

XXII iEARN Conference and Youth Summit 2015

iEARN empowers teachers and young people to work together online using the Internet and other new communication technologies. Over 2,000,000 students each day engage in collaborative project work worldwide. iEARN provides a platform for teachers and learners to communicate, apply and share knowledge. The iEARN conference was held at ESAF School of Finance and Administration in Brasilia.



Delegates arrived on Sunday mid-day and were warmly welcomed by the conference organizers. Registration started after dinner for the delegates who had arrived on Sunday and it continued Monday morning after breakfast. A total of thirty-five countries were represented by the delegates who attended the conference. The conference started with a performance by a youth group which sang the Brazilian National anthem followed by a skype video conference plenary by Peter Copen (founder of iEARN). In his plenary, Mr Cohen emphasized the importance of unity in making the world a better place for all. He briefly stated and explained the three themes of the conference which were inclusive education, cross-cultural communication and transformation. He encouraged the implementation of inclusive education as it provides a sense of purpose and meaning to learners with disabilities. He then proceeded to mention these perspectives. Schools ought to have a plan to support teachers and students through good inclusive practices like collaboration, team work, innovative instructional practices and peer-strategies. Cross-cultural communication is an essential exercise and it goes beyond listening and talking. He urged all the delegates that through new experiences, they should be encouraged to change and make something different to better their lives. Few teachers were then invited to share their testimonials about how iEARN transformed their lives. Overall, they spoke of their experiences in acquiring technological skills with the courtesy of iEARN i.e. how to use videos and software in class, how they also learnt creativity with their learners, virtual communication and diversity. Three special people were awarded for the vital roles they played in the process of growing iEARN as an organization. They were: Lisa Jobson of the USA, Ed Gragert, Cathy Healy and Professor Yoko Takagi from Japan.

David Young, Executive Director of VIF International Education, one of the keynote speakers, spoke of the benefits of participating in global education as it focusses on the world as a whole. He mentioned that teaching students to have a global perspective prepares them to be more successful as it expands student's awareness of the world and prepares them for success in an increasingly interconnected global marketplace. Learners love learning about different parts of the world thus teachers need to be trained on global learning and it should be integrated in the curriculum. Digital badges or certificates should be awarded to learners as a form of encouragement.



www.vifprogram.com

The second day of the conference Diane Midness, a volunteer who works with students in iEARN projects, shared a presentation titled "Where do I begin". She provided steps on how delegates can register on the collaboration center and these were:

- 1) Registering on iEARN website: <https://collaborate.iearn.org/login>
- 2) Learning about existing projects on the iEARN project book and project database.
- 3) Considering language, relevance to students or school curriculum, age of learners when choosing a project.
- 4) Making contact with project facilitator and introducing students in the project forum.
- 5) Reviewing etiquette and expectations – teachers get students involved by reviewing posts from other students and to respond to them. Encouraging them to learn new vocabulary of other languages.

6) Starting off at a slow pace by sharing special and typical days through text, photos, audio and videos or Kindred family history project, oral history on themes ranging from migration to sport.

Another presentation by five learners Ayako, Yuki, Mami, Yulia and Nagisa from Japan who shared a story of Professor Yoko Takagi's childhood in Japan during the first and second world war. Margaret Riel presented on the need for more Action research. She described action research as taking small steps towards change. She shared her goal of wanting her learners to perform well on the required state assessments. Her research focused on learning new skills and ways to teach vocabulary, and for learners to use these skills in reading and writing as this is essential for children to progress in reading and writing. In order for learners to engage in global projects, iEARN, a strong foundation in literacy skills needed to be established; through the action research and focusing on smaller parts of the whole for example add letter "L" to the "word" and it becomes "world". Children can grasp the world through use of metacognitive strategies – thinking about their thinking and concentrating on direct teaching of vocabulary, students communicated better with their iEARN learning circles.



Free to choose- create was a talk by Miguel Gomes who works for an organization called Anne Frank House. An organization that develops educational programs and products with the aim of raising young people's awareness of the dangers of anti-Semitism, racism and discrimination and the importance of freedom, equal rights and democracy. The organization encourages students to create videos or films about their human rights. The aim is to develop and distribute educational programs and products that provide inspiration and connect with the experiences of young people all over the world. The life story of Anne Frank always forms the basis for these initiatives. Anti-Semitism, prejudice, unequal treatment and the denial of civil rights played a crucial role in the life story of Anne Frank. The Anne Frank House opens up these themes for discussion, with the aim of raising awareness and changing attitudes among young people.

