MAKING THE CONNECTION

>> Best Practices in Global Education and Collaborative Technologies
Social networking for social good

After decades of declining youth engagement in civic and social issues, technology is presenting a potential solution. Online social networking sites, including commercial spaces like MySpace and Facebook, are beginning to connect youth to issues and causes, and the voluntary sector around the world is using the Internet to inform and involve youth. For educators, tools like TakingITGlobal.org present an opportunity to combine engaging social networking technologies with citizenship and global education.

This publication gives teachers, administrators, and other educators practical steps toward building 21st century skills, at the intersection of global education and technology integration. Over the course of our research, several themes emerged:

1. Finding and speaking to your students’ passion and making the local-global connection creates engaging learning experiences

2. Giving students the opportunity to co-create learning experiences and work in active collaboration with a public audience helps students take ownership of their learning

3. Professional support networks for teachers make the task of innovating in the classroom more manageable

Each of the case studies in this publication presents one or more best practices specifically linked to one of these themes. We hope that you, educators passionate about global education, are inspired by these stories and can incorporate their best practices as you infuse 21st century skills into your students’ learning.

View this report online at: http://www.tiged.org/bestpractices
Rollerblading down Parliament Hill in Ottawa, Canada, in 1999, while attending a youth conference, Jennifer Corriero and Michael Furdyk reflect on their experiences with different youth programs. They’ve been lucky to have had some amazing opportunities – from participating in various programs, attending different conferences, working on unique community and web-based projects, to starting companies. But why can’t more young people find out about and get involved in these types of initiatives? If they could create spaces that fostered inspiration, information and involvement among youth, what would it look like? The answer to these questions, combined with a passion for technology and a desire to foster global community, lead to TakingITGlobal.

Now in 2007, TakingITGlobal.org is one of the largest social networks for social good directed at youth, bringing together over 1 million youth to learn about, discuss, and take action on social issues of local and global interest. Being at the intersection of key global trends, TakingITGlobal supports young people in being a force for change both in the present and in the future, leveraging the power of social networks and digital media as a tool for learning, collaboration, dialogue and action.

Empowering youth as engaged learners and socially responsible citizens will contribute toward addressing many community development outcomes including improved health, reduced crime and violence, increased levels of literacy and employment. Many of the current generation of youth will enter a workforce demanding new skills including technology literacy, creativity, and cross-cultural perspectives.

TakingITGlobal is contributing to a world where young people everywhere have the opportunity to grow up with the support and encouragement needed to develop their talents and knowledge, while contributing to shaping a more sustainable world.
Educators showed a keen interest in TakingITGlobal.org from its early days. Sue Roliff and Ona McDonald were perhaps the most influential. It was their pilot, the Globalize This! Film Festival at Macklin Public School in Scarborough, Ontario, that led to the development of many educator-focused tools on the TIG site (see page 24 for a case study).

In 2005, TakingITGlobal was awarded a Microsoft US Partners in Learning Mid Tier grant, providing us with the necessary support to scale up a number of pilot projects and online tools, and create TakingITGlobal for Education, TIGed.org. The vision behind this work is to provide educators and students with access to a safe and inspiring social network for social good, creating a space for innovative collaboration and high-impact global education. TIGed now hosts over 5,000 students and 800 teachers from 500 schools in 39 countries.

TIGed’s key components:

Private, secure social networking spaces:
TIGed centers on the concept of a virtual classroom — a space where teachers can introduce their students to TakingITGlobal’s social networking tools, including:

- blogs
- discussion boards
- video chat
- collaborative mapping
- art and photo sharing
- podcasting

The emphasis of these tools is on connecting students within their classroom in a safe space, where teachers control the types of media and access to contribute and view student work.

Standards-linked Content:
Supporting our virtual classroom tools, TIGed has developed two forms of content to support teachers:

1) The Activity Database: A growing database of teacher, partner, and TakingITGlobal-created lesson plans and activity ideas spanning across subjects and ages. All activities are linked to standards through the McREL Compendium of Standards and Benchmarks.

2) Complete thematic classrooms: Rather than presenting individual lesson plans or activities, thematic classrooms present a complete unit of instruction, providing teachers with all the assignments, content, and support necessary to introduce topics such as poverty and life in Haiti, the global tobacco industry, and the social impacts of HIV/AIDS into the classroom.

