

TELECOMMUNICATIONS TO AID

FOREIGN LANGUAGE ACQUISITION

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How often have you, as a teacher, heard "Why do I need to learn this?" In order for students to see the relevancy of a course of instruction, they need to see some immediate use or practical applications of the subject. Learning is easier, more enjoyable and successful if the learners can directly relate information to their lives. Foreign language is one of those subjects that is difficult to persuade students to take because they cannot foresee using it in the immediate future. Transportation and technology seems to have shrunk the world. Ours is truly a global community. People travel from continent to continent as easily as they do from state to state. Even though they may witness the Berlin Wall coming down or watch the Olympics from Albertville, France and Barcelona, Spain live on television via satellite, it is still difficult for students to see themselves as part of this picture. We want to find a way for students to speak and write to people throughout the world without leaving their classroom. We want them to discover that communication is not possible without a common language; then they will realize the need for the study of foreign languages. Like "The Man of La Mancha", we dared to dream the impossible dream and make the dream come true with telecommunications.

MOTIVATION

Getting students online with a computer, a modem and a telephone line puts the world at their fingertips. By entering a few simple commands on the computer keyboard, they can talk to anyone around the world, but only if they speak the same language. At last, we have found our motivating force. The desire to communicate with others, whether they are around the corner or half way around the world is so strong that all we have to do is gently guide the students in the right direction.

PROJECT

To introduce your students to telecommunications we suggest our Small World project. Students choose a country where the target language

being taught is spoken. They research the country through online telecommunications skills using the foreign language.

EMAIL AND BULLETIN BOARD

Two different site schools (preferably one in the country being researched) exchange information, ask and answer questions and prepare a report all in the foreign language through email. A student bulletin board such as KIDSnet (KIDSnet-Request@VMS.CIS.PITT.EDU) or Kidcafe (Listserv@ndsuv1.bitnet) can be used for this purpose.

LISTSERV GROUPS

Several listserv groups will be used to retrieve and send information. We chose MCLR-L (MCLR-L@SMU.BITNET), MEXICO- L (MEXICO-L@TECMTYVM.BITNET) and EUROPE-L (EC@INDYCMS.BITNET). Here the students will read and write messages in the target language to acquire information needed about their country.

TELNET AND INTERNET SITES

Students will also access a variety of telnet and internet site to locate reference material on their country. SERVICES (WUGATE.WUSTL.EDU or 128.252.120.1) for example gets them into libraries where they can actually do research online and in the target language, much like ERIC. Telecommunications can also provide exposure to ASCII Art which in turn gives the students a chance to be creative, humorous and self- expressive.

NEWS GROUPS

There are also many news groups like Soc. Culture Mexico, Soc. Culture Spain, Soc. Culture French, Soc. Culture German etc. which the students can use to post questions and retrieve information for their project in the foreign language.

CONCLUSION

The use of new technologies and telecommunications will help the students acquire writing, conversational and social skills in a foreign language enthusiastically and successfully while actively participating in real communications with others. Learning a new language is now meaningful and motivation is no longer a problem.

All telecommunications addresses were correct at publication time, but could change in the future. We urge you to explore with your students

the new and ever-changing world of communication, whether it be a new language, new telecommunications or both!

REFERENCES

Roberts, N., Blakeslee, G., Brown, M., et al. Integrating Telecommunications Into Education. Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1990.

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