

The Use Of Skype And GizmoProject For Collaborative Online Projects

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Abstract

The purpose of the GizmoProject/Skype project was to examine VOIP telephony and its possible use in connecting classrooms to classrooms and/or experts in specialized areas for collaborative educational efforts. The synchronous aspect of the project allowed for real-time discovery learning. Participants included High School students from computer technology classes in the states of New York and Missouri. Each class had 6-14 students. In the spring of 2007 the project was advertised on Global School Net and was aimed at high school students and/or those in undergraduate classes. While this project took some time to get started, classrooms from New York State and Missouri were successfully hooked up together by the researcher and collaborative efforts were made that examined the software and hardware of Skype and Gizmo. The project included posting of edited interviews via podcasts on a website for archival use. Various add-ons to Skype were experimented with during the collaborations. Students and teachers reported satisfaction with the project. A unique aspect of Skype called Skypecasting may provide a way for rapid on-the-fly podcasts that could be archived for future use. Future projects of a similar nature need to provide more lead time to develop better communications with classes prior to the synchronous events and to provide clearer focus towards common goals and collaborative topics.

Introduction

A class project in collaborative technology was begun in the spring of 2007 with the purpose of connecting one or more classrooms together in a synchronous manner using VOIP technology. GizmoProject and Skype software systems were chosen for this purpose. The question to be addressed was whether or not classroom collaborations via VOIP would allow for rapid posting of synchronous collaborations on to web pages for future asynchronous use as educational learning objects.

Background/Rationale

The typical students of today have been described as, “Digital Immigrants” (Prensky, 2001), the MEdia Generation or iKids (Oblinger, 2003). Cell phones, iPods, mp3 players, and video games are nearly ubiquitous (Bull & Garofalo, 2006). Making use of this fact may result in learning that is situated and socially constructed. This in turn may lead to better future problem solvers and deeper learning. Joining classes of students together for collaborative efforts across the world can address the need for constructive learning. Students that are geographically and culturally distant can learn from each other with VoIP telephony. Synchronous technologies provide for instant learning situations and VoIP provides a potential way of hooking up classrooms on a low budget for collaborative efforts that can cross many miles and cultural boundaries around the world. Skype and Gizmo Project provide the software packages needed to do this.

“Millennial students have grown up with technology...They are comfortable searching for a topic on the Internet while playing music in the background,

instant messaging a friend and talking to their roommate.” Jean Derco,
University of Tennessee Innovative Technology Center

Purposes

This was a multipurposed study. Goals included: (1) the examination of VoIP telephony and its possible use in connecting classrooms to classrooms and/or experts for global collaborative educational efforts, 2) provision of inexpensive, synchronous, cross-cultural collaborative learning, 3) recording and editing of collaborative conversations for development of educational podcasts, and 4) investigation into ways for providing archival podcasts for future educational uses (learning objects).

Method/Participants

A pilot study description was posted on GlobalSchoolNet.org in the spring of 2007. Interested parties were directed to a website for further details on the proposed project. The target of the proposed collaboration was high school and/or college undergraduate classes. The initial goal was to connect Spanish/English classes in other countries to Spanish Classes in the United States. This could include “experts” in culture or language from other countries as well. Spanish classrooms would be hooked up via Skype and/or GizmoProject software, conversations recorded and edited and edited copies posted on a website for archival use. Initial efforts via email exchanges resulted in a group of potential classes from several countries including Great Britain, China, Spain, Venezuela, Mexico, Chile, Bolivia and the United States. For various reasons the pool of participants was reduced to the following list with each class containing 6-14 students dependent

upon the day: 1) a Missouri High school technology class, 2) a New York High school technology class, 3) a Chinese teacher of English living near Nanjing, and 4) a Massachusetts 6th grade Spanish class.

Results

High School classrooms from New York State and Missouri were successfully connected. A 6th grade Spanish class from Massachusetts was hooked up collaboratively with a teacher in China. Students experimented collaboratively with VoIP software. Edited interviews were published as podcasts on a website. Participants experimented with Skype add-ons including video. Students and teachers reported having an enjoyable time. Some students would come before class and leave late. Everyone learned something new. Skypecasting (a unique aspect of Skype) was found to provide a way for rapid on-the-fly podcasts that could be archived for future use.

Conclusion

Skype and GizmoProject can be used for global, synchronous collaborations. Discovery learning by the MEdia generation can result from these collaborations. Podcasts of VoIP events can be posted successfully online as learning objects. Skypecasting can provide a way for rapid on-the-fly podcasts that can be archived for future use.

Recommendations

In a cross-cultural global collaboration it is important to allow for plenty of lead time between participating classes in order to plan joint collaborations and timing. It may take

6 months of correspondence to arrive at suitable times and subjects. It is very important to have common goals or students will wander in their attention spans and little may be accomplished. Skypecasting may be the best solution to developing rapid podcasts that can be recorded, archived, and turned into learning objects via a web site.

References

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