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We build a global community through technology. Our school includes students from preK to eighth grade. In the last few years we've added international exchanges for our middle school students but we wanted to connect our elementary students to students around the world too! We use virtual exchanges for our students to collaborate globally and we use several different platforms to make this happen.

Some classes in our school connect globally using Flipgrid (flipgrid.com). Flipgrid is a free platform for schools that enables students to post short video responses to a question. Through GridPals, classes can pair up with classes around the world (we were paired up with a class in Austria) and they can exchange short videos. This works well because you don't need to worry about the time difference. You can also invite a teacher that you know to collaborate on a Flipgrid project with you. For example, my third grade science classes shared Lego inventions for the UN Sustainable Development Goals with a class that I met in Uruguay. You can customize your grid for any type of collaborative project and multiple teachers can design a grid together.

A popular platform for global exchanges at our school is Empatico (empatico.org). Almost all of our teachers have global partner classes through Empatico. When you sign up for a partner class, you record what times your class is available, your students' grade level, and what lessons you would like to collaborate on (you can use their premade lessons on topics like weather and folktales or you can make your own). Then you are matched with a partner and your classes connect through a live video. My students enjoyed doing various lessons with our partner class in Nigeria. Together they learned about climate and renewable energy. But my students developed the most global empathy when we laughed and danced together. My students taught the students in Nigeria "Baby Shark" and the students in Nigeria taught us a hand clapping game. Other teachers in our school are partnered with classes in Chile, Pakistan, South Africa, and more. Empatico also offers fellowships for teachers and I participated in one recently about using the Design Process to teach Empathy, which I would highly recommend. And, our school participated in a schoolwide Empathy Fellowship last year.

Our school is fortunate to have access to computers (with built in webcams) and Smart Boards but that isn't necessary; our partner class in Nigeria uses a cell phone to video connect with us. We've also connected to classes around the world through Skype and Google Hangouts. Any video platforms will do-- the important part is having the students from different cultures share ideas, learn from each other, and develop global skills and empathy through the process.

Resources

Screenshot of a Flipgrid that my students used to share their Lego inventions for the UN Sustainable Development Goals: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1aD1SSYwqic3PVPW6OQs-rRT_sz24da1D/view?usp=sharing

Here are the lessons I created to go with the Flipgrid project (I created the plan while on a Fulbright Hays Seminar Abroad): https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lTx22dfiSGLfyTOAhNGIdLiwYyLxzKRFBGUe_3v7DLs/edit?usp=sharing

Screenshot of students sharing where electricity comes from in Connecticut and Nigeria: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1z6uzZYXNJPy79wHJYa6BFx_a4rv_9L9G/view?usp=sharing https://drive.google.com/file/d/1xS_9rp5rsflezQf6gk4Cq0H0pSBkp7vX/view?usp=sharing