Distance Learning- Students Travel the World

Distance learning provides students with a very real learning opportunity. Instead of just reading a book or researching online, students are now able to go right to the source. Want to learn about penguins? Call a research scientist in Antarctica. Interested in unique whale habits? Meet with a scientist in Sri Lanka. How about see the Chinese New Year celebration live? Call Hong Kong to see the fireworks and talk to people celebrating there. With over 20 virtual meetings this past school year, a group of second-grade students at Walker-Winter Elementary School have taken their learning to a global level.

Students share flags from places they have visited this past school year. All 7 continents and three times around the world; 85,118 miles traveled.

"I really like getting to see places that are very far away while being with my friends in class." said Ella S. "I like learning about these places. I mean who wouldn't want to visit Madagascar, and when would I really get a chance to go there except when I'm a grown up."

"Our class traveled over three and a half times around the world and contacted all seven continents." said second grade teacher, Chris Kozaczynski. "85,118 virtual miles in total. By connecting through Google Hangouts, YouTube Live, Skype, as well as FaceBook Live, we are able to access very remote places on the world where research is occurring in real time."

The Carnegie Museum of Natural History prepared a lesson for the class to participate in live. While in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, a museum host guided the students on how paleontologists work in the field. With materials sent to the class from the museum, students jacketed "T-Rex claws" in the same fashion as real scientists. They learned how fossils safely make it from the field to the museums for further study. "I loved learning how fossils are made," said Ella G. "Doing the Dino trip to Pennsylvania was great!"

When students begin seeing patterns from different experts around the world, they make strong connections in their learning. Although Arctic conservationists in Wales, Alaska, or Winnipeg, Manitoba, and even Svalbard, Norway may be conducting very different projects, the students see that they face the same challenges of working in such remote, harsh environments. They miss having fresh fruit and vegetables. They all have to be very physically fit to work there.

After more than 20 visits, a commonality begins to emerge- these are very passionate scientists that want to share knowledge with children all over the world. They are truly inspiring these kids to do more, learn more, and guiding them to always ask more questions.

“Second grade was the best year ever in school,” says Gemma. “Mr. Chris took us places with Skype and we explored the world’s greatest areas. I was amazed and so happy to learn about all these places. My favorite was Cape Royds in Antarctica because I love penguins. She took us for a tour around the tent and showed us how an explorer can survive in a cold weather, and also how dedicated she is to the animals in Antarctica.”

“This has influenced how students share their learning.” said Kozaczynski. “By bringing a visit to the classroom, research projects have another level of knowledge. Students have enjoyed adding a scientist slide to their presentations. They are excited to include pictures and videos from their visits into their work. When a student presets this project to others, you can see the level of pride in, ‘I talked to that person. She answered my questions.’”
“Scuba divers in Bermuda inspired me because they found cool stuff underwater.” said Taylor. Shaelyn and Taylor also agree that, “it’s cool that you get to ask them questions. You don’t get that from a book.”

“It was fun to set-up our Mystery Skype event,” said Kozaczynski. “I contacted a teacher in New Zealand and we set the date for our classes to meet.” Due to the time differences, students stayed after school to participate in a game of “20 Questions” to guess the location of the other classroom. “A test of their geography skills, the buzz in the classroom was amazing as students prepared questions and poured over maps to help guide us to where the other group was.” said Kozaczynski.
“The students were so engaged and having fun,” Kozaczynski said. “We actually continued a relationship with this class after the event and shared videos that each class produced for the other.”

“Distance learning gets kids thinking differently,” said Kozaczynski. “There is a shift in how they learn. ‘There’s more to that and we should call someone,’ is heard quite often once the students have experienced this type of learning. I have seen so much growth in their curiosity. They would call someone every day if we could.”