

Innovative Practices Connecting Classrooms through Asynchronous and Asynchronous Technology

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Abstract

The aim of this project was to integrate the technology in low-tech classrooms, particularly in rural government schools. Most of the teachers complain that students studying in rural India are not exposed to enough English so, this innovative practice helps to get connected with the native speakers using technology. During our project, we connected the classroom of the United States (US) with the classroom in India using a technology tool called Padlet. We made a plan of action for 7 weeks. We designed activities like, introducing each other on the online collaborative wall by posting three sentences, out of those three one is a lie. The students were asked to identify the lie and comment on it. This continued for two weeks. After two weeks they were asked to write a review on a film which they have seen recently and asked to read and comment on at least two or three students. This continued for about two more weeks. During the last two weeks, we worked on a Backpack project. Students were encouraged to read the reports or articles on backpacks and collect the information in their own country's context. After collecting information using the internet they prepared presentations and presented them to their class. Their presentations were recorded and shared with the US students. US students also filmed their presentations and shared with us. We came to the conclusion that the students are engaged meaningfully by integrating technology in the classroom. Students got an opportunity to interact with native speakers. This project also helped us to learn and understand US culture based on the reviews written by them. We also learned that students learn better when they are engaged in collaborative tasks with their peers. Technology played a vital role in our collaboration. Most of my students are not good at using technology but this project made them learn to browse the internet and started using Padlet effectively.

Keywords: Connecting Classrooms, Padlet, Collaborating, Blended learning, Technology Integration

Introduction

Technology has helped to connect the classrooms globally. Learning and sharing happens everywhere and classroom boundaries get widened. Technology helps us to prepare as

global citizens. Our project focused on how technology can be integrated asynchronously using web.2.0 tools. We also concentrated on learning happens everywhere, not only in the closed classrooms. We have tried to break the

traditional way of teaching within the four walls of the classroom.

About our project

This project was taken with the initiation of Know my world. This is an NGO work for Global Education. This project was taken as part of a virtual exchange program. A virtual meeting was organized to connect with the US teachers for our planning and designing of the project. In the project, we connected our classroom with the classrooms of the United States using technology. During the project, we collaborated with the teacher in the US and prepared a timeline to work together for about 7 weeks and we used the online collaboration tool Padlet for our project. During our project, it was agreed to work on the main theme culture and digital exchange and the sub-themes like, compare and contrast and problem-solving techniques.

Objectives of the Project

- To understand the cultures of two countries.
- To make the students responsible citizens.
- Going out of classroom walls.
- Break the classroom walls using technology.
- Integrating technology in ESL teaching.
- Creating connections to understand the cultures.
- Incorporating 21st century skills like collaborating, Creating, Problem-solving into the ESL classroom using

technology.

- Cross-Cultural exchange provides an opportunity to learn about other cultures and beliefs, cultivates empathy and understanding, and promotes tolerance and peace.
- To bring the world into the classroom.

Collaborating teachers and their background

P. Vinayadhar Raju is an English language teacher working in Telangana state government school. He has been teaching English since 2002. He works at ZPHS Jangapally in Karimnagar district. He is a continuous learner and tech-savvy, good at using technology but works at the low-tech environment. His students don't have an internet facility at home and school and no proper computer lab even at school so, he used his own laptop, tab and mobile phone for this project. The class strength was 60. Most of his students were from rural India. The medium of instruction in his school is English and Telugu. Class 9 students were chosen for this project who belong to 14 to 16 years age group.

Tanya Washington works at Honor Roll School, Texas in the United States of America. She involved her 6th grades in the project. Their school is well equipped with technology. Every student in the class is provided with a Chromebook. Her students are good at using technology and technological devices. Most of the students' mother tongue is English. One interesting thing is that there were students of Indian origin in her class. They participated very actively in our project and showed

a lot of enthusiasm. Their class strength was 50 and they were aged between 10 to 14 years.

Subject: Culture and Digital Exchange

Planning meetings

We planned our project by organizing synchronous meetings through online conference tools like zoom and Hangout. In our online meetings, we discussed our two-weeks plan of action at a time and prepared a timeline. We are from different time zones so we used whenisgood.net to plan our online meetings.

Technology Used

Padlet: It is an online asynchronous collaborative wall where, we can create our collaborative wall and share with anyone who we want to work with. We can also protect it with a password to maintain the privacy of our work. Padlet supports different ways to express our thoughts by posting text, audio and videos files, URLs, uploading files, embedded content and pictures. It also supports exporting our content to pdfs and excel sheets. Collaborative walls can be shared with friends and colleagues using the social media button.

Timeline

Dates	Week	Description	Notes
Oct. 22-26	1	Introduction	Students will post a formal introduction with a picture of themselves. (no last names) and respond to a student with similar interests.
Oct. 29- Nov. 2	2	Introduction	Students will post a formal introduction with a picture of themselves. (no last names) and respond to a student with similar interests.

zoom: zoom is an online conference tool to organize a synchronous meeting in real-time. This tool was used to plan our collaborative project. To work with zoom we need to install an app or access it from a computer. We need to create an online meeting by selecting a date and time and create an online meeting link. This link can be shared with our friends and colleagues to connect with them in real-time. Desktop screen can be shared during conference so this feature helped schedule our plan well.

Hangout: This is also an online conference tool like zoom. We can connect using a video call facility and even texting each other before calling.

Mentoring: This project is an initiation of Knowmyworld Global Education. Our project has been mentored by them by organizing online meetings frequently and setting deadlines to complete our tasks on time.

Project Notes: General Overview

Students will post introductions on padlet and respond to a student with similar interests. Students will continue to post and respond to that student for the duration of the exchange based on topics assigned around culture.

