

## Global Virtual Classroom: Mrs. Deborah Holt's Long Beach Middle School Students Become Global Investigators

The online project of Global Virtual Classroom aims to provide students the opportunity to develop three skills that are essential in the 21st century: cross-cultural communication, collaboration, and computer skills. The GVC vision is to empower, enable and connect students around the world using Internet technology. The six month collaborative project is sponsored by Give Something Back International Foundation and AT&T. Students communicate and collaborate with their partners in the Global Virtual Classroom project which offers a platform to bridge gaps between cultures.

In a broader context, having students participate in a project such as this gives them a wide variety of learning opportunities. My overarching theme in all my class projects with my students is that they will have the motivation and skills to be self-directed, lifelong learners. In a project such as this, students have a real-world opportunity to communicate with people from other countries and cultures and collaborate in creating a website. Students develop skills such as teamwork, communication, technology skills, and use interdisciplinary skills according to the nature of the website topic. The goal of this lesson was for students to read, analyze, and interpret previously researched and written paragraphs by all my gifted students and synthesize this various information using their expression style to create a project for the website. This type of activity is a Level Four (Extended Thinking) activity in Webb's Depth of Knowledge, so this was very appropriate for my intellectually gifted students. To appropriately meet the needs of my students through differentiated learning opportunities, I administered an Expression Style Inventory to each of my students which was developed by Joseph Renzulli of the University of Connecticut at the National Research Center on the Gifted and Talented. I use this tool, as well as Anthony Gregorc's four learning styles inventory which determines whether students are holists (random learners such as concrete random or abstract random) or serialists (sequential learners such as concrete sequential or abstract sequential) to determine how my students learn best. I conducted these inventories at the beginning of the school year so that I knew how to group the students and identify which types of products they would like to create in order to adequately express what they have learned. The instruction is important at this time because students need to have opportunities to contribute to projects that are meaningful and purposeful. This particular project incorporates many of the 21<sup>st</sup> century skills such as the use of technology, written communication, global awareness, collaboration, and creativity. In addition, connections are also made to National Social Studies standards to include experiences that provide for the study of culture and cultural diversity, as well as to NCTE/IRA Standards for the teaching of English Language Arts. Many middle school students struggle with writing, and giving them an opportunity to be published to an authentic audience motivates them to write. Students use gifted process skills such as communication, group dynamics, leadership, social awareness, interdisciplinary connections, creativity, and research.

Our partners this year were from Ein Ganim Elementary in Petach Tikva, Israel and The New Roberto Clemente in Paterson, NJ (USA). We enjoyed working with these partners to create an educational web page. We began by signing into Nicenet to collaborate with

our partners in the “Conferencing” area. Our website theme was “Past/Present/Future” of all 3 schools/communities.

When compiling and creating informational pages and illustrations for the “Past History of Long Beach” section, students researched using information from Mary Ellen Alexander’s Rosalie and Radishes, Carol Paola’s students “Bears, Indians, and Pirates, Oh My” booklet, and various Internet sources. Students then moved to the “Present Day Long Beach” section and wrote and illustrated about the trials and tribulations of living in Long Beach in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Students created dreams for the future in the “Future of Long Beach” section. Students also interviewed Mayor Billy Skellie to find out what the future plans are for our city in the rebuilding effort. Students had many questions for Mayor Skellie, and this was a great opportunity for them to see first-hand how goals can be realized through a great deal of effort.

Throughout this project, students wrote informational pages, but also had the opportunity for creative writing. Students wrote poetry and created illustrations. Students also used the digital camera to take pictures and students created web pages using Kompozer and Dreamweaver. In addition, all illustrations were scanned, so students also learned how to use the scanner. After all web pages were complete, students created quizzes using Hot Potato. Students utilized rubrics for web page composition, writing, poetry, illustrations, and research.

Long Beach School District 6<sup>th</sup> grade gifted students have been extremely successful with this international competition in the past, taking second place in 2007 and 2010, third place in 2008, and Special Recognition for Multimedia award in 2009. We have had global partners from Russia, Croatia, Taiwan, Mexico, and Israel. We have had USA partners from Michigan, Florida, and New Jersey. In addition to the element of collaboration in creating the web pages, students have also had the opportunity to immerse themselves in a geographical study of the particular area (U.S. or abroad) of our partners. Students learned first-hand through Nicenet communication with our partners about how students from other areas are alike, as well as different from us. Cultural awareness and appreciation of cultural diversity is one of the main goals at the forefront of this project.

The Long Beach School District’s mission statement is to produce globally competitive graduates while utilizing the best learning opportunities and drawing on all community resources. I feel that in order to produce globally competitive graduates, I must introduce my students to learning opportunities in which they think on a global level. Participation in Global Virtual Classroom has given my students that opportunity.