

Videoconferencing between Australian and Korean Schools for Intercultural Exchanges

Myung-sook Auh (University of New England, Australia)

Chris Reading (University of New England, Australia)

ABSTRACT

This paper reports how videoconferencing sessions between Australian and Korean schools were designed and implemented in five pairs of Australian and Korean schools for intercultural exchanges. Participating schools were five from regional Australia and five from Urban Korea. To design the experience, the project team consulted those with previously reported expertise and experiences in using videoconferencing in schools. The sessions were held in Social Studies in the Australian schools, and in English classes in the Korean schools, with times and curriculum content negotiated between Australian and Korean teachers. Students gave presentations over the videoconference connections and engaged in question and answer sessions. Feedback on the videoconferencing sessions showed that 1) the students developed interest in and familiarity towards each other's culture; 2) the videoconferencing sessions increased students' attention in classes; 3) teachers had opportunities to develop their videoconferencing skills; 4) technological challenges had to be addressed especially, connection failures and poor audio and video qualities; 5) a coordinator is needed to assist teachers by communicating with them by email, telephone, and Skype. Improvements are suggested for the proposed next implementation of the project with an increased number of schools.

I . INTRODUCTION

This paper reports how videoconferencing sessions were used to connect learners in five pairs of Australian and Korean schools. First is a description of the birth of

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the project as a response to the current trends in education in Australia and Korea. Second, research findings about videoconferencing, web conferencing and online discussions are shared. Next are details of how the videoconferencing sessions between Australian and Korean schools were designed and implemented in schools. Finally, issues and challenges identified during the design and implementation are discussed.

1. Current trends in education in Australia and Korea

Economically and politically Australia is strongly linked with South Korea. Strong Australian business connections with Korea include exporting beef and importing electronic goods such as from LG, Samsung, Hyundai, and Kia. Australia belongs geographically to Asia and thus it is strategic to maintain positive relationships with Asian countries such as Korea.

Recognizing the importance of Asia for Australia's future (ADEST, 2006; MCEETYA, 2008), the Australian Government has been investing in teaching Asian languages and studies for schools and universities. For example, for the for the National Asian Languages and Studies in Schools (NALSSP) program, the Australian Government has committed funding of AUD \$62.4million over 3 years, from 2009 to 2011, to support studies of four Asian countries, i.e., Korea, China, Japan, and Indonesia in schools. The Becoming Asia Literate funding, one of the NALSS Pprograms, is to assist Australian students to become Asia-literate.

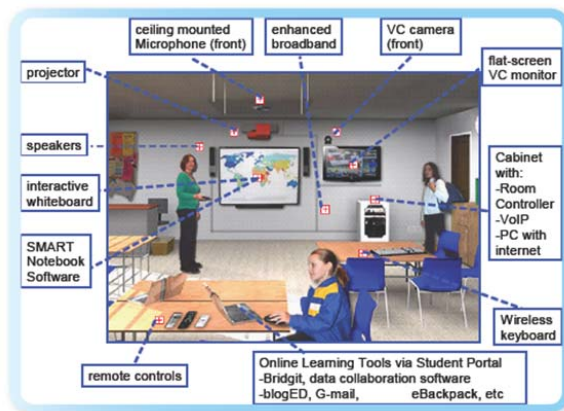
A major goal of the Korean government for education is to develop students to become global citizens by developing their English skills and digital technology skills. To achieve this goal, the Korean government encourages schools to link with overseas schools for intercultural exchanges through technology and school exchange visits (Korean Ministry of Education, Science, and Training, 2008).

The demand from Korean schools to link with Australian schools using technology, and the Australian government's support for Korean studies led to the development in Australia of a project to utilise videoconferencing to connect students for learning. Another development that also helped support the project was a complex system of interconnected videoconferencing equipment within government schools in New South Wales (NSW), one state of Australia.

2. Connected Classrooms in NSW

Videoconferencing became part of teaching and learning in NSW public schools through the Connected Classrooms Program (CCP) (<https://www.det.nsw.edu.au/about-us/how-we-operate/connected-classroom>) initiated by the NSW Government in 2007. The CCP's primary goals are to: provide students and teachers in regional/rural/remote areas with educational resources through videoconferencing; provide professional learning for teachers in isolated areas; and assist students and teachers during collaborative projects using videoconferencing and interactive whiteboard technology. The CCP is a four year project (March 2007 to June 2011) investing AUD\$158 million to equip all 2,200 NSW public schools with Tandberg videoconferencing equipment connected to an interactive whiteboard and supported by related equipment (see [Figure 1]). Outcomes of the CCP are reported in the NSW Department of Education and Training (2010) report.

