Interregional and Intergenerational Virtual Collaborative Teaching Using the Apple
FaceTime App: The East L.A. to PA Project
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ABSTRACT

This paper examines the utility of engaging middle school students living in the inner city of East Los Angeles with undergraduate college students at a women's liberal arts college in Eastern Pennsylvania. This collaborative intergenerational and interregional research project involves social media and the use of the Apple app, FaceTime, as a method of experiential and virtual learning.

Keywords: Virtual Learning, Experiential Learning, Apps, Convergent Media, Intergenerational, Interregional, Virtual Classrooms

INTRODUCTION

Building healthy and strong relationships is powerful for middle school and college students. This paper examines the utility of engaging middle school students living in the inner city of East Los Angeles with undergraduate college students at a women's liberal arts college in Eastern Pennsylvania. This collaborative intergenerational and interregional research project involves social media and the use of the Apple app, FaceTime, as a method of experiential and virtual learning. The female undergraduate participants designed mentoring and communicative goals specialized to engage in dialogue with the middle school students through the technology of video chatting twice a week throughout the school year and to take ethnographic notes of their experiences.

Enrique Legaspi, the Hollenbeck Middle School history instructor and his students developed conversational and technological goals to discuss a variety of historical, regional, and cultural topics with the Cedar Crest College students. Hollenbeck Middle School is over a hundred years with old with decades of tradition and history. The population of its students is 98.4% Latino. The students at Hollenbeck reflect the generation of students who are digital natives and possess the need for classrooms to leverage technological access and resources to enhance media literacy and content expertise. The successes of the school are incredible as well as its failures, as it is a community that thrives on talented scholars who dream big and loud. It was important for the female college students to encourage the option of some day attending college as part of the middle school students' dreams.
Review of Literature

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Creating pedagogical environments and projects where experiential learning moves

the focus away from the professor or instructor and to the experiences of the students provides the students with active and thoughtful leadership roles [1]. Social media gives us many opportunities to be mobile, interactive, and convergent in our activities. In this project, the female college students interacted, mentored, and engaged in a bi-coastal, multicultural, intergenerational, and interregional communication research project with the Hollenbeck Middle School classroom on the West Coast. Experiential learning has been an important characteristic in education throughout history [2] and in present day, social media increases the opportunities of teachers linking pedagogy and projects that contribute to diverse communities and to society.

For both the Hollenbeck Middle School students and the women at Cedar Crest College, the goal of this research was to provide interregional access and an experiential learning environment where two classrooms that were very different in age, location, ethnicity, size, and gender collaborated with one another. Online environments have the ability to create "fluid boundaries" [3], where the idea of a virtual field trip to opposite sides of the U.S. gave students the authentic experiences to communicate, inspire, and build their networks with each other.

METHODS OF COLLABORATIVE VIRTUAL LEARNING

Intergenerational and interregional communication is an important form of communication research in studying and learning more about the wants, needs, and communication norms and habits of future generations of people. In the Cedar Crest College women's class the students watched a short CNN news clip about Hollenbeck Middle School's use of social media. The college students engaged in conversations with students of the ages 13-14 years old on a weekly basis. The women college's students were encouraged to mentor the middle school students about topics such as higher education, U.S. history, geographic locations, and their daily diets. They also provided them with information about living in the eastern region of the U.S., the history of Pennsylvania, and their personal interests.

Multicultural stories and leadership contribute to history and culture. Women and men play important roles as carriers and teachers of their cultures to the future generations. There is a focus on difference in history between genders and the women's college students were enthusiastic to share their experiences with the middle school students. The ability to communicate life and cultural experiences on gender, ethnicity, and social class was empowering for both the women's college students and the middle school students [4].

DISCUSSION

Both participants from the west coast and east coast reported personal benefits from engaging in the intergenerational and interregional pedagogical and virtual projects such as an increase in communication, technology, cultural knowledge, and social skills. The process and focus of students from the middle school and the college reflecting of their experiences was a significant benefit of the experiential and virtual learning. Through this project the students increased their knowledge and use of social media to understand the importance of their digital responsibilities to each other. The students also developed their inter-classroom experiences to learn and view the different lifestyles, diets, and cultures in the different regions of the U.S. Because of their interregional and intergenerational communication, their inquiries of U.S.

history, geography, and technology has advanced and become more meaningful.

Students from both the college and the middle school displayed an improvement in classroom attendance because they looked forward to the biweekly conversations with the students at each school. Last but not least, the students at the middle school's coursework was connected to Pennsylvania, a state that is rich in history and making it applicable for the students to learn more about U.S. history and the events that shaped our nation.

Online environments create many opportunities for its users [5] and media literacy and power influence one another [6] The process of reflection in experiential learning makes students accountable for the interactions and the decisions they made during the research process [7]. The students at the women's college reflected on some of the challenges they faced, ranging from technical issues to age and cultural differences. The majority of the students at the college found the experience of talking to middle school students in Los Angeles to be very rewarding. As one of the female college students said:

> "The FaceTime project is my favorite. It's not only about mentoring but using the technology to reach people all across the country…It's great to be able to give them information and I really enjoy it and think it's a good experience."

This collaborative teaching and research project aims to provide an example of applying the intersections of generation, region, and technology into a dual classroom where students of various backgrounds, ages, and locations can take place. The virtual collaboration LA2PA project gave students online experience in bi-coastal networking, helped them builds

skills using technology, and more importantly, it gave students an authentic experience to build their language and knowledge to with others outside of their local cities and age groups. The students were excited to learn about the world and adventures happening in the classrooms using technology. Going beyond the boundaries of classroom walls and using virtual technology enables students to gain more worldly experiences where they can interact with people outside of their location, city, state, and age group.

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