

# Global Connections - Lessons Learned

By Geoff Wood, Rosmini College

## FINDING PEOPLE TO CONNECT WITH

1. Teacher to teacher, casual suggestion that a meet up might work;
2. Referral from colleagues, or mention at conferences;
3. *SKYPE in the CLASSROOM*, *British Council* websites have each yielded three active connections for us over the past five years. The problem with these sites is that you must keep your request to connect active, visiting at least once a month. I suggest you join a posted project or offer to connect for a Mystery SKYPE in order to establish a relationship with a teacher and once the relationship (see below) is established and you know what those teachers are interested in doing, then explore how you may collaborate further; and
4. There are several other groups that help connect (*Google* "global connections classrooms") e.g Flat Earth collaborations.

## ONCE YOU HAVE FOUND SOMEONE

Experience clearly suggests that not everyone is willing to work to your plan or we to their plan. I have had teachers suggest that we only use their experimental platform. Recently we were asked to join another school's video platform. We refused when we learned that they needed to access our computers to run their programme. ZOOM and SKYPE are universal and will provide the connection you need and you can always upgrade to a paid subscription to improve the quality of the link (only one end needs to have that subscription).

## BEFORE YOU CONNECT YOUR STUDENTS

We recommend strongly that you talk with the teacher(s) you are wishing to connect prior to connecting your classes. This will allow you to check that the link is working, can get to know each other a little, and also agree to some ground rules for the students. Covering the ground rules with your students is very important prior to the link opens. Discuss on-line etiquette/manners that will enable a more successful link. Here are our's:

- a. Students sit close to camera and microphone. If you do not have a separate microphone, the students will not hear each other clearly and will soon become distracted. If we are running a class to class connection, we usually designate two students to sit next to the computer so they can relay questions from the larger group, and also MUTE their microphone when the other class is talking/presenting.
- b. Only one person is talking at the same time. Muting the microphones will help, but our students also need to know that we **share** the audio connection with others.
- c. Start with a simple introductions of the host students at each site, stating their name, their class, their school and town. We encourage our host students to write down the names of the other host students so that they can ask questions directly to those students.

- d. If a student is in the back of the class or group and has a response or question, have students move forward to stand directly in front of the camera and microphone.
- e. If you are using multiple devices to connect to same conversation, (for example the other day we had 15 devices (4 class and 11 personal devices) connected on the same call), it is important that the speakers and microphones on those other devices are switched off, unless there is plenty of separation to eliminate audio feedback.

We have witnessed some very 'wild sessions' where students have all tried to talk at once, have talked too fast (without taking a breath of air), had all their microphones and speakers on full volume, made rude gestures and comments with microphones open, referring to language, clothing, mannerisms. We have seen students running around classrooms, or they have run the device around the classroom, fought over who is using the shared device or students sitting around the walls disinterested using their phones or other laptops.

Briefing a class on expected outcomes, having suggested topics to discuss or questions to ask, and expected manners will greatly enhance the experience for everyone. At times I have had to quieten the other class and explain these rules – having grey hair and a strong voice has helped.

### **CONNECTING ACROSS TIME ZONES:**

When you connect internationally, always double check the time and day at the other country. For example, the day light time in the Cook Islands is 2 hours ahead of NZ time at this time of the year, but they are actually one day behind us – 22 hours behind NZ time. Double check connect times.

Most computers/devices have an application to enable you to check those time differences. Between late March and late October, we in New Zealand can connect during the normal school hours (9:00 am to 3:00 pm) as far west as India (6.5 hour difference: 2:30 pm—8:00 am) and east to the west coast of the US (5 hour difference: 9:00 to 2:00 pm). During that seven month period the following time differences are:

- India: 6.5 hours-
- Bangladesh: 6 hours-
- Singapore: 3 hours-
- Thailand: 5 hours-
- Indonesia: 5 hours-
- China: 4 hours-
- Taiwan: 3 hours-
- South Korea: 3 hours-
- Japan: 3 hours-
- Australia—West 4 hours-, South and North 3 hours-, Queensland, Victoria, Tasmania and NSW 2hours-
- Fiji: 0 hours
- Tonga: 1 hour+
- Samoa: 23 hours-

Cook Islands: 22hours-

USA/Canada: West 19 hours-, Mountain 18 hours-, Central 17 hours-,  
East 16 hours-

Don't forget that we have day-light savings times, as do some other countries – not all. For example, when connecting to the west coast of the USA in March they move their clocks forward an hour, so we become 20 hours apart and then we move ours to make it 21 hours difference (or just 3 hours) enabling an easy link with our respective school days. Of course we have to remember that our Monday is their Sunday.

To connect to our USA schools, we try and do that in February/March and October/November except when we agree to meet outside of school hours. Connecting west to India after we move our NZ clocks forward then becomes impossible. Our partner school in Finland (10 or 11 hour difference) have hosted an overnight conference from their classroom and we have also linked from student homes.

### **HOLIDAYS:**

Be prepared for holidays and other days when your students can not meet up. School holidays, examinations, teacher-only days occur on a different schedule than those in New Zealand. Even our Australian friends have a different day to celebrate the Queen's Birthday.

### **INITIATING THE CONVERSATION:**

We have learned that our students often need a topic that will help initiate conversation. For example, it has never failed when connecting to India, Sri Lanka or Bangladesh to start talking about cricket. Another topic that we find helps start a conversation is talking about favourite foods, video games and sport. However, it is often difficult for Kiwi students to understand that the rest of the world is not interested in rugby and the All Blacks.

