Ang Maria Clara Ngayon: An Telecollaborative Project

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Abstract
A telecollaborative project is one in which geographically separate participants share a learning experience. Although collaboration can be achieved through traditional forms of communication, e.g. telephone and mail, telecollaboration generally implies the use of Internet-based communication tools such as email, discussion forums, and chats.

Telecollaborative projects have several formats: interpersonal exchanges, information exchange and analysis, and problem-solving projects. Interpersonal exchanges are undertakings that encourage students to discuss and interact with peers or with resource persons. Information exchanges and analysis teach students how to gather, exchange, and analyze data. Problem-solving projects are a synthesis of interpersonal exchanges and information exchanges and analysis. Students must work together to solve a common problem. This entails the careful communication of knowledge and ideas.

The telecollaborative project discussed in this paper was an undertaking of two Araling Panlipunan teachers, Rebecca Lacanlale of Commonwealth High School and Soledad Saet of Marikina High School. They designed an interpersonal exchange with the theme "Ang Maria Clara Ngayon," an investigation into overseas working Filipinas. Their students interviewed Filipinas who intended to go abroad, who were currently abroad, and who had just returned. Students asked these workers about their motivations for working abroad, the advantages and the disadvantages of their situations, their working conditions, and so on. The two classes exchanged information using email. Together, they collated the data and presented it in the form of charts, graphs, and summaries.

This paper will discuss the design and implementation of this telecollaborative project. It will explain how the project was conceptualized and how it tied into the curriculum. It will discuss how the students were selected and organized, how the data was gathered and exchanged, and how it was summarized. The paper will also discuss the various problems and challenges that the teachers had to overcome. Finally, the paper will discuss the benefits that the students and the teachers derived from this undertaking.

Introduction to Telecollaboration

A telecollaborative project is an educational endeavor between geographically separate individuals or groups whose communications are mediated by technology (World Bank Institute, n.d.). The project's objectives are deliberately formulated; they must be driven by curricular goals. The project is constructed and implemented in order to enrich the learning process. The parties involved are geographically apart, possibly in different cities, provinces, or countries, yet they work together to achieve a common educational objective. Interactions may be one-to-one, where individuals communicate with one

another; one-to-many, where one individual communicates with a group; or many-to-many, where whole classes exchange information with other classes. Finally, communications between collaborators is mediated by technology. While it is possible to communicate using telephones or by post, telecollaboration generally denotes the Internet-based communication tools such as email, discussion groups, or chats.

One of the underlying assumptions of telecollaborative projects is that each party has something unique to contribute to the project. Harris (1999, p. 55) notes that educational objectives best served by telecollaborative formats are those in which students must
- be exposed to different opinions, perspectives, beliefs, experiences, and thinking processes;
- compare, contrast, and / or combine similar information from dissimilar locations;
- communicate with a real audience using text and imagery; and
- expand their global awareness.

Aside from the subject area learning, students also derive other incidental benefits from telecollaborative projects. They learn communication skills. Students generally exhibit strong desire to involved themselves in all communications, from sending emails to participating in discussion groups to chatting. This type of participation is generally not limited to high achievers. Even students with difficulty mastering basic skills persist in and are enthusiastic about participating (Schaw, 1998a, paragraph 1).

Telecollaborative projects also build self-esteem. Improvements in communication skills foster greater self-confidence. Students feel especially proud when they are afforded the opportunity to collaborate with adults. Interaction with adults, especially high-ranking officials or experts makes students feel important (Schaw, 1998c).

Finally, telecollaboration increases interest and engagement. Students working on telecollaborative projects maintain attention to their work. They become annoyed when partners fail to communicate at designated times. They become interested in other places and people. Correspondence with partners from different parts of the world inevitably stirs curiosity about different countries and their cultures (Schaw, 1998b).

Telecollaborative Activity Structures

Telecollaborative projects can take a number of formats. Harris (1998) identifies three types of activity structures: interpersonal exchanges, information collection and analysis, and problem-solving activities.

