

## **Videoconferencing in the Classroom**

An introduction by Michelle Fontaine, Educational video-conferencing Consultant for the Community Learning Centres project.

What can videoconferencing in the classroom do for students? The possibilities are endless. By bringing the outside world into the classroom, students become motivated to learn. Specialists are readily available to answer questions that go beyond the normal classroom experience. Interactive Virtual Field Trips are there to support all subject areas. Pre and post activities help students to set goals as well as reflect on their experience to ensure learning. Collaborative projects with schools from around the world develop cultural awareness and cooperative learning skills. Students soon begin to improve their communication skills and physical appearance as they become aware of how others hear and see them. Roles and responsibilities are given to students to enable them to become better learners. Technology plays an important role in the lives of today's students and these skills will increase their opportunities in the workforce.

Videoconferencing can become an extension of the classroom offering a multitude of teaching possibilities. Teachers will now have unlimited resources for their students, taking them to places, meeting people, and having face-to-face discussions they would not normally be exposed to. Videoconferencing is a tool for teachers, not something extra that is added on. Teachers will learn how to create learning situations that fit their curriculum or modify projects that they have already used.

To make this experience positive for all, teachers and students have to be trained. First of all, teachers have to learn what is out there for them and their students. In groups of 2 to 4 schools, the teachers are brought into a 3 hour videoconference that consists of a trainer, invited Content Providers, such as the Canadian Space Agency, the Biosphere, etc., and teachers from outside the province who have been involved in collaborative projects around the world. This helps the teachers to understand how they can use it with their own students and what kind of curriculum connections they could make.

Planning and preparation is crucial. Videoconferencing should be an interactive experience, not a "talking head". Lessons should be planned with before, during and after activities, assigning roles and responsibilities to students, encouraging them to take control of their learning. When students take an active role in learning, behaviour problems are diminished.

Just like in the classroom, teachers have to learn technical skills, management skills, and project planning. Initially, teachers and students will be working on collaborative projects with other CLC schools in order to become comfortable with the new technology. Once everyone is familiar with checklists, testing, setting goals, reflecting and evaluating a videoconference project, the teachers can begin to plan Virtual Field Trips and make connections with schools around the world.

All teachers involved in the project have access to a Community Portal which contains planning documents, web links, checklists, evaluation forms and a discussion forum. Teachers are invited to add to the Community and post collaborative project requests. Eventually, the Learning Situations will be posted on the CLC website so everyone will have access to videoconferencing in the classroom.