

Bringing the World to the Classroom

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English Language teacher Miss Siti Hajar used her school holidays to teach English in Nepal. Today, she connects her students to their peers in the United Kingdom (UK). Find out what she and her students have learned from their global connections.

Upon entering the Year 10 classroom, I froze. More than 50 boys and girls from the Deupur Village in Nepal squeezed uncomfortably behind low long tables. There were no fans or air-conditioners, but that was not a problem as the weather was cool. At the back of the classroom, there were scribbles on the wall, where a noticeboard was usually placed in an ordinary classroom. That was when I realised the challenge that was in store for me – I was going to spend the next week engaging a huge class in the learning of English Language with just a marker and a small whiteboard. No visualizer, no screen, no projector.

Fortunately, that day, I only had to introduce myself and observe how the students learnt English in Mr Gopal's class.

Every child can learn

Despite the tight squeeze, the students sat upright and periodically responded with a loud and firm 'Yes!' whenever Mr Gopal asked if they had understood what he had said. They each had a textbook and an exercise book in which they furiously copied down everything Mr Gopal had written on the board during the lesson.

When the time came for me to stand in front of the classroom and teach about a news article in the textbook, I brought a local newspaper and shared about Singapore's newspapers. During these lessons, their eagerness to learn was evident in their eyes as I brought my country to their classroom.



My experiences in Nepal have reaffirmed my belief that *every child can learn*, and students can be happy and enthusiastic about learning. With that resolve in mind, I told myself that I did not want my students to merely understand a passage, but to find out more about its function in the real world. Other than making learning authentic, I want my students to learn about the world, whether beyond the borders of Deupur Village, or beyond the shores of Singapore. I want them to understand why certain events happen. I want them to be global citizens.

Global citizenship

To me, a global citizen is one who is exposed to issues around the world, makes connections and appreciates the similarities and differences between the local context and global issues, and thinks of ways to tackle these issues. While we live in a country which is safe and progressive, we never know if this will change in the future. Therefore, I find it pertinent for Singapore educators to prepare students to be responsible global citizens so that they are better equipped with the skills and values to survive in an interdependent world.

Every child can learn... to be a global citizen

To develop students into global citizens, I initiated a Connecting Classrooms project by British Council with Hayes School in the UK in 2014. I had visited the school on a teacher-exchange programme in the previous year, and was keen to maintain the link. One may wonder what two groups of students can learn from each other that they can't learn on their own. Plenty – especially when they are separated by 11,000km.

The eight-hour time difference was an issue at first. By the time the UK students began their lessons, curriculum time would be over at our end. However, as teachers from both schools were equally keen on seizing the learning opportunity for our students, with some compromise, we managed to fix a time for our first ever video conference!

Upon confirmation of the details of the video conference, I quickly emailed a number of parents to seek consent for their children's involvement in the project. At the same time, I gathered some students and spoke to them about the opportunity. I was delighted to know that they were as excited and open to take part in the conference as me, and having to stay back a little longer after school did not bother them much. As the session involved the discussion of global issues such as Sustainable Living, my colleagues and I also guided the students on ideas and possible questions to ask their UK counterparts. With the support of an amazing ICT team, we managed to have a few dry runs and tested several ICT platforms to ensure that the video conference would run smoothly on the actual day.



The day of the video conference soon came. My students felt a sense of trepidation and anxiety when they faced the computer screen, waiting to see their new friends. However, once the video conference started, the anxiety disappeared and smiles and occasional laughter ensued.

During these sessions, students, curious to find out more about each other, asked question after question, some of which yielded startling responses. One such session was about Identity. When Pauline*, asked the Hayes School students how foreign students assimilated into their school, we were surprised that they didn't have any! When discussing the various consequences for challenging students, another student asked, "Oh, the schools over [in UK] don't cane their students? Why?" Through these sessions, my students became more aware of global issues and learnt how to view them from different perspectives. I never knew the impact the sessions had on my students until once, a student came up to me and exclaimed, "Miss Siti, thank you for the opportunity! I want to speak with them again, because it ended so quickly!" It was rewarding to know that my students enjoyed interacting with their UK friends and learning more about their views. I even had students who volunteered and asked to join the next video conference session.

To deepen my students' understanding of global issues, I worked with a colleague to mentor and guide them to write articles of their interest for newsletters in collaboration with Hayes School. We scrutinised notes taken during the video conference so that our students could examine the issues more critically. Although the process was tedious, our students felt proud to be part of the collaborative newsletter, especially when they received the newsletter and learnt that it was published on the school website.

SUSTAINABLE LIVING

living in harmony with the environment

Welcome to the first edition of our collaborative newsletter working together on Global Citizenship themes. We are: Hillgrove School, Singapore; Ivy League Academy, India; Liaocheng No.1 High School, Shandong, China; Hayes School, UK.

OUR SUSTAINABLE SINGAPORE: COMMUNITY EFFORTS

"If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go together"

The peace projects will help to build better neighbourhoods where everyone can live, respect and accept one another as they diplomatically negotiate errors and differences of prejudice and hatred. Born in Singapore, a tiny, prosperous and highly urbanized nation, many Singaporeans grow up thinking success is largely defined by the scales of money. However, as our material wellbeing improves by leaps and bounds, it threatens to overshadow our spiritual wellbeing and we begin to realize that money is no guarantee of happiness or fulfilment in our lives. We are here today to search for those answers, to ask: how can people living within urban landscapes adopt a social and ecological harmony with the earth? An earnest answer to that would

Since I cannot bring my class around the world, I had to bring the world to my classroom. Other than the Connecting Classrooms project, during my English lessons, I showed videos about the war in Syria and Severn Suzuki's speech about the environment, and brought in articles about famous people like Malala Yousafzai and Mr Lee Kuan Yew. My students' enthusiasm about the world around them extended beyond school hours. Once, Sara* found a picture of Malala Yousafzai in a magazine and shared it in our English group chat, creating an instant buzz. I watched how they, awed by her courage, applied their learning points to Singapore's context. When Jane* wondered if Singaporeans would risk their lives for a good cause, another student remarked, "If Singapore is in trouble, I'd fight for the country, the same way Malala is bold enough to fight for women's right to education." It was heartening to witness a change in their attitudes – from apathy to empathy – and it was an affirmation for me to continue to mould my students into global citizens.

To me, teachers have the power to change the world. From our very classrooms, we lead in the importance of seeking knowledge by educating our students. In the process of imparting knowledge, we show them how to care by exposing them to issues all over the world. At the end of it, we hope they will be responsible people

who are inspired to make a greater change from the classroom and beyond the classroom. I feel most fulfilled when I see students sharing differing perspectives on local and global issues, and exuding sensitivity and empathy when talking about them. As I continue to educate them about global citizenship, I hope that one day they will use what they have learnt to play an active role in making a change to the nation. To me, it is the start of being part of a greater community – the world.

**Actual name has been changed.*