British Council

Connecting Classrooms (Europe)

External Evaluation 2012 – 2013

Final Report

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Glossary of terms

DFID: UK Department for International Development

Teachers International Professional Development: British Council Programme, ended 2010

Transversal Measures: EU professional development and study visit programme

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank national partners, British Council country programme managers, teachers and headteachers and the many students who enthusiastically contributed their time and expertise to distributing or completing questionnaires and taking part in interviews and workshops.

This evaluation report could not have been completed without your help.

Ray Kirtley & Jill Ritchie March 2013

About the evaluators

Ray Kirtley is an Associate and Director of the Global Learning Association and also works as an independent consultant and for the Faculty of Education at the University of Hull. His background includes working as a secondary teacher and later as a local authority adviser for international education. As an external evaluator for European Union education projects he is experienced in devising and applying evaluation tools for project teams and in producing evaluation reports. Ray has been involved with Connecting Classrooms since the start of the programme and was part of team recruited by the British Council to create, test and deliver a successful series of training courses for Connecting Classrooms schools worldwide. He also produced the evaluation sections for the EU 'Survival Kit for European Project Management' (http://www.european-project-management.eu/).

Jill Ritchie was formerly an education adviser for Bristol Local Authority, responsible for continuing professional development for school staff including teachers and school leaders, and the development of a global dimension in all schools from nursery to upper secondary . She was co-ordinator of the British Council South West Regional Network for International Learning. She is now Director of Global Learning ltd and undertakes consultancy work, including as a Comenius expert and providing training and support to schools and local authorities. As an associate of the Global Learning Association she assesses current Connecting Classrooms applications. She has a particular interest in global school partnerships and is a trustee of the Bristol-Masindi Education Partnership, a charity which supports reciprocal visits and partnerships between schools in the UK and Uganda.

1 Introduction and background to the evaluation

This external evaluation report on the British Council Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme focuses on the results from a series of broad evaluative questions concerning the interaction between student voice and the core Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme themes of inclusion, global citizenship, leadership and the international dimension. These themes are expanded in the following sections. The report builds on a previous assessment of the programme carried out after Year 1 but goes further especially in terms of the breadth of the evaluation and the range of evaluation methodologies employed.

The report begins with a number of preliminary sections including an outline of the approaches used by the evaluators and showing how these were employed to gather and analyse largely qualitative data from the different target groups. The central sections of the report deal with the successes of the programme and with the challenges it posed to its target audiences. Later sections examine the views of national partners and the potential for some of the key activities to be sustained when funded support from the British Council comes to an end in the summer of 2013. The report ends with a number of learning points for schools, national partners and the British Council.

There are a number of appendices to the report including a breakdown of quantitative data and specimens of the evaluation tools. Also appended is a dissemination plan for the final phase of the programme and a report which includes a selection of dissemination activities realised or planned by British Council country offices.

2 Executive summary

This report focuses on the impact of the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme in schools across Europe. The evaluation considered 5 key questions:

1 To what extent has student voice been a key agent of change?
2 How was the understanding and practice of global citizenship developed and how did it impact on student learning?
3 How did the programme contribute to inclusion and diversity?
4 How was the wider community engaged?
5 How was school leadership at all levels enhanced?

The evaluation revealed a range of findings**:**

Student voice

- the Young Leader training had powerful impact and a lasting legacy for many schools;
- students learned important life and employment skills and increased their abilities in many areas including leadership, project management, presentation skills, team work and communication;
- schools themselves have also developed, becoming more democratic structures through the influence of this motivated group of students.

Global citizenship and student learning

- learning took place both in and outside the formal curriculum;
- sometimes institutional or other barriers prevented curriculum implementation;
- inhibiting factors mentioned most frequently concerned international co-operation and communications, but many schools were still able to establish robust international partnerships with at least one other country.

Inclusion and diversity

- the themes of inclusion and diversity were interpreted very differently amongst the schools;
- there was a desire by the students to understand inclusion and diversity issues in their school and in their community and to use their Young Leader training and status to take action;
- in countries and partnerships where the issues were grappled with and challenging activities undertaken, this led to a change in the attitudes of young people.

Community engagement

- a strong outcome of the programme has been the development of new links and joint activities between schools in the country cluster;
- for many schools the programme stimulated involvement with the local community for the first time;
- some schools were able to extend this into a deeper understanding of social injustice and inequality, and, in some cases, to taking positive action.

School leadership

- the programme enabled co-ordinating teachers to develop as leaders and to enhance their project management skills;
- the support of senior leadership teams was essential to the operation and sustainability of the programme.

Sustainability

- the involvement of the British Council partners including local and regional authorities and Ministries of Education, essential to the development and operation of the programme, is also a vital component in ensuring its lasting impact. This may be through successor projects or the development of new resources to support the work in schools;
- 90% of countries are intending to keep at least one international partnership active after the end of the project;
- schools and students have grown to value the links made within their clusters and many of these will also be maintained and developed further;
- student voice has been a powerful influence on school culture and democracy and will continue in some form in the majority of schools.

3 Purpose and scope of the evaluation

This evaluation provides an inclusive interpretation of the impact of Connecting Classrooms (Europe). Therefore it covers all 22 participating countries and a wide variety of educational institutions. It takes into account the views of all members of the school community and especially the extent to which the students themselves have engaged with the project alongside their teachers and other stakeholders, including a sample of project partners. It also looks closely at the new institutional relationships generated by the programme both within the national clusters and in international partnerships.

The evaluation is based upon both qualitative and quantitative data plus a baseline survey of all project plans and Year 1 and Year 2 reports. It aims to measure the success of the programme against planned outcomes and particularly to identify the learning that has come from each project and from the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme as a whole. The evaluation therefore has the wider purpose of informing current and future British Council school partnership programmes and contributing to the debate around the leadership role that young people can play in school and the extent to which they can influence educational policy and decision makers. To facilitate this wider aim the evaluation report includes a dissemination plan which addresses both internal and external stakeholders including ministries of education, regional and local authorities and head teachers. Linked to this plan are suggestions of how the work might be sustained after the end of British Council support in summer 2013.

4 Methodologies

The evaluation methodologies that have been applied to the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme are broadly those proposed by the external evaluators in the 'supplier response' to the British Council. These were discussed with the British Council at a preliminary meeting in early October 2012 and implemented across the 22 countries from mid October 2012 to early January 2013. There were a number of important factors in the choice of these evaluation methodologies and in the subsequent development of evaluation tools:

- access to the external evaluation by every school;
- the opportunity to engage directly with the teachers who act as cluster leaders;
- the need to capture student views and to enable groups of students to interact and reflect on how working in Connecting Classrooms has supported their own development;
- the part that the programme has played in curriculum and policy development at an institutional level.

4.1 Level 1 Evaluation: Questionnaires posted to a Yahoo Group

The purpose of this evaluation tool was to enable all the target schools to make a contribution and also to make provision for some interaction and dialogue between respondents.

The consultants created a questionnaire covering four areas:

- a means to capture quantitative data;
- the greatest challenges they have encountered in the project (the evaluators provided a list but respondents also had the opportunity to add additional challenges);
- the most successful aspects of project (the evaluators provided a list but respondents also had the opportunity to add additional successes);
- the opportunity to comment on any unexpected outcomes and the resulting learning.

The questionnaires were sent as an email attachment to the lead teachers for each cluster. For most this was their introduction to the evaluation therefore some explanatory notes were added including the offer to translate responses should this be required. Lead teachers were requested to distribute the questionnaire across their cluster. They were also asked to explain that once completed it could be uploaded directly to the appropriate country folder in a Yahoo group or alternatively sent directly to the evaluators who would carry out the uploading process on behalf of the respondent.

The responses were evidenced against anticipated programme outcomes including:

- changes to institutional policies and systems;
- international work having a positive influence on students, teachers, wider school community;

- effectiveness of the young leaders training (if applicable);
- the impact of the project on students;
- practitioners gaining confidence and intercultural competences;
- the proportion of teachers and students in any institution who have been active in the project.

Appendix D (i) Evaluation questionnaire

4.2 Level 2 Evaluation: Interviews

The purpose of this evaluation tool was to focus on impact and outcomes for one of the lead schools and also to enable real dialogue to take place with a key teacher and representatives of the student cohort.
Evaluation interviews were carried out with one of the cluster leaders from each country using a standard format of prompt questions devised by the evaluators. This was tested in two face-to-face interviews in Wales and Germany then refined for the remaining interviews which were conducted by telephone or using Skype.
The interview included a number of guiding research questions focussed on:

- the respondent's perception of the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme and their initial expectations for their own school's project;
- the successes and challenges presented by the programme;
- the extent of engagement with the project – in the school, within their own cluster and internationally;
- student voice in the project, and in the wider life of the school;
- evidence of attitudinal change – in the cohort involved in the project and in the wider school community;
- the professional development benefits for teachers;
- the potential for sustainability (at school level, locally and internationally;
- the impact of the project on school policies and on curriculum development.

The duration of the interview was usually between 40 and 50 minutes. Student participation was an important component of this second level evaluation therefore lead teachers were sent the questions beforehand and asked to involve the student cohort and other members of staff in drafting responses. Some interviews were with a single member of staff but for the majority at least one student was present. On three occasions a second teacher also took part.

The interviewer was equipped with background information obtained from the relevant project plans and reports and looked for opportunities to focus attention on particular project activities and

outcomes. The evaluators had made provision to use translation and interpretation should this prove to be necessary. In the event all of the cluster leaders and students who were interviewed were able communicators in English and many commented on the positive effect of the project on their spoken and written English.

Appendix D (ii) ***Interview questions***
(Note: the prompts were omitted from the version sent to interviewees)

4.3 Level 3 Evaluation: Workshops

This was the most intensive level of evaluation with a focus on Student Voice and the impact of Connecting Classrooms on a cohort of students. It required the target countries of Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Germany, Romania and the UK to organise a dedicated workshop for a cohort of students who are currently involved in Connecting Classrooms. In order to prepare for the workshops the consultants produced a trial workshop plan with accompanying guidance notes and report form. This was tested in Germany using a skilled external facilitator and with the evaluators in attendance. A number of modifications were made to the format following the session. These were based on the facilitator's immediate impressions plus the observations of the evaluators:

- the use of Hart's Ladder of Participation (Hart 1992) as a means of assessing the impact of the Connecting Classrooms project on individual students and their school was sound but the terminology used needed to be more accessible (especially if the students were younger than the German trial group);
- accompanying teachers were (understandably) interested in joining the students' discussion and influencing their responses. It was recommended that they took part in a separate activity;
- an icebreaker activity would prove unnecessary when the students knew one another but essential if they came from several schools from across the cluster;
- there was scope at the end of the session for an individual question for each student to answer.

Although there was consistency in the core activities of each workshop and therefore in the comparability of the results there were some differences in the way each one was delivered:

Germany: The trial workshop was delivered in German by an external facilitator with British Council support. Students attended from 4 schools from the local cluster.

UK: The workshop was delivered by the evaluators, students attended from 5 schools from the local cluster. The session began with a pre-planned student meeting following their visit to partner schools in Portugal.

Romania: The workshop was delivered by the British Council and a report submitted to the evaluators.

France: The Connecting Classrooms schools in France are dispersed across the country. Therefore the workshop was delivered in each school by the contact teacher using an adapted format which

the evaluators provided in French. The lead teachers (but not the students) attended a planning meeting in the UK. They were briefed at this meeting by one of the evaluators and later submitted their reports and feedback via the British Council Country Programme Manager.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: The workshops were delivered by cluster co-ordinators and the results sent directly to the evaluators.

Appendix D (iii) ***Workshop guidance notes***
Appendix D (iv) ***Workshop format***
Appendix D (v) ***Workshop report form***
Appendix D (vi) ***Key terminology***

Further evaluative material has also been derived from:

4.4 Project plans and reports for year 1 and year 2

Project plans and reports from all available countries were analysed against the objectives of Connecting Classrooms as follows:

- impact on students (CC outcomes: 1. Global citizenship; 4. Youth leadership);
- impact on teachers (CC outcome: 3. Teachers and global learning);
- impact on school (CC outcomes: 5. Inclusion; 6. Community engagement; 2. An international curriculum);
- unexpected outcomes/learning points.

The analysis looked both at activities and reported outcomes. Reports were analysed in clusters in order to reveal common concerns and to give a rounded picture of the activities engaged in across the partnerships. Particular attention was given to the most recent activities, and to the outcomes and benefits identified.

4.5 Other supporting material

During the course of the evaluation a number of British Council offices and cluster co-ordinators submitted additional material in order to illustrate activities that were taking place during Year 3 of the programme. This supporting material could not be systematically analysed as it originates only from a selection of countries and was not specifically requested. It is either illustrative of activities from clusters and international partnerships at their most intensive level of collaborative work or it paves the way for the continuation of the project after British Council support comes to an end. These activities were therefore considered alongside the project plans and reports referred to in the previous section and examples of this additional material are included in Section 7 – Sustainability.

4.6 Ethical issues

Ethical issues related to the evaluation were addressed as follows:

- Confidentiality of respondents: All those interviewed and taking part in the workshops were assured that their comments, particularly any direct quotes, would be non-attributable, and that care would be taken to render them anonymous unless they agreed otherwise. This was different for reports which can be regarded as more public documents; quotes derived from them were sometimes attributed to the country concerned in order to contextualise them. Names of students participating were not recorded by the evaluators.

- Clarity of purpose and audience for the evaluation: All interaction with participants, whether face to face or through questionnaires, was preceded by explicit information about the role of the evaluators, the purpose of the evaluation and the way in which data collected would be used.

- Validation of data: Interviewees were sent the questions in advance and a transcript of their replies in order to give them the opportunity to amend or withdraw comments.

- Language issues: Translation into respondent's mother tongue was always available and all workshops were conducted in mother tongue. Many interviewees opted to work in English, but had the opportunity to make notes in their own language first.

- Power relationships: Connecting Classrooms relies on a team rather than an individual teacher and there are therefore power relationships within the team. Individual teachers had the opportunity to submit a questionnaire to the Yahoo group in complete confidence. A further complication was the need to ensure that students had the opportunity to comment on the project without the intervention of teachers. This was achieved in the workshops through the use of wall charts where students could be independent, and devising a separate activity for teachers to ensure as much distance from the activity of students as possible. In addition, students had a sentence completion activity which was handed directly to the evaluators. However, it is important to be realistic about the extent to which the student activity could be completely self standing.

4.7 Strengths and limitations of the methodologies employed and of the resulting data

The main strengths are the range of methodologies employed and the potential of the questions asked of both teachers and students to yield detailed evaluative material. In addition the methodologies have the capacity to capture the perspectives of several schools from the same cluster and by using project plans and reports alongside interviews and questionnaires to do this over the whole life of the programme. The evaluation is therefore much more than a 'snapshot' of the current situation.

The response rate and the resulting size of the sample was something of a limitation in terms of the questionnaires but not for the interviews where virtually all countries have contributed. It is clear that some schools found the compiling of reports and project plans challenging, in spite of receiving guidance from British Council staff, and this has resulted in a wide range of responses making comparative analysis difficult.

5 Results

The information included in this section was chiefly derived from the evaluation questionnaires described in Section 4 (Methodologies); an example is also appended to this report. Lead teachers in every school in each cluster were asked to record the **most successful** and the **most challenging** aspects of the programme in their own institution. They were encouraged to seek the views of other members of staff and of students before responding. They were provided with a list of possible responses for each category but also encouraged to include additional responses and further details. The first and second parts of Section 5 deal with successes and challenges.

A final section of the questionnaire asked for **unexpected outcomes** and the learning which had resulted. These are described and discussed in the final part of Section 5. The quantitative data which formed the first part of the questionnaire has been analysed separately and included as Appendix A.

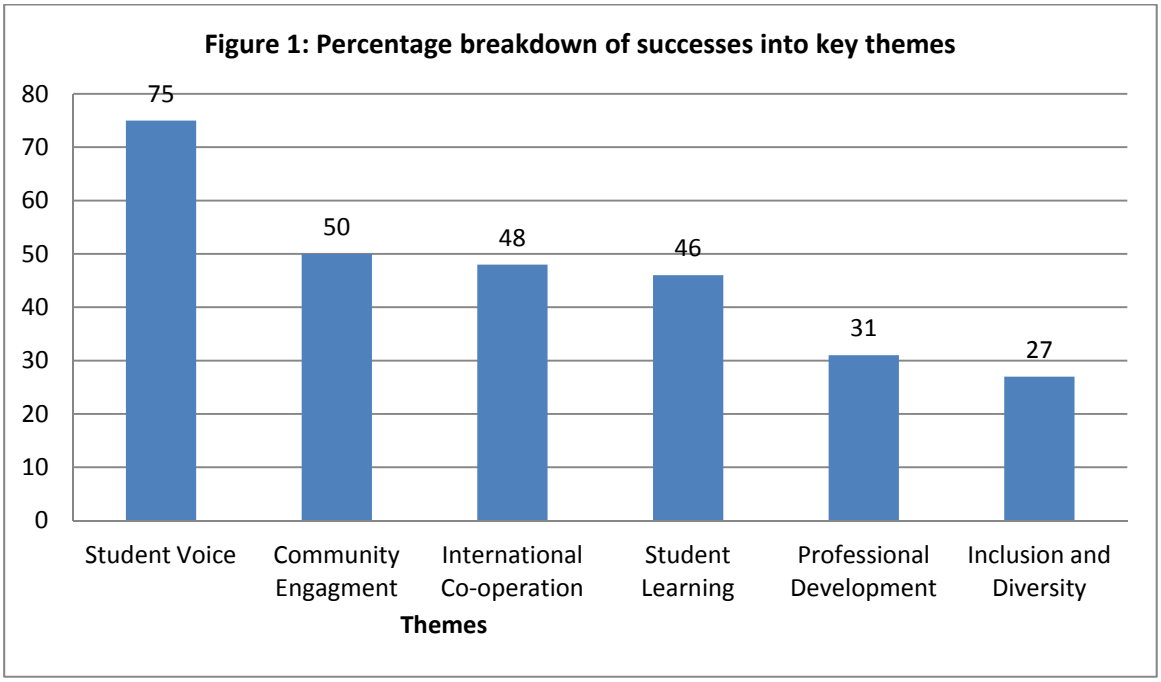
5.1 Successful aspects of the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme

The evaluators analysed this information and categorised it into 6 key themes:

Student voice
Student learning
International co-operation (including online collaboration)
Inclusion and diversity
Professional development
Community engagement

Figure 1 below suggests that 'Student voice' has been the leading success factor followed by 'community engagement'. 'Inclusion and diversity' was mentioned with least frequency.

