

SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS ON THE WEB – USING THE INTERNET TO FACILITATE SCHOOL COLLABORATION

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Introduction

For a number of years, school partnerships have been regarded an essential element of language teaching and learning. It is beyond doubt that it is highly beneficial for students to cooperate with their peers from abroad. When learning the language, and especially when learning English as a Foreign Language, students are all the time in a sort of an artificial learning environment, where the teacher is usually also a non-native speaker of English, and where students do not have to use the target language to communicate their ideas, since they can do the same in their mother tongue. The learning environment is even more artificial when the class is homogenous in terms of nationality, culture and race, which is the case in Polish schools, where you can rarely find a student born or brought up in some other country or culture. Therefore, students, when learning in a class like that, do not see immediate purpose of their using the target language, and exist all the time in the same surrounding.

To a classroom like that, a school partnership can bring a lot of benefit. First of all, when communicating with their pals from other countries, students have to use the target language to convey their ideas, emotions or suggestions as they cannot cope in any other way, so they are forced to use the language learnt all the time. Also, their communication has a real purpose and is more natural, because they treat English as the common channel of communication, which is not the case in teacher-students or student-student relations in the classroom. Finally, when dealing with students belonging to other cultures, having different beliefs, customs or habits, students learn to appreciate different cultures, opinions, attitudes, they increase their cultural awareness, broaden horizons, develop a deeper and more mature view on different matters.

These are all well-known benefits of student partnerships, which do not need any justification. However, there are times when real school partnerships are not possible, simply because of the distance between the partner schools and the cost of journey from one place to the other. Also, it sometimes happens that when classes do have students exchanges with schools in some other country and students meet each other for the first time when arriving in

the place, they do not know anything about themselves, the pairs are not grouped according to age, interests or level of English, but at random. In such cases, it seems that online cooperation, that is class partnership done on the Web, using e-mail, chat, and WWW in different collaborative projects, should always precede a real exchange, and online collaboration like that may bring much benefit to teaching a number of school subjects, not only English.

The present paper will try to explore the issue of Web partnerships as a prelude to real students exchange, and will try to address the problems of demands on the teacher, students and equipment, finding a suitable partner class, preparing and running an exchange. Also, it will be explained how a student partnership on the Web should develop from simple e-mailing to a more complex project, how its focus should evolve from teaching English to teaching other subjects and creating collaborative projects on the Net, and how different communication channels (e-mail, chat, mailing list, WWW) can be used in the exchange, and finally the issue of support for a school partnership will be addressed. The paper is followed by the appendix, where some information about projects facilitating different Web-based exchanges can be found.

Pen Pal Exchange vs. Key Pal Exchange

First, we need to compare the traditional form of collaboration (a pen pal exchange) with the one using a different medium, a key pal exchange. Pen pal exchange involved writing traditional letters between students from partner classes, while key pal is the same but using e-mail as the medium of communication.

A traditional pen pal exchange, because of the usually long time passing between writing a letter and receiving it, and consequently between writing a letter and getting the response to the letter written could be quite ineffective and demotivating for students. Obviously, waiting for weeks or months to get the response must have had a rather bad effect on students. Because of that, it was hardly possible for teachers to use a pen pal exchange to achieve some teaching goals, and it was treated rather as an additional component of the course, some opportunity to practise the language learned outside the classroom in real life. Also, before the Internet offered teachers all over the world the chance to communicate and share opinions easily and quickly, pen pal exchanges tended to be random, as it was more difficult to find appropriate partners. What is more, a pen pal exchange, being ordinary letter writing, involved some cost of posting the letter, which could be quite high when talking

about two places remote from each other. Thus, it might have been impossible for the teacher to organise a letter exchange for the whole class, simply because some students would not be able to afford it.

