



Challenge

A need to maintain face-to-face weekly support and instruction of teachers in India, from 10,000 miles away

Solution

- VidyoPortal
- VidyoGateway
- VidyoDesktop

Thinking Schools Academy: Enabling a New Way of Teaching in India's Schools



The Thinking Schools Academy at the Auxilium Nava Jyothi School in Kunnamangalam, Kerala was founded in August 2012 under the sponsorship of Homes of Hope, a non-profit organization that aims to enhance the well-being and education quality of marginalized children in India. Nava Jyothi is a K-12 school with over 1500 students. Operated by the Salesian Sisters of Don Bosco, a Catholic order of nuns headquartered in Bangalore, Nava Jyothi is an English Medium school in which instruction, homework and books are delivered in English.

Key Results

High-quality visual and audio communication between school teachers in India and instructors in the U.S.

Maintain momentum of weekly meetings and tutorials, in-between physical visits by instructors

Collaboration between multiple teachers and instructors from regions across the globe

When author, journalist and teacher, Paul Wilkes, established Homes of Hope, he found that one of the biggest problems for many children in India, was the availability of quality education. Although English is the preferred language of instruction in most of India's schools, the majority of students come from households where English is not the primary language spoken. Students are able to speak and read English words, however, because of their limited vocabulary, their challenge is in understanding what they have read. Wilkes was determined to change this and enlisted the help of Dr. David Paige, Assistant Professor and Program Chair, School of Education at Bellarmine University,

to oversee an initiative to raise the quality of education among these groups of marginalized school children. They named the program The Thinking Schools Academy.

"Education in India is typically conducted through instruction that encourages the learning of facts through memorization," said Dr. Paige. "The method of most school teachers in India is usually: 'I'll teach you something ... you memorize it ... and then spit it back to me.' The exams are just that. They don't know how to educate by way of a higher order of thinking; no type of expanding or analyzing or synthesizing information. The instructors, themselves, have

little or no training in teaching methods that encourage and facilitate student thinking beyond fact acquisition. As a result, the development of student thinking within the Indian educational system, particularly in the primary and secondary grades is limited and highly one-dimensional.”

It was this realization that indicated where the primary focus of the Thinking Schools Academy needed to be; the main goal of the Academy is to train teachers in instructional methods that facilitate various ways of thinking in their students. “In a very real sense, the Thinking Schools Academy gives teachers a new perspective of their craft, one that is ‘learning re-imagined,’” said Paige.

“Vidyo has features and flexibility that we couldn’t find with other systems. We would not have gotten so far along with this project without having the abilities that Vidyo provides.”

Dr. David Paige, Assistant Professor and Program Chair,
School of Education at Bellarmine University

“Right around the time we started planning the Thinking Schools Academy, I was introduced to the notion of teaching via videoconferencing. We were looking for a solution to connect and communicate with our teachers when we could not be physically present in India. That’s when we found out about Vidyo. Vidyo fulfills our needs extremely well. I can bring on people from multiple locations -- teachers from India, our colleagues from different places in the U.S. -- we can all be at the same meeting at the same time. The other great feature about Vidyo is that it allows us to collaborate; we share PowerPoint presentations and other documents that make what we’re talking about more real for our students.”

Dr. Paige and his colleagues travel to India three or four times a year, at which time they work with the teachers there in person. However in the interim periods, when they cannot be in the country with them, using Vidyo enables them to keep up with the momentum of the education system and meet

weekly. “Rather than waiting two or three months until we’re back in the country to work with them, we keep going every week, without interruption. “Vidyo has features and flexibility that we couldn’t find with other systems. We would not have gotten so far along with this project without having the abilities that Vidyo provides.”

When asked how the teachers in India first reacted to the video interactions, Dr. Paige replied, “Vidyo was quite the novelty when we began. As our sessions continued, the teachers gradually became more comfortable interacting with me in Louisville, Kentucky and my colleague in Wilmington, North Carolina. I noticed that after five to six sessions the teachers were becoming more animated and more willing to share, which indicated to me that they were moving past the self-consciousness of being ‘on camera.’ By the time our series of sessions ended, no one was showing any signs of being inhibited or distracted by the technology.”

Dr. Paige accesses Vidyo from both at his office at Bellarmine University and on his PC at home, in Louisville. With a Logitech camera and a Phoenix Duet PCS speaker connected to the computers, he has instant access to his colleagues in North Carolina and their “student” teachers in India. The teachers in India, who also use a PC with the same Logitech camera and Phoenix set up, simply sit surrounding the computer in the room at the Nava Jyothi School. Both in the U.S. and in India, the conference participants are connected through local Internet providers, and Dr. Paige is quite pleased with the quality of the video and audio.

“In our meetings over Vidyo we cover a lot of ground,” said Paige. “We discuss the strategies the teachers have been using, their challenges, and the victories they’ve had with what they’ve been learning and doing. It has been a very successful endeavor. Vidyo has allowed us to create and maintain a classroom environment from 10,000 miles away.”

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