

18 March 2015

Dear Ms Michelle McIlveen (Chairperson)

**Shared and Integrated Education update on ePartners;**

You might recall that I gave evidence to the Education committee in November 2014 about the ways we had been using ICT to link schools in Northern Ireland to schools in the Republic of Ireland through the Dissolving Boundaries Programme. I mentioned on that occasion that we were starting a new project called ePartners with the aim of using a similar approach to link schools **within** Northern Ireland.

I'm pleased to include with this letter an update on the progress we have made so far and to let you know that the cost of this is working out at around £26 per pupil.

What the E-zine shows is the value of carrying out this work where there is a good mix of face to face contact connected to sustained online interaction and where University students are working to support classroom teachers.

We are currently working with 26 schools and would like to expand the numbers next year to include more schools that are geographically and culturally isolated; we will need financial support to do this and I'd welcome your guidance in determining the best way to do this.

Yours Faithfully,



Professor Roger Austin

# ePartners e-zine

March 2015

ePartners is a program managed by Ulster University to help schools in Northern Ireland use ICT and face-to-face contact to support shared education. ePartners is co-funded by the Department of Widening Access and Participation and the School of Education.

## Schools involved 2015

### Schools in Belfast



1. Carr's Glen Primary School
2. Our Lady's Girls Primary School
3. Gilnahirk Primary School
4. St Joseph's Primary School
5. Black Mountain Primary School
6. Holy Cross Girl's Primary School
7. Wheatfield Primary School
8. Holy Family Primary School

### Schools in the rest of Northern Ireland

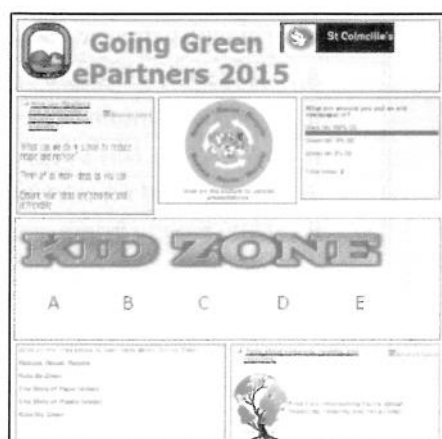


1. Castledawson Primary School	2. St Patrick's Primary School
3. Richmount Primary School	4. St Ita's Primary School
5. Maghera Primary School	6. St Colmcille's Primary School
7. Knockloughrim Primary School	8. St Mary's Primary School
9. Sacred Heart Primary School	10. Oakgrove Primary School
11. Ballysally Primary School	12. St Colum's Primary School
13. Eden Primary School	14. St John's Primary School
15. St Lawrence's Primary School	16. Denamona Primary School
17. St Brigid's Primary School	18. Harnur's Hill Primary School

The schools have been using a Virtual Learning Environment (Fronter) and a Video Conferencing tool (Collaborate) to communicate and discuss issues such as cupcake designs, Vikings, experience with video conferencing, etc...

## Fronter

This Frontpage looks brilliant!



So far on Fronter there has been a total of 700 posts from the 26 partnerships. (11/03/2015) The most from one partnership was 145 posts!!!

Some of our favourite posts are displayed in the graphic below:

## Video Conferencing

Schools use a video conferencing tool called Collaborate for real-time contact. Some schools are using Collaborate to play games like hangman and noughts and crosses. This is a great way for the kids to get to know each other before their face-to-face and we heard a good story about how Collaborate is also creating friendships outside of school:

*"Just want to share the news a child in my class told me today. That child had been to Jump Lanes a local recreational facility within our city where they spend their time bouncing on trampolines. Whilst there they had spotted a child from our partner school that they had recognised through the use of Collaborate. Due to this they were quite willing to speak to each other during their time there. Even though this was a chance meeting it was nice to hear that the children were willing not only to talk to each other but more importantly spend their time playing together. In the words of*

**The Vikings**  
 "The Viking age in European history was about AD 700 to 1100 ..."

"The name 'Viking' comes from a language called 'Old Norse' and means 'a pirate raid'."

**Cupcake Ideas**  
 I would like to make a sort of marshmallow cupcake, the icing could be marshmallow flavoured and coconut sprinkled on top...

"Thank you for your ideas. We thought that we could have a red strawberry sponge, white chocolate icing and cookies for topping ..."