Of course, traditional letter writing did have some advantages. First of all, students learned how to write letters in the appropriate manner, with the proper layout, style; they worked on their handwriting, paid ample attention to capitalisation and spelling. Nowadays, in the era of e-mail writing, these matters are no longer that important, capitalisation is no longer essential, spelling is checked by the program, and the letter does not look like a traditional letter, so less attention (if any) needs to be paid to its layout. Also, traditional letter writing was definitely more secure, as it was only the recipient which could get the letter in a sealed envelope, while in a key pal exchange, an e-mail message, after being received, may be read by other people if it is not erased. Also, it is sometimes possible to send messages from other people's accounts, which makes e-mail communication unsafe and unreliable. Finally, e-mail messages, and especially their attachments, are dangerous as channels for viruses of different kinds to be spread.

When considering the merits of a key pal exchange, and its advantages over traditional letter writing, it needs to be noticed that it is much faster, as the letter arrives in a few minutes, which makes it more motivating and beneficial for students, as they do not have to wait months for a response. Also, e-mailing is relatively cheap, if not free at all (if it is the school which pays the cost of the Internet connection), and when compared with the postage costs, e-mail messages are definitely much cheaper, and in this way more affordable for all students. Belisle (1996), when talking about the benefits of using e-mail in the classroom, says that when e-mailing students become familiar with the medium, which is going to be essential in the near future; the interaction between the teacher and students or the teacher of one class and the teacher of the other is more convenient, and due to that it will be possible to closely coordinate the Web project. Also, as Belisle claims, it is possible for the teacher to monitor the process of creating a message, to compare consecutive letters and evaluate students' progress, as well as to compare the letter and the response to it to see what is the understanding between the writer and the receiver. According to Warshauer (1995), e-mail provides students with an excellent opportunity for real communication, makes it possible for students to learn independently, at their own pace, to communicate their individual ideas, emotions and opinions. Finally, as Warshauer's argument goes, e-mail enables students to have many chances for collaboration, communication and information, leading them to a brand new world of experience.

Web-Based Collaboration: Demands On The Teacher, Students, Organisation

When talking about a student exchange done with the help of the Internet, a word is needed about the necessary skills and qualities possessed by the teacher and students, as well as the organisational provisions necessary to make such an online collaboration successful. The first element of the online classroom is the teacher. As for him/her, he should be not only capable of teaching English, but should also have certain knowledge of the Net and computers, so that he could teach it if necessary. Of course, the initial assumption is that the lesson of English is not the time to teach students how to set up an e-mail account, write, send, or reply to letters, browse the Web for some specific information, because these skills should be acquired during Information Technology classes. However, it may happen that some students are not skilled enough or have some problems, so the teacher should be able to help them. It seems that if the teacher himself has an e-mail account and exchanges e-mail messages on a regular basis, he does not need any special knowledge. What is more important about the teacher is that he should be convinced of the benefits of a Web-based exchange, should have some ideas on how to organise, run, manage it, what goals he wants to achieve in terms of teaching and learning. Nagel (1999) claims that when using e-mail in teaching, the teacher should gradually become a “learning facilitator,” a less prominent figure, passing more independence and responsibility in the hands of students, but if it happens so, the teacher should make sure that the exchange is in line with his teaching goals, with the content of the course, that it does not evolve the way students want. It is also essential that the teacher should consider the online partnership in terms of the syllabus of a given class, and plan the assignments for students in such a way that they have the chance to put into practice the structures, vocabulary or forms of writing learned recently. In the question that was asked by Nagel (1999), should e-mail serve as an add-on to the course (using e-mailing as an additional element of English instruction) or as a core (basic component of the course, just as coursebook is in most cases), it seems to me that e-mail exchange should be an additional chance for students to practise their English in authentic writing interaction, reinforcing and practising already learned structures, rather than be treated as the basis for the course, instead of a coursebook.