Figure 1: Percentage breakdown of successes into key themes



These responses formed the basis for the following sections focussing on 'successes'. Additional material was used where this was appropriate; from the interviews with co-ordinators, the student workshops and the Connecting Classrooms reports, chiefly from Year 2 of the programme.

5.1.1 Student voice and student leadership

CC outcome 4: Youth Leadership

Student leadership and 'Student Voice', the way in which students are empowered to lead and manage the project, is an important element of Connecting Classrooms and is highly rated as an outcome by many who took part. Over 75% of teachers who responded to the questionnaire identify student voice as one of the successes of the project, making it the highest rated success overall. Additionally, project co-ordinators speak highly in interviews of the positive effect the development of student voice has had in schools; of the 19 co-ordinators interviewed, 50% identify the development of student leadership as a successful outcome, with 75% of those mentioning Young Leader training as a specific successful element which had a positive impact on students and the school. The students themselves, through workshops run in selected countries, show a deepening understanding of their role not only in leading and managing the project but also in contributing to school development.

Young leader training

Young Leader training attracted many positive comments as being motivating, educational and enjoyable:

'Young Leaders' training gave a positive result for the growth of the students and their confidence in their own capabilities to deal with difficult situations'

'Thanks to the training sessions on leadership, students were able to appreciate an alternative approach to education and to take a more active role within the school community and their local community'

As well as the teacher questionnaires and co-ordinator interviews, the training is also commented on very positively in 80% of year two reports:

'The Young Leaders have grown more confident during the training. Students have not only learned more about how to create a vision of success, set goals and make plans, listen and solve problems but also understand, accept and respect others. They also had a great time.' Year 2 report

An examination of all the data suggests that youth leadership and student voice are well understood across the partnerships and that all countries have worked on this; a common understanding is evident and this is largely due to the quality of the training provided.

'The students benefited a lot from the training of Young Leaders launched by the British Council. As a result, they have acquired a lot of practical skills, learnt how to get across their ideas successfully, initiate the discussion, involve their peers in teamwork, search for solutions co-operatively and understand that they can make a difference. The most positive impact is that they have become leaders in their peer groups, made their 'Student Voice' heard, listened to and taken into account'

Students played a role in the projects as project leaders and managers, but also as leaders of learning:

'Young leaders have had a chance to experience being managers, organisers and adults responsible for certain tasks. They have also experienced working in a team, trying to motivate less active members of teams to work and participate. They have experienced not only successes but also troubles and obstacles which they had to overcome. Young leaders had to demonstrate the leadership skills which they had been theoretically instructed during a series of trainings organized by the British Council. The obtained skills are definitely the employment ones that will help them in their future jobs and their lives. As a result of the project, new talents were discovered, and even those young leaders who have never been successful in their studies, experienced success in different fields and gained self-esteem.' Year 2 report

Students as project leaders and managers

Students were enabled to take responsibility for aspects of the project and to form project leadership groups, many of which met outside school time. The roles they played were multiple: a Ukrainian school provides a useful identification of participating students as:

'*Planners and designers of projects; managers of up to date i net technology; definers of aims and objectives with finding the ways to reach the goal; evaluators of the project outcomes; learners'*

Students in Serbia were '*presenters, organisers, quiz masters, designers, journalists, commentators etc'*

Other management activities included: *'organising meetings; producing newsletters; putting information on the school website'.* Year 2 report

'The social skills of meeting deadlines, co-ordinating activities with other schools' different curricula, appreciating different school cultures and being responsible to the others in the cluster have been the cornerstone in the general co-ordination of students' and teachers' alike motivation, choice and selection in implementing the tasks on the project's plan.' Year 2 report

'Starting their projects from scratch, based on needs analysis of their local communities and designing and delivering a real project to respond to these needs meant that students learned a lot. They learned planning skills, developing workshops skills, making logistical arrangements and communications skills.' Year 2 report

'They also were responsible enough to put budgetary, logistic and other matters into consideration'

Perhaps more importantly, students were involved in the leadership of the projects, and teamwork was of particular significance here:

'New for them was the fact that they gave suggestions and made decisions- these are activities that are the priority of their teachers. The students ran many of the events virtually alone. The role of the teachers was just to observe and correct, if needed'

'Teacher's task was to offer them the tasks we could go through and after that, they had a chance to pick up the one on which to work. After giving instructions, students become leaders and they, as a team, plan all the steps. The teacher is an observer, the teacher monitors in case some problems appear.' Year 2 report

'The project had an impact on the students' skills to take responsibilities and to work as a team. This is due to the role they played in guiding the project- they had a leading role in deciding on the particular activities and in organising them'

'Young leaders plan and organise the activities. They identify opportunities to volunteer within the community and get involved in decision-making. Students' Voice became very distinctly heard in all the events and matters of the project.' Year 2 report

'Young people were involved at all stages. This year representatives participated in all planning meetings and there were no decisions taken without them within the programme'
Interview with co-ordinator

Students as leaders of learning

Young Leaders cascaded training to other students; they also acted as mentors to younger students joining the project. In addition, for example, they: ran sessions for other classes on topics relevant to the project e.g. Human Rights (D); led assemblies(MT); organised a questionnaire 'inclusion in action' (RO); wrote a play about racism, choosing the characters and rehearsing the play to present it to the colleagues in the school (PT); planned a collapsed timetable day and organised an hour's lesson about each partnership country (UK); organised an international evening for the wider community (UK).

At the Birmingham Partnership Seminar young leaders worked collaboratively to decide on the possible areas of inclusion that were pertinent to their school and their situation. Students chose a relevant topic (e.g. sexual abuse, religion, violence etc.) as pre-discussed as the seminar, and learnt from their partner schools knowledge and understanding of this issue by asking questions and investigating the topic.

'The students had various opportunities during our project- to be leaders, writers, film makers, dancers, artists and actors. They prepared workshops on different topics. The students were involved in many activities- they had a lot of discussions on how to make different films and they did them very successfully. Some of the participants of the project were trained to be young leaders and they had the opportunity to train other students in these skills'

'Representatives of young people were provided with training in diversity, equality, inclusion, community learning and intercultural dialogue. They took on the responsibility of sharing the learning with their colleagues in schools. At different stages, they presented the project's aim and achievements to the school management, the local authorities and even to the Ministry representative who attended one training seminar.
The Young Leaders contributed to the planning, design and application of the survey in their schools. They were also instrumental in putting together action plans to improve the inclusion culture of their schools'

Effect on student learning and on the school

All of the above led to a reported increased self confidence for students as well as the development of skills such as presentation and public speaking skills; these are mentioned by 26% of the group:

'…..self confidence of students, participating in teaching, organising, evaluating'

' Students had the opportunity to learn valuable things such as how to operate as a team and how to have their voice heard in order to send messages and thoughts'

'… students were charged with responsibility and as a consequence felt more confident and motivated'

'The students got more involved in their classes because they felt empowered'

Additionally, it was felt by some that this led to students feeling more aware of world issues and their ability to have an influence:

'Participating in the various activities raised their awareness of world problems and the perspective that they could do something to change things'

'There was a great positive impact on the students. They were more eager to learn, creative and committed. They also got more aware of social needs'

'Students were able to be part of the project and so they had a great experience of trying to get the message across. In this way they felt that they are part of something important and capable of truly changing and solving problems'

'Students have widen(ed) their ability to express their opinions on current affairs'

'*The students have learned that they can change things within their own schools by taking an active role based on being informed'* Interview with co-ordinator

The increased learning about student leadership, and the effect of the Young Leaders activities in schools, meant that new school relationships were forged with the opportunity for students and teachers to work together in a non curricular setting. Learning was two-way, with teachers better able to appreciate students' new ability to contribute:

'In classrooms, there are teachers that were willing to 'listen' to 'students' voice' and there the difference could be recognised in the more articulate requests by students'

'The Connecting Classrooms project helped us….. understand that student voice is very important in school decisions'

For a more detailed discussion of the effect on teachers see section 5.1.5 'Professional Development'.

Structures put in place to deliver the project included: a core group of 15 students (B-H); Young Leaders meeting regularly at a time reserved for clubs (D); a committee (MT); a Student Council (RU); the creation of a permanent student council responsible for initiatives and projects (E) and

weekly meetings of working groups in each school (UK). In one Russian school a Students Council has been set up, which has a 'Department of Foreign Affairs' dealing with issues of tolerance and diversity.

The impact of this aspect of the project had a more wide reaching effect in some schools, with Young Leaders acting as a catalyst for change:

'The participation in the project also gave them more confidence in their skills and their judgements that lead to their being more active in matters not related to the project. They also influenced other students in the school to do the same and now 'student voice' is louder in the whole school'

'They are able to lead the rest of (their) classmates with their deeds and actions'

'They started to name the things they did not like in their school, but they also came with solutions'

In a one school their activities led to changes in PE uniform requirements, and induction for new pupils.

Student perspectives

'Student voice is not always valuable in important issues, as grown-ups think that we are not adult enough, but we will always try to convey our ideas to heads of the school. I think that this is the difference the project has made: now we will try and try, although before this experience we would never have even thought about this possibility' student participating in interview

In one Russian school, of 14 students who contributed to an evaluation, 13 agreed with the statement *'students' opinion is always taken into consideration and is the foundation for any kind of activity'*

The enthusiasm of students is apparent in many reports:

'It's the first time I have carried out the lesson myself! (Business English) I was carried away by a "bridge building" activity at the International Forum of Young Leaders'. Student comment in Year 2 report

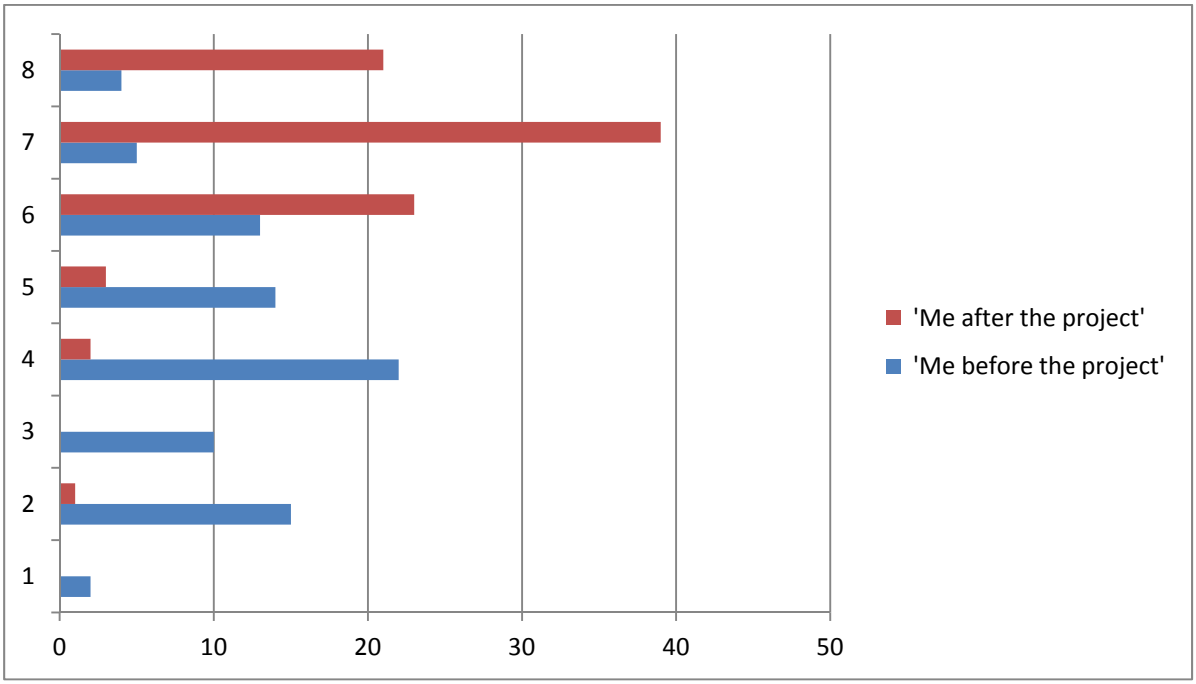
'We noticed great involvement in the students who participated in group experiences (Young Leaders): that was the greatest part of the project!' Interview with co-ordinator

Student workshops were run in five countries to gain information directly from students about the way in which they felt involved in the leadership and management of projects (see Methodologies section 4 for a description of how these workshops were set up, and Appendix D for examples of the materials used).

The workshop used an adaptation of the ladder of participation (Hart, 1992) in order to assess perceptions before and after the project for individual students, as well as their perception of the school as an environment where student leadership was taken seriously. Over100 students took part in the workshops which were held in Germany, Romania, Bosnia Herzegovina, France and the UK. Amalgamated results are shown below.

Figure 2: Students' perception of their participation in the project

Cumulative data of student numbers taken from student workshops in target countries



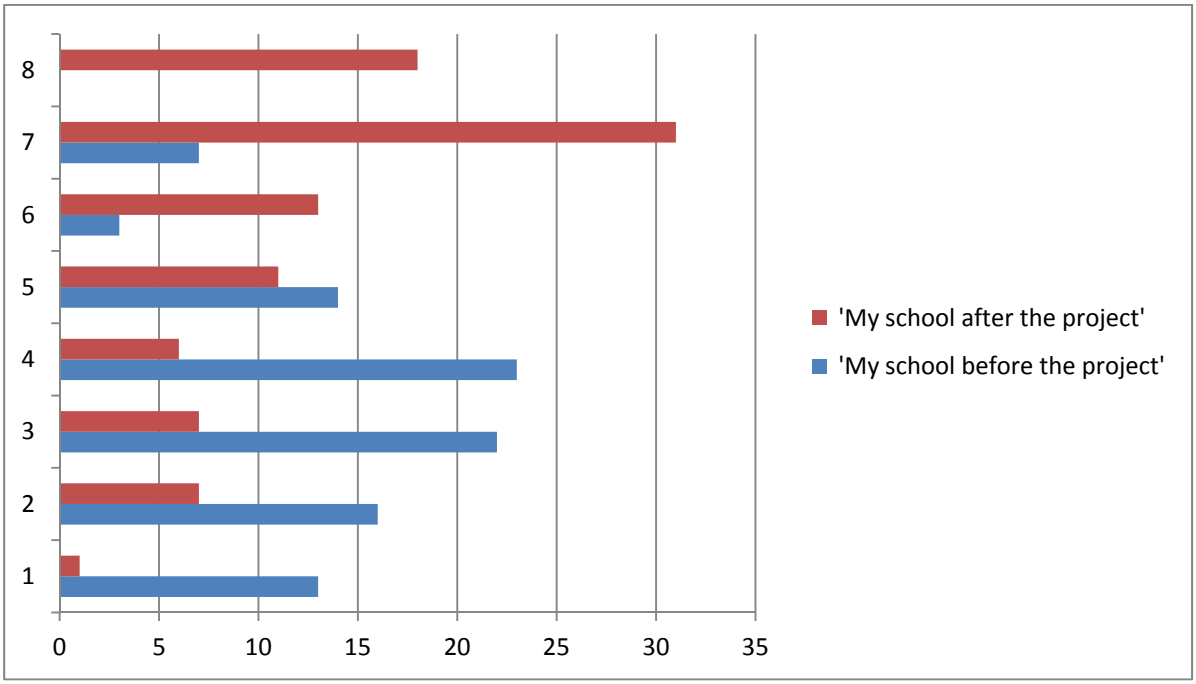
The students selected two statements each to represent how they felt before and after the project. They did this by adding coloured dots next to the appropriate statement on the 'ladder of participation'. The bars represent the numbers of students selecting the statement as the one most closely aligned to how they felt both before and after the project.

Statements (vertical axis 1 - 8):

1. Teachers use us to support the project without asking us what we would really like (and pretend it was our idea).
2. We help with the project but at least the teachers don't pretend that it was our idea.
3. It looks as if we are deciding on the activities but we really don't have much choice apart from deciding about the details.
4. We are given specific roles in the project.
5. We advise on the project but it is still run by the teachers.
6. We are invited to share in all decision making in the project.
7. We run the project but the teachers help us.
8. We decide everything about the project but know that we can ask the teachers for advice if we want to.

Figure 3: Students' perception of how their school became more democratic

Cumulative data of student numbers taken from student workshops in target countries



The students selected two statements each by adding coloured dots next to the appropriate statement on the 'ladder of participation'. These represented how they felt about their school before and after the project. The bars represent the numbers of students selecting the statement as the one most closely aligned to how they feel about their school.

Statements (vertical axis 1 - 8):

1. Teachers use us to support the project without asking us what we would really like (and pretend it was our idea).
2. We help with the project but at least the teachers don't pretend that it was our idea.
3. It looks as if we are deciding on the activities but we really don't have much choice apart from deciding about the details.
4. We are given specific roles in the project.
5. We advise on the project but it is still run by the teachers.
6. We are invited to share in all decision making in the project.
7. We run the project but the teachers help us.
8. We decide everything about the project but know that we can ask the teachers for advice if we want to.

