

Building International Learning Communities in our Classrooms:  
Making a Difference in the World through Education

By Kristi Rennebohm Franz  
International Education Summit  
Seattle Washington  
September 18, 2003

Today's children and youth know the world is interconnected and interdependent. They know the challenges in their own lives and that there are challenges facing people in communities around the globe. It is essential that their education provide experiences that engender hope and opportunities to meet those challenges and to be positive participants in their world. It is essential for education to prepare students to understand and solve problems of their world as it is today as well as into the future.

In today's interconnected and interdependent world, it is essential that students participate in international learning communities as a way of comprehending curricular concepts from the context of and in connection with their local to global world. It is essential that international learning collaborations provide opportunities for students to understand the world today across the breadth, depth and complexities of human experiences so that they can use their education to create a better world in local to global realms. When students are involved in learning communities with global peers, they discover commonalities that are affirmation of likeness with one another and, as importantly, discover their diversities as opportunity for growth in peace and understanding among people and places in ways not previously experienced or imagined possible.

Technologies of the internet, such as the K-12 International Education and Resource Network (iEARN), mean that student and teachers can have immediate access to global peers. With economical internet connections and software applications, over 15,000 students in over 100 countries are able to use the iEARN K-12 network ([www.iearn.org](http://www.iearn.org)) to do collaborative curricular projects that are making positive contributions to the world. Students are learning with one another across time zones, continents, cultures, and world languages. Using new technologies, students today are building bridges of human-to-human connections that are bringing about changes in attitudes and understandings toward positive actions. Opportunities for international

teaching and learning are happening in ways that are transforming the definitions of education. Students who are participating in international learning communities are finding hope and are making significant contributions to their world in the present and for the future through education. There resources and opportunities in our communities, state, nation and world for our classrooms to be international learning communities. We have the invitation before us to work together as people around the world. We have invitations and opportunities for learning together so that education can have positive impact for children, youth and all generations from village to village, country to country and continent to continent.