The CCP focused on linking students and teachers within Australia. Consequently, there were only a few cases of videoconferencing with overseas schools (NSW DET, 2010). The CCP Review recommended investigating ways to sustain the CCP. The Australia-Korea ConneXion (AKC) program (described below) is a possible as a possible way to sustain the CCP in NSW public schools by establishing long-term relationships with Korean schools through regular videoconferencing, e-Pal, and school exchange visits.



[Figure 1] Example of a Connected Classroom (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010, p.62 [CCP – Compendium of Practice, p.7]).

3. Australia-Korea ConneXion program

The Australia-Korea ConneXion(AKC) program (<http://www.une.edu.au/austkoreaconnection/>) is an intercultural exchange program linking Australian and Korean schools through three components: videoconferencing, online discussion and school exchange visits. The goal of the AKC program is to develop cultural understanding between Australian and Korean students. Through videoconferencing sessions, Australian students teach their Korean peers about Australian culture, while Korean students teach their Australian peers about Korean culture in English. The students use the online discussion, based in Moodle, to ask questions about presentations made during the videoconferences and to chat about personal matters as well as cultural issues. It is hoped that such exchanges will assist the students to build friendships with each other. The school exchange visit is the peak of the AKC program by consolidating their relationships through meeting face-to-face. Although there are three components to the project, this paper only reports on the videoconferencing aspect.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Three important forms of digital communication: videoconferencing, web conferencing and online discussion, are reviewed.

1. Videoconferencing

Videoconferencing motivates students to learn because it has a novelty effect (Andrews, 2005; Howard-Kennedy, 2004; Lee & Hutton, 2007), links remotely-located classrooms (Lee & Hutton, 2007), and has the potential for international and intercultural education (Bell, Carr, & Whelan, 2009; Lee & Hutton, 2007). However, structured and facilitated videoconferencing sessions are more effective than free-style classes as they facilitate rigorous debate (Bell, Carr, & Whelan, 2009). Key factors for successful videoconferencing sessions are: choice of teacher, quality of videoconferencing equipment, curriculum content addressed, and classroom design

(Andrews, 2005). Teacher commitment is the key to effective use with students of the Connected Classrooms of the NSW public schools (Mitchell, Hunter, & Mockler, 2010).

Videoconferencing is also useful for teacher professional learning in rural and remote areas (NSW Department of Education and Training, 2010), but difficulties in finding appropriate venues and coordinators for the learning sessions can be a problem (Broadley, Boyd, & Terry, 2009; Reading et al., 2008). Videoconferencing sessions were trialled as a solution for multi-campus lecturing, but were not as effective as hoped because of coordination and technical issues (Freeman, 1998) and lower quality learning in remote sites (Knipe & Lee, 2002).

Videoconferencing allows data sharing, i.e., all participants can see Power Point slides, Word files, and websites from other participants, thus facilitating collaborative discussion. To do data sharing while videoconferencing, either a separate screen should be connected to videoconferencing equipment, as in the Connected Classrooms arrangement, which have an Interactive Whiteboard connected to Tandberg equipment; or certain sophisticated videoconferencing equipment, which can allow formatting its screen for data sharing.

Key factors for successful videoconferencing sessions

The study by Andrews (2005) provides relevant guidance to the AKC project because of similarities in the context. Andrews (2005) implemented a curriculum-based videoconference program for Science, Social Studies, Global Classroom, Legal Studies, Music, and Mathematics in a high school in Canada. IP-based H.323 videoconferencing system and internet-based software such as Macromedia Breeze, VSee, WebEx, RealNVC (Virtual Network Computing) were used. Four key factors for successful videoconferencing sessions were identified through a literature review and by observing the whole process, including all the videoconferencing sessions. Based on these four factors: Teachers, Videoconferencing quality, Contents, and Classroom design, Andrews (2005) provides the following tips for videoconferencing sessions:

A. Teachers: "Select teachers carefully, build a team of champions and ensure

committed, involved and supportive leadership” (p.82).

