

About icEurope

icEurope – Intercultural Communication in Europe – is a research and development project funded by the EU Lifelong Learning Programme / Comenius.

It is coordinated by the Chair of Applied English Linguistics at the University of Tübingen, Germany and involves five partner institutions from Bulgaria, Germany, Hungary, Italy and Turkey.

The project team has been exploring the use of the internet and web collaboration for intercultural learning in the English language classroom with 4 teachers and 80 secondary school students from all the partner countries (except Germany).

Parallel to this, teacher workshops on using web tools for foreign and intercultural language learning have been carried out by each local icEurope team.

icEurope – up to date

• Web collaboration pilot study finished with great success

The icEurope team has reached an important milestone: after many months of planning and piloting, the 6 months long web collaboration course finished at the end of May. A very successful time of working together has come to an end. A big thank you to all who have participated with all their energy and a lot of motivation to make this pilot course and study possible! Much has been accomplished there! To all our icEurope teachers and students: have a good summer!

The research teams now are continuing along the project path: they are evaluating and analyzing the course's outcomes from pedagogic and linguistic perspectives for the icEurope booklet on web collaboration in the foreign language classroom. The booklet – a guide book with accompanying online materials – will be available as print and online publications from December 2010.

• Teacher workshops in full swing – some places still available

Since March, all the project partners have been carrying out teacher workshops on using web collaboration and Moodle to foster authentic intercultural foreign language learning in the English secondary classroom. The workshops will continue throughout 2010 and some places are still available. Also, many partners offer workshops at institutions. If you are interested in this opportunity or in participating in a local workshop, just contact one of the icEurope members.

Issue

2

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icEurope News



This issue

Taking a walk in the park: Intercultural foreign language learning through web collaboration.

Comments from the students.

Taking a glimpse at the course.

icEurope Web Collaboration Piloting

Web collaboration (aka telecollaboration) projects allow learners to get in touch with other learners of the language in an authentic and communicative way.

Within icEurope, the team created a constructivist Moodle learning environment where the learners negotiated intercultural topics and contents with their peers to explore and deepen their own English.

One of the main aims was to heighten their awareness of intercultural aspects and to give them the opportunity to practice communicative means and strategies relevant for successful intercultural dialogue.

In mixed international online teams with members from Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy and Turkey, the students discussed topics on intercultural awareness, food, customs, and local and international music. Each international team was guided by one of the four local teachers.

The course lasted from December 2009 until late May 2010.

A demo course is available from www.iceurope-project.eu

Taking a Walk in the Park: Intercultural Foreign Language Learning through Web Collaboration

Web 2.0 seems to be all around: Twittering, blogging, chatting, facebooking and more are the ways for communication for teens and twens and many beyond. And these tools have also made their way into the foreign language classroom in schools and at universities.

Taking a walk in the park on the way to intercultural online exchange

But why would a teacher or trainer want to use such tools? And if so, how?

Web 2.0 tools can connect learners across time and around the globe. Without leaving their home or classroom, students and teachers can get in touch with others through the internet. Together, they can work on a common topic or solve problems in an international online team while using the foreign language quite naturally. This is where 'intercultural web collaboration' starts out.

It can include single tools (e.g. a blog, wiki, forum, chat) or make use of a full 'virtual classroom' on a learning platform like Moodle. It can cover one topic or many. It can be large or small, long or short.

Just like any classroom exchange needs its thorough planning from phone calls over research to checklists, bookings, student training and final packing, so does that of building a course for intercultural online exchange. But to reassure you: if you have ever planned and carried out a school exchange or class trip before, planning such a course will be (almost) like a walk in the park.

What gear do you need on the way to your own web collaboration course for intercultural foreign language learning? Your standard bag of methods and teaching materials, some ideas for topics, curiosity in web tools, a partner class, and access to the internet for yourself and your classes.

Where does it come from?

The following tips and suggestions build on our experience from the European Comenius project icEurope. This is web collaboration on the larger scale: four classes of 80 teenagers (10th and 11th grades) from Bulgaria, Hungary, Italy and Turkey worked together on intercultural topics between January and May 2010. Their common language was English and the project looks at the use of English as a lingua franca for intercultural online communication.

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A Comenius Web Collaboration Project

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Comments from Participants

What did the students particularly like about the web collaboration?

"Learning new things about different countries and cultures, making new friend and last but not least improving my language skills."

"I can say now that it improved my English and helped me to know about people from different cultural backgrounds. It's true, of course. If I want to be more selfish, I can also say that I enjoyed different activities and also got to know myself a bit better through them."

"Exchanging cultural information, meeting new friends, discussing interesting topics."

"I understood how people from different cultures speak English."

