Chapter 45
Promoting Global Citizenship through Intercultural Exchange Using Technology:
The Travel Buddies Project

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ABSTRACT

This chapter presents a critical instance case study that describes the implementation of an international, telecollaborative project between elementary level students in rural Kentucky and those located in Rio de Janeiro. Learning activities focused on the development of cultural knowledge and understanding, with the main goal of increasing the students' global citizenship characteristics by comparing cultural backgrounds with an emphasis on cultural similarities and differences between the two groups. This was accomplished through the Travel Buddy Project, a new pedagogical approach to learning that combines blog exchanges with photographic documentation couched in culturally oriented lessons.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present a critical instance case study (Davey, 1991) in which the researchers were interested in examining the implementation of an innovative and engaging way to establish international, cultural exchanges through the use of Internet-based communica-

tion tools. To this end, we studied two groups of students engaged in a Travel Buddies Project (see http://www.globalschoolnet.org/programs/travel-buddies/). This online, international exchange had two main objectives:

1. To provide an opportunity for young children (ages 6-8) to begin to understand and appreciate diverse cultures while developing characteristics of global citizens, and

2. To introduce young children to Internet-based, information and communication technologies (ICTs) that would help them develop new literacies for success in the 21st century.

This chapter highlights a telecollaborative exchange between early elementary level students in a small, rural Kentucky school district (population of approximately 1,100) and those in a school located in Rio de Janeiro, a large metropolitan city in Brazil (population of approximately 6.3 million). The exchange focused on the development of cultural knowledge and understanding through a variety of curricula-based activities with the main goal of increasing the students' global citizenship characteristics by developing an awareness of cultural similarities and differences between the groups. This was accomplished through a Travel Buddy Project blog exchange, which included photographic documentation, culturally oriented lessons, and introduced students to basic practices of computer mediated communication.

We begin by providing a statement of the problem followed by a description of the two theoretical frameworks, new literacies and global citizenship, which supported and guided this cultural exchange. Next, an explanation of the format for the telecollaborative exchange, including descriptions of the participating classrooms is provided. Then we illustrate the curricula-based artifacts that were collected throughout the four-month collaboration. Various instructional lessons are highlighted that allowed the students to learn about similarities and differences between themselves and their international partners. Lastly, we discuss implications for the classroom related to teaching and learning at the early elementary level.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Internet is rapidly becoming the defining technology for today's youth (New Literacies Research Team, 2007). The most recent Pew Internet and American Life Project report shows that among teens (aged 12-17) in the United States, 93 percent go online and 73 percent use social networking sites (Lenhart, Purcell, Smith, & Zickuhr, 2010). However, this trend is not isolated to the United States. Internet access and use worldwide is exploding with a 444 percent increase in Internet use worldwide over the past decade (Internet World Stats, 2011). Looking specifically at the two countries of interest for this international exchange, the United States shows Internet growth from 2000-2011 at 156.9 percent with a population penetration rate of 78.3 percent; Internet usage in Brazil has grown by an astounding 1,419.6 percent during this same time period with a population penetration of 37.4 percent. The Nielsen report (Nielsen Company, 2009) shows that teenagers (ages 13-19) in the United States are ranked third worldwide with monthly Internet use at 24 hours and 54 minutes, and Brazilian teens are the world's top Internet users logging 43 hours and 50 minutes monthly. Clearly, Internet use worldwide is on the rise, but what about Internet usage among younger populations?

When we focus specifically on children, including younger aged children, in relation to Internet use statistics, a similar trend is found. In a recent Kaiser Family Foundation Study that surveyed children in the Unites States aged 8 to 18, in which 9 percent of the respondents were third graders, 70 percent indicated that they used a computer on a daily basis (Rideout, Foehr, & Roberts, 2010). This report also shows that 8-18 year olds use the Internet an average of 1 hour and 29 minutes per day. Similarly, the Norton Online Living Report (Symantec Corporation, 2009) that included children aged 8-17 in 12 countries indicated that children use the Internet an average of 39 hours per month. Children in the United States are slightly higher than this average at 42 hours per month, and children in Brazil spend the most time online of the 12 countries studied at 70 hours per month.

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