



Considering Your Connection

Define Project Goals:

The first step to any successful collaboration is communication. Spend some time – over several days or weeks – discussing what you hope to accomplish and how you might go about completing the project. Make sure that all teachers have time to touch-base with their support personnel in school to ensure that they have the required materials or support. Think about:

- What standards do you need to meet with this project?
- What would you like students to understand?
- What are your essential questions?
- What kind of authentic task can you design for your students to demonstrate their understanding?
- What supporting activities or tasks need to be completed to help your students construct their understanding?

Develop Explicit Expectations:

From the outset clarify what the expectations are for all teachers and students involved in the project. Think about:

- Time commitments
 - Will this take 1 lesson or 12?
 - Is one lesson 45 minutes or 90?
 - How often do your classes meet?
 - Will students need to work outside of class or can everything be accomplished in class time?
- Scheduling requirements
 - When are your holidays? What is your school year (Aug – June or Jan – Dec)?
 - Do you want common due dates and times, or flexible dates?
 - Will students be required to complete specific tasks for their collaborative partners by a certain class lesson?
- Task breakdown for teachers
 - Who is responsible for what?
 - When do your tasks need to be completed?
 - Who will be relying on you to finish your work?
- Technological Requirements
 - What kinds of technology are needed to complete this project?
 - What access do teachers and students have? Are you 1:1 or do you have 1 computer per classroom?
 - What kinds of peripherals will students want to use? How can you leverage the materials you have to benefit all students (perhaps splitting the work so that the school with more access to peripherals completes different tasks)?
- Communication needs
 - Will students need to communicate in real time at any point?
 - Do your locations enable you to achieve that during the school day? What is the time difference between your time zones?
 - If you can't connect real-time, what are the expectations for communication? Daily? Weekly?

Develop a Communication Structure:

It makes sense to have one common “home base” for your project, whether it be a wiki, or a Ning, or a blog – one space where all students and teachers will go to connect with their global partners, one place to store all assignment requirements, one place for all announcement and news, one place for all student artifacts. Items to consider when choosing your “home base”:

- Protection level
 - Does this space need to be private, protected or public – this has implications for student safety and parent notification
- Tools needed
 - What kind of things do you want students to be doing?
 - Does this project require discussion forums, or is threaded discussion by page more appropriate?
 - Are you looking for a tool that supports media uploading, or are you planning to host your media somewhere else?
 - Do you want your students to have a space that is “theirs” or do you need to keep the focus on something specific?

Determine Assessment Methods:

When students are working collaboratively across great distances, it is especially important to clarify, explicitly, at the beginning of the project, how students will be assessed, including specific assessment tools. Take time to:

- Develop criteria and rubrics
 - Be sure to post completed assessment tools on your “home base” so that all students and teachers have access to them.
- Clarify the process of how students will complete the project
 - What stages or steps must they go through to complete their project?
 - Are parts of the project going to be outsourced to different schools based on their resources, location, or experience? How will this be coordinated?

Design Matters:

A good rule of thumb to keep in mind when completing a globally collaborative project is that other teachers may want to look to your completed work as an example, therefore it is essential that your page layout, navigation, and materials are as complete as possible, and easy to understand – even for non-participants. You might want to think of the “home base” as a complete artifact for the entire project – teacher planning, assessment tools, communication strategies, student works, and feedback – so that your “home base” can be a stand-alone resource for teachers around the world. Think about:

- Having an “about this project” page describing what your goals are with the project and who is participating.
- Having a “participating schools” page to coordinate the schools and students that will be collaborating.
- Having an “assignments” page to place all assignment requirements.
- Having a “students” page for all students to link to their personal online environments.
- Having a “contact us” page to give teachers, students and parents a way to contact you for further information.