"It was very interesting to share our feelings, emotions and sensations with someone we didn't know before, and who has seen us objectively, like only the great Gulliver was able to do!"

"The course helped me a lot to understand the differences in people's cultures while doing interesting activities. In icEurope we had chats, forums and an emailer. That was the way to communicate with each other and it was great!"



During the pilot, the learners were guided by a project management team and the four local teachers while working together in one course on the icEurope Moodle platform.

Web collaboration as a method of web-based learning

Web collaboration runs under many names: telecollaboration, telecollaborative or network-based learning, or online networking. As a method, they all stand for the didactic use of web tools and the internet for joint, collaborative learning.

This builds on a constructivist approach of learning by solving problems or tasks together in a team of learners. One could compare it to the pedagogic method of group work, but with the group or groups being distributed across Europe and their common meeting space being an online classroom, for example with the help of the

open-source learning management system (LMS) Moodle. The different tools allow for different patterns of group work: the participants can work and communicate together at the same time, i.e. synchronously in a chat or by talking with each other through internet telephony tools like Skype.

Or the participants can work on their common topic independently but parallel and share their results or thoughts through asynchronous tools such as forums, emails or wikis.

What Is Web Collaboration And How Can I Use It?

Find out more about web collaboration, its use in foreign language and intercultural teaching and some tips to get started with your own classroom project.

Authentic and practical learning experience

Web collaboration as a method of computer-based collaborative learning has at least two distinct benefits: it turns learning into an authentic and practical experience.

Rooted in the setting of working together online with students from other countries and with different cultural and linguistic backgrounds, the participants have the opportunity to communicate with real people and in an authentic environment.

Most likely, one foreign language will be their language of communication – in the case of icEurope English as the lingua franca - communicative situations thus are not artificial, but develop rather naturally. The context itself is already cross- or intercultural, which is a good basis for more focused learning of intercultural and language skills and strategies.

In that sense, the setting is also a very practical one. Tasks for web collaboration are usually problem-oriented or meant to trigger higher-level thinking and communication between participants. They are rooted in situations, challenges or topics that concern the students and their lives and tend to allow for transfer of skills. Many of the tools you will employ already belong to your students' daily lives. These tools will become more important in their professional lives at a later stage. By implementing such tools, one can show learners how to use them purposefully.

Web collaboration is the didactic use of web tools and the internet for joint, collaborative learning. Think of it as 'virtual' group work.



Web 2.0 & learning platforms as helpful tools

Many tools are available nowadays that can support web collaboration activities. Many of them are so called Web 2.0 tools, that is, they already concentrate on facilitating interaction, sharing topics and collaboratively creating contents between participants.

Technical challenges are low. You usually do not have to install any software but users only have to register. Some tools are free, some providers offer educational packages at reduced rates. If you decide to use Web 2.0 tools, it can be helpful to compare some of their features and the maximum number of participants.

If you wish to concentrate on just one or two tools (e.g. forums and wikis) in your teaching, web 2.0 tools are particularly helpful.

Using too many at the same time might overwhelm your participants - and maybe yourself – in the beginning.

You are more interested in using several tools and in creating an online classroom atmosphere? Then a so-called learning management system (LMS) or learning platform could be the better option.

There are also several tools on the market.

Your school or your department of education might even already offer an LMS and helpful technical support. Moodle is one of them and is worth paying some attention to! Next to being 'free' (costs might apply if you don't want to deal with the technical aspects and pay for online course space), it has a big online community and many tips on didactic and technical aspects are out there.

The other advantage of an LMS like Moodle is that your participants will work together in a closed (non-public) online classroom.

There, you can mix and adapt many communication tools, add other learning materials and even include tests, quizzes or questionnaires. Or you can ask students to hand in assignments or contribute to a course glossary. The participants will need only one username and password to use all these tools and meet with their international peers.

So, it's worth considering and weighing both options for your web collaboration needs.

No matter what you decide on, you will most likely come across common tools such as the following.

What are they and what are they good for?

Some Tools for Web Collaboration

Forums

A forum is basically a bulletin board, a means for asynchronous communication with a group of users. Existing posts can be reflected upon and reactions prepared before posting.

Some ideas for application:

- Ask questions and ask for help
- Discuss and exchange information and opinions on a particular topic, statement, text, movie, image, cartoon etc
- Students write their own contribution / texts / statements
- Means for socializing and getting to know each other
- Help and guidance: Teachers can participate, guide, encourage, draw the focus on particular aspects
- Teacher networking: teachers can exchange ideas and experiences in an 'invisible' forum

Chats

A chat is used for live (synchronous) written discussions. A session can be moderated by a teacher and framed by a task or it can be used for 'random' communication.

