

Chapter VII

Use and Perceptions of External Content Providers: A Teacher's Journey through the Process

Jennifer Hahn

Bethlehem School District, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter presents the process of videoconferencing with external providers from the teacher's side of the camera. It summarizes the steps necessary to conduct a videoconference, including how to contact and select external providers, as well as how to prepare, conduct, and follow up on a videoconference. It carefully examines how to develop lasting relationships with experts in the field, and how to use their resources to create an interactive research-based classroom environment. For classroom teachers, videoconferencing is a relatively new educational tool, and the extent of its implementation is constantly expanding and virtually endless. Utilizing examples of specific experiences, the chapter provides the reader with an overview of videoconferences that exist and can be used by K-12 educators.

INTRODUCTION

Most U.S. students born in the 1990's are computer-savvy and have actively worked with computers for the majority of their lives. Videoconferencing is an educational technology tool that they will experience through their years in the K-12 arena, but also is one that is likely to be a part of their higher education and/or workforce lives. Current

advances have not only improved the process of videoconferencing, but also have increased the quality of instruction and provided flexibility to when and where videoconferencing can take place (Motamedi, 2001). Its use not only assists in providing content-rich curricula, but it also improves students' technical knowledge skills and abilities. This information will continue to be useful as videoconferencing becomes more commonplace (Motamedi, 2001).

Why Do Videoconferencing?

Within the classroom, videoconferencing can be extremely helpful in creating student connections to authors, historians, scientists, researchers, and zoologists; through select access, these outside experts can present valuable, content-rich curriculum to students reflecting their unique field of expertise. Educators also benefit from the content providers' current research; videoconferencing can be valuable in extending the education of teachers in the field. For example, when there are breakthroughs in science, educators can access the newest information, and discuss it based on firsthand knowledge given by the external content provider. Many times, these experts are providing information to schools that may be a great distance from the provider site (Motamedi, 2001). As part of this process, these providers supply educators with informational articles, charts, graphs, videos, and materials that will enhance curriculum instruction in the classroom.

Maintaining a long-lasting relationship with an external provider also can have great educational value in the classroom. Because most videoconferencing providers are professionals and experts in their respective field, they oftentimes have cutting-edge information that teachers could not adequately present to their students. Through the use of planned instruction, students are able to see research facilities, museums, and other real-life work areas that they may not be able to access through conventional educational resources. For instance, by interacting with NASA experts, students are able to see the thought processes of real scientists and hear the scientist's feedback to their questions and work. Students also put forth more effort when they know their work is going to be looked at by an expert, and have received a glimpse of the equipment and buildings where real scientists work, and how they use labs and conduct experiments (Peterson, 2000).

Purpose of the Chapter

This chapter will present videoconferencing from the teacher's point of view. It will discuss how to contact, prepare, conduct, and follow up on a videoconference in the classroom. It also will discuss the procedures that teachers should follow to ensure that the videoconference is relevant and appropriate for their students. It will cover perceptions that many educators have about the external content providers, and will give guidelines to help create long-lasting and meaningful relationships with these experts that will not only provide camaraderie, but also will serve as an invaluable resource for information and materials that are relevant to curriculum standards. Examples will be provided so that differences can be examined and commonalities can be observed. Finally, this chapter will discuss why videoconferencing, if properly integrated into the classroom, can be an excellent, educationally-sound practice that can really engage students in activity-based lessons and involve them in their own learning process.

BACKGROUND

Some Important Terms that Teachers Should Know

This chapter will make reference to some terms that may be new to educators who have not used videoconferencing. A *videoconference* is when two parties in separate locations are able to connect to each other via computer and can interact via picture and sound. This occurs frequently in business and has expanded to the field of education. Most of the videoconferences to which this chapter refers to are between a group of students and an external expert who can provide them with learning opportunities that cannot be afforded to them in a classroom setting. This chapter will also make reference to electronic field trips. *Electronic field trips* are a specific type of videoconference where

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