1. The Beginning

The idea for this project began with the incredible courage of a young girl in Pakistan, Malala Yousafzai. Her story inspired me to think about the importance of education for young girls, and I thought that it was an important topic for students to discuss. As a result, I sought the help of Ed Gragert, the executive director of iEARN, to begin work on a collaborative project. (IEARN is a non-profit organization made up of over 30,000 schools and youth organizations in more than 140 countries. They provide a safe and structured environment in which young people can communicate online, as well as educational projects that can be easily incorporated into a classroom. Every project is designed to serve as an answer to the question: “How will this project improve the quality of life on the planet?”) Ed Gragert suggested the film Girl Rising, a documentary about the remarkable lives of various young girls who rose up against all odds. Thus, the Girl Rising film project was started in 2014, and through a partnership with GCE-US (Global Campaign for Education - US), members of iEARN can contact the project facilitators to receive a copy of the movie DVD for free.

2. Purpose and Method

The goal of this project is to teach the importance of education for young girls, and to watch and discuss the film Girl Rising. The students were asked to pay close attention to the tales of the various girls in the film and to think about the struggles of the characters in the film. Then, the students participated in an online forum dedicated to discussions about the film. On it, they shared their thoughts and impressions of the film with students from around the world. They also discussed other issues, like poverty, equality of opportunity, gender inequality, and more, which were also featured in the film. Eventually, we were able to hold a Skype meeting with a class from another country, and we were able to have an active conversation about the film and its many important topics. In past years we had skype conferences with schools in India, Australia and the U.S.

3. Activity Content

In 2016 twenty-five 12th grade students participated in this project in Global Studies. Starting in October, we watched the film Girl Rising about various, impoverished girls in Cambodia, Haiti, Nepal, and Afghanistan. Afterwards, on an online forum dedicated to the movie, the students were able to search for ongoing discussion groups with foreign students who had also watched the movie. Together with these foreign students, our students were able to deepen their learning and understanding by engaging in discussions about the film and its many important issues. Our students enjoyed sharing their thoughts and opinions with others. Furthermore, in class, we
continued to learn about the serious living conditions that still exist for young girls in many parts of the world. We studied this so that we could have a better understanding of the great difficulties facing our world today. The girls in the film served as great role models for our students as well. Through their valiant actions, and through dedication to following their dreams, these young girls showed us the importance of never giving up, even in times of immense difficulty. This message resonated with our students, who learned of the importance of standing up for what they feel is right. The effect of this Girl Rising project is that it creates a sense of mutual connection between students despite the physical borders that separate them. Also, it instills in each of them the sense of being part of a global community. Finally, by watching the DVD in English, and expressing their thoughts and opinions in English, and working on projects in English, they were able to improve their English ability.

4. Reflection

In the past we attempted this project, we ran into an issue due to time differences. For example, it was difficult to find the right time to interact with a partner from abroad. As a result, we determined it was necessary to post to the Teacher’s Forum and the Girl Rising Forum in advance stating that we are interested in finding a school for collaboration. Last year, students from the US and Taiwan delivered their comments in January, long after our students had posted their opinions. In order to avoid such a time gap, we determined it was necessary to confirm with other schools in advance and to create a schedule by e-mail. We took such precautions this year, and so we were able to have lively and engaging exchanges with an American high school third year class in April of 2017. During the exchanges, not only were the contents of Girl Rising raised, but also the details of each other’s home country, culture, fashion, school life, etc. The students were even able to sit down together and have a Skype video chat with one another. It all worked out marvelously well.

5. Student Testimonial

“We often hear about the conflicts with human and women’s rights that occur in Afghanistan and the Middle East, but watching the film Girl Rising was the first time I encountered these issues with my own eyes. Experiencing these issues in this way brought a tight feeling to my chest. However, I also felt a faint sense of hope in the battle against the discrimination of women by watching this documentary. I think that the ‘culture’ of one country is formed by the people who live in that particular country, and so I think that before a ‘cultural transformation’ is achieved, it is necessary for them to undergo a change in their way of thinking. Therefore, forcing a unilateral transformation from the outside (foreigners invading inwards) only causes ‘cultural friction,’ which poses a danger as it may lead to a worsening of the conditions for women in those regions. I think that it is better for foreign countries to support a champion of women’s rights from within the region itself. Those individuals need our support and to know that an active global community is available to help them if they are in need.”