Information and Communication Technologies and young language learners

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This publication is accompanied by a CD-ROM containing a static copy of the website with the children's postings.

Introduction

Project 1.3.3 of the first medium-term programme of the ECML – *ICT and young language learners* – was conceived as a testbed for what we choose to call, for want of a better term, constructionist language learning. Like constructivism, constructionism centres around a view of learning as a process of building knowledge structures. In addition, constructionism posits that such cognitive constructions are especially facilitated when the learner is "consciously engaged in constructing a public entity" (Papert 1991 p. 1). The construction of such public artefacts is a central tenet of constructionism.

When applied to the foreign language classroom, constructionism is to be understood as the production of linguistic artefacts in the foreign language by the learners for public consumption. The linguistic artefacts may take the form of stories, poems, jokes or even recipes – the form itself is immaterial and is one variable the language teacher can tweak to better suite the learners' particular circumstances and the curricular demands.

Such artefacts, however, are not to be constructed as an end in themselves – the presence of a receptive audience is crucial in completing the cycle of constructing knowledge. How to acquire such an audience for the novice language learner, especially within the confines of a classroom, has always been the chief challenge when implementing such 'communicative' approaches to language learning. In casting around for a way to break down the walls of his classroom in the 1920s, Celestin Freinet hit on the idea of installing a printing press and having his students produce and publish newsletters for circulation among schools in the vicinity (what he termed *Correspondance scolaire*) .

Today's publishing technology is the World Wide Web, with its attendant advantages of cheap production costs, practically instantaneous turnaround times, and potentially global circulation. Publishing on the web however is not for the faint-hearted – the technical know-how required to produce a web page, although not in itself particularly advanced, can easily overwhelm the average 8-year old. We wanted to design, create and deploy a tool which would empower the young foreign language learner to publish his or her linguistic constructions on the web to a receptive audience of peers from around Europe – what Illich would probably have described as a 'convivial tool' (Illich 1973)[1].

1 "Convivial tools are those which give each person who uses them the greatest opportunity to enrich the environment with the fruits of his own vision", Illich (1973) p. 22.

This publication describes this convivial tool and the pedagogy of constructionist language learning which goes with it. The accompanying CD-ROM contains the entire unedited corpus of postings the children participating in the project published using the web tool.

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Theoretical Context

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How do children learn?

The participants of the project ICT and young language learners were 8 to 10 year old children. At this age, children are rather curious. They ask questions (usually 'Why?' and 'What for?') to be able to understand the reasons and purposes of notions experienced in their social and physical environment. Their basic concepts are formed, thus they can tell the difference between fact and fiction. They rely on the spoken word as well as the physical world to convey and understand meaning. As a result of this they have a developed sense of reality and fairness about what happens around them.

Young children are able to make some decisions about their own learning and they have definite views about what they like and do not like doing. That is why they are 'innately' independent learners who can easily be assisted to take responsibility for their own progress. There is a realistic basis for raising self-awareness, helping them learn how to set objectives, identifying needs and taking control over their own development. All this implies facilitating their growth into autonomous and life-long learners.

Children can be exposed to co-operative modes of discovery learning as they are interested in exploration. They have a rather inquisitive nature and they are able to work with others. Young learners prefer learning by doing, thus experiencing reality. Learning about or through abstract concepts is not a characteristic of young learners.

Children are natural learners, provided they are offered an informal context to promote their active involvement in making sense of things. They are able to seek information from others when it is needed and can use what has already been known socially and psychologically alike. While learning, they discover the nature of their own learning. Children's learning is both implicit and explicit. It is implicit because it occurs without one's awareness of it. One can make sense of regularities, has the knowledge but is unable to talk about it. Thus learning is automatic.

Learning is explicit when it is based on memorising, problem-solving and understanding. Such learning is difficult because it requires conscious and deliberate effort. This nature of learning is unique to humans. Learning as memorisation refers to accumulation of information in memory through rehearsal and the repetition of material. New information is added on to existing information without impinging on other existing knowledge. Accumulation of information is very distinct from adaptation

or change. When learning through problem-solving new knowledge is acquired in reaching a solution. Finding a solution implies finding the quickest route to the goal as all problems have a goal, though there are no immediate ways to attaining it. Learning in a problem-solving context occurs as a result of practice. Practice can lead to understanding when knowledge gets internalised. Prior knowledge helps to interpret new information whereas the new information modifies previous knowledge.

Learning takes place in a meaningful, social context when it occurs from an interpersonal to an intrapersonal level.

What kind of learning environment do children need?

A teacher can promote learning by providing a wide range of opportunities to gain vivid, first-hand experiences, placing tasks in meaningful contexts, helping children make sense of new experiences by relating them to what they have known already and introducing the same idea in a variety of meaningful contexts. One has to organise tasks to stimulate mental activity, thus adopting problem-solving and investigational approaches where possible. When children have learnt something, one is advised to give them a chance to make something of their own from it.

One has to provide an ACTIVE learning environment in which A stands for *active*. Tasks require cognitive behaviours that emphasise the transformation of information into personal knowledge. The social environment is *cooperative* (C) as the tasks require meaningful interaction among students. These tasks are flexible and multidisciplinary based on an organising theme, so the environment is *theme-based* (T) and *integrated* (I) with tasks that emphasise content area knowledge and use technology tools to encourage learning the content in ways that are meaningful. Tasks that make efficient use of technology skills and develop others that can be applied repeatedly, promote a *versatile* environment (V). As tasks allow the assessment of students' ability to use the necessary knowledge and skills, the learning environment can be *evaluative* (E).

How do children learn languages?

As far as linguistic competences are concerned, 8 to 10 year olds are competent users of their mother tongue as they are aware of the main rules of syntax. So, they have a language with all the basic elements in place. They can understand abstract notions and symbols as well as make generalisations and organise concepts systematically.

Where the practice of teaching modern languages to young learners is concerned, Scott and Ytreberg (1990) argue that:

- There are many similarities between learning one's mother tongue and learning a foreign language.
- The period from 5 to 10 sees dramatic changes in children, but we cannot say when it happens. The magic age is between 7 and 8 when things seem to fall in place.

The Language Acquisition Theory by Stephen Krashen (1987) could be referred to as a theoretical background to the first statement. Krashen outlined five hypotheses that form a firm foundation for the approaches, methods and techniques applied when teaching languages to young learners or rather when helping them to learn.

- The Acquisition versus Learning Hypothesis emphasises that children acquire languages while adults learn them.
- The Natural Order Hypothesis states that structures of a language are acquired approximately in the same order, regardless of what is taught in a formal setting.
- The Monitor Hypothesis supposes that there is a trigger in the brain which applies rules that have been learned. This is the monitor. The monitor makes the speaker aware of a mistake after it has been made. So, the speaker must know the rules have time to think of them and apply them. These conditions do not usually apply in the conversational situations in which a child is most commonly exposed to the target language.
- The Input Hypothesis proves that the most important factor in the amount of language acquired by the learner is the amount of comprehensible input to which the learner is exposed. The comprehensible input is what the learner can fully understand and just a little more.
- The Affective Filter Hypothesis refers to a notion that anxiety, motivation and confidence play an important role in learning. There is a filter that goes up in the presence of anxiety, low confidence or in the absence of motivation. The filter goes down and the input can come through when the motivation is high, when a student is confident and when the learning takes place in an anxiety-free environment.

If the first hypothesis is accepted, we have to look into the conditions for language acquisition. According to Krashen (1987), it takes place most effectively when the input is meaningful and interesting to the learner, comprehensible and not grammatically sequenced. Long (as cited in Scott & Ytreberg, 1990) believes that it takes place best in a setting in which meaning is negotiated through interaction, so that the student has influence on the message being communicated. According to Merril Swain's (as cited in Scott & Ytreberg, 1990) views, students acquire language most meaningfully when they have the opportunity for comprehensible "output", i.e. when they can use it in a productive way.

Taking the Affective Filter Hypothesis and the Input Hypothesis (Krashen, 1987) into consideration, one finds that learners must always be challenged, but never to a point at

which frustration sets in and that the target language must be used in such a way that the message is understood, even though every word of the message may not be familiar. Thus, in a classroom designed to encourage second language acquisition there should be an emphasis on communication in an environment in which children are surrounded by the target language where teachers use 'caretaker speech' (Curtain & Pesola, 1988).

What are the characteristics of this 'caretaker speech' or 'motherese' or 'teacherese' language? The person or teacher responsible for helping children acquire the target language, uses a slower rate of speech, distinct pronunciation, shorter, less complex sentences, more rephrasing than repetition, frequent meaning checks, gestures and other non-verbal elements of communication (such as body language), visual reinforcement and concrete referents (Curtain & Pesola, 1988).

Contemporary methodology of modern languages education is based not only on the five hypotheses by Krashen (1987) but on the principles of cognitive psychology, too.

These principles are the following:

- Students are active processors of information
- Learning occurs when information is made meaningful
- How students learn is more important than what they learn
- Cognitive processes become automatic with repeated use
- Metacognitive skills can be developed through instruction
- Internal motivation is one of the major conditions for learning
- There are vast differences in students' information processing abilities.

The approaches, methods and techniques based on the principles of cognitive psychology are in sharp contrast to behaviourist approaches which emphasise the importance of rote learning, habit formation, reinforcement techniques and drills. According to the behaviourist principles students are passive subjects of the procedure following the pattern of stimulus and response. (Curtain & Pesola, 1988).

Theories underlying contemporary methodology of teaching modern languages to young learners encourage the introduction of various educational set-ups that promote natural learning, i.e. language acquisition.

Modes of education to promote children's language learning

One of the few rather well-known ways to promote natural learning is immersion education which is a form in which the target language is a tool to teach the curriculum. Thus the focus is on the curriculum (social studies, science, mathematics, language

arts, health, art, music) rather than on the target language. The students of immersion programmes are generally monolingual speakers (of the first language) who learn another language for enrichment purposes. Their teachers – either native or non-native speakers of the target language – are certified to teach at elementary level (Curtain & Pesola, 1988).

The goals of immersion education are to help learners acquire functional proficiency in the target language and promote cross-cultural understanding. It caters for the maintenance and development of the first language skills comparable to the achievement of students in mother tongue or first language-only programmes, too. All in all the mastery of subject-content material of the school curriculum is given emphasis over the improvement of the target language that is used as a vehicle (Curtain & Pesola, 1988).

The key concepts of immersion-principles are as follows (Curtain & Pesola, 1988):

- Communication motivates all language use
- There is natural use of oral language
- Language is a tool of instruction, not just the object of instruction
- Subject content is taught in the target language
- The sequence of grammar instruction follows developmental sequence of the elementary school language arts curriculum, or may be dictated by communication needs
- Error correction is minimal and focuses on errors of meaning rather than errors of form
- Use of the native language is clearly separated from use of the target language
- Reading instruction begins with previously-mastered oral language
- Literacy skills are transferred from the language in which they first are learnt to the next language
- Culture is an integral component of language learning
- The second language atmosphere permeates the classroom and the school.

Immersion programmes can be introduced at the very beginning or in the first few years of formal education (early immersion) or at various further stages, such as secondary or tertiary levels (late immersion). The target language can be used as the ultimate tool for completing the curriculum (total immersion). On the other hand, one can deliver some content in the first language and some other subjects can be taught in the target language (partial immersion). Partial immersion programmes – early or late / at primary or secondary level – are conducted at bilingual or dual language schools. If both languages of instruction are used in the social environment around the school as a natural means of communication, the school can be considered as bilingual (like Dutch-

French schools in Belgium; Italian-German schools in South Tyrol, Italy; Finnish-Swedish schools in Finland; Russian-Latvian schools in Latvia or Romanian-Hungarian schools in Transylvania, Romania). Where the target language is not spoken by the community, the school offers dual language rather than bilingual education. For example, there are a few dual language schools in Hungary that offer education both in English and Hungarian. Similarly, there are institutions in Bulgaria which offer tuition in French and Bulgarian.

In immersion programmes teachers:

- make regular use of contextual clues such as gestures, facial expressions and body language. They also use concrete referents such as props, realia, manipulatives, and visuals (especially with entry-level students)
- provide hands-on experiences for students. Such experiences are accompanied by oral and written language use
- use linguistic modifications when necessary to make the target language more comprehensible for the students in the beginning stages of the programme. Modifications include:
    - controlled, standardised vocabulary
    - controlled sentence length and complexity
    - slower speech rate
    - restatements, expansions and repetitions
- accelerate student communication by teaching functional chunks of language
- constantly monitor student comprehension through interactive means
- use the language-experience approach to reading instruction
- draw classroom techniques primarily from elementary school methodology. (Curtain & Pesola, 1988).

Immersion programmes offer opportunities for cross-curricular learning, allowing for the acquisition and integration of the target language with the content of various subjects.

The literature on cross-curricular language education suggests three types of relationships between the content and the language of teaching:

Students can be assisted in learning the target language through content subjects. In such settings the focus is on the content while language skills develop incidentally. Students learn the language through exposure to modified content. This kind of relationship between content and language can be identified in the context of total or partial immersion programmes when either all or particular learning areas (such as Maths, Geography, History, Music, PE or Art) are covered in the target language. The

methodology of teaching language by the content is based on the didactic principles of teaching the particular subject(s).

At some dual language schools, preparatory years are introduced to lay the linguistic foundations for learning and teaching subjects in the target language. This is the case when the language is taught for the content. On induction courses students learn specific language of various subject areas. Their language education is supported by the methodology of modern language teaching rather than that of the subject areas.

The two categories mentioned above characterise immersion (bilingual or dual language) programmes.

The third type of relationship between language and content would be the most favourable for comprehensive schools that are not designed and licensed for immersion programmes, but the integration of content of learning areas and target language could be considered. When the language is taught parallel with the content the focus is both on content and language. The language and content objectives are closely linked and language learning can further the goals of content teaching by giving learners help with the processes of content learning. In this parallel type of 'language with the content' model both language and content are graded according to the principles of modern language education methodology and subject teaching didactics (Curtain & Pesola, 1988). This latter category of cross-curricular language education is often referred to as topic-, theme- or content-based.

Topic, theme, or content-based language learning can be promoted by stories, since they have themes, topics and content, too. Stories can open up cross-curricular perspectives. Stories can be pieces of classic or contemporary literature performed by an adult, read by children, visualised in cartoon strips or filmed. Stories can be performed in staged drama-formats or in puppetry-shows, too. A complex approach to stories can integrate all these resources and ways of performances with usual modern language teaching techniques such as project work and role-plays related to the content. The content often opens up perspectives of various learning areas such as history, mythology, social studies and other aspects of humanities; geography, environmental education and various sciences; technology, art and design. Stories can be acted out and even filmed by students thus they can practise expressing themselves. But a really appropriate way of expressing themselves is provided by creating stories, where the theme and the storyline are negotiated within the community. Every participant of the educational procedure has a say about the content as well as the ways of conveying the message. Stories can be created by telling, acting out and even designing visual images to accompany the storyline. A series of activities to elaborate a theme, to find out facts about a topic can be organised along a storyline, too. Thus learners are active creators of a story that caters for their own intellectual and emotional development.

There are several advantages to be obtained from integrating target language and theme-, topic- or content-based teaching. According to Scott & Ytreberg (1990):

- By concentrating on a particular topic the content becomes more important than the language. It is easier to relate the lessons to the experiences and interests of the learners.
- Working on topics can help the learning process as a result of the association of words, functions, structures and situations with a particular topic. Association helps memory whereas learning in context helps both understanding and memory.
- Topic-based teaching allows teachers to deal with a subject in depth. Pupils need more and varied vocabulary. Their needs are acknowledged.
- Topics allow more opportunities for a personal and local touch.
- Topic-based teaching allows teachers to rearrange their material to meet actual needs.
- Timing is flexible.
- All skills – linguistic, social, subject-related – are involved.

Factors that promote natural language learning

According to Medgyes (1995), the communicative and humanistic classroom should offer more real situations than realistic ones. He distinguishes real situations to realistic ones on the basis of the following statements. A real situation is one when you have to say something but a realistic situation is the one when you have something to say. Topic-, theme- or content-based language teaching offers a wide range of real situations, creating an environment in which the learner feels s/he does what s/he is interested in; s/he investigates areas in which s/he can develop skills and process information s/he needs while using the target language as a natural means of communication.

Primary teachers can use a number of authentic materials to create a natural environment and real situations to promote natural (cross-curricular) learning. Thus one can integrate oral presentation (including that of the teacher and other pupils), print materials, audios, videos, resources via ICT and real objects. One can rely on specific information, data, stories and other types of information.

Success of contemporary language education also depends on learner autonomy. Children have to learn to be autonomous. Teachers have to help learners become aware of what they know, what they are able to do and the progress they have achieved. In order to identify their needs, learners must know how to set goals, aims and objectives and contrast them to the existing competencies which have to be learnt. As soon as the ‘way to go’ and the competencies to learn are clear, selecting resources, learning strategies and techniques to meet the needs are the next steps to take. Deciding on timing, pace and amount of time to be used is important too. Children have to be made

aware of the fact that they can take control and responsibility over their own education and when reflecting on and evaluating efficiency they again make themselves aware of their progress.

A further aspect of learner autonomy is co-operative learning. This takes into consideration the division of labour and responsibility.

New roles for teachers have been formulated over the past few years as a result of the development of contemporary primary language teaching methodology. The teacher has become a resource person, a strategist, a consultant and adviser, a facilitator, monitor (but not controller) of developmental (learning) procedures and a supporter of reflection and evaluation.

ICT and language learning

The Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) have opened up meaningful opportunities for self-directed and interactive learning. There are software that can be used to practice various skills through exercises, games and simulations. Multimedia software can offer the chance to demonstrate language in its authenticity and practise listening, reading and writing skills alike. They very often provide an opportunity for practising pronunciation and intonation too.

Internet has opened up the widest perspectives for learning. One can find reading and even audio-visual materials related to various learning areas. Thus websites often open up the opportunities for cross-curricular learning. Authentic resource-based educational procedures, such as project work can be organised thanks to the Internet. It promotes autonomous as well as co-operative learning through meaningful context.

In addition, the Internet can be a forum for learning through meaningful output. It can offer a chance for learners to place their messages on sites thus initiating meaningful communication among students interested and involved.

The current project has incorporated all features of ICT-stimulated learning that have been discussed thus far. The ‘Stars’ website was a forum for publishing messages, interacting with peers, thus creating a multiple-storyline digital fiction for all pupils and their teachers involved. The project integrated traditional and non-traditional language teaching methods relevant to the age-group of children. Traditional and non-traditional ways of communication included ordinary phone calls, letters, parcels with mascots, souvenirs, various written and colourfully designed messages on paper, e-mail-messages and postings on the net. There was a lot of independent and co-operative learning in the background of each contribution that have all added up to create a diverse story of 4 stars on the Internet.

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Organisation, development and implementation of the project

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Theoretical rationale of the project

Good practice in the teaching of young learners requires that all learning takes place in a meaningful context. Children need motivation to carry out an activity and be aware of the purpose for doing it. If language teaching and learning are going to lead to communication, children must have:

- a reason for wanting to communicate about something
- an audience to communicate with and
- a shared interest

These three features of language use come naturally to young learners outside their classroom context, in their daily use of their mother tongue. For any message which is to be passed on, a speaker who needs to express a thought, feeling, idea, belief, opinion or concern looks for other speakers with whom to communicate and get a response.

That first language acquisition occurs naturally in a meaningful context where participants of different ages have something to contribute and communicate about is well-documented and researched. Similarly, practising one's second or foreign language in situations which are not contrived for the sake of practising specific language structures or rules, increases one's confidence in using the language and assists in gaining fluency and competence.