Although live, reaction can be delayed; gives more time for thought than oral communication, but more spontaneous than forum exchanges.

Some ideas for application:

- Compare forums but with the difference: immediate reaction and feedback is possible, moderator can influence direction of chat
- Help and guidance: teacher can interact live with individual students (e.g. prompting)
- Copy of a chat (forum, wiki) session can be used for focus, preparatory or follow up work in the classroom

Wikis

In a wiki, everyone can contribute, edit, or comment to a joint, online document. Everything is always accessible in the wiki, no need to store and carry files.

The wiki allows tracking editing steps; teachers can monitor the production process ('history' function).

Some ideas for application:

- Writing tasks where students work on a specific topic, story or problem
- Creating a multimedia collage (text, pictures, captions, embedded video or music files)
- Track and document steps for a group project
- Students collaboratively write a wiki with individual students responsible for separate parts (peer writing and editing)
- Help and guidance: teachers can write comments in their students' wikis

Seven steps on the way to your own web collaboration adventure

If you think web collaboration is an interesting adventure for you and your students, the following 7 steps can help you with your preparations.

1. Bring a colleague aboard

Get another teacher from a school abroad interested in the web collaboration idea (e.g. from your already existing school exchange partners or through websites that offer a school partner search – see box below for some links).

You're teaching English as a foreign language? How about choosing a partner class from a non-English speaking country? This gives your students insights into English as a lingua franca and new cultural contexts.

2. Decide on aims, topics and a frame

Found an interested teacher? First, decide on the learning aims and skills. Then work on topics that are interesting for both classes, fit the syllabi and the aims.

Settle on a time frame and schedule.

- For how long and when should the web collaboration take place?
- Do you want the classes to (partially) work online at the same time?
- If relevant, what about time differences?

3. Specify tasks and activities

Now it's time to specify the tasks and activities.

- How should the students benefit from collaborating with each other online?
- How can the task and the task description trigger communication and discussion across the miles and keep the participants motivated and communicating?

Here, it's helpful to think of common classroom methods for collaboration and pair or team work. Then transfer them to the online learning environment.

4. Supporting the learners

Consider how activities, online and in the local classroom, will synergize and how you can support the learners:

- What accompanying activities will you include in the local classroom ("blended learning")?
- How are web collaboration and local work connected?
- How will you and your colleagues support the classes locally and online?
- What will your roles be?

5. Choosing the tools

Ideally, the tools for web collaboration should be picked based on learning and communication aims. Sometimes, the choice might be triggered by tools or learning platforms at hand. Even then, closely consider which tools to use and the functions you want them to fulfill.

Which tools do you want to use for communication?

- Do you have a learning platform available (e.g. Moodle) would you like to use one?
- Or do you want to use individual Web 2.0 tools (e.g. forums, chat, wikis)?

There are many services available online where you do not have to worry about the technical details. It might also be helpful to check students' previous experience. Many already are avid chatters and bloggers!

6. Bring aims, tasks and tools together

Now, bring together tasks and tools. Make an initial sketch on paper. This will help you transfer the tasks to your e-learning tools in the next step.

7. Get started!

The course is all set and ready? You have gotten parents' permissions, made a backup copy of your course and introduced your students to the tools and course? Then all the best with your web collaboration adventure!

What's next?

Web collaboration activities are a good and very effective way of getting students from different cultures and with different languages in touch with each other to naturally use their foreign language while working on some common tasks. Several projects have shown that taking part in web collaboration can increase language and intercultural skills and attitudes in a relatively small time span (and to a different degree than usually possible in a 'non-web collaborating' classroom).

It is an adventure that takes some time and energy to plan - but students and teachers will highly benefit from venturing into it.

