupils. I made them responsible for carrying out the project and deciding on its end products. Our projects obliged them to devise, execute and take responsibility for the projects over a number of months and thus developed their long-term planning skills. All the projects were pupil-led to a large extent and involved peer work in teams.

Justyna Kukulka

School | Zespol Szkol Gimnazjum I SP nr 13
City | Zawiercie
Country | Poland

The impact of eTwinning on me was tremendous, it helped me to apply new and innovative teaching methods, which my pupils adored and they took real pleasure in their work.

We (my pupils and I) made friends all over Europe and we had the chance to meet them through a Comenius partnership. We became familiar with ICT, we became more social and tolerant by communicating with other European people. We also improved our English language and we learnt by playing since eTwinning transformed learning process into fun.

I think that eTwinning is a unique tool for the whole educational community and all European teachers and pupils should experience it. I’m sure that once they use it, they’ll keep it forever! It’s superb.
I found out that this was an approach that produced such good work from pupils that I have incorporated it increasingly into my normal teaching. My pupils were full of enthusiasm and new ideas. They enjoyed chatting with their partners and had a lot of satisfaction with using English. The projects offered real improvement in all four skill areas (reading, writing, listening and speaking) in ways that would have been impossible before. They also provided increased motivation for the pupils to learn and use a foreign language. Carrying out the tasks connected with the project really increased pupils’ self-esteem. They brainstormed on the most innovative ways of carrying out the activities; they cooperated in groups discussing the effects of the group work and would draw conclusions for planning further work. Up-to-date meetings of pupils and teachers are held to evaluate the projects. Twice a year opinion polls are conducted to assess the progress of the projects.

One of the major factors of success was the support given to the projects and their activities by the head teacher. This had the result of increasing other teachers’ interest in international projects. This was achieved by promoting the school in the local community and Europe, promoting the websites of the projects on the internet, organising exhibitions of end products and prizes given to the various projects.

Through sharing experiences with teachers from different countries, I could also improve my teaching methods and techniques. And last, but most important, I could make friends with my partners from Britain, Tenerife, Germany and Portugal, and I was able to meet two of them personally. Our relationship is based on mutual trust and support. I strongly believe the cooperation will last for years.

Sometimes life is not always a smooth path. María Jesús discovered that; but she also discovered that her eTwinning colleagues were there to help, support and encourage her.
eTwinning brings back to me good and bad memories at the same time. It was 2006 and I was attending a course in the Teachers’ Centre I belong to in my city. I was flipping through some papers and I came across some leaflets which seemed interesting. There were so many leaflets on the desk so why did those ones draw my attention? Who knows? At that time I was so afraid of using the computer and I felt really clumsy. However, that didn’t prevent me from trying to get more information on my own and I started to search the Internet.

I had always dreamt of being in touch with other European teachers in order to exchange experiences and work together with our pupils on common projects. Yet it was so difficult to do so, but my first steps in eTwinning were encouraging and they improved my confidence and self-esteem.

Unfortunately, I got seriously ill and I couldn’t carry on any further. My European eTwinning colleagues were so helpful and without knowing me personally they felt sympathy for me and they sent me emails to encourage me to go on in my personal fight. The memory of those moments still moves me. I’m so grateful to them. For a couple of years I didn’t dare to start any project through eTwinning. I was afraid of not being able to finish up the project, but life goes on and I have decided that I want to participate in it again.

eTwinning is not always easy, there are many challenges to face – the technical challenge and the language challenge to name just two. In our last contribution, Irina Vasilescu, examines the challenges she encountered and explains how she set out to overcome them.
Voices of eTwinning

Irina Vasilescu

School | School no. 195
City   | Bucharest
Country| Romania

eTwinning is not always a bed of roses. There are obstacles that we all more or less bump into, but surpassing them is part of the adventure. Here are some of those I have encountered so far.

THE ICT MONSTER: Like many other eTwinners, I knew nothing about it when I started – almost 5 years ago. I am not a technical person and (although I’m not the typical mathematician who attentively frowns at an egg while his watch is boiling on the stove) anything that is endowed with buttons, keyboards, pedals, handles, etc., makes me numb. For our first project, I needed a lot of help from my family. Then, they decided it was time I was on my own. It was very hard to learn by myself and help the pupils too, as we had no ICT teacher in school, then I found sources of information: Comenius ICT courses, Learning Events; everything I learned made me more self-confident and reflect more on the way I and others teach, adopt the new techniques and ideas that corresponded best to my pupils’ needs and interests. And I understood how much I still have to learn and finally I found the courage to enrol in a master’s degree in ICT in Education. I’m still no expert now, of course, but I know better how to find information and I know that even if I often fail first, I will finally find a way.

PARTNERS: they are more important than the idea. We have all had partners who disappointed us at some point; this is part of real life. The worst case is when your partner disappears in the middle of the project. It happened to me in my first maths project. It was the follow-up of a Comenius course on constructivism and my pupils were 11 years old. It was a short project and there was no time
to find a new partner, besides, it was based on the course concepts and ideas. Fortunately, the hands-on maths activities were so attractive and unusual to my pupils that they did not lose their motivation and we managed to finish the experimental lessons. Moreover, the next year the pupils agreed to take part in another project, which was a success.

CONSERVATIVE COLLEAGUES: In many cases, our colleagues are not eager to collaborate, maybe because this kind of teaching is so new to them, or because they feel insecure. Many of the maths teachers (not all, of course!) think that “serious maths” is to be taught only with pen and paper. Using games, projects, animation, videos, etc. makes it less rigorous for them. And to be quite honest, finding a way to use such tools for this topic requires quite a bit of effort. Even indirect support and appreciation from our colleagues are a big asset. There are always people willing to learn new things and adopt new teaching styles, and they are the ones to find and start with.

MEETING NEW PEOPLE: I’m a shy person and this was quite an issue for me, but surpassing this obstacle was a big boost to my self-esteem. One activity called for another. Blending eTwinning and Comenius projects, having the chance to get grants for Comenius courses, taking part in PDWs and conferences, helping in a contact seminar as a new ambassador, gave me the opportunity to meet wonderful people all over Europe and feel part of a community. One of the most touching moments was meeting my partners for the first time for the eTwinning Prizes finals, after a year’s work. I’ll never forget the exciting experience we lived through together in Seville.

AROUND THE CLOCK: no need to talk about time, I’m sure. Fitting projects into a stuffed curriculum and timetable is almost “Mission Impossible”. I’ve sometimes used tricks to do that but many times just worked in my and pupils’ spare time.

As I have already mentioned, a rewarding feeling springs from surpassing these obstacles. Which brings me to yet another issue: eTwinning can be quite addictive....

To sum up, eTwinning is an open and versatile tool as it allows you to make changes along the way, allows for the integration of any subject of the curriculum (cross-curricular): maths, science, history, languages, culture, technology... which makes it great to work with.
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