

# e-Portfolio Way: Learning through Global Collaboration and Communication for High School Students

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**Abstract.** One of the strong powers of e-Portfolio is to link students who are spread globally to work in a team to tackle with a project. The international high schools in Japan, Taiwan, and the Great Britain took part in the project. While conducting the project, the high school students had chances to brainstorm, discuss, and plan through the e-Portfolio. The high school students in the three countries shared the experience of the difference in cultural values, decision-making process, criteria for judgment, as well as project management. This is an example of Connecting Classrooms East Asia (CCEA) initiated by the British Council Japan in 2008-2009, employing e-Portfolio. The original goal set by the British Council in Japan was to nurture global citizens through this project. This paper reports the successful results of the global collaborative learning of the high school students with different cultural background.

**Keywords:** e-Portfolio, High School Student, Cloud-based Application, International Collaboration, British Council in Japan, CCEA

## Introduction

It is seen in this section an e-Portfolio in action in the international collaboration project called Connecting Classroom East Asia (CCEA), initiated by the British Council Japan in 2008-2009. The project originally aimed at improving the international awareness of junior-high/high school students throughout Asia and Europe. The projects of this kind had historically been conducted by assembling students in one location from all over the world for a limited period of time, and by facilitating the communication and interaction among them in a classroom setting and/or a group work format. When the Internet became widely available in early 2000's, several efforts had been made to create the similar objectives virtually, for instance, by creating the online mailing list for students from several countries and by facilitating the communication among them via e-mail, which turned out in vain.

The British Council Japan did in fact try to follow a similar path for the CCEA project: creating an online bulletin board on its website, assigning IDs for the participating junior-high/high school students, and letting them communicate online. However, the project only succeeded after the project team implemented a cloud-based application dedicated for the project, which contained not only an online bulletin board for discussion and communication but also an e-Portfolio, in which each student had their own personalized area to accumulate his/her profile, other pertinent personal information to share with others, research papers, and presentation materials.

This paper introduces how the project team utilized the cloud-based application with an e-Portfolio function and succeeded in facilitating the interactions among students in

different locations and with different cultural backgrounds in the virtual setting. First, the CCEA project is described focusing on its goal, structure, and implementation process. And then the cloud-based application implemented for the project is elaborated. Finally, the outcomes of the CCEA project is shared.

## 1. Project Overview

The CCEA project was kicked off when the British Council Japan approached The Education Institute for Private Schools in Japan for participation in June 2008. The goal of the project was “to build sustainable school partnerships, which might broaden the international views of young people and educate young people as global citizens,” and the Council tried to achieve it by virtually connecting students of private junior-high/high schools in Japan, Taiwan, and the United Kingdom. Five private junior-high/high schools participated in the project, which communicated with the students from Taipei City in Taiwan and Belfast in the U.K.

The project was officially kicked off with Taiwan, Japan, and UK Contact Seminar on October 13-15, 2008, and the discussion topics were selected for participating students to conduct research and discussion. The participating students were divided into eight groups based on the discussion topics. Table 1 below lists the eight discussion topics as well as some of the examples of sub-topics.

**Table 1. List of Discussion Topics for CCEA**

1. Change of our Life Style	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The Progress of Social Activity of Women</li> <li>• Educational Change</li> </ul>
2. Space	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Should we cut money for space exploration?</li> </ul>
3. Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What is water crisis?</li> <li>• What can we do NOW for water?</li> </ul>
4. Human Rights	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Canada: A Barrier Free Nation</li> <li>• Afghanistan: A Country Struggling to Develop</li> </ul>
5. Poverty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Poverty of children</li> <li>• Social problems caused by poverty</li> </ul>
6. Biodiversity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Type of biodiversity</li> <li>• Biodiversity of Species</li> <li>• Treaty for preserving biodiversity</li> </ul>
7. Counseling	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Parents' influence over children</li> <li>• Ways to communication</li> </ul>
8. Energy & Environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-sufficiency ratio in the energy supply of Japan</li> <li>• Measure with nuclear power generation</li> </ul>

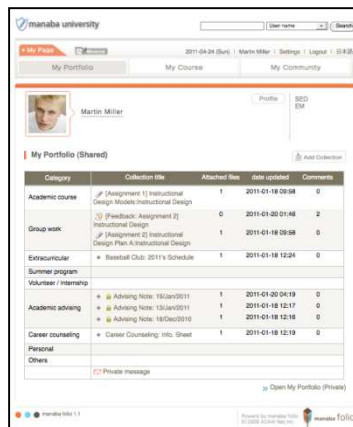
## 2. Virtual Communication Platform using e-Portfolio

The project team decided to implement the cloud-based application, *manaba folio*, in February 2009 in order to facilitate the communication as well as information sharing among students from different high schools and different countries, who had never met face-to-face before. *manaba folio* included two key functions suitable for the CCEA project: an e-Portfolio function and an online bulletin board function.

