

Education for Global iEARN Family: Challenges of JEARN

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BEFORE GETTING IMPRINTED with a discriminatory attitude towards countries, religions, and colors, children should be provided with the opportunity to learn respect for each other, compassion to others and find solutions to problems in a safe global educational environment using information and communications technology (ICT) and real time conferences. Various kinds of projects can create a sense of “Global Family” among children, and students. Furthermore, these projects will allow teachers to become aware of human rights, which children possess. This is what the International Education and Resource Network (iEARN) does.

History of JEARN

I was born in Fushun, at the then Republic of China in 1940. I learned practical English in my late 30s, a skill which opened me to the idea of international communication. My career as Coordinator of Global Education started with Luma phone, a still image video phone. In 1985, I worked at Teleclass International (a project organized in collaboration with the Department of Education of the State of Hawaii using Luma phone). This project surprised me because it was the first time I had learned about an international educational project, which uses modern communications technology. Since then I have coordinated more than six hundred video conferencing between schools in Japan and other countries.

One day, I received news about the delivery of three hundred new Luma phones to many schools in different countries by an American educational organization in New York. Upon further research, I learned of iEARN, a global educational network.

In 1996, with limited knowledge of the iEARN, I attended an iEARN conference in Budapest, Hungary. After attending this third iEARN Annual Conference, I decided to start an iEARN chapter in Japan. I applied for support under the “New 100 Schools Project” of the Ministry of Education of



Luma phone project. (Opposite page) Youth summit.

Japan, and started the Japan Education and Resource Network (JERN) as iEARN Japan Center in 2000. The center received non-profit organization (NPO) status in 2003.

JERN now has about one hundred twenty members who facilitate seven active iEARN projects. The biggest JERN event for the last fifteen years was the Tenth iEARN Annual Conference held in Awaji Yume Butai in 2003, with four hundred participants from fifty-five countries, six hundred Japanese school teachers, and four hundred volunteers.¹

What is iEARN?

iEARN promotes the idea of “Learning with the world, not just about it.” The iEARN Constitution states:

The vision and purpose of iEARN is to enable young people to undertake projects designed to make a meaningful contribution to the health and welfare of the planet and its people.

It is:

- a safe and structured environment where young people can communicate;
- an opportunity to apply knowledge in service-learning projects;
- a community of educators and learners making a difference to the educational process.

iEARN is a non-profit organization made up of over 30,000 schools and youth organizations in more than one hundred forty countries. It empowers teachers and young people to work together online using the internet and other new communications technologies. Over two million students are engaged in collaborative project work worldwide. iEARN International is registered as a non-governmental organization (NGO) in Spain and has an international office in Callus, Spain.

Since 1988, iEARN has pioneered on-line school linkages to enable students to engage in meaningful educational projects with peers in their countries and around the world.

iEARN has the Collaboration Center, an interactive curriculum-based online group where students create, research, share opinions and become global citizens. I consider the Collaboration Center as the heart of iEARN that keeps it alive and active. See videos of the iEARN activities at <https://iearn.org/multimedia>.

Most iEARN projects have their own space – digital forums. Facilitators of the projects organize the “forum” and invite students and teachers to log-in and post messages.





Youth Summit.

The annual conference of iEARN attracts educators and students. Each conference, hosted by an iEARN country, is a week-long program with project presentations, poster sessions, workshops, new project discussion, culture nights, media festivals, local bus tours, and shared meals together with singing and dancing. It is a week that creates family bonds across countries, religions, and appearances. Participants leave the conference full of energy and make friendships that keep them active online for a whole year.²

JEARN Program

JEARN holds a number of activities such as workshops for educators, projects in the classroom, and local and international conferences.³ It has an "Office" that helps teachers and students find partners in Japan for their projects. It guides students and teachers who would like to participate in the Collaboration Center.

It implements three programs and seven special projects:

a. Programs

- Japan-Korea High School Exchange Program;
- JEARN Tokyo Kids Program(new);



Japan-Korea Exchange Program.

- ANNE FRANK Meet & Learn;

b. Projects

Natural Disaster Youth Summit (NDYS);

- Pen Friend Club;
- Teddy Bear Project;
- Taisho Koto Project;
- Origami Project;
- Girls Rising; and
- Hiroshima for Peace.