Interpersonal exchanges are the oldest and most popular type of activity. These involve individuals or groups talking to other individuals or groups via email, chat, or discussion forums. They can include penpal-like activities where peers exchange information about a curriculum-based topic. They can also involve exchanges with a subject area expert or mentor, for a fixed amount of time (like a guest on a television show) or over a period of weeks (Harris, 1998, pp. 7-9).

Many successful telecollaborative projects fall under the category of information collection and analysis. These are activities in which students collect, compile, and compare similar information from diverse geographic areas. The group then analyzes the data, notes similarities or differences in the data collected, and draws conclusions about what the data says about the locations from which they came (Harris, 1998, pp. 9-11).

Problem-solving activities combine interpersonal exchanges with information collection and analysis. Activities may include exchanges of feedback about creative work, collaboration on a creative work, comparisons of solutions to a single problem, participation in simulations, and so forth (Harris, 1998, pp. 11-14).

Telecollaborative Project Lifecycle

The World Bank Institute (n.d.) divides the lifecycle of a telecollaborative project into several stages: project planning, project design, call for collaboration, implementation, facilitation and collaboration, evaluation, and dissemination. Project planning involves brainstorming, the pitching of ideas to determine the purpose and form that the project will take. It is also during this stage that the project team is formed.

During the project design stage, the team formalizes the activity structure. Will the undertaking be an interpersonal exchange, an information collection and analysis, or a problem-solving activity? The team also decides on the project timetable.

Once the details of the project are settled, the team calls for collaborators. Finding collaborators may entail advertising the project on reputable web sites or contacting sister schools, fellow teachers, or acquaintances.

During the implementation phase, the project begins. The participants undertake the initial project activities. As the collaboration progresses, facilitation becomes essential when circumstances necessitate schedule adjustments or problem resolution.

Evaluation involves a reflection on the activities that transpired and an assessment of the success or failure of the project. It is during this stage that the project team determines whether the goals of the project were met.

Finally, information about the project is disseminated. This may involve publication of the project's details in periodicals or conferences. It may also include the presentation of the project before interested parties.

Project Background

The focus of this paper is a telecollaborative project undertaken by Rebecca Lacanlale of Commonwealth High School, Quezon City, and Soledad Saet of Marikina High School, Marikina City, both high school Araling Panlipunan teachers.

In April 2001, Ms. Lacanlale and Ms. Saet participated in a training workshop on Telecollaborative Learning in Singapore. The workshop was organized by Pilipinas SchoolNet and co-financed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore and the World Bank World Links for Development Program. The workshop introduced participants to the concept of telecollaboration and the methodology for initiating such projects (Foundation for Information Technology Education and Development, [2001]).

After completing the training, Ms. Lacanlale and Ms. Saet proceeded with the implementation of their project. The remainder of this paper discusses the details of their undertaking, as well as their insights regarding the experience.

Project Planning

During the project planning stage, the teachers decided on the curricular goals of the project. They also determine which groups of students would participate.

Curricular Goals
The curricular goals of the project were as follows:
1. To develop critical thinking skills through the integration of ICT in the teaching/learning process.
2. To supplement the unit material and serve as an extension activity that asks students to go beyond their classroom experience to investigate and research a social, political, or economic issue from the content.

Student Profile
The students who made up the telecollaborative class were selected from the different sections in the fourth year level. It was a mixture of male and female students whose ages ranged from 16 to 18 years old. They had varying levels of academic abilities. Most of them had computer skills.

Project Design

This telecollaborative project was an email exchange. The implementation steps were as follows:
1. Give orientation and lecture to the class about telecollaboration.
2. Divide the class into groups of five to six students.
3. Send emails for personal exchanges to their counterparts from partner school to establish rapport and contact.
4. Gather data on women working overseas. (Library research, search on Phil. websites)
5. Conduct internet interviews of Working Filipina Overseas from different sectors and locations.
6. Conduct interviews with Returned Filipinas.
7. Conduct interviews with Filipinas Intending to go overseas.
8. Collate information and data gathered.
9. Make analysis and abstractions.
10. Oral presentation of gathered data in the class.