- B. Videoconferencing quality: “Ensure high quality, synchronous transmission of image and sound through the use of IP-based (H.323) videoconferencing equipment over non-commercial broadband networks” (p. 84).
- C. Contents: “Adopt a variety of well planned, research-based methods to make the content engaging for the learner; keep lectures to a minimum of 15 minutes and ensure that all participants are actively involved” (p.86).
- D. Classroom design: “Videoconferencing classrooms require a flexible design to support activity and interactivity within a variety of subject areas” (p. 96).

The above tips provide important strategies for and insights into designing and implementing videoconferencing in schools.

2. Web conferencing

Web conferencing is distinguished from videoconferencing in that the latter uses hardware, such as Tandberg or Polycom videoconferencing equipment, while the former uses web-based software, such as Skype, Adobe Connect (previously called Macromedia Breeze), BizNuri (developed by a Korean company). Like videoconferencing, web conferencing allows data sharing.

Using webconferencing to learn language and culture

Two studies using web conferencing are closely related to the AKC project. Jauregi and Bañados (2008) used Adobe Connect software for web conferencing to teach Spanish language as a second language to Danish (non-native Spanish) university students by linking them with Chilean (native Spanish) university students. They also used a blog for follow-up discussion and reflection on the web conferencing classes. Data analysed included: student responses to a questionnaire, recordings of the web conferencing classes, and the project blog. The results showed positive impact on students’ motivation for learning and effective learning outcomes, i.e., understanding the use of language in the given context and the cultural issues. The positive learning outcomes were that all the Danish students (N = 20) wanted to continue the web conferencing classes for their language learning; they appreciated the

opportunity to meet students of their own age from Chile, learn the Spanish language from native speakers, experience the Chilean culture through interaction with their Chilean peers, and realize how different their culture is from that of their Chilean peers.

Lee (2009) also investigated how web conferencing classes contribute to the development of intercultural communication in learning a second language. Participating students were Korean students in Korea learning English from native English speaking teachers in the United States of America (USA) through web conferencing classes using BizNuri. Recordings of the web conferencing classes were analysed. Results showed that the web conferencing classes facilitated Korean students' learning of culture-specific connotations in American English, contributed to developing students' cultural awareness and deeper understandings of their own (Korean) culture and the USA culture, and helped Korean students to develop a willingness to engage with the American teachers, thus reducing their shyness towards the Americans.

3. Online discussion

While videoconferencing and web conferencing provide synchronous interactions, online discussion is asynchronous. O'Neill's study (2007) can inform the AKC project in that it investigated intercultural exchanges between Korea and the USA, but is different in that it used online discussion based in Blackboard. A special program (IVECA) was designed to promote meaningful cultural exchanges, through negotiations between Korean and USA teachers by identifying cultural issues common to both countries. Various positive student outcomes were found, including evidence for improved intercultural competence of Korean and the USA primary students (each living in their own country) and it was found that school principal support was crucial in making this type of project successful.

III. DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

This section reports how the videoconferencing (VC) sessions between Australian and Korean schools were designed and implemented in five pairs of Australian and Korean schools.

1. Participating schools

Participating schools, five Australian schools in regional areas and five Korean schools in urban areas, were paired up for the project. One class was chosen from each school. Four of the schools were secondary, and one was primary. The Australian schools were all in New South Wales, four from Armidale and one from Temora. The Korean schools were from Gyeonggi province, Daejeon city and Gwangju city. Students were from Grade 6 (primary) and Grades 7 and 8 (secondary). The focus for Australian students was Korean culture with the VC sessions in their Social Studies classes, while the focus for the Korean students was English language skills with the VC sessions during lunchtime. In total about 230 students participated, approximately 125 Australian students (about 25 students per class) and 105 Korean students (23 students in each group).

In each Australian school, two teachers were involved in the VC sessions (except for one school, where 1 more teacher [English] joined it due to her interest). One was a Social Studies (i.e., Human Society and Its Environment [HSIE]) teacher who planned and taught VC sessions, and the other was a Computer Studies teacher who assisted with the technical aspects of the VC sessions. In Korean schools, only one teacher from each school was involved in the VC sessions. These were English teachers. Technical assistance for Korean schools was provided by a Korean company, Samyang Data System, who provided VC equipment to the schools. Thus 16 teachers were involved within the VC sessions, 11 Australian and five Korean teachers.