Among these projects, several have human rights components to it. Three of these projects have been developed by JEARN through the years, while one project is an international project.⁴

Girls Rising Project

Girls Rising is a global social action campaign for girls' education, created by Ten Times Ten, LLC. Its purpose is to "make sure people everywhere



(Top) Japan-Korea Exchange Program. (Above) Natural Disaster Youth Summit.

are talking about girls' education, that they understand its transformative power, recognize the barriers, and choose to get involved in order to make a difference.”⁵ It involves nine videos of nine girls in different countries:⁶

- Sokha – Cambodia;
- Wadley – Haiti;
- Suma – Nepal;

- Yasmin – Egypt;
- Asmera – Ethiopia;
- Ruksana – India;
- Senna – Peru;
- Mariama - Sierra Leone;
- Amina – Afghanistan.

iEARN participates in this project and promotes it among its members. The project has participants from iEARN members from many countries in different parts of the world.⁷

This is a project for students who are asked to watch video on “Girl Rising” (or excerpted chapters such as Nepal Chapter [<http://youtu.be/Hk2Q7WLzns>] and Peru Chapter [<http://youtu.be/7P6nL7PXILw>] if the full DVD is not available) and, asked to share their reflections on the videos by posting them on the Girls Rising forum of iEARN.

The students are encouraged to share ideas about what they can do to make the situation of girls in the world and in their own country better. Where possible, students are invited to arrange skype conferences with those from other countries and share what they have learned while learning from each other in the process.

Hiroshima for Peace: Machinto

With books such as *Machinto* and *My Hiroshima*, participants learn about the consequences of the atomic bombing in Japan during the Second World War. They research and discuss why the little “birds” (war-affected children) are still crying in the world and how nuclear power plants today affect people. Participants express ideas of peace, friendship, and a safe world



through creative picture books, videos, and media that can be shared with those little “birds” in the world.

I started this project during the iEARN Annual Conference held in the Netherlands in 2006. Every year at subsequent conferences, iEARN organizes a *Machinto* workshop and display



Machinto Forum.

all the picture books created by children and students. Two hundred picture books are available in the JEARN office and circulated to schools whenever requested. In recent years, the participants created videos more than picture books.

The discussion at the Machinto Forum in May 2015 was interesting.

Group: Machinto

Topic: Let Hiroshima, Chernobyl or Fukushima never occur again!

Country: Ukraine

Message:

Having read the book *Machinto* by Matsutani Miaoko and on the eve of the 29th anniversary of the tragic accident at the Chernobyl Nuclear Power Plant, I would like to dwell upon those awful events, their reasons and consequences. I think that it is very important for mankind to draw a conclusion from those “lessons” of the past in the hope of preventing the recurrence.

As it is known, two atomic bombs were dropped on Japanese cities of Hiroshima

and Nagasaki by the American troops at the end of World War II. Nuclear bomb “Little Boy” was dropped on Hiroshima on 6 August 1945. And bomb “Fat Man” was dropped on Nagasaki on 9 August 1945. Those were the only cases of nuclear bombs during World War II. But I began to understand the terrible consequences of those events better after reading the book *Machinto*. The awful pictures of effects of those bombings, the crippled fates of children and adults arise in my eyes from its pages again and again.

My memory also keeps in mind the event that occurred a decade later in my home country Ukraine. On 26 April 1986, the fourth nuclear reactor exploded at the Chernobyl Atomic Station and caused radioactive contamination of a vast area around the plant.

When I compare those two tragedies, it seems to me that the accident at Chernobyl has more serious consequences. I think so, because it is known, that nowadays about 1.6 million people live safely in Hiroshima and Nagasaki, but Chernobyl and its so-called exclusion zone (with thirty kilometers in diameter) still remain uninhabited.

Why can people live in Hiroshima and Nagasaki and not in Chernobyl?

Our (Ukrainian) and foreign scientists explain this difference by two factors. There was much more nuclear fuel in the reactor of the Chernobyl Atomic Station. It splashed about ten tons of nuclear fuel. The second important factor was that explosion happened on the ground, not in the air. As the result, there was contamination by radioactive isotopes such as cesium-137, strontium-90 and iodine-131, and it made the living of people unsafe in a Chernobyl zone.

According to experts, the victims of the accident numbered 15,000 to 30,000 people. More than 2.5 million Ukrainians have health problems related to the Chernobyl accident.

Fortunately this was not observed in Hiroshima. “Little Boy” and “Fat Man” exploded about 500-600 meters above the ground. The response was very strong in both cases. A lot of people perished and later died from cancer in Hiroshima. The “Fat Man” bomb had less losses of life. It fell in the valley and most of the city was not affected.

And if it was impossible for the Japanese people to avoid those two cases of atomic bombing, it was possible to prevent the Chernobyl accident. It is the worst accident in the history of my country, a combination of human mistakes and a faulty design.

Has humanity made conclusions from this? It seems not.

