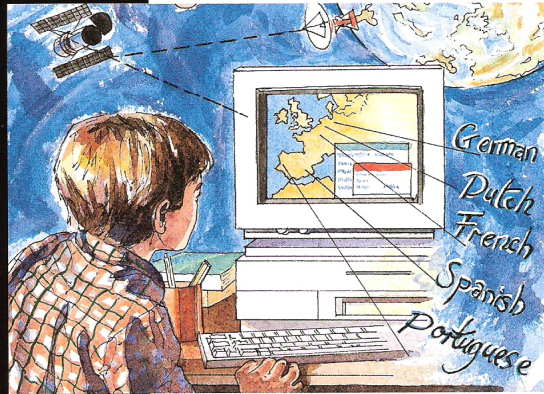


LEARNING TECHNOLOGIES

The Schools Satellite Project

OVER TO YOU



Satellite dishes are a familiar sight on houses and pubs throughout Britain. They are less frequently seen on school or college buildings. Nevertheless, in the age of advanced communications, satellite technology is starting to make a major impact in a whole range of areas, of which education and training is one of the most important. The Schools Satellite Project is an example of one such

initiative, designed to take satellite technology into the classroom.

Schools and colleges across Europe are already benefiting from the availability of an unprecedented range of educational programmes covering a wide spectrum of curriculum areas. However, the most advanced use of communications satellites involves the exploration of interactive elements made possible by new satellites such as Olympus with its experimental payloads.

The launch of Olympus in 1989 was the catalyst for a surge of interest in Satellite Assisted Learning. It led to the formation of a string of user networks across Europe and to the exploitation of 'narrowcasting' by which programme providers can transmit their programmes to selected outlets across Europe, working with partners in other countries.

The Schools Satellite Project was established in 1991 to capitalise on interest in Olympus and to test the usefulness of these exciting new technologies in an educational context. Funded by the Employment Department, the initiative involved six secondary schools in the North West. The experiences of the participants would be of use to other institutions interested in embarking on Satellite Assisted Learning projects, while also reflecting the spirit of cross-cultural co-operation fostered by the Single European Market.



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LEARNING METHODS CASE STUDY

Project Aims

The project was launched with several clear objectives, both technical and educational. These were to:

- acquire new teaching and learning materials
- develop in staff and pupils new attitudes, skills and abilities
- promote new relationships between different sectors interested in education and training
- encourage new institutional networks in the UK and Europe.

Sixth Formers were the first target group, as it was felt that older students would benefit most from the challenges of the satellite environment.

Launching the Project

The first stage of the initiative saw a series of exploratory visits to participating schools, each of which completed an audit check list. In some cases, the project was an extension of existing Open Learning programmes. For schools that did not already have access to or experience of satellite equipment, technical support and practical help was offered.

The system was demonstrated at each of the schools and a series of workshops and in-service training (INSET) sessions set up, led by teams of experts from Gwynedd TVEI Centre.

Satellite Assisted**Learning in the Classroom**

The most common use of satellite broadcasts has been in the Modern Languages classroom, usually involving the recording of relevant overseas broadcasts for viewing as a back-up to other learning activities. However, an important aspect of the Schools Satellite Project was to encourage teachers to venture beyond this primarily passive use of satellite materials. Exploring the interactive features of the system and experimenting with the creation of 'live' links with other schools and colleges were key elements.

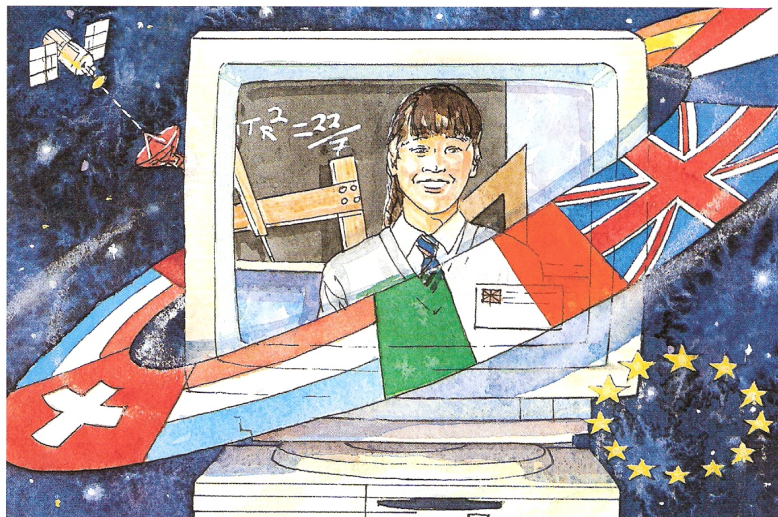
Two of the most exciting interactive features of Satellite Assisted Learning are narrowcasting and audio conferencing.

Narrowcasting provides educational establishments with the opportunity to plan and produce their own programmes for transmission and direct broadcast to other schools and colleges throughout Europe.

Audio conferencing enables a network of schools to record and watch a particular programme and follow up the viewing session with a 'live' discussion and exchange of views.

The Margaret Danyers College Experiment

Some of the most innovative and adventurous work carried out within the Schools Satellite Project was at Margaret Danyers College which was selected as one of the receive sites to take part in a series of three pilot teacher



INSET programmes. These took place 'on air' with studio presenters. Receive sites were set up at schools across the UK and the University of London's 'LIVENET' studio was used for programme presentation and co-ordination. The centres were linked back to the studio via the Gwynedd TVEI audio-bridge.

Several live broadcasts were staged, during which teachers at the various centres discussed current educational issues in conjunction with a live presentation via satellite TV from the 'LIVENET' studio.

Project Results

Perhaps the most enduring success of the Schools Satellite Project has been in identifying the major issues associated with Satellite Assisted Learning and in exploring its potential for future users.

The responses of the six participating schools indicate key areas of agreement about the steps that are necessary for the success of any such initiative. These are:

- School management: Satellite Assisted Learning can only be implemented in schools where there is already a firm commitment to its integration into a range of curriculum areas.
- Classroom management: departments must ensure that staff are confident in using Satellite Assisted Learning to meet agreed curriculum targets.
- Technical support: it is essential that an experienced technician is given overall responsibility for managing the system.
- INSET: adequate training of all staff is essential if satellite technology is to be used easily and effectively on a regular basis.

L E A R N I N G T E C H N O L O G I E S

- Networking: links between schools and other educational establishments are invaluable in providing support and practical help.

Conclusion

The Schools Satellite Project has successfully paved the way for future Satellite Assisted Learning initiatives in schools across Europe. So great was the interest in the Gwynedd

project that satellite technology is now being made available to other members of the local community. Most exciting of these latest projects are an electronics course to train women returners and a scheme to provide supplementary training for qualified doctors. In this way, the satellite facility has become a focus for the training and education of the local community and not just for schools and their pupils.