Collaborative Tools:
In an effort to support student-centred, active partnerships between classrooms around the world, TIGed includes tools to that allow teachers to:

- Create safe, private spaces for collaboration between schools, mirroring the virtual classroom environment
- Find other teachers with whom to partner, and project ideas
- Support each other through the process of collaboration

Rationale for this document
A year after launching TIGed.org, some exemplary uses of the technology have emerged, as well as some recurring obstacles and barriers. This document is intended to help share these best practices not only to the community of teachers currently using TIGed, but also to educators and administrators around the world who may find them applicable to their work in global education using technology.
Jennifer Meagher teaches 7th grade Math, Science and Moral Education at Alexander Galt Regional High School, an English school in the Eastern Townships School Board, located in predominantly French-speaking Quebec. Every student in the school is equipped with a laptop for use in and out of school and all classrooms have wireless Internet access.

Jennifer discovered TakingITGlobal when Co-Founder and Director of Technology Michael Furdyk visited her school. Hesitation at the overwhelming scope of the site quickly gave way to excitement about TiGed’s virtual classroom tools: “I realized that the potential to use it in a real way in the classroom could be huge!”

Jennifer stresses the importance for teachers to feel comfortable with the technology before introducing it to the classroom. Before involving her students, she created several classrooms on TiGed to investigate what her students could do in the online space, and was reassured by the level of teacher moderation and control. She was impressed and excited by the way her students were socializing in the space and making use of the tools. The potential for using a virtual classroom was deepened by allowing students to take the lead in exploring the site.

How did Jennifer’s class use TakingITGlobal?

- TiGed tools, including discussion boards, blogs, class chat and gallery helped in the brainstorming and planning processes.
- Students conducted background research using Understanding the Issues and the Panorama online magazine
- They then found and contacted active TiG members around the world, asking them to join the project. Active TiG members joined their classroom as virtual guest speakers. These guests participated in live chats, student discussions and responded to blog entries. Guests uploaded photographs to help students make connections with the discussions taking place on the discussion board.

Jennifer notes “people are a little nervous about technology, but if you manage it right and put the structures in and do your research like I did, you can meet a lot of good people online too.”

In 2007, Jennifer’s class collaborated with inspiring TiG members, including Zimbe Moses of Uganda, the head of a community school at an orphanage in Uganda. Using the discussion board in their TiGed classroom, students started a dialogue with Mr. Moses, focusing on issues his community faces, such as poverty and HIV/AIDS.

When the students learned that 70% of the population lives on less than a dollar a day, they began a fundraising project, Survivor Galt. A twist on the concept of World Vision’s 30-Hour Famine, students spent 30 hours in the school gym and communicated via video conferences, class chat and discussion boards with people from all over the world. Jennifer’s class connected with members from Mali, Florida, Britain, France, Guinea, Nepal, Kenya, Nigeria, and other parts of Canada to learn about what TiG members around the globe are doing to improve the quality of life for others.
Survivor Galt Uganda

Zimbe Moses is the headmaster of Nakulabye Junior School, which assists orphan children and other vulnerable groups of students. The school is located in one of the most densely populated slum areas in Kampala. He has been actively involved with orphans for over 15 years, both as a community leader and a teacher.

TIGed: How did you get involved with TakingITGlobal?

Zimbe Moses: I got the idea from a colleague first and I saw it was in line with what I was involved in. I’ve tried to create as many friends as possible, and I have identified programs that develop me personally and the children in the orphanage. I have also tried to develop links for the orphanage. I have consistently been given advice on how to manage given the meager resources available to me by a number of countless friends. Some have gone further to make sacrifices for the orphanage, for example, Jen recently organized a fundraising drive to support the orphanage.

TIGed: Can you reflect on your experience with Jen and her class regarding the Survivor Galt project?

Zimbe Moses: I think it helped to increase awareness of the plight of the children and people as a whole in Uganda. My country is one of few in the world that is gifted with an abundance of natural resources, but the people here have failed to exploit the riches and are thus living as that of paupers. Given the nature of questions Jen asked, I realized that we are a sleeping lion with talent and natural resources and I am dedicated to seeing to it that the children get the most out of the physical potential of the land as well as resources to live a normal life.

TIGed Class Chat

Jennifer Meagher used TIGed’s class chat tool to build relationships between her students and her partners, including Zimbe Moses. This live chat tool allows her to create opportunities for real-time discussions with up to 100 participants using the text portion of the chat, with up to 4 participating via video. The ability to host video chats can create particularly strong connections between students working on global collaborations, and is also an excellent tool for guest speakers you would like to invite to your class.