The second element of the classroom are the students. When thinking about a Web-based exchange, it is important that they should have the computer skills necessary to send

and receive e-mail messages, browse the Web, create websites, etc. Also, they must have sufficient typing skills, so that writing a letter does not take too much time and does not cause frustration. They should be eager to take part in a Web-based partnership, but this is usually no problem, as the Internet and computers are usually extremely powerful magnets, motivating students to learning. Also, they should be willing to collaborate with students from other countries, be open to new ideas and attitudes, innovative and creative enough to put their share to the collaborative project. Of course, they must be fluent in English to a degree allowing them to express themselves and ask for response. Finally, students must be aware of the importance of netiquette, that is the appropriate way of writing, referring to previous messages, asking for information, agreeing, disagreeing, all within the socially accepted norms. As Nagel (1999) notes, some students could be discouraged from participating in an exchange when encountering unsympathetic or unruly verbal behaviour, and perhaps a good idea would be to practise writing and responding to letters among the students in class before starting writing to students from a partner class, in order to learn appropriate conventions and modes of writing.

Finally, some attention must be devoted to the organisational aspects of a Web-based partnership. Obviously, students need to have their individual e-mail accounts, so that they could write e-mail messages from school or any other place, at any time they wish. If they do not have their e-mail accounts, the teacher of English could devote some time to setting them up on some website, explaining the basic rules of e-mailing such as replying, forwarding messages, creating a signature, changing the stationery, attaching files, etc. Students must have relatively free access to computers, either in a library reading room, or some self-access provision for a computer lab, so that they could freely e-mail their key pals. As Web-based partnerships, in my understanding of the term, comprise not only e-mailing but also collaborative webpublishing, students should be able to create their own website, so the school should provide the space on the school server and some webpublishing programme (the simplest being Microsoft Frontpage Express, supplied free of charge with MS Internet Explorer).

Finding a Suitable Partner Class

As it was said before, one of the problems with traditional pen pal writing exchanges was that they were sometimes organised at random, and pen pals were not chosen according to their level of English, age or interests. Because of a widespread interest in e-mail

partnerships, it is possible now to find a partner class which will match one's class in all these respects. In this section, I will address the issue of finding a key pal in two dimensions: finding an individual partner and finding a partner class.

If we want to give our students the chance to use their language in real written interaction, and if they are curious to find out about foreign students' customs, lifestyles or opinions, we could guide our students to finding individual key pals. There are plenty of educational sites on the Web, where it is possible for students to post a "looking for a key pal" advertisement and wait for response. One example would be Dave Sperling's ESL Cafe, www.eslcafe.com, one of the best known ESL/EFL sites for teachers and learners of English. It is more than likely that our students get the response and will be able to start an e-mail exchange on their own, since, as the example quoted by Gajek (2000) shows, when her student placed an announcement on this site, she got at least 10 responses even the following day.

However, the question which needs to be answered is the following: shall we let our students manage their key pal connection, namely write what they want, how often they want, or perhaps not write at all, or perhaps should the teacher be responsible for running and managing the exchange, using it to enhance learning in the context of the syllabus? As was already signalled earlier, it is my feeling that the latter approach is more profitable in terms of learning benefit, as students get the chance to implement the structures and words learnt in practice, to exchange their opinions, and the material learnt is no longer abstract, but becomes really useful. Therefore, it seems necessary for a teacher to find a partner class for his class as a whole, that is, first of all, a partner teacher with similar teaching goals and attitude to using e-mail in the classroom, teaching students of a similar age, level, interests. Before starting an exchange, the teacher could conduct some analysis of students' needs and expectations, so that they can feel that what they are doing is their exchange and not the teacher's. It is essential that the classes are suited to each other in these respects, since otherwise the communication will not be natural and motivating to students. Whenever there are two teachers coordinating the exchange on both sides, they should make sure that there is a response to every letter sent, so that the problem of non-response having a harmful effect on motivation (see Nagel 1999) does not exist.

