

Macrory, G., Chrétien, L. & Ortega-Martin, J. (2012). Technologically enhanced language learning in primary schools in England, France and Spain: developing linguistic competence in a technologically enhanced classroom environment. *Education 3-13: International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education* 40(4), 433-444.

Technologically enhanced language learning in primary schools in England, France and Spain

What this research was about and why it is important

This paper reports on an EU-funded project (Ref: 134244-2007-UK-COMENIUS-CMP) that explored the impact of technology, notably video-conferencing, on primary school children's language learning in England, France and Spain, as it was deemed important to establish the potential of new technologies in supporting language learning. Data were gathered from the children in the project, their teachers and also from trainee teachers placed in the schools, through focus groups and questionnaires. The findings suggest that this technology offers real benefits in the development of intercultural understanding, increases motivation and has interesting implications for language learning processes.

What the researchers did

The six schools in the project were in fact two groups of three: each school in England had a partner in France and one in Spain, thus creating two 'triangular' partnerships:

- The three schools in each partnership followed a shared curriculum, where themes such as 'My school' were taught in language classes in all three countries; they shared resources stored upon the learning platform, and the videoconferencing exchanges between classes were integrated into the scheme of work.
- In each school, two classes were partnered with the classes of the same or similar age in the other two schools (one English–Spanish link, one English–French link and one French–Spanish link). All children were in the upper primary age range, from ages 8 to 11.
- All children were asked the same questions, which were agreed in advance and translated into all three languages. In order to ascertain the perceptions of the teachers and teacher trainees placed in the schools, data were collected through a combination of questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, again with the same questions translated as appropriate.

What the researchers found

- **Development of intercultural understanding:** enjoyment and an acceptance of difference; even more striking was the issue of cultural similarity; children regarded each other as friends.
- **Impact upon motivation:** motivated by speaking and listening and interacting with real children their own age; children's confidence increased as the technology became more familiar.
- **Language learning processes:** confidence reflected in their ability to both risk making errors and acceptance of others' mistakes; developing a desire for independence from the teacher.

Things to consider

- > Videoconferencing has positive benefits as far as speaking and listening skills are concerned.
- > Appropriate pedagogy needs to be developed – notably the choice of target language and the use of code-switching and code-mixing in authentic communication.
- > Learners need to develop communication strategies integral to authentic, purposeful and spontaneous communication.
- > The place of intercultural understanding and content in language learning and the relationship of these to linguistic progression is of central concern.
- > Finally, there is the question of what happens when children who have experienced this innovative approach to language learning transfer to secondary education and may have to face a change in teaching approach.

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