

Students Without Borders



Global Collaborative Learning Connects School to the Real World

Teachers from middle school on up are familiar with the complaints of students questioning the need for instruction they think they'll never use once they get out of school. In contrast, lessons that have an obvious practical purpose or, better yet, make a clear difference in the real world right now, seem to make sense and to engage their interest.

Using information and communication technology (ICT), such as Web conferencing and wikis, to connect students to their peers in other countries and cultures is one way to engage our students. But it's not just about technology. Global collaborative learning is about connecting students in communities of learners around the

world so they can work together on projects that make a difference locally and globally. It is about building relationships and achieving authentic, meaningful learning. And it lends purpose to lessons and drives just-in-time learning for teachers as well as students as they become co-learners.

Organizations such as the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN) and TakingITGlobal facilitate collaborative partnerships between classrooms, students, communities, and educational partners around the globe. These projects use ICT to help students work together to accomplish meaningful tasks, solve problems, and learn new perspectives from their peers. Creative processes

that allow for a grassroots style of learning and questioning enrich students' critical thinking skills. What better way to learn about such difficult subjects as war, natural disasters, child soldiers, and segregated education than from other students who are involved? They learn *with* the world rather than just *about* the world.

New Perspectives

The Machinto Project is a K-12 literature-based iEARN program that draws inspiration from the Japanese picture book *Machinto*, which is about a 3-year-old girl who is outside playing in Hiroshima, Japan, on the morning of August 6, 1945. She is tragically killed by the atomic bomb but is



Third and fourth grade students from Yasutomi North Elementary School in Hyogo-ken, Japan, collaborated with Canadian students on a mural depicting what each learned about an environmental issue in its partner's country.

resurrected as a peace dove that brings hope to other children in the world who are affected by war.

Students learn about how war affects children their own age in the past as well as in the present day. They also read other books with a similar theme, such as *Sadako and the Thousand Paper Cranes* and *Peace Crane*, and learn to make both text-to-text and text-to-world connections.

The culminating task for the project is the creation of a picture book with the theme of peace and friendship. Every participant makes his or her own book to publish on the Machinto website. The program also sends the collection of books to children in war-affected areas of the world as a gift of friendship from the project participants.

This year, our students created picture books about how they imagined peace and sent them to a school in Kandahar, Afghanistan. The amount of work, care, and thought the students put into their writing and artwork showed the depth of connection they had to the project and to their peers in Afghanistan.

Because real children and real-world issues are part of the project, the tasks they perform become incredibly engaging and inspiring.

Machinto participants located at schools throughout the world had the chance to meet each other during a live Web conference. They participated in a literature circle during a virtual class-to-class meeting and shared their stories, poems, and artwork in a “classroom without borders” with peers from Canada, Taiwan, Japan, Mali, and the United States. It was a life-changing experience for both the teachers and the students involved, as having that personal connection to others reinforced the relationships they developed through the project.

The Machinto Project’s collaborations open up dialogue about issues that are normally not discussed in elementary school classrooms, and in the process, students get to experience discussions and friendships that reach well beyond the walls of traditional learning. Because real children and real-world issues are part of the project, the tasks they perform become incredibly engaging and inspiring.

Our students were able to ask others who lived in war-affected countries what it was like to live in such challenging situations. Last year’s partners included participants from Palestine and Israel, where students were able to communicate with others in the Gaza strip while a conflict was occurring there.

The students get to view each other through a different lens than if they had been left to learn about each other through contemporary media alone. One student articulated her feelings

about the project in a profound way: “Before the Machinto project, I never gave the war much thought. Now that I know someone living in those situations, I feel compassionate toward them.” This kind of character development, though immeasurable, is an invaluable learning experience.

Collaboration across the Curriculum

You can integrate global collaborative projects into all curriculum areas, so they aren’t just time-consuming add-ons, and they meet curriculum standards in all subject areas. For example, one project that fits many K–12 curriculum strands is the My Hero Project.

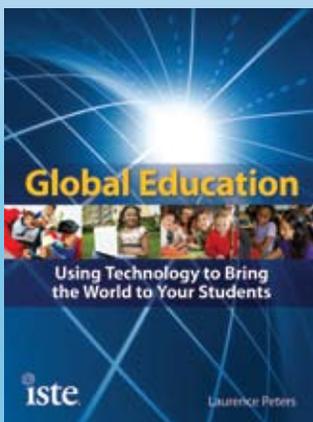
At the My Hero website, students can publish essays about their heroes for a global audience. Entire classes can also participate in the project within a formal global “Learning Circle” of six to eight classes from countries all over the world.

A project facilitator coordinates activities for all of the classes in the circle. Each class is responsible for completing and posting class interest surveys on group forums, sending welcome packages to the other classes in their circle, and participating in online circle discussions about their heroes.

Students research and write about a hero in their lives using a structured writing-process tool and create a webpage about the hero with publishing tools (found on the eCreate page of the My Hero site). These tools enable

Learn More about Global Collaborative Learning

For more ways to engage students with the real world while teaching them about the curriculum and other cultures, tune in to the ISTE webinar “Learning WITH the World: Using Technology to Connect Students Globally in Project-Based Learning.” In this presentation, available at www.iste.org/webinars, Mali Bickley and Jim Carleton give educators more examples of projects that teach higher-order and critical-thinking skills while helping students develop real and meaningful relationships with their peers around the world.



