

2007 BridgeBuilder Award



Comments from Motria Melnyk, 2007 BridgeBuilder Award Honoree

It is truly an honor to be here. I would like to thank Racebridges, the Chicago Province of the Society of the Divine Word, Father Derek and Sue Halloran for this recognition. I would also like to thank everyone who is here celebrating this event with me... my family, friends, colleagues from Meadowbrook School and of course all the children, their moms and dads.

Every child comes into this world with their heart open for love and acceptance. Yet as these children grow they are at times exposed to intolerance. Each and every child is important to the future of our world. They will impact our world. Therefore it is our responsibility to plant those seeds of tolerance, acceptance and respect for self and others. These intangible, immeasurable qualities will guide these children through life and make this world a better place.

For the last 5 years the children in my classes in Meadowbrook School have been involved in an ongoing very exciting project with children of Harmony School in Kyiv, Ukraine.

I must say, I feel very fortunate to work in District 28, where the focus is on the whole child, where resources are readily available and where teachers are greatly supported. This support enables projects like Dialogue Across the Ocean to grow and blossom. I would also like to thank Darlene Andre and Bruce Ahlborn. Their expertise in technology was integral in the development of this project.

It may be hard to imagine first and second graders engaged in an international project, but these little people are truly ambassadors.

Our conversations with Harmony School started on a conference site on the web through writing to each other. Many very, very important questions were asked and answered: For instance:

Is there a McDonald's in Kyiv?
Are the buildings in Chicago really that tall?
Did you ever see Michael Jordan?

Children shared experiences and stories about their lives drawing them closer together, and a bond of friendship was being created across the ocean by two countries, two cities and two schools of one world. This enabled the discovery, realization and learning about the diversities and similarities of culture and life in two countries across the ocean. What better way to start growing as world citizens?

I had the opportunity to travel to visit Harmony School in Kyiv several times. The students there were so curious about life in the United States - their questions were never ending. After one of my visits, I created a video that portrays children of two cultures teaching one another about their flags and their cities, in which they share their thoughts, their language, and their songs.

Our project continued to grow and we were fortunate to see one another through videoconference. The first time we videoconferenced, the children were in disbelief - they couldn't believe they were seeing children on the other side of the world. After we finished our videoconference, I overheard a student saying, "They are just like us!"

I recall during another videoconference, a child from Kyiv greeted one of the children here using the term "druzhe". In the Ukrainian language it means "friend."

During the holiday season we shared traditions about our different holidays and sang songs and carols together all through video conferencing.

Yes, these are 7 and 8 year old children but they are initiating conversation about diversity, respecting and valuing all people as equal and different. They are developing in their roles as world citizens.

Truly, this Bridgebuilder Award is for all the children that have been involved in this project, for children are natural bridgebuilders. They are bridgebuilders through their enthusiasm, curiosity and acceptance... and they are our future! Thank you.