Visit http://www.tiged.org to learn more.
Many of eleven-year-old Dylan Mahalingam’s interests are typical: tennis, basketball, snowboarding, and swimming. He is in sixth grade and his favorite subjects are math and science. He holds a purple belt in karate and has a wide array of musical talents. However, he is strictly vegetarian—and this is not the only thing that sets him apart from his peers. Dylan’s passion for public health and the quality of life worldwide led him to create a non-profit organization, ‘Lil MDGs.

Based on the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), the organization was founded, managed, and run by youth, with adult support. When Dylan was 8, he was on a trip overseas with his family when he realized the harsh realities of poverty and felt mobilized to do something about it. He heard about the MDGs and in his quest to learn more, found that most of the information available was written for older children or adults. This inspired him to create a website with information readily available for others his age. As a result, Dylan has received approval to begin a ‘Lil MDG’s club in his middle school next year to involve more of his fellow students.

This project has helped his class to connect with classrooms in other countries. Dylan says that the project has taught him about real life problems that are not necessarily covered in classrooms, and given him leadership skills by networking with teachers and administrative staff. Dylan is also involved with another project, Living on the Brink, which increases awareness about endangered species around the world.

**MDGs & TakingITGlobal**

Interested in teaching your students about the Millennium Development Goals? Check out the lesson plans on the MDGs in the TIGed Activities Database or visit TakingITGlobal’s featured theme page on the MDGs (http://mdg.takingitglobal.org) where students can play the MDG card game, participate in discussions surrounding the issues, and develop ideas for action.

**Action in the Classroom**

One World Youth Project is a sister-school initiative in which students in the US and Canada collaborate with schools around the world to learn about one another’s culture and the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) through community service and leadership. In 2006, One World Youth Project and TakingITGlobal partnered to create an Educator’s Guide to the MDGs, featuring lesson plans that integrate the MDGs across the curriculum into subject areas such as math, social studies, and language arts, as well as ideas for service learning and action linked to TIG’s online youth portal on the MDGs. Visit TIGed’s Activities Database to access the lesson plans or download the entire guide from the OWYP web site!

TIGed Activity Database:
http://www.takingitglobal.org/tiged/activity/
One World Youth Project:
http://www.oneworldyouthproject.org
Playing 4 Keeps

Global Kids, an organization based in New York, works “to transform urban youth into successful students and global and community leaders by engaging them in socially dynamic, content-rich learning experiences.”

Through Global Kids’ Playing 4 Keeps program, students at a Brooklyn high school gain the skills necessary to build challenging games about social issues, starting with Ayiti: The Cost of Life, which received the Games for Change Best Awareness Raising Game award. This game is a simulation of the life of a family in Haiti, focusing on the obstacles to education for children in developing countries. TakingITGlobal has partnered with Global Kids to host Ayiti: the Cost of Life within TIGed, so that educators can easily incorporate it into their virtual classrooms.

International Teen Life Project

Students from Colombia, the United States, Canada and Malaysia collaborated to research and discuss global issues they are concerned about in order to exchange their thoughts and perceptions of what one another’s lives are like. This dialogue led to collaborative production of poetic multimedia presentations about the global issues. By reading and listening to the perspectives of others from around the globe, students gain a greater perception of the similarities and differences of people’s lives around the world.

Each project was completed by two students from Malaysia, two students from Colombia, and either two students from the US or two students from Canada (due to class size). Students in Colombia worked on storyboarding and filming, students in Malaysia wrote poetry and took photos, and students in Canada and the US edited and finished the videos. Each project was fully collaborative across continents and time zones and students were given the opportunity to explore issues and work intensely to gain a clearer understanding of concerns that people have in the world.

Check out Kim’s full project description online: http://www.tiged.org/bestpractices
And view the wikis where students collaborated: http://internationalteenlife.pbwiki.com/, http://teenlife.pbwiki.com/
Global Youth Murals Project

Name: Stacy Chance
TIG profile: http://profiles.takingitglobal.org/PTPIGYM
Location: Kansas City, MO, United States

People to People International is a non-profit organization whose goals are to enhance understanding and friendship between people in different countries through educational, cultural, and humanitarian programs for youth and adults. The organization promotes its mission through programs such as pen pal exchanges, a global youth forum, and peace camp abroad.

In 2001, Stacy Chance, director of School and Classroom Programs, developed the Global Youth Murals Project, based on the premise that art is the universal language. Global Youth Murals invites students worldwide to create artwork illustrating their cultures and communities, and their ideas about friendship and peace through understanding. Murals are created on an ongoing basis, and are exhibited at different venues year round. Each year, four to six murals are chosen to receive awards and are featured in PTPI’s magazine, People.