In order to find a perfect match for his class, the teacher could use one of the various channels on the Web to post a call for collaboration, with specific demands and expectations, and find partners willing to start a student exchange:

- one of the specialist discussion lists (e.g., TESLCA-L or NETEACH-L)

- national or local discussion lists (the Central European TEFL list CETEFL-L or Greek TEFL-GR list)
- the European Schoolnet newsletter (www.eun.org website)
- the professionals from national IATEFL Computer Special Interest Groups (e.g., IATEFL Poland Computer SIG, <http://www.iatefl.org.pl/sig/call/call1.html>)
- the database of schools participating in the European Commission 3m. Socrates Comenius programme (www.3mnet.org, see the appendix for details on the programme)
- join the Computer Pals Across the World (CPAW) programme, at <http://reach.ucf.edu/~cpaw> (see the appendix for information about it)
- post a teacher call for collaboration on Dave's ESL Cafe (www.eslcafe.com)
- join one of the mailing lists of the Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections (<http://www.iecc.org/>), (see the appendix for more specific information on different IECC mailing lists)

Obviously, these are just some of the possibilities on how to find a suitable partner class, and what is essential is that it is the teacher who finds a matching partner class for the whole class, which makes it possible to give whole-class assignments and work whole class on similar tasks and projects. An individual student exchange, that is having students write what they want and how often they want, though certainly beneficial in terms of developing communicative abilities and giving students the responsibility for their learning and freedom of expression, may fail to be used to its full because some students may be unwilling to share their ideas and opinions. An institutionalised e-mail exchange, that is communicating whole class with another class, with two teachers responsible for running the partnership, giving students the purpose to write by assigning certain tasks, is more likely to be successful and beneficial for students.

Running the Exchange

A Web-based partnership between two classes, in order to be beneficial to students, needs to be prepared, coordinated and run appropriately by the teachers of both classes. A close collaboration and mutual understanding is crucial here, so that the exchange will be successful and students will be motivated to use this new medium of communication.

When preparing students for an e-mail exchange, the teacher must first make sure that the organisational conditions are met: students have their e-mail accounts, either on school

mail server or Web-based e-mail on some websites such as Hotmail or Yahoo, that they are able to access the computer lab in order to write and receive mail, that they have ample computer skills and typing skills.

The next step to be made is teaching students the rules of e-mail discourse, namely how to reply to letters, how to convey emotions with the help of special signs called smileys, what are the things to be avoided (using capital letters – “shouting” or sending offensive messages – “flaming”). Also, students could be taught some time-saving features of the e-mail software: how to create and add a signature, how to create filters to filter incoming messages and put them to new folders, how to set up the options of the e-mail software to suit students’ preferences and make their work easier (for details on using filters and managing large volumes of mail, see Nagel 1999). After that, the teacher should devote some attention to preparing his students for the exchange by working on developing their tolerance, cultural awareness, explaining the rules of the partnership, the goals and expectations, so that the exchange is not disrupted by offensive or irresponsible behaviour by any of the students. Of course, a similar preparation should be done by the teacher of the partner class.

As for the teachers, they should try to establish some schedule of work, by looking at their syllabuses, topics, genres of writing, grammatical structures, so that the partnership would follow some established plan. For example, if I teach a class with *New Headway Intermediate*, where at the end of each unit there is one writing genre to be practised, my expectation towards the e-mail exchange is that in this week my students will write a letter to a friend, while at the end of the next unit, six weeks later, they will practise describing a person in a letter to their key pals. Thus, a close look at the writing genres to be introduced in the book, the topics, the texts, should result in some approximate syllabus of the exchange, which then needs to be negotiated with the teacher of the other class. Of course, it may sometimes be difficult to agree on a syllabus like that, and perhaps this would kill the spontaneity of the exchange. It is not my intention to claim that students’ exchange should be planned from the beginning to the end; students should be encouraged to write to their pals when they want to. I would only like to stress that the e-mail partnership should serve also some overall teaching goals, should be compatible with the syllabus by reinforcing structures and vocabulary, and that students should also write to accomplish some tasks or assignments given by the teacher.

