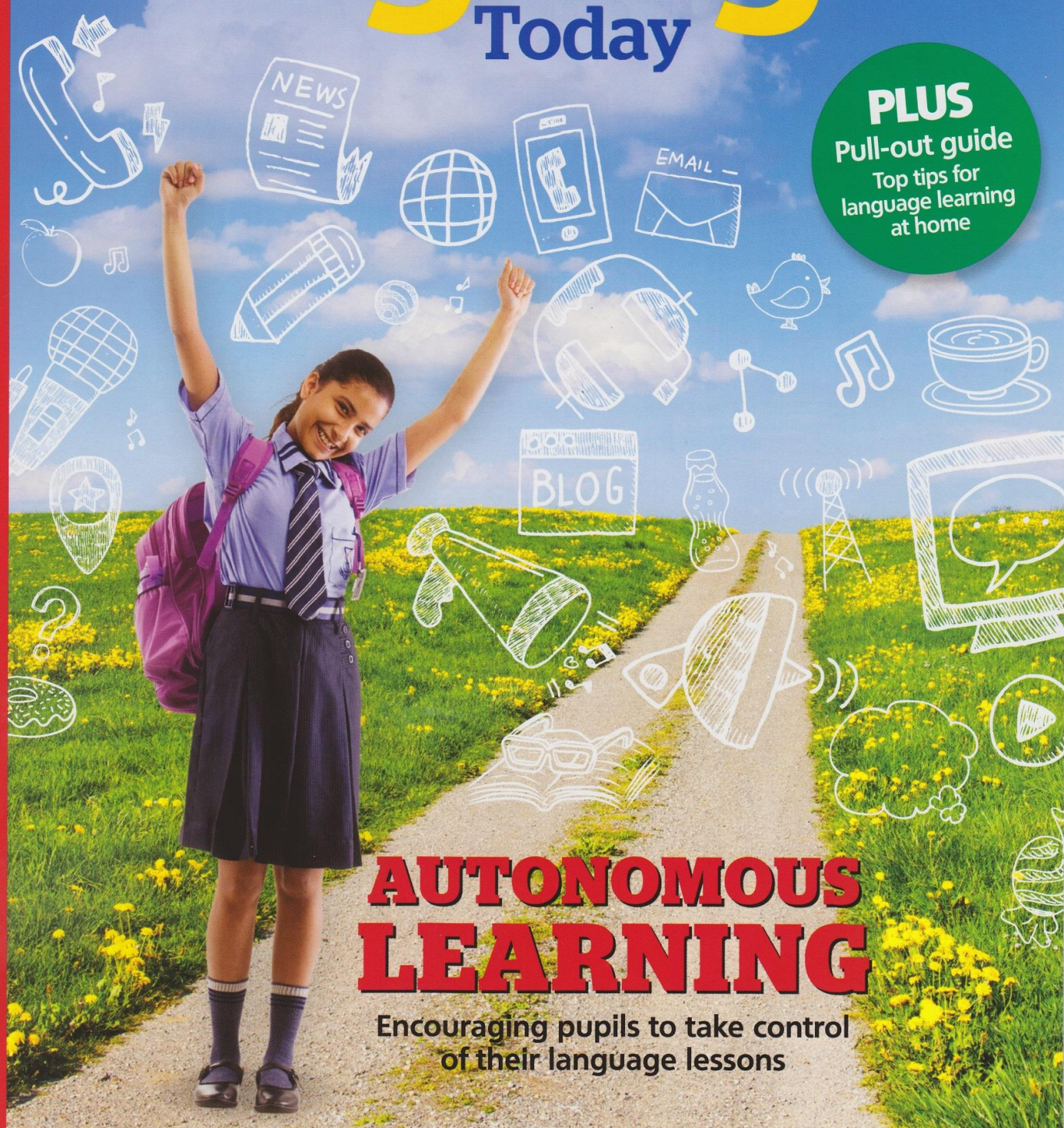


Languages Today

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Top tips for language learning at home



AUTONOMOUS LEARNING

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Learning through play
Taking your language classes into the playground



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Language Futures
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How to...

How to develop intercultural understanding through play

Sarah Bruce explains the benefits of taking language learning into the playground

It was all fun and games for the pupils at Panshanger Primary School in Hertfordshire last autumn, when we took part in the eTwinning project 'Playground Fun – a European Day of Languages project'.