2. Videoconferencing equipment

Among the five Australian schools, three were public schools equipped with the Connected Classroom facilities, including IP (Internet Protocol)-based Tandberg VC equipment and interactive whiteboard (Smartboard). One Australian school was an independent school with Tandberg VC equipment. The fifth Australian school was a Catholic school with no VC equipment and so web conferencing (with web-based software) was used as an alternative solution for synchronous classes. The four Korean schools matched with the four Australian schools with Tandberg equipment were loaned Tandberg VC equipment by Samyang Data System. The fifth Korean school used web conferencing with the Australian Catholic school for synchronous classes. In summary, four pairs (Australian & Korean) of schools used Tandberg VC equipment, and one pair used web conferencing for synchronous classes.

3. Designing videoconferencing sessions

To design effective VC sessions, the project team consulted those with expertise and experiences in VC sessions and applied relevant research findings. Those consulted included teachers, university academics, educational authorities, business people relating to videoconferencing, and government personnel. Based on these investigations, the following decisions were made for designing the VC sessions.

- 1) Intercultural exchanges: The sessions should aim to develop the inter-cultural understandings of Australian and Korean students and the English skills of Korean students.
- 2) During school hours: The sessions should be held during school hours in Australian schools in order to ensure teacher commitment and student participation and because many Australian students have to catch a school bus home. The sessions in Korean schools should be held either in English classes or in lunchtime as an extra-curricular class.
- 3) Social Studies: The sessions should address curriculum based on the NSW Human Society and Its Environment (HSIE; equivalent to Social Studies) which addresses the teaching of Korean culture as one of the four major Asian cultures recommended by the Australian Government. Thus HSIE teachers

would be involved.

- 4) Class contents: The sessions should be based on content negotiated between the Australian and Korean teachers. Australian teachers made the first choice, since the contents were based on the NSW HSIE curriculum, then the Korean teachers added their suggestions for the Australian teachers to consider.
- 5) 30 minutes fortnightly: The sessions should be held every two weeks for approximately 30 minutes. This was considered frequent enough to maintain students' interests and not requiring too much class time.
- 6) Term/Semester dates: The sessions should consider both the Australian and Korean school Term or Semester dates and their break dates. They were held in the periods from 1 September to 30 November 2010 and from 2 March to 30 June 2011. Five VC sessions were scheduled for each school.
- 7) Grade levels: The sessions should be held with Grade (Year) 5 and 6 (primary) or Grades 7 and 8 (secondary).
- 8) Structured classes: The sessions should be structured rather than free-style so that students engage in productive discussion related to class topics instead of just chatting about personal matters.
- 9) A-K culture: The sessions should be conducted in English and allow Australian students to teach Australian culture to Korean students and Korean students teach Korean culture to Australian students.
- 10) Class format: The sessions should start with brief (2 minutes) greetings, followed by Australian and Korean students delivering group presentations alternately. Each presentation should be followed by 2 questions from the audience. For example, Australian presentation #1, followed by questions from Korea; then, Korean presentation #1, followed by questions from Australia; Australian presentation #2; Korean presentation #2. Finally, Open discussion should be scheduled at the end.
- 11) Class times: The sessions should be based on class times were decided by obtaining three options from both Australian and Korean teachers, and determining the class time that suits both. One difficulty in deciding class times is Australian Daylight Savings, which begin in early October and end in early April. It must be remembered that Korea is two hours behind Australia from early October till early April, but then only one hour behind for the

remainder of the year. This can complicate class schedules that are matched across daylight saving and non-daylight saving time.

- 12) Group presentations: The sessions should include student group presentations using Power Point (PPt) slides. PPt slides should be used to assist communication between the Australian and Korean students and should have visual images, such as photos or pictures, to attract attention and should have key words, phrases, or sentences to assist in overcoming accent and audio quality issues. Each group consisted of three students, and each presentation was scheduled for four minutes.

An example of a Class Outline for VC sessions is shown in Appendix A.

4. Videoconferencing connection test

Before starting VC sessions, VC connections were tested between the paired Australian and Korean schools. For the VC connection tests, three parties were involved: 1) the NSW Department of Education and Training (DET) Multimedia and Conferencing Unit; 2) a representative from the Korean company providing the Tandberg equipment; and 3) the first author of this paper. The main difficulty in the two parties connecting was firewall protection in the Korean schools. In Korean schools firewalls had to be opened and permission to do this had to be sought from the Korean Offices of Education. In NSW schools videoconference connections can only be made via DET virtual rooms and so the DET Multimedia Unit created three separate Virtual Meeting Rooms (named after their partner Korean schools) for the three NSW public schools to do VC sessions with their partner schools. The private school made a direct videoconference connection with their Korean partner school.

