



Adapting the Pandemic Teaching Scenario to Include Synchronous Learning for 21st Century Skills

*¹Dr. A Tamilselvi

*¹Associate Professor of English, Thiagarajar College of Engineering, Madurai, India.

Abstract

In view of the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic, there have been no live classes all over the world. Instead of wasting time this academic year, as teachers we focused on strengthening various skills among the students.

Thus, we teachers voluntarily took up a project which was entitled as "The Connecting Classrooms". The whole project was scheduled and guided by Mr. Vinayadhar Raju, SA English, ZPHS Jangapally, Ganneruvaram, Karimnagar District. This is a USIEF (The United States-India Educational Foundation) project in collaboration with Swechha foundation. As a part of this project, we were connected to other teachers, their classrooms, shared our thoughts and ideas with theirs. We worked in a low technology environment, even though students worked hard to carry out a good output. Students from rural backgrounds, different IQ levels, various cultures met on this platform. We worked in collaboration and brought about the desired change in our students. As teachers we have to be aware of both the positive and negative sides of every situation. Here, by working on this project, we faced many challenges and overcame all those obstacles successfully. It was a great experience to work with other teachers as well as students. Here are our experiences and perceptions about the project that how we CONNECTED to the teachers and students of different places during the period of pandemic, since the miasma brought the people together in which we experienced the togetherness.

Finally, after 8 weeks (two months), all the students from all the schools (different districts) presented their reports through a ZOOM meeting. All the students presented and performed effectively and impressively by overcoming all the technical glitches and connectivity problems. The work put in by the students is available for viewing by all and is of appreciable quality. Every week we used to have one or two Zoom meetings to give suggestions to the students. This success is not ascribed to the efforts of one teacher but the success is attributed to the whole team.

Keywords: Connected classrooms, covid-19, Miasma, Moral values, Cartoons, Collaboration, 21st century skills, Technology

Introduction

In the article, "Preparatory course _ A Must for Rural students_ before taking E-Learning course or online test for Development of language - A Study'_ by Dr. V Vijayababu, visiting faculty, Department of English, stated that, "Nowadays, the advancement of technology has imposed tremendous changes in almost all the fields, of all options that the advancement of technology has provided E-learning, which is a modern, efficient and flexible alternative to traditional learning, has been in the moon light."

Yes, as the writer explained it is pleasant to know how the technology fascinates the rural students and the way they are benefitted by E-learning. It is open that E-learning is an alternative to the traditional learning, but E-learning is not the one and only way to the education. He has talked about the rural students but the rural students cannot afford a smart phone/PC/ Laptop. So, E-learning is possible to those students who have any of these devices. He also stated that E-learning is useful in learning process and developing the English language skills. He rightly said that the students enter the UG colleges with a poor command over the English language. Factors like illiteracy, lack of awareness, poor economic conditions etc.. are the drawbacks for such a situation.

Technology cannot replace a human teacher, but it has its own significance and students can do wonders, if they use the technology in a proper way and will be able to become aware

of various virtual platforms such as Zoom, Padlet, Canva for poster making, WhatsApp, a social networking app for daily follow up, Google meet, Google docs for collaborative documentation.

The Project: We teachers all of us teach classes 6th to 10th standard students. About 20 teachers participated in this project. We were paired with other districts' teachers by using the tool 'Random Student Generator'. Under Mr. Vinayadhar Raju's mentorship, a group of English teachers from Telangana (India) state started the project of "Connecting Classrooms". Our topics are: Moral values, social issues and Gender equity respectively.

We learned many things and gained knowledge and confidence by working with other teachers through online. We were paired up with other teachers from other places. To carry out the project, we 3 teachers were grouped from 3 districts and all our students are from rural background. The main purpose of our project is to improve the critical and creative thinking skills of students and use of technology. In one sentence, we can say that 21st century skills are focussed fully in this project. Every week we conducted Zoom meetings to clarify the doubts/queries of the students.

Objectives

- To improve language skills and Presentation skills

- To become Critical thinkers and Independent learners
- To learn Collaboratively
- To make use of Technology

The Time-Line

Actually, the project was expected to start in the month of June, but due to pandemic, it was postponed to September 28th. We were going to schools on alternate days. No Face-to-face classes, but only digital video lessons were telecast on Television. Without any direct interaction with the students we started our adventurous journey, depending completely on Technology like smartphones, PC/laptop etc.

The project's time line was for 8 weeks in which we did all the following activities.

Week-1- Self- introduction

Week-2- Interacting with each other

Week-3- Reading Moral value stories

Week-4- Analysing

Week-5- Discussion on moral value stories, covid-19 and cartoons

Week-6- Gathering stories

Week-7- Report preparation

Week-8- Presentation

Used Zoom app for discussions on our topics.

Detailed Explanation of Week-Wise Activities

Weeks 1 and 2: We used the Padlet to upload the works and performances of our students. Students from every school, who had given their self-introductions and responded to other students' introductions on all three Padlets as well. They had read other's posts and uploaded their own. Some Students used the Voki App for Self-Introductions. They interacted with each other and had a detailed discussion about their families, schools, facilities in the schools, tastes, hobbies, habits, ambitions etc. The students felt very happy to communicate with children from other schools.

