

## 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:

Jacobsen, M., Clifford, P., & Friesen, S. (2002). Preparing teachers for technology integration: Creating a culture of inquiry in the context of use. *Contemporary Issues in Technology and Teacher Education*, 2(3), 363-388.

Northwest Regional Educational Laboratory, (2005) Focus on Effectiveness.  
Retrieved from <http://www.netc.org/focus/challenges/student.php>

Prensky, M. (2001). “Digital Natives, Digital Immigrants”. *On the Horizon* 9 (5). Lincoln: NCB University Press.

RESEARCH

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# in the classroom

PRACTICE

<https://education.skype.com/>

There are so many potential uses for Skype and other web-conferencing software. In addition to the technological affordances, Skype has also put together a community that lends itself to supporting teachers. I put out a call for classes and experts to Skype in to a class and received over 20 replies within only a few hours! Now that's support!

<http://www.teachingdegree.org/2009/06/30/50-awesome-ways-to-use-skype-in-the-classroom/>

A recent example and review of a Skype in the Classroom 'Global Classroom Project' <http://mrparkinsonict.blogspot.ca/2013/01/the-power-of-skype-in-classroom.html>

Consider Skype as a means of sharing language models or for 'tandem language learning' – while research is mixed on the effectiveness of this form of language learning and still favours face to face, sometimes models just aren't locally available.

Please visit Dean Shareski's Blog for some caution and kudos:

<http://ideasandthoughts.org/2011/03/28/the-anatomy-of-a-skype-call/>

ALWAYS consider your purpose for inviting any guest into the classroom. How will it advance the learning? The visit should have a purpose that is connected with the learning and the students.

Scientists and innovators in the schools from 'our own' Telus World of Science offers f2f visits from working scientists in this volunteer based program.

<http://www.scienceworld.ca/sis>

Try the [Flat Stanley Project](#) with Elementary aged students: an old-school project via snail mail that has begun to harness the value of the web. Classes create their own Stanley and send it on a trip around the world – learning about the people and places he visits.

Think outside the box with [KIVA](#) and try some 'challenge based learning' with your class or family. KIVA crowd sources small loans (micro-funding) for individuals and groups around the world. I met an educator who used KIVA as a way for his students to learn more about world geography while also participating in global community service. The students even visited local businesses, Rotary clubs and their municipal government office to do presentations about their chosen project in order to raise funds. [Visit the blog of one educator from Salem Middle School:](#)

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<http://blogs.ubc.ca/scarfesandbox/>