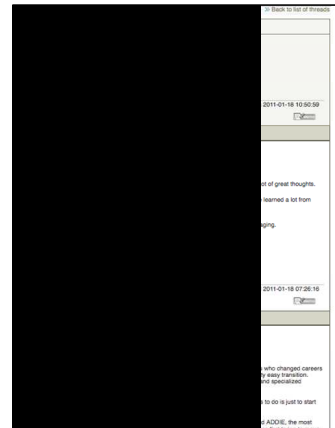
The e-Portfolio function is shown in Figure 1, which provided each student with his/her own space. Students were able to accumulate their profile information, short research papers, presentation materials, and any other pertinent information to save or

share. Thus, by accessing the application, the students could check and reflect on their own previous work at any time and anywhere. It was also equipped with a function which enabled the students to share their own portfolios with other participants. With such function, the students were able to search and look at other students' portfolios, learn about them including what they had been studying.

Another key function, an online bulletin board, shown in Figure 2, was used as the communication platform for the students to share and exchange ideas and thoughts. Any student could either initiate a series of discussion on a specific topic or respond to peers' comments. In the CCEA project, each of the eight groups was provided with its own bulletin board to learn to communicate and collaborate in an international group.



**Figure 1. e-Portfolio**



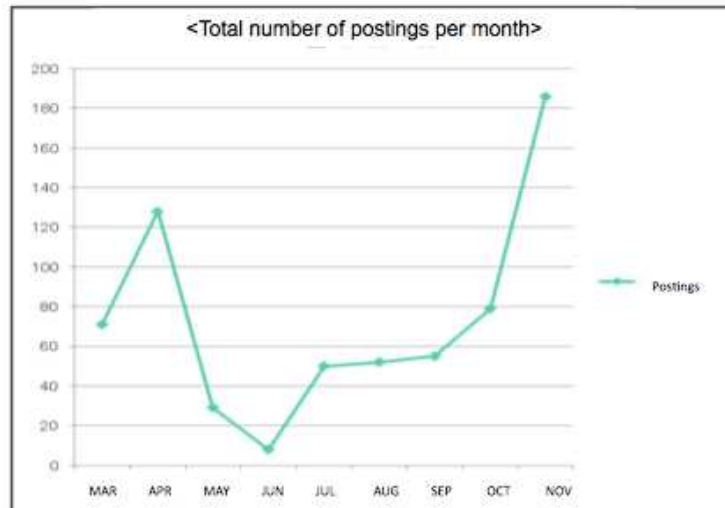
**Fig. 2. Online bulletin board**

The combination of these two key functions, the e-Portfolio and the online bulletin board, led the CCEA project to success. Within the discussion group, an individual student or the small team conducted researches on sub-topics, put together their results in the form of a short paper, and saved in their respective e-Portfolio as artifact. Other students in the same discussion group were able to easily access the student's paper accumulated in his/her e-Portfolio, and to initiate a discussion on a specific topic using the online bulletin board. After the discussion within the group, the student responsible for the sub-topic either modified the original paper and saved in his/her e-Portfolio, or simply entered discussion notes directly in his/her e-Portfolio. By taking turns, all the participants in the same discussion group were not only able to learn about a variety of sub-topics by discussing and exchanging ideas, but also experienced and learned the cultural differences and values in order to nurture an international community. By making friends in this way, the students were motivated to continue working on the project.

### 3. Results

The success of the project was guaranteed by the statistics on the use of *manaba folio*, and the final comments by Akiko Tokumaru, the student leader of the CCEA project 2009. The statistics of *manaba folio* indicates that over the course of the project from March 2009 till November 2009, as the students learned more about each other through the interaction on the e-Portfolio system and the online bulletin board, they became more and more active in participating in the discussions as well as their mutual communication. As shown in Figure 3, the total number of posts made on the bulletin board of *manaba folio* increased from less than 10 in June, to around 50 over the summer, and eventually to over 180 in November. In the same way, the total number of page view went up from 3,000 in

July and August to 16,000 in November. As Akiko Tokumaru, the student leader of the CCEA project 2009, commented in the final report, CCEA 2009 Activity Log, the participating students learned that “communication is important in order to get to know and understand each other no matter which country we are from or what language we speak.”



**Figure 3. Total number of posts made on the online bulletin board in 2009**

The original goal set by the British Council Japan to “broaden the international views of young people and to educate young people as global citizens,” ended up with a great success. It was also witnessed by the comment from Akiko Tokumaru, who stated “The most important thing in making relationships with friends from other countries is just to have fun communicating in our own expressing way. We are all together on the same planet. So let’s not be prepossessed with our own country. We are Global Citizens.”

A lesson we learned from this showcase is that the success of e-Portfolio is due to the proactive collaboration of all users/stakeholders as well as the motivation to communicate actively. In order to lead to any project to success, the clearly defined goal or mission is the key to make all members united and work in teams.

## References

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