"Our cupcake idea is an Oreo cupcake with vanilla icing sprinkled with oreos and smarties!!!!!!"

"These are the different cupcakes that I found in Tesco: Chocolate swirly 4 pack £1.00 Smarties 6 pack £1."

**Video conferencing**

"...I have used skype with my uncle , auntie and my brother I am really looking forward to the v.c"

"...V.C was easy, hangman was great and we need to get better at noughts and crosses. Group A had fun. BYE BYE"

**Face-to-face**

"I really enjoyed the trip to W5.. My favourite activity was when we had to make our own cars working in partners with someone in the other school."

*Van Morrison it's nice to hear "there'll be days like these"..."*

## Face-to-Face

Schools either organise their own face-to-face meeting or come to events at Ulster University, planned for the end of March. Here are just 2 brief reports from schools that held their event early on...

*"The schools ... started the morning of Friday the 27th with video conference. On this the children discussed their online contributions and what their expectations were for the tour of Derry's Walls later on in the day. The bus left ...The children from each school then had to sit beside a pupil not from their own school and find out five pieces of information regarding the person sitting beside them. For the tour the*



*children were then put into their five groups consisting of pupils from each school and together they walked the Walls with the guide getting the history of the city in which they live. Not only was this informative it proved very enjoyable with both sets of pupils mixing very easily so much you were nearly afraid to stop the conversations so the guide could give his*

*information. The collaboration that we had online helped with this as the children were not strangers to each other and were excited to meet the person in real life as opposed to a face on screen."*

*"Our schools had their face to face meeting at W5 this week.*

*It was a fabulous experience for both schools. We*



*had the opportunity to learn, play and eat together! The technology challenges lent themselves brilliantly to collaboration and the pupils worked together in teams to design, build and race cars. This encouraged lots of discussion. Problem solving and excitement. After working together in teams it was easier to make friends on the climbing activity and on the galleries. We all sat together for lunch, and we saw lots of discussion and sharing of ideas and experiences. It was a really positive experience for all the children, and adults, involved. We are looking forward to meeting online next week and launching our Fairtrade themed collaboration."*

**You can read more about what other schools are doing in the teachers' lounge online discussion in Fronter.**

## Impressions

Ulster University students are working in most of the schools through a volunteering initiative called Tutoring in Schools. Here are some of their comments, and the teachers they are working with.

### **Partnership between teacher & university students**

*"Our pupils have just completed a really worthwhile session with the 2 students. Throughout the week our children have experienced some problems saving and retrieving contributions that they have made together with importing images onto discussion boards, these ladies have spent time with us and ironed out all our issues and our children are becoming more confident as a result. Many thanks, I'm learning so many ICT skills myself!" - **Teacher***

*"If at any point the pupils, as a whole class, become loud, the teacher has created a 'time out' phrase whereby he shouts "pineapple, pineapple" and the whole class respond by shouting back "spikey on top". After this, the pupils sit quietly on their seats and behave." - **Student***



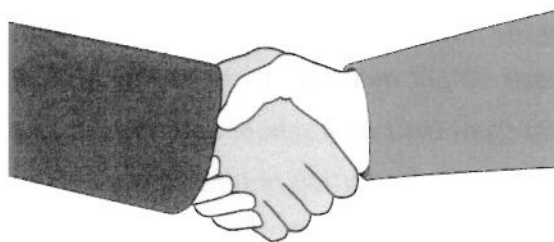
*"The teacher offers plenty of support to us when we are leading the class. He will think of ways to help us get the children engaged and often start discussions. We feel very much as though we are working alongside him in this project... We feel very blessed to have such an engaged teacher who loves the project!" - **Student***

*"The teacher is as supportive to us in this project as we are to him; ensuring the class are engaged at the beginning of the project*

*and supporting our input frequently" - **Student***

*"The pupils in this class are very energetic and enthusiastic about learning and very excited about taking part in the E-Partner project. It is very rewarding to see the pupils getting so involved in something which we have helped organise. The teacher is very inspirational to both the pupils as well as myself and I feel I could learn a lot about organisation and leadership skills from her teaching methods" - **Student***

### **Using Fronter for pupils to build trust**



*"The children absolutely love the "pen-friend" aspect of the project and have found that they have many things in common. It's a great experience of them to enter into the world of "e-mail" to share information." - **Teacher***

