

GLOBALORIA FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

1. What is Globaloria?

It's a social network for learning—an online program (www.globaloria.org) that invites students and educators to master the tools of social media technology as they learn how to create their own web games, produce wikis, and publish blogs. They do all this individually and in collaboration with others via an activity-driven, networked learning community.

Think of it as a social network in which members learn how to build a web game “by doing it” and share their ideas, questions and progress using the latest digital communication technology. That makes Globaloria a pathway to what everybody is talking about these days: digital literacy.

2. What are ‘social media technologies’? And what is ‘digital literacy’?

Simply put, social media technologies are the new internet tools that enable people to create and edit information—in the form of words, photos, videos, animations, games, etc.—as a way to share experiences with one another on the web, thus creating a community of shared meaning.

Social media can take many different forms—from the collectively editable reference site Wikipedia (www.wikipedia.org), to the popular social networks like Facebook (www.facebook.com) or MySpace (www.myspace.com), to video- or photo-sharing sites like YouTube (www.youtube.com) and Flickr (<http://www.flickr.com>), to online personal organizers like Plaxo (<http://www.plaxo.com>) that include a range of digital features. All of these platforms are open for anyone to join; users just create a personal account and participate—individually and collaboratively.

Once you've learned how to use these social media tools as both a reader and writer—that is, as someone who contributes as well as observes—you're digitally literate. When you're posting your own videos—and not just watching other people's, or when you're publishing your own Wikipedia article—and not just reading existing articles, you're probably comfortable in the web 2.0 environment.

In the Web 1.0 environment of the 1990s, most people were just consumers of Internet content who shopped, surfed, looked up information, sent and received email. But with the new tools of Web 2.0, everyone can become active creators of experience—and can share it all with others in real time.

3. Why do kids need to know these technologies? Why is it essential to be digitally literate?

Because this kind of interactive digital communication through online social networks increasingly defines the way the world works. It's the way businesses operate, the way we shop and access services, the way we are entertained, and the way we participate as citizens.

Understanding these tools and being able to put them to work effectively—achieving “digital literacy”—is essential for citizenship and success in the 21st century. It's the new reading and writing, and it's basic. *Everyone* needs to know about social media technologies, especially today's young people.

Even more to the point, these technologies are **essential learning tools**. Kids learn better—and are better prepared to keep on learning—when they are comfortable using these social media and can read and write with the new web 2.0 tools.

4. I thought these social media were just that—*social*—so kids could meet others and have fun online. How does digital literacy help them learn?

Researchers have found that one of the most critical factors for students' educational success is the ability to *study in groups*. Students learn more, are more engaged in their studies, and are better prepared for class when they can question, answer, and discuss their ideas with others. In this kind of social learning, children learn new knowledge by “constructing” it, just as you learned your mother tongue by growing up speaking it.

What's more, participating with others—peers and experts alike—is like becoming an apprentice in the subject you're studying. You observe, emulate what you see, and eventually contribute your own value. You construct your own original ideas and projects, and you share them with others who construct their own. These exchanges are crucial for your learning.

Many scientists, architects, engineers, writers, and other professionals are now collaborating online on a regular basis as they create new theories, program software; write books; do medical research; craft policies; and rethink old assumptions. This is precisely what happens in Globaloria. Students work together in a common space, on the network, and create their own games. They share ideas, resources, and game files—and participate in each other's design process. In so doing, they actually *practice* the essential contemporary learning abilities that digital literacy requires.

5. How does Globaloria “teach” this new level of digital literacy?

Through construction, interaction, and play. Globaloria is effectively a game-making network, with a built in curriculum, where students learn “by doing.” What they are “doing” is collaborating with others to build original web games and simulations; and in order to do this, they have to master the technologies of using and creating digital media, wikis, and blogs. So they do.

What they are really learning are the abilities to play with and originate digital content—that is, to write as well as read digitally, to express themselves systematically and creatively in a networked community, and to innovate and collaborate at once using social networks and social media technology. These are the very skills needed to be productive, successful 21st-century citizens. That's what people at Google do, for example; that's how they work. And that's how people at research universities work. That's how global organizations operate. That's how successful political campaigns are managed. So at the same time that it is teaching digital literacy, Globaloria is also teaching kids how to flourish in the community-style work environments they'll encounter when they leave school.

We've identified six topics or themes for our Globaloria network platforms, aimed at forming six purposeful, goal-oriented global communities of young people. Right now, three networks are operational and being tested in beta version: My G(lobal)Life, in which students from around the world collaborate to innovate educational games for fun; My S(cience)Life, in which students create games and simulations on the subject of global warming; and My H(ealth)Life, in which students create games and animations about living a healthy life. Still to come are networked communities about art, mathematics, and human rights—MyALife, MyMLife, and MyRLife.

