Educate With E-Mail: Part 2

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WHY A TECHTORIAL?

What will I learn today?
You will learn how e-mailing off campus can benefit your classroom.

What hardware and/or software does the techtorial apply to?
The techtorial applies to any classroom with Internet access.

Which National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers does the techtorial address?
The techtorial will help teachers accomplish standard IIIa in particular.

The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) has developed a set of National Educational Technology Standards for Teachers. Standards or Performance Indicators are included for each techtorial to help teachers and administrators improve technology proficiency. For a complete description of the standards indicated, go to NETS for Teachers.

WHAT'S TELECOLLABORATION

Telecollaboration refers to electronic communication between students, classes, or other groups, usually for a specific project or task. If you read the techtorial, Educate with E-Mail: Part One, and are comfortable using e-mail with your students, it might be time to use your telecommunication skills to move your students beyond the four walls of their classroom.

This techtorial will cover the following steps in telecollaboration:

- **Preparation:** Are you and your class ready to e-mail?
- **Exploration:** What do you want to telecollaborate about, and with whom do you want to telecollaborate?
- Expectations: How can you ensure a successful telecollaboration?
- Implementation: How might a sample project work?
- Evaluation: How can you evaluate a project's success?

PREPARATION IS KEY!

Because telecollaboration involves teachers and students in other classrooms and other schools, you'll want to be sure you and your students are well prepared before becoming involved in such a project. The following steps will help you prepare for a telecollaborative activity:

- Review the techtorial Educate with E-Mail: Part One for specifics on using e-mail in the classroom.
- Examine your district or school policy on student e-mail accounts.
- Decide whether you will use a group e-mail account or individual student accounts. A group e-mail account -- one account for the entire class -- offers a higher level of control, fewer requirements for parent or district permission, and a greater chance of completing the project successfully. Individual student accounts - a separate e-mail account for each student -- result in higher student engagement and motivation, and more opportunities for "spontaneous learning."
- If you don't want to use your own e-mail account or your school's e-mail program, you can set up a group e-mail account at Gaggle or individual e-mail accounts at Gaggle or Think.com.
- Use the activities in Educate with E-Mail: Part One to assess and reinforce your students' e-mail skills.

EXPLORATION

Now, decide what you will telecollaborate about and with whom you will telecollaborate.

What
Some teachers begin with a simple project, in which students talk to other students about the weather, sports, music, and so on -- e-mail "pen pals," so to speak. Such non-academic projects often falter, however, when students run out of things to say. A better choice is to select an area of the curriculum you want to focus on and then decide what your students can learn about it through an e-mail exchange.

Who
When selecting a class with whom to telecollaborate, be sure the other class is

- similar to yours in size.
- similar to yours in age/grade level.

- led by a teacher who is as committed to the project as you are.
- covering the curriculum area you want your students to learn about.

Note: E-mailing students in foreign countries might sound particularly educational, but you should be aware that Internet service in other countries often is not as reliable as it is in the United States. Your students could grow frustrated waiting for e-mails that take weeks to arrive. Also, be aware that, because of cultural differences, a middle school student from another city or country might discuss topics that are more mature than your middle school students are prepared for (or vice-versa).

Don't reinvent the wheel! For your first telecollaborative project, consider joining an established program instead of trying to start your own. Check out one of the successful (and free) e-mail projects below.

- Monster Exchange is a great project for younger grades using a group e-mail account.
- Jenuine Tech is the brainchild of a tech teacher in California. Projects encourage classes to gather data on a given topic and then submit their classroom results through the teacher's e-mail account. This is an excellent starting point for K-6 classrooms when the teacher has e-mail but students do not.
- Global SchoolNet, the "granddaddy" of collaborative projects, includes a search engine to help you find a project that suits your needs.
- CIESE (The Center for Innovation in Engineering and Science Education) offers science-related projects for students in upper elementary grades and above. The site contains very clear explanations of each project along with curriculum standards.

EXPECTATIONS

Whether or not you're successful with your e-mail project depends largely on careful planning and your ability to clearly define your expectations and convey those expectations to your students. To maximize your chances for success,

- Establish goals, expectations, and procedures in conjunction with the teacher of the class with whom your students will be communicating. Each time students e-mail their collaborating students, make it clear exactly what you want them to do such as, "Today, I want your group to write four sentences about our school's location and student body and e-mail it to your partners." Be prepared to be

flexible; make changes to your expectations and procedures as necessary.
- Determine how student work will be evaluated. You might, for example, have students print their e-mails or forward them to you, and then grade the content of the e-mails. (Did students do what they were supposed to do? Did they observe the rules of Netiquette? Was their tone and language appropriate? Did they respond promptly?)
- Invite students to evaluate the project and write short essays reflecting on what they learned.
- Have students in both classes collaborate on a hands-on project. (Students might collect rainfall data in their area, share the data, and then use the data to generate a variety of conclusions on rainfall and climate, for example.)
- Ask the collaborating teacher to write a short e-mail reflecting on the value of the experience, and you do the same.

IMPLEMENTATION

How might a telecollaborative project actually work? The following is the agenda from a real project between two freshman English classes -- one in a rural and one in an urban setting.

- **Step 1**: Students are arranged in groups of four; each group is paired with a group from the cooperating school.
- **Step 2**: Each group writes an e-mail to its partner group, introducing group members and their school.
- **Step 3**: Each group reads the introductory e-mail it receives, notes any questions in the e-mail, and reflects on the similarities and differences between the two schools.
- **Step 4**: Each group responds to the e-mail it received, and then picks a character in Romeo and Juliet and shares why that character acted a certain way in a scene
- **Step 5**: Each group responds to the e-mail it received and answers any questions in the e-mail. Then each group writes several sentences comparing teenage life in Romeo's time with teenage life today.
- **Step 6**: After exchanging four more sets of e-mails on topics related to the play, students e-mail one last time. They thank one another for participating in the project, and describe what they learned from the exchange.

Note: In the project, students were able to meet in person after the project, which was an important way to put faces to the names on the e-mails. If a meeting is not feasible in your case, try sharing photos, videos, drawings, and so on.

EVALUATION

At the end of your project, ask students and teachers from both classes to evaluate its success. Discuss

- What went wrong? (Remember, there's always time for visions and revisions.)
- What was successful? (Share with your peers and principals.)
- What should be changed in future projects? (Write it down so you'll remember!)

Getting started with telecollaborative projects can be difficult. Give yourself credit for trying! Then check out the resources on the next slide for help with your future e-mail projects!

TELL ME MORE!

Where can I find more information?
Check out Judi Harris's Virtual Architecture: Designing and Directing Curriculum-Based Telecollaboration for more information about using e-mail in group projects.