

Virtual Class Exchange

Connecting across cultures

Overview

Virtual classroom exchanges provide an opportunity for students to engage in an on-line interaction with students from another part of the world. The AFS exchange student plays a crucial role in connecting the student's classrooms in his/her home and host country. By being part of a virtual classroom exchange, both the students and the teachers have the opportunity to participate in an intercultural experience that will grow their awareness of cultural differences, enrich and encourage their intercultural understanding, and make them better global citizens.

Learning Objectives:

During this activity participants will:

- Reflect on their local community and learn about a community different from their own
- Engage in intercultural conversation and collaborate with students from another culture
- Appreciate the value of interacting with people from diverse cultural backgrounds and develop increased curiosity to further experience intercultural interactions

AFS Educational Goals supported:

- Building intercultural friendships
- Cultural knowledge and awareness
- Global concern

When:

Virtual Classroom Exchange activities should take place in the second half of the stay of the exchange student. That way, students will have explored basic intercultural concepts and the exchange student will already be familiar with the local language and will be able to act as a facilitator for the activities.

Target audience: students ages 15–18 years-old

Group size: 15–30 students (of each school)

Required Time: 150-180 min total (Preparation - 90 min, Virtual Exchange Live Session - 60-90 min)

Materials:

- Internet connection
- Computer and video projection
- Smart phone or camera to prepare short video or photo presentation

Notes to Facilitator:

Before running a live session don't forget to take into account time differences and to double-check technical equipment and make sure the internet connection is strong enough to avoid technical hiccups during the conversation. Some free videoconferencing tools are Google Hangouts, Skype and Zoom. For suggestions of other platforms to run Virtual Classroom Exchange activities see the Resources section at the end of this session outline.

Description of the activities

Preparation (~90 min)

Part I - Connecting with the teacher in the other school

Meet with the exchange student to establish a communication channel with his/her home school 8 to 10 weeks before the date you have in mind for the virtual classroom exchange to take place. Encourage the exchange student to be involved in the preparation as a co-facilitator and a bridge between his/her home and host school. He/she can help with translation, if there is a language barrier.

Get in touch (via email, phone, social media or conference call) with the teacher who will be responsible for facilitating the virtual classroom exchange on their side.

Now it's time to decide which platform you will be using to connect, planning the date and time for the live session.

Alternatively, you can also ask the support of your local AFS chapter to connect you with another school abroad or use the network provided by free online platforms such as ePals.

Part II - Students preparation

Organize one or two meetings with students between two to four weeks before the date planned for the Virtual Exchange Live Session to take place. During these meetings facilitator explains what is the Virtual Classroom Exchange and when the Live Session will take place.

Ask students to prepare photo slides or a short video to introduce themselves and their school to the partner school. This presentation should include key elements of their everyday life in school. Some questions for them to have in mind:

- What happens during your typical school day?
- How do the spaces in the school look like?
- How do you dress to go to school?
- What are key rules in your school?
- What topics are you currently studying?
- How do you spend the breaks?
- What extracurricular activities does your school offer?
- What makes your community unique?
- What information can someone only learn from someone who lives here?

Challenge students to be creative in presenting these either in photos or video in a way that can be engaging and informative for someone that doesn't speak their language.

Virtual Exchange Live Session (60-90 min)

Facilitators convene the virtual session by making general introductions. The exchange student can act as a co-facilitator to organize when students will ask questions, make comments, and also he/she can help with translation when needed.

Make sure to set some ground rules for an intercultural conversation:

Each school will present the video or photo slides they have prepared about their everyday life in school. After the presentations, facilitator invites students to ask each other questions. Encourage students to ask further information about things that caught their attention on the presentations, things they are curious to learn more about or any other questions they might have. The facilitators will only jump in when/where necessary.

Close the session by asking students from each school to make concluding remarks. These can be structured in the following topics:

- What are the main differences you noticed between our everyday life in school and yours?
- What are the main similarities you noticed between our everyday life in school and yours?
- What did you learn today that surprised you?
- What are you left wondering and that you would like to learn more about?

Thank everyone for participating, and encourage students to keep connected and sharing pictures or videos from their everyday life beyond school on social media.

Resources

ePals (<http://www.epals.com>) - online platform that connects students and teachers across 200 countries, providing tools and meeting places to create a worldwide community of learners. The tools include ePals SchoolMail™ and ePals Global Community™ as well as built-in language translation designed for schools. Whether you want project ideas for your class-to-class partnership, or discussion areas where you can contribute your views on a matter, ePals strives to make it easy for members to make meaningful connections.

Global SchoolNet (<http://www.globalschoolnet.org>) is a non-profit organization dedicated to connecting K-12 students by providing a clearinghouse of collaborative, engaging projects that focus on skills and multicultural understanding. They offer several different ways for teachers to get their students involved

Intercultural Virtual Exchange of Classroom Activities - IVECA (<http://website.iveca.org>) - online classroom exchange program in which K-12 school students in different countries share what they study and everyday life through a Web platform. Students in different countries perform individual and group projects in their classrooms according to the weekly activity topics provided by the IVECA Virtual Classrooms. Students from each country exchange their thoughts and information with each other through text messages, images, and video clips as well synchronously through the audio and video-conferencing.

Skype in the Classroom (<https://education.microsoft.com/skype-in-the-classroom/overview>) - Skype in the Classroom is an online community that enables thousands of teachers to inspire the next generation of global citizens through transformative learning over Skype.