

Chapter 61

eTwinning Project: A Virtual Orchestra

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ABSTRACT

This chapter aims to explore new possibilities in musical, social, and cooperative learning offered by new technologies. The author worked on an electronic twinning project creating a virtual European orchestra (choral and instrumental). It was formed by pupils from 6 to 19 years in 5 countries: Italy, Greece, Turkey, Spain, and UK. The common goal was to create a spirit of community, both among young people than among teachers who do overcome the difficulties of communication and enhance commonality and specificity. Music was chosen as subject because of its valences in multidisciplinary and inclusive educational activities. Some of the pupils had special needs, and they were very involved in the project. At the same time, the Greek Music School's pupils created a Braille Scores' Library for their schoolfellows. Participants used the European eTwinning platform (part of the Lifelong Learning Program of the European Community) to communicate, exchange files, and publish some of the works.

INTRODUCTION

The school where I work is a Comprehensive School in a village of 9000 inhabitants of Basilicata in Southern Italy. It was a center for agricultural economics, in the 1970s saw an industrial development but is now in serious crisis, with strong repercussions on family ties and training opportunities available to young people. Ours is the only primary school in the country, state,

and has occasionally collaborated with some cultural associations of the area for small events (contests, civic and/or religious celebrations) but never long-term planning goals and activities that had continuity.

In this context, some teachers felt very much reduced their chances of renovation and expansion of professional tools, crystallized from a local context that seemed to ignore the indications that arrive, at both national and European level, so

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we need to extend the operational skills but also cultural horizons and opportunities for exchange and teamwork, both for pupils and for teachers.

We wanted to work in music because here the country band tradition is still alive, there is already a degree in Secondary School specializing in music and many young people follow the courses in the Conservatory of Matera. What is missing is a public music education for children under 11 years.

We considered the eTwinning projects (European distance Twinning) a response to those needs consistent with the limited financial resources available and feasible autonomy even by a small group of colleagues. In fact, the eTwinning enable teachers and pupils to work in teams at a distance, using ICT commonly most schools have available. In our case we started on the school year 2007/08 and had available in a classroom with some PCs, a camera and a digital camera and an internet connection to 56 kb. Over the years I got the ADSL and LIM in both complexes involved.

Another important element that we did adopt this mode of work was the possibility of being followed, monitored and supported by national and NSS provides updates on national and European directives, care refresher courses (both online and physical), examines projects for which you are requesting QLabels, giving directions and evaluations very useful for the design later.

Each year the number of classes and teachers involved, ranging from a minimum of 2 to 5 classes, 4 to 9 teachers (in the Italian school).

BACKGROUND

We wondered about how much and in what ways we used music in our teaching: stimulus element, integrating background, specific learning goal-technical executive, sensory belt to facilitate other activities. We were interested to compare our experiences with other colleagues working in a variety of situations as possible and, simul-

taneously, offer our students the opportunity to experience the relationship with others through a channel such as that of their loved-music sound.

Many of Italian teachers hadn't a specific musical education, but experienced how music is one of best icebreaking activities for pupils. The twinning was an occasion to have help from more expert colleagues, to learn and apply the tools in real contexts, both for teachers and pupils. The Music Schools' pupils practised very hard but needed real occasions to use their abilities to make a product that could be used in other contexts: arrangements made to measure for the orchestra and special needs schoolfellows, playing their instruments, making translations, mixing sound tracks. Younger pupils used sound tracks to sing and play rhythmic instruments and it was very exciting to use their twinnings instead of commercial ones.

In everyday life most of our children used a lot of technological tools (as CDs, DVDs, MP3 readers, electronic games) They used to see PowerPoint presentations and videos, to find pictures in the net. Their approach to all technological instruments was just as consumers. Few of them had no access to new technologies because of their family background and had never used a digital camera or a PC. In both the situations the school had to help them to enter the ICT world in a more creative and active way.

So we started to make recordings, presentations, and videos, not just use ready-made ones. Our products were born to share ideas, to build up new products, to help each other to overcome difficulties: ICT were means we must know to use at their best, not something to buy because it's charming.

This required to plan school activities that helped pupils to become planners of their work (that is not so easy, especially for younger ones), to develop their critical abilities to choose among different patterns and proposals, to learn to share their ideas and accept critical essays. We think these abilities are really important in growing up as good citizens and workers.

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