As an eTwinner of four years, I was hopeful that the theme would appeal to potential partners, and this proved to be so. Schools from France, Italy, Poland, Romania, Slovenia and Spain took part in the project, as well as two other UK schools, which added an interesting extra dimension.

The premise of this short project was a simple one: since play is the universal language of childhood, the pupils from the partner schools would select their favourite games and share these via the Twinspace in the form of photos and videos. (A Twinspace is the collaborative workspace where we can

plan and blog about the project and securely upload documents, images and videos.) For those schools whose eSafety policy did not permit the sharing of pupils' images, these would be substituted with hand-drawn pictures and written instructions for their games, to be scanned and presented in PowerPoints or other media.

Cultural lessons

By the time the European Day of Languages arrived at the end of September, the children had already found out something of each other's cultures, school settings and local environments from a variety of work shared in the Twinspace, so the next step was to try out the games.

Since the children from the partner schools ranged in age from four to 11+, there was a wide assortment of age-appropriate activities from which to choose, although many of the games proved universally popular, irrespective of age.

At Panshanger, I chose to organise the day by selecting a focus country for each class – from Reception to Year 6. In addition to playing the games (mostly in English, but with elements of the target language), the children learnt simple greetings from their focus country, located it on a map relative to the other partner countries, and found out about its flag. We held a whole school Language



Biography

Sarah Bruce

Sarah Bruce is Modern Language Subject Coordinator at Panshanger Primary School, Welwyn Garden City, Hertfordshire.



Above Children shared photos, videos and hand-drawn pictures to explain their favourite games



Pupils in Morawica, Poland, enjoy playing Stary niedźwiedz mocno śpi, or Old Bear is Sleeping



Above Pupils at Panshanger Primary School take part in a French hand clapping game

Left Hesketh Bank pupils in the playground for a game of Old Bear is Sleeping

TOP TIPS

- **Start small and keep project ideas simple**
It is better to extend a successful project, than to be overly ambitious and intimidate potential partners (especially new ones)
- **Bear in mind different term dates**
Other countries' term times differ, so double check before agreeing a time frame

- **eTwinning projects**
These can provide the ideal opportunity for skill sharing between teachers and for developing valuable links between schools for future collaborations

- **Sign up for free eTwinning webinars**
These can be very useful and will explain how you can get

started on an eTwinning project

- **Restrictions**
Explain to project partners from the outset if your school has any restrictions on uploading of pupils' images and get an agreement from all partners as to how any photos will be shared with their school communities

Celebration Assembly at the end of the day, where the children were keen to share not only the new games and language they had learnt, but the discovery that most children across Europe had their own variations of familiar clapping, chasing and hiding games, including regional versions within the UK.

In addition to inspiring a 'have-a-go' ethos for pupils and teachers alike, one of the most valuable aspects of the project was that, through careful selection of focus countries, children of different nationalities within the schools were encouraged to share their own experiences of play, and have their home languages valued by their peers.

My project partner, Erzszi Culshaw, of Hesketh Bank school, and I both have pupils

in our schools whose home language is Polish, and have witnessed these children's delight and confidence at helping to lead the game: 'Stary niedźwiedź mocno śpi' – 'Old Bear is Sleeping', which was shared by Polish partner, Anna Litwin, of Szkoła Podstawowa im. Kornela Makuszyńskiego, Morawica. When Jan, a Year 1 pupil at Panshanger explained, rather enchantingly, "I felt very happy that I could play a Polish game and get the Polish out of my brain," I realised what a very special day it had been for him.

Lasting legacy

What had not been anticipated, when initiating this short-term project, was that some of the schools would wish to continue

the project after European Day of Languages had been and gone.

I found it really rewarding to follow the development of work shared by Anna and Erzszi, who decided to introduce a 'Game of the Week', so that their pupils could experience as many of the games as possible.

Anna explained the reasons for her decision to continue language learning through play, and the benefits for her students: "I'm really delighted to work on this project... I could learn so many fantastic games and gain so many useful materials. My lessons are more interesting now and my students are so excited."

The final phase of the project was to produce a simple PDF booklet, as a record of the games shared and to provide a practical resource for teachers to use in the future.

With the Rio Olympics looming ever closer, now is the ideal time to start preparing a language learning journey through play. After all, what could be more fun?

Further information

- ETwinning community for schools in Europe
www.etwinning.net
- Examples of games and demonstrations of pronunciation
www.youtube.com
- Interactive video clips of children teaching their home languages
www.newburyparkschool.net/langofmonth
- Information about health, sport and games
<http://tiny.cc/MaSanteEnJeux>

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