The final issue to be considered is the attitude of the teacher to error correction, feedback, and content of the letters. Traditionally, students write some written works and submit them to the teacher, who returns them with errors corrected. In this way, however, a

letter to a friend is never a letter to a friend, but rather to a student's worst enemy, the teacher. When writing their works, students feel that it is only to practise language, or to evaluate them, but they do not have the real purpose to write. When participating in an e-mail exchange, students do have the feeling of authenticity, they know that they are involved in a real act of human communication. Letters sent to key pals are, as all letters, messages from one individual to the other, and it seems that the teacher as a kind of "middleman" would interfere with students' freedom of expression and might have a deteriorating effect on students' motivation to write. Also, it appears that a letter corrected by a teacher, where corrections may involve not only outright grammar or spelling mistakes, but also some rephrasing, is not really a letter written by a student, and in this way the exchange becomes artificial. On the other hand, some way of correcting errors in order to provide feedback and eliminate mistakes is needed in an e-mail exchange as well. Also, a teacher should think about the problem of censorship or control of the content of students' writing, so that the letters do not contain any offensive or abusive material, supplied maliciously by students, or that students, especially when communicating with pals from other cultures, do not unconsciously break any rules or commit blunders.

As for error correction, the best solution that comes to my mind is to make students send the letter to their key pal, with the copy to the teacher, so that the letter which is sent is actually the student's work, but the teacher has also the opportunity to highlight mistakes and provide feedback on the quality of writing. As for the problem of censorship and control, it seems that the teacher should not interfere with the content of the letters before they are sent, but should react, if necessary, in an appropriate manner after receiving the copy of the letter.

Developing the Web-based Partnership

At the beginning of the present paper, it was emphasised strongly that the Web-based collaboration is not only an e-mail exchange. In this section, I would like to develop this idea, and show how the Web partnership could grow into deeper and more specialised forms.

The first stage of the class exchange, in my opinion, is an e-mail exchange. Under the guidance and with the help of the teacher of English, students write letters to their key pals, get responses, reply to them, etc. The teachers of both classes are in close cooperation, they work on some approximated syllabus, so that they can use this channel of communication to reinforce structures or practise new writing genres. Apart from school assignments, students are encouraged to communicate freely, just as they wish. At this stage, the e-mail connection

is used primarily for learning English, developing fluency in writing, working on reading comprehension, practising new genres and styles of writing, learning how to interact in writing with a real person. Students should get specific tasks from time to time (e.g., once a fortnight), and in order to accomplish these tasks they need to write a letter asking for information from their key pal. In this way, the e-mail exchange adds an additional dimension to traditional learning by giving students a real purpose to write.

After some time, as the exchange is well established and students know their key pals so well that they do not feel very curious to find out any more information about them, the established partnership could move to the second stage, namely stop serving only learning English, but could be used with benefit to other subjects as well. In this second stage, students could be encouraged to do collaborative projects in other school subjects (history, geography, ecology, etc.), such as for instance measuring and analysing noise level or pollution in their respective towns. In this way, the well-established channel of communication can serve teachers of other subjects as well, and students would get a deeper view on the matters learnt if they did some collaborative projects with their key pals. As for learning English, there is still enormous benefit, since all the time English is the language of communication, and students constantly practise the language. What is even better, when working on collaborative Web projects they move to more specialized registers and areas of language, learning vocabulary from some other fields such as biology or geography. The role of the English teacher is less prominent here, and he is rather the facilitator of the exchange, providing language help, but the partnership should be taken over by teachers of other subjects. Of course, the teacher of English could still work as the coordinator, convincing teachers of other subjects of the great value of Web-based collaborative learning, and urging them to assign students projects demanding collaboration with their key pals.

