

BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: TOOLS FOR LEARNING  
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ABSTRACT

In an attempt to keep up with the interests of students and to use the tools that are available to make learning meaningful, we have started to do video conferencing to enhance practice and assessments. Connecting with schools in Osaka, my own family members have become conversation partners, story tellers and instructors. Topics of interests are also discussed and music is shared internationally through the use of video conference technology.

KEY WORDS

Video conferencing, practice, assessment, international

INTRODUCTION

About 5 years ago, I was approached by a media center coordinator from Osaka, Japan to help find an elementary school who would be willing to start an international sun tracking project using video conferencing as a means of communication. I was unable to find an elementary partner at the time, so Mr. Shoji Umeda helped me set up a rudimentary system in my classroom. The quality of the video was poor, but the sound was worse, so we used the telephone line hooked up to speakers. We tested the system for about a year with just small groups or individuals to work out the technology issues. We were then ready apply the tool.

PROJECT

Our first project was to use the system to teach English to a class at a private high school in Osaka. I read passages from their reader and we did a question/answer session. I would also prepare my own topics to share and discuss. My then 7 year old son started doing conversations with elementary classes, preparing photos, powerpoint presentations and other “lessons” to share and talk about with the students. They also did songs and dances for each other.

We have also participated in international concerts where students from South Korea, Singapore, Taiwan, Australia, New Zealand , Hawaii and Japan share some musical traditions. We have seen dances in full costumes, classrooms of recorders, singing and even singing in second languages as we share our music. The students are always amazed at all of the similarities shared by the different cultures.

The best part of the project has been the sharing by real life experts. My father, and now my father-in-law speak about their life experiences. My father does a short presentation about his life during World War II. The students have a lot of questions about life in Hawaii during that period. He also speaks about how he returned home prior to the war starting. My father-in-law has been speaking about his life in China and how he emigrated to Hawaii. He shares his background and some of the reasons for leaving. The students he spoke to were preparing to travel to China and had a lot of questions.

We have continued this project with the Matsushita Electric Company as our new experts. They have representatives share the history of batteries and have the students make a dry-cell battery during the conference. We have tried them both entirely done in Japanese and done in Japanese with translations. The visual nature of the presentation made it possible for the upper level of students taking Japanese to follow the instructions quite easily. The lower level students benefited from the translations for some parts, but were able to follow the instructions even before the translations were done. Although we have tried it out only with high school students studying Japanese, we look forward to doing it again with our target audience being elementary 4th or 5th graders.

## CONCLUSION

Students found the use of video conferencing quite simple and non-threatening as they saw the benefits of the practice and sharing. I am hoping to develop a better way of monitoring their progress and measure their language acquisition using the video conferencing technology available.