Nov. 5- Nov. 9	3	Movies (comparing and contrasting)	Vinay's students will pick an Indian movie and post a short summary of the story with an image of the movie. Tanya's students will reply with a movie in their culture that relates.
Nov. 12- Nov. 16	4	Movies (comparing and contrasting)	Vinay's students will pick an Indian movie and post a short summary of the story with an image of the movie. Tanya's students will reply with a movie in their culture that relates.
Nov. 26- Nov. 30	5	Problem-solving BackPack Issue Identifying and analyzing a problem	Students will research "backpack" issues and prepare a report for presentation. Reading material: Articles on the weight of backpacks. 1. https://www.thebetterindia . 2. http://indiaeducationdiary.in/
Dec. 3- Dec. 7	6	1. Collecting data 2. Finding solutions Preparation of reports to solve the problem of backpack.	Students will read and research the topic and prepare a presentation based on the following clues: 1. Problem 2. Statistics 3. Cause of a problem 4. Effects 5. Precautions 6. Role of parents/ teachers/ students 7. Possible solutions
Dec. 10-Dec. 14	7	Closing by posting their videos	Students will present their reports and post their videos online to receive comments and feedback.

Teacher reflections

1st and 2nd week:

During the first two weeks of our project students introduced themselves by using the following clues:

They Wrote two truths and one lie about themselves and read the introductions posted by their friends and comment on it by finding which of them is a lie.

Students participated actively and engaged meaningfully. They uploaded their picture to get familiarized with each other. Most of them started questioning one another if they don't understand some words which are culture-dependent. By the end of the 2nd week they got familiar with their countries and cultures.

Sample from their discussions:

From US Students

"Hey

Hi, my name is Hanieh and I go to The Honor Roll School at

Texas. If you don't know what I'm doing, I'm telling you 2 truths and a lie

Here they are:

- 1) I love scrunchies
- 2) I only eat the frosting on cupcakes
- 3) I'm very athletic"

From My Students:

"Hi My name is Rahul .I am studying 9th class in zphs jangapally in India

1. I read story books
2. I read horror story books
3. I am a kabaddi player"

3rd Week and 4th Week:

During these weeks the students started writing film summaries of their favorite movies. While writing their film summaries they included the following:

1. Preliminaries: They wrote preliminaries like hero, heroine, director, produces, choreographer, music director etc. They used the internet to collect information.
2. Summary: After watching the movie they had to write a summary of the film in English. The movies they saw were in their regional language for Indian students. They translated it into English. This activity provided an opportunity for the students to use the language in a real context.

3. Pictures: They are asked to collect the pictures of the film crew from newspapers to use them in their presentation. Some students even try to draw the characters in the film if don't get the pictures. Children love to do this activity of drawing and use of colors and enhanced their presentation skills and creativity.
4. Reflected on the following questions: The last part of their presentation included the answer to the following reflective questions.
 - Which part of the movie do you like most? Why?
 - Whose performance do you like most? Why?
 - Write some dialogues you like most?

Students participated actively and did their work well in advance particularly boys who never participate actively in classroom activities also did this activity with a lot of interest.

This task made the students to use the language in context. Most of them watched the movies regularly. The topic we chose was within their experiential orbit and provided an opportunity to read and use the language without much difficulty.

5th week and 6th week:

In the 5th week, students were encouraged to learn the skill of problem-solving. We took up the issue of school bags. Most of the students carry school bags having a lot of weight which result in health problems. The students were told to work in groups to learn collaboratively.

During the 5th week, they researched the topic by finding reports related to backpacks using the internet and collected different report and their findings. Using this information they worked in groups and brainstorm the topic and organized the information on different slides like our PowerPoint on papers. They added their own ideas to solve the problem, some of the best solutions they have given are dividing the textbooks into small books of two chapters each and bind them again and asking the teachers to plan their homework or assignment so that, every day they get only one homework. Some students even said they don't like the homework so they insisted to ban homework in schools. Few others suggested that every student should be given tabs that are preloaded with softcopies of their textbooks.

7th week:

During the 7th week, we filmed backpack project presentations and shared them with each other using Vimeo online video sharing tool. While doing this we struggled a lot because uploading lengthy videos in a low-tech environment is troublesome. So, we changed our plan and made portable documents of their presentation using the camscan application and shared them through the mail. At the end of our project, we invited guests to watch students' backpack presentations to provide feedback to them. They watched their presentations and gave constructive feedback by writing comments in their notebooks.

Conclusion

I conclude that the project has made a drastic change in my perception of language teaching. Initially I felt that writing spelling is more difficult for us because we are not native speakers but, now I have changed my opinion. My students got memorable lifelong experiences by interacting with students in the USA and I realized that even language is not a barrier when there is a need for communication. At the beginning of our project I thought that my students will not able to cope up with the US students but, they did well and worked hard.

Apart from language skills we also learnt so many life skills like collaboration, time management, planning, cultural etiquette and negotiation skills. We also started using new technologies like whenisgood and conference tools like zoom and hangout.

Finally, language learning is process-oriented, not product-oriented. Learning happens when students are engaged in real-life situations by creating an urge to do something. Collecting evidence of learning using technology is a key to become a successful teacher in the 21st century.

Technology has changed the role of teachers from teaching to mentoring, facilitating, collaborating, event organizer, content developer and e-moderator. This project is evidence of these changes. During our project we played the roles of a mentor and facilitator by supporting them and engaging them to become autonomous learners. We also became event organizers and content developers by creating our own

content and not depending on regular course books. By supporting online synchronously and asynchronously we become e-moderators and instructional designers as well. "Technology won't replace teachers, but teachers who use technology will probably replace the teacher who don't"- Sheryl Nusbaum

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