



# Telecollaborators Wanted

## *More Than Seek & Find*

**Eureka!** You've just had a *great* idea for a telecollaborative project that you *know* your students will love. You review what they would be doing as they work on the project, mentally checking to be sure that both the content and processes they would experience address the educational standards that guide your instructional planning. You think about their previous learning, their learning styles and preferences, and what you know to be their most pressing educational needs. The more you think about this project idea, the more convinced you are that it will be both enjoyable and worthwhile—for both students *and* teacher.

You decide to go ahead with the project. You write notes to yourself about how to structure the activity; what materials to gather; what special events, equipment, and facilities to schedule. You find good days in the class calendar for the students to participate, and you're pretty sure that you've allotted enough class time for the students to complete the project. You create an enticing description of the project plan that you think would attract other teachers. You're excited. You can't wait to share your telecollaborative project idea with your students.

And then you realize you're missing an important piece of information. How are you going to find the *other classes* to participate in the project?

You've just encountered one of the most challenging, yet intriguing, aspects of designing and directing curriculum-based telecollaboration: finding virtual partners to co-create powerful educational experiences at a distance.

### Seeking Options

How *does* a teacher with a great telecollaborative project idea find others to participate? There are several ways to do this. I've summarized them here as a rhyme to help you remember the options. Stated simply, after writing a project announcement, you can:

- Store it.
- Spray it.
- Or Select and Convey it.

### Store It

Several well-established Web sites encourage teachers to post new project descriptions as a way to attract distant participants.

The Lightspan Network's Internet Projects Registry (<http://gsh.lightspan.com/pr/index.cfm>) is the most comprehensive of all of the K–12 telecollaborative projects directories (Figure 1). Its large database of project and activity invitations is searchable by age, project starting and ending dates, curriculum area, technologies used, and project level (e.g., basic or advanced).

**By Judi Harris**

**Subject:** Telecollaborative projects

**Audience:** Teachers, technology coordinators, library/media specialists, teacher educators

**Grade Level:** K–12 (Ages 5–18)

**Technology:** Internet/Web, e-mail

**Standards:** *NETS-S 4. NETS-T II.* (Read more about NETS at [www.iste.org](http://www.iste.org)—select Standards Projects.)

In addition, users can search the ever-growing collection of entries by typing their own keywords as search terms.

You can add your idea for a telecollaborative project to the Projects Registry once you supply your contact information. To add a project, you will be asked to supply its:

- Title and brief summary
- Beginning and ending dates
- Level (e.g., basic or advanced)
- Curriculum fit
- Primary technologies used
- Descriptive keywords
- Contact person's e-mail address
- Registration specifications
- Cost (if any)
- Number of participating classrooms wanted
- Participant age range sought
- Target audience (regional, national, international, or open), including specific countries targeted, if "international" is chosen
- Web address (URL), if applicable
- More detailed description
- Objectives and desired outcomes
- Sponsor (if any)

When this information is submitted, it is forwarded to a project moderator, who reviews it, then requests clarifications of you by e-mail, if necessary. She then posts your project announcement to the registry's publicly accessible database. The process usually takes one to two days. After the announcement is posted, you can update it, change it, or archive it after the project is complete.

Houghton Mifflin's Education Place hosts a smaller but similar Project Center ([www.eduplace.com/projects/](http://www.eduplace.com/projects/)) that encourages teachers to create and publicize projects of many types, both on- and offline. Information from a Project Submission Form ([www.eduplace.com/projects/submit.html](http://www.eduplace.com/projects/submit.html)) is added

to a list of Online Projects ([www.eduplace.com/projects/online.html](http://www.eduplace.com/projects/online.html)) or Key Pals and Correspondents Exchange ([www.eduplace.com/projects/keypals.html](http://www.eduplace.com/projects/keypals.html)) when a telecollaborative activity idea is submitted. Although the collection of projects at Education Place is searchable only by the six categories shown in Figure 2, the lists are kept current and are a manageable size for browsing.

