

The Global Teenager project

A world class initiative

Imagine how lively a classroom debate on immigration, rainforests or HIV/AIDS would be if teachers and pupils could link up with their peers in Ghana or Ecuador and get their opinions on the subject! Now, apply that thought to the school curriculum and you capture the essence of the Global Teenager project (GTP). The Global Teenager project enables classroom discussions to 'go global'. It gives secondary schools a kick-start in the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) and it offers students a safe, structured environment in which to discuss global issues. It also provides them a strong basis in communication skills and valuable insights into other cultures. Finally, it livens up the whole teaching process as teachers incorporate new ideas and methods into their classes.

Today, Global Teenager involves almost 10,000 pupils from 300 schools over 32 countries in Africa, the Caribbean, Latin America, Europe and the Middle East. The Global Teenager project was launched by the International Institute for Communication for Development (IICD) to meet the ICT needs of students, teachers and secondary schools.

Pupils embrace the Global Teenager project because it makes learning fun and enables them to meet their peers all over the world as never before. Teachers are inspired because it provides a new and exciting way to deliver lessons. Schools are pleased because it uses ICT infrastructure to reach curricular goals.



School: the missing link

Global advertising, satellite television and the Internet have brought an entire generation of teenagers closer together by exposing them to identical images. Modern forms of ICT can narrow the gap even further by giving teenagers worldwide a safe, structured virtual meeting place in which they can discuss ideas. School would seem to be the obvious venue for this, so what is the story so far? To date, while many schools in developed countries have integrated ICT skills into the curriculum, most schools in developing countries are still in this process or are becoming connected. What binds them together is that most schools in developed as well as developing countries have not yet succeeded in harnessing ICT for a specific purpose like research or intercultural exchange or, for instance, collaborative and international learning. This is where the GTP project comes in: it offers schools a tried, tested and low-tech solution.

It is not only the students who benefit; teachers also get a lot from the Global Teenager network. They can use it to find

out about different teaching styles, as well as strategies adopted by other countries to tackle global educational issues. It also helps them brush up on their own ICT skills.

"The effects of globalisation in our culture are that many people are watching tv and listening to overseas music. Long ago the people of our culture used to play games like nhodo and playing drums as their entertainment."

Quote from Mucheke High School, Zimbabwe

International Learning Circles

The powerhouse behind the Global Teenager project is the 'Learning Circle' concept; brainchild of American educator Margaret Riel. In a nutshell, Learning Circles are web-based, thus virtual environments for intercultural exchange and learning. The Learning Circle set-up works as follows: twice a year, under the guidance of facilitators and 'country coordinators', groups of 8 to 10 classes from different schools all over the world link up via e-mail or World Wide Web to form a 'Learning Circle'. If applicable in the school context, new communication tools such as web logs and chat are used as well.

The communication of the Learning Circles is visible on the Virtual Campus website: www.iicd.org/virtualcampus. The teacher plays a key role in the process. The classes select a theme from a shortlist of topics ranging from health, environment, human rights, globalisation and 'my life'. For the next 10 weeks the secondary school pupils in each Learning Circle e-mail each other on that one topic, using a structured six-phase method:

- Phase 1: Teachers prepare their pupils to take part in the Learning Circles and learn how to manage incoming mail.
- Phase 2 (weeks 1-2): Students say "hello" to other Learning Circle schools using an open 'Class Letter' introducing themselves and their school.
- Phase 3 (week 3): Students sponsor a question for the Learning Circle.
- Phase 4 (weeks 4-6): Students answer predefined questions posed in the Learning Circle.
- Phase 5 (weeks 7-9): Students reflect upon their thoughts and send their final report.
- Phase 6 (week 10): Students say "goodbye" to each other, the Learning Circle is formally closed.

The discussions are conducted in English, French and Spanish. In some countries national or regional Learning Circles are developed in other languages. Another added value of the Learning Circles is that the content is formed by the participants themselves and as such reflects local contexts. Schools can experiment with different and exciting new approaches to both learning and teaching, sharing their findings with other schools.

Partners

GTP owes its success to its local and international partnerships. Its extensive network includes representatives from many different sectors and at every level, from schools, government bodies and NGOs, to embassies, corporate enterprises and other global networks such as iEARN, World Links for Development, and SchoolNet Africa.

Everyone is a valued stakeholder in the Global Teenager project.

Benefits

Regular feedback highlights the following benefits:

- Educational activities: These are regularly assessed with input from pupils, teachers and the country coordinators.
- Intercultural exchange: Stereotypical images and preconceived ideas give way to a deeper intercultural understanding and sensitivity to other belief systems.
- Life-long learning skills: Students are given a solid grounding in critical thinking, teamwork and independent learning, using ICT media.
- Democratic information exchange: GTP's virtual environment creates a level playing field where everyone is equal and an expert in his or her own field. Lasting friendships are formed which continue long after the Learning Circle has ended.
- Teacher-training programmes: Teachers are taught ICT skills and shown how to integrate ICT in the classroom using new teaching concepts, such as project-based learning.

Assess and re-assess

GTP subjects itself to frequent critical internal and external assessments and sets itself realistic goals. Feedback is encouraged from all those taking part so that we can build on our successes and learn from our mistakes. The project also has built-in mechanisms to ensure long-term sustainability, such as encouraging local involvement in and ownership of the project; getting 'country coordinators' to oversee the project on site and act as troubleshooters; and, persuading local businesses to sponsor schools in their area.

More information

If you would like to join the Global Teenager project, please contact Deem Vermeulen (dvermeulen@iicd.org). For more information you can also visit our website: www.iicd.org/globalteenager or see www.qlobalteenager.org

With the right tools, people in developing countries can considerably improve their livelihoods and quality of life. Better access to information and communication technology (ICT) is particularly vital in enabling them to achieve their goals. This is why the International Institute for Communication and Development (IICD) creates practical and sustainable solutions that connect people and enable them to benefit from ICT. As an independent not-for-profit foundation, we put knowledge, innovation and finance to work with partners from the public, private and not-for-profit sectors. Together, we can make a world of difference.

IICD is active in Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, where we create and enhance development opportunities in education, good governance, livelihoods, health and the environment. Our approach includes linking local, national and international organisations as well as formulating and implementing ICT-supported development policies and projects.

IICD was established by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 1996. Our core funders include the Dutch Directorate-General for Development Cooperation (DGIS), the UK Department for International Development (DFID) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). For more information, please visit www.iicd.org