With the advances of technology and the advent of the world wide web, another mode of communication has been unleashed. Developments in this area suggest that children can use the web to express their ideas in many forms: written, pictorial, static, dynamic, monologic and interactive (Harris & Reifel, 2002). The web is being promoted as a tool which allows children to be heard and be seen. Teachers are thus giving up total control over ideas, structures and content of the students' work to the students themselves.

Working with technology has implications for the teaching methods normally associated with a classroom context. Research into the dynamics of classroom interaction in a technology-rich environment conclude that technology can lead to

better individualisation of student assignments, more emphasis on independent student work and an increase in student interaction and co-operative learning (Tiene & Luft, 2001-2002). Technology-enriched approaches can help promote more student-centred, constructivist learning activities in any classroom.

For the ICT and young language learners project it was hypothesised that the creation of fictitious characters would offer a shared interest. The children in the various participating classes would be the audience and the adventures of the characters would provide sufficient motivation for the children to want to engage in using the foreign language. The web with its integration of graphics and text would offer opportunities in this regard which are difficult to achieve with traditional technologies.

Using characters to create and stimulate interest is not a novel idea. Information provided on www.kidlink.org/KIDPROJ/Benni/index.html and www.kidlink.org/KIDPROJ/Danni/ give ample evidence of the snowballing effect two teddy-bears, Benni and his cousin Danny had while travelling around the world. The idea initiated in Iceland with visits to various schools in the USA. However, the objective of the Benni project did not appear to be language related. In fact, the primary objective was rather more of a cultural and social exchange.

> The goal of this project is to link kids around the world. Benni will travel from one school to another. On his travels he will gather information about different people and cultures. In Benni's box there are some things about Iceland that teachers can use in their classrooms while Benni is there. My kids in 8 HS prepared this project and collected the things in Benni's box. Every school that gets Benni can, if they want to, put a little something in the box. When a school gets Benni, they must send him off to the next school.

Benni's initial trips proved so popular in 1997 that additional trips were planned for 1998 and his cousin Danni appeared on the scene to tackle different countries. The three objectives for the second project were similar to the initial one, namely:

> Learn about other cultures around the world
> Gain more geography knowledge of the world
> Learn how email and the world wide web allow everyone to communicate easily.

The main purpose was "to link kids around the world" through a variety of activities. Some of the activities listed include: encouraging children to write about the area where they live and/or Benni's visit, videos, recipes, pictures, flags, posters, maps, CD or cassette, postcards, lightweight items. Communicating by email on the KIDPROJ list with other classes and providing pictures and writings for Benni's web page so everyone could follow his trip are also identified as activities to attain the desired purposes.

The subsequent sections in this chapter outline the processes undertaken in order to organise and set up the stars website and project with a view to promoting language learning through relevant and meaningful contexts.

Phase I – The Pilot phase

The initial stages in the organization and development of the project were set in motion during the first team meeting in Graz in December 2000. From the ECML's point of view, the objectives of that meeting were to go through the different stages of the project, discuss the roles and tasks of the team members and prepare in detail the activities foreseen for 2001/2002. From the team's perspective, decisions had to be made concerning the creation of characters which would give life to the project, the storyline within which the characters would fit, how to create a community of language learners via the use of ICT and eventually be able to promote the use of ICT for language teaching with young learners.

After lengthy debates and discussions, it was decided that rather than a single character, as initially proposed, there would be four characters which eventually took the shape of stars. The stars had to be given credibility and each was given very specific characteristics[1] which eventually would give children and teachers ideas for topics and activities without restricting personal initiative and creativity. Each character had to have something positive about it and this was to be reflected not only in the appearance of the character but also in its name. Thus, Bouncy was the rotund, jovial character who not only loved food, but was also keen on sports; Brainy studied and worked hard, being interested in general knowledge; Nosy was the curious star, ever wanting to find things out and consequently turning up in all sorts of unexpected places and Brighty was the star with a creative flair who loved finding out about customs, traditions and cultures but also had a sense of humour.

Considering the age of the learners, it was essential that apart from the virtual images of the stars, children could experience some tangible proof of the stars' existence. Thus, stars had to be designed and made so that children from four different countries would at any one time be sharing information about the adventures of the star visiting their class and country at that moment in time. This scenario linked the children further since within a certain pre-established time-frame, they were responsible for posting the star to the next country and in turn wait for another star to arrive. Such a set-up had implications for size and weight since star-parcels would have to be physically easy to send without incurring hefty postal bills.

Simultaneously with the birth of the stars, came the storyline[2]. It was to be the starting point for the language teachers and children. The story had to have some unusual elements and appeal to the children's interest. Personification of celestial objects have appeared elsewhere in the literature but assigning tasks to stars in the absence of the sun as it took a holiday gave the story an original turn of events.

Early on in the initial planning phases of the project, it had become evident that prior to the workshop, there would have to be a detailed pilot study to try out the website in real

1 For details of each star, see the home page of each star on the website

2 The whole story can be read on the home page of the website

classroom contexts as well as to find out how welcome the story and the characters would be among teachers and young language learners. More specifically, the pilot phase of the project was intended to:

- Trial the Web tool in French and in English and iron out any design and programming problems which came to light
- Produce a corpus of postings which could be used for training teachers participating in the main project phase
- Find out how children would receive/welcome the idea of stars as characters
- Monitor how children and teachers communicated with each other via the web; review the postings which children included on the web (from the language perspective).
- Another issue which could only be marginally assessed by the pilot study concerned teachers' ability to incorporate the star project within their regular curriculum and class contact time. Since the pilot phase started in late February/early March, the participating pilot teachers couldn't have planned to incorporate this project from the beginning of the scholastic year. To save time, the initial set of stars were created by the Director of Studies at the ECML rather than by the children themselves. As will be mentioned later, the actual designing and making of the stars was left to the children and teachers when the second phase of the project was underway.

Some notes describing the use of the Web tool were prepared and distributed to teachers participating in the pilot phase. These notes dealt with:

- How to introduce the background story to the children
- How to introduce the children to the stars' website
- Preparing the children for the first star visit
- Implementing plans and conducting activities while a star is visiting
- Sending the star on to the next country
- Supporting activities while the second star travelled to its destination

On the odd occasion when technical problems cropped up, email support proved sufficient. Non-technical assistance was provided by the project team members where and when necessary. Each pilot teacher was assigned to the care of one member. The pilot phase involved six classes in four countries (Malta, Spain, Hungary and Poland) and lasted 3 months. Four classes made up one circuit to try out the English version of the website whereas a Polish and a Hungarian class teamed up to try out the French version of the website. The various team members were responsible for identifying and choosing the participants for the pilot phase.

Phase II – Launching the project

Following the completion of the pilot project, the team met up in Graz in July 2001 to evaluate the pilot phase and to make modifications to the planning of the workshop scheduled for September 2001. From feedback obtained by the pilot teachers, it was evident that the children had enjoyed participating in the project and they had readily accepted the stars as real characters. Posting their work on the website was encouraging for the children and there were no difficulties reported in the use of the website itself.

Three main limitations would have to be addressed in the project itself. One limitation was the duration of the star at any one school. This was easily remedied by adjusting the timetable so that instead of two weeks, one star would stay for three weeks before being posted to the next school. The second difficulty encountered during the pilot phase was teachers' lack of use of the Teachers' Forum on the website. This tool had been set up with a view to encouraging teachers to share with each other any methodological issues, ideas, difficulties they could have come across during the piloting phase. As it turned out, none of the teachers ever used the forum. This could have arisen because there was no personal contact and they had not really been introduced to each other. The third difficulty, related to the second one, concerned the lack of communication among the pupils from the different countries. Each of the four classrooms which had used the English version of the website as well as the two classrooms using the French version of the website did so independently. Children were posting their work on the web without responding to postings of children in other countries/classrooms. From this perspective, the project had failed to create a community of learners, involved in sharing and exchanging information. These two issues would have to be dealt with during the workshop itself. To a large extent, if the right participants were attracted to the workshop and convinced of the product, the difficulties which emerged in the pilot phase would not be encountered again.

The success of the workshop depended entirely upon whether participants would carry on with the proposed work once they went back to their countries. One of the crucial issues to be dealt with by the ECML and the project team concerned attracting the right participants to the workshop. Prior to the start of the workshop, it was agreed that workshop participants had to have a very specific profile. Rather than policy makers or education administrators, participants were to be practising teachers who already had some basic skills in using the internet and had access to internet in their classroom or school. The right participant would:

- Be the same individual who would actually carry out the project in their own classroom
- Have basic I.T. literacy skills (specifically word processing) and preferably internet literacy (have used email & browsed the web)
- Definitely have access to the internet on a regular basis (preferably in the classroom where s/he works)

- Be practising, experienced teachers of English or French as a foreign language in primary education, currently working with 8-10 year old children (although working with slightly older children was also acceptable).

The workshop was conducted in the third week of September in 2001. There were four general objectives to be achieved at the workshop, namely:

- Introducing the project and reviewing work achieved during the piloting stage
- Preparing teachers who would be participating in the second phase of the project
- Promoting the use of ICT in the teaching of modern languages in the primary school
- Discussing methodologies which are relevant to the teaching of young learners.

By the end of the workshop, it was expected that participants would have:

- Developed possible ideas and activities to be used in their respective classes
- Been trained in the use of the web tool
- Been informed of the effective use of ICT in teaching English or French as a foreign language to young learners.

In order to achieve these aims and expectations, it was essential to get the actual participants to Graz, rather than a policy maker or an intermediary who would go back and report to a colleague what s/he is expected to do. This was crucial for reasons detailed below.

The social perspective: As mentioned earlier, one of the outcomes from the pilot study indicated that teachers never used the forum or communicated with each other in any way and tended to work in isolation. Meeting up in Graz for a week would go some way towards bringing down these barriers of speaking to virtual teachers or children and putting faces to names.

The hands-on perspective: It was imperative to ensure that participants would leave Graz feeling confident that they knew what their commitment to the project was, they had the necessary technical know-how and assistance, and a realistic framework about how the work would develop over the scholastic year. From this perspective, the workshop was compulsory for two main reasons. During the week, participants:

- Were assigned tasks which forced them to try out the various facilities available on the web (posting messages, posting graphics & images, using the teachers' forum)
- Had to commit themselves to a circuit made up of 4 countries. Each circuit had to design a timetable to accommodate for the different school calendars, varying I.T. provisions and language teaching contexts prevalent in each of the countries.

An ownership perspective: Assuming that success in achieving desired goals depended on ownership, another task involving the workshop participants focused on the preparation of a compendium of tasks and ideas which children could develop once particular stars were visiting their classroom. The team did not want to impose particular activities to be done with the children since participating, practising teachers would have more experience and ideas related to language teaching with young learners. They would also be familiar with the working conditions and the expectations of pupils, parents and other members of staff in their own schools and countries. They would also be in the best position to decide how to incorporate the project within their existing curricular demands.

The "I can do it" perspective. It was anticipated that several participants would have had limited, if any experience of integrating ICT in language teaching programmes. The ICT and language teaching scenarios would be as varied as the participants themselves. There are countries with permanent access to the use of computers and internet as a result of having computers in the classrooms as opposed to other countries where use of computers and internet access is limited to weekly timetabled slots in a computer lab. There would be teachers who are purely language teachers, coming into contact with groups of children for short weekly lessons in contrast to teachers who are responsible for the same group of children, 5 days a week for the entire school day, teaching them the whole range of subjects taught at primary level. There would be teachers who had to rely on colleagues' support and assistance (especially the I.T. staff) and others who would be able to function independently.

Coming to Graz also offered the participants the opportunity to meet the teachers who had participated in the pilot phase. The pilot teachers were invited to the workshop so that potential participants could hear about first-hand experiences and consequently convince themselves about the work that could be achieved via the project.

One concern voiced by some participants at the end of the workshop suggested their fear of being left to flounder once they returned to their countries. To ensure constant support, each member of the team was responsible for a circuit. In addition, participants were specifically instructed to contact the two co-ordinators if technical assistance was required or administrative difficulties arose at any stage of the project. Moreover, participants were invited to provide addresses of authorities in their country if they wanted to inform them about their participation and from whom support was being requested.

The availability of the teachers' forum on the website provided another avenue of communication among project team members and participating teachers. It was agreed that the forum could be used to share methodological ideas and discuss constraints and difficulties. In this way, everybody would be invited to provide suggestions about ways in which similar issues were sorted in different classrooms/contexts.

Conclusion

From an organisational point of view, it was crucial for as many details as possible to be identified prior to the start of the project, in order to ensure smooth running to the maximum. There were technical considerations (elaborated upon elsewhere in this publication) as well as logistical concerns. Some issues were totally beyond any control, such as whether stars in transit would make it on time to their next destination. Other concerns were related to practical classroom issues, such as how much time could one realistically expect teachers to provide to the project or how they would fit in the demands of the project within their language curriculum. The greatest apprehension must have been waiting for the right participants to attend the workshop. Not only were there academic gains for participants attending the workshop, but it was necessary to build up teachers' confidence in using the technology. The participants had to be individuals who have started to come to grips with technology, but also they had to be prepared to take a challenging and sometimes trying situation where they too were, up to a certain extent, learners alongside their pupils. Undoubtedly, all individuals had to be committed to participating in the project for it to be successful.

By the end of the workshop, participants had generally grouped themselves into 6 circuits (Table 1). This implied that potentially, there were going to be 24 teachers and their classrooms participating in the project. Five of the circuits would be using the English version of the website whereas one circuit would be using the French version of the website. Some schools and teachers which would be participating within some circuits were not identified at the end of the workshop. This happened where workshop participants representing particular countries were not practising teachers and consequently did not have their own classroom to implement the project. However, these participants were optimistic about finding ideal candidates to take on the implementation of the project. Participants from Lithuania, Poland and Andorra who planned to participate in the French strand were also in a position to encourage and recruit colleagues to participate in an English circuit.

Table 1: Circuits for implementation phase – September 2001 – May 2002

Circuit 1	ENGLISH
Malta	
Germany	
Slovenia	
Estonia	

Circuit 2	ENGLISH
Norway	
Austria	
Latvia	
Hungary	

Circuit 3	ENGLISH
Poland	
Spain	
Andorra	
France	

Circuit 4	ENGLISH
Holland	
Greece	
Cyprus	
Bulgaria	

Circuit 5	ENGLISH
Iceland	
Lithuania	
Czech Republic	
Sweden	

Circuit 6	FRENCH
Poland	
Lithuania	
Andorra	
Armenia	

How well these circuits actually functioned during the project will be discussed in the evaluation chapter.

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http://www.kidlink.org/KIDPROJ/Benni/index.html

http://www.kidlink.org/KIDPROJ/Benni97/

The design and implementation of a convivial Web publishing tool for children

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> Part of the problem with successfully integrating new technologies such as the Internet into classroom practice lies with the generic nature of these technologies. The amount of training required to turn the average language teacher into someone who can make full use of all the resources and capabilities of the Internet is not only prohibitive, but in the end may even be counterproductive – teachers would spend more time grappling with the technical details than with the learning and teaching processes. Consequently, teacher training must be complemented with efforts to create Internet tools targeted towards a specific application of the technology – in this way teacher and learner can focus on the task of applying the technology to their area of interest without needing to first master the technology in its raw form. …. Such tools, in simplifying the technology, inevitably reduce its versatility – this is the price one pays for reducing the overwhelming complexity which is frequently a source of anxiety for the non-technically minded.
>
> (Camilleri 2001)

This chapter describes the design and implementation of a tool intended to put web publishing into the hands of 8-10 year-old children. While much has been made of the educational value of the WWW as a source of information, relatively little has been said about the potentially more engaging use of the web as a publishing medium. One reason for this may be that publishing on the WWW requires more technical know-how than web browsing, in much the same way that language production requires a more developed linguistic ability than reception. Because of this, the constructionist potential of the WWW remains largely untapped in most classrooms.

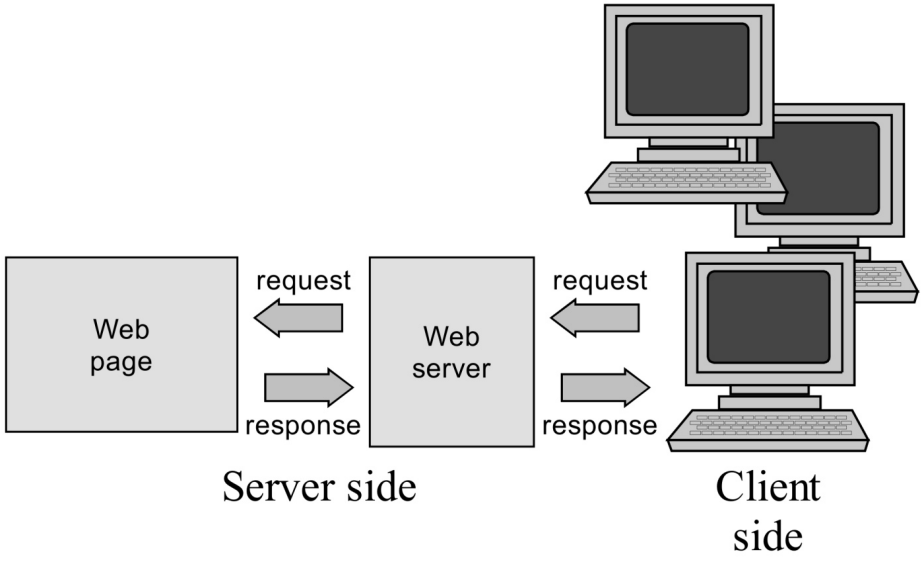
One advantage of the asynchronous nature of web publishing compared to synchronous online interactive tools such as chat rooms and MOOs (virtual role-playing environments in which learners interact in real time, see Haynes & Holmevik 2001) is that there is no need for 'turn taking', which can result in 'production blocking' because one learner's progress may be impeded by other learners (Hiltz 1992). By the same token, asynchronous communication tools do not force learners to collaborate, potentially detracting from the sense of community. Consequently, such tools must implement alternative mechanisms to ensure that learners do not work in isolation.

These considerations lead to an initial set of design objectives which can be summed up as follows:

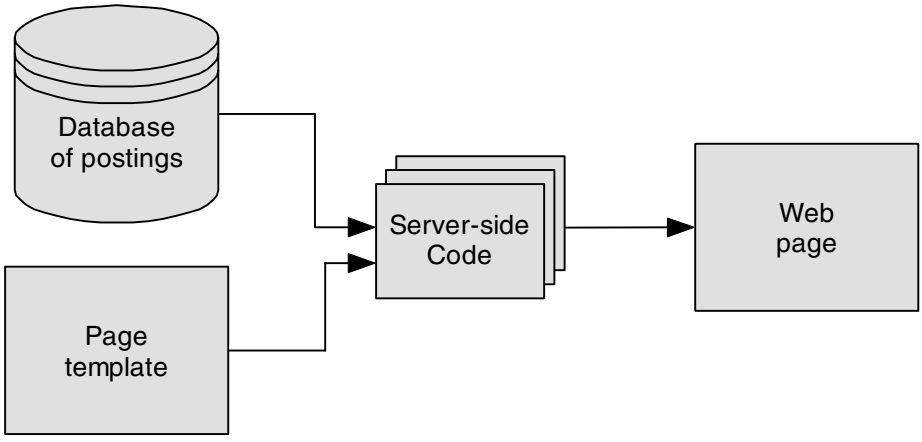
- The publishing tool had to be in the form of a website on which children can post their stories and communicate via email. Because websites are platform independent, the publishing tool would be accessible from any computer with the minimum specifications required to browse the WWW thus ensuring as wide a potential user base as possible and universal accessibility.
- Children had to be able to use the publishing tool with the minimum of training and supervision. The tool had to be intuitive and easy to use, and therefore necessarily limited in scope and versatility. Power and flexibility were not an issue here – simplicity and transparency were.
- Children had to be able to upload both stories and pictures. Besides the motivational potential of graphics, it was felt that being able to support a faltering command of the language with illustrations would go some way towards encouraging children to communicate in the foreign language.
- In view of the asynchronous nature of the tool, mechanisms to encourage learner to learner interaction and promote and support community building had to be implemented. In spite of the potentially global audience, web publishing can be a very solitary and impersonal endeavour, much in the same way as television broadcasting. As a minimum the tool had to provide two mechanisms to counter this – a way for children to know who their audience was (in the form of class profiles) and a means for the audience to respond to postings (in the form of email links associated with each posting).

