

Connecting the Dots: Uniting Education Around the World
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This paper describes a current and ongoing effort to increase global awareness by providing a unique use of Internet2 and video for English instruction with international teachers and students, exchanging cultural information, addressing needs of learners from diverse cultures, and understanding the importance of providing enabling technology experiences that learners cannot have otherwise. The University of Missouri-Columbia College of Education (MU CoE) has implemented a globalization initiative and there are currently 4 schools in Taipei, Taiwan that are connected with K-12 schools in Missouri as well as MU faculty and pre-service teachers. This year, the MU CoE sent three faculty and staff members to Taipei to develop and implement a literature-based English curriculum for students to share with their American counterparts. The goals of this globalization initiative are a critical 3-part model that is a unique experience that currently does not exist. This experience evolves around information and learning, enabling technology, and global connections. This 3-part model is based on: 1) connecting a K-12 school in Taipei, 2) with a K-12 school in Missouri, and 3) MU CoE Literacy faculty. The connection is provided through utilizing Internet2 and video conferencing equipment.

The process of this globalization initiative focuses on individual school needs, but all involve utilizing technology to allow students to have email as well as face-to-face conversations to practice online communication, establish friendships with students of other cultures, exchange cultural information, and develop and understanding and tolerance for other cultures. Students from both cultures benefit from the opportunity to improve their English language (written and verbal) skills as well as identifying the benefits and limitations of online communications.

Current projects where partners include schools in Taipei working with Missouri schools include two elementary schools, one K-9 school, and one senior high school. Projects include development of web sites for descriptions and pictures of participating teacher and students, the school and surrounding community, special events and holidays, as well as information on foods and day-to-day life for students their age. Schools have participated in paired reading of English children's literature books and had face-to-face video conversations around the books. Several schools are participating in science projects together where they collect samples of vegetation, water, and wild life to compare and contrast on the web site with their partner school. With the time difference between Taipei and Missouri being a complicating factor, partners are sharing information through threaded discussions and emails as well.

The impact of this globalization initiative has proven to be beneficial to the Taiwanese students having authentic conversations with native speaking English speaking students their own age and improving their English writing and oral skills. The Missouri students have discovered a new cultural appreciation as well as developing friendships. The MU CoE faculty and pre-service teachers have acted as cyber-tutors to help in the writing process as well as professional development for the Taiwanese teachers.

This summer, three of the Taiwan schools are planning trips to Missouri to visit their partners and learn more about living in the United States. One school will have the opportunity to participate in the ThinkQuest Internet2 conference in Seattle, Washington after spending time in St. Louis, Missouri, taking field trips to Boeing corporation, St. Louis Science Center, and other points of interest. Students will collect digital photographs, movies, and other media objects to share as part of the conference and globalization initiative.