

# Kids Connect

Josephine Dorado<sup>1</sup>  
ZoomLab

Saar van Kouswijk<sup>2</sup>  
Waag Society / for old and new media

## 1. Introduction

*Kids Connect* is a series of summer workshops culminating in an original performance between youth in distributed locations. Our goal is to have young people across the world connect through streaming media and art. Kids from each city are taught theatrical and technology-related skills in a workshop, facilitated by media and theater artists, in order to create a performance that occurs both live in the theaters and online simultaneously.

For example, in the pilot program, we will be working with young people in Amsterdam and New York. In a series of progressive workshops, they will learn performance skills involving theater, music or dance, while also learning technical skills such as digital storytelling, video/audio production, and streaming.

They will then take those skills and create a show. The entire process of the show will be collaboratively created by the youth involved, from storyboarding and concept creation to performing and online stream mixing, resulting in a show that they can perform together, simultaneously occurring in Amsterdam and New York and online.

The objective is to bring youth together, so that they gain a sense of cultural understanding and connection while also learning creative and technological skillsets.

It is a perfect time for a project that brings together artists and young people via performance and technology. Technology permeates most households and young people are growing up more comfortable with technology than their parents were. In an age where the square of the television screen and the square of the computer monitor dominate kids' lives, why not harness that intimacy with technology to create a performance?

The performance will serve as a creative outlet and learning tool for both the artists and youth involved and will cross cultures and disciplines.

Our mission statement: we are dedicated to the promotion of cultural connection and understanding between children in different nations, through the use of online collaborative arts initiatives and education in media technology.

Josephine Dorado (ZoomLab, New York) and Saar van Kouswijk (Waag Society, Amsterdam) will be collaboratively directing the workshops and performance premiere. Participating organizations in the pilot project are Waag Society for Old and New Media (Amsterdam) and ZoomLab (New York). At the time this paper was written, there was also discussion of partnerships with Imagine IC (Amsterdam) and Eyebeam (New York).

The pilot project will be a model upon which to build other future collaborations. The goals of the project are to not only foster creative interplay and cultural connection but to also create a

sustainable program that, through training and the use of local talent, can be repeated from year to year and city to city.

This pilot project will commence in July 2006 and will conclude in a performance in August 2006.

## 2. Processes

Processes involved include the following phases:

Phase 1:

- Theater games, sound/movement experimentation, and improvisational exercises will be explored to provide a foundation for creative interplay between the kids
- Additional (sound, video, performing) artists that will be native to the local area may be brought in to imbue different meanings to the workshop material
  - One of these artists in each city will be trained with the necessary knowledge to continue curriculum involved for following phases and to coordinate that site's show
- A theme will be decided on that is relevant for each of the youth communities
- Narrative structures will be explored that enable both online and virtual presence
- Performance roles will be explored

Phase 2:

- The online component of the workshops is introduced
  - Introduction of the kids to their online partners
  - Implementation of theater games/structures in an online collaborative environment
- Thematic details and performative roles will be further explored
  - Specific theme subsets may be assigned to certain locales or specific performance roles may be assigned to certain kids
- Collaborative storyboarding of the theme and narrative will begin via multi-user online authoring and streaming video
- Kids will be presented with the tools and taught the necessary technical skills
- Media (sound, video segments) will be prepared for inclusion into storyline

Phase 3:

- Rehearsals begin for the culminating performance
- Performance premieres in each city simultaneously in theater and online
- Entire process is documented both in video and in writing and will be published online

---

<sup>1</sup> email: josephine@zoomlab.org

<sup>2</sup> email: saar@waag.org

### 3. Skillsets learned

Specific skillsets are learned through the course of the workshops. Students become proficient in a number of creative and technical areas. In addition, they have the chance to improve their ability to collaborate, share and socially interact with other cultures. Examples of skills learned are as follows:

Performance and communication skills:

- performing for a live audience
- theater
- music
- dance
- writing
- creating a common language
- communication through performance
- multi-user authoring (i.e., writing as performance)
- symbols and visual graphics as common language

Technological literacy:

- digital storytelling
- writing narrative
- video and audio production
- virtual communication
- instant messaging
- email
- websites/wikis
- media technology and virtual environments
- streaming technologies (telematics)
- multi-user media manipulation
- computer use: hardware and software

As mentioned above, other performing and media artists will be invited to participate and facilitate in the workshops. Depending on the topic being taught, students may learn about writing a script, creating a character, editing sound, shooting video, making a dance, or streaming the production online.

In addition, at least one artist in each city will be trained with the necessary knowledge to continue the curriculum involved for subsequent phases and to coordinate that site's show, thus creating a sustainable event.

### 4. Output

The output of the *Kids Connect* pilot project will result in an original performance premiere which will be broadcast globally over the Internet and documented on various websites and platforms.

Audiences may come to any of the performance venues in each locale, and those not able to attend in person may also watch it online.

A book of theatrical exercises and improv gameplaying for interdisciplinary collaborative creation will also be assembled for dissemination.

Through art, media technology and the Internet, kids can "connect" with kids in other countries, thereby constructing a connected performance while creatively learning about other cultures.