Static and dynamic websites

A website consists of a number of interlinked web pages which present formatted content. The Web browser running on the user's machine (the client) sends a request for a web page to the server in response to a user action (such as clicking on a hyperlink), which responds by locating the page on its disk and sending it to the client, which decodes and displays it on the user's screen.

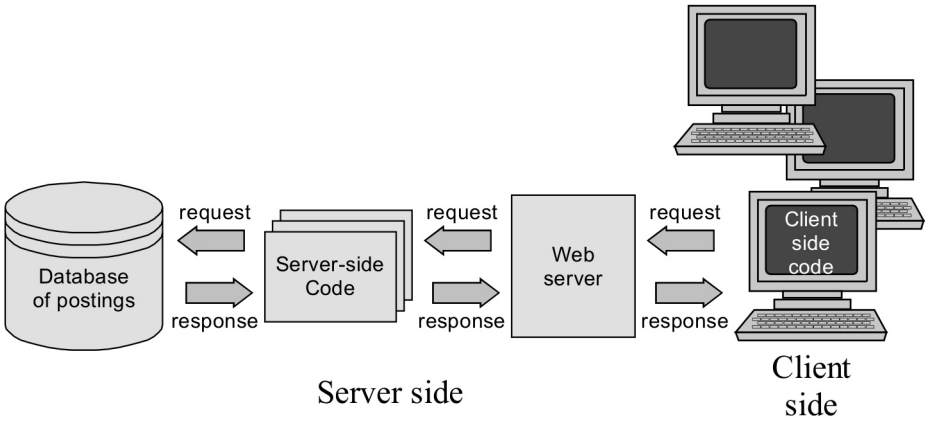


In a typical website, a web page combines both content and formatting instructions (layout) because the content is static – i.e. fixed at design time. For the purpose of this project, however, the content had to be dynamic – most of the content was provided by the project participants themselves (children, teachers and project team members), who could add, edit and delete content at any time. The standard way of providing for dynamic content is to separate the content from the layout. The content is stored in a database on the server, and the formatting instructions are placed in page templates. Web pages are then constructed on demand (i.e. whenever a client requests the page) by code which pulls the required data from the database and combines it with layout from a template page, returning a complete web page to the client machine.



The publishing tool was to consist of two principle components – a client component (front end) which ran on the users' machine, and a server component (back end) which ran on the web server.

- The *client component* consisted of a number of Web pages which served as an interface allowing the user to navigate the various stories and messages on the site as well as post, edit and delete stories and messages.
- The *server component*, running on the ECML's webserver, was to consist of a database of the various messages, stories and images posted to the site, together with code to manage this database as directed by requests received from the client component running in the users' Web browser.



Design features and constraints

The functional design of the client component (seen by the end user) as originally laid down by the project team required that:

- The client component of the tool had to be platform independent to simplify its deployment and ensure a wide user base. Moreover, it had to be operable from any computer capable of browsing the web. This immediately ruled out streaming audio and video (which would have enhanced the 'conviviality' of the tool). However, the interactive nature of the tool required that client machines be at least capable of executing Javascript – Java would have been a better solution, but would have raised the minimum client specification unacceptably and limited accessibility.
- The tool had to require low-maintenance – with the exception of setting up user accounts no intervention by the system administrator was to be required for the duration of the project. This effectively meant that the tool had to incorporate sufficient error-recovery facilities to enable users to cope with most eventualities on their own.

- Because the question of linguistic correctness was known to be of major concern to a number of teachers, teachers had to have editorial control over their class' postings. Thus in place of a centralized moderation system as commonly found on internet fora, the moderation function was entrusted to the teachers who were free to exercise editorial control as they saw fit.

The server component had to run under Microsoft IIS4.0 with ASP and Access as the database back-end. Although this server platform is fairly common and particularly easy to work with, it has the disadvantage of being proprietary.

The interface metaphor

One of the problems with using a new communication medium is that the medium, rather than the message, becomes the focus of attention and may get in the way of communication – either because the user is fascinated with the new technology, or because he/she is overwhelmed by it. To minimize this effect, the tool had to be designed in such a way as to mimic a medium the children were already familiar and comfortable with.

The role of metaphor as a bridge between a new medium and established knowledge is relatively well understood (see for example Carroll & Thomas 1982). Massari et.al. (1999) define a metaphor to be a mapping from objects in the virtual world to objects in the real world, and a 'structurally sound metaphor' to be one which correctly models relationships between the various real world objects. As Graefe (1998, p.67) points out, a sound metaphor should do more than simply model the external user-interface – it should closely model the internal 'software functions' supporting that interface. In other words, the metaphor should not be merely visual, but semantic and ontologic, dictating both the external representation of objects, as well as how they are structured (the relationship between them) and operated upon by the user.

Because the chosen theme for this project centred around the story of four stars travelling around European countries, it was decided to use the postcard as the primary publishing metaphor, thus establishing a mapping between the electronic postings using the web tool and the more familiar medium of physical postcards. Because of its association with travelling, its ubiquity and familiarity, the brevity and succinctness of its message, and its pictorial nature, the postcard was thought to provide an apt metaphor for presenting the idea of publishing to the children in a 'convivial' way. Using the website, children would send e-cards (electronic postcards) on behalf of a visiting star. Additionally, an album metaphor was used to group each star's postcards in a way which would simplify navigation and browsing of the children's postings.

Like real postcards, e-cards carry a brief message focused on a single event or topic. Unlike real postcards, however, e-cards may carry any sort of message – a poem, a

recipe, a joke, etc. Also, e-cards need not carry a picture, although it was recommended that most do to enhance the children's publishing experience.

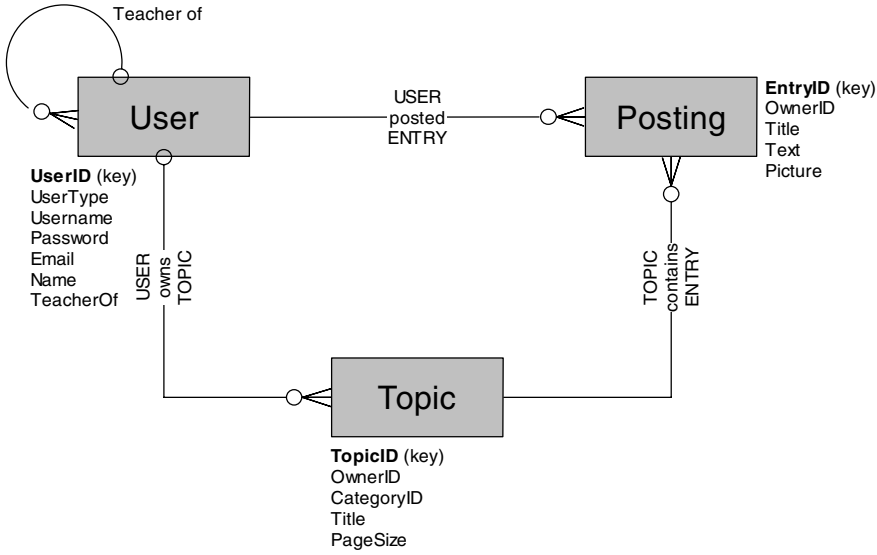
Interface design

Once the central interface metaphor had been decided, designing the user interface became simply a matter of providing the tools required to manipulate the e-cards and navigate the various albums of postings. A few guiding design and usability heuristics outlined by Pane and Myers (1996) were adopted, principally the following four:

- *Visibility of system status:* the user had to know at all times his/her current position within the interface space and what options were available.
- *Match between system and the real world:* because the chosen metaphor of e-cards and paged albums related to things children are familiar with, they could form an intuitive conceptual model of how the publishing tool operated.
- *User control and freedom:* the interface had to allow the user to easily move from one page to another rather than impose a hierarchical navigation structure. For example, each posting had to contain an email link to the author and a hyperlink directly to the author's class profile.
- *Consistency:* the same postcard metaphor was used for both the story postings and the class profiles and exactly the same procedures had to be followed when posting in both cases. This may have overstretched the postcard metaphor, but was thought to be preferable to introducing yet another metaphor for the class profiles.

The database back-end

The system is composed of three primary entities, related as shown in the following entity-relationship diagram:



The USER entity

This entity represents registered users of the system – i.e. users who have an account as opposed to casual web browsers who can view, but not log onto, the site. A user can be one of four different types:

- Participant class
- Class teacher
- Observer
- Administrator

Besides defining access rights, these user types also serve to define certain relationships. Specifically, a class teacher is in an optional 1-to-many relationship with a class user, and every class user is in a mandatory 1-to-many relationship with a teacher.

This scheme ensured that every participating class was under the care of at least one teacher responsible for that class' web presence, although participating teachers need not necessarily be responsible for a class. The system was specifically designed to allow for flexibility in teacher-class relationships to better reflect various teaching

models (e.g. team teaching) and conditions (e.g. a teacher responsible for multiple classes) – hence multiple teachers could be related to a single class, and multiple classes could be related to the same teacher.

The TOPIC entity

This entity represents a collection of related postings, corresponding to the album in the interface metaphor. There are three categories of topics:

- *Story topics:* postings relating to the adventures of each of the 4 fictional characters. There were 4 such topics, one for each of these characters.
- *Fora:* postings relating to the only forum implemented in the current version of the site, the teachers' forum, intended to serve as a meeting place for participating teachers and project team members.
- *Class profiles:* postings relating to each of the participating classes.

Each topic has an attribute determining the number of postings displayed on each page (the metaphorical album has tabbed pages), which in the case of story topics are shown in reverse chronological order. Each class profile topic is in a mandatory relationship with a class user as determined by the *OwnerID* attribute – only the specified class user can post to this topic, and only users designated as that class user's teachers can edit (modify, delete and undelete) postings to the topic.

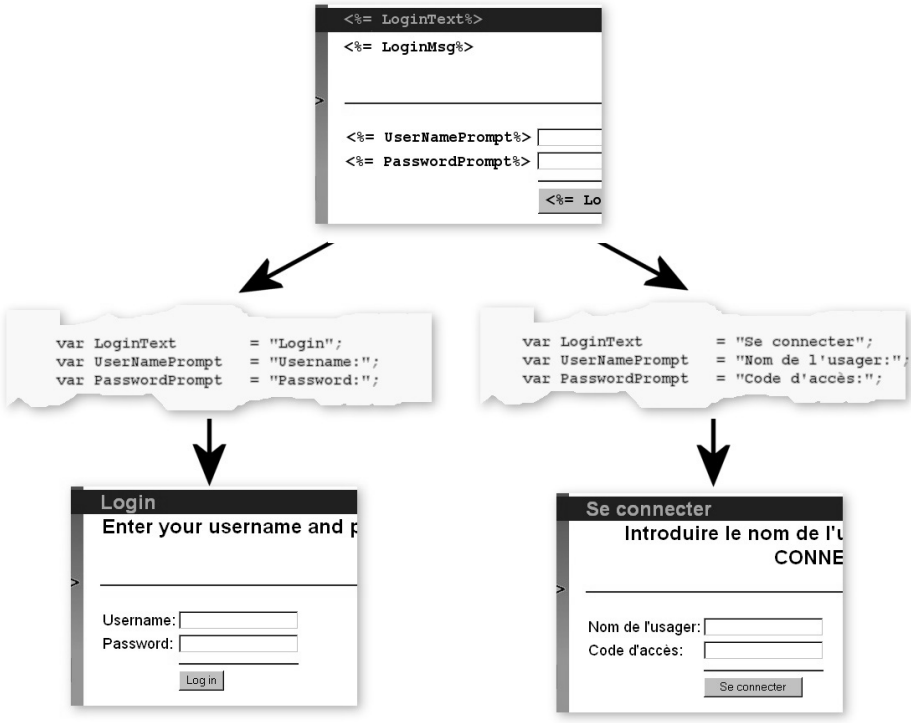
The POSTING entity

This entity represents a story, forum message or other piece of writing posted to the site. Each posting consists of a title, text and optionally an image. Each posting is owned by exactly one user and belongs to exactly one topic. All postings must have a title and message text, and class profile and story postings may also optionally have an associated picture (the picture attribute is actually the filename of the image to be displayed with the posting).

Internationalisation

Internationalisation refers to those design methods which simplify the creation and maintenance of multiple language versions of the same software product, or to simplify the process of converting software to other languages. One of the basic principles of software internationalisation is never to hardcode translatable text. Even with just two languages – English and French – the web tool had to be designed in such a way that both versions share the same code, thus simplifying site maintenance and development as well as the subsequent addition of other language versions if this was required.

Internationalisation involves isolating and extracting all the locale-specific features of a user-interface – in this case this consisted mostly of text in the form of messages, prompts, and instructions. These were collected into a single language file, a text file which could be combined with the page skeletons at runtime depending on the language requested by the user. The figure below shows how the same page skeleton containing placeholder expressions for the various phrases is combined with two different language files to produce two different versions of the same web page. Note that the process in this case is one of simple substitution.



As Russo and Boor (1993) point out, translating a language file is more complicated than translating the text in a book, partly because of subtleties in the interface but also because the contents of a language interface file are decontextualised. Certainly this is an area where further research is required.

Conclusion

This chapter has very briefly outlined the considerations which dictated the design of the web publishing tool used in this project and sketched its implementation. Judging from the comments received in the project evaluations (see the evaluation chapter and the associated appendix), the tool design seems to have worked fairly well.

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Implementation of the stars project in a Spanish English class

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Introduction

This chapter has a dual purpose: primarily, it reflects on the experience of a group of fifty-nine, nine-year-old Spanish pupils learning English in the 4th grade who participated in the stars project. Secondly, by reflecting on the experience, step-by-step procedures to be taken in realising such a project are provided for readers interested in setting up similar projects.

The pupils attend *Buenaventura González School* in Bezana, a village which has developed from a rural to a suburban area, just 9 km away from the capital of the region, Santander. Children come from the 8 villages that belong to the municipality of Santa Cruz de Bezana. Most children come from an urban background and their families have recently moved to the many estates built in this area in the last ten years. Since they have no roots in the place most families are willing to develop a sense of community through the school. The majority collaborate with the school authorities and have positive attitudes. The main problem is that the population has grown too rapidly for the capacity of the school. There were less than 200 pupils in 1982 when it was inaugurated. Nowadays there are 488. There is an urgent need to enlarge the existing building. In addition, a new school should be built nearby. Overcrowded classes are the main problem currently to be dealt with. On the other hand, pupils are extraordinarily eager to learn and they willingly come to school to enjoy a friendly atmosphere.

Innovative, international projects are welcome. From a linguistic perspective, international projects offer a valuable opportunity to improve levels of achievement, giving the pupils a real communicative need. Moreover, they provide a framework to broaden their minds in terms of tolerance and understanding differences. In this context the stars project was tried out in the pilot phase and followed up during the school year 2001-2002 with the 59 pupils in 4th grade.

Adults' support: presentation of the project to colleagues, educational authorities and parents

Investing time in introducing the project to the school staff, the educational authorities and the parents is essential. Colleagues are the first ones to be involved, as their support is indispensable. Collaborating teachers help when it is necessary to divide the class into small groups, re-arrange timetables or where the English teachers cannot cope with ICT tools very well. Understanding from the educational community is important for the support given to the pupils' work.

With the increase in the usage of computers in daily activities, children are far more familiar with computers than the teachers. There is always at least one child who knows how to annoy adults by changing the screen configuration, adding "dirty" websites to "favourites", clicking on gambling games, e-mailing or chatting to strangers. Although the teacher is constantly monitoring children, it is safer to use passwords and shields to protect children from undesirable intruders. For these reasons it is indispensable to rely on an expert for technical tips. Contacting the webmaster is the first option. However, where one lacks familiarity with technical English, it is quicker and easier to ask somebody in one's mother tongue. Colleagues or parents may willingly help in this field if they are aware of the problems. In addition, authorities should supply essential aid to the schools involved, providing requisites to support the project.

Parents' involvement is an equally essential requirement. The support they give to the project is fundamental to its success. It is very motivating for children to show their parents what they have accomplished in class. In this particular project children could show their work even to the relatives and friends living far away, via WWW. It is helpful for parents to see the work their children are doing in the classroom. Parents are usually surprised by what their children have achieved. They are usually eager to collaborate when they can easily check the results.

When the various stakeholders commit themselves, they contribute to the success of the project. An appealing presentation is a good strategy a teacher can use to get extra help and persuade stakeholders of the educational value linked to participating in projects.

Pupils' involvement

Participating children also need to be aware of the importance of their contribution as individuals as well as members of a group. Children should feel proud of their participation since they are representing their country in an international project, giving them the opportunity to belong to a wider community. The more they develop this sense of community (along with their teachers) the stronger their commitment will be. It is important to make them responsible for their own success. To increase children's

commitment, each child can be given the responsibility of monitoring one participating country, becoming a "web watcher". Working in groups is another way to encourage them to fulfil their obligations. Giving them clear tasks makes their involvement easier.

Planning the project for one's class

To guarantee success it is important to choose clear objectives matching the needs of a particular class, which would encourage shy or lazy children and give them motivation towards learning and participation. Children have to be assisted in developing more accurate vocabulary and grammar; learning strategies to use new tools such as on-line dictionaries, word processors, spelling tools; writing accurately as they become aware of people living in other countries. Encouraging attitudes of autonomous learning, enjoyment of learning and broadening minds to communicate with different people are crucial points in order to succeed.

It is necessary to consider the methodological changes and evaluate the difficulties one would have to face, especially in very traditional schools. It is also necessary to evaluate the ICT resources and one's own ability to work with them, taking into account when computers can be used, the classroom and its furniture, the number of children in the class, as well as the possible collaboration of "voluntary helpers" (other teachers, parents).

The National Curriculum and the language teaching approach

National Curricula obviously differ from one country to another, but for foreign language teaching most of them have a point in common: they closely follow the guidelines of major ELT publishers. This being the case in Spain, it was not difficult to incorporate the project into the requirements of the curriculum. All suggested topics match the stars' interests and "personality" in one way or another.

The English programme in Spain is based on the communicative approach and it tries to provide a meaningful context to achieve long-lasting learning.[1]

In the Spanish class where the project was carried out, *New Stepping Stones 2* [2] was used as a textbook. The main objectives in the *New Stepping Stones* series can be summarised as follows:

- Instil the idea of the fun of language learning

1 See Appendix I (Objectives of foreign language teaching in the Spanish curriculum) and II (Common topics in the EFL class in primary school and how they were adapted to the Stars project).