5. Implementing videoconferencing sessions

The VC sessions were held in the five pairs of schools as scheduled in their class outlines, every two weeks for 30 minutes in for three months from early September till the end of November. [Figure 2] shows what VC sessions look like from the Australian and Korean sides. The researcher(s) observed all sessions by visiting the

four local schools in Armidale, and attending electronically as a third party in the videoconferences for the non-local school Temora. The researcher(s) talked with the classroom teachers before and after the sessions to review what went well and what did not, and to suggest improvements for the next session. For example, after receiving feedback from a Korean school about the difficulty in hearing Australian student questions, the research team bought a wireless microphone for the Australian school, which could be connected to the Control box of their Tandberg unit.

IV. DISCUSSION

There are four indicators of positive student and teacher outcomes from the VC sessions. First, the VC sessions helped students develop a more informed image of the culture of the other country. Australian students developed interest in and familiarity with Korean culture, and Korean students with Australian culture. Since Korean communities in Australia are mostly located in cities, the participating students from schools in Armidale and Temora had little exposure to Korean culture. Similarly, for Korean students they had poorly formed images of Australia people, focusing on such things as sheep, beef, beaches, and Great Barrier Reef. Korean students' English pronunciation is based on American English, because many native English-speaking teachers employed in schools are from the USA. In the VC sessions the students talked about their culture, and then asked about each other's culture, increasing the curiosity about each other. Also, their regular meetings through the VC sessions and the questions and answers, often about personal matters, in the Open Discussion helped them understand each other better. For example, when one Australian student described her family, i.e., "father, mother, brother, myself, and a dog named Charlie," Korean students laughed and the Australian students "Why are they laughing?" It had to be explained that in Korea.



[Figure 2] Videoconferencing sessions between Australian and Korean schools. The upper image was taken in an Australian school, and the lower image in a Korean school.

Second, the VC sessions increased students' attention in classes. It was apparent that both Australian and Korean students were curious about seeing their peers from their partner countries and communicating with them. For example, while Australian students were waiting for technical problems to be fixed, they waved their hands

and made other gestures towards Korean students, who responded by waving and gesturing. They all laughed with expressions of joy and excitement and with a sense that “they are like us”. Also, students appeared to concentrate on their peers’ presentations about culture so that they could ask questions and also answer their peers’ questions indicating that most students were on task. Several previous studies showed that videoconferencing sessions increase students’ motivation for learning (Andrews, 2005; Howard-Kennedy, 2004; Lee & Hutton, 2007).

Third, the VC sessions provided teachers with opportunities to develop technical skills through regular use. While VC facilities were installed in four of the Australian schools, the facilities had not been used frequently by teachers. This is partially explained by the fact that there was a belief that VC was for Computer Studies teachers thus not relevant for other teachers, and partly explained by the fact that VC equipment was not installed in accessible spaces. In one of the Australian schools, the videoconferencing equipment was installed in a Year 4 classroom for Year 4 and so could not be used by other teachers unless an advance arrangement was made with the Year 4 teacher to displace the class. In another school, the equipment was in the school library and so could not be used when the library was being used for other purposes.

Fourth, the VC sessions provided technological challenges, e.g., unclear audio and video qualities, or sudden failure of the connection due to network infrastructures beyond the school network. For example, a pair of Australian and Korean schools had a Demonstration class, when dignitaries attended including school principals, educational authorities, the Education Counsellor from Australia Education International in Seoul, university professors, business representatives. It was a big day to showcase how videoconferencing sessions worked but, in the middle of the class, suddenly the videoconferencing connection failed, and the Australian school disappeared. A project leader, in the Korean school at the time, called the computer teacher in the Australian school, who explained their electric power dropped for a few minutes. The connection returned after a few desperate moments for the organizers.

