Skype Sessions in School

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Skype gives students and teachers an opportunity to interact with students from other countries and cultures, through the online mode.

As a school principal, I was keen to usher in interesting educational initiatives. Our school signed for the 'Skype in Classroom' programme, which aimed at fostering empathy and compassion, and generating environmental awareness among students. The programme allowed virtual travel and experiences to both students and teachers.
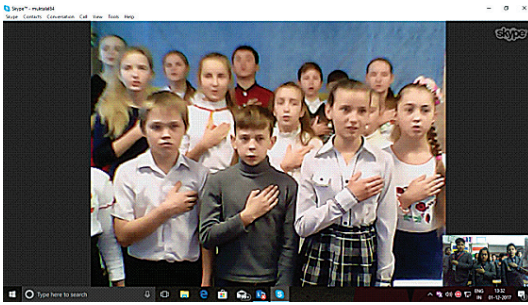
Connecting with a classroom of a different country virtually provides an educational experience that cannot be attained in a traditional classroom set-up. For the Skype sessions, selected students and teachers from the school were seated in a hall, and interactions with students and teachers of other countries were initiated. The sessions were projected live on the big screen.
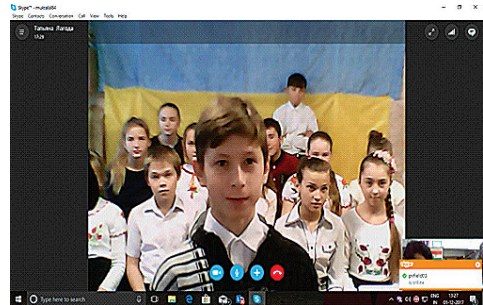
SESSION WITH UKRAINE STUDENTS

The students were thrilled to meet children of their own age group, belonging to Ukraine. The Skype session was for students and teachers of the primary classes from both the countries, in which 90–100 (both Indian and Ukrainian) students participated. More sessions, each spanning 45 minutes, were held after this. Initially, students, on both the sides, were a bit hesitant while interacting with each other, but later, they seemed curious to know about each other. The students sang the national anthems of their respective countries at the end of each session. It was an enriching experience for both the students, as well as, the teachers.

I could feel the concept of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (meaning, 'the whole world is one family') being reinforced during the sessions.

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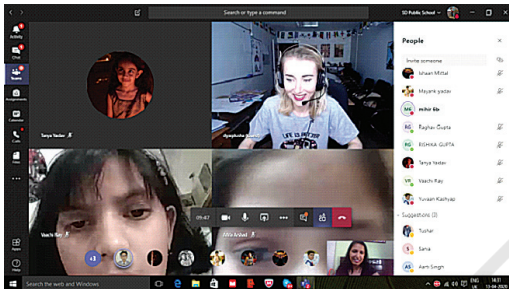*Figure 1(a and b): Indian and Ukrainian students bonding through Skype*

Figure 2(a): Indian and Russian students interacting through Skype

Figure 2(b): Some authentic Russian recipes shared by students on Skype

Some of the upper primary students, who were also watching the session, shared, "We, and people of all religions, need to put our differences aside and look at our similarities...If we take time to get to know religions other than our own, we will understand that we can get along happily."

SESSION WITH RUSSIAN STUDENTS

Students of Class VI got an opportunity to interact with their Russian counterparts. They had completed a chapter on food and were curious to know more about Russian cuisine. During the session break, they talked about the cuisines of their respective countries.

SESSION WITH UK STUDENTS

After completing a chapter titled 'Fibre to Fabric', the students were provided with an opportunity to interact on the theme with their counterparts in the UK. They learnt not only about some of the traditional Indian attires but also about those worn in the UK.
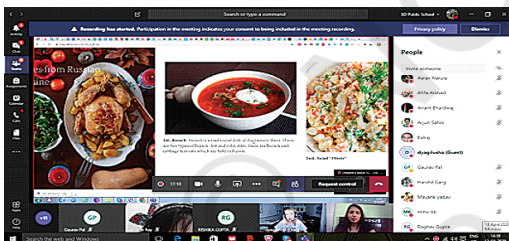
PROGRAMME OUTREACH

Apart from making our own students a part of the Skype sessions, we also invited underprivileged children, studying in Navjyoti Foundation, an NGO, to participate in the digital activity.

One of the virtual activities was 'Mystery Skype', which allowed the students to connect with students

of another country for cultural exchange. A game of 'Mystery Skype' was played, wherein, the students had to guess the nationality of their virtual counterparts. This activity interwined knowledge with fun.

In a Nutshell..

The Skype sessions provide unlimited opportunities for teaching and learning, allowing exploration beyond the four walls of a classroom. Even a school with limited resources can participate in such an activity. The Skype activities conducted by the school reflect an approach that aims at fostering sensitivity to languages and cultures other than one's own. As teachers opened up to the idea of Skype as an educational tool, they realised that these elements helped constitute the idea of Global Citizenship Education, ingrained in the Indian culture as *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam.*