Most striking was the extent to which students felt their ability to lead the project had developed; at the start of the project many (27%) had not felt significantly involved in the running of the project, with a further 21% involved through specific roles; this figure drops to 4% by the end of the project, by when many (39%) felt they were running the project mainly themselves, with support from

teachers. A significant number (21%) feel they are running the project with just advice from teachers - the highest level of participation.

This shift in participation is replicated in students' perceptions of how much more democratic their school became. At the start of the project nearly 50% of students identified their school as involving them at the lowest level of participation, with a further 22% being given clear roles. Numbers who felt their schools were working at the higher level were minimal – 6%. By the end of the project 47% of students felt their schools were working at the two higher levels – i.e. offering support and advice to students rather than directing them.

Students thus identified a significant shift both in their own ability to work independently and proactively, and to display leadership, and in the democratic development of their schools.

Summary:

The development of student voice and student leadership has been a significant outcome of the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme, reported on positively by teachers, cluster co-ordinators and the students themselves. Young leader training was very positively evaluated, and the impact of Young Leaders on school development is significant. Students have learnt important life and employment skills and have increased their abilities in many areas including leadership, project management, presentation skills, team work and communication. Schools themselves have also developed, becoming more democratic structures through the influence of this motivated group of students.

5.1.2 Community engagement

CC outcome 6: Community Engagement

A significant aim of the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme, related to both diversity and global citizenship, is the way in which schools and young people are supported to engage with their communities. The aim is to develop community cohesion and challenge misconceptions about other people in the community, and also to challenge attitudes that may give rise to extremism.

These are ambitious aims for an international project and are variably addressed by schools. Although over 50% of respondents in the teacher group identify community engagement as a success of the project, for many their expression and understanding of this is perhaps more limited than the Connecting Classroom aims. In many parts of Europe the role of the school does not include a strong relationship with the local community. For teachers, engagement with the local community has tended to mean the following (in descending order of priority):

- relationships between schools in the country cluster;
- relationship with parents;
- relationship with the local community through volunteering and charitable work;
- relationship with the wider community through action, including relationships with community groups and other organisations.

Relationships between schools in the country cluster

This has been a strong outcome of the project, with 80% of the group identifying it as a success. There have been great benefits to schools within the cluster, which has enabled them to plan joint projects, share experience and also find out more about each other's systems and expertise.

'During our work on our project we have had the possibility to make close contact with different types of school in our town and our country- not only with other high schools but with Art and Music schools and vocational schools'

This exchange happened across clusters in the same country as well as within clusters in some cases:

'Through the Connecting Classrooms students had the opportunity to meet their classmates not only from Dimitrovgrad, but from Vidin, too. They were introduced at a meeting in Vidin and conducted joint training aimed at cohesion'

This compensated in some ways for the lack of international contact and exchange and was felt to be very valuable when the schools were most different from each other. This learning seems particularly valuable when one school is a special school as it has enabled them to work together with mainstream schools on an equal footing.

'The participating students also learned the value of tolerance, since they worked with students of various ages, origins and social backgrounds'

This element contributes to sustainability, with many schools intending to continue these local partnerships.

Relationship with parents

Over 50% of the group felt that relationships with parents were increased and improved as a result of the project:

'On the positive side we have to mention the impact of this programme through the families of students who participated'

The involvement of parents tended to be through supporting their children, attending events, and in some cases offering expertise e.g. the provision of traditional recipes for a recipe book.

Relationship with the local community through volunteering and charitable work

Many schools developed charitable activities within the community as part of the project; volunteering is not usual for students in many parts of Europe. This aspect of community engagement was identified as a success by 20% of the group. The elderly were a particularly popular choice for charitable activity.

'We became familiar with the people in the neighbourhood of our school, e.g. the elderly who need a lot of care'

This aspect was often linked with fundraising for local causes e.g. raising money for a boy to have an operation in Brazil (Year 2 report); restoring a vandalised war memorial (Year 2 report); Art in the Community and tree planting (Year 2 report).

'We organised two events: traditional Maltese food and cake sale, where the profit made was donated to charity. We also had another two activities where we offered our services…… helping in an old people's home and an orphanage'

Students were felt to benefit from these activities by becoming more aware of people less fortunate than themselves, and by putting something back into the community:

'They learnt to perceive individuals for their internal charisma and had the chance to spend quality time with them. This involved giving presents, sweets and a monetary contribution.' Year 2 report

The benefits of voluntary work, which was new to many schools, were widely reported:

'The voluntary work is also very useful to the future; the students got more aware of social needs and participated in social events like fund raising and alert campaigning'

Schools in Bulgaria changed their school mottos as a result of this work;
'Volunteering is way of thinking" – the slogan of Vocational school, Vidin
"Helping is loving", "Volunteer from your heart", "See from the good side, "Give something to the world" – slogans from Maths school Antim

In the best cases this work in the community led to more understanding of societal problems in general:

'So far we can say we are proud of our efforts because our students have a chance to work with each other, with our community, with pupils abroad, understand the problems we have in our society, and grow individually.' Year 2 report

Sometimes there is a however a slightly uncomfortable relationship with the inclusion and diversity theme, and the potential reinforcement of stereotypes:

'African and south American country hardships'. Students explored the lifestyle of Kenyan link and exchange letters and make links. Invited a charity representative to give a speech to the audience about the charity's work. Students communicated with the Kenyan students and staff and shared this with students in assemblies. They created activities in order to help some Kenyan students enhance their education.' Year 2 report

Relationship with the wider community through action, including relationships with community groups and other organisations

Some schools established links with other organisations, including local educational establishments outside the cluster, care homes, local authorities etc. and 15% of the group identify this as a positive outcome which will contribute to sustainability of the work.

'We have involved the wider community in the project activities- the Day Care Social Centre for mentally and physically handicapped young people, the special primary school, the Centre of Social services '

'The Young Leaders, monitored by the project responsible in school, have made an action plan, which focussed….. on partnership activities with the local community and with other institutions from the town'

It is also clear that many schools have reached out to the local community through newsletters and events organised mainly by students.

'The most successful part of this project has been the International evening. A massive amount of people were involved in this evening, helping connect students, parents, teachers and the wider community to different cultures and traditions. The bright and colourful evening had a massive effect on everyone involved' Student participant in interview

The involvement of local authorities was felt by many to be a very important part of the project and was much valued by schools when it happened. It was felt that this gave credibility to the projects and would also support their survival. In some cases the municipalities/local authorities have supported the schools financially, enabling them to do activities which would not otherwise have been possible.

In a few cases this led to action and campaigns:

'Investigating injustice in other places made them question injustices in there local (sic)'

Song for Tottenham' after the riots in the summer- a flashmob performed a song/dance about community cohesion in the streets of Tottenham.

An innovative event was organised by the Algarve schools: *The idea is to involve the communities and "contaminate" the village with messages regarding 'Inclusion'. Shops, streets and other public places, such as monuments, will be decorated with inclusion slogans. The messages will be transmitted in the most varied ways, as creatively as possible. Each school will produce slogans, leaflets, posters, etc.'* Year 2 report

Summary

For many schools, involvement with the community was not common; however they gained a lot from volunteering activities and this lead to a closer involvement with the local community.

Building stronger links with the community are not only beneficial for the community but also for the school (leadership skills promoted, autonomy and assertiveness strengthened.....

A small proportion of schools were able to extend this into a deepening understanding of social injustice and inequality, and, in some cases, to taking action through events.

5.1.3 International co-operation (including online collaboration)

CC outcome 2: An international curriculum

Connecting Classrooms (Europe) aimed to connect schools through collaborative work both in-country and internationally. This section examines the more successful aspects of international co-operation. It is principally based on evidence derived from the teacher questionnaires and interviews with cluster leaders with additional material from existing reports. It is important to state at the outset that although the international component of the programme generated many fruitful projects it also presented the cluster groups with real challenges. These are examined in greater detail in Section 5.2.2. International co-operation in Connecting Classrooms (Europe) was based on schools working in their clusters across 4 or 5 countries, potentially involving more than 20 schools.

International collaboration and joint working between students and their teachers has been the subject of a number of recent surveys and reports; it is therefore comparatively easy to benchmark the indicators of a successful international partnership and to relate these to the responses from Connecting Classrooms schools:

Partnership components	**Indicators and examples**
Partnership formation	A clear purpose for the partnership A mechanism to negotiate the relationship Joint communications plan A supportive external organisation Supportive school leadership Good personal connections made at an initial meeting
Partnership objectives	For example: Support for student and teacher learning To enhance the curriculum (wide range of subjects) To contribute to school improvement To support the schools' aims and a shared vision
Leadership and management	A shared set of values Active senior leader support Strong staff, student and parental support Student participation at all levels Agreed and transparent roles and relationships
Support and training	External support Governing body support Funding Professional development
Communications	Developing effective communication skills, including language proficiency and cultural knowledge

	A variety of methods of communication including opportunities for face to face meetings
Whole school involvement	Community involvement Creating teams for specific activities Opportunities to raise confidence and self esteem Staff involvement
Monitoring and evaluation	Formal evaluation Assessment of impact on all target groups Cost effectiveness

Adapted from Comenius impact report (2013)

Results:

48% of respondents mentioned international co-operation as a successful aspect of their project.

Content

The international school partnerships set up as a result of the programme were usually focussed around one or more projects. These tended to be extra-curricular and this pattern fitted in well with student groups drawn from several classes and year groups in their institutions. Students sometimes collaborated on activities that were relatively short term and with limited impact. These included an exchange of materials – postcards, Christmas cards, culture boxes and calendars are all mentioned as introductory activities. Other activities required more co-operation and joint planning but were still not closely related to the Connecting Classrooms themes of student voice, inclusion and diversity:

'Designing the cook book brought lively students' and teachers' communication with the international partner schools that resulted in a real visible outcome'

Respondents also mentioned working together a wide range of other joint activities including fashion shows, international conferences and country presentations.

Deeper curriculum involvement depended very much on active collaboration between cluster leaders. Where this was lacking or intermittent, international work frequently continued but with the partner schools working side by side on the same theme and exchanging materials rather than actively collaborating. By contrast one group with a high degree of collaboration stressed their regular contacts via Skype and as a result grew to understand each other's curriculum so that informed decisions could be made about what to implement. It was very much within the spirit of the programme that these choices were then put to the student groups in each country before the work began. An example was the preparation and delivery of a lesson on drug education which was approached in different ways within the partnership. In terms of discrete curricular areas, language learning was mentioned frequently as an ongoing benefit coming out of the school's project:

'By international correspondence the students practised their English'
'Links with pupils via email and facebook has a positive impact on their motivation to study French'

The opportunity for a face to face meeting with their peer group was a key motivating factor for many students:

'Our students were committed from the outset but the opportunity to travel encouraged this commitment'

It also encouraged Young Leaders to be active in the planning process and sometimes in working with a wider cohort in their school:

'Planning and going on the visit was a success for the students'
'Our students planned international contacts for the younger ones'

Teachers made many comments around the wider benefits of face-to-face meeting for their students but also appreciated that most students were communicating by other means such as facebook:

'She had the chance to speak a different language (English), she interacted and collaborated with students from three other countries. The students understood how important communication is both directly and on the internet'

Teachers also noted the professional development benefits of these meetings:

'Co-ordinators in our cluster have had the chance to see different methods and approaches to teaching ... we could share ideas and experiences and pass them on to our management.'
Year 2 report

Outcomes

The international element was mentioned repeatedly as a motivating factor but also as one that helped to consolidate the Connecting Classrooms group in the school and build social skills and the ability to work as part of a team:

'Students have become active members of the larger international team – working together, collaborating in English, developing social skills'

Teachers also commented on the students' increased awareness of other cultures and their genuine interest to find out more about partner countries:

'The students got really interested in studying the traditions and cultures of the countries involved in the project'

The opportunities for international collaboration also brought benefits for the teachers who were most involved and sometimes for wider school development:

'For the teachers this project also meant a lot because they found new ways of teaching to use in their lessons, they also practiced their teambuilding, organising and executive skills or just became friends'

'The project helped to find the partners for developing a new progressive model for co-teaching and team teaching'

This theme is followed up in more detail in section 5.1.5.

The Connecting Classrooms programme will end in mid 2013 and several of the school partnerships have sought the means to continue to work together. Sometimes this is expressed as an aspiration:

'Both students and teachers are sure their co-operation will continue after the project'
'We hope the partnership will outlive the project which created it ... visits are the best way to connect students and teachers'

On other occasions positive steps are being taken to sustain the partnership:

***'**As a result we will be moving on to a Comenius project and job shadowing with our partners'*

Summary

There have clearly been challenges to the international component of Connecting Classrooms (Europe) and these are dealt with in section 5.2.2 of the report. The factors that encouraged and enabled international co-operation conform reasonably closely with the indicators for successful international partnerships in that they started with relatively small scale activities which were used to build a culture of co-operation both between members of staff and within the student cohort. Further activities were planned carefully to ensure that all institutions can take part and that both students and staff experienced real benefits from their participation. The questionnaires but more especially the telephone interviews captured the motivation of the teachers and students who had first-hand experience of one or more of their partner schools and this is a key success factor.

Face to face meetings were seen as an essential means of keeping the partnership alive but to be successful the schools needed to set up other planning and communication strategies. In some instances the size of the wider cluster group and problems with communications prompted the co-ordinators to devise a simpler network based on bilateral links. Partnerships made quite frequent references to their desire for sustainability but it was only occasionally translated into concrete proposals to seek alternative funding. Senior management support was barely mentioned by any of the respondents – most of whom were heads of department but not head teachers. It is probably reasonable to assume that those schools which took part in collaborative meetings in another country did this with the full support of their senior leadership team.

5.1.4 Student learning (global dimension in the curriculum, subjects, motivation)

CC outcome 2: Global citizenship

One of the key aims of the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme is to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding of the student cohort in ways which equip them for life in a more globalised society. In addition Connecting Classrooms outcome 2 includes reference to 'an institutional ethos that supports a global dimension'.

This section reviews the results that relate to the broad theme of student learning including the programme's impact on global citizenship. The evidence is mainly drawn from the questionnaires where 46% of teachers gave student learning as a successful aspect of the project, with most giving details of subject areas that they felt had been enhanced and many also mentioning global citizenship. The section also references interviews with cluster leaders who mentioned student learning as a positive outcome of their project and some additional material comes from the student workshops in the target countries and from the Connecting Classroom reports, mainly from Year 2.

Global citizenship and global learning are widely used terms and it is highly likely that the teachers who took part in this survey will have very different perceptions of what either term means for their students or for their institutions. Most however would identify with one or more of the key concepts of the global dimension in education proposed by the UK Department for International Development in 2005 and since then used widely both in the UK, in other parts of the EU and in countries where the current Connecting Classrooms programme operates:

Global citizenship
Interdependence
Social justice
Diversity
Human rights
Sustainable development
Values and perceptions
Conflict resolution

Many Connecting Classrooms teachers would also agree that global learning implies more than imparting a body of knowledge but instead encourages students to debate, to have their assumptions challenged and to take positive action either in their school or their community. A high proportion of the activities generated by Connecting Classrooms include one or other of these themes and this is reflected in several questionnaires which specifically mention global citizenship:

'They learned what a global citizen is, not taught in school'

'Students equipped with knowledge, skills and understanding for life in a global society and work in a global economy'
(4 other countries mentioned global citizenship)

Although many schools worked hard to integrate the project into the curriculum this was not possible or practical for some systems and the project work took place outside the taught curriculum. This section is therefore sub-divided to reflect these two approaches.

The impact on student learning through the taught curriculum

In terms of subjects the most commonly mentioned was a **foreign language**, chiefly English. This was mentioned in 23% of questionnaires, in 8 Year 2 reports and in the majority of the interviews with cluster leaders. Language learning and the application of the foreign language for a specific purpose was also mentioned by the students themselves during the student workshops. Many of the teachers co-ordinating the project are teachers of English delivering the project through their English lessons. It is therefore unsurprising that they noticed significant progress in the students involved in Connecting Classrooms especially where the activity itself required a reasonable competence in English:

'They had a higher motivation to learn English - One Hundred Words, BBC News Report, Big Dance'

'The students are active and motivated, especially to speak English'

A virtually identical comment comes from the only questionnaire to refer to another language:

'Links with pupils in France has had a positive impact on their motivation to study French'

Responses from every country mention **ICT** as a means of communication, both with partner schools abroad and sometimes across their cluster. Questionnaires, interviews and reports all highlight the benefits to students of virtual communication with a real audience (issues around communication technologies and international links are dealt with in section 5.2.2).

A number of other subject areas are mentioned but none to the extent of foreign languages. **Geography and social studies** lead this group mainly in connection with students learning about countries in their partnership, occasionally the work in this subject area also relates to the cultural heritage of the students:

'The teachers of the English language have become pioneers in introducing a cross-cultural component in their plans. The teachers of geography have also contributed to this process.'
Year 2 report

Practically every other commonly taught subject is mentioned at least once. This is usually in connection with a particular project theme that has a firm link with an element of the curriculum – **science** and **home economics** are examples. **Art**, **music** and **sport** all feature as subjects through which students could celebrate and disseminate aspects of the project.

In some instances the teacher is implying that the subject has simply become more relevant as the student now has first hand contact with the countries they are studying:

'The knowledge of partner countries coming from history and geography became alive, realistic, part of their everyday lives'

'There is some embedding going on when lessons are connected with the topics of the project'

'Neither is there curriculum development although they have included curriculum related aspects of the project in lesson plans'

One interviewee, although not specifying the subjects involved, was keen to point out that a school's background in 'Dreams and Team's' had led to teaching about both leadership and teamwork being included in the formal curriculum of the school. This helped to prepare the students for Connecting Classrooms. In much the same way schools in the Romanian clusters have now brought Young Leadership training into the curriculum and there is a possibility that the Ministry of Education may update the national curriculum for citizenship based on the Connecting Classrooms experiences.