Some days ago our media reported that South Korea and the USA are going

to sign a new agreement on the use of “a peaceful atom”. As for me, I consider that a man should search for the alternative kinds of energy because the use of so called “peaceful atom” is always unsafe. The nuclear disaster at Fukushima nuclear power plant in Japan proves it once more. To my mind, nuclear technology should be abolished. It is very dangerous for mankind.

And what do you think about it?

Group: Machinto

Topic: Chernobyl in the Life of My People

Country: Ukraine

Message:

I have never been to Chernobyl. . . . Chernobyl is not a historic place or a cultural centre. But everybody in Ukraine and even in the world knows it. It is known as the Chernobyl disaster.

The Chernobyl catastrophe happened in April of 1986. Today we realize that this disaster was the result both of the flawed reactor design and of serious mistakes made by the plant operators. It also was a direct consequence of cold war isolation. Four hundred times more radiation was released by the disaster than what had been released by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. The radiation had been later detected in almost all parts of Ukraine. Over one million people have suffered from the radiation. The radiation has caused numerous problems, including Down syndrome, chromosomal aberrations, leukemia, thyroid cancer and birth defects.

I know that apart from increased thyroid cancers, there is evidence of a major public health impact attributable to radiation exposure nearly thirty years after accident.

The radiation has affected all parts of the environment surrounding the plant, killing plants and animals and infecting the soil and groundwater in Ukraine.

Today, radiation levels in Chernobyl are still higher than in the areas surrounding the plant, but have dropped considerably from the levels twenty nine years ago. It is estimated that it will take 20,000 years for the reactor core to be completely safe.

I suppose, people must prefer some other alternative power stations, because health and life are more important and expensive than economic effect.

There are many postings from Russian students. Some talked about the Russian atomic plant disaster too. I took their postings to JEARN's open discussion forum, but unfortunately there were no student replies from Japan.

There were people from many countries participating in this project including Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, India, Indonesia, Iran, Japan, Moldova, New Zealand (Aotearoa), Pakistan, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tunisia, Ukraine, United States of America.

ANNE FRANK Meet & Learn

JEARN keeps thirty-four panels from the ANNE FRANK House in Amsterdam and bring them out in panel exhibitions at schools, universities, and peace museums in Japan. It has added Japanese text on the panel descriptions.

JEARN invites Japanese students to participate in posting reflections on the life of Anne Frank and the situation in Europe regarding the treatment of the Jews during the Second World War. The messages appearing in the website of the Global Campaign for Peace Education Japan (GCEPJ)⁸ mention issues such as Nazism, discrimination, racism, killing; and also human



Anne Frank Meet & Learn.

rights, equality and even the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. JEARN works with GCEPJ on the Anne Frank project.

The following is a reflection of a student from Senri International School of Kwansei Gakuin (Minoh city, Osaka prefecture) who visited the exhibition:⁹

How does one man change the world? (You can choose who that man is in connection to the story or today's study.)

Chiune Sugihara is a Japanese Consul-General in Kaunas who saved over 6000 people of Jewish during WW2. He disobeyed the order from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and issued visa for Jewish people. He had cut down on his sleep to spend more time to issue visa. When Chiune Sugihara left Kaunas, he kept issuing visa until the train [was] leaving. I heard the news that a descendant of Chiune Sugihara and a descendant of Jewish who were helped by Chiune Sugihara were meet each other, and a descendant of Jewish was very thankful to a descendant of Chiune Sugihara few years ago.

Another student from the same school wrote:

What resulted at the end of ww2? What effect do you think this has had on the world?

The United Nations was found[ed] in 1945. On December 10, 1948, the General Assembly of the United Nations adopted and proclaimed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Since that time nearly 200 countries have signed up to the Declaration, and thereby committed themselves to respecting and upholding human rights in their national legislation. I think this [has] effect on only [...] advanced nations. I have lived in Japan, America, and Canada, which are classified [as] advanced nation[s], and in those countries, I lived peacefully and there were no war in [those countries]. However, in the developing countries, there still have war, and people were killed for no reasons. Therefore, I think there still no human right[s] in the developing countries.

JEARN also hosts visiting officials from the ANNE FRANK House in Amsterdam and organizes special activities to allow these officials to speak to students and to other people in schools regarding the life of Anne Frank.

Teddy Bear Project

This project aims to foster tolerance and understanding of different cultures. Classes in Japan are paired with classes in other countries. Once paired, students in the paired classes send each other Teddy Bear or other soft toys by airmail. The bear sends home diary messages by e-mail or through the iEARN Teddy Bear Forum at least once a week. The students write the diary messages as if they were visiting the bear, or describing their experiences in the new culture.