TakingITGlobal’s Global Gallery hosts all of the murals submitted to the Global Youth Murals project. Through the site’s large international community and simple posting process, the Global Gallery has served as a tool to reward and provide exposure for the artist beyond the exhibitions. PTPI is frequently contacted by TIG members interested in getting involved in their international network.

From the teacher’s eyes...
Elizabeth Sanchez, an online teacher with Virtual High School, integrated the Global Youth Murals project into her online course, Literacy Skills for the 21st Century. During the last five weeks of the course, Elizabeth introduces her students from across the United States to TIged, focusing each week on a different unit of study and incorporating various tools from the site.

- Students plotted their hometowns on a collaborative class map and then explored TIG’s local city sites (http://www.takingitglobal.org/explore/) to learn about their peers’ communities.
- Students explored the art in the Global Gallery and blogged their responses to questions that asked them to think critically about each piece.
- Students developed critical thinking and cross-cultural skills by reviewing the Global Youth Murals project and identifying symbols from the murals, using TIG Country sites to gain a deeper understanding of the culture in which the murals were created, and making connections between artistic symbols and culture. They used a class discussion board to reflect on their findings.
- Elizabeth’s class accessed other sections of the TIG site, such as Browse Resources, Understand Issues and Take Action to explore an issue they care about and learn what work is being done around the world on that topic. Students discussed their topics online and were encouraged to comment on each other’s work.

For PTPI’s murals, ideas for incorporating murals into classroom projects, and lesson plans, visit the online case study at http://www.tiged.org/bestpractices

Best Practice:
- Giving students an authentic audience for their work is both a motivator and a source of engagement.
- Combining traditional research with art and action components helps reach different styles of learners/multiple intelligences.

“I think if we can motivate youth to think about respect, peaceful relations, and global concerns when they are young, we may help them become the type of thinkers and leaders we need when they are adults.”
The Little Prince

Name: Cecilia M. Estoque
TIG profile: http://profiles.takingitglobal.org/cmestoque
School: Agusan National High School
Location: Butuan City, Butuan, Philippines
http://ejournal.eduprojects.net/philippines

Cecilia, an English Language and Literature teacher to 13 and 14 year olds in the Philippines, was passionate about the power of technology for learning, but faced a number of obstacles. Cecilia’s school has approximately 10,000 high school students, the majority from low-income families. The school has less than 20 desktop computers in the laboratory, giving less than 5% of the total student population computer access at a time. There is an average ratio of 1 teacher per 50-70 students per class. A teacher handles an average of 300 students per day!

Despite these circumstances, Cecilia maintained her vision of authentic global learning and together with Adrian Asis of Xavier High School, a private school, designed “My Personal Encounter with the Little Prince Telecollaborative Project.” To make the project viable, Cecilia collaborated with private internet café owners, asking them to transform their businesses into Computer Learning Centers and give her students special discounts for access fees.

After the first successful local collaboration, Cecilia and Adrian began collaborating with European partners. Cecilia’s successful endeavors opened doors for her to reach out to school administrators, teachers, community stakeholders, parents, organizations and advocate to them the benefits of technology as an educational tool in teaching. This project provided evidence of the value of collaboration in promoting cross-cultural understanding and learning. Cecilia initiated trainings in technology integration and digital literacy that helped other educators become more open to her vision for her students. The community became more involved in helping the school procure computers, engaging more internet café owners, and soliciting donations from private companies to provide computers and free internet access.

The Challenge of Resources
Cecilia’s article in Panorama, “Quality IT in Education” speaks to the challenges faced by educators worldwide who have access to very limited resources. Cecilia now has diverse resources in her community and built local and international partnerships to make technology integration a reality. To read her article and learn more, visit Cecilia’s online case study at http://www.tiged.org/bestpractices.

I would like to attest and to encourage my fellow educators that quality global education is attainable through the aid and appropriate use of technology and with the right attitudes in our sworn profession.

Our students went global!!!

Best Practice:
• Seeking support from parents and the community can add a valuable local connection to global projects.
• Giving parents ongoing access to a collaboration space like TIGed helps build support for innovative projects.
Laurie Eaton is an advocate of teaching with technology because of the technological skills that will be expected of her students in the future. During her nineteen years in the classroom, technology has made it increasingly easier for students to learn from wherever they are; Laurie says having an online classroom on TIGed has helped to facilitate class even when students are not in school: “having TakingITGlobal has been awesome because I can upload an assignment and they can upload their work even if they are home. If they are sick they can get online and look at the assignment and I can get it that night.” Laurie has used several TIG resources and TIGed tools to engage her students beyond the confines of the school day.