ISTE also recently released the book *Global Education: Using Technology to Bring the World to your Students*. Author Laurence Peters explains how to integrate global collaborative projects into your curriculum using Web 2.0 tools and existing global networks such as iEarn, Global Schoolhouse, and ePals, supported by case studies, lesson plans, and hundreds of resources for bringing global education opportunities to students of every subject area and grade level. You can find *Global Education* at the ISTE Bookstore (www.iste.org/bookstore).

—Megan Dolman, Books Sales & Marketing Specialist, ISTE

Knowing that their stories are to be part of a worldwide project and having the ability to share their work are huge motivators for many reluctant writers.

students to include pictures, Web links, bibliographies, and quotations. At the end of the project, each class has a professional-looking webpage that features My Hero stories from each participant.

Knowing that their stories are to be part of a worldwide project and having the ability to share their work are huge motivators for many reluctant writers. In fact, we have seen students who had never before finalized a piece of written work produce an inspiring My Hero story.

Students can also produce short films about their heroes. Several fourth grade students from W. H. Day Elementary School in Bradford, Ontario, Canada, wrote, filmed, produced, and edited a short film about their hero, Mohamed Sidibay, a former child soldier from Sierra Leone they had supported and communicated with for several years. They submitted the final product to a national Canadian multimedia competition and won first place in the elementary school category for their film.

These projects also allow for differentiation within the summative and assessment pieces while encouraging all participants to reach their potential. We encourage teachers to participate in the My Hero project as a

springboard to integrating technology into their classrooms while participating in collaborative learning, as the project is so successful with students of every age group.

Artful Connections

The Art Miles project is a collaborative global project that helps geographically distant K–12 classes learn about a specific aspect of each other’s country. This year, several classes from Japan partnered with classes from Canada, Indonesia, Russia, Vietnam, Italy, and Fiji. As the program expands, other countries will be added as partners, including Romania and the United States.

The students’ primary job is to teach their partners about a specific aspect of their own country or culture. Each class begins their participation by preparing and sending a welcome package of gifts from their culture to introduce their community to the other class. The students put a great deal of thought and effort into this package. Our Ontario class sent Canadian flags; maps; hockey cards; maple syrup; a small Canadian sweater; a variety of Canadian tales, such as “The Paper Bag Princess;” and information about an environmental issue in our region. In return, our Japanese partners sent origami paper, Japanese cartoons, Japanese games, and books that



Canadian fourth graders sent their handmade books about peace, inspired by the Japanese picture book *Machinto*, to students in the war-affected town of Kandahar, Afghanistan (left). Student-created paper cranes were dedicated in the name of peace at the Hiroshima War Memorial in Japan (right).



Fourth grade students at W. H. Day Elementary School in Bradford, Ontario, Canada, wrote, filmed, produced, and edited a short film about their role models to share with peers around the world through the My Hero Project.

depict the Japanese culture and environment. Each class also prepared a short video that gave a tour of their school and community.

The students communicated through a wiki, where they posted photos, told stories, and planned their final collaborative task, painting a 12-by-5-foot mural. For their part of this task, the Japanese students painted half of the mural about what they learned about the Canadian environmental issue. They then shipped the mural to us, and we completed it based on what we learned about the Japanese environmental issue. The end result was a truly inspiring depiction of an important part of each country's environment, a symbol of the classes' collaborative relationship, and a demonstration of how technology can seamlessly integrate science, art, and literacy while celebrating cultural diversity through the universal language of art.

We will display the mural around our community before it goes back to Japan to be part of the Japanese students' graduation ceremony. From there, it will become part of a traveling art exhibit that will be displayed at major art galleries throughout the world before ending up in an exhibit

with 5,000 other Art Miles murals at the Great Pyramids in Giza, Egypt, to celebrate the end of the UNESCO Decade of Peace in 2010.

We encourage teachers who have been participating in global collaborative learning projects to mentor and support other teachers who are beginning the journey of integrating such projects into their programs. It may take more energy to plan for these learning experiences than traditional, hierarchical, top-down learning, but that model was better suited for the Industrial Age. Once we saw how these projects engage students and effectively teach 21st-century skills, we knew we had a responsibility to continue teaching with them. We also knew that we had to showcase our students' work—work that is powerful and moving and speaks to our common humanity—so that administrators and parents can see how ICT changes the way we teach and learn as well as how we engage our students to be responsible and literate citizens in a global information society.

Resources

Art Miles project: www.art-miles-project.com
 International Education and Resource Network (iEARN): <http://iearn.org>
 Machinto project: www.machinto.org
 My Hero project: www.myhero.com
 TakingITGlobal: www.tigweb.org



Mali Bickley has been a classroom teacher for 27 years. She integrates technology into her classroom program to connect her students to global partners as they work together on projects that make a difference.



Jim Carleton is an ICT consultant for the Simcoe County District School Board in Ontario, Canada. He is a strong advocate for using new and emerging technologies in ways that inspire students and teachers.

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