In this second stage, that is collaborative projects in other subjects, students should be encouraged to using the Internet as the source of materials and searching for relevant information, facts, pictures, to make their projects more interesting and evidence-based. Working in the Internet still brings enormous benefits in terms of learning English, simply because most of the Internet content is in English, and anything students do is in fact incidental learning of the language. The projects, being comparative in nature because of being created by two sides, make students' learning more interesting, and place their knowledge in other subjects in the broader context of the world, in this way increasing cultural awareness, developing tolerance and appreciation for other cultures.

The next stage of the partnership might be having the two classes working together on a collaborative website. Students of both classes could be asked to write texts on such aspects of life as lifestyles, their rooms, unusual houses, entertaining guests, their city, etc. Then, a common website could be created, publishing the texts of both classes together, under one topic (e.g. our rooms). Such a collaborative website could be easily created, with one side responsible for that and texts sent to the webmaster (the webmaster might be a student, more proficient in computer skills and needing additional challenge). After creating a website like that, new works should be added there as they are created, and in this way, when knowing that their works will be published and seeing them actually published, students would get additional motivation to writing. For the school administration, a collaborative website will be the visible evidence of a deep and well-developed partnership on both sides. Also, a website like that will be a good resource of materials concerning the two cultures, and could stimulate some discussions comparing them. An intercultural, multinational website would be a true culmination of the Web-based partnership, and would truly serve the purpose of removing barriers between nations, dismissing national stereotypes that students might have of their key pal nations, building understanding and friendship between nations.

An example of a website putting these values into practice could be the British Council Rome's Students' Metro Pages (www.britishcouncil.it/english/english/rome/students), the site done by and for Italian students of English at BC Rome. The coordinator, Michael Ivy, encourages also students from other countries to contribute their works on the topics presented on the site. In this way, the site made in Rome by Italian students starts being a multicultural, multilingual forum for exchanging opinions and describing customs, easily accessible from any place on Earth. The Internet is a medium which does not know any borders, limits of time or space, and which connects people from all parts of the world. Thus, creating collaborative websites by partner classes seems to be the best way to make the most of this medium for the benefit of students.

Another dimension of the online collaboration is using some other forms of Web communication such as mailing lists or chat. After having been e-mailing for some time, teachers might organise a chat session from time to time, for students to exchange their opinions and talk with their key pals in real time, in this way developing not only writing but also speaking (it is assumed here that chatting is not really writing, but rather speaking in a written form). Of course, students need to know how to operate chat software, how to talk to the whole group or talk only with one person of their choice, so a good idea would be to organise chat sessions in the classroom before doing one with the partner class. However, the

important factor to be remembered is that for the chat session to be successful students need to have sufficient typing skills, so that it does not take ages to exchange views, and therefore it is advised to use chat after having been e-mailing for some time. As for mailing lists, they allow sending messages to the whole group (here two classes), and this technical opportunity could also be used by the teachers coordinating the exchange. Here, it needs to be remembered that mailing lists can generate large volumes of mail, so students should know how to manage them by using filtering, saving messages, deleting them, replying to the individual author or the whole group.

Finally, as the last stage of the partnership, a real student exchange could be organised, with a trip of one class to the other and vice versa. Of course, this stage is not necessary, and if partner classes live in too remote places or cannot afford the journey, the lack of a real exchange is no problem, since the Web-based collaboration they have already done has already brought some benefit both in terms of learning English, learning other subjects and developing students' character and personalities. If a real exchange does take place, it is thoroughly prepared by the Web-based collaboration, students know their key pals very well, and in this way the real meeting that occurs is the one of old friends, and not of strangers seeing each other for the first time.

