



Dissolving Boundaries through ICT in Education

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Dissolving Boundaries is a north-south inter-schools Programme which uses ICT to communicate. The Programme is jointly funded by the **Departments of Education** in the Republic of Ireland and in Northern Ireland.

Established in 2000 the programme is managed in the Republic of Ireland by the Education Department, National University of Ireland, Maynooth and in Northern Ireland by the School of Education, University of Ulster, Coleraine.

The **aims** of the project can be summarised as follows:

- To engage pupils in collaborative, curricular-based projects
- To promote mutual understanding on both sides of the border
- To promote sustainability of the use of technology in schools

How many schools are involved at present?

Many schools have been involved in the Programme over the years and there are currently over 170 schools, making up around 90 partnerships, consisting of Primary, Special and Post Primary schools.

What is involved for participating schools?

The Dissolving Boundaries Programme facilitates links between schools. All participating schools are invited to a planning conference at the beginning of the school year. This consists of an overnight stay in a hotel, followed by a day of training and planning facilitated by the programme team. This gives teachers the opportunity to meet each other socially and plan joint project work for the year ahead. Teachers discuss and sign an agreement form outlining work to be undertaken with their partner school.

What do the pupils do?

Once teachers have chosen the topic to work on, they present the idea to the pupils explaining that some of their work will be done with a partner school and that it will be project based using online interaction and video-conferencing.

Online written communication using Moodle:

The Dissolving Boundaries Programme has its own computer conferencing area, using a password protected interactive site called Moodle. Pupils communicate on forums and can add pages, upload podcasts and create blogs about their project work. For safety and privacy reasons, this area is closed to non-participants.



Video-conferencing

A secure environment for video conferencing is also provided: where necessary, a web-cam and microphone are supplied to schools to facilitate this form of communication.

Face-to-face meeting

Finally a key feature of the Dissolving Boundaries programme is the face-to-face meeting for pupils which can be carried out at any point in the year and in any location. The purpose of the face-to-face meeting is to consolidate and sustain the relationships initiated in the online and video-conferencing communication.

What training do teachers get in the programme?

Teachers are trained in all aspects of the technology used in the programme. Training is held in local Education Centres and and/or conveniently located schools. The project continues to support teachers in the day-to-day running of the projects. Many teachers need technical support and this is available from the Dissolving Boundaries team.

What funding is available to the school?

A grant of up to €500 is available to schools in the first year of the Dissolving Boundaries programme to facilitate teachers attending the planning conference and training events.

A grant of up to €200 is available for subsequent years (or for additional projects undertaken by the same school). Funding of up to €800 is available to schools in the Republic of Ireland for a meeting. Schools are required to supply invoices for actual costs.

How is the project work evaluated and disseminated?

The on-going work and communication between schools is securely protected and not visible in the public domain. So to ensure that the outcomes of pupils' work are seen and celebrated teachers provide a summary of the outcomes, a short description of the activities carried out throughout the year and this is produced in a Yearbook which is distributed to all participating schools.

The project team carries out academic research and evaluation of the programme each year and this is disseminated in annual Dissolving Boundaries reports and published in academic journals.

How can schools in the Republic of Ireland join the programme?

Schools may be nominated by Education Centres in the Republic of Ireland or fill in an expression of interest form on the Dissolving Boundaries website: www.dissolvingboundaries.org or by sending an email directly to one of the programme team Alma Grace (alma.grace@nuim) or Nigel Metcalfe (dissolvingboundaries@nuim.ie).