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Resources: Staying in Touch - Gone Global

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RESOURCES

staying in touch – gone global

introduction

It has never been easier to stay in touch with friends and family than it is in today's information society. Just take a ride in a car and watch people on the move talking to friends on their mobile phones. Today there are multiple ways to communicate with friends and family in an instant through instant messaging, email, chat rooms, and the like. Human capability to communicate through these new technologies has not only allowed people to communicate on the move but also on a global scale. For decades children have been conversing with others their own age thousands of miles away through pen-pal exchanges. Over the years, a variety of pen-pal clubs have successfully linked youths with common interests through pen-pal organizations—however, this communication took months to complete through traditional airmail correspondence. Today, students can communicate almost instantaneously using modern

communication technology. This column will feature some of these resources to help you and your classroom stay in touch globally.

pen-pal/classroom exchange programs

Technology today allows classrooms to communicate with other classrooms from around the world. Teachers can enhance learning by assigning students to a pen pal from another country, thus helping the students explore other cultures while at the same time honing their writing skills. Although technology can help make our global society a little smaller, communicating through the World Wide Web can also potentially bring dangers into the classroom. Knowing the right web resources is critical to starting a pen-pal activity. One such resource is located at: www.zen.org/~brendan/kids-pen.html. This web link highlights 21 different websites dedicated to pen-pal

by Todd Kelley

exchanges and international classroom communication. It is important to note that this web link stresses the importance of having adult supervision whenever students are communicating over the World Wide Web. The creator of this link has searched for sites that are kid-friendly and kid-safe. The link contains a variety of web-based resources for pen-pal organizations that are organized by age levels, gender, hobbies, or special interests. There are also a variety of sources posted that are online international classroom exchange programs, with several networking opportunities to specific parts of the world.

videoconferencing and webcams

Many classroom online exchange programs exist, allowing classrooms from across the state, across the country, or around the world to communicate and collaborate on classroom projects. Under the right circumstances, a webcam can enhance the classroom exchange experience. Imagine working with students on a hands-on design project and participating in a videoconference with a class from another country that is doing the same design challenge. Classes could meet through video conferencing to share information and critique final design solutions. There are a wide variety of collaborative applications for using video conferencing as well as multiple benefits to the classroom for staying in touch on a global scale. There are a few things you should know about purchasing a



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