Laurie’s class embraced TakingITGlobal’s mission of becoming informed and empowered to take action when they learned that a local creek was going to be turned into a parking lot. Students conducted online research to learn what others around the world have done to improve their environment and find ways to get involved. They wrote an environmental impact statement, which they presented to city officials. Their hard work paid off as plans for the parking lot were halted and the city is now working with the students to improve the park. Laurie talks about the success of the program and further steps as the students move onto high school.

Laurie has had great success using Class Chat to engage all students in meaningful discussion. Go online to hear Laurie discuss these strategies, as well as interesting ways she had incorporated additional site features, such as Panorama, TIG’s online magazine. Submitting their poems to Panorama has helped Laurie’s students to further develop technology literacy. Sharing their work with others in this forum not only provides them with the opportunity to receive feedback on their work, it also presents them with the ability to have their work published for a global audience.

Washington’s Teacher Leadership Project
Laurie Eaton joined TIGed as part of a workshop offered in partnership with The Teacher Leadership Project (TLP). She had previously participated in TLP’s nationally recognized professional development program, which trains teachers in technology integration through intensive face-to-face summer institutes and online mentorships, all designed for teachers and by teachers. For more information on the Teacher Leadership Project visit, http://www.tlp2.org

**Best Practice:**
• Effective professional development trains teachers to use technology as a tool, and provides a sustained learning community
• Local connections make global issues tangible and real for students
Globalize This! Film Festival

During Sue Roliff’s thirty years as a teacher she experienced the evolution of technology in the classroom, from the Apple IIE and “floppy” software to Web 2.0.

In 2004, Sue’s 8th grade class used TakingITGlobal.org to create the Globalize This! Film Festival. Over five months, with help from TakingITGlobal staff, the students used the site to research global issues, contact organizations working on those issues and discuss their findings with TIG members. The festival gave her students the opportunity to refine their research and writing skills, and experiment with a number of different technologies. The public nature of the festival—parents, teachers, and community leaders were invited—presented these 13 year olds an opportunity to be the experts in the room. After all the films were shown, students fielded questions from the audience, impressing people three to four times their age with the depth of their knowledge.

The impact of the project was so profound that in 2006, Sue used the Understanding the Issues section of TIG again, this time to create a photography project for her 6th grade students:

**Assignment Description:** Each group has been assigned one issue to research; choose one or two subtopics and present your findings to the class. Make sure that you thoroughly understand the issue as the class will be asking you questions. A computer presentation will also be marked as a component of your assignment. The background knowledge that you have gained will be very important to the next step of this project... photography, with your issue as the focus.

Students were then provided with cameras to create images that represented their research. Sue used TIG’s Global Gallery and the public exhibition of her students’ work as a means to inspire engagement in the process, and give students the chance to spark a dialogue with youth from around the world.

“TakingITGlobal gives them a connection outside the four walls of the school.”

“TakingITGlobal gives them a connection outside the four walls of the school.”

“There is so much there, that you just need to make the connection to your curriculum. I am sure that your curriculum is different than ours, but you just need to look at it and say, ‘ok, this works!’”

“Developing Global Awareness

“When we started this the kids didn’t have an understanding of what education was like in Africa or the treatment of women in Iran. When they began researching they were amazed at what they found out, and they were proud of themselves for being able to talk about issues.”

“Best Practice:

Media such as games and film provide engaging methods to introduce students to complex issues. Giving your students the opportunity to create this kind of media engages them with understanding both content (issues) and technique (technology) at a deeper level.”
Invisible City

Name: The School of the Future
Location: Philadelphia, PA

The School of the Future is a high school in West Philadelphia that opened in 2006 to fulfill a vision of a technology-empowered community where learning is continuous, relevant, and adaptive.

The integrated, project-based curriculum emphasizes the development of skills such as leadership and systems thinking, and incorporates experiential learning in the local community as well as technology-enabled learning as a means of accessing a global community.

Prior to the school’s opening, the first group of incoming ninth graders used TIGed to meet online and begin developing digital literacies that are now essential in the school’s technology-rich learning environment. They created online profiles as a means of exploring issues of identity, and used communication tools, such as TIG messages and blogs, to respond to one another’s ideas and become comfortable with this online learning. Students’ sense of a world outside of Philadelphia broadened as they made global connections by reading Member Stories or receiving feedback on their blogs from active TIG members around the world. During the school year, student projects have continued to explore themes of identity, making local connections to global issues.