In terms of activities the Year 1 and Year 2 reports show that many clusters that were working through the curriculum planned rather simple projects that did not build on the Connecting Classrooms themes (exchanging Christmas cards and a multicultural calendar are examples). This might reflect some of the difficulties of international collaboration coupled with relatively rigid curricula. However for the most part these ideas developed substantially by the second year of the project and for some schools the activities moved wholly or partially into extra curricula time often following the impetus of the Young Leader training.

The impact on student learning outside the curriculum

For some systems and in some projects curricular integration was difficult or impossible. This viewpoint was expressed several times in the questionnaires but it was through the reports and interviews that more detailed explanations emerged. Sometimes this was due to the rigidity of the curriculum itself:

'The educational scene did not really support any major curriculum development within schools due to the fact that the Government announced a more centralized approach to curriculum development, which undermined teachers' and even school heads' involvement in this process. Teachers can mainly rely on extra-curricular activities when bringing in international dimension to schools. This was well-reflected in the many different activities school organized. On many occasions they succeeded in making these programmes part of the yearly school programs in a way that a Connecting Classrooms theme became central to those events.' Year 2 report

'They can't change the curriculum, the Connecting Classrooms work is extra-curricular'

'The curriculum does not allow any bending or integration of projects. It was very difficult to meet our teams, since we had to "take" them from their lessons and thus, creating trouble to our colleagues, some of whom did not allow the students to attend the meetings' Year 2 report

In other instances student groups were drawn from different year groups making it almost inevitable that most learning took place outside the formal curriculum. It was in these circumstances that respondents made frequent references to learning that was more concerned with skills and competences:

'Students developed the necessary skills to use their strategies, they disseminated what they had learned, to make compromises, to work in teams, to defend their own ideas, to share their knowledge'

This was sometimes linked to the Young Leader training:

'The training helped them to develop in many ways, to communicate, to be tolerant and patient, to listen to people, to change their views'

It was also in this context that **global learning** flourished, in this instance (and in the majority of other examples) relating to the themes of inclusion and diversity:

'Their motivation increased when finding practical solutions to the problems of inclusion in the questionnaire. Applying the solutions to their action plan was a chance for some to discover their sense of belonging to a community dominated by diversity'

Other schools, although less commonly, developed the theme of conflict resolution:

'Celebrating the anniversary of Gandhi's assassination and the non-violence message students watched the film (Gandhi) and worked on anti-bullying themes, they exchanged thoughts with a partner school' Year 2 report

Results derived from the student workshops in target countries

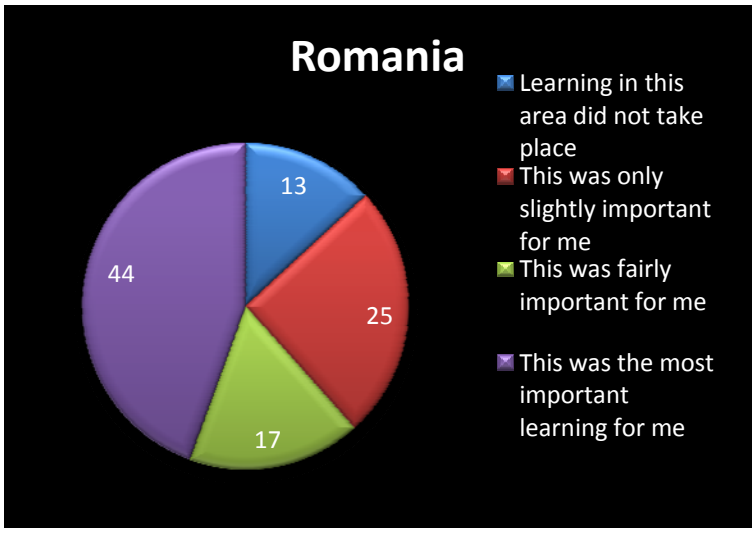
Student workshops took place in a number of target countries identified by the British Council. These were Bosnia and Herzegovina, France, Germany, Romania and the UK. The workshops were participative events designed to enable the students able to voice their views independently. Full details of these workshops are given in Section 4, (Methodologies) and in Appendix D (Evaluation tools) . Results for the workshops are especially relevant to this section since they included three themes around student learning. These were:

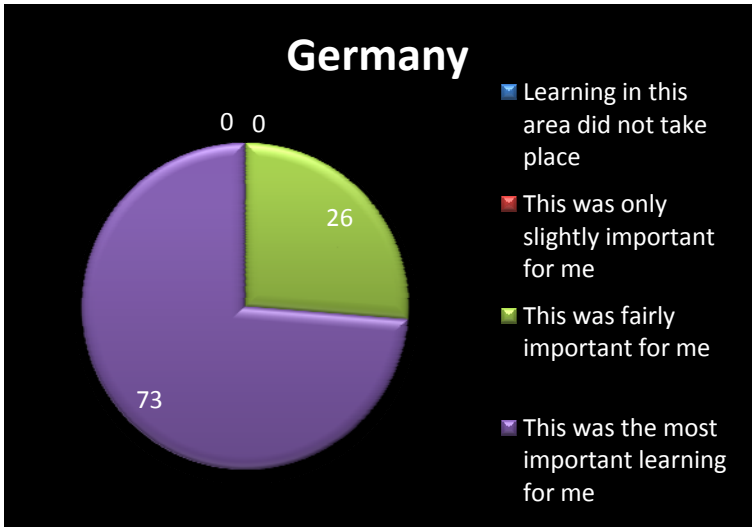
- how much more do the students understand about being a global citizen;
- concrete learning as a result of the project (languages and geography were given as examples of subject areas where this might take place);
- what other learning have the students identified that has come out of the project.

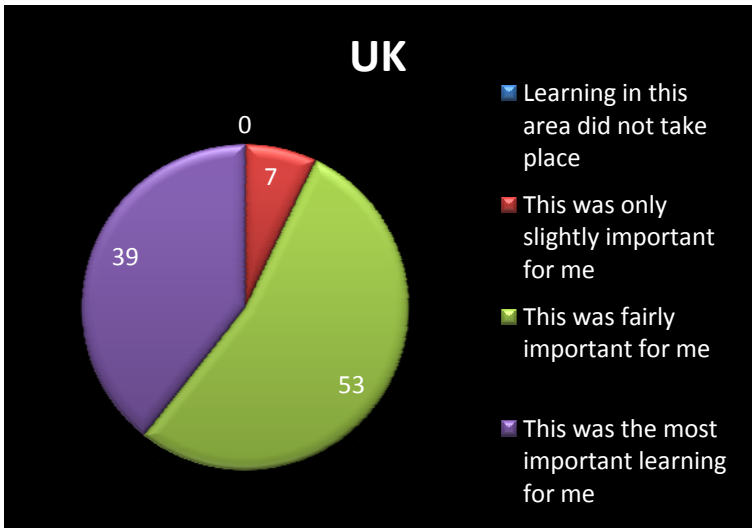
The following section shows the results for the first two questions in a graphical format followed by a summary of the statements generated by the 'other learning' question.

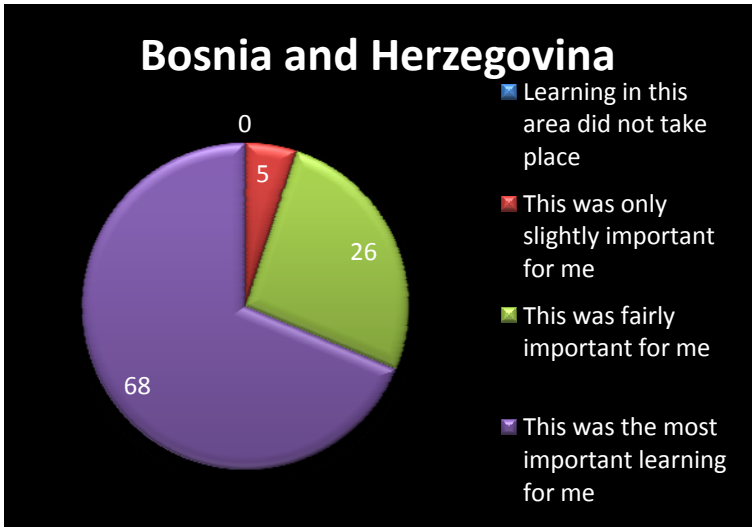
Note: The data from France for these questions was incomplete.

Figure 4: How much more do students understand about being a global citizen





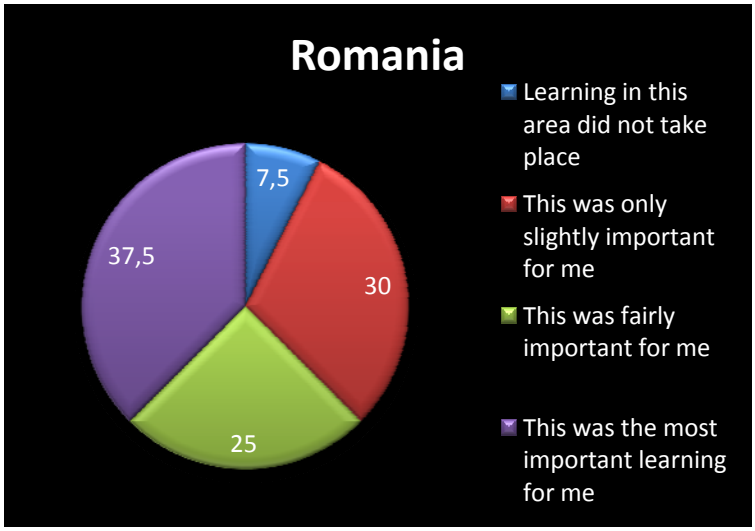


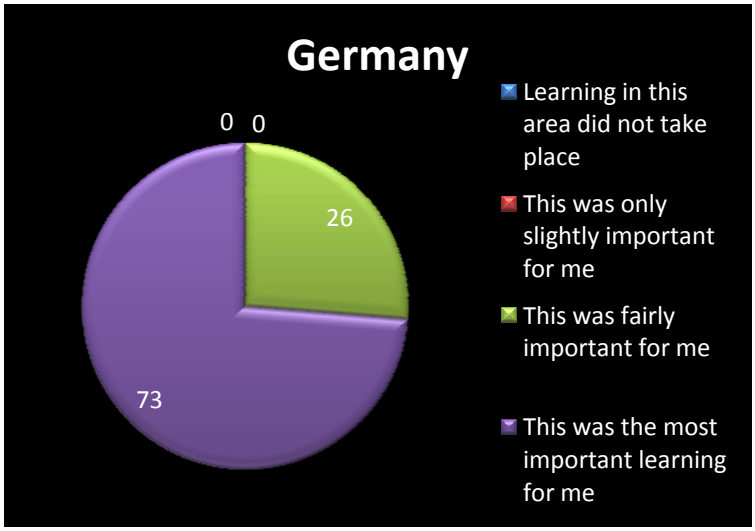


The students were given the opportunity to add examples from their own experiences:

'The experience of other cultures and evaluation of their own attitude to diversity'
'I think my sense of being part of a wider world has grown'

Figure 5: Concrete learning as a result of the project




Germany
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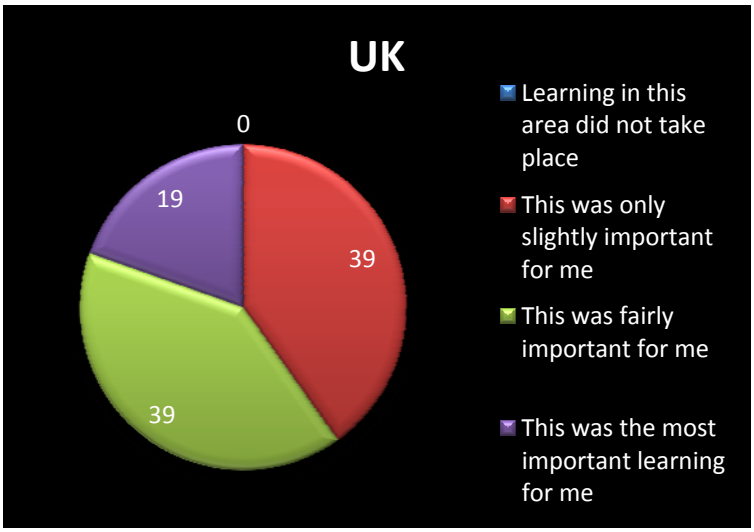
26
73
Learning in this area did not take place
This was only slightly important for me
This was fairly important for me
This was the most important learning for me


UK
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39
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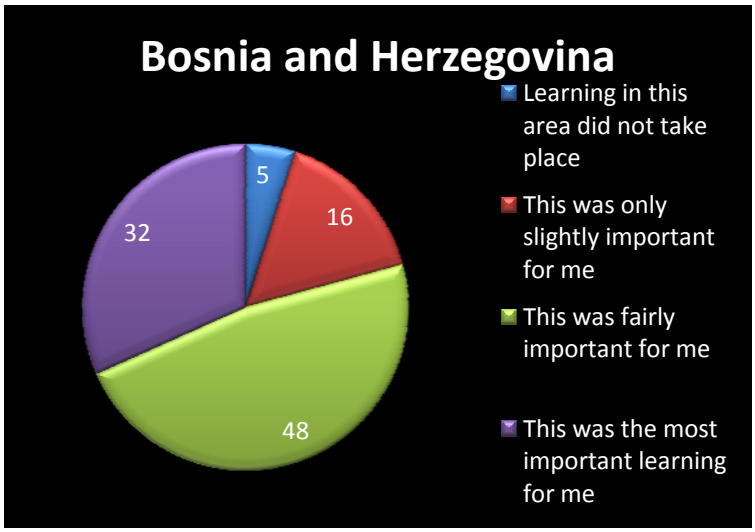
Learning in this area did not take place
This was only slightly important for me
This was fairly important for me
This was the most important learning for me


Bosnia and Herzegovina
5
16
32
48
Learning in this area did not take place
This was only slightly important for me
This was fairly important for me
This was the most important learning for me

The students were again given the opportunity to add examples from their own experiences:

'Improvement of English language skills and the cultural aspects of partner schools in France, Hungary and Wales'

'Language competence improved a lot during the exchange and we learned a lot'

Other learning identified by students from project

'Cultural diversity' *'Understanding of the world'* *'Communication'* *'Teamwork'*

'Beating routine' *'Challenging differences'* *'Accepting diversity'*

Learning to: *'co-operate, work in a team or in groups, write a project plan, organise people, respect each other, practice, help people with needs, cope with new situations, have fun!'*

Future plans

Finally the students taking part in the workshops were asked to complete this statement:

As a result of the project .....

This produced a range of answers. Some are personal and mention aspirations which the project has prompted while others refer to the student as a member of a group. However some students mentioned further information about how their school has progressed as a result of Connecting Classrooms. This is a summary of their statements:

Changes in personal attributes, behaviour and new ambitions

'I was happy to help and it developed me as a better person'

'I became more responsible, more sensitive to different people'

'I learned to cope with new situations'

'I have enhanced my coaching and leadership skills'

'I learned how to communicate better (mentioned many times)'

'I will try to convince other people not to discriminate on ethnicity grounds'

'I want to go to a different country again to learn more things'

'I have become more confident to present my ideas'

'I feel more confident within lessons and outside school (mentioned many times)'

'I am more aware of different cultures and customs'

'I will be an active citizen'

Changes in attitudes to others

'I have learned to help people and accept people for what they are'

'We learned to perceive the problems and difficulties in our community'

'I will try to extend inclusion values in my life outside school'

'I want to make a difference; I will share this experience with others'

'I will treat every person as my equal'

Wider awareness of issues – local, national and global:

'As a result of the project .....there is a better world outlook'

What the group of Young Leaders have gained

'We were doing the social and humanitarian activities through which we succeeded in enriching our knowledge'

'We co-operated with schools, university and many cultural institutions'

'We all learnt how to function as a team'

'As individuals, we all learned something new, improved our skills, knowledge of English, launched many initiatives in our school'

'We learnt how to spread the positive energy we all carry inside of us'

'We are more aware of the differences and common points between us and our partners'

How the school has changed

'The school has gained more attention from the student body as well as from the people that decided to participate in our activities'

'Our school has grown in society'

'The school got a chance to show the wider community and to connect with partner schools abroad'

'I will see that principles of inclusion are observed in my school'

Many also mentioned new friendships

'We have friendships and wonderful companionship with students from other schools'

This final comment is more difficult to classify but has considerable resonance:

'We learnt that we can work and grow together, that we are all just teens who aren't guilty for the things that happened in the past'

Summary

Taken as a whole the results indicate that the programme has had a considerable impact on student learning. This might have taken place within the formal curriculum, as part of extra curricula activities or a combination of the two. Learning was sometimes expressed purely in terms of subject knowledge but both teachers and students were keen to emphasise the impact of the project on skills and competences, especially those which enabled the students to work effectively in groups or teams. There were some inhibiting factors to student learning. Some of these were structural (for example the school curriculum) and outside of the influence of the programme. Others were centred around the motivation and commitment of both staff and students and depended largely on the circumstances in an individual school. However the inhibiting factors mentioned most frequently were around international co-operation and communications. These factors are discussed in more detail in the section of the report relating to 'Challenges'.

5.1.5 Professional development for teachers and other staff

CC Outcome 3: Teachers and Global Learning

Professional development for teachers and other staff is mentioned as a successful aspect of Connecting Classrooms (Europe) by 31% of teachers who responded to the questionnaire. The learning described falls into four main categories:

- learning between teachers internationally and/or within the country cluster;
- learning related to the skills involved in running the project;
- learning about specific aspects of the project, particularly Student Voice;
- improving language skills, including confidence in using a foreign language.