11. Send the reports by emails to the co-telecollaborators for information sharing.
12. Synthesize the received informations from their counterparts showing similarities and differences.
13. Consolidation and Evaluation.

The project was implemented during the third and fourth grading periods, from October 2001 to March 2002.

Implementation

There were three groups of target respondents:
a. Filipinas Intending to Work Overseas
b. Filipinas Working Overseas
c. Returned Filipinas
The working Filipinas were generally employed in the services and entertainment industry.

Survey Questions
The techniques used in the surveys were personal interviews and questionnaires. The questionnaires were sent to the respondents through postal mail and email.

Questionnaires
Interview questions for each subgroup are detailed as follows. The questions for the first three groups were written in Filipino so that they would be more easily understood:

For Filipinas Intending to Work Overseas
1. Bakit naisipan mong magtrabaho sa ibang bansa?
2. Bakit sa _____? (bansang patutunguhan)
3. Ano ang magiging trabaho mo doon?
4. Magkano ang inaasahan mong kita?
5. Ano ang saloobin at reaksyon ng pamilya mo?
6. Ano ang nadarama mo ngayong hinihintay mo na ang iyong pag-alis?
7. Anong mga preparasyon ang iyong ginagawa para sa iyong magiging trabaho doon?
8. Ano ang inaasahan mong magiging buhay doon?
9. Di ka ba natatakot na pumalpak o di mangyari ang iyong inaasahan?
10. Kung may pagpipilian ka, nanaisin mo pa rin bang magtrabaho sa ibang bansa?

For Filipinas Working Overseas
1. Ilan taon ka ng naninirahan sa bansang iyong pinapasukan?
2. Ano 'yong naaalala mo o nami-miss sa Pilipinas?
3. Anu-ano ang iyong mga atas o responsibilidad na nakaatang sa iyo, sa iyong pinapasukang trabaho?
4. Naranasan mo na ba na ma-discriminate sa iyong trabaho dahil sa iyong kultura at sa iyong pagiging Pinay? Ipaliwanag ang sagot.
5. Ano ang iyong nadarama sa pagtatrabaho sa mga taong kaiba sa 'yong lahi at kultura?Ipaliwanag ang sagot.

6. Masaya ka ba ngayon sa trabaho mo?
7. May mga naging problema ka ba na kinaharap sa iyong pagtatrabaho diyan? Ilahad.
8. Magsalaysay ng isang karanasan sa iyong pinapasukang trabaho at sa iyong Host Country.
9. Ano ang saloobin ng iyong pamilya sa iyong pagtatrabaho sa ibang bansa?
10. Ano ang iyong mensahe sa iyong mga mahal sa buhay dito sa Pilipinas?

For Returned Filipinas
1. Sa anong bansa ka nagtrabaho?
2. Ano ang iyong naging trabaho doon?
3. Paano makitungo ang iyong employer sa mga empleyado nito?
4. Ano ang nagustuhan mo sa pagtatrabaho mo sa ibang bansa?
5. Ano naman ang di mo nagustuhan?
6. May mga suliranin bang lumitaw sa iyong pamilya dito sa Pilipinas noong ikaw ay nagtatrabaho pa sa ibang bansa? Ipaliwanag. Ano ang naging damdamin mo hinggil dito?
7. Anong mga kapakinabangan ang naidulot sa iyo at sa iyong pamilya ng pagtatrabaho mo sa ibang bansa?
8. Nang pagbalik mo dito sa Pilipinas, nakaramdam ka ba ng paninibago?
9. Anu-ano ang iyong maimumungkahi o maipapayo sa mga kababaihan na nais magtrabaho sa ibang bansa?
10. Ano ang trabaho mo ngayon?
11. Anu-ano ang mga suliranin o hamon na kinakaharap mo ngayon bilang isang Returned OFW?
12. Paano sa palagay mo maaaring makatulong ang pamahalaan sa iyo at sa iba pang bumalik na OFW sa bansa?

Outcomes Related to Subject Area

The activity yielded results on various levels. In term of subject content, the email interviews gave students insight regarding the situations of overseas workers.

