

Broadening horizons

Thanks to an EU funded MINERVA Videoconferencing Project, Polish, Finnish, Greek and English pupils got off to a flying start in March 2003 debating the euro. The children had to research the topic, explain their country's position and their own views - and then ask questions on the issue.

After some initial nerves, language difficulties and some time spent getting to grips with the subject, the students became more confident. They prepared and delivered their presentations, adding their own personal touches.

"I like it because it's fun but it is more than that. It gives me a chance of talking to real English people of my own age," said a Greek pupil. And a UK pupil commented "My family are Polish, but I knew nothing of their life in Poland. I have now researched the family history, shared this with my Polish friends, learnt some language and have far more interest in exploring this further as a result of the project."

Regular videoconference links followed, covering a variety of topics. All in all it was a wonderful opportunity to bring four European countries together in one classroom and an exciting way to communicate, helping the pupils develop respect and a wider understanding of their own and other cultures.



Global Leap 2004

www.global-leap.com - a videoconferencing resource for teachers.

Videoconferencing is certainly a very powerful technology in the classroom but, as all teachers know, ensuring this resource is also very important.

Buying videoconferencing kit is the easy part; getting started with activities and contacts that begin a process to take you and your class around the world, is something else.

www.global-leap.com is a starting point which offers a solution to that frequently asked question - "Now what do I do?"

- Well the website is there for you to use:
- to find partners
 - to get help and advice
 - to bring new and exciting events into your classroom
 - to give you access to the wealth of videoconferencing resources out there.

To find the website go to: **www.global-leap.com**

The front page shows you some back-

ground information and outlines some current projects.

Next, click on "Directory of Schools Using Video Conferencing". Click on "Add your details to the Classroom Directory". Now enter the details of your school (accurately please) to become part of the online directory.

You will be given an ID code which you must keep and use to update your details and book events. Use the directory (UK and International) to search for a suitable partner for your project.

Next, you can join one of the events from the website events page. You can view the events for 2004, by "provider", by "month", or by "view all".

When you have chosen an event, please click on "more details". Enter your school's special ID number (you get this when you register your school on the direc-



tory) and fill in any additional information or contact details or special requests. Your school's name will appear against the event that you have booked, and you will receive a confirmation email.

The Museum or Gallery will then contact you to make the necessary arrangements for the link to your classroom.

Most of all have fun! **www.global-leap.com** is there for you to use and we are always pleased to promote your school events and projects. If you have any stories to tell, let us know.

Mike Griffith

The International Dimension

Big in Japan

Teachers from 67 countries gathered on Awaji Island in Japan for the 10th IEARN (International Education and Resource Network) Conference. International collaboration was the reason for coming together, to share existing projects and to develop new plans for future projects. It was a privilege for me to be able to make a presentation about the DfES *Videoconferencing in the Classroom Project* to the international delegates, writes Mike Griffith.

Some of the presentations and workshops throughout the week also encouraged teachers to look at videoconferencing as a communication resource to support the curriculum in their classroom. Links to UK schools featured at the top of many delegates' wish lists of countries they would like to link with.

The Global Leap/DfES presentation demonstrated how easy a videoconferencing link can be when the broadband connection has good bandwidth and when the issue of firewalls doesn't get in the way. The broadband videoconferencing link from Awaji to London was excellent and all the delegates were impressed with how easy it was to connect, using the right software and a good PC.

Behind the scenes all the necessary tests had been put in place to ensure success.

Several other workshops featured videoconferencing and made reference to **www.global-leap.com** as a recognised and useful source of international contacts. Lisa Perez from Chicago explained how she had developed several projects using the Global Leap International Directory as a starting point.

In another presentation an ISDN videoconference link from Japan to Moscow featured students and teachers

planning exchanges and programmes for the future.

The *Videoconferencing in the Classroom Project* newspaper was a big hit and teachers enjoyed reading about the good practice being developed in the UK.