Learning between teachers internationally and/or within the country cluster

For most international projects (for example Comenius school projects) the professional development of education staff is an important element. The learning that takes place, for example: observing new teaching methods and having the opportunity to try them in their own classrooms; the chance to discuss common educational issues (for example motivation and behaviour or the teaching of literacy) and above all the chance to reflect on one's own practice in a situation away from everyday teaching has had many benefits which are documented elsewhere. The Teachers International Professional Development Programme in the UK capitalised on this by providing teachers with a structured way to observe and learn from practice in other countries; Council of Europe in-service training, EU Comenius in-service training and Transversal Measures have, at their best, the same outcome. 48% of teachers who identify professional development as an outcome of Connecting Classrooms projects identify this aspect as one of the most valuable:

'The benefit to the professional development of teachers is due to the new contacts we made with colleagues at home and abroad, exchange of experiences we shared with each other, tying personal contacts and contacts that will last beyond the end of the project'

(The project has) *'added value as professionals through incorporating best practice of teaching at partner school and created a new 'common language' of co-teaching'*

Teachers mention that they have had the opportunity to develop a wider world view, which in turn develops their ability lead the global dimension at school:

'As regards teachers, I think this project has offered me the opportunity to work on the basis of a wider perspective, getting to know different opinions and points of view which are often the expression of one's cultural identity'

'The teachers involved have also benefited from this project by being exposed to different cultural values and attitudes'

Teachers who had the opportunity to meet their international partners and perhaps even visit them in school benefited most from this aspect, although there was also some learning in one project through the development of joint lesson plans using ICT which were delivered in each country. However, a significant number of the group (32%) identified learning and sharing of experience between teachers in the same country as a valuable development opportunity; many had not previously had much contact with each other and they enjoyed the opportunity of learning about each others' schools and different ways of doing things:

'A superb professional development opportunity – schools tend to work in isolation from each other, even though they have to follow the same curriculum. Staff members in these different sectors have very few opportunities to meet up and thanks to this project, we were given the opportunity to go out of our isolated walls and interact with each other, expose the culture of our schools and appreciate the distinguishing characteristics of each'

This was particularly powerful when schools had not been in touch before – for example a special school and mainstream secondary school.

Learning the skills involved in running the project

This is mentioned by 25% of the group as a successful outcome of the project. Formal training, provided in some cases by the British Council and in some cases by local authorities, for example *'Gestao e Coordenacao de Projectos Internacionais numa Perspectiva Interculturalidade'* in Portugal, which also provided credits for teachers' career progression, were mentioned positively:

'teachers involved in this project were trained and this has had an impact on their career progression and on CC project development'

Training provided covered both intercultural and thematic aspects and project management skills:

'There were trainings for teachers which also benefited (to) their professional skills, for example the last one, where the teachers learned how to script a lesson of kindness and how to give this knowledge to students'

'Training and seminars helped us learn/review project planning skills; workshop organising skills; how to promote inclusion, voluntary work and team spirit'

Attendance at international meetings was also appreciated as a developmental activity.

Many teachers learned the skills not through courses but 'on the job', managing people, resources, arrangements, meetings, report writing etc:

'The participating teachers certainly gained a lot of benefits as far as their professional development is concerned. For example, through such projects teachers enhance their coordinating and organisational skills….. and also improve their ICT skills'

'Co-ordinators: Organising exchanges; leading the cluster; meetings etc in school'

'I've been equipped with the skills needed to run an international project in my school'

'… experience of report writing, negotiating time to devote to the work'

'Good for organisational and motivational development of staff'

Learning about student voice and becoming confident in including aspects in their dealing with students.

Student Voice was variously understood and implemented across the countries and clusters (see section 5.1.1 above for an analysis of this). Learning about student voice, and the impact this had on teaching styles and strategies, was identified by 19% of the group as a successful outcome.

In many cases this had an impact on methodology:

'Well, at the beginning I did not think I would achieve so many things. I had to learn to leave my traditional teaching methods behind, and just direct the students a little bit, to give them more voice and responsibility'

'The teachers learned how to guide the students instead of doing all the work themselves, how to support them'

'…. Improving facilitating abilities, learning to trust students more with responsibilities…'

Overall, involving students more in the life of the project and the school meant that relationships changed in the classroom:

'Students' enthusiasm provided the impetus for teachers' development'

Improving language and communication skills, including confidence in using a foreign language

For most who responded, this meant improving English language, and often developing the confidence to use it in meetings or in other communication. Not all the teachers running the project were English teachers, and this was an important aspect for them. In addition, several mention the use of ICT for a real purpose:

'The project has (supported) the professional development of teachers, training of new leaders, encouraging the use of modern communication technologies'

'Within the school the three different subject teachers have had the opportunity to develop their communication skills towards a common goal'

Summary

It is clear from the respondents that professional development, in its widest sense, was an important outcome of Connecting Classrooms (Europe). Teachers learnt from international partnerships where they had the opportunity; they also learn from colleagues in their local cluster; from training courses provided locally and from international meetings, and finally from running the project, which enabled them to develop project and other management and leadership skills and well as ICT and language. Perhaps the last word should go to the Russian students whose teacher involved them in completing the questionnaire:

'The teachers began teaching better!'

5.1.6 Inclusion and diversity

CC outcome 5: Inclusion

This section examines the results for the Connecting Classrooms themes of inclusion and diversity. It is principally based on evidence derived from the questionnaires and interviews with cluster leaders who mentioned this theme as a successful aspect of their project. Some additional content comes from existing Connecting Classrooms reports, mainly from Year 2. Inclusion and diversity are overarching themes for all the Connecting Classrooms work at a European level. They were therefore central to the Young Leaders training programme which focussed on raising awareness of issues around inclusion and helped participants to understand that these themes should be at the heart of their work in school partnerships.

27% of respondents to the questionnaires mentioned inclusion and diversity as a successful aspect of their project.

Content

The wide range of countries and schools represented in the programme coupled with some diversity within the school and local community populations has led to a variable understanding of inclusion and diversity. This is reflected in how they are identified by our respondents in schools' project work and has a bearing both on content and outcomes.

For some schools there was a legacy of work with the previous British Council INDIE programme (Inclusion and Diversity in Education). Others mentioned 'understanding difference', 'tolerance' and 'dispelling stereotypes'. Some schools that would later produce exemplary activities began working with their local and international clusters with quite a narrow view of the programme:

'At first we thought it was about school linking – no-one really knew what inclusion meant'

Others acknowledged that this theme would be open to a range of interpretations:

'There was a cultural difference in the interpretation of inclusion'

while for some clusters the theme encouraged the students to compare their local circumstances:

'Inclusion can be different in each school according to the situation: For one of the schools physically or mentally challenged students are included automatically ... in one of the schools there is even a majority of Romanies' Year 2 report

For at least one cluster this realisation also provided a productive introductory activity for their students:

'Photo competition and exhibition (Diversity through my eyes) helped us to learn how others in the cluster saw and interpreted the terms inclusion and diversity'

It is unsurprising therefore that the target groups engaged by the Young Leaders were also relatively diverse. They included other students who were somehow disadvantaged (for example new to the school or being from a minority ethnic group) and students who were being bullied or had a fear of

bullying. Respondents who mentioned inclusion and diversity outside the school itself did this mainly in relation to youngsters or adults with physical or learning disabilities:

'We worked together on volunteering and building relationships in the community'

The programme's special schools had a rather different focus to the theme very much around the opportunities for student participation alongside mainstream schools:

'Young Ambassadors meetings were a great possibility for handicapped students to be able to represent themselves abroad – it was a big challenge and chance for them'

while in Portugal students with impaired hearing were part of an anti-bullying presentation at an international education fair. This was sung as a rap and encouraged communication between the two groups as the hearing students needed to learn some sign language.

Relatively few respondents specifically referred to inclusion and diversity in relation to the activities taking place in their school or cluster. There were however some outstanding examples where these themes were the drivers for the work rather than simply underpinning other activities. One of these was an 'Inclusive Schools' survey which sought to identify major problems within the schools involved. This was drafted and the results interpreted by the Young Leaders groups who then took action in order to deal with the issues that the survey uncovered.

'The activity was about helping new students to integrate, they drew up a questionnaire, identified issues and problems then put together an action plan. The problems included the fear of rejection and of bullying. The students started clubs for new students and asked counsellors for advice about the bullying problem. Later another questionnaire confirmed successful results'

In much the same way the partnership seminar held in Birmingham in November 2011 enabled the young leaders to work together and decide on the areas of inclusion that were pertinent to their school and community. Topics such as sexual abuse, issues around religion and violence in school were investigated in face to face sessions in preparation for collaborative work.

Connecting Classrooms in France was delivered through the 'Internat d'excellence' network of boarding schools for students from underprivileged backgrounds. These schools are spread over a wide geographical area therefore students are unable to meet as frequently as in other national clusters. Their approach was for the young leaders in each school to work together to define inclusion and to decide on key actions for their school. This approach appeared to work well at an international level and led to a short film being made with a focus on inclusion. One of the French schools then put together a theatre project around discrimination at job interviews and won a regional completion on inclusion and diversity.

Surveys were also at the centre of the work in Romania where the young leaders designed and implemented an 'Inclusion in Action' project. This led both to action plans to improve the inclusion culture of their schools but also valuable dissemination work with local authorities and the Ministry of Education.

Work with the local community was mentioned chiefly in relation to students volunteering to visit homes for the elderly or special schools.

'Inclusion – especially humanitarian aspects, in practical terms this means voluntary work'

Diversity was referred to only occasionally and the term was usually coupled with inclusion. However schools and communities which had seen recent immigration from the Middle East or North Africa were more inclined to work on understanding why their communities were becoming more diverse and use related project work to broaden the horizons of their students:

'They realised that in order to travel, live and work in other countries they have to accept and try to find common ground with other cultures and people from other countries' Year 2 report

Some groups also decided to befriend students from minority ethnic groups whom they felt were being marginalised in school:

'Although the community is very closed-minded about foreigners and their integration into local society the students who participated in the programme espoused a more progressive view, got out of their comfort zone and got in touch with students who would otherwise be excluded from their circle of friends'

Outcomes

The questionnaires and interviews provided many general statements relating to the outcomes for students in terms of inclusion and diversity:

'The project has raised the students' awareness of different cultural and moral issues like cultural stereotypes and prejudices, tolerance and equality'

It was also clear that some projects had achieved a wider understanding amongst the staff and in the relationship the school has with the wider community:

'For the teachers their attitude to inclusion has changed dramatically – they used to think it meant work with disabled children but now the conception has become much wider'

'The project put the spotlight on the importance of inclusion in school and in our community'

These outcomes are based on the assumption that the students and teachers in each school have at least a basic understanding of inclusion. Some of our sources suggest a contrary view:

'Pupils don't understand the very notion of inclusion because they live in a sort of shell and don't have contact with other groups ... everyone was surprised at the questions because this topic is not part of everyday life'

*'Teachers don't see beyond what happens in class.' Yea*r 2 report

Very occasionally institutional policy changes are mentioned but these references are more in terms of reinforcing existing policies rather than creating new ones.

'It is part of our college's mission to promote diversity and inclusion so the project fitted in well'

Summary

The Connecting Classrooms themes of inclusion and diversity were interpreted very differently amongst the schools which were involved in the programme. Clearly there were external factors at work for some countries; in Serbia for example inclusion was referred to as a '*burning issue and important focus for the project'*. Other approaches were less driven by national circumstances and more by a desire by the students to understand issues in their school and to use their Young Leader training and status to take action. This certainly helped many students to understand that inclusion and diversity have many dimensions and are not simply about 'tolerance' or fellow students who for some reason are excluded from the mainstream life of the school. Respondents who mentioned this development of awareness in their students often followed this up with remarks about the growing confidence of students to express opinions that were based on first-hand experience gained during their project work.

Inclusion and diversity were quite frequently linked to the international component of projects but in these instances responses tended to be restricted to 'learning about other cultures' and not always have the depth to be found in project work taking place in individual schools or national clusters.

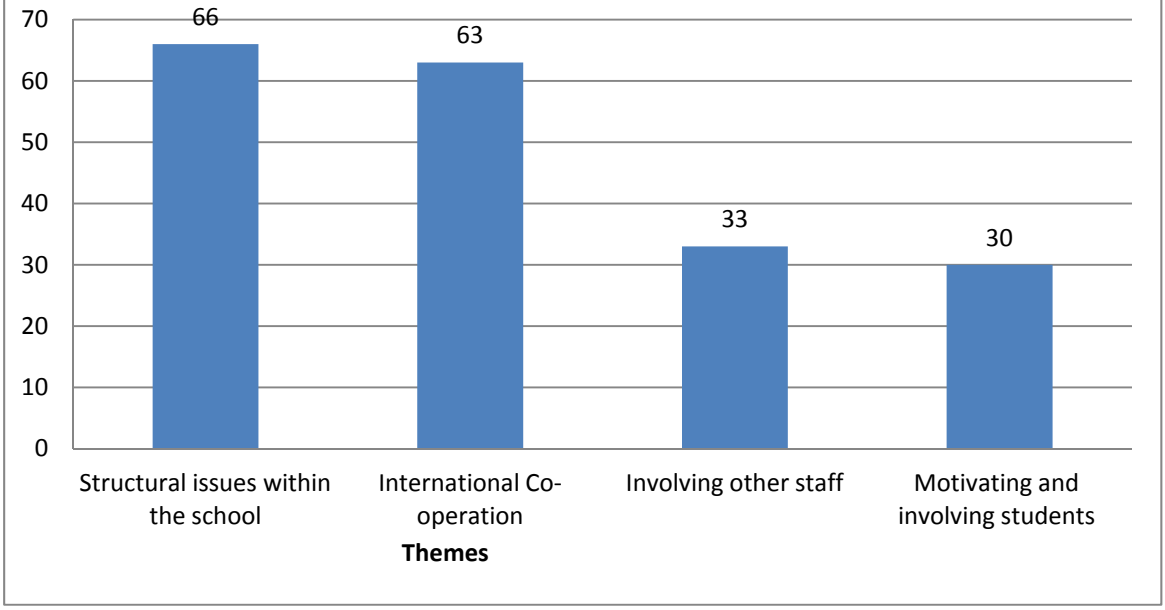
5.2 Challenging aspects of the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme

The evaluators analysed this information and categorised it into 4 key themes:

- structural issues within the school
- international co-operation
-involving other staff
- motivating and involving students

Figure 6 below suggests that 'Structural issues within the school' has been the main challenge followed by 'International co-operation'. 'Motivating and involving students' was mentioned with least frequency.

Figure 6 : Percentage breakdown of challenges into key themes



These responses formed the basis for the following sections focussing on 'challenges'. Additional material was used where this was appropriate from the interviews with co-ordinators, the student workshops and the Connecting Classrooms reports, chiefly from Year 2 of the programme.

5.2.1 Structural issues within the school

Structural issues within the school were identified as a problem by 71% of respondents who specified challenges in carrying out the project.

The major challenge faced by teachers in this group was finding the time to undertake project activities. This was clearly a serious issue; 81% of those who identified school issues as a challenge in carrying out the project identified lack of time as the major obstacle– for example in Russia fourteen students and six teachers contributed to a discussion and all of them identified time constraints as a challenge.

This was closely related to the second main challenge, which was the integration of project activities into the curriculum and normal activities of the school. This was identified as an issue by 34% of the group.

Time

The main difficulty with time was that many schools did not set aside teaching or co-ordination time for project activities, which meant a huge burden for some participating teachers:

'It is not scheduled in our teaching workloads so work had to be done during the teachers own free time'

'Teachers had too much work to do with very little time at their disposition'

Teachers found innovative solutions to the time problem:

'The programme did not run during the regular school programme. This was a great challenge for students and their teacher alike, mainly because the meetings were scheduled outside school hours (mainly at the teachers' residence) and during the weekends'

'We met during break times, during class time, on afternoons and holidays. This posed problems for the students as they had to make up for any school work they missed out on and added stress to their lives'

'All activities are extra lessons for teachers; students' timetables are full/packed'

There were also time issues for students:

'Both children and teachers are very busy. In the project activities are included children who are the most active in the school and participate in many initiatives'

This lack of time in a busy school day meant it was not only difficult to undertake activities, but also to organise meetings within schools, and even more difficult within clusters. It also had implications for co-ordinators who were trying to encourage colleagues to work in the project. The project was in many cases additional to, and in some cases in conflict with, the work undertaken by teachers:

'The problem is that co-ordinators are class teachers at the same time and work with the class is top priority'

Time was a problem for co-ordinators as well as for participating teachers:

'I found it not easy for myself, the co-ordinator of the project. It is quite difficult to put much effort if you work full time, having six or seven lessons a day'

'One of the most defying aspects of joining this 'adventure' was finding time to work on all the issues to talk/learn/ work on'

Some difficulties with time were caused by the project structure itself; in the second year of the project particularly, some schools felt that the project did not always take account of the needs of particular schools:

'There was not any structured plan to follow with agreed deadlines. We had to do assignments that were put on us with immediate deadlines which caused problems doing them at the most stressful time of the school year'

What is however very clear is that teachers were committed and found the time somehow, even at personal cost.

'I didn't have time, but it was so thrilling that I did some activities at night'

Curriculum issues

For many schools, activities took place outside the curriculum and this had considerable implications for the amount of time teachers had to put in. Teachers found it hard to deliver the projects through subjects (see section 5.1.4 Student Learning for a description of where the project fitted - or did not fit - into the curriculum).

'A really great challenge was to 'implant' the project work in our school programme. It is totally impossible to find a place for moral issues like cultural stereotypes and prejudices, tolerance and equality etc in the biology classes, for example. And this restricts the possibility for teachers in different subjects to take part in the project'

'No extra time has been allocated to the project and it has not been written into any kind of schemes of work or programmes of study'

The lack of time for the project in school, relying heavily on teachers' good will and extracurricular activities rather than building the project into the curriculum and other activities of the school, has a clear implication for the sustainability of the project.

