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# VideoPal: An Asynchronous Video Based Communication System to Connect Children from US and Greece

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**Abstract**

In this paper we describe VideoPal, a novel video based asynchronous communication system. VideoPal is currently being used by approximately 30 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> grade students from the US and Greece to explore the opportunities and challenges of video-mediated asynchronous communication in supporting traditional Pen Pal activities.

**Keywords**

Asynchronous CMC, Video, Pen Pal, Education, Children

**ACM Classification Keywords**

H5.1. Information interfaces and presentation (e.g., HCI): Video.

**General Terms**

Video, Asynchronous CMC, Pen Pal, Nonverbal Communication, feeling of proximity

**Introduction**

Pen pal programs have been popular for generations. Traditionally, Pen pals communicate with each other by exchanging letter mail. More recently email has been used to support Pen Pal activities. Pen Pal friendships

have been shown to be effective in supporting cross-curricular learning, developing cultural understanding, and serving young children's growing need for a close and intimate friend [1].

We have recently begun to explore the potential of multi-media video to extend current Pen Pal activities. In particular, we developed a video-based asynchronous tool called VideoPal to support cross-cultural communication for children who live several time zones apart. Similar to the notion of a Pen Pal, instead of writing letters or emails, participants send short videos to each other.

We are particularly interested in asynchronous video because: a) the primarily text-based nature of email is a limited symbolic representation system; b) young children often have not mastered the communication competencies to make full use of text-based technologies so video based communication may be more effective; c) video can support non-verbal communication which is often missing or attenuated in text-based communication [2]; d) the asynchronous nature makes it an ideal tool to support communication between people from different parts of the world spanning many time-zones.

### **Research Questions**

We are partnering with a school from Washington, USA and Corfu, Greece to conduct this research. This project involves an empirical investigation of asynchronous video-mediated VideoPal activities between a group of 4th grade students from Washington and a group of 4th and 5th grade students from Corfu. In this project, we seek to answer the following three research questions:

- Can video help children from two different cultures get to know each other, and learn about each other's countries and culture?
- Can video-mediated communication help children become more familiar with each other and increase their feelings of connectedness with each other compared to text-mediated communication?
- What are the opportunities and challenges of children's video-mediated asynchronous communication?

### **Expected Contribution**

As part of this project we will collect a wide range of data to address our research questions including data from: a series of interviews, students' weekly diaries about the use of VideoPal, the videos students send to each other, and the usage logs recorded on the server. The proposed contribution of this project includes: a) a state-of-art video based asynchronous communication system which enables children to easily create short videos to send to their friends b) gaining a better understanding how VideoPal activities can help children from different countries better understand each other's culture, life styles, etc. and c) understanding how asynchronous video can support communication between temporally distributed people.

### **References**

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- [2] Isaacs, E. and Tang J. What video can and can't do for collaboration: a case study. In *Proc. Multimedia 1993*, ACM Press (1993), 196-206.