Recent conversation always ground to a halt with the Korean students when rugby and the All Blacks were brought up, until I mentioned that perhaps fewer than 5,000 people, among the 50 million people living in South Korea, know of rugby. On the other hand, South Korea was hosting the U-20 World Football Cup, so that conversation quickly moved on to football, food, music.

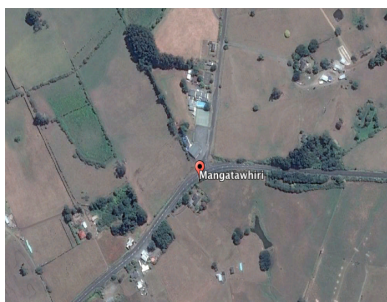


A topic of common interest will initiate talking, and once things have warmed up you will have progress to set topics you want the students to share. Ask each party to share a short presentation about their school, town/city and country. This provides a good orientation for the students. This activity can be followed by slide/movie presentations related to the topic under study.

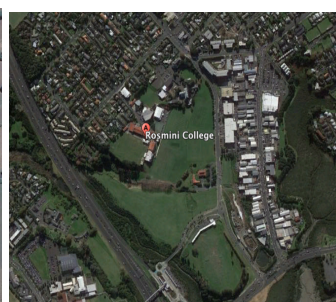
It is a good idea to send questions to the other class at least several days before you link. When linking with one school in India we try and send information about our topics and questions in advance so those students can research and prepare the response. If classes link frequently, it helps everyone if a prepared menu of topics is shared in advance. Several of our connections will meet weekly over the entire school year. We have a prepared schedule of topics, links and other resources.

### **SCREEN SHARING:**

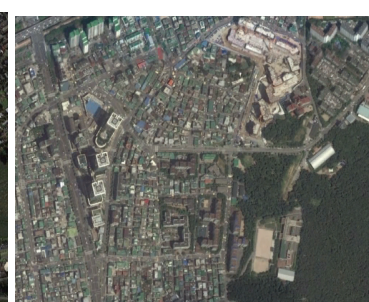
**ZOOM**, **SKYPE** and other programmes have a screen share tool that is very useful for showing items/programmes open on your desktop. We use *Google Earth* to enable the students to see where the other school is located. Recently students in Mangatawhiri School joined one of our links to a school in Seoul. There is quite a difference between neighbourhoods and a lot of discussion followed, especially when we go to 'street view'.



*Mangatawhiri School*



*Rosmini College*



*Tae Reung Middle School*

*off GOOGLE EARTH screens*

### **EXAMPLES OF DIFFERENT CONNECTIONS:**

Before initiating your global connections activity, consider what you want to get from your connecting with another classroom. The following are some examples of the connections that we at Rosmini College are currently running: (Note that almost every one of these connections is different.)

#### **1. Year long mentoring:**

- a. Provide mentoring for students doing NCEA studies at remote schools in the Cook Islands. Rosmini students must commit to this programme for the entire school year.
- b. Three sets of Rosmini students are engaged in weekly on-line discussion, building the communication skills and confidence of students living an isolated New Zealand community.

**2. Year long teaching:**

Several groups of students (2 students per group) are teaching Filipino languages to New Zealand students across 7 schools.

**3. Year long cultural/language meet ups:**

Approximately 100 Filipino students attending NZ schools meet weekly to discuss current topics of interest – *Virtual Merienda*.

**4. Term long teaching or mentoring:**

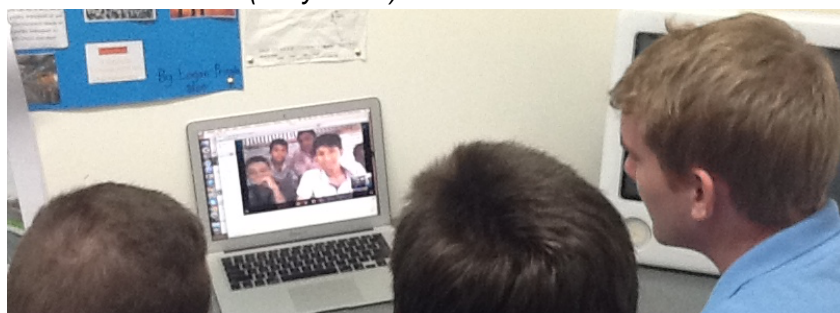
- a. Two sets of Rosmini students are working as mentors to students living on isolated Pacific Islands, bridging the gaps between their current home/school and possible future locations for education and work.
- b. Multiple groups of students (3 per group) commit to one term teaching a class of primary age students short lessons related to health, safety and the environment.

**5. Intercultural Exchanges:**

- a. Weekly meet ups between students in different countries to promote language usage, cultural understanding and discussion on environmental health topics.
- b. On-off mini conferences between two or more schools to examine an issue or share student research/projects.



*Students at Cobden (Greymouth) connected students in the Cook Islands*



*Rosmini College students with Bangladeshi students*

**6. One-off Sharing -- Seek reciprocity opportunities.**

Teachers familiar with SKYPE in the CLASSROOM will be aware that there is a wide list of expertise available for your class to tap into for “talks with experts”. Rosmini Y8 students were examining the Native American cultures recently so we connected the students with the education advisor for a North American Nation. A school in New York recently interviewed Rosmini students about the New Zealand “life style”.

These examples, 1-5 above, are some of the 54 current weekly connections Rosmini College students are currently making. Your students are welcome to join and teachers are welcome to suggest other possible connections or join one or more of the connections as a partner or for observation. All we need is an email address connected to your device. We provide a link and meeting number. One click on the link, enter the number, and you are connected.

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