

# A School Without Borders



iEARN Director, Andrew Greene, with W.H. Day students.



■ by Jim Carleton

**Global education is much more than simply learning facts about the world. At W. H. Day Elementary School in Bradford, global education is all about preparing students and teachers for the 21<sup>st</sup> century – for the burgeoning global information society that we find ourselves in.**

At our school, global education is about character education: developing empathy, respect, cooperation, responsibility, caring, inclusiveness, and optimism for others who share our planet. It is about using technology to form relationships with others. It is about covering curriculum in real, meaningful, and engaging ways. And it is about communicating and collaborating with others within their schools and around the world, on projects that make a difference in people's lives.

Global education at W. H. Day began when staff and students collaborated on a number of Grassroots projects. Grassroots was an Industry Canada program that encouraged the use of information and communication technologies (ICTs) to foster collaboration on curriculum-related projects. These projects grew from collaboration across grades to collaboration involving the whole school and finally, schools beyond – from across Simcoe County, across Canada, and around the world.

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By following the Grassroots link on our web site – <http://whd.scdsb.on.ca> – you can get a sense of how our involvement in global education was indeed a grassroots approach from within the school, a process that started small and evolved in an organic and natural way.

As our projects moved out beyond our own school walls, the students and staff of W. H. Day became part of the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN). iEARN (<http://iEARN.org>) is the world's largest non-profit global network. It enables teachers and young people to use the Internet and other new technologies to collaborate on projects that both enhance learning and make a difference in the world.

The connections we formed in iEARN set in motion a truly remarkable project, "Children Connecting Children." This project has helped to establish and maintain a community access centre (15 computers connected to the Internet along with peripherals such as digital cameras) so that children in war-torn Sierra Leone can also communicate and collaborate on meaningful projects with the rest of the world.

The Global Mural of Peace is another aspect of this project. The mural uses all of the arts to showcase and advocate for peace in our world. It is on our website: <http://whd.scdsb.on.ca/children/home/page.htm>. The videos in the project section are truly moving and vividly demonstrate what is possible in global education. The video *We Don't Want No War*, created by students in Freetown, Sierra Leone, shows how these former child soldiers can be ambassadors for world peace if given the support they need. *We Don't Want No War* can be found in the drama and dance section.

Other projects at W. H Day have included such memorable events as an exchange with students in the Netherlands. Students were placed in collaborative teams and worked in a virtual learning environment for approximately one month before the Dutch children arrived in Bradford



Anita Townsend with colleagues at the International Confederation of Principals.

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and they met face to face. During the week they were together, students completed the multimedia presentations that they had started on-line and presented them to an enthusiastic audience of community members, board officials and local dignitaries.

Teddy bear exchanges have occurred between grade 1 students in Japan and grade 6 students in Australia. Flat Stanleys and Flat Sarahs are travelling the world on behalf of the grade 2s. Art lessons from Turkey, recipe exchanges with Israel, tsunami messages for Sri Lanka and surrounding areas, are just a few more of the projects that can be found on W. H. Day's website.

Guests from around the world can frequently be seen in the hallways and classrooms of our school. Whether it be the Watoto choir from Uganda, Andrew Greene (iEARN Director) from Freetown, African drummers, dancers and storytellers from Afroculture, or dancers from Sri Lanka, students and staff are constantly exposed to and working with different countries, cultures, and ways of life.

The staff at W. H. Day is truly committed to global education. As a grade 2 and planning-time teacher, I had the incredible opportunity to attend two of iEARN's international conferences and world youth summits in Japan and Slovakia. On both a personal and professional level, the chance to meet with and collaborate with other teachers and students from all around the world was a life-changing experience.

This past summer our principal, Anita Townsend, was invited to speak on global education to the International Confederation of Principals in Cape Town, South Africa. She says the conference provided her with a rich opportunity to connect with colleagues around the globe and gain a greater understanding of global issues. She also visited the iEARN center in Freetown, Sierra Leone, where she was able to see first hand how the technology support our school provided built positive relationships between students, and how it has truly made a difference in the lives of these war-affected children.

W. H. Day has received numerous awards for its global education initiatives. We have become a member of the prestigious Network of Innovative Schools, and last year Anita Townsend and I received The Learning Partnership's National Technology Innovations Award. Eight teachers from the school are presently collaborating on a book on global education with Michael O'Sullivan of York University. Staff are often asked to speak at a variety of conferences and other public events.

The real reward, however, has been the work itself. Research on students at W. H. Day has clearly shown that students are more engaged when working on these types of global collaborative projects. Staff and student technology skills have increased as a direct result of their work. Curriculum expectations are integrated and covered in a real and meaningful way. Project-based learning, as a method of staff professional development, is thriving at W. H. Day. Character education has found a focus and outlet for practice.

Students at W. H. Day are indeed global citizens. Ironically, as the school reaches out to the world, our staff collaborate with each other far more to make it all work. In short, there is a unique energy and vitality at W. H. Day. This elementary school is truly a school without borders.

It is also important to remember that we can all make a difference. It is not about creating huge elaborate projects but, rather, about all of us working together to effect positive change for our planet, while teaching our students invaluable lessons that will last a lifetime. Start small and make it happen. ♥

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For information and help getting started in global collaborative learning, contact Jim Carleton at [jcarleton@whd.scdsb.on.ca](mailto:jcarleton@whd.scdsb.on.ca).