6. How did we decide on which technology tools and programs to use in Globaloria?

The World Wide Workshop is committed to using the same preferred media technology and tools being used by millions of people around the world. This is because we aim to empower students to participate in today's most active networks, so they learn and lead in the 21st century global knowledge economy. In other words, Globaloria is real-world, hands-on learning for real-world applications.

As such, we carefully chose technology and tools such as Flash (Adobe), MediaWiki (Wikipedia), Blogger (Google) and WebEx (Cisco) that are the current worldwide industry-standards, with a very large community of practitioners (and learners), and offering the greatest potential for professional opportunity to our students. We make learning to navigate and take advantage of these and other existing social networking tools a central focus of the Globaloria curriculum. For example, students are using social media applications like Flickr and YouTube to store and share images and videos, and GoogleDocs to work collaboratively on writing, planning or preparing spreadsheets. This knowledge and skills will facilitate viral social networking, active online participation in education, and socially-responsible civic engagement that will benefit our students for years to come.

7. Who can participate in Globaloria?

Any school or learning institution with a rather small budget, a passion for transforming education with technology, and a robust technological infrastructure can offer Globaloria to its students. More specifically, this means having governors, superintendents, principals, teachers, educators and administrators who are enthusiastic and committed to improving their technological knowledge, skills and content learning, and leveraging technology for education modernization and excellence.

Students and educators must be first and foremost ready to commit six to eight hours a week to learning, creating and collaborating online using the Globaloria curriculum, tools and networks. It also means each student having access to a laptop/PC with high-speed internet and the necessary software (i.e., Browser, Flash, Photo Editing, MediaWiki) to develop their own original social-issue web games. If your school, group, or club meets these criteria and is interested in implementing a Globaloria pilot please send an email to info@worldwideworkshop.org.

8. What is the mission of the Globaloria West Virginia pilot program?

Our goal is to develop a successful educational model for statewide implementation of the MyGLife network. The West Virginia pilot program consists of the technology platforms and wiki-based tools for students and educators, the game-design curriculum, and professional development programs.

Specifically, that means that in the pilot:

- We are developing and testing a robust and scalable Web 2.0 platform and social network with open-source, virtual learning tools (websites, wikis, blogs, tutorials, and virtual support tools)
- We are creating and testing—and thus continually improving—our comprehensive game-design curriculum using Flash programming software
- We are training educators and school administrators in all aspects of this complex and innovative educational program.

The pilot has been running since the fall of 2007 in middle schools, high schools, vocational schools, community colleges, and alternative education programs. Now in our second pilot year, the program has tripled in size, reaching more than 350 students and educators in 14 schools across the state.

The ultimate mission is to advance the state's students and educators in their 21st century skills quickly and effectively, creating a program that has been proven effective and that will eventually be used by everyone everywhere in West Virginia's schools, colleges, and homes.

9. Why West Virginia?

The state's legendary commitment to educational improvement and its household income statistics make it the perfect place to pilot Globaloria.

With significantly lower median household, and per capita, income than the rest of the country, and with a higher poverty level, West Virginia represents an opportunity to close not just one but two digital divides. The first is the digital divide defined by access—or lack of access—to the Internet. It is a rural state, and so far, not widely wired; meaning most citizens are not yet using high-speed Internet in their homes. As a result, they lack the contemporary skills and practices for creating media and actively participating in the various social networks. They are lagging behind and need help.

The second digital divide is defined by digital literacy, by the ability to participate in the power and potential of the Internet—to create as well as consume digital content. Globaloria can help West Virginians bridge both divides while educating students in the competencies that are critical for the state's economic development—and for their competitive posture in the world of tomorrow.

Globaloria also aims at contributing to the State's economic development and job creation. It may help create a software development and game-design industry down the road, with local talent participating virtually in the national and global knowledge economy.

10. How is the Globaloria West Virginia pilot structured?

The pilot is being conducted by the World Wide Workshop Foundation in partnership with the WV Office of the Governor—eagerly championed by First Lady Gayle C. Manchin and the West Virginia Center for Professional Development (WV-CPD). In 2008, we recruited a small local team of professionals to work closely with our partners and educators to ensure their success and the growth of the program statewide.

11. How is the Globaloria West Virginia pilot being funded?

Seed funding for the pilot was provided by West Virginia Governor Joe Manchin III in July 2007, supplemented by grants from the Benedum Foundation in September 2007, and from Verizon West Virginia in January 2008. In the second pilot year, thanks to the collaborative efforts of WV-CPD and the World Wide Workshop, funding for the program was increased by 30 percent among the same funders as those in PY1. The World Wide Workshop Foundation and Dr. Idit Caperton and her husband, former Governor Gaston Caperton (1988-1996), have also sponsored the Globaloria-WV pilots.