2 ASHWORTH, J. & CLARK, J.: New Stepping Stones. Longman Group Ltd. UK

- Train the pupils to be able to communicate successfully
- Establish a foundation for later learning of structures, vocabulary, functions and study techniques
- Train the pupils to use English for a purpose and to consider it as a means for real communication
- Help the pupils to become more independent by teaching them specific techniques
- Encourage the children to develop their linguistic aptitudes outside the classroom

New Stepping Stones 2 is divided into four topic-centred units (clothes, food, animals and homes) easily adaptable to the requirements of the stars project. The contents in this book have been designed to fulfil the specific needs of 8 to 9 year-old children, bearing in mind their cognitive and social development. Structures and vocabulary are regularly recycled to assure the maximum profit for all pupils. Thus a textbook could be helpful and useful for a project which can fit in with the project demands.[1]

Lesson planning and activities

When planning lessons it was important to keep in mind:

- Aims and objectives in terms of concepts, procedures and attitudes
- Timetables, furniture arrangement, teaching techniques, and everything related to the classroom organisation
- Available resources such as stationery, board games, reference books, dictionaries and ICT tools
- Clear and well defined tasks to accomplish
- Criteria to assess pupils' progress

Tasks were defined in flexible terms and adapted to each group of pupils. For instance, the task of getting information about a specific country in the project assigned to individuals meant that all children had to get information about partners in the website. Each child had to pay attention to the postings of a particular country and inform the class about their findings. Problems arose when countries dropped out of the project. It was disappointing for the children in charge of those countries not to have news to report and it was necessary to re-allocate countries and re-define jobs. This was possible because such an activity was sufficiently flexible. All activities allowed for differences in the pupils' knowledge and abilities. Whereas all could participate,

1 See appendix III: Lesson Planning

activities allowed for a range of learning styles and a variety of techniques to allow children to develop their abilities to the maximum.

An example of lesson planning

UNIT 1: Welcome back to school – Autumn festivals ("Magosta" & Halloween)

Time: 20th September- 2nd November 2001

Star: Nosy: lots of interests in life. Favourite hobby: finding out about people and making friends. Another pastime: talking and communicating with people in their own language.

Communicative objectives: be able to express simple facts about oneself, as well as to understand similar texts.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Contents</th><th rowspan="2">Cross-curricular contents</th><th rowspan="2">Assessment criteria</th><th rowspan="2">Tasks & activities</th></tr>
<tr><th>Concepts</th><th>Skills</th><th>Attitudes</th></tr>
<tr><td>Functions:
Introducing oneself
Speaking about oneself
Speaking about school and traditions</td><td>Making comparisons
Searching for relevant information on a text
Browsing the site for specific purposes</td><td>Listening to others
Broadening minds
Awareness of differences and similarities</td><td rowspan="3">Knowledge of different countries and their customs
Autumn celebrations at home and abroad
Timetables
ICT skills
Art: "Spanosy" design</td><td rowspan="3">Able to understand short texts about personal information
Able to write a short text giving information about themselves</td><td rowspan="3">Welcome party
Writing a personal profile
Reading about other children
Comparing timetables and other schools' information
Writing about our class and school
Singing Halloween songs
Drawing Nosy
Learning a poem about autumn in mother tongue & English
Getting information about the country in the project that every child is allocated.</td></tr>
<tr><td>Target language:
My name's…
I'm …years old
I live in…
My favourite…is…
I like…
My school is…</td><td rowspan="2"></td><td rowspan="2"></td></tr>
<tr><td>Vocabulary
Personal information
School
Halloween/ Magosta</td></tr>
</table>

Spanosy was made by three children in 4A, according to the designs of the other participating classes, with some help from their class teachers Mª Ángeles and Conchita. This first "guest star" visited the school and was introduced to all classes. Spanosy participated in all school celebrations. She ate chestnuts at the "Magosta" (a kind of harvest festival), and went on a "Trick or treat" round the school.

Classroom arrangement

Before implementing the project in one's class there are some practical aspects to consider. Things will be very different if the class has 10 children or 30. It is necessary to take into consideration the number and age of the pupils, the possible ways of grouping, timetables, classroom physical conditions and furniture, access to the computer and to the Internet, financial problems and possible solutions, school staff involvement and parental support.

The fifty-nine children involved in the Spanish school were divided into three groups. They had three English lessons per week, each of one hour's duration. They used *New Stepping Stones 2* (Longman) as a class book and workbook in addition to some readers to reinforce learning. The topics in these books are very flexible and consequently matched the stars' characters easily. Children also had a 45 minute session a week on ICT.

Pupils usually worked in their own classroom, except for the ICT lessons, when they went to the computer room. There are no computers in the classrooms. In the computer lab there are 14 PCs, all with access to the Internet. There is also a scanner, a printer and a small web cam, useful for taking pictures on the spot. Children used the computers in pairs. Each pair of children always used the same computer and had the same partner. Children were responsible for any misuse that could have occurred. Pair work is very useful in this case if the teacher organises balanced pairs. Sometimes "weak" pupils are surprisingly skilful at ICT.

In an attempt to make the most of so little time in front of the computer, substantial amounts of work used to be done in the classroom prior to the ICT session. The texts (e-mails or other pieces of writing from other schools, stars' introductions, stories, etc) were printed beforehand, read and discussed in class. The texts and drawings produced by the pupils were also corrected in class most of the time, although sometimes they typed and corrected their own texts directly using the word processor.

In the computer lab children browsed the website and chose the texts and information they considered interesting for their class work and then printed these selections. They also posted their own messages and pictures thus finding out about the functions of different ICT tools, such as e-mail and scanner.

The following tables illustrate the steps taken in class to introduce the star and the follow-up activities which were carried out leading up to the star's departure.

STAGE 1: Preparation

Cross-curricular approach	Activities
	Divide the class into mixed-ability teams/ pairs
Language	Reading comprehension – Background story Vocabulary work Prepare questions to be answered in mother and/or foreign tongue to check global comprehension
English & handcrafts	Create the first star (to be sent away) Draw previous sketches according to the personality Describe how children imagine the star (physically) Decide and list the material needed to make it Make the star Invent other features (physical and/or psychological – likes and dislikes …)

STAGE 2: First star at school

Cross-curricular approach	Activities
Language	Brainstorm: "What can we offer our guest?" Organisation of the visit: decide whether the children can take the star home or not (considering the number of pupils, special events such as birthdays, etc.) Distribute responsibilities to the teams Photos, pictures, charts, art work and writing
Music & PE	Prepare "welcome party": songs, music, dances …

STAGE 3: First star at school: developing activities

Cross-curricular approach	Activities
Social studies, maths, sciences	Collect relevant information from and for the star Look for information on the WWW
Art & craft, ICT	Record the activities (photos, drawings …) Use digital cameras, scanner …
Language	Write down the pieces of information (co-operative handwriting first, then using a word processor) Correct the texts in class

STAGE 4: First star at school: communication on the Internet

Cross-curricular approach	Activities
Social studies, maths, sciences …	Learn about other people on the Web
Art & craft, ICT	Take records of the activities (photos, drawings …) Use digital cameras & scanner
Language	Interaction with other classes and countries: read carefully and look at what they have done. Prepare guessing games and other activities for your partners to do Select your texts and pictures Decide whether you (the class) put the texts in the star's scrapbook or in the class profile and why. Post messages and pictures

STAGE 5: First star's farewell: evaluation

Cross-curricular approach	Activities
Art & craft	Pack the stars together with "souvenirs"
Language	Involve children in reflection Keep records: Reflective notes on the web page Individual diaries of children to commemorate the star's visit (stories about the visit, drawing, cartoons)

Assessment and evaluation

Pupils must know that they are going to be assessed. As a result of their participation in the project they are supposed to improve their:

- awareness of the differences between the oral and written language
- ability to associate oral production and written language
- understanding of the global meaning of a text with visual support
- understanding and response to written instructions
- ability to grasp specific information from a simple text
- capability to interpret different codes: maps, graphics, symbols
- reproduction of short written texts at word level and sentence level
- ability to label pictures and realia in context
- ability to complete the information required in a text.
- production of short, modelled texts.

Presentation, accuracy and clarity in children's productions are as important as their linguistic aptitudes, so every child individually and the class as a whole can be assessed according to the mentioned criteria. Other factors to take into account are participation, eagerness for communication, motivation, group work and collaboration, peer learning, improvement of intercultural knowledge, development of learning strategies, mastery of ICT and commitment.

The project itself must be analysed and evaluated in terms of efficacy and efficiency. Apart from the continuous assessment in class, some tools have been created in an

attempt to quantify the pupils' improvement, such as tests based on the website, interactive games on the site and even a class diary.[1]

Conclusion

Working in this project was very rewarding for both children and teachers. Children enjoyed and appreciated this project very much. They considered it to be an exciting way to learn, and it did not represent any extra work. Every activity on the website was carefully designed to have something to do with the work in the "normal" curriculum, trying to avoid "overdose" of work. So the lessons were planned to incorporate the web activities.

"Our class" (class profiles) was the most productive section as it included relevant texts to read and personal information to share. The star toys and their albums constituted the most successful part of this project. Children got highly involved because of the feelings towards the toys.

It's difficult for children of this age to communicate without a concrete reason, an "excuse", like solving a puzzle, a guessing game or something similar. Interactive activities gave them that reason. Class activities became purposeful and meaningful, with the overall aim being that of transferring these activities to others via the website. When working in groups of 20 children, it was difficult to focus on technical aspects, as priority was given to the linguistic and communicative aspects. However children learnt (or at least became familiar with) using a word processor, scanning pictures, logging in, e-mailing, taking pictures with a very simple digital camera, re-sizing the pictures.

Nevertheless one has to be aware of some risks to face up to when using the Internet. Some children, having more experience than their teachers in "surfing" the WWW, know how to access "censored" sites. Help and advice from the experts to avoid pornography, violence and/or gambling games in class are absolutely essential in this case.

Despite the above mentioned difficulties, the global evaluation is very positive, not only because the results in the exams at the end of the school year were better than in previous years, but also because of the positive change in the children's attitude towards language learning.

1 See Appendix IV: "Stars" class record , Appendix V: Evaluation sheet and Appendix VI: Continuous assessment grid

References

ASHWORTH, J. & CLARK, J., *New Stepping Stones* (Primary courses with teacher's guides). UK: Longman, 1997.

ASHWORTH, J. & CLARK, J., *Top Class* (Primary courses with teacher's guides). Oxford: OUP.

Appendix I: Objectives of foreign language teaching in the Spanish curriculum

By the end of the second cycle (8 to 9 years old) pupils should be able to:

1. Understand easy oral and written texts about objects and situations close to the pupils, using specific and general information.
2. Use a foreign language to communicate with the teacher and with other pupils in normal class activities and demonstrate a respectful attitude to everybody's contributions.
3. Produce written texts about familiar topics applying the basic rules of written language.
4. Read comprehensively texts about activities in the classroom and personal experiences, knowledge or interests in order to find the required information.
5. Recognise and appreciate the communicative value of foreign languages and the ability to learn how to use them showing an attitude of understanding and respect towards the others, their languages and cultures.
6. Understand and use linguistic and non-linguistic patterns used by the speakers of the foreign language in daily situations and so facilitate a smooth communication.
7. Use, in the process of learning the foreign language, the previous knowledge and experiences and to develop strategies of autonomous learning.
8. Establish relationships between meaning, pronunciation and graphic representation of words and easy sentences of the foreign language and to recognise its proper rhythm, sound patterns and intonation.
9. Use extra-linguistic resources (gestures, body language, sounds) to communicate in the foreign language.

MINISTERIO DE EDUCACIÓN Y CIENCIA. – Documentos para la Reforma de la E. Primaria. Área de Lenguas Extranjeras. Madrid 1992

Appendix II: Common topics in the E.F.L. class in primary school and how they were adapted to the "STARS" project

NOSY STAR

Family & friends

- Nº of brothers/ sisters
- Ages and birthdays
- Old people in the family
- Types of families
- Other relatives sharing homes

Pets

- The pets we have/would like to have

Homes

- Types of housing
- Nº of rooms
- Plan and furniture

Festivals

- Halloween, Christmas, Easter, local celebrations.
- Dates, calendars.

BRAINY

School

- Nº of pupils & teachers
- Classrooms
- Holidays
- Timetables

Animals

- Animals in danger
- Top ten animals

Towns

- Inhabitants
- Surface measurement
- Shapes
- Maps
- Shops and facilities

BRIGHTY

Clothes & weather

- Temperatures
- Rainfalls / sunny days

Money

- Pocket money
- Currency

Opposites

- Comparisons: taller, younger, longer hair than …

BOUNCY

Body

- Physical features: height/weight; eyes colour; hair colour

Food & drink

- Top ten favourite foods
- Healthy breakfast
- Packed lunch/ canteen/ home

Spare time

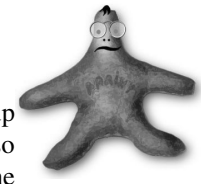
- Collections
- Sports: records, favourites, super-stars

Television (time)

- Favourite programmes
- Nº of hours watching TV

Appendix III: Lesson planning – an example

UNIT 2: Weather and clothes – Christmas



Time: 5th November-20th December 2001

Star: Brainy is rather quiet and she enjoys reading, looking up information on the internet, trying out new experiments. Also interested in new inventions which will help conserve our planet. She also wants to learn about weather and climates and how it affects people's lives.

Communicative objectives: be able to express simple facts about oneself, as well as to understand similar texts.

Contents			Cross-curricular contents	Assessment criteria	Tasks & activities
Concepts	Skills	Attitudes			
Functions: Making sentences about what someone is wearing Asking about favourite clothes Speaking about Christmas traditions Speaking about the climate in their region	Browsing the site to make comparisons about the climate Writing a short description of what they are wearing Swapping information to solve guessing games (What is that child wearing …?)	Showing interest towards other people's customs Enjoying creating clothes for Brainy Awareness of social and cultural aspects of clothes and fashion	Knowledge of different climates and clothes Christmas celebrations at home and abroad Temperature and weather ICT skills Art: fashion design for Brainy	Able to solve guessing games about people wearing some clothes Able to write a short text describing clothes Able to match clothes and weather conditions	Welcome party: Brainy's new clothes Writing a personal description on what they are wearing Reading about other children Comparing weather conditions at home and in other countries Writing about our climate Singing a Christmas carol ("Twinkle little star") Drawing Brainy's clothes Getting and giving information about the country in the project that every child is allocated
Target language: Whose is this/are these? Possessives I like wearing… I'm wearing… In winter we wear…					
Vocabulary Clothes Weather Christmas					

Brainy participated in a kind of "fashion show" in class, modelling some nice clothes on the catwalk. She also celebrated Christmas at school, performing the "Twinkling Little Star" at the crib.

Appendix IV: "STARS" class record

Here are some examples of the class work done during the first term. Besides that, every child who took a star home must write some sentences about what they've done together. The class kept a file with this kind of short texts, most of them plenty of grammar and spelling mistakes, but understandable in the context of this particular group, although unsuitable to be published on the website.

4-10-2001 *Print and photocopy main story*	PROJECT INTRODUCTION TO THE CLASS: story reading and understanding
11-10-2001 *Print and photocopy Nosy's introduction*	CHOOSING NAMES: For the group (a nickname: Dragons, Cockatoos, Tigers…) and for the first star (Spanosy, Bezanosy …) READING COMPREHENSION: draw Nosy, according to the description given in the text. Make models and start sewing the puppet.
18-10-2001 *Welcome party for Nosy*	WRITING: a short text introducing themselves. Type and correct them using WinWord tools.
25-10-2001 *Take pictures of everyone individually.*	POSTING MESSAGES: post their introductions to the site. DRAWING: "What's Nosy doing?"
8-11-2001 *Send Nosy to Poland*	BROWSING: searching for texts of children in the same circuit (Poland, Andorra, France).
15-11-2001 *Allot a country to each pupil*	BROWSING: look for information about the allocated country. ART: make a poster to share information about the countries in the project.
22-11-2001 *Print and photocopy Brainy's introduction*	READING: information about Brainy. WRITING: about the climate and appropriate clothes in the region.
29-11-2001 *Take pictures of groups (in fours)*	WRITING: "I'm wearing…" guessing game.

11-12-2001 *Game "Who is who?"*	READING AND WRITING: e-mails (check the answers to the game).
18-12-2001 *Sending & getting Xmas greetings*	CHECKING the countries that are posting something. WRITING season's greetings.
10-1-2002 *Scan drawings*	WRITING & DRAWING: "Brainy's wearing…"

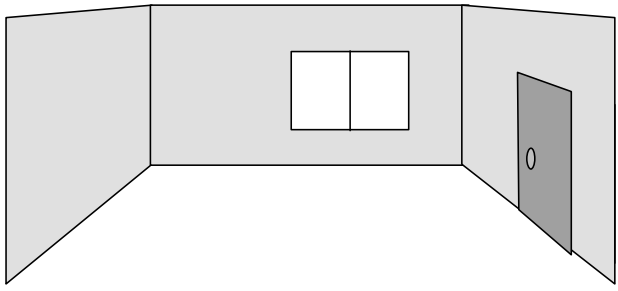
Appendix V: Evaluation sheet

NAME **CLASS**

1 – Introduce yourself

2 – What are you wearing?

3 – Draw Aljaz's room



Do you like my room? My room is a very nice place. There is my bed and my furniture. I've also got a desk, a chair, a wardrobe, a television and posters. I've got a computer and a desk lamp. There is a window too.

Aljaz, 5.b class, II.OS Rogaska Slatina, Slovenia, 31 January 2002

4 – Write these children's names

Our class. We are class VB group 2:

1. I'm Dominika. My favourite animal is a parrot.
2. I'm Ewelina. My favourite sport is volleyball and I like horses.
3. I'm Joanna. I love skating.
4. I'm Bartek. I'm a good footballer.
5. I'm Magda. I'm crazy about dogs.
6. I'm Sylwia W. I like basketball and all animals.
7. I'm Damian. I eat quite often and quite a lot.
8. I'm Krzys. I'm a small boy.

Kasia, 15 January 2002

5 – Ask five questions to Carmen's best friend

My best friend. Hi! My best friend's name is Heleri. She is ten years old. Her eyes are light blue. Her hair is light orange. Her nickname is Hellu. She isn't very tall and fat. She likes roller-skating, singing and good jokes. Her favourite colour is light and dark blue. She always help me and I help her too. Her favourite band is "The Corrs". Her favourite season is summer. Her mother's name is Helen and her father's name is Peep. Her mother is 30 and father is 32.That is all about Heleri.

Carmen, Kuninga Basic School Form 4S, Estonia 28 November 2001

1 _____

2 _____

3 _____

4 _____

5 _____

6 – Circle the ingredients you need to make this recipe

Blueberry Buttermilk Muffins. This is a favourite recipe of our teacher ELISABETH:

Ingredients: 2½ cups flour, 1 cup sugar, 1 cup buttermilk, ⅛ kg butter, 2 teaspoons baking powder, ¼ teaspoon salt, 2 eggs (beaten), 1½ cup fresh or frozen blueberries

7 – Find two mistakes in this text

Hello! Here we are in class with Nosy. It's our favourite class: Music. We are playing the piano.

Appendix VI: Continuous assessment grid

Age: 9 years old

Level: Beginners

Number of students in the class: 20

Country: Spain

Curriculum: Learner-centred and Cross-curricular approach

Syllabus: Based on the development of the communicative competence.

Teacher:

Class:

Topic/Unit:

Date: from ..... to .....

Key: 1 – Not yet covered
2 – More experience needed
3 – Secure understanding
4 – Can apply and extend

Attainment targets	PUPILS						
	1	2	3	⋮	18	19	20
Listening							
1- Recognises onomatopoeic and situational sounds and phonemes.							
2- Reproduces rhythm patterns and chunks.							
3- Understands the key words in a text.							
4- Follows basic instructions in context.							
5- Understands the global meaning of a story with visual support.							
6- Understands the global meaning of limited texts in context.							
7- Grasps specific information from simple texts.							

