What is a SchoolNet?

CHAPTER 1
1. What is a SchoolNet?

The concept of a “SchoolNet” (school network) has spread since the mid-1990s, when the Internet began to be used more widely in education. Individual definitions and activities of SchoolNets vary but a SchoolNet can be described, in general, as a network which is set up to support effective use of the information and communication technologies (ICT), particularly the Internet, for enhancing education, and for encouraging greater communication and co-operation among a network of schools.

From an organizational perspective, SchoolNets vary from being private, non-profit, governmental or intergovernmental initiatives. No matter what the type of initiative, however, the majority of enduring SchoolNets involve input of Ministries of Education.

SchoolNets also vary in their goals and objectives, depending on such things as the policy environment in the country they are in and the accessibility of the required equipment. For example, the Thailand SchoolNet has so far focused on establishing Internet connectivity in schools, while the Malaysian SchoolNet, which faces a different policy environment and has fewer challenges in terms of connectivity, has focused on providing teachers with access to learning materials in the national language, Bahasa Melayu.

School networks can be local, national or international (regional). One of the earliest international (regional-level) SchoolNets was the Nordic SchoolNet, ODIN, which encompasses the Nordic countries and was set up in the early 1990s by the Nordic Council of Ministers. Around the same time, local and national SchoolNets were being set up elsewhere in the world, for example the Ohio SchoolNet (set up as a network of schools in Ohio State of the United States of America in 1994), the Canada SchoolNet and European Schoolnet, which were all established in the mid-1990s.

Other organizations, such as I*EARN and the European Schools Project, were implementing initiatives similar to SchoolNets in the early 1990s, but did not use the term “SchoolNet” and worked mostly on a practical level with teachers, rather than also engaging policy makers.

All SchoolNets promote partnerships in learning. For example, Canada’s SchoolNet, one of the first national-level SchoolNets, explains a SchoolNet as follows: “a partnership with the provincial and territorial governments, the education community and the private sector, which promotes the effective use of information and communications technologies in learning.”

“Through the use of communication technologies like the internet and the mobile phone, the reach of our relatively short digits has been extended to a much larger sphere – that of the global digital world.”

International Telecommunication Union, Internet Report 2006: Digital Life

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6 The Nordic countries include: Denmark, Finland, Faero Islands, Greenland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden, Åland. For further information see the Nordic SchoolNet website: www.nordskol.org
7 Ohio Schools Become Founding Members of State’s Third Frontier Network, www.osc.edu/press/releases/2003/ohio_schools.shtml
8 I*EARN website, www.iearn.org
9 Canada’s SchoolNet, www.schoolnet.ca/home/e/whatis.asp