Finally, the VC sessions demonstrated the necessity of having a Coordinator for VC who can assist both Australian and Korean teachers by communicating with them by email, telephone, and Skype. Many Australian teachers are so busy that taking on the VC sessions is extra work for them and the appointment of a Coordinator should assist them. After more use Australian teachers should develop more interest and expertise with VC. Korean teachers are highly motivated toward using VC with English speaking countries, because such work is expected as part of their achievement in the annual teacher assessment procedure undertaken by Korean Offices of Education. The Korean teachers difficulty is concern about whether they can communicate with Australian teachers easily and without misunderstandings. Although many Korean teachers of English have fluent-to-reasonable English, negotiating about complicated details is not easy for some Korean teachers. This is where the Coordinator could assist.

1. Expanding the Australia-Korea ConneXion project

The project team is planning to gradually increase the number of schools over the period from 2011 to 2013. An AKC Expression of Interest Form has been sent to Australian teachers through the NSW DET teacher list, and has been uploaded to the English teacher websites in Korean Offices of Education. A number of actions that should be taken to manage the increased numbers of schools are as follows:

- A. The project team should hire a Coordinator for videoconferencing to assist both Australian and Korean teachers by communicating with them by email, telephone, and Skype.
- B. For a systematic arrangement of videoconferencing sessions between Australian and Korean schools, the NSW Department of Education and Training and Korean Offices of Education should discuss collaboration with each other. Then both Australian and Korean teachers should feel recognized for their videoconferencing work.
- C. There should be Demonstration classes for videoconferencing at the end of each

teaching period. Such classes provide opportunities to invite principals, interested teachers from other schools, and educational authorities to show how the sessions work and what benefits flow on to students and teachers.

- D. The videoconferencing sessions should be publicized, especially in newspaper articles locally (see Appendix B). Such publicity should boost teacher motivation and principal interest in the videoconferencing sessions.
- E. here should be gatherings of participating teachers at the end of each teaching period to share experiences and strategies for conducting videoconferencing sessions.

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APPENDIX A

Class Outline for Videoconferencing sessions for one pair of schools

	Australian school	Korean school
School Name	Duval High School http://web2.duval-h.schools.nsw.edu.au/main/html/	Imae Middle School, Gyeonggi Province www.imae.ms.kr
Tandberg VC	· IP address details included here	· IP address details included here
Teacher	Teacher name and contact details included here	Teacher name and contact details included here
Students	Y7X class, 25 students, boys & girls.	Extra-curricular students.

CLASS TIMES & CLASS TOPICS	
13 October (Wed), 2010 Australia: 2.40 – 3.10pm(Duval P5) Korea: 12.40 – 1.10pm(Imae Lunch)	·Introduction of the classes to each other. ·History of Armidale; History of Imae and Gyeongin Province.
27 October (Wed), 2010 Australia: 2.40 – 3.10pm(Duval P5) Korea: 12.40 – 1.10pm(Imae Lunch)	·History of Indigenous Australia. ·The Early Era of Korea : Old Joseon and Three Kingdoms - Dangun and Gwanggaeto the Great
10 November (Wed), 2010 Australia: 2.40 – 3.10pm(Duval P5) Korea: 12.40 – 1.10pm(Imae Lunch)	·European settlement of Australia - Convict origins. ·Goryeo Dynasty : Gyreo Celadon and the Tripikata Koreana
24 November (Wed), 2010 Australia: 2.40 – 3.10pm(Duval P5) Korea: 12.40 – 1.10pm(Imae Lunch)	·Major events that shaped Aust in the colonial period - eg Gold rushes. ·Joseon Dynasty and Japanese Colonization : King Sejong and Murder of Empress Myungseong
1 December (Wed), 2010 Australia: 2.40 – 3.10pm (Duval P5) Korea: 12.40 – 1.10pm(Imae Lunch)	·Immigration to Australia in the late 20th century and 21st century. ·The Divided Nation as North and South after Korean War

CLASS FORMAT
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Initial greetings (2mins) ■ Duval Presentation 1 (4mins) à Imae, Question (2mins) ■ Imae Presentation 1 (4mins) à Duval, Question (2mins) ■ Duval Presentation 2 (4mins) à Imae, Question (2mins) ■ Imae Presentation 2 (4mins) à Duval Question (2mins) ■ General comments and close (2 mins) <p>Reverse order of schools in the next videoconference.</p> <p>Follow up to each conference: Students to post further questions and messages on the Moodle Online discussion board for students of the partner school to respond to.</p>

APPENDIX B

Local newspaper report on the videoconferencing sessions between Ben Venue Public School and Gyeongin Primary School in Korea

“Technology smooths way for young globetrotters”

The Armidale Express, 18 Oct 2010

