

## Exploiting ICT and distance learning to provide access to information, learning and human resources

Embedding ICT in teaching and learning is a major initiative in all branches of education, ICT has a particularly important role to play in developing provision for bilingual learners. This is concerned with exploring new ways of working with bilingual learners as well as facilitating more established techniques. Although the increased use of ICT to deliver and enhance aspects of educational provision is emerging practice for all learners, rural and geographically remote mainly monolingual areas may have advantages in that they may already have developed considerable experience in using ICT to overcome geographical barriers. Such areas will be able to build on this practice to meet the needs of isolated bilingual learners and may indeed lead developments nationally. For example video conferencing facilities developed to enable isolated learners to share learning with others in remote areas can also be used to reduce linguistic isolation by allowing same first language learners to discuss and communicate remotely.

ICT provides teachers in mainly monolingual areas with:

- Access to EAL pedagogy and expertise via the internet
- Opportunities to work collaboratively with EAL and bilingual specialists who may be geographically distant
- Opportunities to share good practice, resources and professional development remotely
- Access to resources which are culturally and linguistically diverse even if their settings are not
- Access to innovative tools to support the integration of language and curriculum

### Vignette 10 – Using video conferencing to combat isolation in Devon

#### The Context

Although the majority of children from ethnic minority families in the UK are situated in urban areas, many of which have substantial populations of ethnic minority groups, the situation, in Devon is one where the 'isolated bilingual learner is the norm. A single child may be the only representative of a particular language or ethnic heritage in the entire county.

There are 97,857 pupils of compulsory school age in Devon. Pupils from ethnic minority backgrounds comprise three per cent of the total population. There are nearly 1000 pupils for whom English is an Additional Language This represents just over one per cent of the whole school population. Currently between 40 and 50 languages are represented in schools.

Pupils learning EAL in Devon come from a wide range of backgrounds and circumstances. There is a long tradition in the South West associated with the Chinese community. Recently with the extension of the European Union many families have arrived from Europe especially Poland. Some families live in Devon on a permanent basis whilst others are here for a short time, for example children of parents studying at Exeter University. Although clusters of bilingual pupils are located in the urban areas of Exeter, which has an Islamic Centre and a Chinese Community School and Barnstaple, which has a small Bangladeshi community, the majority are scattered throughout the rural parts of the county.

To overcome the isolation of pupils, their families and teachers our service has invested in video conferencing equipment. We have a number of 'group' videoconferencing systems (Polycom Viewstation 128s) and video phones. These are all located in schools.

### **The process**

The decision to purchase the equipment was taken after a training session run by Tim Arnold, the Digital Media Education Adviser in Devon. In the initial session he showed us various types of equipment and invited us to take part in several video links. At the end of this session we could see the potential for us was infinite.

An initial link with John Landon, from the Faculty of Education, University of Edinburgh, was followed up by another link in which John described his job, the language groups he works with and how video conferencing was used in Scotland. We also had further sessions with Tim to familiarise ourselves with the equipment and during these we made links with other authorities. Tim has led whole school training so teachers can use video conferencing for a range of purposes and become familiar with the equipment. Where possible we have an advisory teacher at each end of the initial link and as well as school or County technicians.

### **Video Links**

Our video links are used for different reasons and so involve different participants. As we gain more experience we are seeing more possibilities and so the range of link ups is expanding. We hope that we act as the catalyst and schools will take the possibilities further

- (i) Linking isolated families, parents and children.

We have linked Panjabi speakers in a first and middle school. A bilingual teaching assistant in the first school prepared a version of a story. Panjabi speaking pupils brought along an English speaking friend to the session held over lunch time. The assistant read the story in Panjabi and asked questions. There was initial shyness in speaking Panjabi, but the English speakers at the end said they wanted to learn some Panjabi.

In another link newly arrived Turkish pupils and their parents communicated in two Exeter schools. Before the session one school prepared 'getting to know you' questions. One pupil was very shy in this session and her mum spoke frequently for her – in fact it was difficult to keep the parents quiet and allow their children to speak! However, the parents did make arrangements for the children to meet in the holidays.

Three Korean pupils at an Exeter middle school were linked with an isolated pupil at another Exeter school. The pupils were given time to plan questions to ask each other before the session so that the conference had a focus. Model questions were provided in English. An advisory teacher worked with the three pupils and a Korean bilingual assistant with the isolated pupil. The pupils only took a few seconds to feel at ease with the situation. They chatted non-stop for half an hour, asking each other about their families, schools and future plans. The experience was particularly rewarding for the isolated pupil as he had no other opportunity to use his first language during the school day. Unfortunately he has now returned to Korea, but the school are planning to continue email links with him in Korea and are experimenting with other ways of involving whole classes in curriculum based conferencing.

