

6. Case studies

6.1 E-mail in history teaching

Elisabeth Edding - Norway

One of the rules when starting to use ICT in history is not to try to be too ambitious at first. Consequently when we started our project we did not aim for advanced learning or highly developed technological skills. We were two teachers one from Norway and one from the Netherlands who decided in April 1998 to use E-mail to compare family history in two countries which were occupied in World War II.

Our aims for our students were to:

- make them produce their own enquiry in the form of a questionnaire;
- use the enquiry;
- evaluate the enquiry;
- make a comparison.

In terms of developing our students' ICT skills we wanted them to use:

- E-mail;
- chat rooms;
- word processing to structure the answer.

In terms of developing their historical skills and consciousness, we wanted them to:

- relate the past to the present;
- work with history close to the present day and their own lives.

We also wanted them to develop their ability to learn independently rather than just answering the teacher's questions.

The project was initiated at a EUROCLIO conference at a time when the Internet was just a word to me. The only thing I knew was that my computer would be connected in six months time. I thought that would leave me time to catch up on learning how to use the Internet. I was right to assume that the school would be technically ready but wrong to assume that I would have been trained or become an experienced user. However, I did not let my partner teacher know - I didn't want to scare him off.

My inability was compensated by the ability of my female students to solve problems, support each other and help out. Still, technical difficulties meant that some students were unable to send their documents. Precise timing was not our strong point.

Each of the two schools had a computer room with Internet connections. In my case the room was available once a week, so that I could use it in one of my four sessions a week with this class. The room had fifteen computers and the students worked in pairs.

On my first visit, the computer teacher helped the class and me which was a great relief and a big help. In advance she established an E-mail address for our history project, and ensured that each pair had a floppy disk which gave access to the Internet. (The discs were stored by me.) She also taught the students how to use the computer room. Most students did not have access to computers at home and they found it

difficult to use the room on the two evenings it was open. Consequently, it was essential to do most of the work in the lesson in which we had access to the computer room.

The material produced by my students was interesting because of its uniqueness. They really got to know some family history by interviewing some elderly family members. Because they worked in pairs, everyone had someone to interview and they could help each other with technical issues. However not everyone had material about their own family. They used material to structure investigations such as "What were the living conditions of people who had no problems with food rationing".

Unfortunately, the teachers involved had not communicated enough about the project in advance. My students had done research on Norwegian history as well as carrying out the interviews while the Dutch students had researched their history. The students had done different task and there was no basis for comparison. My Dutch colleague therefore proposed that we should regard this as a pilot year.

We did not use the chat channels as we could not compare the two countries. We could not convert the E-mails from the Netherlands so we were unable to read them. They had to fax their material. My students did not manage to send all their material and the Dutch students were disappointed.

Despite these difficulties, I do not regret having tried it. I realised that using the Internet helps to motivate students. It created a new atmosphere in teaching and learning history. This interest in the Internet will not last but I will take the next opportunity to use the net and get on-line. Above all I have learnt the importance of advance communication - a message I pass on to others.

Elisabeth Edding - Norway