*"Fronter worked perfectly for us. Children enjoyed posting about themselves but especially loved reading about the pupils in our partner school. Some great conversations starting already." - **Teacher***

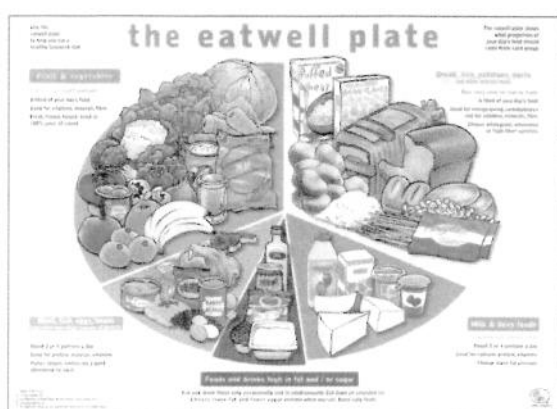
*"After the past two weeks the children in the 2 schools are getting to know each other through Fronter and responding to each other's messages; today after a few teething problems we managed to get*

them talking through the use of Collaborate. After the initial shyness and giggles there was some positive discussion work.” – **Teacher**

“Pupils really enjoyed posting and finding out what their partners like and are interested in. We played a game of snap! Spreadsheet took a little while to type in and to avoid children staring at the computer thinking about interests, we made a paper copy in a worksheet layout for the children to fill in. This helped to speed things up and also allowed for discussion both in class and when the children typed their comments.” – **Teacher**

### **Working together on joint projects**

“Week 2 went very well! We discussed and explained 'Healthy Shopping' to Primary 6. To further highlight this topic, we discussed the 'Eat Well Plate', using suitable activities to make it interesting for the pupils. In keeping with healthy shopping, we used flash cards suggesting sugar swap ideas.” - **Student**



“We explained the Fronter task that we would like them to carry out. This was to visit a supermarket and note down the

various flavours and colours of cupcakes that were available on shelves. We then invited the children to report their findings into the discussion board on Fronter.” - **Student**

“They have all been using the discussion boards on the Fronter page to discuss their ideas and concepts and all seem willing to engage with one another. They will also be using Collaborate this coming Friday to speak to the school and they will be doing this within their groups. They seem highly amused and are looking forward to this experience.” - **Student**

“They all really enjoy the discussion board with the other school as they really feel as they are getting to know the pupils they are working with when discussing as a group the various different recipes to create” - **Student**

### **Dealing with technology...**



“However, as each pupil within my school has access to an iPad, they were unable to complete certain activities on an individual basis due to not having Adobe Shock Player. However, I made sure to turn this negative into a positive, and solve the problem by completing this activity as a

*group and using one computer which allowed the pupils to work as a team and communicate effectively with each other.”*

**- Student**

*“Limited resources within the school means that each child does not have their own computer, however allocating them into their ePartner groups from week 1 has helped them work as a team through all activities. As a result pupils have been open to all suggestions made about their new product and have even mentioned that their ePartners may have different suggestions.”*

**- Student**

*“‘Collaborate’ was not as successful as we would have liked it to have been due to poor internet connection, however eventually we got it to work and both schools were able to communicate effectively over the webcam and come up with their final cupcake ideas. The chance to actually see the pupils in the partner school via webcam made the whole project become even more exciting for the pupils.”*

**- Student**

### **Working with Pupils...**

*“The beauty of working with younger school children is that they are less aware of the difference in backgrounds and cultures than older children may be. To children aged 10 or 11, friendship is friendship; it is this pure and simple nature that makes the E-Partnership so easy! The children are being exposed to other backgrounds in a natural way, using learning and fun as the primary focus. The*

*children are engaging with their partner school well on the discussion boards, and are freely sharing their ideas and coming up with compromises to ensure that everyone is pleased. I believe this helps the children to develop key negotiation skills as well as team work abilities.”*

**- Student**

## **IT Surgery**

Remember if you need any help regarding problems with Fronter and Collaborate get in touch with Eoin. If it is a problem with login details your question would be better put to C2K.

If you would like to arrange a video conference session with Eoin to discuss any technical problems you are having send him an email –

**coyle-e12@email.ulster.ac.uk**

