

## **Global Videoconferencing for Engaging Student Learning**

By Janine Lim, published in the MACUL Journal, Fall 2005

With the explosion of IP (H.323) based videoconferencing and portable IP videoconference carts, the possibilities for engaging learning experiences are expanding to cover the entire globe! Before the advent of IP-based-videoconferencing, the long distance charges for an ISDN videoconference were prohibitive. In addition, overseas connections were often 128K resulting in poor video and audio quality. However, now with the exponential growth of IP videoconferencing around the world, students can collaborate and converse with peers around the world.

Why might it be advantageous to have students engage in conversation and projects with students in other countries? Students can learn how people live in different areas of the world. Students can learn the value and benefit to be gained from different cultures, points of view, and experiences. Global videoconferencing help students feel connected to the world around them, gaining an understanding of global issues and differing perspectives. Students can learn more than just tolerance of other cultures, but appreciation for the value that other points of view bring to an informed dialogue. The Becta document on "What the research says about videoconferencing in teaching and learning" states:

Collaboration with schools where the pupils come from different cultures leads to the development of multicultural relationships and understanding, while enriching traditional activities (Cifuentes & Murphy 2000)<sup>1</sup>.

For example, in a case study shared by Global Leap, students from the United Kingdom, New Zealand, South Africa, Australia, and the United States shared presentations related to their local environment. Project coordinators commented in an evaluation,

“Often questions were difficult and detailed and dealt with difficult and far-reaching topics. It was clear that the pupils were keen to increase their knowledge of life in the different countries that were linked together for the event. At the end of the 90-minute videoconference we had discussed the AIDS epidemic in South Africa, the environmental disaster facing one of the wonders of the world, the threat to the environment posed by industry, and the importance of maintaining your local environment.”<sup>2</sup>

The Eastview Middle School in White Plains, New York has been participating in global videoconferences for that last few years. Jody Howard-Kennedy, a teacher at Eastview, describes the impact on middle school student learning:

“The sheer power of this kind of communication medium was demonstrated when our 8th grade health students, learning about HIV and preventative awareness, were able to interview HIV positive students in South Africa. Eastview students were able to hear first hand about the severity of this global issue as they put a face on this epidemic that before was simply a distant abstraction. Students were moved from apathy into empathy as they began to form an emotional connection to the people on the other side of the world.”<sup>3</sup>

Scott Merrick’s classroom in Tennessee and Darrick Mosser's class Japan have been collaborating on projects over the past few years as well. Classes have exchanged information on local weather, culture, and many more topics. They have interacted via videoconferencing, email, and other web based communication tools. Mosser commented, “We also believe that a project such as this collaboration between students in Japan and in Tennessee can serve as a model for a future of classrooms without borders.”<sup>4</sup>

On May 20, 2005, Rebecca Clemons 5<sup>th</sup> grade class in Hollywood Elementary, Lakeshore Public Schools, Stevensville, Michigan, connected to four Mayan children in Guatamala, thanks to the coordination of Cynthia Castillo, an independent consultant in Guatemala and myself. The interaction between the students was incredible to watch as they practiced their limited Spanish and asked each other questions about how they. It

was very difficult for the Michigan students to understand the poverty of the two children who at the age of 12 are now working with their parents in the fields and sewing and cooking items to sell. Children on both sides of the videoconference gained a new appreciation and understanding of the culture of the other children. These exchange experiences are invaluable to students who will live and work in a global economy. As stated by Masum, Brooks, and Spence (2005) in their article *MusicGrid: A Case Study in Broadband Video Collaboration*,

“dealing with a diversity of political, cultural, religious, and intellectual viewpoints can only grow more important as the world grows more interdependent. Travel and direct constructive contact with those from elsewhere can broaden the mind and increase understanding and co-operation, but these opportunities are not part of most people’s everyday experience. However, they can be through online channels. Once those channels grow rich enough, any who wish will be able to understand their global neighbors better, and to work with them on problems of mutual concern and interest. Unlike text where all interaction flows through the same set of symbols, seeing the greater diversity of those we are interacting with will require more give and take — but may lead to more true understanding and tolerance.”<sup>5</sup>

Our own Michigan curriculum has several benchmarks where a global videoconference would enhance the student learning. Consider these possibilities:

### **Science**

- ▶ MI.SCI.II.1.HS.3: Show how common themes of science, mathematics, and technology apply in real-world contexts.
- ▶ MI.SCI.III.5.HS.6: Explain the effects of agriculture and other human activities on selected ecosystems.
- ▶ MI.SCI.V.2.HS.2 Explain relationships between the hydrosphere, regional climates, and human activities.

