

C2L Proposal: Skype in the Classroom

Hello! How would you like to take your geography students to the Badlands of South Dakota? Or what about taking your biology students on a diving trip in the Florida Keys? What if all this was free? Good news! It is! Sorta.

All of this can be done with Skype, free app that allows two or more people to engage in a video call, and can be downloaded on almost any device as long as it has a camera feature. Smartphones, tablets, and most laptop computers have a built-in camera, and Skype can be used on any of these devices.

So how is Skype useful in the classroom? First, I would recommend creating an account with the Microsoft Community for Educators. This is an online community created by Microsoft, for the purpose of connecting educators around the world with each other. To create an account, just go to education.microsoft.com, click “Join Now”, and follow the instructions. After you’ve created an account, look on the left side of your screen and click “Skype in the Classroom”. Here you’ll see some of the many tools you can use as an educator to incorporate Skype into your classes, and give your students an experience they will never forget!

Skype lessons give you and your students a chance to collaborate and discuss certain topics with experts and other classes around the world.

Mystery Skype is a fun and interactive game in which your class is paired with another class somewhere in the world. You have no idea where they are located, and they have no idea where you are located. Then, through a video call, each class is asked a series of questions in order to guess where the other class is located. This not only enhances our students’ sense of global community, but it also encourages your class to work together using critical thinking skills and searching for context clues to reach a common goal.

Virtual field trips allow you to take your students on virtual trips to a wide variety of places around the world. All you have to do is click the tab and, if you find one you like, register for it.

Finally, Skype allows you to digitally **bring guest speakers to your classroom**. This is a collection of authors, professors, and other experts in various fields. Each guest speaker is preapproved by Microsoft, so you can be certain you are connecting with legitimate sources. Narrow your search results by using the filter option. Once you find your guest speaker, check their availability. Fortunately, Microsoft automatically accounts for the differences in time, so even if your guest speaker is 10 hours ahead of you, you may still be able to find a good time for both of you. All you have to do is click, “Request a Guest Speaking Session.” It’s that easy! If

you cannot find a time that works for you, find out if you can leave a video message or a chat message, so the speaker can still communicate with your class, just not in a live stream.

Tips

- If you choose to invite a guest speaker to your class, **I would recommend having your class work together beforehand to construct a list of 5-10 questions** to ask the speaker, depending on how much time you have.
- Ask the guest speaker or the other class involved if they have any questions for you or your class. **Let this be a learning experience for everyone involved!** That way, you can guarantee healthy conversation, and there will be no surprises.
- **Do not be afraid to communicate!**
- Have your students **take notes** during the Skype session.
- **Have a follow-up activity** just to make sure your students got the right idea.
- **Keep your objectives and learning goals in mind.** Don't let a Skype session be the primary mode of instruction for your lesson. Teach your students what they need to know, and let the Skype session offer additional insight or perspective. These are not electronic substitute teachers, they are teaching aids.
- **Always, always, always have a Plan B.** As incredible as it is, technology fails us sometimes. In the event that you or your guest speaker cannot participate in the event for any reason, have a backup plan.