Attainment targets	PUPILS						
	1	2	3	...	18	19	20
Reading							
1- Is aware of the differences between the oral and written language.							
2- Associates oral production with written language.							
3- Follows visually the oral reading of a written text.							
4- Understands the global meaning of a text with visual support.							
5- Understands and responds to written instructions.							
6- Grasps specific information from a simple text.							
7- Can interpret different codes: maps, graphics, symbols, etc.							
8- Reads simple texts with appropriate pronunciation and intonation.							
Speaking							
1- Can use body language to communicate.							
2- Uses expressions of social interaction.							
3- Reproduces brief messages with appropriate intonation and pronunciation.							
4- Uses the most common classroom language: instructions, requests , etc.							
5- Can produce short modelled oral messages and descriptions.							
6- Can ask and answer simple questions in context.							
7- Can produce original oral messages.							

Attainment targets	PUPILS						
	1	2	3	...	18	19	20
Writing							
1- Reproduces short written texts at word level and sentence level.							
2- Labels pictures and realia in context.							
3- Completes the information required in a text.							
4- Produces short modelled texts.							
Learning skills							
1- Can make predictions in context.							
2- Uses previous knowledge and applies it to new situations.							
3- Uses reference sources: displays and visuals, picture dictionaries, etc.							
4- Uses paralinguistic strategies to communicate.							
5- Can work independently of the teacher.							
6- Can select and carry out own work activities.							
7- Can reflect on own performance and progress.							
8- Uses different strategies for problem-solving.							
Attitudes							
1- Co-operates with the classmates and the teacher.							
2- Pays attention to classwork.							
3- Shows interest in learning English.							
4- Finishes his/her tasks.							
5- Behaves according to the classroom rules.							
6- Shows tolerance and respect to his/her classmates.							
7- His/her productions are tidy and neat.							
8- Shows interest in and respect for other life styles and cultures.							

The integration of the Information and Communication Technologies project in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language (FLE) to young learners

Helena Leja, teacher of French at the College for Teaching Training in Foreign Languages at Rzeszów in Poland.

Project 1.3.3, "Information and Communication Technologies and young learners", contributes to the growing field of information related to computer-assisted teaching of languages where the teacher allows the pupils a large degree of autonomy. Implemented in four French classes (one per country) in Armenia, Lithuania, Poland and Andorra, it casts a new light on the concept of French as a Foreign Language courses where the relationship between the learners and the teacher has evolved towards a basis of mutual confidence and creative work by the pupils.

It is difficult to propose technical "evolution" and even more so technical "revolution" in an establishment and a class not prepared for it. The institutional context and the school environment played a major role. Time was required to convince, explain and identify the relevant advantages of the project compared to usual practice in the various schools. This preparation work took place at two levels: it targeted the human contacts and relationships and addressed the field of didactics, the focus being placed more on the learning process than on teaching. The issue that the teachers also raised at the outset of the implementation of the project was how to introduce the activities based on the story of the stars into the school curriculum.

The preparation stage began by obtaining the consent of the educational community. Consequently, the directors of all the schools welcomed the project with enthusiasm, which was a significant achievement given that the implementation of the project involved an unusual organisation of the classes, excursions, supplementary activities to the courses and also access to technical resources: computer equipment, internet connection, sending packages with the toy star together with souvenirs.

The launch of the concept through the website (http://stars.ecml.at) with the varied characteristics and personalities of the individual stars gave rise to a wealth of pedagogical activities, mostly suggested by the learners themselves. The commitment and the fascination for this new way of learning the language aroused the curiosity of teachers of other subjects (geography, biology, computer science, art and the librarian were those cited most frequently in the evaluation forms), who subsequently became involved by suggesting their own activities. This valuable assistance allowed the project to be extended beyond the language classroom and resulted in special

collaboration among the teachers themselves and between the teachers and the pupils. The latter was based on a "contract of close complicity", to use the term coined by Michel Boiron [1]. Seeing the enthusiasm of their children, the pupils' parents were active in offering both moral and material support.

It is noteworthy that at one of the schools, which had a number of teaching-practice students (future teachers of French) they also became actively involved in the search for ideas and the work with the learners. This enabled them to see a new aspect that information and communication technologies could bring to the teaching of languages, new approaches going beyond their specific study programme. This collaboration and synergy between the different actors in the project, to a large extent absent in traditional teaching (through lack of motivation and not having a fundamental reason for being there in the first place), was profitable from the very start, and took the form of a voluntary and unconditional commitment by all the participants, which resulted in a website rich in both content and ideas.[2]

In what way was the change in the teacher/pupil relationship reflected in the teaching/learning of the language?

> Creativity requires an atmosphere that allows it to seed and develop but at the same time creates favourable conditions for expression. These activities then enable a climate that encourages contact and relationships between the group members. They make them into participants rather than learners, sharing in these activities with their own being and personality.
>
> Bernard Dufeu, Pour une pédagogie ouverte, FDM, No. 246

The work of the learners is based on a story which constitutes the point of departure for the pupils' pedagogical activities. In fact, it is the learners themselves who, by studying the character of the stars, propose activities together with the teacher. It is a relaxed process but demonstrates a large amount of confidence by the teacher in his learners, a pupil-centred task, with the pupil genuinely and actively involved in the choice of the didactic material for his learning. This gives the pupil great satisfaction, giving him/her value, importance, and giving him/her a say thereby achieving a much higher level of motivation. The teacher also allows the pupil a great deal of autonomy in the conception and development of the activities "Instead of relying on what you have, it is more essential to live what you are" – Bernard Dufeu.[3] This finding is reflected in the reality of the four classes where the role and the position of teacher changed to the benefit of greater pupil autonomy, greater confidence and cooperation at a number of levels since they work together not only in class but also consider themselves

1 Michel Boiron, CAVILAM Vichy, La relation enseignant(e) apprenant(e): vers un contrat de complicité attentive, Vichy, January, 2001.

2 stars. ecml.at/fr

3 « Au lieu de conjuger l'avoir, il est plus essentiel de vivre l'être », Bernard Dufeu, Pour une pédagogie ouverte, FDM, No. 246

responsible for organising social events, evenings and other extracurricular activities. The teacher is no longer the main protagonist, instead becoming the manager of the didactic process, accompanying and assisting his/her learners, but generally allowing them to choose the means and techniques that they wish to use in order to learn. This is possible and provides a great deal of satisfaction, greater still since the way of organising the activities eliminates stress. The work is carried out in groups of two, three or more, with each pupil sharing in the responsibility. The teacher ensures the follow-up (according to a pre-determined grid of tasks allocated to each pupil), managing and evaluating the learners' products before they are published on the site. For the learners, the foreign language becomes a living and authentic means of communication. They pass from the learning process itself to putting into practice the knowledge acquired. This approach tests their linguistic knowledge in a multi-disciplinary way, without learning by heart as often applied in traditional methods. In this way, the result is a simple and painless passage from competence to performance, so sought-after in learning. Furthermore, the production is published on the site and read by fellow-pupils in other countries. In this way the learner becomes a co-author of the site. Being aware of the responsibility of the task to be carried out, the learner applies greater effort in both trying to understand and making him/herself understood.[1] The language that s/he has learned is part of the learner's life, the life and real world discussed with fellow-pupils in distant locations via the internet. In this way, the learner steps beyond the language of the textbooks, "a language mostly sterilized for didactic needs and imported into the classroom by virtue of criteria that are external to the group." [2] The learner begins to communicate spontaneously and in a manner appropriate to the natural needs that give birth and life to learning. In this way, there is an advance towards *learning* and a move away from simple teaching. This approach, often neglected in every-day practice, rapidly found support among public authorities, teachers, learners and the parents who genuinely participated in school life, pleased to see their children's learning anchored in reality, in the needs that challenge them to react and to learn "useful" things.

The following are a number of trends that determine the role of the teacher and the pupil in traditional teaching and which have evolved towards greater learning autonomy in computer and internet assisted learning/teaching.

1 The project aiming at communication in a foreign language.

2 Bernard Dufeu, op. cit.

Traditional approaches	Computer and internet assisted approaches
Teacher	**Teacher**
▪ determines the content to be taught ▪ transmits knowledge ▪ the textbook is the teacher's basic tool ▪ complete management of the execution of the tasks ▪ starts from the basis of what has already been learned to add new material ▪ occupies the central position in the relationship with the learner ▪ puts the pupils in a competitive situation ▪ does not take account of the learners' interest and hobbies, implements his own programme ▪ accumulates information to be transmitted to the pupils without context	▪ allows the learners' participation in selecting the content to be learned. ▪ plans courses together with the learners ▪ proposes work based on an attractive and interesting website, the computer being the driving force for interest and motivation. ▪ places the learner in a meaningful context that facilitates the learning of knowledge ▪ focuses on the application of the knowledge learned ▪ challenges the learners ▪ coordinates the execution of the tasks: helps the pupil, with suggestions, focusing work, listening to the pupil, accepting suggestions ▪ provides assistance to active and autonomous learning ▪ introduces the interdisciplinary dimensions into the teaching of the language ▪ creates a learning community around the tasks to be carried out, readily responds to challenges

Learner	Learner
▪ learns voluntarily and consciously in order to acquire knowledge	▪ unconsciously acquires skills
▪ carries out the tasks, most often individually	▪ feels like a partner of the teacher in the learning process
▪ remains in competition with the others	▪ suggests what he likes and is able to do
▪ does not feel secure in his learning	▪ is actively committed to the tasks
▪ has inhibitions when faced with the task	▪ acquires skills in an active situational context
▪ is not aware of the practical use of what he is learning	▪ learning is closely linked to finding answers to problems
▪ learns a great deal by heart or by repeating structures	▪ tries to take up challenges
▪ likely observations of the kind "I do not need to learn that" or "What use will that be to me?"	▪ carries out the tasks spontaneously
▪ is not aware of the presence and the role of his/her fellow pupils in his learning	▪ does not consider the task as a "burden" but rather as a pleasure
▪ an attitude of protest towards the teacher	▪ is motivated by the task and feels responsibility for it
▪ knowledge acquired about the world remains detached from reality	▪ works and learns in cooperation, consequently feeling reassured, (which is also of great importance at the level of human relationships)
	▪ understands and is aware of the objectives of what s/he is learning
	▪ has great confidence in the teacher, on whom s/he can rely
	▪ feels a member of the learning community
	▪ puts into practice computer and other skills
	▪ is happy to see own work published on the site
	▪ is encouraged to carry out research to "go further"
	▪ acquires practical knowledge related to individual needs

- creates instead of quotes
- updates and acquires knowledge about the world through the language that s/he is learning
- acquires new experiences

How do the project activities fit into the learning strategies in the curricula?

Chapter 3 of the Common European Framework of Reference for the Learning and Teaching of Languages "is based on the analysis of the use of language in terms of the *strategies* used by the learners to implement both *general* and *particular communicative competences* in order to engage in *activities* and *processes* to *produce* and/or *receive* texts in relation to themes enabling them to accomplish tasks in given circumstances that arise in the various domains of social life." [1]

Within the context of the "Information and Communication Technologies and young learners" project, these strategies [2] of acquiring skills remain in correlation to the official curricula. The only difference compared with traditional practice is that the means of access to knowledge and skills change. Every activity is linked to the story that is accessible on the website, every learner task is anchored in a situational context close to reality, all production has a communicative objective that encourages learners to try out their creative skills and linguistic competences. The learner has content to communicate and to publish on the site and wishes in return to receive the production of others. This is achieved through the internet and electronic mail.

In accordance with the principles of the Council of Europe, teaching/learning revolves around key topics contained in all the curricula. This thematic work must nevertheless cover the integration of a number of competences. Alongside comprehension and oral and written production, attention is focused on the development of interaction permitting dialogue, the adaptation of language to the specific communication situation, the latter going beyond the classroom or the borders of a country, a communication enriched and complimented by the intercultural factor which is so important in today's world. It is therefore a question of accepting one's own culture, liberating oneself of one's cultural complexes, knowing, understanding and accepting the others and tolerating differences.

Furthermore, the desired parameter is that of the authenticity of communication, which is linked directly to interdisciplinarity. It is important that the pupil can integrate the knowledge acquired in other subjects into communication acts in French and learns to face up to the requirements of real life situations and human relationships.

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1 Common European Framework of Reference, Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 1996

2 Considered as "an ensemble of operations implemented by learners to acquire, integrate and re-use the target language"; definition by Paul Cyr, Les stratégies d'apprentissage d'une langue seconde, coll. « Le Point sur ... », éd. CEC, Quebec, 1996.

The activities carried out and published by the young learners on the site (http://stars.ecml.at/fr) seem to develop modern learning/teaching strategies utilising information and communication technology and seem perfectly adapted to the contents of the curriculum, conforming with the European dimension.

Communication forms in French as a Foreign Language (national curriculum)	Lexical and communicative activities developed in the project and published on the website	Nosy	Brighty	Brainy	Bouncy
1. Presenting oneself, presenting someone/something, making contact with someone	Presenting:				
	▪ one's family, one's country, one's town, one's school	X	X	X	X
	▪ list of expressions of politeness in a number of languages	X			
2. Naming objects	Objects:				
	▪ contents of the bag	X			
	▪ birthday presents		-	X	X
	▪ Christmas presents				X
3. Situating locations; indicating direction	Moving in town:				
	▪ walks in town accompanied by photos or maps of the town	X	X	-	X
4. Describing places (situating locations)	Description of:				
	▪ the house (young architects competition)	X			
	▪ a bedroom/the kitchen				X
	▪ the school/the classroom, computer room, chemistry lab, the library, the dining hall	X	X	X	X

Communication forms in French as a Foreign Language (national curriculum)	Lexical and communicative activities developed in the project and published on the website	Nosy	Brighty	Brainy	Bouncy
5. Talking about a person, describing a person	Parts of the body:				
	▪ parts of the body in a crossword	X			
	▪ parts of the body in songs	X			
	Describing a person:				
	▪ suggesting a hairstyle for the star (competition)		X		
	▪ describing the stars in the form of a guessing game	X			
	▪ play based on the character of the star			-	X
	▪ drawing the star on the basis of its characteristics				X
	▪ game: qualifying adjective to be found in a grid following comprehension of a description				X
	▪ poems about the star	X	X		X
	Clothing and colours:				
	▪ drawing and patterns of clothes for the stars/colours		X		X
	▪ fashion show		X		X
	▪ fashionable clothes		X		X
	▪ puzzle: guess the name of the item of clothing		X		

Communication forms in French as a Foreign Language (national curriculum)	Lexical and communicative activities developed in the project and published on the website	Nosy	Brighty	Brainy	Bouncy
6. Questioning; asking questions	Professions and their representatives:				
	Interviews with:				
	▪ the headmistress	X	-	-	
	▪ the nurse	X			
	▪ the secretary	X			
	▪ at the doctor's				X
	game based on "Question for a champion"			X	
7. Giving advice	▪ advice in the form of a poem about school life		X		
	▪ medical advice	X			
	▪ health guide			-	X
8. Learning to define	▪ definitions of the seasons of the year in the form of a riddle	-	-	X	-
9. Making a suggestion	Suggesting a recipe:				
	▪ preparing dishes				X
	▪ games based on the names of the ingredients	-	-	-	X
	▪ Traditional meal				X
10. Describing; situating in time	Seasons of the year:				
	▪ seasons in the form of riddles			X	
	▪ descriptions of the weather of each season			X	

Communication forms in French as a Foreign Language (national curriculum)	Lexical and communicative activities developed in the project and published on the website	Nosy	Brighty	Brainy	Bouncy
11. Narrating; talking about daily life and leisure time	Ways of spending leisure time:	X			X
	▪ "during the break"			X	
	▪ the weekend with the star				X
	▪ at the pizzeria				X
	▪ at the disco				X
	▪ poll about favourite activities		X		
	▪ people's leisure	X			
	▪ star's travel diary	X	X	X	X
	▪ star's visits to the pupil's home		X		
	▪ in the park				
	▪ summary of the visits				
	Favourite sports:	X	X	X	X
	▪ cartoon: "The star plays football"				X
	▪ skiing				X
	▪ basketball		X		
	Shopping:				
	▪ at the supermarket				X

Communication forms in French as a Foreign Language (national curriculum)	Lexical and communicative activities developed in the project and published on the website	Nosy	Brighty	Brainy	Bouncy
12. Discussing hobbies and interests; expressing one's taste	Poll or presentation on hobbies and interests:	X	X	X	X
	▪ "my favourite book"			X	
	▪ "my favourite film"		X		
	▪ interview concerning favourite music		X		
	▪ musical instruments				X
	▪ composing a song			X	
	▪ favourite classes	X		X	
	Internet: for and against (poll)			X	
13. Describing, narrating: situating in time and in space	Festivals and traditions:				
	▪ descriptions of the festivals and the related traditions in the countries participating in the project	X	X	X	X
14. Learning through song*	▪ Christmas carol		X		
	▪ Song about parts of the body	X			
	▪ Composing a song: "A friendly wolf"			X	-

Singing is very popular in the French as a Foreign Language class, especially with younger classes.

The table above shows that the project facilitated the development of the principle communication and lexical acts as in the curricula for French as a Foreign Language. Compared to traditional teaching/learning (and the less interesting textbooks used in the respective countries, highlighted by the teachers in their assessments), a basic difference must be highlighted: The information and communication technologies present in the classroom genuinely motivated and encouraged the pupils to improve their work in an atmosphere which was modern, cooperative, playful and illustrated the

pleasure of learning. In addition, the grammar – such a burden upon the pupils – "disappeared" behind the task and the desire to improve and complete the communication, a fact that does not prevent all the points of grammar from being interlaced naturally and in an enjoyable manner into the pupils' productions. All the basic *tenses and moods* are addressed:

- Present
- Present perfect
- Future simple
- Immediate future
- Imperfect
- Conditional present
- Even the present subjunctive

All the necessary *determiners*

- Definite and indefinite articles
- Possessive adjectives
- Demonstrative adjectives;
- Partitive articles and interrogative adjectives

All these points of grammar are integrated more or less subconsciously into the activities, which are so rich in the techniques and the forms suggested: descriptions, private diaries, travel diaries, games, riddles, crosswords, cartoons, drawings, puzzles, opinion polls, competitions, songs, poems, plays, recipes, guides, tourist itineraries, clothes' patterns, fashion shows, word grids, phrases to complete, jokes, interviews, lists of expressions in a number of languages etc.

Formal organisation of the activities with the site

Timetable

All the participating classes have two to three compulsory hours of French per week. (One of the classes had an extra hour for computer work thanks to the project). The activities related to the project were proposed either on a regular basis or every 8 to 10 days (depending on the technical possibilities for integrating the project into the curriculum). Independently of the frequency of contact with "the stars", all the classes worked and suggested a wide range of activities.

Number and age of the learners

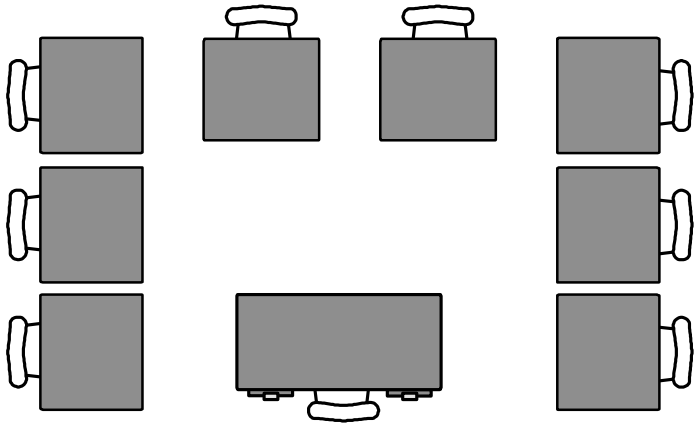
The classes participating in the project were somewhat heterogeneous from the point of view of age and the number of pupils. However, it is important to mention that the age differences by no means hindered communication between the classes. On the contrary, this type of communication seems to have been very lively and enriching.