### **Language Arts**

- ▶ MI.ELA.VII.1.HS.1 Analyze and reflect on universal themes and substantive issues from oral, visual, and written texts.
- ▶ MI.ELA.VIII.1.HS.3 Utilize the persuasive power of text as an instrument of change in their community, their nation, and the world.

### **Social Studies**

- ▶ MI.SS.I.4.MS.4 Select historic decisions and evaluate them in light of core democratic values and resulting costs and benefits as viewed from a variety of perspectives.
- ▶ MI.SS.II.1.HS.1 Describe how major world issues and events affect various people, societies, places, and cultures in different ways.
- ▶ MI.SS.II.2.HS.1 Describe the environmental consequences of major world processes and events.
- ▶ MI.SS.II.4.HS.3 Explain how processes like population growth, economic development, urbanization, resource use, international trade, global communication, and environmental impact are affecting different world regions.
- ▶ MI.SS.II.5.HS.1 Explain how geography and major world processes influence major world events.
- ▶ MI.SS.VI.2.HS.1 Engage each other in elaborated conversations that deeply examine public policy issues and help make reasoned and informed decisions.
- ▶ MI.SS.VII.1.MS.2 Engage in activities intended to contribute to solving a national or international problem they have studied.

Clearly there are many ways to use global videoconferencing to address Michigan Curriculum Standards.

So how does one get started? By participating in global activities and events planned by others; by networking with colleagues using listservs and directories; and by attending conferences to meet and network with colleagues interested in videoconferencing.

### **Megaconference and Megaconference Jr.**

<http://www.megaconference.org/>

<http://www.megaconferencejr.org/>

A megaconference is a worldwide conference spanning 12-16 hours with participants from around the world. Megaconference VI occurred December 9, 2004 with 372 participants around the world. Megaconference started with higher education, but often includes participation from K12 schools and organizations as well. The second annual Megaconference Jr. occurred May 19, 2005 and is organized, facilitated and planned by K-12 students from around the world. Both of these events include short 5-20

minute presentations on creative uses of videoconferencing. Both events are an excellent way to meet and network with VC colleagues around the globe. Megaconference participants learn about multipoint videoconferencing etiquette as well as best practices of videoconferencing. I highly recommend these events to anyone getting started with videoconferencing.

## BCISD Field Trip Database

<http://www.twice.cc/fieldtrips.html>

Many of you are already using the BCISD Field Trip Database linked on the TWICE website. Did you know that under Specialty Searches you can find all the international programs? See the link shown in Figure 1. With this search you'll find

Search the BCISD Video Conference Field Trip Database  
This site is a project of [Berrien County Intermediate School District](#)  
and funded in part by a grant from Polycom, Inc.

**POLYCOM**  
Field Trips by Standard | Search Video Field Trips | Search Content Providers | TWICE

This database contains programs from content providers such as zoos and museums that offer ISDN or IP based videoconferencing. The Berrien County ISD has researched this information to the best of our knowledge.

Program Description: (recommended)   
Program Title:   
Content Provider:   
MI Standards/Subject Area:   
Grade Level:   
Program Fee: less than or equals   
Restrict Connection Type:  IP/H 323 only  ISDN/H 323 only

**Announcements**  
Take an instructor-led online class on integrating videoconferencing in your classroom: [Planning Interactive Curriculum Connections](#). Next session starts August 1. Join participants from all over the U.S. to plan effective use of VC.

**Specialty Searches**

- Find programs edited in the last [two weeks](#) or [month](#)
- Find programs [newly added](#)
- Find [free programs](#)
- Find all [IP/H 323 programs](#)
- Find [recommended programs](#) (those recommended by teachers on the [Virtual Field Trip Evaluations](#) site hosted by Macomb ISD)
- Find programs from [content providers outside the U.S.](#)

programs from the Australia, Spain and the United Kingdom as of this writing.

## **Global Leap**

<http://www.global-leap.com/>

Another place to get started with global videoconferencing is by participating in a videoconference with Global Leap. This United Kingdom based project aims to be “a resource for teachers around the world, enabling them to get help, advice and support to develop videoconferencing in the curriculum, and to find videoconferencing partners and to book interactive videoconference lessons.” By registering, you gain access to an international classroom network and can participate in international videoconferences with other classes and content providers. Via Global Leap, you can connect to the Anne Frank House, the Royal Observatory Greenwich, The Churchill Museum and Cabinet War Rooms, or classrooms on the international classroom network. Getting to know educators participating in these videoconferences can lead to other exciting collaborations and connections.