Supporting the Exchange

Finally, a few words need to be said about the way the exchange should be supported, so that it succeeds in developing greater understanding and friendship between partner students. Obviously, the teacher of English has the greatest role to play, since he is responsible for finding a partner class, teaching students the rules of writing discourse, starting and running the exchange in its first phase. Surely, the English teacher needs help from the Information Technology teacher, in such matters as setting up individual e-mail accounts for students, helping with machines, making the computer lab available for self-access. Also, teachers of other subjects need to support the teacher running the exchange, especially in its second phase, namely collaborative projects focusing on other school subjects than English, by giving students assignments demanding cooperation with their key pals, by making reference to the culture, history or geography of the partner nation, by encouraging students to the idea of searching for information and selecting relevant facts rather than relying on a ready-made coursebook. The next factor is the headmaster, and he should also provide ample support to the English teacher running the exchange. For the school, an

exchange like that is an additional asset, acting to its advantage, and knowing that, the headmaster should make all necessary provisions for it to be successful. Finally, the exchange will surely need financial support, and various governmental programmes (such as European Commission 3m. Socrates Comenius programme, www.3mnet.org) can aid the teacher and the school in organising and running a Web-based collaboration.

Conclusion

It is widely known that a student exchange, either in the form of writing letters or visiting each other, has great advantages for students, by helping them to acquire communicative skills, teaching them tolerance and appreciation for other cultures, giving them a real purpose for writing, reading, listening and speaking, placing their learning in a real-life situation. However, a real exchange is sometimes difficult to organise and execute because of substantial costs involved. The Internet, and specifically e-mail, websites and chat, gives teachers tools for organising partnerships between classes very easily and with little cost involved. It seems obvious that after a Web-based collaboration a real exchange will be much more profitable and successful than without it.

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APPENDIX

PROJECTS FOR SCHOOL PARTNERSHIPS

3M PROJECTS FOR EUROPEAN SCHOOLS PARTNERSHIPS

www.3mnet.org

Multilingual, Multicultural, Multimedia Projects for European School Partnerships (3m. project) is a part of European Commission Socrates Comenius programme. The project, funded by the European Commission Socrates, COMENIUS (In-Service Training), aims to promote European school partnerships using technology and multimedia for collaborative projects familiarising children with other languages and developing their cultural awareness and appreciation of other nations.

3m Comenius project focuses on supporting school based partnerships which enable teachers to use multimedia with children for collaborative projects which enhance children's technological, linguistic, creative, social skills and intercultural understanding.

Project activities are aided by a network of national and regional coordination, and coordinators develop their own language versions of the materials, design and run courses suited to their own policies, and provide technical support and advice for schools setting up partnership projects in their regions.

Examples of projects already undertaken include:

1. multilingual, multimedia collaborative stories on CD. They were created by children in classes aged between 4 and 12 and reflect the enormous potential of these media. The stories created ranged from very simple productions to extremely complex interactive stories, at the same time challenging to navigate.
2. Netd@ys projects, comprising collaboration during Netd@ys between infant schools in different countries of Europe.

The Website of the programme, www.3mnet.org, includes the following features:

- a multilingual database of European teachers interested in setting up collaborative multimedia projects with partner schools (Joining the Network)
- training courses with online linguistic and technical support to help teachers develop multilingual, multimedia authoring skills (Training and Support)
- examples of projects already accomplished (Examples)
- informal contact and discussion online with experienced teachers (Forum)

- information on sources of funding to make preparatory visits, where to apply for European Commission funding for collaborative educational projects, as well as news on European multimedia initiatives with implications for schools (News and Funding)
- links to other useful websites (Links)

Teachers setting up collaborative projects in 3m. project are eligible for financial support through the Socrates Comenius programme. The classes may have one partner at first focusing on one target language, and when established and made firm, they may add additional partners. When looking for partner classes in 3m. programme, teachers of children aged 4-18 can give their details to search for suitable partner classes of similar age, background, interests, expectations. As for older students, the projects may be devoted to some specific curriculum topic and they may require the shared use of English. Communication and collaboration in multimedia projects are achieved largely through the medium of English, but not entirely, taking other languages into account as well, in order to develop students' awareness of linguistic and cultural diversity in Europe.