Around the world there continue to be issues with connectivity. Not everyone has easy access to technology, but it is clear that broadband connections are being installed and that will mean connections to anywhere in the world, even the most remote places, will be increasingly possible in the future.

We are reaching the point very quickly where videoconferencing will cease to be a 'special event' but will become increasingly an additional, easy to use communications tool (along with email, websites, telephone and the rest), to add value and an extra dimension to international classroom to classroom collaboration.

North South links

Alexander is a township outside Johannesburg, South Africa, facing a number of challenges, which include HIV/Aids, poor housing, violent crime and under-resourced schools. Plans are underway to develop a North/South Project which will enable school students in the UK to meet and work with school students in Alexander, using a range of ICT to communicate with each other and to increase awareness and understanding of what it is like to live in other places.

Videoconferencing might not be available in their individual schools, and sometimes not even a computer system to send emails is available directly to them, but we are making arrangements to overcome these diffi-

culties.

Having visited and met with the Alexander Township teachers this summer, I also met and talked with an extremely enthusiastic and articulate group of their pupils. We have already made several successful videoconferencing links between these students and the Global Leap project schools over recent years, and it was wonderful to meet them in person at last.

Most recently, some of these pupils had a very successful link to a summer school at Rainhill City Learning Centre, Merseyside in August, which enabled both sets of students to gain an insight into each others' daily lives.

Marion Leatherbarrow, who supported the videoconference in Johannesburg, said after the event:

"A most successful conference was held between about 50 learners from Rainhill and their teacher Tim Farr from Rainhill Summer School and 10 learners from schools in Alexandra Township. The students had the opportunity to discuss their lifestyles, religion, art, culture and teenage fun such as music, food, entertainment.

"Our pupils spoke about unique South African games, our 11 indigenous languages, our special foods and, best of all, they spontaneously sang our National Anthem in four languages.

"I am proud of our Alex youth. If they represent our future, then I am really confident that this country can go forward and overcome our problems.

"All the young people present today from South Africa are severely affected by HIV/Aids; they all have friends or family who have the virus, some of whom are dying right now.

"They are brave, strong and wonderful. Thank you so much to the Rainhill group - we loved your dance demo.

"Thank you for giving our kids a chance to see your lives and to see that you are just like us in many ways. Chips and rap seem to be universal!"



PROMOTING INTERNATIONAL LINKS: Penny Krucker and Mary Wormington of the Gloucester International Centre

The International Education Office is working with **www.global-leap.com** to support schools video conferencing with partner schools and organisations across the world and to encourage an international dimension in all areas of the curriculum. Bringing the world into the classroom, breaking down barriers and dispelling stereotypes are just some of the benefits of live communication through video conferencing.

Students from North Somerset were surprised to discover the level of opposition to the Iraq war expressed by peers from a school in New York during an exciting video conference debate in the summer. A group of children in Calcutta videoconferencing with a Year 6 class from central Gloucester, describing their school days and comparing their interests, were amazed that some children in England could also speak Hindi! A group of Year 7 children in the first year of learning French were delighted to put their new skills to the test with a French teacher from Montpellier. "Brilliant", "fantastic"

"very interesting" were the views of a Year 5 class from Hull who took part in a video conference looking at Indian culture. The children learnt how to count to 10 in Gujarati and how to put on a sari. They enjoyed hearing a short Hindi story and developing listening and comprehension skills whilst learning about another culture.

The International Office is able to advise schools on funding opportunities to support school visits and links across the world. For example, funding from the EU Socrates programme has enabled teachers from a school in the south-west, linked with schools in Germany and Poland, to use videoconferencing to compare teaching methods, plan joint curriculum projects and arrange student conferences on topical issues.

For more details or to arrange a practice conference please contact Penny Krucker or Mary Wormington at the International Education Office, The Hucclecote Centre, Churchdown Lane, Gloucester, GL3 3QN. Tel 01452427204/270, email mary.wormington@gloucestershire.gov.uk