



## Digital exploration via Skype: connecting your classroom with the experts

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This presentation describes experiences of using Skype in the classroom to connect learners with scientists and explorers all over the world in order to deepen learners' knowledge and understanding of course material, develop their enquiry skills, and broaden their perspectives on life beyond the classroom walls.

In a session organised by the Royal Scottish Geographical Society (RSGS) in partnership with Digital Explorer, twenty-five Perth High School students who were studying coral reefs took part in an exciting live Skype chat with researchers on Australia's Great Barrier Reef. Students spoke to a marine biologist and a geographer who were on-board their research vessel some 15,000km away. They learned about the Catlin Survey's cutting-edge research, which was set up to study conditions on the reef, take 50,000 images, and create a baseline for future comparisons. In addition, the scientists aimed to develop an underwater equivalent of Google Streetview, called Seaview, which will allow people everywhere to engage with this incredible ecosystem. We heard about the divers' encounter with Tiger sharks earlier that same day, and had a tour of the research vessel, as well as asking the experts questions about their research findings and career paths. Feedback from the students was extremely positive, and it was clear that the experience had greatly enhanced their studies. For myself and the other teachers involved, it was an exciting (and surreal!) experience, and helped to update our knowledge of our subjects.

Between July and December 2013 I volunteered as Community Manager for Digital Explorer in their partnership with Skype in the classroom. Digital Explorer is an educational social enterprise dedicated to engaging young people in global issues, and preparing them to tackle environmental and technological changes in the 21st century. We offered seventeen lessons as part of Skype in the classroom's Exploring Oceans event in October and November, which aimed to educate and enthuse young people about the world's oceans. It was fascinating to connect with other teachers and with the guest speakers, and there is huge potential for future events on different themes.

This presentation will outline what I think are the main benefits of, and challenges to, embedding the use of Skype in more classrooms, and offer some tips for successful Skype lessons. Value is added when Skype lessons are incorporated into a well-planned scheme of work that utilises high-quality, innovative resources, such as those produced by Digital Explorer. The use of this technology in schools increases student engagement in course material, as well as in local and global issues, thus facilitating the development of successful learners and informed global citizens. In addition, it provides opportunities for learners to take responsibility for, and direct, their own learning and skill development. I hope that more teachers will develop their confidence in using Skype with their students, as it offers exciting opportunities for creating interactive lessons and bringing the world into your classroom.

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