eTwinning: a case of ICT-enabled Innovation for Learning in Europe

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What is eTwinning

www.etwinning.net

European Commission-funded initiative
Scale and geographical coverage

- 33 countries
- 1 CSS - 35 NSSs
- 25 languages
- 190,000+ registered users
- 100,000+ schools
- 26,000+ projects
- (~5,000 active)

**Policy goals** (Barcelona European Council in March 2002): to promote school twinning as an opportunity for all students to learn and practice ICT skills and to promote awareness of the multicultural European model of society.
Figure 3. eTwinning evolution from project towards more diversified professional development offers

Source: Vuorikari, 2010
Cross-border collaboration and networking

- Visualisation techniques
- Social Network Analysis (SNA)
- Prospective scenario building
Key characteristics

- mainly a blended teachers network (online/offline activities) that brings many existing school collaboration and school outreach projects under the same umbrella
- part of the EU's Comenius programme which aims (for students and teachers) to better understand the range of European cultures, languages and values
- key features: Cross-border school projects, formal and informal professional development, social networking tools
- low bureaucracy, easy to set up a project or participate in PD activities
- free of “user” cost and safe
- (some) recognition (formal and informal)
- evaluation and support mechanisms in place, both at local and European level
- constant development - respond to teachers’ needs (e.g. Groups, workshops)
Main stakeholders involved and their roles

- **European Commission**: has initiated and has been funding eTwinning
- **European Schoolnet**: a network of 33 Ministries of Education in Europe and beyond, which coordinates at European level eTwinning through the Central Support Service (CSS)
- **National Support Services (NSSs)**: training and support (face-to-face, by phone and online) to participating schools, at national or regional level
- **Ambassadors**: experienced eTwinning practitioners, who share their experience and knowledge with other teachers who are interested in eTwinning
- **eTwinners**: teachers of any subject area, headmasters, librarians and other educational staff (e.g. special need teachers, ICT coordinators...) from the 33 participating countries who freely participate in eTwinning projects and in the CPD activities organized by the CSS and NSSs
- **Students**: they are involved in the eTwinning projects that school staff in their schools design and implement
Learners & learning outcomes targeted

- from pre-school education to upper secondary schools (age 3-19) providing general, vocational and technical education
- all school staff members (teachers, librarians, head teachers etc.) from schools in the 33 participating countries
- cross-border projects (between a minimum of two schools from two countries)
- interdisciplinary, project-based learning
- development of transversal soft skills such as collaboration, communication, problem solving, creativity and cultural awareness (Pedagogical Advisory Group)
- balance of ICT- and classroom-based activities, fit into the national curricula
- teaching and learning more fun, meaningful, and engaging
Technology used and its role in innovation

- existing and mainstream technologies (e.g. forum, chat)
- Project work mainly through the password protected Desktop and TwinSpace
- eTwinning projects can take advantage of other suitable ICT tools (e.g. for videoconferencing, blogging etc) which are available outside of the eTwinning portal (‘invisible’ eTwinning)
- the available technologies (inside and outside eTwinning portal) are used in diverse settings and in many different ways
- one of the most important features of eTwinning is that offers a safe and supportive virtual environment to the community of schools in Europe
What outcomes eTwinning has achieved

- promotes school and teachers collaboration in Europe through the use of ICT - crossing national barriers
- focuses mainly in four interrelated and interconnected areas: the promotion of life-long learning, the endorsement of collaboration, the development of communication skills and the development of intercultural awareness through the exploitation of ICT
- for teachers: de-privatisation of teaching, sharing ideas and materials, discussing common interests, running joint projects, professional development
- for students: opportunities to collaborate with peers with different cultural and linguistic background and develop soft skills (e.g. linguistic and cultural competences)
- for schools: part of vision and mission (e.g. ICT, internationalisation, collaboration, project based learning)
- a good means to integrate ICTs in teaching and learning practices
Evaluation mechanisms

- Annual reports from NSSs and CSS
- Monitoring and analysis by EUN (case studies, statistics, SNA, publications…)
- The eTwinning Label is granted to projects that are approved by the NSSs
- The Quality Label is awarded at national level, after application
- The European Quality Label is awarded at European level
- The European eTwinning Prizes, an annual competition which began in 2006, are awarded to schools that have run high quality eTwinning projects.
- Prizes are also awarded at national level but different rules and procedures are followed by the NSSs
Main barriers reported

