

# Global collaboration via technology



From B1

Concordia

★ **Michael Boll**, Technology Coach and Middle School Instructor at Concordia

"HEY Mr Boll. Check this out, I just found the answer to the question you asked in class."

"Gee Karen. That is really swell. How do you know it is the correct answer?"

"Cuz it was the first one that came up on Google."

As a Middle School Humanities teacher and technology coach at Concordia International School Shanghai I frequently have conversations like this with students.

In my nearly five years teaching in Shanghai, I have watched most Shanghai international schools fold technology into their curriculum. They are incorporating laptops, smart boards and projectors and many other devices and products into their program. Tech geeks like myself love this. Normal people (ones that don't have a Twitter, Facebook, LinkedIn, Google+, Delicious and YouTube account or a blog) are not always so thrilled. Sometimes they whisper to me one of their greatest fears: "One day there will be no more need for teachers."

Contrary to this fear, technology makes teachers more relevant than ever.

My students are digital natives, yet they are often clueless about the rest of the world. They easily understand the framework programs are built upon and promptly pick up new software and devices. Yet they have very little idea how to best harness technology to create compelling output. For example, they do not know how to best use technology to conduct research or to create a well-written and edited video that includes a storyline. As I see it, the current environment fits well into a formulaic expression that defines how powerful student output

can be created using technology.

*Formulaic Expression*  
*Student + Assignment Requiring Research + Search Engine = Compelling Research*  
*Student + Assignment Requiring Research + Teacher Guided Sources = Compelling Research*

*Students + (Video Camera + Computer) = Visually Impressive Production With a Compelling Story*

*Students + (Video Camera + Computer) + Teacher Guidance = Visually Impressive Production With a Compelling Story*

As we know, search engines provide students with a nearly endless supply of resources. However, most middle school students are not developmentally ready to evaluate the veracity of the many sites they meet. Nor are most all that interested in doing so. For them, and I mean this with love and affection, the goal is to find an answer (win!) and move onto the next question.

Student media productions are often visually stimulating, but frequently lack meaning. They need guidance to find the compelling elements of a good story. This is where good teachers come in.

While not all teachers know how to create a film, they do understand how to teach story writing. While not all teachers are experts in which websites have the best information, they do understand how to check sources for authenticity.

Now, just as in the past, teachers and parents must continue to play a guiding role in the intellectual development of their students. They must continue to create the scaffolding that allows students to learn at age appropriate developmental levels.

So, from my tech perspective, it frustrates me when I hear or read that technology may one day make teachers obsolete. Only the tools have changed; the students are still the same.

SCIS

★ **Toni Olivieri-Barton**, Technology Coordinator at SCIS Pudong campus

IT all started a few years back when a colleague introduced me to an amazing program called Eracism by Flat Classroom. In this web-based global collaboration project, middle school students discussed how to erase racism. I became interested enough that I joined the Flat Classroom Project.

In my first Flat Classroom project, upper school students deciphered the "flatteners" from Thomas Friedman's book "The World Is Flat." Along with students from all over the world, my students discussed questions like "how does wireless technology change the way we work or play?" After leading two classes through this project and another class through a project called "Digitene," I was hooked on the Flat Classroom model.

I became interested enough that I completed the Flat Classroom Certified Teacher Course. In cooperation with two other teachers, I created "Reading Across the Globe," a program that takes a book and asks students to discuss the difference and similarities between the book

and their own culture. Shanghai Community International School Pudong teacher Lisa Johnson and her fourth grade class are participating in the pilot of this program.

Other SCIS Pudong classrooms are participating in Flat Classroom projects as well. Second graders in Monwei Yung's and Kumiko Imai's classes participated in the "I-Spy Community" project. The students had to photograph and discuss their communities through a website called VoiceThread. Other students from around the world observed the documentation of our community and could then discuss the photographs and comments and guess each other's community.

SCIS Pudong third graders in Ashley Holst's and Sheri Deneef's classes are participating in "A Week in the Life." This is a lower school program that is run by Flat Classroom teachers. Students use Edmodo to communicate with their group of six students from all over the globe. Edmodo is a combination of a classroom management system and a social networking site. They work in a team with students from different schools to discuss their area of the program and create a digital project with all the students' information.

★ **Joel Gabriel Sutton**, Middle School Design Technology and Music Teacher at SCIS

FOR the last seven years, I have been teaching computer technologies to middle and high school students. I began teaching in my hometown of Tulsa, Oklahoma, in the US, and now I teach here in Shanghai. I've taught nearly everything from operating systems to web page design, video editing, graphic design, and desktop publishing. Having been born into a family of educators, and going to school throughout the 1980s and 1990s, I feel blessed in having experienced first hand how computer technology has evolved and changed the world we live in.

In the past, the subjects taught were limited to either the on hand resources of the school or the personal knowledge of teachers. If a class of mine studied a unit on Chinese culture, our only exposure was to a textbook.

However, in today's schools, students not only have ample access to technology, they are often expected, if not required to use technology in nearly every subject from Language Arts to Music. The dawn of the Internet and the ability to access information have fundamentally changed the way teachers teach and the way students learn. Whereas students were once required to memorize poems and speeches, today's students are no

longer expected to as the quantity of content for them to consume has increased exponentially. As for that Chinese culture lesson mentioned above, today's students in Tulsa (along with an ever increasing number of students in the rest of the world) are no longer dependent on their teacher or textbook for knowledge. Instead, they can now query the web for a near endless supply of media-rich content. In fact, from the comfort of their classrooms, they can video conference and receive lessons from a Chinese classroom in real time or take a virtual tour of a Chinese city, a museum, and much more.

As for the teacher, this not only makes our job easier, it also makes it harder as we are now responsible for teaching students how to evaluate the quality of information. Before the Internet, published information was assumed to be valid, whereas today anyone can publish anything. This makes everything online questionable until verified. Further, as technology continues to evolve and secure a leading role in our everyday lives, schools find themselves in a constant race to maintain parity with the needs of the workforce. This places a huge financial burden on our educational institutions, but to ignore technology in the classroom would be a monumental disservice to our students. As such, schools must attempt to stay current with technological trends, and more importantly, so do teachers.



All articles are abridged due to space limitation.

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