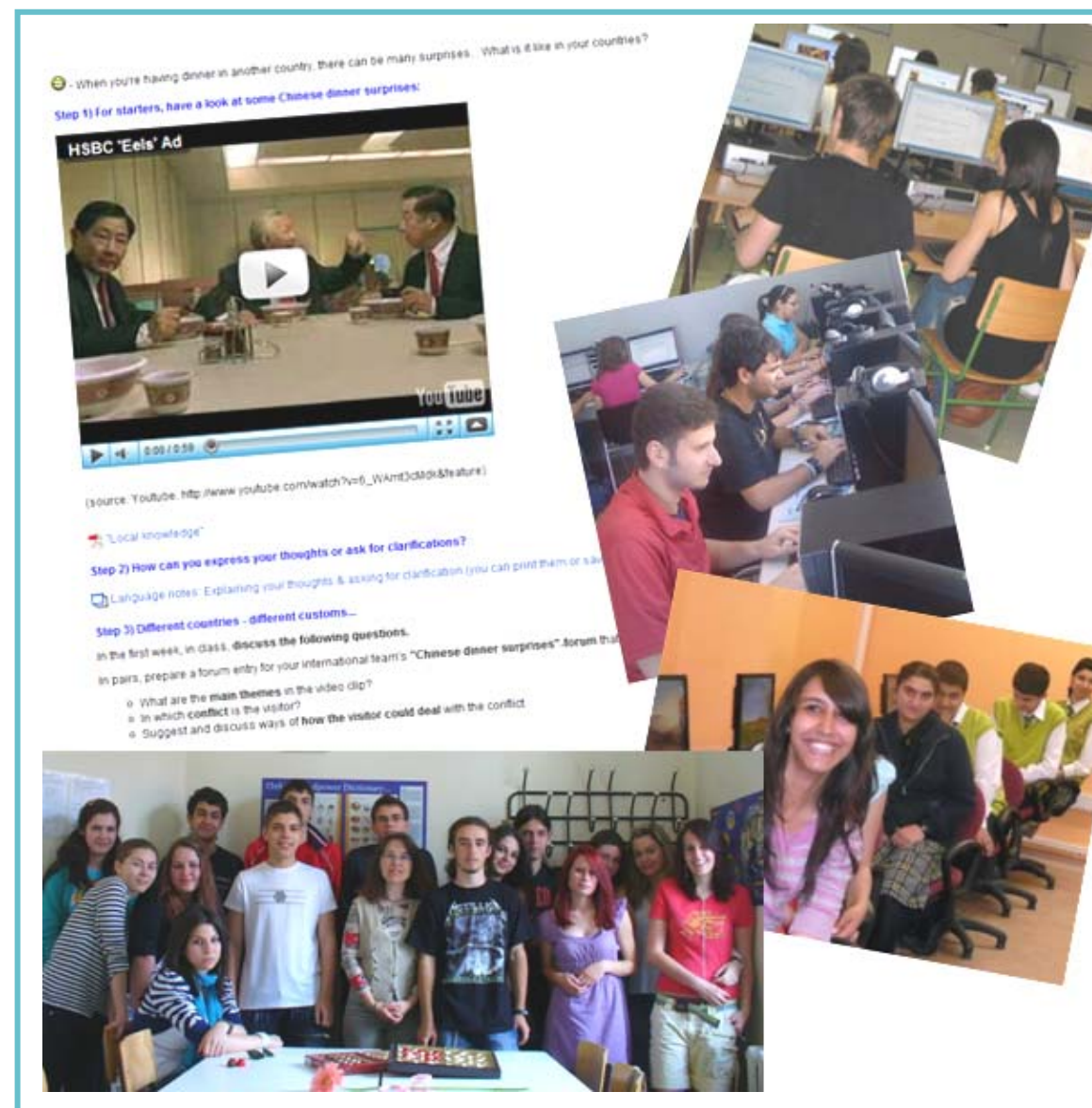
If you have become interested in using such activities in your own secondary or tertiary teaching or in professional training, you can also browse the icEurope demo course available from here: www.iceurope-project.eu

Next to several sample modules, general tips, tools and information about icEurope, you will also find a more detailed grid to plan your own web collaboration.

We are happy to hear from you and your experiences or thoughts on intercultural web collaboration!

Claudia Warth ●

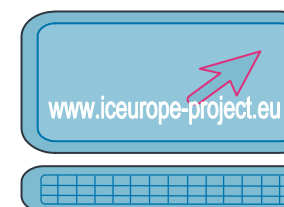
A glimpse at the web collaboration



One of the web collaboration activities: "Chinese dinner" – and students from all the four local web collaboration teams.

From top to bottom: Students from the Hungarian, the Italian, the Turkish and the Bulgarian classes.

We wish you all a great summer!



Visit us for more information and updates online at www.iceurope-project.eu

Upcoming

Eurocall conference presentation in France

You can meet some of the team live at the Eurocall conference in Bordeaux in September 2010. A presentation will show some of the icEurope case study results.

Colloquium in Italy

The Italian partner will hold an icEurope colloquium in Naples in the fall of 2010.

European workshop

The Hungarian partners will give a teacher training workshop on using web collaboration for intercultural language learning at the European level later in 2010.

icEurope booklet and online materials

A booklet with icEurope materials and results will be published in December to provide teachers and trainers with activities & suggestions for teaching 'intercultural English' online and via web collaboration.

Supplementary materials and activities will be provided online.

icEurope Moodle platform

Based on the project insights, a Moodle platform will be set up for teachers and other educators to carry out their own web collaboration activities.



www.iceurope-project.eu

www.iceurope.ning.com

www.moodle.org

www.globalgateway.org.uk

www.globalschoolnet.org

