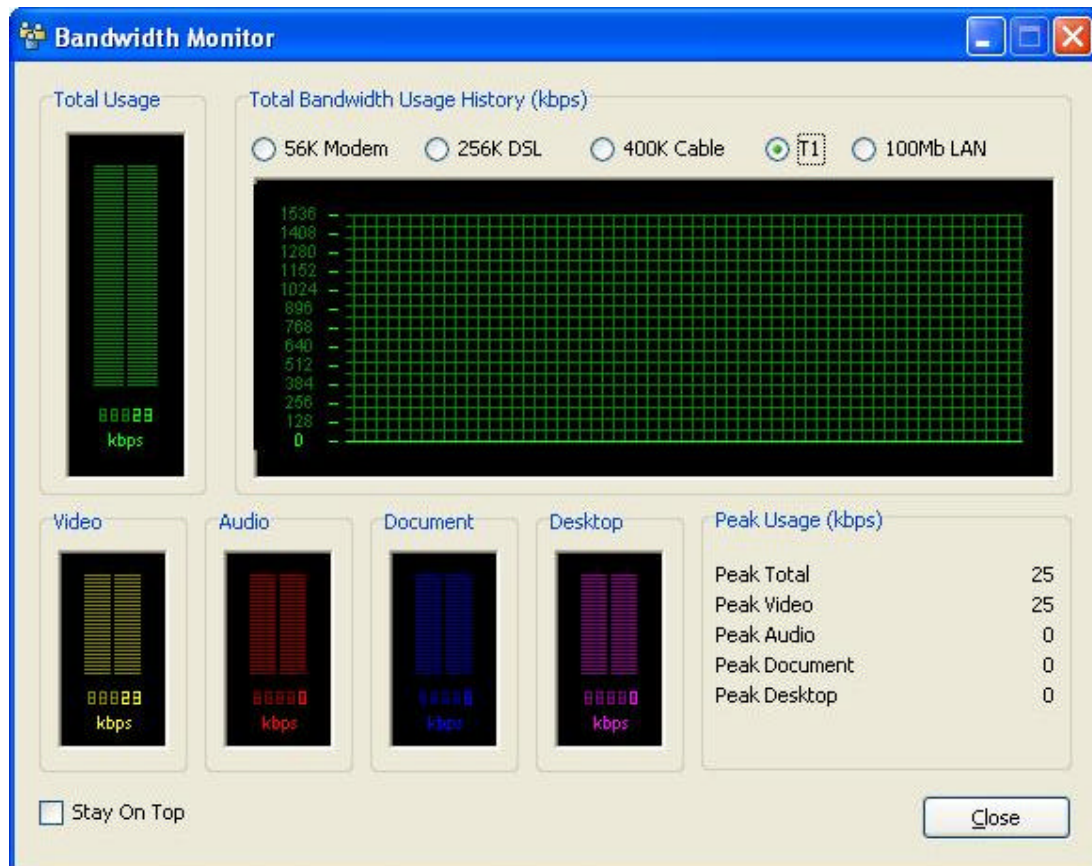


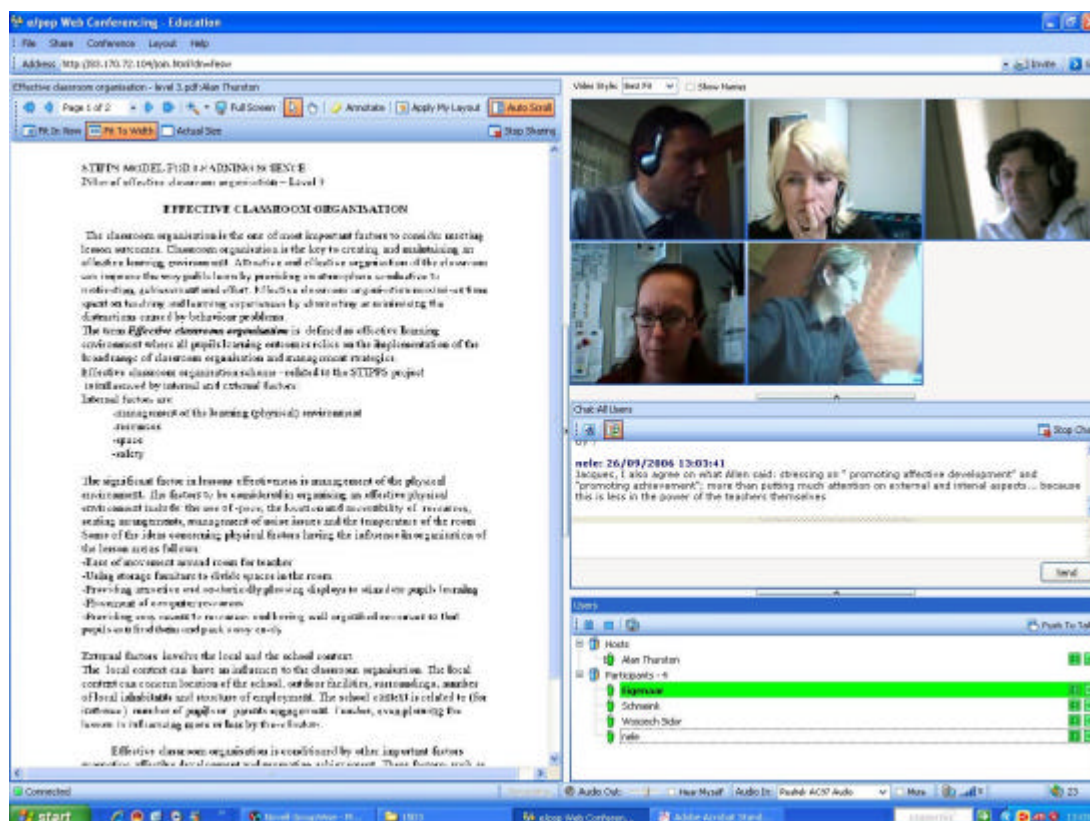
## STIPPS Partners meet through video conferences

### ePop for video conferencing and document sharing

ePop is an innovative conferencing system that allows video conferencing, audio conferencing and text chat. It runs via a web browser (Internet Explorer 6) and is compatible with MS XP operating systems running SP2. There is also a requirement that 'Active X' for Internet Explorer is enabled. The server is hosted outwith the University and the University pays an annual fee for the use of the server and technical support. No additional software installations are required to run the video conference and access to the conference is initiated by email invitation to each participant. Communications taking place via the conference are secure and this may be an additional advantage of the site over MSN Messenger which may be more open to infiltration. The great advantage of this solution is the facility to text chat and video conference whilst one shares a document and makes changes to the document. Up to 10 participants can conference at one time. Pilot studies included conferences with 5 and 6 participants. Even with video, audio and document sharing with 6 participants the bandwidth used remained low (at 42 kbit per second). Typical bandwidth usage data for the conference is presented below.



In the pilot studies conferences were conducted both within the UK and with five other European countries forming the project team (including Belgium, France, Germany, Malta and Poland). The system was found to be stable and easy to learn how to use. After thirty minutes of staff development it was possible to host a conference and invite participants. No additional IT support was required (or provided) for the participants. Screen shots of the conferences as they took place are presented below.



This software solution provides real potential for synchronous support and development within multi-site projects. Interactions between participants proved relatively easy to manage and facilitate once communication protocols had been established. In addition to the usual communication protocols (these involved the appointment of a chairperson or facilitator for the meeting and the necessity to pass conversations from one participant to another in a structured way whilst allowing participants to enter conversations with a predetermined signal). It was also found that the best quality sound was achieved when each participant used a set of headphones and a microphone located close to their mouth. In addition it was necessary to ensure that each participant only transmitted sound to the conference using a voice activation key. This reduced background noise and feedback. The document sharing facility proved particularly useful. This allowed whoever had shared the document to make a suggested change to it that was

immediately updated on the screen of the other participants. This allowed the participants of the video conference to jointly work on developing a document. This facility could prove invaluable for peer and tutor feedback and development sessions. One could envisage it becoming particularly indispensable as the project moves to the development of continuing professional development materials for teachers.