	Andorra	Lithuania	Armenia	Poland
Number of pupils	15	8+15	20	27
Age of pupils	6-7	9-11	10-12	12

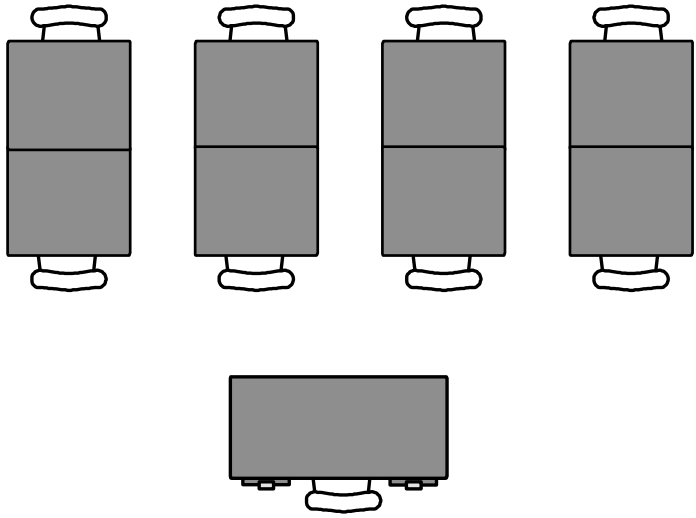
Logistical arrangement of the classroom

The four walls of a classroom seem to define a space attributed to the learner (at the back) and to the teacher in front of the pupils. However, taking account of the number of pupils in each class and above all the wealth of forms and techniques of the work proposed, it was necessary to arrange this space differently. The traditional rows of tables were replaced by an arrangement that was more adapted to group work (2 to 6 persons) and to encourage contact and exchange between the pupils. It was no longer forbidden to sit on the floor or in a circle and the teacher was not in the middle but among the learners. The most frequent layouts for tables are represented graphically:

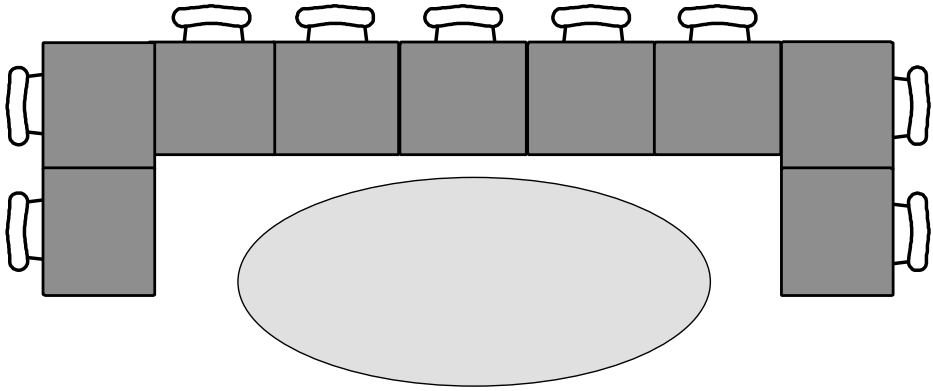
Layout 1



Layout 2



Layout 3 (for instance for performing the play).



These table (and furniture) arrangements not only facilitated the pupils' work, but also enabled the teacher to move, to circulate freely amongst the group, to help them, to supervise them and correct their productions, or when necessary modify the instructions.

In this way, the classroom became a more agreeable and practical space, where the pupils felt freer and at greater ease to carry out their work, which they considered not

as a duty but as a means of self-instruction to develop both their skills and personalities.

Evaluation and publication of the learners' production. Difficulties.

Before being published on the website, the tasks and exercises carried out by the pupils were corrected and assessed by the teacher. The assessment related to all types of work: *written production and expression* (drawings and their description, poems and riddles, plays and drama, games, crosswords, questionnaires for polls, etc) and *oral expression* (for presentation in class). In the majority of cases, the activities and the way work was carried out were beneficial to the *assessment of the learner's ability* and not of their knowledge. The teacher took into account what the pupil was capable of doing or what s/he knew in terms of application to the real world. However, the pupils were also subjected to regular *lexical tests* (for each topic studied) that involved the assessment of knowledge and corresponded to what was taught with respect to the work carried out over a specific period.

The majority of the activities were then published on the website according to the predetermined timetable. This was generally possible in the library or in the computer room, during or after classes, depending on the establishment's equipment and the availability of the room. To begin with, internet access was often cited as an obstacle to work. Nevertheless, in the course of the project, the teachers also succeeded in planning and organising sessions in which the pupils could publish their productions on the site themselves (assisted if necessary by the teacher). The implementation of the project nevertheless gave rise to a number of difficulties. In order to locate the learning process in a context as close as possible to reality, the star toy – present in class for a specific period – was sent by post to the next country. This exchange constituted a weak point reflected in the fact that classes A and C and C and D never sent each other the star toy. This limited the contacts and had a considerable influence on the decline of interaction between these classes. These interactions sometimes took second place to simple production. From time to time, very interesting ideas for interaction opening possibilities for reaction and exchange were proposed but were not taken up, if not totally abandoned (even if certain responses were sent by email and hence were not put onto the site).

Aside from the minor difficulties, the project itself undoubtedly contributed to a genuine application of open pedagogy in the "French as a Foreign Language" classes. The results of the project as published on the website as well as the "invisible" results – on a human level – seem to fully justify the observation that a favourable climate permits effective communication. Thanks to task-based teaching and by maintaining the principle that all linguistic work published on the site originates from an extra-linguistic reality or has a direct link to the latter, the teachers together with the learners succeeded in creating an atmosphere of mutual listening and exchange, where there

were neither good nor bad suggestions, but where instead there were personal, imaginative and original productions. The language taught and learned thus changed in importance. Associated with an individual, it became a *means* and not the end; the means of expression of what the individual lives, feels and wishes to share with the others via the internet.

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Evaluation of the project

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The progress of the participants in the project was monitored by the project team throughout the duration of the work. Whenever participants needed to be contacted, this was done either through email or through the teachers' forum on the "Stars" website.

During the running of the project, participants were constantly encouraged to keep in touch with each other and with the co-ordinating team, either using the forum or e-mail, by writing about and sharing their difficulties, queries and successes in implementing the project.

Informal feedback from the participants was requested half-way through the project as well as at the end of it. In addition, a questionnaire was sent to the participating teachers at the end of the project.

The questionnaire

The questionnaire was divided into six sections requiring participants to think about their experiences prior to the start of the project and during the implementation phase. Questions were asked about the participants' preparation, the organisation of the circuits, practical considerations (from the teaching/learning perspective), technical issues, ECML support and overall comments. A copy of the questionnaire is included in Appendix 1 at the end of this chapter.

Several attempts were made to maximise the response rate from the participants. An electronic version of the questionnaire was emailed to participants towards the end of June 2002. About four weeks later, participants who still had not replied were sent a reminder as well as a printed version of the questionnaire.

As mentioned at the end of Chapter 2, six circuits had been formed by the end of the workshop representing 21 countries. This meant that theoretically, a maximum of 24 questionnaires could be returned. Attrition rate during the project was low. Only two workshop participants from one particular circuit failed to do any work after the workshop in Graz. Of the remaining 22 participants, 15 replied to the questionnaire. Another participant did not complete the questionnaire but submitted feedback during and at the end of the project. Thus the evaluation which follows is based on the responses of 16 participating teachers from 15 countries.

Feedback

The information collected from the questionnaires is shown in Appendix 3.

On the whole the project was well received and comments were generally positive and encouraging. The variation in participants' responses reflects the various circumstances within which teachers and children were working both within their schools and classes as well as variation within the circuits. Success of the project depended on several factors, namely the resources available, the commitment of the participants, the support which they received from administration, other members of staff and parents and participating children. The participant from Andorra who was using the French website reported that:

> If one had to ask children whether they found the project interesting, they would reply yes without hesitation. This project has been enriching at all pedagogical levels. We have been able to do French, geography, the lifestyle in European countries … The stay of each star was sufficient to allow us to elaborate on specific activities, not to mention postal difficulties which were beyond our control. The different characteristics of each star allowed us to diversify work. We were able to choose a specific theme to work with each star as we did with Nosy with the competition for young architects. In addition, as a result of each of the stars characteristics, one could study a specific theme and compare the work with that of other schools. For example: How the school functions (timetable, subjects, holidays …) The main festivals/celebrations of each country. One could also try to select children and put them in contact with others sharing their likes and interests. Each child could choose a child in each country to communicate via email in an individual and immediate manner.

Teachers reported that children were very interested and enthusiastic about the project.

> The children loved the project – they enjoyed reading and writing texts on the website and were keen to do the written work to be sent on with the stars. The most exciting aspect of the project was receiving a star.... the class I had was small and we only met once a week for one hour 30 minutes. This meant that we were often late in getting back to children who had sent us e-mails which is rather demotivating. However, I cannot imagine any class being more enthusiastic than the one I had.
>
> (Norway – English website).

For some children, participating in the project presented a completely new way of approaching language learning.

> I would like to say that in spite of the difficulties which I had to go through, the project was a great success and has provoked the need to make changes to the teaching of French to young learners because the results have shown that pupils are capable of maintaining interest and paying attention to the proposed themes in spite of the demanding learning load and the large amount of new work, because all the subjects were based on things which interest them and which correspond to their daily lives.
>
> (Lithuania – French website).

Understandably there were some limitations which have to be acknowledged. Circuits where members had attended the initial workshop in Graz and had the opportunities to meet other participants found it easier to maintain contact during the project. Within some circuits difficulties in maintaining the project arose when not all circuit members adhered to the initial plans and timetable. Unfortunately, two members in one particular circuit never made a contribution with the result that the remaining two schools did not have much opportunity for exchange of stars or information via the web.

Another aspect which did not develop fully during the project was the direct interaction among the children. This was already a concern for some participants half-way through the project. In listing aspects which children did not like, the Slovenian participant mentioned that children didn't like:

- not getting any response to their messages
- waiting too long to get an answer
- stars travelling too long or not getting an answer from our partner school from Malta
- writing messages at home

On the other hand, children liked:

- pupils from other countries to write back sooner
- more game-type postings (quizzes, etc.)
- the interactive aspect of the website.

Some participating teachers tried to encourage inter-class communication in a variety of ways. For example, the Austrian teacher suggested

> nominating groups of students responsible for one country of our partner schools each. These workgroups are supposed to check for messages and respond at least once a week. This way we expect to get the communication between our countries going on more fluently.

One problem which teachers frequently faced concerned the limited competence of the children in the target foreign language, because they would only have been learning it

for a couple of years. For example, the Austrian teacher noted that "*the teachers' help is needed because Austrian 3rd graders cannot write in English. So we decided to make it very simple and let them write only short sentences along with their pictures"*. Other participants commented that they would have preferred to see more of the children's work and less of the teachers' influence.

Appendix 1 – Evaluation Questionnaire

Section A: Preparation

1. Do you feel you were sufficiently informed about the project prior to its start?
2. Was there any information which, in retrospect, you feel was not properly dealt with and would have been helpful to know about?

Section B: Circuit Organisation

3. Were all the members of your circuit in Graz for the September workshop?
4. Do you feel that all members in your circuit collaborated?
5. Do you think the extent of the collaboration was related to the personal contacts in Graz?
6. How easy/difficult was it for members in your circuit to adhere to the dates for sending/receiving the stars? How did you manage delays?
7. Were there any difficulties in the course of the project which were solved among the group, without intervention from the co-ordinating team?

Section C: Practical Considerations: teaching/learning

8. In your work, are you responsible for a class for the entire day (teaching children a range or subjects) or do you see groups of children from different classes specifically for language?
9. How easy/difficult was it for you to incorporate the stars project in your regular language teaching sessions?
10. Was the stars project (content) seen as something extra, in addition to the demands of your established syllabus or did you manage to incorporate the stars project with the other language teaching demands? How was this done?
11. Do you feel that your participation required additional planning and preparation which was stressful and you could have done without?

12. Did participation mean you have to put in longer hours of work, possibly on weekends or staying on after school?
13. Do you feel your own teaching has changed as a result of increased use of ICT?
14. Did your participation in the project influence your relationships with other members of staff?
15. Did you rely on assistance from school authorities and colleagues? Was this assistance readily available?
16. How difficult was it to prepare the children for the project?
17. What do you think your children have learnt as a result of participating in this project?
18. From a language learning perspective, how do you think participating in the project has helped or hindered children?

Section D: Technical Issues

19. Which of the following were a problem for you:
    a) Lack of access to computers in the school.
    b) Old/slow computers in the school.
    c) Lack of access to the Internet in the school.
    d) Slow Internet access in the school.
    e) Lack of technical proficiency on your part.
    f) Lack of technical proficiency on the children's part.
    g) Any other technical problem you encountered.
20. Was the Website easy to use?
21. Was the Website attractively designed?
22. What features/facilities would you have liked to see in the Website?
23. Did you find the teachers' forum useful?
24. Did children in your class read what children in other classes posted?
25. Did children in your class ever email other children in other classes?
26. Did children in your class ever receive emails from children in other classes?

Section E: ECML Support

27. Do you feel you were promptly and efficiently supported by the co-ordinating team when the need arose?
28. Are you satisfied with the support you were given by the co-ordinating team?
29. At which stage of the project do you feel support was mostly needed: beginning, mid-way; end?

Section F: Overall comments

30. What's the greatest satisfaction you have got from participating in this project?
31. What's your greatest disappointment having participated in this project?
32. What do you feel was the biggest difficulty/shortcoming of the project?
33. What was the major strength of the project?
34. Would you recommend similar experiences to your colleagues? Why?
35. Do you think you will continue to use ICT in language teaching? Why?

Are there other comments about the project which you would like to share with us?

Appendix 2 – Dissemination of the project

This appendix includes references to the variety of ways in which the project has been promoted in some of the participating countries.

Dissemination in Malta

- The "Stars" project was presented during a half-day seminar for Education Officers. The seminar was organised by the Director of ICT to present the several ICT projects being carried out in the various schools. Details about how the project came about and how it was being carried out were given together with information about children's participation and the project's effect on their learning.
- In March, a local television presenter invited some children from our school to her talk show to talk about any particular thing they were doing at school at that particular time. Five children from 5B attended and talked about the Stars project. The star, a chart of the stars, poems to the stars and greeting cards to the various stars, were shown on local television and created interest both there and in homes.
- The Maltese co-ordinators as well as the participants in the project were interviewed by an ICT support teacher working at the office of the Director of ICT. The interview, together with some photos, was printed in the ICT Newsletter *Computerwise* (March, 2002, Issue 7).

Dissemination in Spain

The "Stars" project was given some publicity within the participating Spanish school, town and even country by means of:

- Staff meetings at the beginning of school year to introduce and agree on the project
- Formal presentation to the School Council and the educational authorities to be approved and included in the Annual Programme
- School magazines addressed to children, parents and the whole community (*La Ardilluca /* Dec. 2001 & Apr. 2002 and *La Ardilla* / June 2002)
- Radio broadcast. (COPE Cantabria, Feb. 2002*)*
- In-training teachers'conferences (CPR de Santander, TEFL Conference, May 2002)
- Professional publications (book published on the occasion of the *"Escuela y Sociedad"* teachers' conference, June 2002)

Dissemination of the results and promotion of the projects in Poland

In Poland, the project was presented four times, three of which were at school No. 35 in Rzeszów.

- The first presentation addressed around 30 beneficiaries including the school authorities, the students of the College for the Teacher Training in Foreign Languages at Rzeszów and the pupils' parents: Its main objective was to present the idea of the project, to encourage the participants to support it and even to commit themselves to its implementation.
- The second presentation was held at the same school but was of a different character. It was held on the occasion of the visit to the school (spring 2002) by Christian Sahuc, Cooperation and International Education Attaché at the French Embassy in Poland. The aim on this occasion was to show the way of working with the website and the results of the work. The Attaché, accompanied by two school directors and two college students, was invited to two lessons during which the learners had the opportunity to present the products of their work: star toys, star albums on the site, paper albums, a play and poems they had written.
- The results of the projects were also presented to three teachers and 19 young French learners who had come to school No. 35 in Rzeszów as part of a school exchange, as well as to other classes in this school. On each occasion, it aroused lively interest, particularly in the pupils' ability to abandon traditional pedagogy and create originals things.
- The fourth presentation was held at Łowicz, Province of Warsaw, on March 9, 2002, within the framework of the annual meeting in the presence of the General Inspector of the National Ministry of Education in Warsaw, Krystyna Kowalczyk, and representatives of the French Embassy in Poland. It was addressed to directors and the persons responsible for the French sections in the colleges for teaching training in foreign languages (around 20 people). This presentation aimed to communicate and propagate the idea of using communication and information technologies in teaching French as Foreign Language by showing the specific results obtained by the classes participating in the project. This presentation gave rise to a number of questions and reflections about the possibility of integrating information and communication technologies in the curriculum for the teaching of the French as a Foreign Language.

The website and the principles of the approach encouraging the computer and internet assisted teaching and learning of foreign languages were also the subject of a presentation to trainee teachers at the CAVILAM in Vichy (France) within the module "Media and the internet in the teaching of French as a Foreign Language" (July 2002).

Appendix 3 – Responses to evaluation questionnaire

This appendix contains the responses participants gave in answer to the evaluation questions.

Section A: Preparation

Did the participants feel that they were sufficiently informed and was there any information which, in retrospect, was not adequately dealt with but would have been helpful?

	Information prior to initiation of project	Information which could have been helpful
Malta	No, I was not sufficiently informed prior to the start of the project, i.e. before the September meeting in Graz. I knew about the project by coincidence	I would have liked to have known more about how the piloting of the project was carried out.
Germany	Not at all. I had actually no further information about the intention of the project.	Although the title "workshop" was evident, I had no information in advance about the expected activities after the meeting in Graz.
Estonia	I have to say that I was not sufficiently informed about the project before coming to Graz but I also find it to be my mistake as I did not ask for any information myself.	I do not think any information was wrongly dealt with but any additional info. would have been helpful.
Slovenia	Yes	No
Latvia	No, I wasn't. I received the information pretty late and I had a very slight idea that was different from the real one, but it didn't make any problem.	Not to me. I think it was difficult for people who didn't themselves really take part in the project to be involved, interested and remember everything for somebody else.
Norway	Yes	No
Hungary	Yes I think we were provided with the info we needed during the Sept workshop.	No, for me the only problem was that though we had sessions on scanning & editing, the time was not enough for skills development.
Poland	I was well informed by the Polish project co-ordinator, Ms Helena Leja before the project began.	There was no such information.
Spain	----	----
Holland	Yes, but at a very late stage.	No
Czech Republic	Yes, thanks to our seminar in Graz	I cannot think of anything which was not properly dealt with.
Iceland	Yes, but a mailing list from the beginning would have been helpful.	No

	Information prior to initiation of project	Information which could have been helpful
Sweden	No	I should have been at the workshop in Graz.
Poland	Yes, I participated in the first pilot stage, which is why I knew what it was about.	There were problems with the participants (Armenia).
Lithuania	No, I was not sufficiently informed. The representative of the Lithuanian Ministry of Education did not inform me about the aim of the seminar. I learned that our country was to participate in the project just at the start of the seminar.	I lacked information about the organisation of the lessons.