Another conference linked an isolated Cantonese speaking pupil in North Devon with three pupils in South Devon. The isolated pupil brought a friend to the session to give him more confidence and to ensure the conference did not highlight his isolation in his own school. It also gave the friend the opportunity of experiencing another language. Both mothers were invited, but only the mother of the isolated pupil was able to attend. Before the session all pupils were given time to think of some questions about themselves and about how they celebrate Chinese New Year. Very quickly the pupils overcame their shyness and spoke in Cantonese very confidently. The Chinese mother was delighted that her son had the opportunity to speak with other Hong Kong children because he didn't know any. The English pupil was amazed that her friend could speak and understand another language so well and this must have raised the self-esteem of the Chinese boy. She found it hard not

being able to understand the Cantonese herself and asked the boy and his mother to teach her to say 'Hello'. After the conference she told the advisory teacher that she thought, 'it must be very difficult to be in an English class all day if you don't speak much English'. She now has a great deal of respect for her Chinese friend. The teachers at the south Devon school were also amazed at the proficiency of the pupils' Cantonese. They saw the obvious enjoyment of all pupils and planned more links.

(ii) Linking schools

An early conference involved linking a school in Gloucester and one in Exeter. The project was to complete and swap Clicker 4 books. Tim Arnold helped both schools make a video which was planned, filmed and edited by the pupils. The videos looked at both schools, one rural and one urban, which had a number of EAL pupils. After watching the videos a conference was set up as a getting to know you session. The pupils were able to ask each other questions. After planning with teachers, drama and art with a Chinese artist was undertaken in preparation for making the book 'Wang Shuh and the Red Cloud Herb'. Mandarin translation was included. The second conference involved the pupils in smaller groups discussing what they had done.

A community college in Torquay has used video conferencing for the speaking and listening task of the Welsh GCSE. The pupil had recently left Wales and was anxious to obtain a Welsh GCSE. Her previous college was willing to link with her for the assessment. Using video conferences for first language GCSEs is very useful with our isolated bilingual speakers. Before this arrangement had been agreed pupils had needed to travel to Bristol or London.

A project to support the transition from primary to secondary school is currently taking place in Exeter between a secondary and two of its feeder schools. The Service was awarded £2000 by BT to run the project. The project involves using video and video conferencing in whole class activities and provides opportunities to link isolated bilingual learners speaking the same language, to enhance the speaking and listening skills for these and other pupils, support the transition to secondary school and raise awareness of language and cultural diversity for all. The first video conference took place between the two feeder schools and pupils discussed their fears of moving to a new secondary school. A list of questions was drawn up to ask the secondary school. The second conference was between one feeder school and the secondary. Questions were put to a teacher and pupils to influence the planning of a video 'A Day in the Life of ..... School'. Pupils at the secondary school planned, scripted and filmed video scenes from a typical day that would answer the original questions. Pupils with English as an additional language provided the voice-overs and were involved with the filming. Tim Arnold taught pupils from all schools editing techniques before the dual language video was shown to both feeder schools. A video conference with the secondary school followed this.

**Feedback from users**

- Video conferencing reduces isolation by helping isolated pupils and their family to realise there are other speakers of their language and there are other schools with bilingual pupils.
- Video conferencing raises awareness of the ability of the pupil in his first language.
- Video conferencing raises awareness of language and cultural diversity for all pupils.
- Video conferencing raises schools' awareness of how they can include pupils more and in different ways.
- Video conferencing has led to social events for families.
- Video conferencing highlights that as pupils are learning, so are their teachers.

### **Lessons from experience**

- The groups that are video conferencing can vary from two or three children to a whole class. Always arrange the seating so that everyone can be seen by the far end and also use the preset camera positions facility so that you can move easily from a shot of the whole group to close ups of individuals and small groups, as appropriate.
- Take care to place the microphone in the optimum position, usually in the middle of small groups. With larger groups, arrange for those likely to be doing most of the talking to be nearest the microphone. If you need to move the microphone during a conference, mute it first to avoid the far end hearing loud banging noises!
- Site equipment carefully. You don't want interruptions and a quiet office may be non-threatening to quiet, shy participants.
- Videoconferencing links are made via broadband or ISDN. Increasingly broadband is the connectivity used, which usually means you can use any network point in the school for the connection, which is convenient. If you are putting in an ISDN line for the videoconferencing, make sure you install it in the most appropriate room – which is usually not the ICT room!
- Have a contingency plan if the link up doesn't work.
- Timing – schools may have different lunch breaks. Consider time zones if linking up with another country.
- Timetabling – this may need negotiation with other uses of equipment or rooms.
- Videophones are more portable, but are unsuitable for large groups.
- Plan the session thoroughly so that everyone knows what is going to happen and when. Give the conference a focus. Swap positions in front of the equipment so that everyone has a turn.
- Although the equipment is relatively easy to use and we encourage our team to operate it themselves, it is important that there is technical support available, especially in the early days while colleagues are learning the ropes. Within our Service we have someone who co-ordinates the equipment and attends link-ups. This level of support is very reassuring for novices.

