Developing Competencies for Global Engagement:
American Fourth Graders to Taiwan

Terry K. Smith
Radford University, USA

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This case study tells the story of a teacher who developed and integrated global projects in an elementary classroom, established connections with other teachers around the world, and worked with a university initiative to partner with a school in Taiwan. Going beyond connecting on the internet, this case study shows how leveraging a global project relationship led to international travel experiences for a group of elementary students from a low-socioeconomic environment. Experiences within the Taiwanese culture and student reactions to those experiences are provided. Educators are invited to use the processes, ideas, and methods from this case study to begin their own journey into global education.

GLOBAL COMPETENCIES

Global competencies addressed in this chapter include:

Core Concepts:
- One's own culture and history is key to understanding one's relationship to others.

Values and Attitudes:
- ◦ Self-awareness of identity and culture & sensitivity and respect for differences.

Skills:
- ◦ Is fluent in 21st century digital technology.
- ◦ Recognizes, articulates, and applies an understanding of different perspectives (including his/her own).

CASE BACKGROUND

In a chapter about competencies, it is best to start with my own background and competencies. I taught fourteen years in the elementary classroom in grades 1-5, was a certified talented-gifted instructor, and had technology roles as school web manager and technology director. Before becoming a teacher, I worked in the computer industry. In the classroom, I blended my knowledge of computers with a commitment to project-based learning and technology. Prior to the events of this case study, I had traveled to England and Wales where I taught lessons in the classrooms of project partner teachers. I had considerable experience with multi-school Internet projects such as Kidlink Landmark (Kidlink, n.d.), Monarchs to Mexico (Journey North, n.d.), and The Monster Project (Global, n.d.). I discovered that my learning network expanded each time I joined a new project. This was how I met a teacher from Wales, and that relationship led to my students playing Internet chess, exchanging videos, becoming email pals, and collaborating in a wonderfully creative advertising-graphics project designed by the Welsh teacher.

With each Internet classroom connection, it was clear that the economic and social background of my students was often in contrast to that of the students in other countries. My school was in the poorest part of the city, and most of my students came from homes with many disadvantages. For example, young, single parents were the norm among my students, and among the parents, many of them had dropped out of school and had little job training or skills. Drug use was common in the community, and several of the parents of my students were incarcerated on drug-related charges. Largely, the experiences of parents and students were confined to our rural area on the Mississippi River. My students, immersed in this narrowly defined and poverty-stricken world, lacked significant opportunities to develop the competency to understand cultures other than their own.

Things changed when an individual reached out to me and provided the impetus for adventures I had not even imagined. I was contacted by Dr. John Wedman, Chair of the School of Information Science & Learning Technologies (SISLT) at the University of Missouri. He had learned of some of the global projects going

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