Section B: Circuit organisation

- Were all the members of the circuit in Graz for the workshop?
- Do you feel that all members in the circuit collaborated?
- Was the extent of the collaboration related to the personal contacts in Graz?

	Members of circuit in Graz	Do you feel that all members in your circuit collaborated?	Was the extent of the collaboration related to the personal contacts in Graz?
Malta	Yes	Yes	I would say yes; you knew with whom you were making contact, and with whom you were "talking", especially when it came to using the Forum. The personal contact established in Graz helped also when it came to contacting circuit members for basic information such as whether or not the "Star" arrived safely. This was done mainly through personal e-mail. A sort of friendship developed among circuit members.
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estonia	Yes	Yes I think so	Yes definitely
Slovenia	No, Jeanette wasn't	Not all. We have heard from Harald only once at the beginning. In the case of Malta only Maria contacted us. However, I think it is better that the teacher who is in the class with children is in touch with the other members of the circuit.	I am not sure about that but then I collaborated more with Kati and Maria because we spent more time together in Graz.

	Members of circuit in Graz	Do you feel that all members in your circuit collaborated?	Was the extent of the collaboration related to the personal contacts in Graz?
Latvia	No	Yes, mostly. I had some difficulties with the Norwegian team, I got very few information although I sometimes really needed it. But Hungarian and Austrian teams were excellent.	Yes, mostly. Although Austrians changed their mind and another school with different people was involved but it was not a problem because of very nice and interested contact persons.
Norway	No	Yes	Yes
Hungary	No. Christa was a new member but I think she did the best job.	I think each of us was trying to do our best	The Graz workshop helped a lot. It is always easier to contact someone you have already met. But I think a lot depended on enthusiasm.
Poland	Circuit members from Poland, Andorra and France were not at the workshop	In my opinion, collaboration was ample.	I cannot answer since I did not participate in the Graz seminar.
Spain	None of them	Not very much except Stan from Poland	I think it would have been different if our partners had been in Graz.
Holland	I was not there myself.	They certainly did not.	----
Czech Republic	No	They tried to but because of the absence at the workshop it was quite difficult first.	Partly. Plus partly the collaboration was easier if the partners shared the same background about the project.
Iceland	I wasn't there.	I never got a star.	----
Sweden	I don't know.	No I didn't.	Yes, for them.
Poland	No, the teacher from Armenia did not partici-pate in the workshop. It was the other teacher who was in Graz	No.	Yes, but there is a lack of collaboration with the school, in particular with the headmaster. The headmaster should be informed of our work so that he can help us later.
Lithuania	No, only those from Poland.	Yes, but more could be done in common. For instance competitions for the pupils, games, etc.	Yes.

	Ease of adhering to timetable within circuit	How did you manage delays?	Difficulties in the course of the project solved among the group, without intervention by team?
Malta	Keeping to dates was not a big problem in our case. We found it difficult, most of all, around Christmas although more time had been allotted by the project co-ordinators.	I usually informed the other circuit members that the "Star" would be arriving late because of …	We mostly solved all our problems among ourselves. When I, initially, had technical problems, I contacted Mario Camilleri personally.
Germany	There were delays, but we had no problems.		No
Estonia	The atmosphere in our circuit was very understanding and few delays did not cause any bigger problems or misunderstandings.		All the problems/ questions were solved among us.
Slovenia	In Graz we thought it was going to work but the reality was sometimes different. I myself forgot to send off the last star to Malta.	We let the school know that it was going to be delayed a bit and it was OK.	I and my children had a problem that we didn't know when our stars got to Malta. Therefore Maria did it for Jeanette. In my opinion the best is that one teacher does everything: works in the class and helps children sending their messages.
Latvia	It was good that we had the whole year's plan beforehand. Sometimes my team was a few days late because of developing photos or other small difficulties, the same happened once to Hungarian team.	We informed each other by e-mail and it was not a problem.	Only about small delays.
Norway	No delays		No difficulties
Hungary	We didn't have big problems thanks to the proper timetable we set together in Graz. I tried to post the stars in time and I hope the parcel also arrived without any delay. I did not get any negative feedback from Daina.		No I do not know about any

	Ease of adhering to timetable within circuit	How did you manage delays?	Difficulties in the course of the project solved among the group, without intervention by team?
Poland	It seemed to be the problem at first but in the course of time we managed delays. We started work with the next star without having been provided with it, just children had to be properly informed about it.		No such difficulties.
Spain	Sometimes there were some delays that bother children very much, so we have to e-mail our partners to remind them the dates. When that happened, children didn't want to send that star on the agreed date, because they wanted to have it a longer period.		There were no important difficulties.
Holland	After several mails and phone calls I was given the correct postal address and email address of Cyprus. After sending one star, we received another. That was the end of the contact. Emails remained unanswered.		No
Czech Republic	I think we have managed quite well. The transition weeks helped a lot.		There were some difficulties to get all members of the circle to join the group. However, finally we managed.
Iceland	We sent the first star and started off with a lot of work and expectation waiting for another star which never came. We tried to follow up on the internet.		
Sweden	Difficult		Not that I know of
Poland	It was difficult for some because of the festivities and public holidays at their school. Perhaps because of the problem with the connection.		Yes. We always received the stars late. In this case I was obliged to work with the pupils without the star-toy. The participants did not work according to the timetable. This was bad.

	Ease of adhering to timetable within circuit	How did you manage delays?	Difficulties in the course of the project solved among the group, without intervention by team?
Lithuania	It was very difficult to keep to the reception dates. There were considerable delays from Andorra; practically all the stars arrived during the last week or on the last day. Consequently, we worked on the internet version. It was not easy because the teachers always need to make more efforts to create a happy atmosphere. And when the star arrived, we took photos and we had to send it quickly to another country.		No.

Section C: Practical Considerations: teaching/learning

- In your work, are you responsible for a class for the entire day (teaching children a range or subjects) or do you see groups of children from different classes specifically for language?
- How easy/difficult was it for you to incorporate the stars project in your regular language teaching sessions?
- Was the stars project (content) seen as something extra, in addition to the demands of your established syllabus or did you manage to incorporate the stars project with the other language teaching demands? How was this done?

	Work responsibilities	Ease of incorporating project	Extra or part of established syllabus
Malta	I see classes only for support. Jeannette had the responsibility of the whole class for the entire day.	It was quite easy. I integrated the project with the English lessons as much as possible.	When possible I integrated the project but at times it was extra. Sometimes it was difficult for me to insert the project lessons and cater for children using the computer too.

	Work responsibilities	Ease of incorporating project	Extra or part of established syllabus
Germany	Since I am a head of school I had to pass the project to different teachers.	The stars went very well with the regular session, because the themes were alike.	Our curriculum gives space for extra-curricular activities, so no difficulties occurred. Integration in the regular lessons.
Estonia	I was not a form teacher and saw classes only for the Eng. Classes.	It was not easy as our school system is based on exam and tests results but I had one extra lesson in a week I could use as I pleased and it made things easier.	Still we managed to do some of the things in the class during the lessons as well. There were lots of topics to be discussed, like weather, likes, dislikes. I also asked my students to do some drawings and writing at home.
Slovenia	I see different classes specifically for language.	It was a bit difficult because we make plans at the end of August and then I didn't know that we were going to be in this project.	I managed to incorporate the four stars in the established syllabus as an extra reading on the internet.
Latvia	I am only an English language teacher who meets my group 4 times a week for 40 minutes.	It wasn't an easy job because I couldn't meet my students at an extra time except twice when we went on excursions.	I incorporated the project with the syllabus, choosing the topics from the programme I needed then when the definite star had special interests. Sometimes I had 25 minutes of a regular period and 15 minutes were devoted to the project. Students did drawing and small handicrafts at home.
Norway	Groups of children from different classes specifically for language.	Easy but could not do a lot of work.	It was extra.
Hungary	I see groups of children from different classes specifically for language.	I had some difficulties. At the beginning the children were so enthusiastic about the stars that they didn't want to do anything else but play with them. So I decided to use the star on visit as a co-teacher or a teaching aid. In spring, as the children were getting busier and busier at school, it was more difficult to incorporate the stars in regular language sessions.	Both. Most of the time it went well without any problems. When a topic seemed to be exciting for the children we spent some extra time on it. But it meant that we could not cover some parts of the syllabus. Consequently, I had to devote less time to the last star.

	Work responsibilities	Ease of incorporating project	Extra or part of established syllabus
Poland	I see children from different classes specifically for language.	It was not easy to incorporate the stars project; there were some problems with getting the computer room since other teachers were using it.	Generally, it was seen as something extra, however, some ideas were convergent with our established syllabus.
Spain	Both Belén and I are English teachers. That means that we teach only English to a group for 3 hours per week. I also took the three groups in 4th grade to the computers room once a week (45 minutes every group).	Very easy, because it fitted perfectly in a topic-based programme.	We managed to integrate it in a cross-curricular syllabus.
Holland	Due to shortage of staff I worked as a teacher last year.	Easy; the children are interested in both English and computers.	The stars project was incorporated in the language teaching demands as well as in biology and geography lessons. In Holland we have extensive freedom in our syllabus.
Czech Republic	I do see groups of children for language only.	I think it was the same difficulty as incorporating whatever. When the project became a part of the regular teaching, the work with it became possible.	The project was incorporated into the teaching. The younger children used it for practising storytelling in the classroom – usually based on the printout of the stars stories, the older ones used the project mainly as a means for communi-cation (trying to send e-mail messages to other pupils) and as a source for reading practice and discussions while working with computers.
Iceland	I'm both, a class teacher and a language teacher.	It was easy. It is very inte-resting for the pupil to have some tasks from real life.	Both, in combining it into theme work and as a special task.
Sweden	Groups of children from different classes specifically for language.	It was OK.	It was extra.
Poland	I have courses with a number of classes.	No, I had no problems.	The project was interesting and the work with the pupils was satisfying. It was something different from conventional lessons.

	Work responsibilities	Ease of incorporating project	Extra or part of established syllabus
Lithuania	I have French courses with a number of classes.	At the beginning I found it quite difficult to integrate the project with the stars into my language class because I lacked the experience. But the first good results and the enthusiasm of my pupils encouraged me, and the project went well afterwards.	One might say that we succeeded in integrating it entirely. Since the material in our textbook is so old and corresponds little to everyday life, we took all the grammar material from our textbook and certain texts for vocabulary as well as preparing the material from the internet and supplementary grammar exercises, because we realised that our pupils' knowledge of French did not correspond with that of the pupils of the other foreign countries, and many of the activities for learning the language. When the star was present we worked on the material prepared for the project and after it had left we carried out a sort of revision by reading the texts that we had not used during its stay and by doing the grammar and the vocabulary exercises according to the textbook. Our pupils were obliged to work much more than usual but there were very few amongst them who were unhappy about the extra hours that they had to spend with their textbooks. Very often, the pupils asked me to stay with them to work in the computer laboratory.

- Do you feel that your participation required additional planning and preparation which was stressful and you could have done without?
- Did participation mean you have to put in longer hours of work, possibly on weekends or staying on after school?
- Do you feel your own teaching has changed as a result of increased use of ICT?

	Participation meant extra planning	Putting in longer hours	Changes in personal teaching
Malta	Yes, planning was an extra burden and needed more time and support.	I did need to work more on weekends.	Yes, it did. I needed to change my way of teaching, integrating more ICT.
Germany			No
Estonia	Sometimes I really felt pressure on me, it was due to the fact there were unplanned events (the class was not present, the computers were not in order, students were tired).	Yes, it meant overtime for me but most of it was still fun. I am sorry I could not put up all the material we managed to do during the year.	It is difficult to say but I hope there is something that has changed, at least I got to know my students in after school activities and it helped to create a different atmosphere in the class. In our school the students study IT from Form 1 on and that's why most of them were quite skilled in using it and did not find it so very attractive anymore.
Slovenia	I am usually in a hurry therefore it wasn't stressful at all. Of course, it demanded additional planning because it was a totally different approach to teaching English but at the end it was very rewarding for both the teacher and pupils.	No, only some days because of trying to learn how to send photos on the internet.	Yes, I think it did. We have already started another internet project (The teddy bear exchange) and the children can hardly wait for September to come. They want me to come to school in July and August so that we will check the messages sent by our teddy bear Jaka who is on his way to Australia right now and will be sending us his diary. I have become more open-minded and ready to try out new approaches in my classes which make teaching a real pleasure.
Latvia	The project required additional planning but since I had agreed to it beforehand and I enjoyed it, it was not a problem.	Sometimes it took additional time after classes but I didn't mind.	Definitely! I feel myself more confident at the computer and I have started using computer in my English classes besides the project work.

	Participation meant extra planning	Putting in longer hours	Changes in personal teaching
Norway	It was extra work but not stressful.	No, at most a little at home, perhaps 20 minutes per week.	I have always used ICT.
Hungary	It required additional planning but it was worth it and I enjoyed it. It was stressful only during the visit of the last star when I felt I was unable to join the website.	I did all the preparation at home but I had to spend a lot of extra time at school after the lessons waiting for the ICT teacher to help me with scanning.	Not my teaching but my computer skills. I still have a lot to learn but I feel more confident now.
Poland	It was slightly stressful because of problems connected with the use of the computer room, and the children's IT skills were not sufficient. Planning and preparation were also to some extent time-consuming.	Participation meant sometimes that I had to stay on after school.	I acquired some new skills, e.g. how to plan and organise such activities which require active children's participation.
Spain	Of course it requires additional planning and preparation but it is not stressful at all.	In fact I did put in many extra hours at school, but mainly to solve technical problems, like trying to avoid children browsing freely on the WWW, or learning to use software, etc.	It has changed, but only in the sense that now we are able to use new tools to do the same type of activities we have been doing before: swapping information with other schools, researching in reference books (now we tend to use on-line resources), using art and graphics to express ourselves, writing to European friends…
Holland	No, it was fun to do.	Yes but it stayed within limits.	Yes and no, because we already used computers a lot. But it was a nice way to start using the internet.
Czech Republic	It required extra planning and preparation. However, we would not be able to do the work without it. We tried to reduce the stress which was mainly linked to using the technology – PCs which are quite old and not too reliable. Also the internet connection often did not worked properly. Fortunately the preparation and planning enabled us to use printed versions and diskettes instead.	Yes	I think it has developed in the sense I had to try to involve ICT more than I would normally do with the technology available.

	Participation meant extra planning	Putting in longer hours	Changes in personal teaching
Iceland	It requires additional planning and preparation in the beginning but it is not stressful at all, unless if you face problems like we did, not getting any "shoe-boxes". But that is perhaps my mistake as a teacher to use other methods.	No	No
Sweden	Extra	No.	No.
Poland	Yes, I think that the work on the project required planning and preparation.	Yes from time to time.	Perhaps a little.
Lithuania	The participation in the project required a lot of my time but for me and my pupils it was more interesting than working in the usual way.	Yes.	Yes.

- Did your participation in the project influence your relationships with other members of staff?
- Did you rely on assistance from school authorities and colleagues? Was this assistance readily available?

	Participation & subsequent staff relationships	Assistance from school authorities and colleagues
Malta	Yes, most of the staff were interested in the project and asked about its progress.	Yes, I did and assistance was always available.
Germany	No	Yes
Estonia	No it did not	I did not need any extra help but the colleagues were helpful indeed.
Slovenia	Most of them were ready to participate in the project	It was. Our school has been involved in many projects: the ECO schools project, the LAs scheme, the COMENIUS project, the healthy schools project. Therefore we live and breathe with the idea of collaborating with each other and other schools in Europe.
Latvia	Some people were interested and asked questions regularly and now I try to encourage them to work more with computer with small kids.	The school authorities were happy that the school takes part in the international project, it gives credit points to school, the head master was happy that I was not afraid to undertake a project like this. I got enormous help from the IT teacher technically.

	Participation & subsequent staff relationships	Assistance from school authorities and colleagues
Norway	No	No, did not need assistance from school authorities.
Hungary	Yes, the class teachers of 4a helped me a lot during the project. We had been good colleagues before but thanks to the project our relationship is closer and better now.	The school management let me do what I was ready to do.
Poland	I had to negotiate with other teachers when and how to use the IT room.	Occasionally I was assisted by two teachers, IT and Arts. However, they did not have more opportunities to help me because of a great number of teaching hours.
Spain	Some of them, specially the ones at the Pre-Primary school, showed great interest in knowing and discussing the project, because the teaching approach is quite similar to the one they have to introduce reading and writing skills. Besides, participating in this kind of project is always a challenge and a pride for the managing team, so anything related to the international dimension is very well appreciated.	Yes, although it wasn't necessary most of the time.
Holland	My colleagues as well as other schools were very interested in the project.	No
Czech Republic	We have nice relationships. I kept them informed and they were interested in our achievements. Another member of the staff participated. My colleague took part in the project with younger pupils. She did very well. The main constraint for her was time.	We did not rely on school authorities and colleagues but if needed they tried to do their best to help.
Iceland	Yes, but not by participation.	Yes with the teachers and headmaster.
Sweden	No	No
Poland	Yes, I was in frequent contact with Danute, Helena and the others.	Yes, a little.
Lithuania	Yes	I had a great deal of moral support from our headmaster while the deputy head, who was so keen on maintaining French language in our school, caused obstacles often enough. The teacher with whom I work together helped very little. Thus I myself made all the material and did all the work (organisation). I had good support from the computer teacher and from a teacher of French who helped me with the excursion in town for a star. The reason for such "help" is the lack of time for preparing the courses. Our teachers are overworked and do not want to take on things that require the sacrifice of their leisure time.

- How difficult was it to prepare the children for the project?
- What do you think your children have learnt as a result of participating in this project?
- From a language learning perspective, how do you think participating in the project has helped or hindered children?

	Preparing children for project	Children's learning	Children's language learning
Malta	It was not difficult as the story lent itself easily.	First of all the children became confident users of computers. They also became encouraged in the use of writing in English without too much supervision. They liked corresponding and thus made many friends.	Language as such was still controlled by teacher, but children wrote more and frequently. They did not remain blocked when writing came along. They wrote more willingly since there was a specific aim for writing. In fact fourteen pupils did better in the English Annual Exam as compared to the Half Yearly exam. I feel this is partly due to the Stars Project.
Germany	No difficulties	There was no evaluation	Helped
Estonia	It was complicated to motivate them as children get excited and tired more quickly then adults. And it took extra time and preparation to prepare all the activities.	They know more about the other countries and take interest in them. They could really practice their English which is most important. My students could also come up with more ideas and see them work in real life (cooking).	I am sure the language of the students has improved.
Slovenia	I took some time to explain.	They have learnt about the diversity of European cultures and the people.	It has provided a lot of practice of the language.
Latvia	They liked the idea immediately. They were proud that they were the group who was chosen for the project and that they would have access to the computers (other young learners don't have it). Practically it wasn't so easy – they didn't have any word processing skills and all the work took a very long time and access to the computers was limited. But, to tell the truth, they acquired the skills quite quickly.	They made a good team after a year working together (it was quite a problem at the beginning of the school year). They learnt more about children's life in different European countries. They feel more comfortable now working with computer. They have learnt some more English. They know how to speak about themselves, their class, school, city and country to the others at their level.	The project has definitely motivated children to learn more English.

