

# 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. Further, interacting with groups of students from different countries and cultures helps to create a global community of learners.

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). Consider web conferencing 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 and virtual conferencing can add a cultural element.

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 iMessage eliminate the barriers inherent in field trips or classroom visits (geography, safety, scheduling, cost, 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 one that meets the needs of your class!

## 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

# SCARFE Digital Sandbox - Come Play!

## skype™ in the classroom

### So, you want to 'Mystery Skype'?

Mystery Skype is a game-based environment where two classes attempt to guess the location of the other through a series of questions and responses. Much of the power in Mystery Skype lies in the time spent in the classroom preparing for the experience – conducting inquiry into your own community, developing questions and anticipating responses all support an inquiry mindset.



To participate, teachers can message each other via Skype in the Classroom. The website supports your connections by affording the ability to sort by age level, interest and time zone. You also have direct email contact. Some teachers like to use Twitter to find their 'match' using #MysterySkype NB: you aren't limited by 'geography' as an area to explore via Mystery Skype – some classes play the 'game' using curricular or interest-based content such as the 'Mystery Animal Skype' we are engaging in today! (March 3, 2015)

The Skype Community is Calling: <https://education.skype.com/>

#### Planning Tips:

- Consider your purpose and plan accordingly – there are many different Skype Lessons available – you can even plan your own!
- Plan early! It can take time to reach out to other classrooms.
- Be mindful of differences in time zone.
- Contact as many teachers as possible. Not everyone will reply back to your messages or tweets.
- Ensure you have your Administrator's permission and that appropriate 'media releases' are in place (varies District by District). NB: students who have no media release can still participate, but should be out of camera view... in a more 'supportive role' – perhaps with a designated partner who asks their questions...

#### Set up Suggestions & Considerations:

- It helps to have a chair 'front and center' in full view of the camera where those asking and answering questions can sit. Students can 'rotate' to this seat with their questions. *This helps create more of a personal connection vs. students from various parts of the room who can't be seen clearly speaking...*
- In a larger class, consider assigning 'roles' [http://www.learningandleading-digital.com/learning\\_leading/201302#pg32](http://www.learningandleading-digital.com/learning_leading/201302#pg32) \*if you Skype frequently during the year, these roles can and should rotate.
- TEST your equipment! Try a Skype test call in advance or, ideally, Skype with someone you know before your students are all 'patiently' waiting.

**Ask yourself:** How will this experience advance the learning? How is it connected with the learning and the students? Visit Dean Shareski's blog – a good source of critical thoughts:

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

Sandbox Session - March 2015  
@yvonedtechtalk  
<http://blogs.ubc.ca/scarfesandbox/>

PRACTICE