As participants in the 2006 United Nations Conference on Human Rights and Migration, students attended a preparatory conference to begin exploring the human rights issues around global migration. They researched the issues on TakingITGlobal.org, reading articles in Panorama written by other youth leaders around the world, and used blogs to synthesize this new information and build their collective knowledge. Learners then collaborated with students from other local high schools to draft a plan of action in response to these issues, and later blogged to reflect on the experience of participating in their first student conference. The students chosen to represent the School of the Future participated in a weekly seminar to discuss the issues and prepare a final plan of action, using a TIGed virtual classroom to share documents, blog about ideas, and discuss viewpoints between weekly meetings. The conference itself was webcast around the world, bringing students together from Mexico, the Dominican Republic, Bahrain, the UK, and around the US to discuss human rights as a global issue. This collaborative effort to identify solutions to global human rights challenges engaged students’ problem solving and critical thinking skills.

A digital media project titled “Invisible City” used photography to bring the global issues explored during the UN Conference to the local level at home in Philadelphia. Under the guidance of digital arts and media educator, Louis Mazza, students produced multimedia pieces that explored the relationship between borders and identity. The project culminated with two students showcasing the group’s digital media portfolio, including photographs and original music podcasts, at the 2007 Pennsylvania Educational Technology Expo and Conference.

Read about the project from the perspective of one learner who attended the conference, http://sof-ericw.tigblog.org/

Best Practice: Meet students where they are – their use of technology is predominantly social, so emphasize the social aspects of project-based learning, such as communication and collaboration.
Classrooms for the Future

Classrooms for the Future is a high school reform initiative designed to improve teaching and learning in Pennsylvania by creating technology-enriched instructional settings and providing extensive professional development through a coaching model designed to improve teacher practice and student achievement.

On-site coaches in over 100 participating school districts provide day-to-day technology integration support and mentoring at the school and classroom level. As part of their own training, coaches and school leaders used a TIGed virtual classroom to model the kind of online collaborative learning they hoped to foster in each school, participating in online discussions and blogging their experiences and reflections on the professional development and coaching process. Many coaches replicated this model as a way to provide an online learning community for their teachers, while also introducing them to the TIGed tools.

How are CFF coaches using TIGed?

- Creating TIGed classrooms as dedicated online space for professional development and collaboration.
- Engaging students in online discussions about the Classrooms for the Future initiative, giving students a voice in conversations about the future of learning.
- A Biology teacher at Shanksville-Stonycreek High School introduced TIGed to his students first, building on their leadership with the online tools to later support other teachers’ classroom integration of new technology.
- At Cornell High School, Advanced Placement Government and Politics students blogged about current events and pressing global issues, using Understanding the Issues as reference and background material.
- An English teacher at Midd-West High School used a rubric to define expectations for using discussion boards, preparing students to apply critical thinking and communication skills in an online environment.

Best Practice:
Create collaborative environments where teachers can learn from one another. Social networking can help improve teacher practice, if the leadership and environment are supportive.

Using Understanding the Issues as a springboard for class discussion at Cornell Senior High School, a part of Classrooms for the Future
Barrie Becker met Tanja Bojic while participating in a teacher exchange program in Montenegro in 2004. Three years later, they are still working together to create multimedia, online collaborative projects with the goal of uniting students in friendship, cultural understanding, and tolerance.

In 2006, students collaborated to write, produce, and perform “Rostislav and Julianna” – a modern-day interpretation of Romeo and Juliet set in Montenegro. This effort, which culminated in a 22 minute DVD and podcast series, required deep cultural understanding and constant communication.

Even though some students were limited by poor hardware and connectivity, it was multimedia technology that made every product possible. In this highly visual culture, students learned to be expressive with images and sound as well as text, developing skills in digital photography, storyboarding, sound recording, video production, and editing. Correspondence, poetry, and screenwriting directly developed language and literacy skills; research and dialogue helped students to learn history and culture, all knowledge that must then be applied in a creative way.

Students designed projects that moved learning beyond isolated factual content to require deep critical thinking and share meaningful thoughts and experiences, which helped them to learn empathy on personal and global levels. Participating in multiple teams at a time led to constantly developing cooperative problem-solving skills to achieve their goals.