## **Directories Online**

<http://www.kn.sbc.com/wired/vidconf/directory.cfm>

<https://videnet.unc.edu/vide-dod/>

By searching directories of schools with videoconference capabilities, you can find your own partner school or classroom and create new videoconference experiences. SBC’s Knowledge Network Explorer has a videoconference directory that includes over 1100 K12 schools around the world. The ViDeNet directory has entries from Megaconference participants and other locations around the world. All the sites in the ViDeNet directory can do IP (H.323) based videoconferencing. Mostly higher education

sites are listed. However, by contacting a university you can usually find a nearby K12 school who could use the university facilities to videoconference with you.

### **Keystone Conference**

The Keystone Conference, scheduled for October 3-5, 2005, is a national videoconference conference available onsite in Indianapolis or via videoconference or web streaming. This conference is an excellent way to learn about best practices in videoconferencing and to network with colleagues from around the globe. In the fall of 2004, 1,400 people from five countries and 35 U.S. states attended the inaugural Keystone Conference via 112 remote site connections. Another 160 attended at the host site location in Indianapolis. Networking with other videoconferencing colleagues is the best way to start participating in collaborative projects with other schools. The more people you know, the more videoconference opportunities become available to benefit your students.

### **Planning Tips**

When planning your first project, be as specific as possible. You'll have a much better chance of finding a partner on a videoconference listserv or directory if you have a plan in mind. It doesn't have to be elaborate, but you should include a description of the tentative agenda and outcomes for the videoconference, the time frame for the project, and the type of connection you can make. You may start with a simple exchange using the Read Across America<sup>6</sup> format of 15 min. of each class sharing and then 15 minutes of questions. Then after you have found a partner class, be willing to negotiate the agenda with your partner teacher as they may have excellent ideas to add to the program.

When planning for an international videoconference, know your time zones! Use a site such as TimeandDate.com - <http://www.timeanddate.com/worldclock/> - to figure the difference in time zones with your intended country before you contact them. It will be much easier to connect if you have thought through what time would work best for you and the partner class. As you get to know the time zones, you'll notice that for most connections outside of North & South America, you'll need to plan to come to school early, or stay later in the evening. Some schools plan a parent night; others plan an all night lock-in. Whatever you plan, I know you'll find that an international experience for your students is well worth the effort! Students can gain a greater understanding of the world around them and increase first hand knowledge of how global issues impact various regions in the world.

If you are interested in further study in planning videoconferences such as these, take the online class, *Planning Interactive Curriculum Connections*, from the Berrien County ISD. Participants include educators from all over the U.S. and sometimes even international locations. Visit [www.remc11.k12.mi.us/dl/picc/](http://www.remc11.k12.mi.us/dl/picc/) for details on the next scheduled class.

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<sup>1</sup> Becta. "What the research says about video conferencing in teaching and learning." Becta Publications. 2003. <[http://www.becta.org.uk/corporate/publications/documents/Research08\\_Vi.eoConferencin.pdf](http://www.becta.org.uk/corporate/publications/documents/Research08_Vi.eoConferencin.pdf)>

<sup>2</sup> Global Leap. "Global Leap Case Studies." Educational Videoconferencing in the Classroom. Last updated Nov. 14, 2003. <<http://www.global-leap.com/casestudies/worldenvironmentday.doc>>

<sup>3</sup> Howard-Kennedy, J. "Middle School Videoconferencing Fosters Global Citizenship." Converge. July 2004. <<http://www.centerdigitaled.com/converge/?pg=magstory&id=90700>>

<sup>4</sup> Mosser, D. "Relating Online." TechLearning Educator's Outlook. September 1, 2002. <[http://techlearning.com/db\\_area/archives/WCE/archives/dmosser.html](http://techlearning.com/db_area/archives/WCE/archives/dmosser.html)>

<sup>5</sup> Masum, H., Brooks, M., & Spence, J. (2005). MusicGrid: A case study in broadband video collaboration. First Monday, volume 10, number 5 (May 2005). <[http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue10\\_5/masum/index.html](http://firstmonday.org/issues/issue10_5/masum/index.html)>

<sup>6</sup> <http://www.twice.cc/read/>