Posting your project idea to a database such as the ones described above is probably the most technologically sophisticated yet easy and efficient way to make your need for telecollaborators known. But there is a disadvantage to posting your ideas to a Web site,

then waiting for others to read them and contact you. What if the teachers who would be "perfect virtual partners" don't know to *go* to the site(s) where your project idea is posted? What if they *do* visit the site but don't happen upon your project description while they're there?

### Spray It

Another way to make your quest for telecollaborators known is to send your project announcement to an e-mail distribution list or Internet mailing list. Sometimes called a *listserv*, this is a mechanism by which interested e-mail account holders can have notices of potential interest automatically delivered to them as electronic mail messages.

Some e-mail distribution lists also allow participants to hold public discussions, in that anyone subscribed to the list can also send messages to it. These messages and any responses received from other list subscribers are copied and sent to each

Figure 1. The Lightspan Network's Internet Projects Registry: <http://gsh.lightspan.com/pr/index.cfm>. Reprinted with permission.

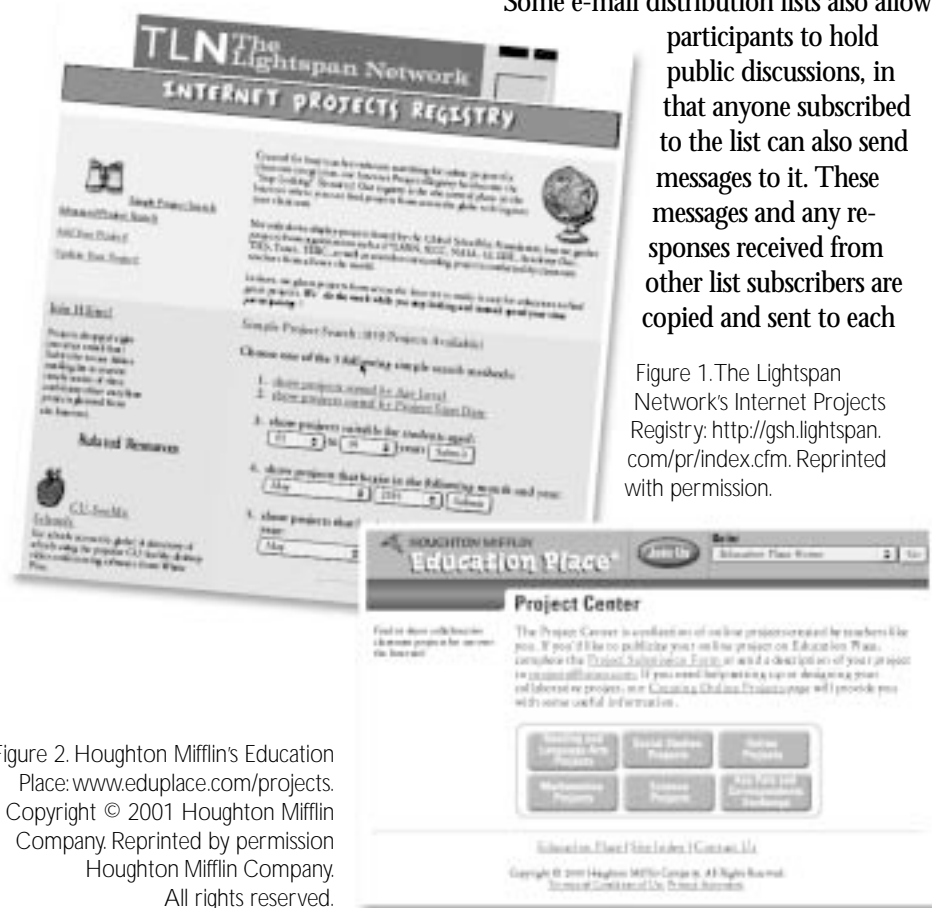


Figure 2. Houghton Mifflin's Education Place: [www.eduplace.com/projects](http://www.eduplace.com/projects). Copyright © 2001 Houghton Mifflin Company. Reprinted by permission Houghton Mifflin Company. All rights reserved.

**Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections Form**

Please choose one of the following:

I would like to search other people's responses for a partner classroom or project

I would like to post my own request for a partner class or project

Then complete this form:

Partner:

Partner Country/Culture:

Language of Connection:

Time Frame:

Number of Partners:

(number of student participants) (e.g., 10, 15, 60)

Figure 3. Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections registration form: [www.iecc.org/iecc-form.html](http://www.iecc.org/iecc-form.html). Reprinted with permission.

**Classroom Connect  
ConnectedTeacher**

Teacher Search

Profile of the Month by 12/08 (Full Circle) from Dayton, Ohio, is a new member of Connected Teacher. She teaches at a nationally recognized Charter Education school.

Would you like to locate and contact educators from around the world to team up with project collaborators, get feedback, or discover far-reaching colleagues in your area? Use Teacher Search to find other educators, or introduce yourself by creating a profile so other educators can find and contact you. (2008, 2007, 2006) and start connecting with teachers around the world!

Creating profiles through Teacher Search is safer than our 2008-2009.

There are currently 4554 teachers you can contact

Find an Educator:

- All Countries
- All Grades
- All Subjects
- All Schools
- All States
- All Districts
- All Schools
- All Districts
- All States
- All Countries

Figure 4. Classroom Connect ConnectedTeacher's Teacher Search: <http://connectedteacher.classroom.com/teacherContact/search.asp>. Reprinted with permission.

person who has registered to receive the list's postings. Such registration is usually free, and e-mail distribution lists have been in use on the Internet since the 1970s—long before the World Wide Web became available.

The keys to using e-mail distribution lists to seek telecollaborators for your project are:

1. Post only to those lists read by large numbers of teachers and teachers' curriculum and technology resource people, such as technology coordinators and curriculum directors.
2. Craft your project announcement so that it is engagingly worded, well-organized, succinct, clear, and complete. Tell what the project is, who should be involved, what they will do, and when. Be sure to include your name and e-mail address as the project's organizer, your school's name, and your geographic location. If the project has a Web site, include the URL, along with directions on what to do once at the site to find out more about the project, then register to participate.

Many e-mail distribution lists are relatively inactive, and others, though active, don't reach the folks who would most likely be interested in telecollaborating. It's important to choose carefully

when planning to post to a distribution list. Four distribution lists that are good candidates for K–12 project publicity are:

- WWWEDU: The World Wide Web in Education List: <http://edweb.gsn.org/wwwedu.html>
- CRC: Connected Teacher E-mail List: <http://listserv.classroom.com/archives/crc.html>
- NET-Happenings: <http://listserv.classroom.com/archives/NET-HAPPENINGS.html>
- IECC-Projects: Intercultural E-Mail Classroom Connections Projects: [www.iecc.org](http://www.iecc.org)

Each of these lists offers a searchable archive of past postings on the Web so interested visitors can find your project announcement if they have joined the list after you have posted it—or even if they choose not to subscribe. IECC-Projects helps you formulate your request for telecollaborators by providing a “connections form,” as seen in Figure 3.

Please note, also, that when you add your project description to the Internet Projects Registry (described above), it automatically gets distributed to all subscribers to Hilites (<http://lists.lightspan.com/hilites.html>), another useful e-mail distribution list for K–12 educators interested in telecomputing projects.

The primary advantage of posting your call for telecollaborators to an e-mail distribution list is how quickly your announcement can reach the personal e-mailboxes of whoever is subscribed to the list. Assuming that the recipients read (or at least scan) their e-mail frequently, this means your project information will probably be read *faster* than if you posted it to one of the project databases mentioned above. The primary disadvantage to posting your project idea to one or more e-mail lists is that many teachers just don't have time to read distribution list postings and therefore are not subscribed to many—or any. If the lists you select for dissemination aren't read by teachers whose students would benefit from doing the project you have designed, you won't have reached the people who would be most interested in telecollaborating with you and your class.

