

languages ICT



Technology for languages • Focus on text-based on-line communication

Please note that on-line communication of any type requires careful consideration of security issues to ensure your duty of care for pupils. Refer to your school's Acceptable Use Policy and visit the DfES Superhighway Safety website at <http://safety.ngfl.gov.uk> for guidance.

Where pupils are communicating with native speakers, particularly in more open contexts, pupils may need to be briefed on strategies for coping with more colloquial and possibly inaccurate language.

Spinning a yarn

Using a **text messaging** program such as Microsoft Messenger or Text ICQ, pupils can work at a distance with a partner to complete a story. Such an activity can be in class time or as a homework task, between classmates or pupils in different schools. Content can vary from daily routine information to the very imaginative and creative, depending on pupils' language level. Each pupil writes one sentence at a time, then sends the message back to their partner for an immediate response. When finished, pupils should check their work for errors and send it to their teacher's ID or copy and paste it into a Word document.

Getting to know your FLA

A secure **notice board** set up with a program such as Yahoo Groups can be used for a class or even the whole school to learn more about the foreign language assistant (FLA) in anticipation of his/her arrival. A class decides on one or more questions to ask the FLA, then posts them on the notice board. When the FLA is next on-line, s/he posts responses for the class to read. This strand of correspondence will continue to grow alongside each of the original questions for all to see. Where budget allows, target language magazines or other material could be made available both to the FLA and to pupils to prompt discussion. A group could also be given the task of writing up any interesting information into an article for publication via the school newsletter or website.

Group work on-line

Pupil collaboration on a group project, such as the creation of a target language brochure, can be encouraged via a secure **notice board** set up using Yahoo Groups, for example. The task is split according to ability or interest and discussion of findings and composition of the final product takes place via the notice board, with the teacher keeping an eye on progress and quality over time. Pupils can thus collaborate on homework or over holiday periods and projects are not delayed by forgotten work. Where more advanced students are collaborating on an international project, the language of communication can include the target language.

Verb challenge

This is a task for a group communicating via synchronous **text chat**, using a secure chat room set up with a program such as Yahoo Groups. Pupils decide on which order to take their go and are given a notional ten points each, as well as a list of sentences in various tenses. The challenge starts a first pupil converting the first sentence into another tense; a second pupil then rewrites the sentence using a further tense, and so on. If a pupil cannot continue, s/he just types in the next sentence from the original list in the tense given. S/he would then lose a point if another member of the group can post in an additional tense for the previous sentence. If you have limited time available, simply reduce the number of starting points. An FLA may be helpful to help adjudicate.



Educational debate

Some websites linked to well-known associations and/or publications (e.g. Unicef, National Geographic) include public **notice boards** aimed at native-speaking teenagers. These are often vetted carefully and can offer valuable opportunities to more advanced learners to read others' contributions and post their own opinions on current affairs and global issues, acquiring useful topic-based vocabulary as they go. As always, a pseudonym or first name only should be used for such public exchange.

Public notice boards for children

A small number of websites exist which provide public yet moderated **notice boards** aimed at young native speakers of the target language. Such notice boards are often organised into categories, such as Film or Sport, where young people with similar interests can exchange opinions. This type of activity can be used to support topic-based project work, providing useful new vocabulary in context, and can be done in class time. Once UK pupils have read contributions made, they can post a message with their comments and ask a question of their own to gather views relating to specific elements of their project. One such example is www.kindernetz.de/quasselbude/foren. As always, a pseudonym or first name only should be used for such public exchange.

Open chat rooms for children

Similar to public notice boards, some websites also include open yet moderated **text chat** facilities aimed at young native speakers of the target language. Such chat rooms are live at given times after school or at weekends, allowing young people to exchange messages in the knowledge that a responsible adult is on hand reading everything that is written. Action is taken immediately, should anyone make an inappropriate contribution. One such example is www.kindernetz.de/quasselbude/chat. It is a good idea to discuss useful target language vocabulary with pupils in advance, such as 'I don't understand', 'Can you type complete words, please?' etc. Where a group of pupils is researching a specific topic, they could also draw up relevant questions in class, such as 'Do you have a school uniform?', 'What does it look like?', 'Do you like it?', etc. They then visit the chat room from school or home, bringing the answers to the next lesson. As always, a pseudonym or first name only should be used for such public exchange.

To read about tried and tested ideas for text-based on-line communication, try searching the *Useful ICT ideas, effective language lessons* database on the Languages ICT website (www.languages-ict.org.uk).

Note: reference to specific software products or websites does not imply endorsement by CILT, the National Centre for Languages nor ALL.