### **Our vision : using video conferencing**

The more we work with video conferencing, the more we see its endless possibilities. Whilst there is a need to evaluate the current activities there is also a need to look at the way forward. We see video conferencing developing in the following ways:

- to exemplify and share good practice of supporting bilingual pupils between schools
- to link cluster groups of service Teaching Assistants for training purposes
- to enable appropriate language brokering where an individual acts as interpreter within a family
- to enable curriculum access
- to enable our few bilingual assistant to work with and support children in different schools
- to use as a discussion tool for the Advisory Teachers

We need to identify future funding to enable all this to happen!

**Contributed by Jacqui Weall and colleagues from Devon English as an Additional Language Service**

## **Vignette 11 – Using video conferencing to support student teachers in monolingual areas**

In this mainly white area, very few of the students undertaking school based training have an opportunity to work directly with pupils learning EAL. Although the school based initial teacher training (SCITT) partnership has traditionally arranged for trainees to visit a multilingual school through partnership work with a London based SCITT, this approach has limitations and has tended to be an ‘experience’ rather than an opportunity for learning. In this pilot project, the rural county arranged for a video conference between the trainees in the London based SCITT and those in the rural area. An EAL specialist attended to provide ‘face-to-face’ feedback in the rural county. Each group had prepared a set of questions concerning the distinctiveness of each teaching situation. The questions from the rural students were centred on issues around linguistic and cultural diversity.

The conference lasted well over an hour as the students exchanged ideas and experiences from their initial teaching placements. Interestingly, very few of the ‘rural’ trainees were originally from the rural area and the video conference unexpectedly allowed them to share and reflect on their own experiences of linguistic diversity in a way which had not previously occurred during the multilingual school visits. The conference also appeared to benefit the London trainees as they externalised their ideas about teaching bilingual learners. For example, a number of misconceptions around bilingualism were challenged by their own colleagues. The question which proved most telling was ‘What would you do or use if you were in the situation of having only one bilingual pupil in your class?’ This question encouraged the London students to think hard about what they were doing, why and how they were doing it.

Next year, at the suggestion of the student teachers involved in the pilot, an initial video conference will be used to prepare the trainees for the visit to the multilingual school and termly links will provide further opportunities for learning discussions and reflections.

**Contributed by a member of the working party**

Strategies to exploit ICT and distance learning to provide access to information, learning and human resources may include:

<p><b>Class or subject staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Presenting curriculum information in different and helpful forms using multimedia, key visuals, or models and simulations</li> <li>• Providing opportunities for learners to refine, develop and store their language output through word processing, publishing programs or by digitally recording oral presentations</li> <li>• Creating a focus on English and how it is used through emails, text tools, text and web publishing and authoring programs, and writing frames</li> <li>• Providing opportunities for learners to practice their skills in particular areas of English through specific software or internet based activities</li> <li>• Using ICT to stimulate working, thinking and talking collaboratively to support learners to process and embed language and curriculum learning</li> </ul>	<p><b>Specialist staff</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Supporting learners to become independent users of internet translation tools, electronic bilingual dictionaries, and first language websites to support their curriculum, English and first language learning</li> <li>• Using a variety of media to capture and store learners' first and English language output to inform assessment for learning. For example, digitally recording first language speech or scanning text and sending electronically to bilingual specialists for ongoing assessment</li> <li>• Timetabling weekly 'on-line' sessions to provide an immediate response to pupils and teachers, particularly once direct support of a pupil or teacher/school has ceased</li> <li>• Using email or video conferencing to communicate and keep in contact with isolated bilingual pupils and their teachers and to respond to concerns, monitor progress, advise on targets and strategies or support lesson planning</li> <li>• Using tape recorders, word processing, digital and video cameras, and translation websites to produce specific dual language resources</li> </ul>
<p><b>School or setting</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Encouraging bilingual pupils to develop their own area within the school website</li> <li>• Using ICT to make links between pupils, parents and language communities</li> <li>• Using ICT to make links with other schools providing for isolated bilingual learners</li> <li>• Supporting teaching staff to access curriculum resources and materials in other languages through ICT</li> <li>• Using remote expertise through websites and similar to develop policies and practices relating to EAL and multilingualism</li> </ul>	<p><b>EAL service, local authority or region</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Piloting and disseminating the use of ICT with isolated bilingual learners</li> <li>• Developing email based mentoring schemes for teachers of isolated bilingual pupils</li> <li>• Exploiting video footage of lessons including isolated bilingual learners to calm the initial concerns of school staff with little experience of bilingual learners</li> <li>• Providing school support staff, teachers and senior managers with access to EAL and bilingual specialists through online surgeries, video conferencing or online professional development</li> <li>• Promoting remote access between specialists and pupils or teachers by providing facilities and training to service staff</li> <li>• Disseminating information, guidance and resources widely through service websites</li> <li>• Facilitating links between schools with isolated bilingual pupils across the region and beyond</li> <li>• Sharing information and ideas with other EAL services through online communities of practice</li> <li>• Promoting multilingualism through the purchase or development of software and hardware which enables different languages and scripts to be used</li> <li>• Embedding multilingualism in local and regional ICT policy, planning, and initiatives</li> </ul>