Teachers interested in developing skills in using multimedia and software and set up school based partnerships, are asked to browse through the materials collected on www.3mnet.org website and register their interests on the database of schools. These applications are checked to make sure that only real schools are accepted. National coordinators of the 3m. programme should provide support to teachers in schools who have registered. Also, the European schoolnet website, www.eun.org, is a perfect source of information and ideas on school partnerships. The European Schoolnet newsletter, which can be subscribed to free of charge on the site, is the posting board for collaboration of schools from all over Europe and includes EUN news, calls for cooperation, announcements of new projects, multilingual and multicultural resources.

INTERCULTURAL E-MAIL CLASSROOM CONNECTIONS

<http://www.iecc.org>

IECC (Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections) is a free service to help teachers link with partners in other countries and cultures for e-mail classroom pen-pal and project exchanges. Since its creation in 1992, IECC has distributed over 28,000 requests for e-mail partnerships. At last count, more than 7650 teachers in 82 countries were participating in one or more of the IECC lists.

IECC has various specific mailing lists, suited for exchanges between particular groups: IECC-HE (for higher education), intended for teachers seeking partner classrooms for international and cross-cultural e-mail exchanges with institutions of higher education; IECC (for K-12), intended for teachers seeking partner classrooms for international and cross-cultural e-mail exchanges, and not for discussion or for people seeking individual penpals; IECC-INTERGEN, intended for teachers and "50+ Volunteers" seeking partners for intergenerational e-mail exchanges; IECC-PROJECTS, where teachers may announce or request help with specific classroom projects that involve e-mail, internationally or cross-culturally; IECC-SURVEYS, a forum for students (and teachers) to post requests for assistance on projects, surveys, and questionnaires; and IECC-DISCUSSION, intended for general discussion about the applications and implications of intercultural e-mail classroom connections.

COMPUTER PALS ACROSS THE WORLD (CPAW)

<http://reach.ucf.edu/~cpaw/>

Computer Pals Across the World (CPAW) is a non-profit global educational electronic network, which was co-founded in 1983 by Dr. Malcolm Beazley AM, an Australian educator, and James Erwin, a computer consultant from the USA. It provides opportunities for people in educational and community institutions to exchange their ideas, experiences, opinions and knowledge in different collaborative learning environments to promote and develop global understanding. It is operated and managed in over twenty countries by dedicated educators and citizens donating their voluntary services and expertise.

CPAW aims to:

- give students a real context in which they can improve their written communication skills;
- provide an opportunity for cultural exchange through reading and writing;
- provide a real-life opportunity for people to develop computer skills and typing skills;
- make people familiar with the use of international telecommunications;
- free people from isolation caused by age, physical and emotional handicap and remove geographical barriers;
- help in the learning of foreign languages;
- provide a medium for collaborative study and research;

- provide a forum for the discussion of and dissemination of information on the effective uses of telecommunications in education.

CPAW has traditionally linked schools one-to-one, matching interests and age groups where possible across national boundaries. Today, among the possible configurations there are the following options: institution to institution; school/class to project; lighthouse projects; class to class; mini-networks on specific topics; individual links within specific institutions or groups such as Hospitals and Senior Citizens.

CPAW is a K-12 organization and beyond to post secondary institutions and community organizations (e.g. Senior Citizens).

CPAW cost structures will vary from country to country depending upon the electronic mail system being used. While there is now increasing use of Internet by CPAW members, other services such as CompuServe, America On-line, BT/Tymenet, etc. are being used. For further information contact cpaw@reach.ucf.edu

As for the advantages of the programme, CPAW is a total community organization which involves schools, senior citizens, universities and hospitals around the world; CPAW has existed for over ten years and has had a wide experience in global networking. It was established by educators for educational purposes and provides an annual Online Calendar of projects from which members can choose. Also, CPAW has a regular Online Newsletter which assists communication between members and keeps them informed as well as a network of national directors and specialist co-ordinators which acts as a support to members. Finally, CPAW holds an annual international conference, where experiences and ideas concerning collaborative learning can be exchanged.