12. How is it going in West Virginia?

Very well indeed. The program runs concurrently with the academic year. In the first pilot, conducted in 2007-2008, seven groups, 18 educators and 89 students participated, representing middle school, high school, community college and alternative educational communities. In the second pilot, 2008-2009, the size of the project has tripled to include 14 participating groups, 30 educators, and more than 300 students throughout the state, and is poised to triple again in Pilot Year 3. In expanding to new locations and new participants, the pilot project assiduously retains connections with the original participant groups, building on our first-year relationships with new game projects, internships, and mentorship opportunities.

Beyond the numbers, the Globaloria pilot has tapped a vital vein of student motivation, unleashing exciting creativity even as it teaches the skills that will be essential to these students as they advance and grow. Ask the six high school girls who created a video game for planning and budgeting a prom. Or the young men and women at the technical college whose game stages a snowboarding race down a mountain. They haven't just learned key tools of digital literacy; they've also widened the horizon of their individual possibilities.

13. What are the other pilots in addition to the ones in West Virginia?

In the past year, we have launched two other pilot networks, **My Health Life** (www.MyHLife.org) and **My Science Life** (www.MySLife.org), in two very different contexts and locations. MyHLife.org was tested in a six-month summer camp in New Orleans. MySLife.org was tested in a four-month corporate environment, with volunteers joining the learning network from China, Mexico, Brazil, Russia, and the USA. We then tested it with students and educators from Saudi Arabia, Russia, Malaysia, and Trinidad. Below is a brief description of each of these two pilots.

MyHLife.org is an online platform within the Globaloria networks that allows students to create interactive web games focused on such health issues as nutrition, exercise, HIV/AIDS, or malaria prevention. Through game-making, students can research and explore issues that affect them and their communities while improving their 21st-century skills.

In the summer of 2008, we piloted MyHLife with 10 students aged 10 to 17 from the Rethink Camp in New Orleans. They worked together to create a web game advocating a healthier cafeteria and healthier lifestyles in New Orleans Public Schools. Their voices matter when it come to their health; we gave them a means to voice their powerful opinions and ideas through MyHLife.org and its curriculum.

MySLife an online platform within the Globaloria networks that allows students to make interactive web games and simulations focused on science. In partnership with Schlumberger-SEED, we taught participants from around the world how to design and develop animated illustrations, interactive simulations, and simulation games in Flash. In our initial 2008 pilot year, the participants—corporate volunteers and high-school students—focused on global climate and alternative energy. While enjoying the fun of creating scientific simulations, participants were also able to master 21st-century learning skills and to explore climate and energy subjects that affect them and the world around them.

14. When will the results of the pilot implementations be officially published?

We are constantly in the process of analyzing data and writing reports. In 2008, we issued our first series of reports on Globaloria-WV Pilot Year 1 (MyGLife.org pilot) and the Globaloria-Rethinkers summer camp in New Orleans (MyHLife.org pilot), and will soon issue a report on the year-long international pilot with Schlumberger Corporation (MySLife.org pilot).

We are especially interested in assessing students' development of what we call the Six Contemporary Learning Abilities (6 CLAs) through their participation in Globaloria. Examples of students' games and video case studies are already available on our foundation's website, www.WorldWideWorkshop.org. Reports include pre- and post-program survey results, exemplary case studies, wiki analytics, evaluations of students' final game projects and their game presentations, and comparisons of student performance across different pilot locations, as related to varying procedures in the schools where we have implemented Globaloria to date. Our research has led us to develop new best practices in teaching, learning, and research. We also applied many changes and fixes in Pilot Year 2. For research reports and selected case studies, please send an email to info at worldwideworkshop.org.

15. Who or what is the World Wide Workshop Foundation?

We're a nonprofit foundation, created in 2004 by Dr. Idit Harel Caperton, an MIT scientist and entrepreneur known for her research, publications, and internet media products and services for children and youth around the world. The foundation team is composed of experienced experts in web and game design, education, and nonprofit work, who create technology-infused programs and networks for contemporary learning and teaching.

Our aim is to use open-source applications of social media technology, and game production curriculum, to enhance learning, innovation, entrepreneurship, and an understanding of the world in economically-disadvantaged and technologically-underserved communities. We share a strong commitment to the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals for education, and to the 1:1 computing movement to provide every child with a laptop. Our work offers a model for purposeful learning within any 1:1 computing environment, using Web 2.0 methods and tools to present new possibilities for learning, creativity, communication, and collaboration.