5.2.2 International co-operation

Building new international school partnerships was one of the key aims of the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme. It has also presented some significant challenges which are the subject of this section.

58% of respondents in the teacher group gave international co-operation as a challenge to their work with Connecting Classrooms. From their comments it was possible to break down the challenging aspects of their international experiences into three broad areas. Their evidence is supported by material derived from the Year 1 and Year 2 reports, from the interviews with cluster co-ordinators and to a more limited extent from the student workshops in the target countries. The final part of this section relates these challenges to the content of the international work and to its impact.

Variable commitment from partners and/or lack of response

90% of respondents to the questionnaire who identified international co-operation as a challenge cited limited or non-existent partner commitment as a contributory factor. This was a major disappointment for teachers and students as many had imagined that the project would be focussed on international partnerships:

'It was impossible to reach the partner school, they never answered our message ... the students thought they would travel more'

Some schools also had the impression that the international component had the overarching aim of language learning:

'We thought it would be more or less a foreign language project and that was the reason why we joined it'

However despite the impetus of centrally organised partner meetings many of the international links were never consolidated. Related comments inevitably originated from the schools which tried to initiate communications:

'There was no connection as the students had expected, no incentives'

'Sadly this kind of communication just did not materialise'

'*We completely lost contact with our partners'*

'There are schools that have never answered our emails'

In other instances communication was:

'Unreliable and sporadic'

Face to face meetings were occasions when failing partnerships could be reinvigorated but teachers mentioned that funding issues would sometimes make these difficult to achieve or restrict the numbers who could take part:

'There was not enough funding to travel to our travel – this made it difficult for the students to communicate'

'It was difficult to select students to travel .. so many wanted to go'

This theme of non-communication also emerged during the interviews with cluster co-ordinators. Most named specific countries where communication between the teachers had been sporadic and as a consequence collaborative work with students never materialised. The UK was mentioned most frequently in this context sometimes with the explanation that firewalls or school regulations had prevented meaningful collaboration but also suggesting that structural issues in the school or local authority had impeded further development of the project. There was often surprise that the UK was unrepresented or only partly represented at the face to face meetings where some of these issues might have been resolved. Both the teachers and students who were interviewed were disappointed that this part of the work had not always materialised, as the prospect of communication with young English speakers had clearly been a motivating factor.

Technical issues around communications

66% of respondents to the questionnaire who identified international co-operation as a challenge went on to mention specific issues with their chosen methods of communication. This theme was also followed up in the majority of interviews where international work was singled out as a problem for the cluster. Technical issues rarely ended school links but instead limited them so that some schools could not be equally involved and the content of the work remained fairly basic. Cluster co-ordinators worked hard to find suitable communication platforms and some tried and abandoned technologies as they failed to meet the needs of the clusters:

'Difficult sometimes to communicate with our partners, the communication platforms have changed several times (Live@Edu, eTwinning, Edmodo), some participants just gave up'

This left gaps in the time that had often been carefully planned for project work:

'The connection existed but just with teachers by email, we uploaded materials to eTwinning but the others couldn't see it, we couldn't pick up the thread after meetings although we tried'

eTwinning was mentioned many times in both questionnaires and in some interviews. It appeared to be the platform that clusters had been advised to use but the numbers of schools involved made it an inappropriate choice:

'We all found the eTwinning platform tough for a group of 20 schools, especially file uploading'

'eTwinning was difficult with so many schools and two clusters'

'Labyrinths of chaotically arranged materials'

Inevitably when faced with the practical limitations of the communication platforms chosen by their teachers many students began to communicate with their peers using Facebook or other social media:

'The platform offered for the work turned out to be inconvenient ... the students could easily find other successful on-line communication'

This was a pragmatic solution but sometimes difficult to organise within the school:

'The UK could not take part with Facebook but didn't share activities on eTwinning either'

The search for alternatives was sometimes driven not so much by failings of the communication platforms but by a school's hardware or connectivity not being up to the task:

'Another problem has been the lack of technology – it is almost impossible for the students to enter into contact at school, most of the work has to be done at home'

Common understanding of the international component of the project

30% of respondents to the questionnaire who identified international co-operation as a challenge went on to mention differences in understanding across the partnership. These might relate to the difficulty of agreeing joint aims, the content of the project, the mode of working or all of these factors. To a certain extent the real desire to bring student voice into the equation made this a more complex issue. It seemed that the large and complicated clusters were not always well matched:

'The number of participating schools itself posed a challenge because the plans had to suit the agendas and timetables of each country ... participating schools were very diverse in terms of size, location, age of students and ethnic background'

'There were too many partners which resulted in only weak links between schools'

As a result activities were sometimes quite superficial and not collaborative:

'We could not find common ground, as a result the schools did their own thing with respect to each task and advised the others when finished'

There was also evidence of a fundamental lack of understanding of the British Council role in the project or the sort of outcomes that schools might expect. This might well have been alleviated had the international element been more successful:

'The students didn't grasp the importance of the British Council or why they worked with us (as our partners have not been working with us)'

'Lack of interest .... we hoped for a student exchange .... the students were much younger than our team – we had the impression that they didn't know what ideas were behind the project'

Limitations in the scope of the international work

The challenges outlined above limited the international activities within some clusters. It is important to emphasise that this was not universal; some activities were of high quality and these are mentioned in the appropriate sections of the report. However some international collaborative activities between schools were rather basic and in many instances resembled those of a primary school partnership in the EU Comenius programme. An example would be the exchange of Christmas cards and calendars. While this is useful as an introductory activity it lacked curricular integration

and the potential for development. Another cluster planned 'Flat Stanley visits Europe' – this is firmly in the primary phase and it is difficult to see how it might link, or lead to, activities concerned with student voice, diversity or inclusion.

Clusters that were struggling to collaborate together for one or other of the reasons discussed above began to put their energy into more local projects within the cluster. This was often accompanied by a shift to work outside the formal curriculum and resulted in some of the most fruitful and sustainable aspects of the programme that are described elsewhere. However it terms of the international element it once again reduced this to sharing rather than collaborating:

'We decided to go ahead with the local projects .... feel that they have been very worthwhile ... and we are content to showcase them to our (international) partners.' Year 2 report

5.2.3 Involving other staff

Involving other staff in the project was an issue for 36% of teachers who identified challenges in the project. Additionally, it was sometimes a problem for country co-ordinators. Overall there seemed to be good support for the project from senior leadership teams.

The main issue was related to the issue of time described in section 5.2.1 above – teachers were reluctant to do extra work on a project, and the issue of them being required to cover the classes of teachers working on the project (for example, in Germany) had to be carefully handled. The aims of the project were sometimes unclear or unfamiliar to them:

'They did not feel confident with the concepts of Student Voice and Inclusion and Diversity' Interview with co-ordinator

and they may not have been able to relate it to their subject (the country co-ordinators for both Greece and Italy mention this in interviews).

The situation in Europe has clearly had an impact:

'*We are in a period of deep crisis and the people don't feel the urge and courage or even anima to go forward with new projects*'

Many of the school co-ordinators were English teachers, and they reveal a difficulty about involving staff teaching other subjects, who did not feel confident in working in English; this was much more of an issue for teachers than for students. In some cases this was overcome as the project developed:

'*It was a challenge for teachers who didn't speak English- but some are taking lessons in English now!*' Interview with co-ordinator

'*There were teachers who did not speak English well/at all but they were curious to be involved. We all worked together and this was not a problem*'

However, due to the persistence of co-ordinators, in many cases other staff became involved:

'*Yes, it was a little difficult, especially in the beginning, but slowly it changed and after the first year of the project, many teachers started to offer their help, time and energy for the purpose of better results. Of course, there has always been a group of teachers who are absolutely indifferent towards this or any other international partnership or project*' Interview with co-ordinator

'*Well, at the beginning I really had to fight with them. Many of them told me, that you speak English, this task was given to you, do not involve me in your project. …. It took some time, one and a half year, to recognise that it is not my own project, but it is a school project, and it enhances all our jobs*'

5.2.4 Motivating and involving students

Of the 19 country co-ordinators interviewed in depth, all reported that they had not found it a problem to recruit students, in spite of some difficulties at the beginning which were overcome as the project gathered momentum. All students were volunteers and most were selected by teachers. In Serbia the Student Parliament ran a recruitment campaign.

However, motivating and involving students was more of an issue at participating school level; 33% of teachers who identified challenges specified this area. The main problem seems to have been motivating students to get involved in the first place; as mentioned in section 5.2.1, students all had full timetables and were not always clear about what the project would involve. As with teachers, time was an issue for students. As the project was not in the main delivered through the curriculum, students had to be willing to participate in their own time, or in school breaks.

Many were disappointed that there was not much direct contact with their peers in other countries, particularly those who were eager to travel, and that communication through virtual means was limited with some countries – unfortunately particularly with the UK, which was a popular but difficult country to work with, as outlined in section 5.2.2.

'All the students were very enthusiastic about the opportunity to find pen friends and to practise writing their English… some students have found pen friends, but some did not. It was difficult to motivate them to continue their participation in our project'

'The initial motivation of students was challenging because as participants in an international project the students anticipated meetings with their peers from abroad and jointly organised activities'

It was particularly de-motivating for students when they sent emails and letters and did not get responses, and found eTwinning difficult or impossible to use (see section 5.2.2).

It was also mentioned several times by teachers that students are involved in other projects which offer them clearer benefits such as resources; none of these incentives were present in Connecting Classrooms.

Language was sometimes an issue, albeit less than for teachers; although students were learning English, the concepts went beyond their vocabulary. Some respondents felt a clearer outline of possible projects to do with partners countries would have made it easier for students to take part:

'The 'concepts' we worked were too difficult for my group they were too young and did not have enough fluency in English'

Although this depended on age, some felt the topics were: *'too far from teenagers experience and too hard for them to understand and express in English'*

'They lost interest very quickly if nothing big was happening'

A further problem was the transience of some students; although Connecting Classrooms (Europe) was set up with the aim that students would be in the school for the three years of the project, in practice some students were older and left before the end, or moved schools due to personal

circumstances. This had a deleterious effect on projects which relied heavily on a small group of students:

'Nearly no students from the beginning remain in the project today. We thought the project would have been more alive, motivating and with more exchanges…… It was difficult to keep both teachers and students motivated due to a lack of real concrete actions'

'We lost several students who had been engaged in the project since the very beginning: some of them just graduated, the others transferred from the school'

Overall teachers did experience some problems in getting students involved and keeping them motivated; this was mainly due to time issues, some disappointed expectations and the lack of student mobility.

5.3 Unexpected outcomes and learning

In a project with such a wide range of content and objectives it is hardly surprising that there are some unexpected outcomes.

However, one thing that emerges from the teacher responses is the extent to which teachers were pleasantly surprised by the motivation and commitment shown by students; this was often directly related to the international nature of the programme:

'*provoked by the new and the unknown pupils showed unbelievable interest in this international project'*

This goes beyond the expected benefits of the programme:

'*We have unveiled the students' potential, formerly hidden, for exceptional creativity and human mutuality'*

Students developed relationships with each other via facebook, and also increased their motivation to learn a foreign language:

'*The students' enthusiasm for foreign-language run programme was a positive, unexpected outcome. This came as a great surprise, especially from kids who are not always willing to take up tasks that take them out of their 'comfort zone''*

'*By challenging the students and taking them into unfamiliar ground the natural leaders and decision makers emerged, often not those you would expect*'

There was also an unexpected impact on relationships at school:

'*I never thought that the staff involved and the students involved would have bonded up so nicely*'

Where international co-operation was successfully established, there were also some unexpected outcomes, including:

'*the possibility of conducting a lesson via teleconferencing, in which both schools from Malta and Cyprus will participate'*

It was not expected that schools would organise international visits, but this happened in many cases where schools could identify the funding, for example the 'road trip' to several countries organised by the Cardiff cluster. These gave a real impetus to the international work. Schools learned that:

'*Personal meetings can't be replaced by communication via \Internet*'

Unfortunately what was not expected was the lack of response from some schools in the partnership; this was particularly hurtful when classes had taken the time to send work and letters which received no reply. Some of these children felt that other countries did not want to link with them. However some unexpected partnerships flourished, for example an exchange visit between Poland and Bosnia Herzegovina. Contact locally was an unexpected positive outcome, especially with schools different to their own – this is explored more fully in 5.1.2 (Community Engagement).

Teachers grew to understand that they had a number of common issues as a profession and this especially applied to their workload. They were sometimes surprised by the personal development they experienced as a result of the project, particularly cluster co-ordinators; this included: working as a team; working outside the formal curriculum and relating to students in different ways.

6 The views of policymakers

The operation of Connecting Classrooms (Europe) was dependent upon the initial co-operation and continuing support of national project delivery partners with the local British Council office. These partners included ministries of education plus regional or local authorities. The inclusion of 22 participating countries in the programme with a range of education systems and policy models led to some different levels of involvement in the delivery of the programme. This report is predominately focussed on the impact of the work for students, teachers, schools and communities however the evaluators were also able to gather a limited amount of information directly from British Council national partners. References to the involvement of policymakers also came from cluster co-ordinators and these are included elsewhere in the report, principally in the sections on successes and sustainability.

Those policymakers who were involved directly in the evaluation appeared to have a good understanding of the aims of the Connecting Classrooms programme, an understanding that was largely shared by the schools:

- to make students aware of their decision making capabilities;
- to learn how to organise themselves (in the school itself);
- to enlarge the project by networking with other countries;
- to build and awareness of disadvantaged groups amongst the students;
- to equip students with the right skills for an increasingly globalised society;
- to help teachers embed partnership work into their lessons.

Policymakers also understood some of the challenges that the work presented and specifically mentioned:

- The extra work for teachers, also for students with busy schedule;
- The difficulties of motivating the school staff to get involved (especially new teachers who were unfamiliar with project management and external projects).

An additional challenge specific to a limited number of countries but critical nonetheless was the need to respond to internal government changes (for example a new Minister of Education) or to a new administration. These situations led to the work having to be explained each time to a new official or politician.

There were also occasions when ministries took positive action to launch or sustain the programme in their country or region. These activities included a special meeting for teachers who had volunteered to take part and support for international meetings. Interviewees also mentioned very positively their links with the British Council office in their country and the joint role they had in ensuring that the projects were sustained beyond the official end of the programme. There were also references to proposed handbooks or curriculum guides and in one instance the idea of some accreditation for students who had taken an active role in the project at their school.

7 Sustainability

The evaluation examined how Connecting Classrooms (Europe) projects would be continued after the withdrawal of funding and other support from the British Council. There were three aspects to this:

1. How schools/ countries/ clusters planned to continue international partnerships, with whom, and what activities they planned.

2. The extent to which schools would continue to address the Connecting Classrooms themes of inclusion and diversity through activities and school policies.

3. The extent to which schools would continue to build on student voice through activities and changed ways of working in school.

The information was extracted from:

- reports of year 2, with some analysis of the progression from year 1 and disparities between plans and activities carried out;
- interviews with co-ordinators, which ask the specific questions: 'Do you think the partnership will continue to work together after the project has ended? And 'How do you see the Youth Voice element developing after the project has ended?'
- interviews with partners, which give a view on how the local authorities will aim to sustain projects;
- examples of current activities (year 3) which show how the partnerships are developing and the relevance of current activities to the aims of Connecting Classrooms. These activities could not be evaluated systematically and are therefore featured separately in Appendix C

The following sections draw on these sources to examine the key factors affecting the sustainability of the activities established through Connecting Classrooms (Europe).

International partnerships

In spite of the difficulties discussed in section 5.2.2, many schools have managed to establish and embed international partnerships with at least one country in the group, which is leading to joint projects, student and staff exchange (in some partnerships) and in some cases applications for further funding (Comenius; Lefèvre). In some groups, partnerships will continue between two partners - for example a range of activities, including an exchange, will take place between clusters in Portugal and the UK (London).

Positive relationships were also formed between countries that perhaps might not previously have considered each other as partners; for example in one cluster Germany, the Slovak Republic and Serbia have undertaken an extremely fruitful set of activities around sport and Olympic values and are planning to keep working together.

Overall, 90% of countries are intending to keep at least one international partnership active after the end of the project, in spite of the challenges they faced, as the following examples of planned activities show:

- a summer camp for students from across the partnership (Ukraine);
- Comenius partnerships (France, UK, Spain, Portugal).

To quote one Russian cluster co-ordinator: '*friendship does not stop so easily'*

An additional outcome has been the development of in-country partnerships and the learning that has taken place within these - for example in Bosnia Herzegovina a project is developing around a drama club in Mostar. This is the case in nearly all the country clusters and is often specifically mentioned as a positive outcome from the project.

Inclusion and diversity

The sustainability of these themes depends on the extent to which they were addressed during the project. In countries where the concepts were difficult to address, or where the understanding was related to 'helping the disadvantaged' (for example, visiting old peoples' homes), activities that have been established will continue to be built into school life and have a positive impact on young people, particularly in countries where this was a new activity. In countries and partnerships where the issues were grappled with and more challenging activities undertaken, this has led to a change in the attitudes of both young people and in some cases in the schools as an institution.

Student voice

As described in 5.1.1 above, the Young Leader training was one of the most positive aspects of the Connecting Classrooms project. Student voice has been a strong element of the project, mentioned positively by nearly all the country clusters as an element that will continue after the end of Connecting Classrooms funding and support. In only two cases were there doubts that student voice would continue to be a feature in school: in one , it was felt that the students were too young in relation to the other students involved, and in another it was felt that the students involved would leave soon and there were no plans for sustainability.

