It’s a Small World on the Web

A common phrase today is “the world is growing smaller.” Not literally, of course, but thanks to the Internet, it is becoming an increasingly close-knit and interdependent planet. The time when our world comfortably consisted of a neighborhood, a small town, or a local community, with occasional insights into state or national issues, is long gone. Today we are bound as never before to the fate of neighbors thousands of miles away, and educators must properly prepare children for the shrinking and complex world they will soon inherit.

Making Multicultural Connections

A program called the Global Classroom Connection (GCC) was created to bring us closer to that goal. By combining the groundbreaking power of the Internet with the vision and commitment of teachers around the world, GCC seeks to provide U.S. students with an opportunity to interact with and get to know students from distant countries. This connection allows the students to learn about each other’s culture, bridge racial and religious barriers, and gain a deeper understanding of the world they share.

In order to accomplish this goal, we needed to create a program that was so simple to use that even the most technologically challenged could master it quickly. At the same time, the program had to offer immediate, powerful, and lasting benefits to teachers and students. After two years of piloting the program, we are convinced we have succeeded.

How It Works

The GCC program, which now partners American schools with schools in Japan, Vietnam, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines, allows participating schools to spend a school year constructing a joint Web site and supplying the schools with software that makes uploading photos and text very simple.

At the start of the school year, under the direction of their teachers, students of the paired schools introduce themselves by posting their pictures and brief biographies. Each Web site contains a “forum” where students can discuss the similarities and differences of their personal experiences, cultures, lifestyles, and environments.

Each of the participating students also has a home page within the Web site, where they are encouraged to put up as many photos as they like of themselves, their friends, hobbies, sports—anything and everything that can help them show their partnering students what their life is like. Both teachers and students receive their own passwords and access to the site is restricted to participants in the “sister” classrooms. Teachers also are able to use the site as an electronic bulletin board to display students’ work, as a medium for group discussion, or as a tool to conduct joint projects.

Looking Ahead

GCC is a very flexible resource that not only gives teachers a powerful set of tools but, more importantly, delivers a potentially life-changing multicultural experience to students. Our ultimate goal is to use digital technology to connect as many students around the world as possible in a meaningful way. In order to accomplish this, we are currently providing the GCC program to teachers free of charge and we will continue to do so until our network grows to a size where a very minimal administrative fee from each classroom will support the growth and continued maintenance of the program.

The students we connect will probably never meet face to face, but by using GCC they will have an unprecedented opportunity to get to know each other and share not only their culture but their common childhood experiences.

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FOR MORE INFORMATION

If you are interested in knowing more about the Global Classroom Connection, or in signing up your school or classroom, visit the GCC Web site: