

languages ICT

Technology for languages

Focus on videoconferencing for languages

Videoconferencing has the unique advantage of bringing learners of languages into direct real-time contact with their counterparts in countries where the target language is spoken. They can exchange personal information, share learning tasks, take part in role plays, enact dramas, participate in games and, above all, communicate in the target language. The suggestions laid out in this document present some of the many possibilities of videoconferencing as a tool in enhancing language learning.

Getting to know you

This activity can be used with learners of any age and is appropriate when pupils are meeting for the first time face-to-face via a videoconference link. The idea of the activity is that individuals speak to camera and their counterparts have to guess the identity of the person from data sent by email prior to the date of the videoconference.

The level of linguistic input will vary according to the age, and level of competence of the pupils. Beginners at Key Stage 2 or 3 may simply make some very brief personal statements while A-Level learners should be able to provide a more complex picture of themselves, perhaps with references to their interests, greatest achievements or fears and family history. It is important that key distinguishing information is included in both what is sent to the partner school and what is broadcast on the day of the videoconference.

Small classes make this activity very manageable but a variation would be for pupils to speak as a group of four and their counterparts have to work out who is who in the group. They could send information under the group's name with a brief portrait of each member of the group. One member of the group speaks to camera initially and the class in the partner school has to identify the group. Other members of the group then come to camera and their counterparts abroad are allowed to ask a limited number of questions to guess the identity of the group member on camera.

Drama

The object of the activity is to present a small drama on a theme agreed with the partner school abroad. The theme might be cultural or historical, or focus on the daily lives of the pupils. If, for example, a small drama is enacted on the theme of school rules, not only do pupils gain insights into each others' school lives but a linguistic focus could be developed around verbs of forbidding, allowing, advising and obligation: "we have to wear a tie", "it is forbidden to bring a mobile phone to school".

As with all videoconferencing activities, detailed preparation and exchange of data is important to guarantee success.

Sharing learning tasks

Pupils may develop presentations or photo stories about specific themes agreed between the two schools; festivals, neighbourhoods, shopping and so on. The two parties need to agree

both themes and target grammar to be covered. Pupils could be in contact with each other beforehand to ask and answer questions on specific vocabulary or how to express specific ideas in the target language.

How do you say?

With a specific linguistic focus, pupils could be set the goal of finding out how to express certain ideas in the target language. They could contact their peers abroad by email before the videoconference and then construct a presentation or photo story in which they use as many of the target expressions as possible. Each set of pupils could be set the task of listening and identifying how and when these expressions were used and if they were used correctly. Pupils can speak to camera afterwards and mention one example of an expression used well and one where some improvement could be made.

Developing intercultural awareness

Young learners may perform a dance and song relating to the area in which they live. This could be adapted at certain times of the year to a celebration of festivals such as Christmas when traditional carols may be sung. Photos of traditional dance or Christmas decorations could also be shared during the videoconference.

Older pupils may take digital photos to illustrate the history or architectural heritage of their city or region. These could be shown to camera while pupils provide a spoken commentary, incorporating as wide a range of structures and specialist language as possible.

What's in the box?

Place an object in a box positioned in front of the camera and invite pupils in the partner school to ask questions to ascertain what the object is. Limit the number of questions to be asked and, if desired, limit answers to simply "Yes" or "No". Points can be awarded and a winning side declared at the end of the videoconferencing session.

Tongue twisters

Pupils in each school prepare a set of tongue twisters which they will recite to camera for their counterparts to repeat. This could be great fun but it may be necessary to also hold up cards on which the text of the tongue twister is printed. As is customary with tongue twisters, the fun comes from trying to repeat the phrase as many times as possible with increasing speed.

Proverbs and sayings

Proverbs are shorthand ways of conveying a message or lesson and their meaning is not always clear to a foreign learner of the language. With careful swapping of information beforehand, pupils could enact a scenario to illustrate a proverb or saying and their peers have to identify correctly the proverb or saying in question.

Marketing seminar

Advanced learners may conduct research into their city or region, its geography, transport links, educational and health infrastructure, cultural life, and leisure facilities. They would then prepare a presentation in the role of city "ambassadors" conducting a videoconferencing seminar with their peers in the partner school who play the part of interested delegates from the administrative headquarters of their city or region. The object would be to attract investment from that region and establish twinning links.

A question and answer session can follow the presentation. The activity could be repeated at

a later date but with roles reversed.

This activity is cross-curricular and, in addition to the background research, requires careful linguistic preparation and collation of resources such as digital photos or video clips to use in the presentation. It gives learners an opportunity to develop learning skills, all four language skills and presentational and communication skills.

Other activities

Video conferencing can be used to advantage in many other situations, some of which are listed below.

Teacher to teacher CPD: local consortia or regional networks of teachers meet via a videoconference to discuss and explore curriculum changes or newly released policy documents.

Remote or distance learning: videoconferencing can be used to deliver lessons to pupils in schools located in remote areas. One teacher may be shared across many schools, thus enabling pupils to access the full range of curriculum subjects.

Cross-curricular initiatives: museums, art galleries, visitor centres or sites of historical or scientific interest may be accessed via videoconferencing. For example, pupils studying French may link to a museum in France for a videoconferencing session or lecture on The First World War.

Teachers interested in joint activities using videoconferencing should visit **JANET Collaborate**, a free service for those wishing to collaborate with museums, galleries, archives and other teachers both in the United Kingdom and abroad.

Where to look

Becta Research Reports and Publications Videoconferencing:

http://partners.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=rh&catcode=_re_rp_02&rid=13659

Becta: How to use videoconferencing effectively in your classroom:

http://schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=tl&catcode=ss_tl_use_02&rid=5223

Becta Leadership and Management - Videoconferencing in the classroom (downloadable):

<http://schools.becta.org.uk/index.php?section=lv>

Devon Education Services Videoconferencing in the classroom (book):

www.deseducation.org/eshop

Global Leap Videoconferencing in the classroom: www.global-leap.com

JANET Collaborate: www.janetcollaborate.ac.uk

The Lighthouse for Education: Videoconferencing: <http://tlfe.org.uk/ict/videoconferencing>