- only 3.3% of European teachers (innovators, early adopters) are eTwinners
- difficult to monitor how the “invisible eTwinning” (online/offline) takes place outside the portal
- technology is still a barrier for many teachers
- project work is often not integrated into curricula
- recognition is not equal in all countries
- mainly not part of initial teachers training (ITT)
- not all teachers find eTwinning suitable for their subjects
- limited involvement of head teachers
- usually absence of school policy and vision
- limited local dissemination (regional representatives)
- project work is usually not part of the assessment
Professional development/training opportunities
Not only a community for schools but also a teachers’ professional development network

**Target:** School staff

**Mechanisms:**
- European-wide Professional Development Workshops (by CSS)
- European and national conferences: by CSS and NSSs
- Online learning events (short intense course on a topic)
- Online and f2f workshops (organized by eTwinning Groups and NSSs)
- Peer-to-peer learning (e.g. Projects, Groups, Teachers Rooms, School Teams)

Vuorikari, 2010
Top-down or bottom-up innovation?

- Providing resources, support and dissemination to encourage innovation
- Pedagogical/technical advise to teachers at local level

- Scale-free (social) network created by bottom-up interactions (online and/or offline)
- Shift of innovation 'ownership' to teachers
- Involvement of stakeholders (e.g. parents) at local level

- EC: initiative and funding
- CSS: developing, monitoring, supporting, evaluating – European level
- NSSs: supporting structures – national level

- Providing data & evidences of bottom-up innovations (case studies, good practices)
- Teachers-innovators as change agents
Reflections
What are the most important impacts #1

- Much more than an online support tool to promote ICT at schools - a grassroots community for knowledge exchange and a catalyst for change in many schools
- ICT is a means for promoting pedagogical innovation (project-based pedagogies, authentic learning, play…) challenging teaching and learning practices
- Contributes to the fostering of transversal soft skills (e.g. collaboration, communication) at both teacher and student level
What are the most important impacts #2

- Co-operation among staff creates opportunities for social and emotional support, exchange of ideas and practical advice.
- Safe and supportive space for experimentation and sharing. It can enhance professionalism, feelings of self-efficacy and prevent stress and “burnout”
- Formal and informal Professional Development through f2f and/or online collaboration
  - Within the school, e.g. eTwinning School Teams
  - Across schools, e.g. projects, networking
  - With other stakeholders, e.g. online learning events, national-international f2f meetings
Key existing factors for sustainability

- **European Commission support**: “eTwinning is much more than an online support tool to promote ICT at schools. It has created a grassroots community and become a catalyst for change in many schools. This is all thanks to enthusiasm of thousands of teachers and pupils. The Commission has proposed to expand eTwinning as part of the new 'Erasmus for All' programme from 2014-2020 to make it a platform for all schools that co-operate across borders with EU support.” Androulla Vassiliou, European Commissioner for Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth ([http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20120401_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/education/news/20120401_en.htm))
- **Stable funding**: The draft budget of Comenius for 2013 foreseen a total of 11,700,00€ for eTwinning (2,300,000 for CSS and 9,400,000 € for the NSSs)
- **Growing teachers social network**
- **Research findings on effectiveness**
What are the prospects for its scalability?

Scale-up through
• expanding in more countries (Erasmus for all)
• student-initiated projects
• attempts to become integral part of national curricula, teachers ITT and PD (more recognition)
• involving more stakeholders such as educational authorities, school advisors, head teachers…
• dissemination at regional (Ambassadors) & school level (School Teams)

E-Twinning reach (2012)*

3.3%


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\text{* \# of eTwinners} \quad \text{total \# of teachers}
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Conclusions

eTwinning

- contributes to educational change and diffusion of ICT-enabled innovation for learning across Europe
- contribute to teachers’ continuous professional development and lifelong learning
- need a wider take-up in order to have an impact at system level
Mapping eTwinning against the ICT-enabled innovation mapping framework
References

- Vuorikari et al. (2012). Teachers Networks – today’s and tomorrow’s challenges and opportunities for teaching profession. European Schoolnet
Thank you for your attention!

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http://is.jrc.ec.europa.eu/pages/EAP/SCALECCR.html