The most significant ways in which student voice is to be continued are:

1. By students selecting and training other students, making it self sufficient. This is already happening in Bosnia Herzegovina, Cyprus and in other countries. Participation in this element of the projects is seen as a privilege, with parents in some schools asking when younger students can take part. Students benefit from the training itself, and then from their continued involvement:
   '*this confidence and the right to speak will stay with them throughout their lives'* Interview with co-ordinator
   Students themselves see an important role in cascading learning about Student Voice :
   'We will leave something in place for the younger ones' Interview with student

2. Through a change in school culture, in particular the way in which students now have an expectation of contributing: in one partnership students have their own network and are able to communicate '*without the interference of teachers'*

   'Students have started to realise that their ideas are important to the schools'

   Many co-ordinators believe that student voice is now embedded in the schools, and that it has 'gone beyond the project' (Spanish partner). The development of democratic structures such as student parliaments (Serbia) and student associations (Spain) are involved in taking this forward.

Overall, this is an element of the project that interviewees feel most positive about continuing after the project.

Conclusion and key factors affecting sustainability

Student voice has been a very strong element of the project; high quality external training was provided, and in almost all cases this element is now embedded in school/ student life.

There was a disparity in the support offered in different countries, and in the expectations of that support. Where support is offered, there is more likelihood that the themes of the project will be embedded and continue.

The dissemination activities outlined in Appendix B give a clear illustration of the ways in which schools and clusters are intending to continue activities.

Section 8 Learning points

Based on the analysis of the data the evaluation identified the following learning points:

For the school:

- teachers who are co-ordinating projects of this nature need to be given adequate time, senior management support and recognition for their role; where it was available, teachers appreciate the chance to recognise their learning through accreditation;
- strategies for monitoring the progress of the project and for evaluating its outcomes need to be in place from the start;
- for the project to be most effective, schools need to identify where it fits into the curriculum and the wider life of the school;
- in order to meet expectations in a realistic way, schools need to identify clearly the benefits of taking part in a project for students and a wider group of staff.

For ministries of education and local or regional authorities:

- sustainability and effectiveness of the project is enhanced where authorities demonstrate their support through meetings, extra funding, dissemination and the celebration of results;
- ministries should continue to be proactive in project design in order to ensure coherence with national objectives and programmes;
- ministries should consider encouraging schools to develop partnerships locally and with countries other than France, Germany and the UK as valuable and unexpected benefits especially in terms of intercultural learning may result.

For the British Council:

- projects which are based on evidence of need, baseline assessments and aligned to the particular circumstances in target countries are most successful;
- school partnerships set up through programme development are most successful where participants have the opportunity to meet and plan at least once during the life of the project in order to develop a common understanding and personal relationships;
- clusters larger than 3 schools in each country are potentially problematic, given the number of relationships, issues and aims;
- the most effective programmes are those which establish a robust administrative and management structure before they begin including clear guidelines, expectations and deadlines, the provision of funding and eligible expenditure, regular reviews of the programme, early troubleshooting and advice from a consistent source (i.e. named contact person at the British Council) and a requirement for clear concise reporting which receives feedback and action if necessary;
- recommended communications platforms need be thoroughly tried and tested with relevance to the composition of the school partnerships set up within programmes and appropriate training provided.

9 Concluding remarks

Key findings arising from the data analysis indicate that the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme has contributed significantly to a number of education priorities shared across the partnership countries, as follows:

Student voice: for many schools the programme was the impetus to develop more democratic structures, for example school councils. There was significant development in this area in all schools.

Education for global citizenship: students gained intercultural awareness through the development of new contacts internationally and in the wider community. There was significant impact on student learning in this area.

Inclusion and diversity: the best practice demonstrated that students came come to understand that inclusion and diversity are significant issues in their own school and wider community and that their own actions can have a positive impact on marginalised groups. This theme developed over the course of the project and permeated the project of a majority of schools by year 3 of the programme.

Language learning: in many cases students and teachers had the opportunity to enhance language skills in a real context.

Soft skills: activities in schools helped students to develop skills which will contribute to their future employability. These included teamworking, presentation skills and adaptability.

The main challenge faced by many schools was the difficulty of maintaining international collaboration in large clusters with little personal contact. In some countries this was exacerbated by internal pressures and differences in expectations of the programme. However due to the commitment of teachers considerable benefits accrued to schools, not all of which were foreseen at the start of the programme.

Appendices

A: Quantitative data

B: Dissemination plan

C: Current Connecting Classroom activities

D: Evaluation tools

i) Teachers' questionnaire
ii) Interview questions
iii) Workshop guidance notes
iv) Workshop format
v) Workshop report form
vi) Key terminology

E: List of tables and figures

F: References

Appendix A: Quantitative data

Details of the number of students, teachers and other stakeholders who contributed to the evaluation

Process	**Number of contributing teachers**	**Number of contributing students**	**Total**	**Notes**
Questionnaire for teachers	376	2006	2382	Students were involved in meetings in order to discuss and complete the questionnaire. Numbers involved ranged from zero to 400, with the majority of schools involving either 2-3 students (seen as representatives) or around 6-15 students (the Young Leader group). 112 questionnaires were returned; many were completed by more than one teacher
Interview with coordinating teachers by telephone/skype	21	14	35	Students present at the interview
Face to face interview with coordinating teachers	2		2	
Student workshops	4	125	129	Teachers present at trial workshop
Teacher activity at workshop	26		26	
Total	**431**	**2145**	**2574**	

Appendix B: Dissemination plan

1. Aims and target groups

The aim of the dissemination process is to facilitate policy dialogue at European and national level and so influence future British Council offers in this area of activity. The main target groups are external stakeholders, primarily the delivery partners in participating countries:

- Ministries of Education;
- Regional and Local Authorities;
- Headteachers.

Additional target groups are:

- the British Council offices in the 22 target countries;
- British Council offices worldwide (and specifically those managing the second generation Connecting Classrooms programme);
- Council of Europe;
- European Commission (Lifelong Learning);
- European Schools Network;
- European Youth Councils;
- UK Global Learning Association for Schools.

2. Dissemination strategy

They will be reached through:

- virtual activities;
- face-to face events;
- other media.

3. Dissemination products and activities (International)

Dissemination activity	Target group (s)	Timescale
British Council Dissemination conference: *'Rethinking European Schools for the Future'* Conference presentations Executive summary Conference report	Representatives from CC participating countries and beyond plus other education policy experts & influencers Ambassadors/Representatives of Council of Europe member states Representatives of the Council of Europe Committees of Education from the CoE Parliamentary Assembly, Congress of Local Authorities and the Confederation of INGO British Council Country Programme Managers	18-19 March 2013 Lisbon, Portugal

4. Dissemination products and activities (Country specific)

Bosnia and Herzegovina:	
Product	**Details and target audiences**
Successor project	A new project, externally funded. This will be a new phase of Connecting Classrooms project with 10 of the original schools plus 10 new schools.

Germany:	
Product	**Details and target audiences**
Newsletter	Issued monthly
Website	British Council (Germany) web pages
Press release	No further details
Final event	To be organised by one cluster at the Ministry of Education in July 2013
Contact with policymakers	PAD (German pedagogical exchange service), education ministries, head teachers and teachers in the project.

Greece:	
Product	**Details and target audiences**
Evaluation meeting	Evaluation meeting with coordinating teachers and partners, March 2013
Resource pack	British Council (Greece) is developing a digital resource pack for teachers which will enable Connecting Classrooms to be run in a simplified form as an extra-curricular programme in Greek schools. The resource pack will include training and selection materials, the importance of student voice as a core component of the programme, how to create a community map, best practice examples from the work of the 10 Greek schools in the current programme, digital networks (via British Council) and others. The idea is that the programme can be run 'stand alone' with a focus on working with the local community. The finished product will be delivered to the Greek Ministry of Education in March and it will go live in the new academic year.

Italy:	
Product	**Details and target audiences**
Evaluation Report	By the end of the school year (June 2013) the British Council Partner (USR Lombardy) will prepare a questionnaire for the Connecting Classroom schools, aimed at the final outcomes of the project.
Conference	From 12–15 March in Sofia, Bulgaria the British Council (Italy) are organising a Final Cluster Event involving 62 Young Leaders and 40 teachers**.** It will be an opportunity for both groups to share their different experiences of the 3 year project and to reflect on the impact the project has had on themselves, the community and the schools. The event will conclude with the Young Leaders' aspirations for the future, how they can hope to inspire others and the message they want to communicate to the British Council.

Presentation	The Young Leaders who will attend the Bulgarian event, on their return to their school will make presentations to their classmates and will show the video/film produced in Sofia.
Webpage	The teachers from the Lazio region will add the Connecting Classrooms material plus any relevant documentation to the educational portal „Indire GOLD section", which is the Ministry's national archive of the school best practices.
Article	Following the two final events in Bulgaria and in Lisbon the British Council intend to write an article for their national newsletter to report on the success of the project at a national and international level.

Romania:	
Product	**Details and target audiences**
Newsletters	Arad School Inspectorate newsletter distributed to all schools in the county Suceava School Inspectorate newsletter distributed to all schools in the county Newsletters and school leaflets and brochure of 12 Connecting Classrooms schools in Romania
Communication with policymakers	Dissemination and communication with national networks and organisations: Teachers of humanities and social sciences Head teachers Students councils organisations –locally and nationally European institutions based in Romania such as the Representation of the Council of Europe Educational NGOs in education, culture and society The National Dissemination meeting in Bucharest was attended by Ministry of Education general inspectors and by local education authorities in 15 of the 40 counties in Romania

Conference and meetings	Dissemination meeting in Arad –cluster 1 (December 2012) Dissemination meeting in Suceava – cluster 2 (December 2012) This included the evaluation workshop. National Dissemination and Sustainability meeting (January 2013): The meeting was organised in co-operation with the cluster leads and representatives of young leaders and international coordinators. Apart from the project members, the audience included local education authorities in 15 counties of Romania, MEN General Inspector for Humanities at Pre-University Level, NGOs, the Director of the Intercultural Institute of Timisoara – who is a trainer and contributor to the CC- ICC programme. The event had two parts: one in which the development and results of the project were presented by students and teachers in CC. The second part was dedicated to discussions and action plans to ensure sustainability of the project. There was huge interest in building on the project success either by trying to take over the framework of the project and identifying international partners and financial resources or by creating new ideas for projects in the inclusion and diversity field. The **Inclusive Schools Award** was launched at this event. This has been co-created and signed by the BC and MEN in appreciation of the CC achievements and with a view to recognising future initiatives in the field. The conference resulted in action plans put together by participants. These include plans ranging from changes to the curriculum and school systems to group initiatives and students leadership initiatives.
Webpage	Arad School Inspectorate and Suceava School Inspectorate websites plus all project schools' websites.
Article	Connecting Classrooms has been mentioned in 5 local county journals and publications.
Press release	A press release was sent in connection with the national dissemination meeting.

Russia:	
Product	**Details and target audiences**
Communication with policymakers	Moscow State Psychology Pedagogical University (Director of the Institute for Inclusive Education) All-Russia Teachers Trade Union (head of the trade union) In-service teacher training Academy (rector and head of English department)
Presentation	At a conference about Intercultural Competences in Lithuania (11-12 October 2012)
Webpage	All project school websites have Connecting Classrooms page Connecting Classrooms Europe project blog British Council Moscow Connecting Classrooms project blog
Article	Teachers' newspaper "1st September"(supplement "English") – a plan to publish a series of articles. In addition project participants have been encouraged to write for HLT journal (Humanising Language Teachers) http://www.hltmag.co.uk

Spain	
Product	**Details and target audiences**
Newsletter	Potential to include information in the British Council 'English in Spain' newsletter which is sent to approx. 1600 teachers in Spain. If findings are relevant to the area of learning English in Europe they could also be included in British Council Europe newsletters.
Communication with policymakers	Teacher Association partners in Spain to be requested to disseminate via their networks.
Webpage	British Council (Spain) website, partner websites and teachers' intranet.

Appendix C: Connecting Classrooms (Europe) activities

The aim of this section is to present three 'snapshots' to illustrate current or relatively recent activities in the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme. The evaluators were made aware of this material during the systematic process of gathering evidence for the main report. It is included here to as a means of giving an insight into Connecting Classrooms activities from a small proportion of the countries involved. Inevitably equally engaging activities are taking place elsewhere in the network but limitations on time and space mean that these cannot be included here.

1 Connecting Classrooms (Portugal) – the ENA cluster

In Portugal 14 schools are involved, these are divided into two cores each of 7 schools:

North (ENA Cluster) - School of Póvoa Lanhoso, Primary School 2.3 Matosinhos, 2.3 Cávado Primary School, Secondary School Carlos Amarante (Braga) and School of Basic 2.3 Paranhos, School of Caldas Taipas School and Joaquim Gomes Ferreira Alves (Valadares);

South (Oi! Cluster) - Basic School Afonso III (Faro), Tomás Cabreira Secondary School (Faro), School of Loulé, Castro Marim 2.3 Primary School, Secondary School and Rosa Pinheiro (Faro), Collation of Schools and School Bemposta Dr. Francisco Fernando Lopes (Olhão).

In each of these schools there is a school co-ordinator who takes care of the work of the project in their school and liaises with the two regional co-ordinators (North and South). These in turn make the connections with the Ministry and the British Council.

Each cluster works internationally with schools in Greece, the Czech Republic and the UK.

The ENA cluster has worked with a wide range of themes, both nationally and internationally and the activities are documented in a regular newsletter. The June 2012 issue can be found at: http://issuu.com/enacc/docs/connectingclassrooms_newsletterjune2012en Student engagement in the 7 ENA schools varies but cumulatively some 1,463 students were involved in activities in the previous academic year, this year it may be even more. The newsletters capture both domestic and international activities through the work of each school in the cluster, examples are:

- student activities to support APPACDM (Portuguese Association of Parents and Friends of the Mentally Disabled Citizen) – co-ordinated by Young Leaders;
- design a T shirt competition;
- emails and Facebook with students in the Czech Republic;
- student reports and reflections on a recent visit to Connecting Classrooms partners in London;
- the Connecting Classrooms library – books in English;
- report from Olympic day which took place in one of the Czech schools where the Czech Young Leaders took charge of events;
- supporting a food bank;
- joint activities through the 'Workshop of ideas' with schools in the Czech republic – the students used videos and blogs to explore sensitive ethical issues.

The newsletters also include articles by teachers and numerous web links.

The Ministry of Education remained in close contact with both clusters throughout the programme and initiated a webinar as a means of disseminating information. The webinar can be found at: http://webinar.dge.mec.pt/2012/03/08/projeto-connecting-classrooms/

One of the final activities initiated by the British Council was the creation of an International 'Word Cloud'[1] poster by the students who had been involved in the projects in both clusters. This activity required students to consider the following prompt:

'*Following your experience of working on the Connecting Classrooms project with your national and international partners what are your feelings, aspirations, motivation and inspiration for the future of inclusive schools?*' Students provided one noun and one verb each and the resulting word cloud featured the following words in descending order:

Friendship, Tolerance, Communicate, Friends, Respect, Share, Love.

2 Connecting Classrooms (Spain) – use of Trello as a project management tool

The Catalan cluster is using Trello[2] as a means of sharing contact details, activities and tasks. Using this system project activities can be depicted along with individualised task lists. Visitors to the site can monitor the progress of the project as a whole, look for an individual task or register a task that they have completed. This system appears to have worked well in the context of Connecting Classrooms and especially as a means of documenting international work.

This partnership has featured two very successful international partnership meetings between Scotland and Catalunya and accounts of these meetings are featured on the Trello platform. The following are brief extracts written by student participants:

Young Leaders and Students from Connecting Classrooms in Scotland visit Catalunya:

'That afternoon we learned about each other more than during the other days: we have become good friends! And we thank our teachers and organisations for letting us share these incredible project. We had a wonderful time but now we know it is time to work and help building better schools, towns and of course, a better world where to live'

The Catalan visit to Glasgow:

'The Scots have taught me many things but I think we also have taught them. I learned how their life is. I saw that when they get to work it's not for nonsense, and when they study, they really do'

'I realized that even though we live many kilometres away and do different things, actually we are all more alike than we thought, and we have a lot in common. It made me open my eyes. I returned with a desire to help people in need. So now that I've finished the project I realized that this trip has helped me as well, to grow as a person'

[1] Wordle is a tool for generating 'word clouds' from text. The clouds give greater prominence to words that appear more frequently in the source text (www.wordle.net/)
[2] Trello is a free online project management tool (https://trello.com/)

3 Connecting Classrooms (Cyprus) – Training and performance session

The British Council in Cyprus worked in collaboration with the Ministry of Education & Culture to organise a residential two-day training session in October 2012 for the 80 students of the eight schools involved in the project. The training had the overall theme of 'Diversity' and how this could be expressed creatively through drama, music, dance or painting. During the training session the students, with the help of their professional trainers, created their own music, choreography and stories from countries they would like to visit always having in mind this guiding theme. At the end of the session a performance was created which combined all four areas.

This was rehearsed and presented in the following month at the theatre of Lanitio A' Lyceum. The following are some quotations from some of the students who participated in both the training and the performance:

'Our participation in the two-day training of Connecting Classrooms in Agros in October 2012, was fruitful, rewarding and fun as we had the chance to learn a lot, work as a team and communicate with other CC students from all over Cyprus'

'I enjoyed meeting other students from different schools in such a nice environment and create new friendships. We also learnt many useful things during the workshops and acquired life skills such as co-operation, team work, patience, hard work and many more'

'Watching it made us feel so proud and special as it was fully our own creation and it is definitely remarkable how students from all over Cyprus co-operated so well and produced that amazing show'

'The show was a colourful journey through different countries and cultures which consisted of short stories reflecting the experiences of people visiting those countries. The students of the drama group acted like professionals. The singing and dancing group with their voices, meaningful lyrics, music and moves made the show even more remarkable. The painters drew beautiful images of many countries making the background vividly colourful. The show had a lot of humour and the spectators enjoyed every moment'

Appendix D: Evaluation tools

i) Evaluation questionnaire

Evaluation questionnaire for teachers in the Yahoo group

Explanatory note:
This brief questionnaire is part of the External Evaluation of the British Council Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme. We have been contracted by the British Council to carry out a number of evaluation activities and to use the information provided by teachers and students to produce an impartial report. We will be gathering information from the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) projects using three evaluation tools:

1 A Yahoo group (for teachers)
2 Telephone or Skype interviews (for teachers and students)
3 Evaluation workshops (for teachers and students in a selection of schools)

We are interested in how teachers* and students in the project schools experienced the project and in their impressions (good or not so good!) of the process itself and the impact. We aim to record your views and comments on the most successful aspects of the project and especially on the role your students have played. By contributing to our work you are therefore helping future school partnerships worldwide. The material you provide will be used in our report without any references to the names of any individual teachers, students or schools.