The third day of the conference was a full day tour. The South African delegates visited to the Metropolitan Cathedral, TV Tower, Juscelino Kubitschek Memorial, Army General Headquarters, the Congress Building and the Dom Bosco Chapel on the waters' edge of Lake Paranoá



President JK Memorial



Metropolitan Cathedral designed by Oscar Niemeyer

On the fourth day, Eileen Cronin the author of *Mermaid: A memoir of resilience* delivered a fantastic keynote. She started off speaking about the effects of the drug Thalidomide in her hometown of Cincinnati which caused many birth defects in the USA and other parts of the world. This drug was given to her mum to help with her queasiness during her pregnancy and resulted in her being born with no legs. She spoke of the many parents at the time who sent their kids away to live in an orphanage across the river-kept away from others and cites herself as lucky as her parents did not send her away. She went on to speak of her ordeal as a child to accept her disability and spent the majority of her youth trying to blend in and pretend she did not have a disability. Gradually, she discovered that she could accept and cope with her disability. She is now helping people with disabilities to understand and to cope with them. As quoted in the Washington post, "Her grit, grace and optimism are a lesson to anyone confronted by a severe challenge. She approached awkward situations with humor and poise rather than humiliation. Cronin's strength, tenacity and wry humor led her to a full, successful life."

Lucia Willadino Braga, a neuroscientist, neuropsychologist, clinical researcher and author was the next keynote. She presented on how the brain works and how literacy develops the brain. As one grows older, memory starts to decline, processing speed slows down and working memory stores less information. The best approach is to stay mentally active, learn new things for example, learn a new language or music or play musical instruments. Learning new facts stimulates the brain and a well-developed brain can be less likely to be active and hence doing crosswords is not necessarily keeping you mentally active.

Mohamed Sidibay a teacher in US, who is an ambassador of peace in the My Hero project shared his story of how both his parents were killed by the RUF in front of him. He was kidnapped and trained as a child soldier in his country Sierra Leone for seven years. He spoke

about how his life changed when he met Andrew Greene who introduced him to the resources of a local iEARN Center. He talked about how important balancing past with the present is and that teachers should have the ability to understand, translate and transform. He put emphasis on people to not focus on analyzing our differences because we are the same and the only difference is our place of birth. Smiling is what makes us human, he said, and we all need someone who believes in us. He would like to work with organizations such as the United Nations, to prevent international conflicts and make sure that no other children are forced to become soldiers as he was. [Watch his story here](#)

Another exciting project for the day by Rhimma Zhukova was a local history project where learners research the history of their communities and share their findings with their global peers. The goal was to help to teach learners how to care about the places they live and for them to appreciate historical and cultural environment. By doing that learners would also appreciate historical heritage of the past and present whilst at the same time developing their research skills, academic skills, thinking, reasoning and teamwork skills as well as ICT skills. The local history project served the goals of iEARN and enables youth and teachers to collaborate locally and globally using technology to enhance learning and making a difference in their communities.

On the closing plenary keynote speaker Nadine Gasman took a stand and talked under a topic the “Brave is not the violent” campaign. She works with gender equality in schools. Her campaign has educational talks about issues and laws of violence, discrimination against women. Since the campaign the statistics of abused woman and violence dropped. Schools should be a platform for reproduction of values and bring change in society. The initiative brave but not violent teaches boys how to take care of families and make them care to stop violence and bullying. Teaches and raise boys that can express themselves without aggression and encourages consolidation policies within the education system that addresses human rights. Read more on the initiatives www.onumulheres.org

The last keynote speaker was Edwin Gragert – Taking the lead in addressing Global issues. He referred to 2015 as the key year and shared that the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) have now been expanded to 17 sustainability development goals (SDGs). This will be tabled for discussion in September 2015, when the current MDG goals are reviewed. This is important as the SDGs are now meant to be achieved by ALL countries and not just the emerging economies. Ed challenged all delegates to come up with iEARN projects that will contribute towards changing the world making it a better place. They sustainability development goals are as follows:

- End poverty in all its forms everywhere
- End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition and promote sustainable agriculture
- Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all ages

- Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all
- Achieve gender equality and empower all woman and girls
- Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all
- Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all
- Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all
- Build resilient infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation
- Reduce inequality within and among countries
- Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable
- Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns
- Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts
- Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development
- Strengthen the mean of implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development



The next iEARN in 2016 will be held in Pune, India between the 3-8 July and the theme is Fostering Quality in Education.