Issues of global concern, such as tolerance, poverty, and pollution, are approached through personal experiences. Rostislav and Julianna explores what happens to teenagers born into an intolerant society. Students often commented in their blogs that collaboration is the most meaningful part of their work, but they also gained confidence that they have power to participate in and change their world.

“Before this project, I hadn’t the slightest idea that there is a country called Montenegro that just received its independence. There are actually teenagers there who share the same interests and aspirations.”

– US student

“This project continues to show us that there must be no barriers between young people. We may not allow different cultures or religions to ever again come between us. It is becoming obvious that people are finally starting to understand that we are all part of the same world.”

– Bosnian student

See Barrie Becker’s lesson plan and link to her podcasts at http://www.tiged.org/bestpractices.

Best Practice:
Visual literacy and digital media provide a window onto intercultural competency.

Collaborating with TiGed
Teachers who are looking for partners for an existing project or who want to share an idea for a new project can use TiGed’s Educator Central to connect with other teachers from around the world. The service allows teachers to find potential collaborators based on subject, grade, country, timeline or specific nature of the project, and contact each other directly through TakingITGlobal, keeping personal contact information private.

For more information, visit http://www.tiged.org
Rock Our World

Over the past three years, twenty teachers from all seven continents and diverse backgrounds have gathered to join in learning about each other and a curriculum topic. Carol Anne McGuire began Rock Our World to teach her class of blind and visually impaired students about their world. Because mapping skills are a difficult concept for them, she instead chose music and authentic global connections to motivate them to want to explore their world. Each country represented in the project creates a 30-second drum track in GarageBand, sending it on to the next school in the circle to add a new layer, until the drums come back to the original class. By then, an original song has been composed by students on every continent! As the music travels, classes connect in live videoconferences to learn about each other and take virtual field trips around the globe.

Check out Carol’s full project description online: http://www.tiged.org/bestpractices

And learn more about the project at: http://www.rockourworld.org/

Best Practice:
Allow the whole collaborative process to happen online, not just the sharing of end products or results.

The Flat Classroom

The Flat Classroom project is a genuine assessment project between 11th grade students at International School Dhaka in Bangladesh and 10th grade students at Westwood Schools in Georgia, USA. Based on the ten flatteners found in Thomas Friedman’s book, The World is Flat, the objective is to create a ‘Flat Classroom’ where two classes work as one.

This project pushes the boundaries and ‘flattens’ the walls of the classroom, expecting all students and teachers to collaborate as if there were one classroom, not two or more. It draws on the wider educational community for input and expert support and feedback (international judging panel for example) and uses collaborative Web 2.0 tools such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and RSS. Students discuss real-world scenarios then create their own content. All students created a final personal video based on their research and on interviews related to their topic, sharing video footage with their partner so that each multimedia piece had content from both sides of the world.

For more on the Flat Classroom project, visit http://www.tiged.org/bestpractices

Best Practice:
“Technology” is not a single tool, but a whole toolbox — use the right combination of tools for a particular project, and be prepared to add new tools over time.
Children Connecting Children

Four years ago, after twenty-one years as a teacher, Mali began rethinking her career. Around the same time, her school embarked on new projects to reach out to the local community and other classrooms around the world. Stepping into the world of collaborative projects reinvigorated her teaching and once again gave a reason to come to school. She began with a school in the Netherlands: students and teachers interacted in a virtual learning space and communicated via email, followed by the Dutch students and teachers visiting their peers in Canada. Mali says that this project was an inspiration to go further with global collaboration.

Similarly, five years ago, Mali’s colleague Jim, a teacher of 20 years, was trying to decide if he wanted to remain in the field when he began working with another teacher at the school to create a website about the local community. For the first time in a long time, Jim was learning something new and collaborating with another teacher.

Jim had been hesitant to use technology. He was afraid to ask questions and didn’t see its purpose in the classroom. Working on the website helped Jim to not only learn the technology, but also enjoy using it. He began to see the potential of working with others outside of school. Involvement in the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN) developed his interest in global education, a passion that spread throughout the school. Jim found that by reaching out to the world, the teaching staff at W.H. Day grew closer. It no longer felt like he was teaching alone, and students were more engaged in and excited about learning.

