

Developing global publishing opportunities for teachers and their pupils in curriculum exchange projects

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Bringing people closer together from around the world almost always has a beneficial effect. In this spirit, at the BETT12 exhibition in London in January teachers and learners from other countries came together to find out about each other's schools and ways of working in order to gain new insights. The events was run by members of the [World Ecitizens](#) charity which was set up by teachers in the [MirandaNet Fellowship](#) to give a web voice to learners all over the world. Teachers and community leaders send all kinds of artefacts for publication, for example: peace posters from six year olds in England; Chinese theatre makeup from children in Beijing; and, concerns about pollution from Russia. When they publish each young learner receives a World Ecitizens certificate as an award for reaching out.

In schools in the UK schools and other developed countries, schools already reach out to their own communities regularly use text messaging to contact parents, whether that is to chase up absences, get out notices, or to celebrate and congratulate. Some schools even use Facebook to creating an online community to reinforce their regular one. Indeed, the role of technology in connecting teachers and learners across the world seems obvious, with email, video-conferencing and online resources such as blogs and wikis coming to mind. But the reality is that access to technology across the globe is very varied.

In his presentation Benjamin Semwayo, who teaches in London but still keeps a very close eye on what is happening in his native Zimbabwe, suggested that despite 95% of students there having a mobile phone access to computers, and to the Internet, is very limited. Even in universities the available hardware is inadequate, and trained teachers leave college with few skills, but there are almost no machines in schools anyway. He made the point that in South Africa Facebook only has 3% penetration (although doubling every seven months). One of the possible factors in this limited access to the Internet is that some governments like it that way, particularly following the role of social networks in the Arab Spring uprisings of the previous twelve months.

Even in countries with heavy investment in technology teacher skills can be an issue. David Obst from the University of Dresden, talking about his study into the use of interactive whiteboards in Physics teaching in schools – where his state had spent around €9million on them – concluded that they were not well used. But that this was not the fault of the teachers, there had simply not been enough money spent on training. A recurring theme that brought many nods from around the room.

In Turkey the government is planning to equip every school child with a tablet, reported Dicle Kortantamer, but again, without investing in training the teachers in making them effective tools for learning. This was one of the catalysts for a grass-roots teacher-training programme, with staff giving up their weekends to give and receive training, to cause a ripple effect to improve classroom practice. See more at <http://www.words2inspire.org>.

Teacher led professional development is also at the heart of the e-Twinning programme discussed by Ann Gilleran, already involving 150,000 teachers across 33 countries, from Northern Europe through to Tunisia, Egypt, Georgia and Ukraine. This community of practice helps bring teachers with similar interests together and provides an online 'Twin Space' to share ideas and resources. Initial interest can be expressed through www.etwinning.net.

Already working together are the schools of Podar in India, and the Cheam Pre-Prep in southern England. Teachers have not only visited each other's establishment, but taught alongside each other, and learnt about, as Marion Scott-Baker, Head teacher of Cheam puts it, "British creativity, and Indian thoroughness." (<http://www.mirandanet.ac.uk/casestudies/271>)

Scott-Baker also talked about the UK drive to teach all children phonics, and for the necessity of them using this knowledge to be able to read by the age of six, an assertion that struck this writer as ripe for a World Ecitizens project with countries that do things differently. Finland, for instance, where formal learning starts at seven, yet has possibly the highest outcomes of any European country. Or Holland, perhaps, where formal reading lessons don't start until the age of seven and a lower incidence of dyslexia is found.

At the end of the programme teachers from the many countries represented were keen to talk together about projects they might run jointly ... There is no doubt that the children and teachers alike will learn much from observing each others practice, adapting their own in the light of new insights and publishing their findings on the MirandaNet and the World Ectizens websites.

Resources from this MirandaNet event can be found at:

<http://www.mirandanet.ac.uk/mirandamods/mirandamods-at-bett/bett12/>