

STORIES FOR ADVOCACY

English Language Learners Excel in Global Project

As told by Luke Walker, Taking IT Global to Suzie Boss

A high school located in a lower-income Toronto suburb serves a large population of immigrant students. Many are learning English as a second language. The school has limited technology resources, but has expanded students' access to technology by collaborating with Taking IT Global, an international organization that connects young people via an online community.

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For a recent project, Taking IT Global provided a set of laptops for the school's English language learners to use. The organization also provided a global network of young "experts" to help answer technical questions. At the school, a group of keen teachers implemented the project. The students' assignment: Work in teams to research a major global issue and develop a five-minute, mini-documentary to share what you have learned.

Students were instructed to conduct their research on the Taking IT Global Web site, which includes content shared by an online community of young people from around the world. At first, many of the Toronto students struggled because of a lack of knowledge about global social issues. They also faced challenges when it came to understanding technology and working as a team. Limited English skills posed another obstacle.

Despite these challenges, students were motivated because they were having fun working on their documentaries. During the three to four months that students spent on the project, their language skills improved. Students' creativity also flourished as they learned how to use digital video editing to communicate their ideas. They were motivated, knowing that they would be sharing their documentaries with an authentic audience. They gained a global perspective about issues and learned to communicate their thinking with each other. In many ways, the project opened their eyes to the world.

Teachers and administrators observed the gains that students were making. English language learners vastly improved their ability to communicate, to use technology, and to understand complex social issues of global importance. And their self-confidence soared.

The project was so successful that it became a catalyst for the school board to invest in technology. The board became convinced of the value of this kind of engaging project to increase student learning, and invested in the technology to make it happen. The video documentary project is now being replicated across the district

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