Is there a way to “target” your project announcement? Yes, but it takes more time to do so.

### Select & Convey It

Classroom Connect uses a different approach to finding others with whom to telecollaborate. Instead of announcing a particular project with a database entry or distribution list posting, the Con-

nected Teacher service (<http://connectedteacher.classroom.com/home.asp>) allows teachers to enter a profile of themselves and their pedagogical interests into a Web-based, searchable database. Other teachers can use the Teacher Search service (<http://connectedteacher.classroom.com/teacherContact/search.asp>) to find colleagues with similar interests, then contact them directly by site-supported e-mail (Figure 4). Teacher Search forwards e-mail messages to members who have listed their profiles in the database, making it possible for others to locate and contact colleagues without revealing profiled teachers' e-mail addresses. Once contacted, profiled teachers can decide whether to respond to messages received, making their return e-mail addresses known to the person who wishes to communicate with them. In early 2001, more than 11,000 teachers had contributed their profiles to this unique database.

Using a service such as Teacher Search, colleagues could plan a project together, then ask students to participate when the plan is complete. Alternatively, once you have designed a telecollaborative project, you could find teachers in the database whose interests reflect the project's grade levels, curriculum areas, and activity types. You could copy-and-paste your project description, then personalize a message to each teacher whose profile indicates potential interest in your project plan. Though this is a more time-consuming process than "storing" or "spraying" a project announcement, its focused and direct approach would probably yield a

higher rate of response from busy teachers.

Of course, there are even more direct ways to select recipients to whom to convey your project announcement. School Web sites often display teachers' e-mail addresses along with their teaching assignments, such as grade levels and content areas. If you are looking for participants in a particular area of the world, or if you would prefer to familiarize yourself with a teacher's previous online work before offering an invitation to telecollaborate, you can visit schools' Web sites to obtain e-mail addresses to use. Teachers can be messaged directly, or campus technology coordinators, curriculum coordinators, or administrators could be messaged with a request to forward your project announcement to anyone at the school who might be interested in participating.

Gleason Sackmann's Hotlist of K-12 Internet School Sites—USA (<http://connectedteacher.classroom.com/library/states.asp>) is a frequently updated and impressive resource that provides links to U.S. schools' Web sites. These links are organized by state, then school level (elementary, middle, secondary). The city or town in which the school is located is listed in the index, along with the school's name. Links to private schools, school districts, and state educational organizations are also included in this helpful resource.

To find school Web sites outside of the United States, consult Web 66's International School Web Site Registry (<http://web66.coled.umn.edu/schools.html#world>). This well-organized re-

source lists Web site links internationally for schools, districts, and related organizations by state, province, region, and country. Unfortunately, at press time many of these links had expired.

As I'm sure you can tell, "select and convey" is the most time-consuming way to make your telecollaborative idea known. Yet, it may be the most appropriate means to find a very focused or specialized group of online project partners.

### An Array to Display

With more than 400 million users worldwide (according to Nua Internet Surveys: [www.nua.ie/surveys/how\\_many\\_online/index.html](http://www.nua.ie/surveys/how_many_online/index.html)), the Internet is a very large virtual space. Getting word of your project idea to the teachers who might want to join you and your students as telecollaborators might be more of a challenge than initially expected. Yet, experience tells us that judiciously *combining* use of the methods and resources suggested above should help you to find folks who will share your excitement and commitment to making that idea a (virtual) reality.



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(<http://emisary.ots.utexas.edu/emisary/>). She has authored more than 150 articles and four books, most recently *Virtual Architecture: Designing and Directing Curriculum-Based Telecomputing* (1998, ISTE; the 2nd edition is due out in late 2001) and *Design Tools for the Internet-Supported Classroom* (1998, ASCD).