Weeks 3 and 4: We supplied them with many links to the YouTube and some Google search engines to read and understand the moral stories. Students have gone through the Moral stories which were sent by us. They have written the stories with pictures which were uploaded on the Padlet. Some students narrated the moral stories.

Weeks 5 and 6: Students collected information from stories related to degradation of Moral values in the textbook. Some students narrated real life incidents which took place around their surroundings. Students read the lessons from 7th class and 8th class textbooks titled: "The Tattered Blanket", "The Dead Rat" and "Puru, The Brave" etc. Some students collected stories from the internet and provided links by us.

Week 7: Students prepared a report from Data analysis through Google slides, posters by using Canva. Students prepared posters of some basic and important moral values and how they are deteriorated.

Week 8: Through Zoom meeting, SIM Group students' presentations were given in the presence of 70-83 participants along with teachers and students. Some technical issues surfaced but students didn't give up till they succeeded in their presentations.

Technological Tools Used

- WhatsApp- for daily follow up
- Zoom- to conduct meetings

- Padlet- to upload student's performances
- Voki- for self-introduction
- Canva- to prepare posters
- Google Docs
- Google slides and
- Google meet etc.

Improved the Language Skills: Complete lockdown was there in that particular period of time due to corona virus which caused an irreparable damage to the student community around the globe. We are working in rural and remote areas where we cannot expect a computer or laptop. We have selected those students who have smart phones. Some students said that they are going to work in the fields as daily labour. It was heart-touching and pathetic but unavoidable condition. The students who participated in this project were fully focused so that they are not only technologically advanced but also improved their language skills simultaneously. For this WhatsApp played a major role to clarify their doubts and to rectify the errors written or spoken by them. I told them to listen to the stories from you-tube and some other sites for listening practice. And after that I asked them to read the story and record to send audio-recording. Coming to speaking skill, some students told stories and small speeches. Last but not least writing skill is very much improved and even their drawings were also very nice, which are uploaded on padlet.

Reflections of My Colleagues: My colleagues opined that they are very happy to see their school children having participation in this project. Some other teachers said, that the students are using technology and the presentations were very effective and skills improved very much.

Reflections of Connected Classrooms Teachers: Teachers from other schools have expressed that learning through reflecting the experiences happened through this project. They also said that challenges meet opportunities as well as talent meet opportunities.

My Own Reflections: I'm pleased to work with like-minded people. They helped and guided in every aspect, since I'm novice to this project. I was over joyed with the performances of my students and felt very happy to see a remarkable change in the students. For the first time, students used technology for knowledgeable purpose. I was in touch with them every day through WhatsApp, and if it is necessary they called me even after 8.00pm. in the night. Working in this project has given me a wonderful opportunity to enhance my teaching through online and helped for my professional growth. Our group was named, "SIM Group".

Challenges Faced: As Teachers we have to face the consequences of every situation. Here, while working in the project, we faced many challenges and eventually overcame all the obstacles successfully. Everything was done through mobile, so some unavoidable conditions like signal problems, low net connectivity took place. Technical glitches were there while the final presentations were going on, but the children didn't give up till they performed the given task confidently which is appreciable.

Finally, after two months, all the students from all over the districts prepared posters, slides, power point presentations and presented their work on Zoom platform. All the students presented effectively and impressively and presentations were

given to an audience of 79-81 participants (Teachers and students).

Conclusion

Since the outbreak of COVID-19, there was a break in the traditional face-to-face teaching learning process. The pandemic forced the teacher community to motivate and adopt themselves to using technology. The inactive have become active to strengthen their professional skills. So that they have enhanced their traits of teaching by taking up various relevant on-line courses like MOOCS on Canva, OPEN Courses, attending webinars, conferences, live stream programs conducted by RELO, India, on the Facebook network.

All the programmes brought the faculty into limelight. Eventually, online teaching process has become inevitable and mandatory in connecting the Universe. Most of the teachers and learners were enlightened and paved the way to the online platforms forgetting the malevolent damage caused by the miasma for over a year.

Shared our experiences at the Final Dissemination Event

Here are Some Takeaways from the Project

1. This is a very good platform to share our ideas and get many views/opinions of other teachers.
2. Students from different schools worked and gathered interestingly and responded in a positive manner.
3. Due to COVID - 19, face-to-face classes with interaction had to be cancelled. Despite this, they participated actively in the entire project.
4. They have overcome some problems like unavailability of smart phones or laptop/ computer and presented very well.
5. Students have learnt collaboratively and used technology in a proper way.

Finally, all the 21st century skills involved including Critical thinking skills, Creative thinking skills and Presentation skills were introduced besides all the four language skills and students gained in abundance from them. We teachers satisfied with the performance of the students thinking that, "Online teaching has become as a brightening lamp in the darkness".

References

1. *Innovative practices Connecting Classrooms through Asynchronous Technology*-Vinayadhar Raju Prathikantham, SA English, ZPHS Jangapally, Ganneruvaram, Karimnagar, Telangana.
2. DR. Ve Vijayababu visiting faculty- Department of Engineering Thirukkuvalai, (A Constitute college of Anna University: Chennai), Thirukkuvalai, article named, *Preparatory course-before taking E-learning course or online test for Development of language- A study*, published in the Bi-annual journal "*The English Classroom*", Regional Institute of English, South India.
3. Compendium of Lesson designs 1
4. <http://Swechha.in/>
5. Google Search Engines etc....