

# Student EMPOWERMENT

## Path to Global Student Empowerment

Upon reflection, my life has been dedicated to empowering students through education in the international school setting. Our family thrived in this positive environment. Yet, there was often one area that caused us and many of those like us consternation. When someone posed what appeared to be a simple question, "Where are you from?" It was often not easy to answer for those of us living in this international and often transient world. Then just a few years ago, we began to see importance and accuracy of recognizing that we are really "global citizens." It is surprising that this revelation was so long in coming!

By using "global" to effectively describe our "citizenship", our students and members of the international community, we alleviated an area of dissonance in our lives and replace it with empowerment. As Jean-Francois Rischard, author of *High Noon*, affirms that this "global citizen first mindset" is imperative as we begin to address the



**GIN Conference  
Western Academy,  
Beijing, 2008**

ing to recognize our shared global citizenship. As Global Citizens, it becomes clear that it is our responsibility to work to create a more cohesive and collaborative planet both environmentally and socially.

By Linda C. Sills

Then a keynote address changed my life. After listening intently to Jean-Francois Rischard at the EARCOS Administrators Conference in Bangkok 2006, I immediately became an ardent supporter of his ideas on the importance and his rationale for creating a Global Issues Network. Everyone in the audience was deeply inspired. Since then both Jean-Francois and Clayton Lewis have generously and ably served as my mentors.

In Bangkok, on behalf of EARCOS, I took the challenge and offered to organize the first Global Issues Network and Conference for students and advisers from around the world attending our international schools. We chose Western Academy Beijing in 2008 to host the first GIN Conference in our region and International School Bangkok in 2009. The Chinese International School in Hong Kong will be hosting 2010. <http://earcosgin.ning.com/>

Also upon reflection, I have observed a dramatic change in the international school culture in response to our need to urgently address these global issues. For many years, in light of our schools educating international students from every part of the world with diverse cultural beliefs, we worked hard to instill a universal sense of acceptance of all of the individuals around us. We did not often encourage our students to be openly strident or vocal. With our students' involvement in the Global Issues Network (GIN), many of our global international students have been able to find their "voice"! It now seems critical to stand up in a unified way and have these voices be heard when it comes to addressing global issues.

The Global Issues Network and GIN Conference are about recognizing and the potential and power found in our international school communities. It is about sharing concerns and seeking possible solutions. We have long been closely nurturing connected. This is a very important virtue as well as strength and enables us to easily create a viable and sustainable network.



**EARTH'S HOPE-delegates collaborating on the global issues.**

We are all aware that our world has many issues that must be addressed immediately. The Global Issues Network ideology has been adopted and is so well suited for our international students for just that purpose. It truly empowers students to tackle an environmental problem with other members of their school, community or world to seek sustainable solutions using the network. Specifically, the Global Issues Network Conference empowers all of the delegates by treating students, advisers and presenters as peers. Each has the opportunity as well as responsibility to present. Presenters are of all ages with a variety of interests which also empowers as this allows each delegate to "find their own puzzle piece" as 17-year-old Ryan Hreljac, <http://www.ryanswell.org>, recommended to us in Bangkok. Each voice is equal. Many have the opportunity to be heard especially this year with the introduction of the GIN Film

**"Global citizenship"  
replaces dissonance  
with empowerment.**

# for COMMUNITY Enhancement

Festival allowing each school to share with all of the conference delegates their projects through film. These films are all posted on the GIN website <http://earcosgin.ning.com/video>. Ongoing discussion groups were formed to allow students to form bonds that will serve them well as they continue work together and to network.

Many of us marvel at the degree of empowerment that seems to come from being involved in the Global Issues Network and Conference for the students, the advisers and school community. We are in awe to observe this kind of sustainable energy, sense of purpose, enthusiasm and empowerment coming from one's participation in a variety of the GIN efforts. You can read student's first hand accounts in this edition of *InterEd* or see them in a panel discussion at the upcoming AAIE Conference. "Helping students to realize they can make a difference by empowering them to work



**We Can. We Will.**

with their peers internationally to develop solutions for global issues" is becoming a reality and a genuine sense of empowerment. To quote Jean- Francois Rischard at the conclusion of the first EARCOS Global Issues Network Conference held in Beijing where we were honored to have him as a keynote speaker, "This is profound!!!"

We know that clearly demonstrating to these students that we believe in them will empower them for life. The students know that they can and will make a difference because they have seen it with each success creating a difference thanks to the Global Issues Network and Conference. Being ac-

tive participants in their world creates a long lasting sense of worth and empowerment. They also work together virtually by registering as members of the GIN network and interacting with one another. This network proves to be very effective before and after the conference. We have promised that the network will remain viable in perpetuity! This is our future! Remaining connected to others who care deeply is an important source of energy.

The theme for the second EARCOS Global Issues Network Conference in Bangkok—"We can. We will."—demonstrates the feeling of empowerment that is now clearly within! ■

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