

Connecting your Classroom - To a wider community of peers and experts

“We can no longer live in a world in which information is scarce, and the teacher’s role is to hand deliver content to children. The old certainties of a world defined by four classroom walls and impermeable dependencies and complex systems that require flexibility, responsiveness, and imagination boundaries have disappeared forever, replaced by global interconnectedness.” (Jacobsen et al, 2002, p.364)

Having students interact with experts in the field, be they scientists, models of culture or language, educators or other professionals, can help to develop a sense of interconnectedness and allow students to see beyond the school walls.

Skype in the classroom and other web conferencing software have the potential to transform a classroom-based lesson into an interactive and relevant real-world experience. Such real-world experiences increase student motivation, engagement and learning at all grade levels (NREL, 2005).

While the concept of inviting guest speakers into the classroom, visiting experts in the field or participating in ‘pen-pal’ opportunities are not new to education, the capabilities and availability of apps, hardware and software widely available today make the potential for this sort of interaction more and more accessible. Further, not only do virtual experiences like Skype or iChat or Messenger eliminate the barriers inherent in field trips or classroom visits (geography, safety, scheduling, financial issues, permissions and district or school policies to name a few), but the instantaneous nature of the interaction helps to make the experience particularly relevant to learners today (Prensky, 2001).

To strengthen the value of web-conferencing, Skype also offers an online community, “Skype in the Classroom” where groups and individuals can seek experts from particular disciplines, ready-made lesson ideas and or post lessons and resources that others in the community can access.

Many online communities exist to help connect your students to the world. Investigate a little and you’re sure to find some.

References:

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