Enriching The Curriculum

Dissolving Boundaries Project.
Heatherbank Special School took part in the Dissolving Boundaries during the academic year 2003-2004.

The Dissolving Boundaries Project is designed to support schools in N. Ireland and the Republic of Ireland to engage in collaborative curricular projects using computer and video conferencing. It aims to integrate ICT in the curriculum and use ICT for inter-cultural school links. In N. Ireland this project is funded by the Department of Education and is managed by the University of Ulster.

In Heatherbank two teachers, Mrs N. Grant and Mrs W. Winters coordinated the project and nine Year 11 pupils took part. Heatherbank was well matched with Scoil Bernadette, Cork, a school that also caters for children with mild learning difficulties. The link teacher was Miss F. Kelly and from the outset both pupils and staff had a great relationship with the partner school.

The three strands to the project were: Video conferencing, computer conferencing and a face-to-face meeting. Videoconferencing took place every week for about an hour and many different approaches were used from discussion forums to quizzes and poetry readings, all of which required much preparation. Computer Conferencing was done as often as was possible but this was a slower process with MLD pupils. It was however good for teasing out ideas to be used in Video-conferencing. The face-to-face meeting with the partner school was an overnight stay in Galway.

The benefits of the project were many. The pupils improved their ICT skills through the weekly video and computer conferencing and the setting up of a website. Their communication and thinking skills were well enhanced.

Both staff and pupils enjoyed the Dissolving Boundaries experience and it certainly developed everyone’s cultural awareness. The face-to-face meeting in Galway was particularly successful and it made the video-conferencing more meaningful as it developed friendships and higher quality exchanges among the pupils.

A virtual visit to the US House of Representatives,
Seventy 'A'Level politics students “meet” and dialogue with Congressman Jim Walsh for almost ninety minutes!

“This is the best thing that has happened in the study of ‘A’ Level politics in the twenty years that I have been teaching the subject.” (WELB Teacher)

A Geography lesson from a distance.
KS 4 pupils enjoy an interactive lesson from teachers in The Liberty Science Center, New Jersey and take a virtual trip to the Hudson River Estuary.

“A great way of bringing learning to life.” (WELB pupils, KS4)

Storytelling across the Atlantic.
KS 3 pupils and their American peers are held spellbound by the tales of an African-American storyteller. Pupils tell him stories from their culture in return.

“I liked watching his [storyteller's] face. His expression kept changing. That really brought the story alive.” (WELB pupil)

“It was the proudest day of my life. To think that I actually told a story by videoconference to a whole class in an American school! I felt really good about having done it.” (WELB pupil)

Rural primary school in a series of three-way videoconferences with schools in Norway and Italy.

“This is a most valuable experience for the pupils of this school. Most of them have never
been out of Northern Ireland and are not likely to be in the near future.” (School principal)

Urban post-primary school in Virtual Shared Classroom Project
A WELB post-primary school linked up weekly by videoconference with a middle school in New Jersey for a shared lesson. They collaborated in a curriculum enrichment history project. Project teams were composed of pupils from both sides of the Atlantic. They used the Internet for research and communicated by email before the shared lesson. Learning was enhanced by some team-teaching and by sharing experts.

"I never thought learning could be such fun!” (WELB pupil)

**Across Three Continents: Global Youth Forum.**
Young people from a WELB youth club dialogue about youth issues with peers in USA and South Africa.

"The most amazing experience of my life. Actually seeing the other young people made it all so real. We have all so much in common.” (WELB youth club participant)

**Across the Irish Border: Cross-Connect Project.**
Senior pupils in small rural secondary schools along the Irish border receive weekly tutorials in oral French by videoconference. The tutors were native French speakers who were studying at the Magee campus of the University of Ulster.