Children Connecting Children

W.H. Day Elementary School and iEARN-Sierra Leone collaborated to create Children Connecting Children. Students at W.H. Day Elementary raised money to buy video cameras and send them to the war affected youth in Sierra Leone. The youth took videos of themselves that focused on their lives as child soldiers and sent them back to the students at W.H. Day. The Canadian students were touched by one child in particular, Mohamed Sidibay, a former child soldier whose dreams are to one day become an international lawyer. They have been communicating with him and organizing fundraisers to support his education for the past three years. Their goal is to connect with others like Sidibay and sponsor scholarships for them. You can visit the school’s page on Global Projects to learn more, http://whd.scdsb.on.ca/global_ed/global_ed_01.htm. You can also visit Mali’s class page: http://whd.scdsb.on.ca/classes/bicann/bicann.htm.

Mali’s Reflections on Children Connecting Children

“My students are nine and they have a really strong sense of responsibility. They know Sidibay is depending on them and that motivates them to continue with the project. One student drew on her interest in fashion to organize a fundraiser called Fashion for Education. She solicited sponsors and spoke about the issue during the fundraiser. She raised $1,100 in four hours all on her own! These kids feel empowered to make a change.”

“They key is that the technology allows us to connect with other people for the purpose of collaborating and doing something real and meaningful. The kids see that they are making a difference. Our school board also places a strong emphasis on character education, teaching our students about caring, compassion, optimism, integrity. These projects are enabling the students to put these words into action to become global citizens. This is going to be their world.”
From an administrator’s perspective
Anita Townsend was the principal at W.H. Day when the school began these global initiatives.

“I see no reason why technology can’t be a part of the curriculum in all subjects... it has a huge potential to engage students and teach them to be discriminate learners, problem solvers and collaborate with others. Projects focusing on global education provide the students with a global understanding of global issues and teaching them that everyone’s thoughts on the issues may be different helps to heighten their sensitivity to others.

Everyone is more motivated and teachers are more engaged teaching. Teachers have been able to take their areas of expertise with the technology and teach others. As a result collaboration among teachers and students increased.

Even young kids can participate and think about the issues. They have the ability to understand what it means to have friends, be a good friend, have a safe home, and these are topics that they can discuss with others their age around the world. They don’t have to get into the complexity of the issues of war, poverty, violence, but they can talk about poverty by developing an understanding of kids around the world and their families.

My strategies for supporting my staff have been to take the ‘critical mass,’ those that are right there with you, embrace change and become innovators themselves, and provide them with leadership roles. For the middle group, that are willing to participate but need support, you provide them with the support they need and the constant reminder that this is the direction we are moving in. For the small percentage who are resistant, you give them time to grow in that direction. You give them plenty of time to play around with the technology and provide them with support from the ‘critical mass.’ It helps to have their colleagues supporting them, rather than me telling them to do it. You also have to be relentless and not give up on that group. These collaborative projects build a whole school culture and bonds people together. It makes learning and teaching more engaging. You have to be prepared to take that risk and let people fly on their own and give them the support and guidance they need.”

Mali further notes, “When you have an administrator that lets you take risks, you are more willing to take one. It is important to have the assurance from an administrator that will stand by you and say, “I will walk this road with you”

Best Practice:
• Global issues can be integrated at any grade or year, if they’re presented in an age-appropriate way and you make real, tangible connections for students.
• Project-based learning is motivating for teachers as well as students.
• Supportive leadership and environments help hesitant educators experiment and innovate.
Best Practices: Making the Connection

The case studies presented here are diverse in their use of technology, the types of collaboration involved, and the issues tackled. Taken as a whole, however, common threads appear:

1) Each educator sought to find and speak to his or her students’ passion. In terms of technology, this means integrating gaming, video, and social networks and other Web 2.0 tools, the tools that drive youth engagement at the moment. Educators were able to make issues more tangible or “real” by adding a local connection and developing strong, personal relationships with their global collaborators.

2) Students were involved in co-creating the learning experience. Giving students a meaningful role in the planning process helps them take ownership of the project, and allows for deeper learning. Even at very young ages, when students are given a leading role, with some adult support, amazing results can emerge.

3) A supportive environment helped even the most hesitant educators succeed in global collaboration. When an administration focuses on helping staff develop the types of projects in this resource, not only do teachers benefit from relationships and learning from other teachers around the world—the teachers in their own school can become closer.

We believe that these three broad themes are the keys that are behind the recent, and exciting, growth in global collaboration in the classroom. As technology changes and new possibilities for collaboration emerge, these three themes, which relate to the human factors of projects, will remain crucial to successful learning experiences.

A Living Resource
This document is only a starting point. The online version houses extended versions of the case studies, podcasts with the educators featured, and other additional resources. We hope to build a living, growing source for inspiration and best practices from around the world on global education using technology.

Visit the online version at http://www.tiged.org/bestpractices