

## Global Collaboration

This journey started when Bob Lyons read an *Le&L* article written by Greg Taranto on “Internet Safety: A Whole School Approach” (March 2007). The article described the Internet safety survey given to all seventh graders at Greg’s school. At the time, Bob was preparing to start a new job at the American School of Warsaw (ASW), an independent K–12 international school in Poland.

He thought the survey would be a great way to tailor an Internet safety curriculum. Bob needed a few survey tools to assess the needs of his high school computer science classes. Greg’s Internet use and safety survey was simple, informative, and a great segue to the Internet lesson planned for the first week of school.

After giving the survey, the results were tallied. The figures were surprising and brought up some interesting questions about student practices on the Internet. Bob and his students wondered if their results were specific to ASW, or to international schools in general because of their expatriate communities, or if online safety is a global issue. Bob’s introductory computer students asked if they could survey other schools around the area to demonstrate that their behavior was the norm.

Bob asked to use Greg’s questions, and the two embarked on a partnership that led their students on a successful international project.

We exchanged ideas on how to reach students. Greg wanted to explore the idea of videoconferencing in his school. We formed a collaborative plan that would allow both schools to experience the power of videoconferencing. We decided to use the results of the global Internet survey as the discussion points of the

conference while giving the students an opportunity to learn about one another’s culture. Greg decided his seventh graders would be the best fit for this pioneer voyage, as Canonsburg Middle School’s seventh grade social studies curriculum has a strong focus on world cultures. The next step was collecting the data and finding an affordable way to share it via videoconferencing.

The ASW beginning computer class embarked on an Internet safety research project that resulted in minor adjustments to the survey questions to match areas of interest. For example, students added a question regarding wireless Internet access in bedrooms.

Canonsburg Middle School and international schools from the Central and Eastern European Schools Association (CEESA) participated initially, but it soon expanded to schools around the globe. We used Zoomerang, a Web-based survey site, to host the survey and record responses. Students were questioned in grades 3, 5, 7, 9, and 11. Bob’s students graphed the aggregated results in Excel and sent them to Greg for review. They chose to use Skype, a free, easy-to-use software program that allows videoconferencing between computers to almost anywhere in the world. Google Docs allowed them to create, collaborate, and share the presentation, agenda, and numerous graphs.

The videoconference was scheduled during the annual ASW family tech night in February, but a series of events delayed the link up. On March 27, 2008, students took a virtual field trip. Fifteen “ambassadors” represented Canonsburg Middle School, each on behalf of a seventh grade social studies class. The students asked questions about life in Warsaw. On the Poland side, Kristy Weiss,

an ASW seventh grade social studies teacher, enthusiastically agreed to have her class participate. The connection was relatively smooth, with only some choppy points here and there, but nothing to complain about for the minimal cost of the Web cams. ASW remotely controlled the Google presentation, allowing Canonsburg students to follow along with the slide show. The graphs were used as conversation pieces for the students to share ideas on what contributed to the differences in each school.

The students thoroughly enjoyed the experience, as evidenced by the level of conversation, interactive dialogue, and looks on their faces throughout the experience. In addition to discussing Internet safety and etiquette, students inquired about a variety of topics, including favorite sports teams, hobbies, places to hang out, and forms of entertainment. There was a real sense of inquiry and willingness to learn from one another.

We plan to move forward with this newly formed partnership to provide future videoconferencing opportunities for both schools. This year, we intend to branch out to more countries around the world. As educators, it is our responsibility to use technology to provide the very best learning experiences for our students. This collaborative project between students six time zones apart illustrates the power of technology in today’s 21<sup>st</sup>-century classroom!

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By Greg Taranto and Bob Lyons