Thank you for your contribution
Ray Kirtley and Jill Ritchie (External Evaluators)

***** *The views of the headteacher and/or any others involved in the project may also be included.*

Quantitative data for your school

Name of your school:			
Brief description*: ***Urban/suburban/rural? Any special features?**			
Total number of students:		**Total number of staff:**	
Number of students involved in Connecting Classrooms (Europe):		**Number of staff involved in Connecting Classrooms (Europe):**	
Number of students who contributed to this evaluation:		**Number of staff who contributed to this evaluation:**	
Number of students who took part in Young Leaders training (if appropriate)			

SUCCESSES AND CHALLENGES
What do you think have been the **most successful aspects** of the Connecting Classrooms project in your school? You could mention: - The positive impact on the students (their learning and motivation for example) - The role that students were able to play in guiding the project - The difference the project made to 'Student Voice' in the wider school - The professional development benefits for the teachers who were involved - The impact of the project on the school as a whole (for example on school policies) - How the project has built new relationships between the schools in your country cluster(s) - How the project has built new international relationships - The role of the wider community in the project - The potential for the partnership to continue after the project funding has ended
Please list the most **successful aspects** of your project here:
What do you think have been the **greatest challenges** of the Connecting Classrooms project in your school? You could mention: - Any difficulty of motivating students to get involved - Finding the time for project activities - Any lack of interest from other members of staff - Language and communication barriers within the international partnership - Variable commitment from partner countries - Differing understanding and application of the term 'Student Voice'
Please list the **greatest challenges** for your project here:

UNEXPECTED OUTCOMES
Where there any unexpected outcomes to your Connecting Classrooms project (positive and / or negative)?
And what (if anything) has been learned from these

Thank you for your contribution *21.10.12*

ii) Interview questions

Evaluation questionnaire for telephone interviews

Guidance notes for the interviewer:

Background:

This interview is part of the external evaluation of the British Council Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme which has been in operation for just over two years and has about 9 months still to run. You will have been briefed by Jill Ritchie or Ray Kirtley before carrying out this interview and we hope you now have a reasonably clear idea of how the programme works, the objectives of this evaluation exercise and the other evaluation activities that we are conducting. You will be interviewing in the mother tongue of the respondents, making notes as the interview proceeds and producing a short report in English based upon the questions we have provided.

The interview:

This should take from 30 - 45 minutes and will be pre-arranged, either by yourself or by the evaluators.

Theme: Introductions and setting the scene		
Interviewer:	**Response:**	**Notes:**
Please start by introducing yourself and finding out who you are talking to - their name(s) and position in the school. Mention how long the interview is likely to take and emphasise that the evaluators will not use the names of		Respondents will be teachers who are leading their cluster in the Connecting Classrooms project. They should be accompanied by a nominated student(s) who has taken part in the project.

schools or individuals in their report.		
When did the respondents start working with the Connecting Classrooms project?		Have they been involved from the start in 2010 or joined in later on?
Introduce the next theme.		Remind respondents how the interview is structured.

Theme: The most successful aspects of the project		
Interviewer:	**Response:**	**Notes:**
Start by reminding the respondents of the objectives of Connecting Classrooms and ask if these agree with their understanding of the programme.		The programme was expected to impact on students, teachers and schools but there was a special focus on the development of 'Youth Voice'.

What was the most successful aspect of the project from the point of view of the students involved? Did this apply to all the students or just some of them? Please note any examples provided.		We are looking for examples of successful activities especially where these have involved the young people in leadership training and/or enhanced their learning and motivation. These are important project outcomes.
Were the students able to play an active role in guiding the project? How exactly did this take place (examples)?		There may be instances where the students have worked independently with their peers in other schools, locally or internationally.
Has the project has built new relationships between the schools in your country cluster(s). What sort of activities help to achieve this aim?		The respondent will probably be in the 'lead school' in the cluster. This question aims to explore activities in the cluster.
What has worked well in terms of international projects? Have new relationships been established with schools abroad?		Try to discover how much this applies to students – are they communicating internationally in their wider cluster?

Has the teacher (or other teachers who were involved) gained any professional development benefits or new competences from the programme.		The teacher(s) might be more confident in working with other schools locally or internationally. They could have gained expertise in teaching about global issues (rights of the child for example).
What has been the impact of the project on the school as a whole? Have school policies changed as a result? Has the curriculum changed as a result?		Either teacher or student might mention the development of 'Youth Voice', perhaps through the formation of a School Council. There could be new or amended policies on inclusion or community engagement and/or references to Global Citizenship and Inclusion.
Have there been any completely unexpected outcomes that you would consider successes for the project?		Once again we are looking for concrete examples preferably student driven that fit in with the wider objectives of the programme.
		Indicate that you are moving on to the next theme.

Theme: The project's greatest challenges		
Interviewer:	**Response:**	**Notes:**
We are interested in the greatest challenges faced by the project, the evaluators have suggested some possible challenges but there will be an opportunity to mention others.		There may be some reluctance to mention too many challenges so be prepared to stress (again) that identities will not feature in the final report and that this information will help to inform other partnerships.
Was it difficult to get students involved in the project? How was this managed?		It could be that students were selected for the project (perhaps from particular classes) or volunteered to get involved.
How did schools in the cluster (or your school) interpret the term 'Student Voice'? How much autonomy was given to the students?		Student Voice should be at the heart of the project, hopefully it should not be expressed in a short term or tokenistic way.
Did you find it difficult to motivate other members of staff to get involved? How was this managed?		Is the project a team effort in the school or does it seem to just be the responsibility of one teacher. Did the teacher mention time constraints? Is there a coordinating group?

Were there any problems with the international element of the project?		Language and/or communication barriers for example. Perhaps also variable commitment from partners in other countries.
Are there any other challenges that you would like to mention?		

Theme: Sustainability and bringing the interview to an end		
Interviewer:	**Response:**	**Notes:**
Do you think the partnership will continue to work together after the project has ended?		Respondents might mention the lack of funding and/or British Council support as barriers.
How do you see the Youth Voice element developing after the project has ended?		
We are coming to the end of the interview. Is there anything else you would like to add?		

Operational details:	
Who was present at the interview? Students and teachers?	
Time taken:	
Date of interview:	
Telephone/skype or face to face?	

Interviewer comment

Reporting back to the evaluators:

Please complete your notes in English using the boxes on the form.

Please make any additional comments in the box provided at the end. It may be (for example) that you felt that enough time had not been allowed for the interview or that the teacher did not have all the information at his/her disposal.

Thank you very much

Ray Kirtley & Jill Ritchie (External Evaluators) 21 October 2012

iii) Workshop guidance notes

Evaluation workshop – guidelines for organisers

SETTING UP THE WORKSHOP

Time to allow: One hour to one hour 15 minutes
Representation: One teacher and 5-6 students from each school in the cluster. Ideally these students have been active in the project and experienced the Young Leader training (if it has taken place in your country). The maximum number taking part should be around 30 - 35. Where possible mix groups to include students from different schools on the same table. Teachers who have accompanied the students to the workshop take part in their own evaluation activity and sit at a separate table.

Facilitation: The cluster leader should locate an independent facilitator. This may be a contact organised by the British Council. In the UK the evaluators will lead the workshop.

Recording for the evaluation: It is important to keep all the material coming from the workshop so that this can be entered on the **recording sheet** provided by the evaluators. Please take a photograph of the 'Ladder of Participation' as well as recording the number of entries on each rung. Other photographs of the session will also be welcome.

Recording for the country cluster and for the international partnership: This session is as much part of your project as any other group activity. Please do mention it in the final report for this year.

RESOURCES

- Venue for the workshop (for example a school hall or large classroom). This should be arranged so that students and teachers can sit in separate groups of 5-6 around a table.

- Post-it notes in two colours.
- Coloured sticky dots in four colours (or coloured marking pens)

- 7 sheets flip chart paper labelled – 'Guiding the project', 'Being a global citizen', 'My own culture and community', 'Subject knowledge', 'Inclusion and diversity', 'Other learning' and 'Challenges'. It is helpful if the first 5 sheets have grid of 4 squares drawn underneath the heading with a single dot in each square – this will speed up the recording process but don't forget to subtract your dot from each total!

- A hand-drawn diagram of a ladder with 8 rungs (treads). These should be labelled 1 -8.

An ideal ladder would be made from 2 sheets of flip chart paper taped together. The left hand side of the ladder should be labelled 'me', the right hand side labelled 'my school'.

Ray Kirtley and Jill Ritchie (External Evaluators) **08 November 2012**

iv) Workshop format

INTRODUCTIONS AND SHARING EXERCISE (15 mins)
The facilitator should introduce themselves, ask for a show of hands from students and teachers from each school in turn then mention the aims of the session, especially that: - This is part of an evaluation of the whole Connecting Classrooms (Europe) programme across all of the clusters (not only this one) - The evaluation **is not** judgement on yourselves, your teachers or your schools. In fact no individuals or particular schools will be mentioned in the final report - The evaluation **is** an opportunity to reflect on your project, share some of the findings and to help other teachers, students and school partnerships worldwide The participants on each table then introduce themselves. This should be followed by an ice-breaker (if it is felt to be necessary). There are two alternatives: **Either:** The students from each school attending are asked to bring something with them that is linked to their project (a photograph, piece of work or an object). This has been chosen by the students. They spend two minutes talking about this item. **Or:** A generic icebreaker of your choice.
LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT (25 minutes)
This is to help the evaluators to find out what the main areas of learning have been from the project. Each table is asked to think about what they have learned from the Connecting Classrooms project. The facilitator mentions the following themes, (these are also on the flip chart paper): 1. The role that they were able to play in leading or guiding the project. 2. How much more they understand about being a global citizen. 3. How much more they know about their own culture and community. 4. The concrete things they have learned – about Languages or Geography for example. 5. Their own understanding of inclusion and diversity in society. Each student (and teacher) can contribute up to 5 dots to the appropriate flip charts as follows: Green: This was the **most important** learning for me Orange: This was **fairly important** for me Blue: This was only **slightly important** for me Red: Learning in this area did not take place It is fine for a student to contribute 5 green dots (or 5 red ones!) **Examples** are welcome; they should be summarised in a few words and should fixed to the appropriate flip chart. Any **other learning** that has come out of the project plus any **challenges** the students perceive will be recorded in the same way on separate flip chart paper (no dots are needed on these two sheets). The participants should be given 10-15 minutes to talk about the most important aspects of the project in their small group before 'voting'. Afterwards the students will appreciate the opportunity to walk around and look at everyone's contributions.

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT (20 minutes)

The activity is based upon 'Hart's ladder of participation' which is widely used when assessing the effectiveness of activities that aim to promote Student Voice. Any accompanying teachers should only act as observers for this activity. Connecting Classrooms (Europe) has a strong emphasis on Student Voice and Student Participation. This activity aims to find out two things:
1. How far do the students think **their school** has progressed in using and valuing Student Voice since the start of the Connecting Classrooms project.
2. As a result of the project - how far do the students think they have progressed **as individuals** by taking an active role in the project in their school (rather than being directed as passive participants).

1. Each student sticks two coloured dots on the right hand side of the ladder as follows:
Red: This is the where **my school** seemed to be in involving young people in decision making when the Connecting Classrooms project began
Green: This is how **my school** has progressed in during the life of the project

2. Each student sticks two coloured dots on the left hand side of the ladder as follows:
Blue: This is the level at which I felt I could participate as **an individual** when the Connecting Classrooms project began
Orange: This is the level to which I think I have progressed during the life of the project

THE LADDER OF PARTICIPATION

1. Teachers use us to support the project without asking us what we would really like (and pretend it was our idea).
2. We help with the project but at least the teachers don't pretend that it was our idea.
3. It looks as if we are deciding on the activities but we really don't have much choice apart from deciding about the details.
4. We are given specific roles in the project.
5. We advise on the project but it is still run by the teachers.
6. We are invited to share in all decision making in the project.
7. We run the project but the teachers help us.
8. We decide everything about the project but know that we can ask the teachers for advice if we want to.

REFLECTION AND CONCLUSION (5 minutes)

All the students consider the following statement:
'As a result of the project I am now going to .....'
Their conclusions are shared around each table or with the whole group then each student writes their completed statement onto a post-it note. These are collected and retained by the organisers.
Conclusion and thanks to all concerned
End of session

v) Workshop report form

Evaluation Workshop - Recording Sheet

Workshop location (city & country):		**Workshop venue (e.g. school):**	
Number of students attending:		**Number of schools represented:**	
Number of staff attending:		**Number of clusters represented:**	
Date and Start Time:		**Finish Time:**	

LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT: Please enter the number of students who scored at this level into the columns and comments from post-it notes into the appropriate box, the evaluators will arrange for translation of these if required.					
Themes:	**Re**	**Bl**	**Or**	**Gr**	**Any examples connected to each theme**

LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT: Please enter the number of students who scored at this level into the columns and comments from post-it notes into the appropriate box, the evaluators will arrange for translation of these if required.					
Themes:	**Re**	**Bl**	**Or**	**Gr**	**Any examples connected to each theme**
1. The role that they were able to play in leading or guiding the project.					
2. How much more do they understand about being a global citizen.					

LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT: Please enter the number of students who scored at this level into the columns and comments from post-it notes into the appropriate box, the evaluators will arrange for translation of these if required.					
Themes:	**Re**	**Bl**	**Or**	**Gr**	**Any examples connected to each theme**
3. How much more they know about their own culture and community.					
4. The concrete things they have learned – about languages or geography for example.					

LEARNING FROM THE PROJECT: Please enter the number of students who scored at this level into the columns and comments from post-it notes into the appropriate box, the evaluators will arrange for translation of these if required.					
Themes:	**Re**	**Bl**	**Or**	**Gr**	**Any examples connected to each theme**
5. Their own understanding of inclusion and diversity in society.					
6. Other learning					
7. Challenges					

Red: Learning in this area did not take place

Blue: This was only **slightly important** for me

Orange: This was **fairly important** for me

Green: This was the **most important** learning for me

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT: Please enter the numerical scores taken from the ladder chart into the boxes			
Ladder of participation		**Score before the project**	**Score after the project**
1. Teachers use us to support the project without asking us what we would really like (and pretend it was our idea).	**School:**		
	Students:		
2. We help with the project but at least the teachers don't pretend that it was our idea.	**School:**		
	Students:		
3. It looks as if we are deciding on the activities but we really don't have much choice apart from deciding about the details.	**School:**		
	Students:		
4. We are given specific roles in the project.	**School:**		
	Students:		
5. We advise on the project but it is still run by the teachers.	**School:**		
	Students:		

STUDENT PARTICIPATION IN THE PROJECT: Please enter the numerical scores taken from the ladder chart into the boxes			
Ladder of participation		**Score before the project**	**Score after the project**
6. We are invited to share in all decision making in the project.	**School:**		
	Students:		
7. We run the project but the teachers help us.	**School:**		
	Students:		
8. We decide everything about the project but know that we can ask the teachers for advice if we want to.	**School:**		
	Students:		

FUTURE PLANS: 'As a result of the project I am now going to ……..' (Please record these comments below)
FACILITATOR COMMENTS AND OBSERVATIONS: Please enter any other comments about the workshop into the box below. We are particularly interested in comments about the level of engagement and enjoyment of the students and teachers taking part today.

Thank you very much for your contribution to the Connecting Classrooms (Europe) evaluation!

Ray Kirtley & Jill Ritchie (External Evaluators) 08 November 2012

vi) Key terminology

Evaluation workshop

First activity: Learning from the project	
Themes	
Guiding the project Being a global citizen My own culture and community Subject knowledge	Inclusion and diversity Other learning Challenges

Second activity: Your participation in the project	
Levels of participation	
1. Teachers use us to support the project without asking us what we would really like (and pretend it was our idea). 2. We help with the project but at least the teachers don't pretend that it was our idea. 3. It looks as if we are deciding on the activities but we really don't have much choice apart from deciding about the details. 4. We are given specific roles in the project.	5. We advise on the project but it is still run by the teachers. 6. We are invited to share in all decision making in the project. 7. We run the project but the teachers help us. 8. We decide everything about the project but know that we can ask the teachers for advice if we want to.

Final activity
As a result of the project .....

Thank you

Ray Kirtley and Jill Ritchie (External Evaluators)

Appendix E: List of tables and figures

Figure 1: Percentage breakdown of successes into key themes

Figure 2: Students' perception of their participation in the project

Figure 3: Students' perception of how their school became more democratic

Figure 4: How much more do students understand about being a global citizen

Figure 5: Concrete learning as a result of the project

Figure 6: Percentage breakdown of challenges into key themes

Table 1: Appendix A - Quantitative data

Appendix F: References

Cook, A (2012). The value of Comenius School Partnerships. Cambridge: Cambridge Education

DFID/DfES (2005). Developing a global dimension in the school curriculum. London: DfES

European Commission (2010). Survival Kit for Lifelong Learning Projects www.european-project-management.eu

Hart, R. (1992). Children's Participation from Tokenism to Citizenship. Florence: UNICEF Innocenti Research Centre