An Odyssey through the Internet: Using Portals to Foster Global Citizenship

Kristen Erickson, Greenwich Academy
Lewis Lee, Milwaukee Portal Curator
What are Portals?

Portals at:
Vanderbilt University, Nashville
Zaatari Refugee Camp, Jordan
The European Parliament, Brussels
Portal at Greenwich Academy, Fall 2016
Typical discussion prompt:

“What would make today a good day for you?”
Portal at Harsham Camp, Erbil, Iraq

Harsham Camp is in the Kurdistan region of Iraq.

It houses 1500 internally displaced Iraqis who fled their home in Mosul when Isis took over.
Harsham Camp, Erbil, Iraq

“Although I had brainstormed a few questions the night before, I really felt like there was no way to prepare for a conversation with someone from across the world that just wants to go home…”

The Erbil Portal is sponsored by UNICEF.
“I think the portal helped reaffirm my belief that refugees should be treated like unique individuals whose situations aren't all the same.”

“The kids asked numerous times how they could grow up to be successful like us, but I wanted to say to them how much more successful they are than I. They have survived such hardship and turmoil that I cannot imagine being in their position.”
“[A] boy asked what we think about Iraq, and I just felt so bad that I didn’t really know anything positive about the country... All we hear are negative things about Iraq like war, terrorists, and bombs. His question made me realize how the media changes our perceptions of Iraq... I was angry with myself for not knowing how to answer his question.”
Portal in Milwaukee, Wisconsin

Located near the Amani Gardens in zip code 53206
By age 30-36, 62% of men in the 53206 zip code have spent time in a correctional facility.*

Rates of black male incarceration by state, 2012 (left).

Source: University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee
The Milwaukee Portal along with those in Newark, Chicago, Los Angeles, Baltimore, and Mission, Texas were established to discuss issues of criminal justice and police/community relations.

A MacArthur Foundation grant supports this initiative.

Left: Newark Portal. Right: Chicago
Milwaukee 53206
Greenwich – Milwaukee Talent Show

Students at GA and in Milwaukee held a 3 hour talent show in November.

The acts included Chinese yo-yo, Gospel Choir, rap, drill team, spoken word, and poetry.
Youth Rising
Up Radio

Greenwich &
Milwaukee Edition
Dear Lewis,

Thank you for sharing yourself with us for 30 minutes today. It was so interesting to see the parallels and the differences in your community and ours. I loved hearing about the music and dance in Milwaukee, because I think it is something that is relatable no matter what city you're in. I would love to know more about what we in Greenwich can do to better our community, and what guidance you can give, as a community activist. I would also love to see how we could help your efforts in Milwaukee.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Lewis said a very powerful quote that resonated with me: "go on a vacation and leave an impression". He was referring to the perception of Milwaukee from people who don't live in the area. He described how he wasn't proud of the phrase and he is doing a lot to help their community turn around this stereotypical perception. Towards the end of the Portal visit Lewis brought in a group of preschool students and I was struck by their optimism and innocence in light of recent events in their community. I hope that through the Portal and other community projects the children that we met don't grow up with that phrase still defining their community. Lewis said crime decreased by 21% since the Portal installation and the community takes great pride in it. I think the future is looking bright for Milwaukee and future generations.
The Honduras Portal is housed in a school called Instituto Oficial Perla del Ulúa and supported by OYE, Organization for Youth Empowerment.
Connecting to Honduras

“...we laughed so much. I thought it would be serious and silent, but we spent more time laughing than talking.”
Palmer "I sang Buenos Dias."

Keen "I learned they have pet turtles."

Camille "I learned they walk 10 minutes to school."

Cece "I learned how to say 'farm' in Spanish." "Granja"

Heather "We shared our favorite ice cream flavor."
The Warriors Zulu Nation, hip-hop group

Greenwich Academy students meet The Warriors Zulu Nation, a youth-led organization in Honduras that reaches at-risk kids through hip hop.
Culinary students and kitchen staff
Portal in Isfahan, Iran
Portal Reflection

Name: Eliza Schaefer
Grade: 6
Teacher at the portal with you: HS Henderson
Location connected with: Iran

1) How are you feeling as you come out of the portal?
   I feel very good about learning about another country.

2) What are you thinking about as you come out of the portal?
   How similar are different our countries' cultures one.

3) What's one new or surprising thing you learned in the portal?
   That Anna and Eddie both lived sheep meat as a favorite food, Anna also spoke English, and Eddie didn't. Eddie was a painter, and Anna works in a studio.
The Universality of the Dab

A recent “dab-off” between Gaza City and Rye, NY
Portal in Herat, Afghanistan

The Herat Portal is located at the Hariwa Institute of Higher Education

Portal Reflection

Name: Amanda Parks
Grade: 6
Teacher at the portal with you: Ms. James & Ms. Henderson
Location connected with: Afghanistan

1) How are you feeling as you come out of the portal?
As I came out of the portal, I felt amazed because I was able to connect us to someone in a different part of the world.

2) What are you thinking about as you come out of the portal?
I was thinking about how the person's life and the country were very different from what I thought it would be.

3) What's one new or surprising thing you learned in the portal?
One new thing I learned in the portal was that people in Afghanistan have to be married to move out of their parents' house.
Fostering Global Citizenship

Portals encourage students to:
• Beware of stereotypes
• See the common humanity of people
• Recognize and appreciate cultural diversity
• Recognize a different scale of values in other cultures
• Appreciate the interrelationship between language and culture
• Develop human empathy and active concern for other people
• Effectively communicate and engage with people around the world

Portals have fostered dialogue about:
• Criminal justice
• Religion and culture
• The refugee crisis
• Government and politics
• Art, music, literature, poetry ...
Lighting and Debriefing: GA Portal Lab

Mapping project by 5th graders
Poetry Reading in the Portal Lab
GA Portal Lab
Chalk Response Wall

It has expanded our boundaries.

1. It helped me learn more about their culture.
2. Advanced our social skills.
3. In a lifetime.

1 + 1 = 3
2 = 4

It taught me new things.

Advanced our social skills.

Fun!

Different perspective.

It showed me how similar we are to other people across the portal.

No matter where you are in the world, we're all the same.

It gives GA a nice decoration.

Hellow
Portal Lab
Mission, Texas
Portal Response Wall in Rye, NY

- We are just like them
- They had nice music
- He dabbed
- He was very nice and he dabbed
- Tell us what you think of the Portal!
President Obama in Silicon Valley speaking with young entrepreneurs in Erbil, Seoul, London and Mexico City.
Next steps

• European Parliament

• Portal in a Prison

• Portal Room at Greenwich Academy

• Your school?