



Cross-curricular worlds move closer

A charitable networking project is giving pupils and teachers a chance to make hi-tech international links

By Helen Ward

SOME 450 schools in the UK have signed up to a new charitable website that will allow pupils and teachers to communicate with their counterparts abroad via email, instant messaging, forums and video-conferencing.

The website Rafi.ki – Swahili for “friend” – has 900 schools registered in 94 countries.

It works like a social networking site but also allows schools to work on cross-curricular projects.

So far it has linked up with organisations including Medecins Sans Frontieres in a project on Darfur, and with the Fair Trade Foundation for work on ethical trade.

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The site also enables schools to create its own projects.

One group getting involved is from King John School in Benfleet, Essex.

Hina Robinson, head of geography and a teacher adviser for Rafi.ki, said: “We used the Darfur project. A lot of our pupils had never heard of Darfur, so it was a bit of a shock for them to find out what was happening there.

“We also did a podcast with a school in Serbia.[The country] had been through its own civil war and so had a bit more empathy with what was going on in Darfur.

“I knew the teacher in Serbia was interested to see how pupils worked on it.” The new key stage 3 curriculum introduced in Year 7 this September requires schools to include a cross-subject “global dimension”.

The aim to expand young people’s awareness of global issues goes back to 2004, when the then Department for Education and Skills published its Putting theWorld intoWorld-Class Education strategy, which sets out eight key concepts pupils need to know (see panel), and launched the International Schools Award, an accreditation scheme.

Rafi.ki was launched in January 2007 and became the focus of research earlier this year by Richard Shotton, a freelance expert on the use of ICT for international collaboration based at Manchester Metropolitan University.

He analysed questionnaires from 148 teachers in 46 countries, and 393 students in 32 countries.

Mr Shotton found that almost all the teachers said Rafi.ki helped to motivate students; 55 per cent said it had a very significant impact on the most disengaged learners.

Nine out of 10 students logged on to the website both in and outside school – a quarter of them checked it every day.

The Times Educational Supplement Friday October 31, 2008 www.tes.com

Young traders have business off to a T

When pupils at Northfield School for Girls in Kent got invited to a “T-shirt printing project, they also got involved in international negotiations. Alessandro Bascchi, the Florence-based teacher at the specialist business and enterprise school, set

up the project through Rafi.ki – a website that enables pupils around the world to work together. The idea was for pupils in Ghana, Uganda, Serbia, Slovenia and the Philippines to design T-shirts. They then ordered them from 80 pupils in England who would manufacture and ship them back. The project was explained to pupils, and they were taught to use the

website working with Bascchi. They already knew customer and market prices online. Students could then communicate with each other and they were responsible for finding shipping partners, at this point. Mr Bascchi said: “One of the first things which captured our attention was that the others spoke English well enough to communicate with them. They thought about why

they have to make that effort? It was learning values as much as business. We didn’t want to impose our design. We wanted to reverse the roles – instead of manufacturing in Africa and selling in Europe, we wanted to manufacture in Europe. They were the consumers, and we were the producers.” A local firm and the school machinery had enabled students

to print designs on to the 200 T-shirts, and a local printer produced the ones set up on the day. The T-shirts were printed, packaged and sent off. “I visited it, a number of it. I visited it in Morocco where students received the T-shirts, said: “The experience we had with Northfield School, designing T-shirts, was really fun and beautiful.”

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Some 450 schools in the UK have signed up to a new charitable website that will allow pupils and teachers to communicate with their counterparts abroad via email, instant messaging, forums and video-conferencing. The website Rafi.ki – Swahili for “friend” – has 900 schools registered in 94 countries. It works like a social networking site but also allows schools to work on cross-curricular projects. So far it has linked up with organisations including Medecins Sans Frontieres in a project on Darfur, and with the Fair Trade Foundation for work on ethical trade. Rafi.ki has a range of projects, such as one on the 1960s. The site also enables schools to create its own projects. One group getting involved is from King John School in Benfleet, Essex. Hina Robinson, head of geography and a teacher adviser for Rafi.ki, said: “We used the Darfur project. A lot of our pupils had never heard of Darfur, so it was a bit of a shock for them to find out what was happening there. “We also did a podcast with a school in Serbia.[The country] had been through its own civil war and so had a bit more empathy with what was going on in Darfur. “I knew the teacher in Serbia was interested to see how pupils worked on it.” The new key stage 3 curriculum introduced in Year 7 this September requires schools to include a cross-subject “global dimension”. The aim to expand young people’s awareness of global issues goes back to 2004, when the then Department for Education and Skills published its Putting theWorld intoWorld-Class Education strategy, which sets out eight key concepts pupils need to know (see panel), and launched the International Schools Award, an accreditation scheme. Rafi.ki was launched in January 2007 and became the focus of research earlier this year by Richard Shotton, a freelance expert on the use of ICT for international collaboration based at Manchester Metropolitan University. He analysed questionnaires from 148 teachers in 46 countries, and 393 students in 32 countries. Mr Shotton found that almost all the teachers said Rafi.ki helped to motivate students; 55 per cent said it had a very significant impact on the most disengaged learners. Nine out of 10 students logged on to the website both in and outside school – a quarter of them checked it every day. Rafi.ki was most commonly used in modern foreign languages and geography classes, but was also used often in design and technology, maths and science. John MacNutt, director of Rafi.ki,

said: “It helps schools find a partner, talk to a partner and work with a partner. We had two new countries join last week – Nepal and Algeria. “Schools tend to start with one class, then use it more and more across the subjects. There is lip service about the global dimension and making it work across the curriculum – ‘the foreign’ is above.” The website is one of three projects run by Gemin-i.org – a charity that specialises in using IT to enhance education and international development. All communications on the site are monitored. Membership costs £750 a year. Teachers in the UK can exchange resources with their counterparts in Australia, India and Sudan using a new website, writes Adi Bloom. The Schools United site aims to help teachers to share ideas with other school staff around the world. Users can search the website for staff who teach their subject or who hold similar management positions. They can then browse any resources, photographs or videos that these teachers have uploaded, or contact them directly to share ideas.

Eight key concepts of global education

- Citizenship
- Social justice
- Sustainable development
- Diversity
- Values and perceptions
- Interdependence
- Conflict resolution
- Human rights

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“Schools tend to start with one class, then use it more and more across the subjects. There is lip service about the global dimension and making it work across the curriculum – this brings it alive.”

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