I consider the Teddy Bear project (TBP) as one of the oldest projects in iEARN. I was fascinated learning about it during the 1996 iEARN Annual Conference in Budapest in 1996. Some years later, when the Australian iEARN team was about to stop TBP, I asked to take the role of TBP facilitator under JEARN. Since then, JEARN members have been taking care of TBP matching and supporting activities and over eight hundred TBP couples have been born.

In most cases, a child takes the Teddy Bear home, lets it experience the child's daily life, and reports the experience in a diary. On the next day, another child takes the Teddy Bear home and does the same activities. When all children have written their diaries, they say goodbye to Teddy Bear who goes back to its home country with the diary. It is important for children to receive the diaries and read about the positive news from the Teddy Bear, and not the negative news that newspapers or the TV often report, so that children keeps good memories of the partner country and its people.

The TBP has participants from the following countries: Argentina, Australia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Brazil, Canada, China, Colombia, France, Germany, India, Iran, Iraq, Israel, Italy, Japan, Kenya, Kuwait, Lebanon, Lithuania, Malaysia, Mexico, Moldova, Morocco, Nepal, New Zealand (Aotearoa), Pakistan, Peru, Puerto Rico, Romania, Russia, Slovenia, Spain, Sri Lanka, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Thailand, Tunisia, Turkey, Ukraine, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Vietnam, and Yemen.

Working for a Global Family

In a 2007 interview, I made these statements:¹⁰

We often think that peace comes by through a big power... from someone who has a huge power such as [economic power]. People often wait for peace to come from somewhere else, but I should say that peace is from you and me. And by creating a little

smile and a few lovely words for your friends or other persons around you, that moment gives you peace. iEARN is the place that we learn how to create peace. I love it!

iEARN also promotes the idea of “Global Family” for all.

After twenty or thirty years, when those children grow up and become active members of society, the things learned and experienced through iEARN projects will stay long in their memories as they remember being part of the “Global Family.”

This is what iEARN aims at in promoting involvement in iEARN and its projects by more schools, teachers, and children/students so that the world can listen to their voices through the iEARN forums.

Endnotes

1 Visit the website of the conference for more information: www.jearn.jp/2003conference/.

2 The annual conference had been held in Argentina (1994), Australia (1995), Hungary (1996), Spain (1997), USA (1998), Puerto Rico (1999), Republic of China (2000), Russia (2001), South Africa (2002), Japan (2003), Slovakia (2004), Senegal (2005), Netherlands-Poland (2006), Egypt (2007), Uzbekistan (2008), Morocco (2009), Canada (2010), Taiwan (2011), Virtual Conference (2012), Qatar (2013), Argentine (2014), and Brazil (2015).

3 iEARN big events during the last fifteen years:

- The 10th iEARN Conference & the 7th Youth Summit in Japan (2003)
- NDYS 2005 at Awaji Yume Butai (2005)
- The First iEARN Asia/Pacific Conference in Tokyo (2006)
- iEARN International Conference 2007 in Aichi (2007)
- The Second iEARN Asia/Pacific Conference
- Global Education Future Conference 2007 in Tokyo
- Youth Environmental Summit in Kobe (2008)
- The First Global Education Forum “Jyukugi” in Tokyo (2010)
- The Second Global Education Forum “Jyukugi” in Tokyo
- The Third Global Education Forum “Jyukugi” in Tokyo (2012)
- The Fourth Hyogo Youth Summit
- The 1st AYV Japan Media Festival in Tokyo (2014)
- AYV Create Media Day in Tokyo
- Natural Disaster Youth Summit in TOYOTA city? (2015)
- iEARN International Youth Summit in Kobe
- The 2nd AYV Japan Media Festival in Tokyo
- iEARN Tokyo Kids Program.

4 For more information on iEARN activities in Japan visit www.jearn.jp/eng/index.html. Additional information is available at iEARN website: <https://iearn.org/>.

5 What is Girl Rising?, <http://girlrising.com/faq/what-is-girl-rising/>.

6 Girls Rising, <http://girlrising.com/about-the-film/>.

7 Countries where participants of the Girl Rising Project come from: Armenia, Australia, Brazil, Cameroon, Canada, China, Egypt, France, India, Iran, Japan, Korea (South), Mali, Morocco, Pakistan, Palestine, Qatar, Russia, Senegal, Somalia, Sri Lanka, Suriname, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Tanzania, United States of America, and Yemen.

8 See <http://gcpej.jimdo.com/link/annefrank/> for more details on GCEPJ.

9 See for example the student reflections after seeing the Anne Frank panels in <http://gcpej.jimdo.com/link/annefrank/r7/>.

10 Interview at the 2007 iEARN Annual Conference and Youth Summit, hosted by iEARN-Egypt, <https://iearn.org/testimonials>.