	Preparing children for project	Children's learning	Children's language learning
Norway	Easy, children were enthusiastic.	How to use the internet for communication.	The project has helped children to see similarities and differences in cultures. It has helped them see how important good writing skills are. It has helped children to see how the internet can be used to learn from others.
Hungary	It wasn't difficult at all; only it took much longer time to prepare the lesson plans & teaching aids.	How to work together; to appreciate work done by others; to use previously acquired vocabulary in a different situation.	The topics demanded useful extra vocabulary. They acquired items 'taught' by the stars or learnt with the help of the stars easier & more quickly. Hopefully, their reading comprehension skills have developed. Sometimes class management required extra time, thus less time could be devoted to the 'teaching material'.
Poland	It was difficult for them to put their own ideas into practice; that is why they needed instructions and teacher's supervision.	They undoubtedly gained some language skills, especially when vocabulary is concerned.	It did not absolutely hinder children but advantages do not seem very meaningful [children too young?]
Spain	Not difficult at all. Children were captivated by the story from the very beginning and they were very proud of being "the only Spanish school" participating in such great work.	They are more confident, much more autonomous and they can solve little communication problems by themselves. They have learnt more vocabulary than was planned and are quite sure how to use linguistic structures. They have also learnt about other people in other countries, their culture and ways of life. They have leant the importance of commitments and the responsibility of their own work.	They have enjoyed the project so much that they are eager to learn more and more. In my opinion, in language learning motivation is 80% of success.
Holland	It was not difficult because they were very motivated. Keeping them motivated after experiencing failing contacts took more effort.	They learned that the communicative aspect of a language is more important than their fear of making mistakes.	

	Preparing children for project	Children's learning	Children's language learning
Czech Republic	It was not difficult to get them motivated. All of them have enjoyed the project	To use English for communication. The older ones also partly to work with PCs.	I think the need to read the messages in English, discuss them and write the responses helped them to learn and practice the language. They became more secure. It also seems it helped them to raise their confidence when they realised they are able to communicate successfully.
Iceland	Not difficult at all. If you can make them interested in what they are doing.	Working with the computer, the internet, writing letters, getting to know children from different countries, of their age.	I teach 3rd grade. We start English in 5th grade. In this project some pupils showed a lot of understanding. The only help they needed was to write the words. For them this project was a good preparation for following years.
Sweden	Easy	More writing	I think they would have benefited more from contact with 1 school rather than a circuit. The pupils often requested this.
Poland	It requires plenty of patience, reflection and preparation before beginning work.	They learned the discipline of work, how to work in a group, to collaborate in class, to work alone, to do projects, to create poems, to present their ideas.	Certain children did not know very well how to connect.
Lithuania	No, it was not difficult since the children like new things.	The children learned a lot more than usual. Their vocabulary is much richer as is their knowledge of grammar. They learned to work together, their work became much more creative, they are more active during lessons.	

Section D: Technical Issues

- Which of the following were a problem for you:
  1. Lack of access to computers in the school.
  2. Old/slow computers in the school.
  3. Lack of access to the Internet in the school.
  4. Slow Internet access in the school.
  5. Lack of technical proficiency on your part.
  6. Lack of technical proficiency on the children's part.
  7. Any other technical problem you encountered.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
Malta						yes	
Germany	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Estonia	Sometimes the computer lab was not free to be used or there was no Internet connection.		Yes sometimes		If I needed any help I was given it.	They were mostly very good at I.T.	Electricity failed too often
Slovenia		Yes, at the beginning. (Have got new ones now).		Yes, at the beginning.	Yes	Yes	Key of computer room wasn't always available.
Latvia	Yes			Yes	Yes	Yes	
Norway	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Hungary	Yes				Yes	Yes	Only two computers have access to the internet. The one in the classroom is in use all day. I could use it very rarely. The other one is in the deputy head's office and is used mainly for administration.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
							The biggest problem is that only the two ICT teachers are allowed to use the modem. That means that when they are not available at school nobody has access to the internet.
Poland	Yes	50%	No	50%	Yes	Yes	Lack of access to internet at children's houses
Spain		A few of them were really slow, so we took those in turns.			Yes	Yes	Uncontrolled browsing.
Holland	No	No	At the beginning of the project.	No because broadband is installed now.	No	No	No
Czech Republic	Yes	Yes	Yes, occasionally	Yes	Hope not	Only at the beginning. They quickly mastered it & learnt from each other a lot.	
Iceland	No	No	No	No	No	No	No
Sweden	Yes	Yes	Yes				
Poland			Lack of access to the school computer.		Technical knowledge on the part of the learners insufficient, as was mine.		Because of the large number of pupils at the school.
Lithuania				Slow internet connection at school.	Your preparation was insufficient from the technical point of view.		

- Was the Website easy to use?
- Was the Website attractively designed?
- What features/facilities would you have liked to see in the Website?
- Did you find the teachers' forum useful?

	Website easy to use	Website attractively designed	Additional features you wanted	Usefulness of teachers' forum
Malta	Yes	Yes	Nothing comes to mind	Yes very useful
Germany	Yes	Yes	----	Yes
Estonia	Yes it was. Thank you Mario.	Yes, it was OK	----	Not really, as forgot to visit it and it was not reliable to for-ward messages through it.
Slovenia	Yes	Yes	A chat room for teachers.	Yes, although I missed some teachers. They didn't join in at all.
Latvia	Very easy	Very attractive	Everything was there	Extremely useful
Norway	Yes	Yes		Yes
Hungary	Yes I had problems with scanning only	Absolutely. All children liked it		Yes but I could not use it very often because of reasons mentioned above.
Poland	Yes, the website was very friendly to use.	It attracted children's attention since the graphics were colourful and nice to look at.	I do not notice any such features.	The teachers' forum was a very good idea.

	Website easy to use	Website attractively designed	Additional features you wanted	Usefulness of teachers' forum
Spain	Yes	Yes	A kind of "Class profile" or "School profile" only for teachers, telling in detail what type of school are you working in, how many children are per class and so on. I think this would have created a better "sense of community" among the teachers, and the closer the teachers are the better for the children's job.	Very much, but I think we could have used it more. Maybe making "appointments" on the forum, like we did for the first term evaluation, would work.
Holland	Yes	Yes	No	No
Czech Republic	Yes	I think it was adequate to the project aims and expectations of school technologies available. If more advanced technology would be available in general more graphics could have been used – but I think this was discussed & explained in Graz & the simplicity kept on the website was an advantage for schools with old / slow technologies.	More graphics and interactivity but see previous answer.	Yes, it was very useful to see the work done by other people.
Iceland	Yes	Yes	None that I can think of	Yes
Sweden	OK	Yes	----	Never used it
Poland	Yes, sufficient	Yes, interesting.	Nothing	If necessary I could present my considerations
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	----	Just to learn if a star had arrived at its destination

- Did children in your class read what children in other classes posted?
- Did children in your class ever emailed other children in other classes?
- Did children in your class ever receive emails from children in other classes?

	Children read postings of others	Children emailed other children	Children received emails from others
Malta	Yes they did, especially when practical items, such as recipes were inserted in Website.	Yes, one in fact still writes to another girl in Slovenia.	Only from children from Estonia.
Germany	Yes	Yes	Yes
Estonia	Yes, they did. First they were excited about it later they used to read texts with the pictures only.	Yes, they did but there we faced difficulties as in children's case the interest is different as they do not possess any communicative skills and they believe only things they can touch or taste. Their interests in different fields of life are still limited and therefore they have nothing much to write about.	Yes, they did. But as some of the mails were difficult to understand, they could not answer. The school was afraid of viruses and it was not allowed to read the mails for quite a long time. As the class had one e- mail address it was not possible to read the mail if someone had used wrong password for 3 times.
Slovenia	They did.	Yes, they did once but only got two answers and were really disappointed.	Two and one from some Italian primary school who probably visited our website.
Latvia	They did but maybe not as much as I would like them.	A few times, but it was not as much as I would wish.	No. Sometimes teachers did it.
Norway	Yes	Yes but not much due to time	Yes
Hungary	Yes. We tried to find time during the afternoon. I couldn't take them all to the computer together. So they came in groups of 4 or 5. Even the German learners were interested & a little brother from class 3a!	Yes but only few times. Once the Austrian teachers organised a so-called language day & we were given another e-mail address to use. During that morning I had two free lessons & I was sitting in front of the computer all the time trying to catch the messages right away. I invited the children to the Deputy head's office & we started to send our messages. But something must have gone wrong because we were unable to contact each other.	The Austrian language day was a nice try. Another child who drew a nice postcard for the stars got a message; also the Szappanos brothers who took one of the stars to the swimming pool. The messages arrived from Austria.

	Children read postings of others	Children emailed other children	Children received emails from others
Poland	They read it when they had access to the internet at school in English classes. Unfortunately, they were unable to do so at home.	No	Yes, there were emails for the whole class.
Spain	Yes, not only on the screen, but printed on paper, so they could read the texts in class or at home.	Yes, but only for a short time, because we had lots of problems with virus coming via e-mail.	Yes, mainly season greetings (Xmas., St. Valentine, Easter…) and answers to guessing games.
Holland	Yes	Yes	Yes
Czech Republic	Yes. They enjoyed it and tried to respond	They enjoyed it and tried to respond.	However, the individually sent responses did often stay without answers. Maybe because they sent messages to any pupil not just from our circuit.
Iceland	Yes	Yes	No
Sweden	No	No	No
Poland	Very often	From time to time	Yes, several times
Lithuania	Yes	Yes, they sent several messages but they had no reply	Yes, but only two

Section E: ECML support

- Do you feel you were promptly and efficiently supported by the co-ordinating team when the need arose?
- Are you satisfied with the support you were given by the co-ordinating team?
- At which stage of the project do you feel support was mostly needed: beginning, mid-way; end?

	Prompt & efficient support from team	Satisfied with support given by team	Stage of project where support was needed most
Malta	Yes	Yes	Mainly in the beginning, until we got the hang of using the Website
Germany	Yes	Yes	Beginning

	Prompt & efficient support from team	Satisfied with support given by team	Stage of project where support was needed most
Estonia	Yes, I think I could have been.	I do not think I asked for any help.	Rather at the beginning and at the end. Some feedback could have been useful.
Slovenia	Yes, very. Thanks, Mario and Valerie!	Yes	Beginning
Latvia	Definitely	Absolutely	At the beginning
Norway	Yes	Yes	Beginning
Hungary	Yes	We supported each other through our work. I had a closer connection with the Austrian & Latvian schools (received parcel from Austria & sent ours to Latvia).	Before starting the project & after the stay of the 3rd star. During the stay of the 1st star we were curious; during the stay of the 2nd one we started to feel the process; with the 3rd star everyone knew what to do & was enthusiastic. But during the stay of the last star we were tired & under time pressure.
Poland	All the co-ordinating team were very helpful	Yes	Especially at the beginning and at the mid-way to encourage participants to work.
Spain			I think that support is needed all along, because otherwise the initial enthusiasm fades out.
Holland	Yes	The support stopped after the moment the contact with the school in Cyprus was established. The groups were to be rearranged, but that did not take place.	Beginning
Czech Republic	Yes, always.	Yes, thank you	Especially at the beginning
Iceland	Yes	Yes	All the way, as problems can pop up at any time.
Sweden	I never asked for support	I never asked for support.	Beginning
Poland	Yes, very often.	Yes, I was always happy.	At the beginning and at the end.
Lithuania	Yes	Yes	At the beginning.

Section F: Overall comments

- What's the greatest satisfaction you have got from participating in this project?
- What's your greatest disappointment having participated in this project?
- What do you feel was the biggest difficulty/shortcoming of the project?

	Greatest satisfaction	Greatest disappointment	Greatest difficulty/shortcoming
Malta	This was a 'fun' way of learning for the children. For most of them it was the first time they were using the computer to communicate with others. Internet had just been installed in class and they still had no access to email, so the Website was a good – if not better - way of communication. For me it was the first time that I was participating in an inter-schools project and I must say it was very satisfactory.	I wasn't disappointed in any particular thing.	I had thought that there would be more communication among the other countries, although the idea of the circuits was explained in Graz. We always sent the star to the same country and received another star from the same country. We had only contact with these two countries. Not even the fourth country in the circuit was involved. Perhaps more co-ordinating even from the schools themselves could bring about a wider communication. Another drawback, which I found, was the star's album and the class writings. At times it was difficult to distinguish where children had to insert their messages. Our children found it a little difficult to be the star. They wrote more about what they did with the star, and it being at their school.
Germany	Meeting colleagues from different countries.	The lack of time to proceed with the project on my own.	The lack of time to proceed with the project on my own.
Estonia	I could do something different with my students, personal contacts.	The students in different countries did mot make friends.	----

	Greatest satisfaction	Greatest disappointment	Greatest difficulty/shortcoming
Slovenia	Meeting new people and getting to know their culture and getting more familiar with the internet and the internet projects.	I was disappointed because my pupils sent their emails and there was no response. When they sent the stars they weren't informed when the star arrived at its destination (Malta). Later on I realized that their message was on the star's website. I thought it would be nice to get a personal message to my pupils' email address.	Real communication between the pupils and perhaps more of their English with all the mistakes not ours (teachers').
Latvia	The initial meeting in Graz was very practical and interesting. I met many interesting professionals. The excitement of children was good but they didn't always want to do small extra jobs.	That it is over and I can't start it from the beginning with another group of children.	I would like to have more time together with my students and to work more on the project, go deeper, but it is not the project's fault.
Norway	Enthusiastic learners	Lost contacts	None
Hungary	I had a new 'colour' in my teaching job. It was challenging & exciting. Our relationship with the children & their class teachers has improved. I had the chance to get acquainted with new colleagues & learn a lot from them.	I didn't do a good job in using the web.	Ordinary primary schools in Hungary are not equipped enough & teachers are not prepared well to carry out projects like this.
Poland	It is the children's joy while working on the things which were next put on the website.	The lack of access to the internet at school – the reason was a bigger number of I.T.-lessons in our school in the older classes.	In my opinion, this project should be designed for a little older children.
Spain	That ALL children (even the mischievous, slow learners and weak pupils) want to learn more English, or to communicate somehow, and to follow up this project. They are very proud of their work.	That some children never had an answer to their efforts, and that some of them never had anything to tell the others about the countries they were allocated.	Keeping things under control. Kids are so enthusiastic that sometimes they go much too far. From the linguistic perspective I think it is too difficult for children this age to write on the behalf of a third person, so they mixed up all messages from and for the stars and put them indiscriminately on the stars' albums or on the class profile.

	Greatest satisfaction	Greatest disappointment	Greatest difficulty/shortcoming
Holland	The way my pupils worked.	The lack of response from other schools in our circuit.	---
Czech Republic	Both my pupils & I enjoyed the project. Thanks to it we have used the ICT a bit more then we probably would and at the same time we have used it for real communication. Children were quite motivated and interested in the project and new messages even though the other pupils were younger.	None	The biggest difficulty was the age of the children and their proficiency in English. Czech children usually start to learn English (or any other language) at the age of 9 (4th grade). They have great difficulties especially in expressing themselves to respond to the story in the way they would like to. However, they can manage when support of the teacher is provided.
Iceland	To have this "European school-net"	Not getting shoeboxes.	Perhaps that one has to find time to plan and find a way through the curriculum.
Sweden	Preparing an envelope of materials to send to another school	My own lack of time.	The circular contact.
Poland	I did it all the time, the pupils and the parents were happy with this work and for me there was the satisfaction. I presented the project to the school twice.	The work in a large class was difficult for me (27 pupils).	Lack of official information at school from the organisers of the project – lack of money for organising certain activities, making photos, sending parcels, etc.
Lithuania	The report on the visit by Bouncy to our country.	Considerable preparation for the activities and the lack of support of the other French teachers (we have 6 in our school)	The lack of time for the activities

- What was the major strength of the project?
- Would you recommend similar experiences to your colleagues? Why?
- Do you think you will continue to use ICT in language teaching? Why?

	Major strength of project	Recommending experience	Continue to use ICT in language teaching
Malta	The major strength of the project was the story itself which set the children off on the idea of a global, albeit only European, voyage, together with the stars, visiting various countries. The idea of sending the stars travelling was also a great strength. The arrival of each star was a major celebration in the school with the whole administrative team going to Year 5B to witness the opening of the parcel. The children's enjoyment was infectious. The other great strength was the Website, where the children's messages are posted instantly and can thus be viewed by others at the same time. The Website layout and workability was a great idea and kept the children's interest till the end. The fact that photos could be inserted and children could view themselves and others made them feel "at home" with the project.	Yes, I would. Although the greatest difficulty in such projects is the lack of time and there is always the extra work involved to insert such projects in an already-more-than-packed syllabus, nonetheless these projects bring fun to teaching and learning.	Same as previous response
Germany	To motivate the other teachers to support it.	Yes. Because the idea of using the language practically and building a bridge between European countries for children is excellent.	It's part of the curriculum.
Estonia	Yes, I would but it should be more personal.	ICT in language lessons will soon be a must, at least here in Estonia.	Sorry, I am not allowed to use the computer any longer now but I still hope I could be some help.
Slovenia	Using the internet as a teaching tool.	I would because it widens your horizons.	I will because I find this work very rewarding and simply like it!
Latvia	That I saw different ways	Certainly. They will see the	I am sure, I will. Because I

	Major strength of project	Recommending experience	Continue to use ICT in language teaching
	how to use IT for teaching English to Young Learners.	benefits of using the Internet in the teaching process.	can teach English from new aspects, it is a break from the routine and the students get more motivated to study the language.
Norway	Writing for a purpose	See previous answer	Yes it is an excellent tool to support learning
Hungary	It was really motivating for the children. It was something new & exciting for them. They could hardly wait for the next parcel, the next English lessons, the next activities with the stars. It made me think about problems & possible solutions.	Yes (see previous answers)	I know I would have to but I don't think we have the facilities for that at our school. I am dreaming about working together with the ICT teachers but we are somehow isolated from each other due to the lack of time, shortage of computers, financial aspects of having access to the Internet, demands of our own teaching areas etc. It would be ideal to use their computer skills during the language lessons and vice versa; to build on their knowledge & skills in English during the computer classes.
Poland	Its attractive website.	I would recommend such an experience since it is worth trying especially in small groups of children providing that they have some basic IT skills.	I will try to use ICT, however, it will not be the central idea of my teaching.
Spain	The toys made the story come true.	Of course I would and I try to spread the idea all over. Whenever I tell my colleagues about it everybody shows great interest in participating in some way.	Yes, because it works, it is creative, flexible and, if these reasons were not enough, we live in the XXIst century, so it is a must and we have to face ICT with a positive spirit of challenge.
Holland	Motivating the children to share information in a foreign language.	Yes, because it is a possibility to have your pupils contact other pupils in an educational way.	Yes, we already used ICT in all subjects.

	Major strength of project	Recommending experience	Continue to use ICT in language teaching
Czech Republic	Communication. The feeling that "your friends" are quite close, reachable, waiting for you with something interesting on the website.	Yes. I think the pupils found it interesting and it was a really good way to put the language learned into practice.	Yes. I think it is a very useful means for teaching languages which offers a lot of information, allows variety and the same time individual approaches. It attracts pupils' attention and they can get motivated quite easily this way if appropriate activities are chosen. It also allows regular up-dating and real communication with other schools all over the world
Iceland	Easy to use.	Yes, they were all interested.	Yes, because I think it is a part of language teaching.
Sweden	Can't say	Can't answer	Can't say
Poland	The learners can develop a foreign language. They are motivated to learn and to create, the teachers could exchange opinions between the participants	Perhaps	Yes, if the participants were responsible and they respected the rules.
Lithuania	The attractiveness of the site	Yes, because the project gives good ideas for organising teaching and because this way of working is more attractive to the pupils.	Yes, because the courses using information and communication technology are more active and interesting to the pupils.

The contributors

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