Filipinas Intending To Work Overseas
Filipinas who were planning to work overseas said, if they had a choice, they would continue to live and work in the Philippines. However, they felt compelled to go because there were limited opportunities in the Philippines and they had many financial obligations to meet.

They expected their lives abroad to be comfortable. Their families, though, were sad at the prospect of being separated from their loved ones. Their families were also apprehensive about their safety and security because of the news reports regarding fellow Filipinos' misfortunes while working abroad.

Filipinas Working Overseas
Filipinas working overseas said that they had to remodel themselves. They had to adapt and adjust to the new situation. They missed family and friends the most. Some former

teachers missed classroom teaching. Others missed their favorite television programs. Some of them said that they felt discriminated against, while other did not. The group that did not experience discrimination said they enjoyed working with fellow Filipinos as well as people of different nationalities.

Without exception, though, the respondents believed that their work was worthwhile. They enjoyed the financial benefits of their work. They also found their work rewarding and satisfying. They saw their work as a means towards personal and professional advancement.

Returned Filipinas
Returned Filipinas were positive regarding their work experiences abroad. They liked working abroad because earned in dollars. However, they did not like being separated from their families. Some suffered from homesickness. Others complained that it was sometimes difficult to get along with people from different cultures.

Upon returning to the Philippines, they noted that they could not find work. They believed that the government could help returning workers by starting livelihood projects, by providing work opportunities, and by increasing salaries.

Other Outcomes

The telecollaborative learning project also achieved several cognitive, affective, and psychomotor outcomes:

Cognitive
Communicate their thoughts and ideas with their co-telecollaborators as well as share and exchange information with them through email exchanges.
1. Identify the issues and concerns affecting Migrant Filipina Workers and the challenges facing them through the surveys conducted on them.
2. Sharpen their thinking skills through the hands-on, minds-on activities they performed.
3. Demonstrate decision making skills about how to approach a task, how to work together to complete their project and how to share the group results.

Affective
1. Appreciate the importance of ICT in maximizing one's potential for learning.
2. Show appreciation and pride of Filipino Women in their significant contributions to the economic development of our country.
3. Develop friendships among their peers.
4. Demonstrate respect for others as individuals.

Psychomotor
1. Show and enhance their varying levels of computer skills.

Facilitation and Collaboration

During the implementation, the greatest difficulty that the teachers and students faced was limited access to the school computer laboratory. The computer room was generally reserved for computer classes only. As such, Ms. Lacanlale and Ms. Saet had to schedule the telecollaborative project sessions based on the availability of the computer room.

Student-related Challenges
During the first few meetings, the students appeared to be bored, displayed passive attitude towards the project and lacked focus on it but when it got the momentum rolling, interest ran high and the students developed a receptive attitude toward the project.

Benefits

Both the students and the teachers benefited greatly from the project.

Benefits to Students
1. It increased student motivation and enhanced their interest in the teaching learning process.
2. The students took group responsibility for learning and sharing information.
3. It developed the students' interpersonal skills as well as personal and group interaction skills.
4. The students gained genuine collaborative experience - the talents of every member of the telecollaborative class were utilized in interviewing, preparing questionnaires, tabulating results, preparing charts and graphs, researching in libraries and on web, taking pictures, and emailing.
5. The activities sharpened their critical thinking skills.

Benefits to Teachers

1. It helps teachers turn classroom into a community of learners, not just collection of individuals.
2. It empowers teachers to help students develop their creativity and their thinking skills by working collaboratively.
3. It helps teachers meet lesson's objectives, and make teaching more effective.

Benefits to the Learning Process
1. It lends itself to a teaching method designed to enhance interest of the students and put excitement into teaching.
2. A way to vary presentation of content and to reinforce materials is to provide telecollaborative experiences for the students.
3. It provides for an interactive learning environment where the activities provide experience that encourage the students to participate in constructing their own conceptual understanding.

Conclusions

The telecollaborative project proved beneficial both to the learners and to the teachers. Both groups worked collaboratively with their peers and colleagues in order to achieve the learning goals. Given its many pluses in the teaching / learning process, we strongly urge our fellow teachers to undertake such projects and to experience their effectiveness first-hand.

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