

SARA BRUUN

Furutorpskolan (Hässleholm, Sweden)

Chapter 8. Global goals: A virtual project with students from Sweden and Tanzania

Introduction

I am a language teacher at a secondary school in Sweden. The school where I work is located a few miles north of the third largest city in Sweden, Malmö and has about 600 students. Part of my workload is teaching English as a foreign language during two weekly 60-minute classes. The school I work at has always endeavoured to be innovative and to introduce technology into the everyday teaching and learning practices of the teachers and students. In particular, we have worked quite often with Chromebooks and we use Google Classroom¹.

In addition to the progressive environment of our school, as a teacher I feel the need to continuously try to combine authentic tasks, literature and digital tools in order to create subject matter that allows students to see a real purpose for engaging with the proposed activities. Along these lines, it is my belief that the use of digital tools helps open up the classroom towards the whole world, which is an essential part of the learning process

1 For those unfamiliar with these two technological tools, Chromebook is a rather recent (and economic) laptop that is Internet-dependent laptop that functions with Google Chrome Internet browser while the rest of its working components are Web apps (email, photos, documents), or apps that run while you're connected to a network. This everything to be saved on the Web so that content that is being worked on in the classroom can then be accessed from any other computer (from home, from a different classroom or even from a different computer in the same classroom). It has the added incentive that students can never use the excuse that the dog ate their homework! Google classroom is, as its name implies, an online learning environment that draws principally from the Google functions available virtually (e.g. google docs, forms, presentations, albums and portfolios) and which can be easily shared among users. (See also the chapter by Ingelsson and Linder in this book).

for today. One effective means of ensuring that students are gaining global knowledge of the interconnected world is to get them involved in collaborative and international projects. With social media platforms such as Skype (or any other online video conferencing tool) easily available in the classroom, students all over the globe are able to meet, speak, and work together in real time. Clearly digital tools can and should transform teaching and by using them wisely teachers can take their students far beyond textbooks and workbooks and vocabulary tests. This is precisely the premise that underlines the project I will describe in the rest of this chapter.

The project, entitled Global Goals, was a collaborative effort between my classes and a class from a school in Bagamoyo, Tanzania, located on the East African coast, a few miles north of Dar Es Salaam. In comparison to our school of approximately 600 students, their school has close to 1200 students. For the project itself, there were 28 14-year-old students in my class in Sweden and 28 students in Bagamoyo, ranging between the ages of 10 and 13. The aim of the project was to help the students learn about aspects of a sustainable future while working on their English as a foreign language. The project lasted for seven weeks and the lessons were integrated into the English and Social Science lessons of both schools. In the next section of this chapter I explain the background and planning that led up to this project.

Background

There are many different webpages where teachers can find a school to collaborate with. 'E-twinning' or 'Skype in the Classroom' are two of the more popular sites where you can easily find a partner to work with. However, I also use different Facebook groups to find school partners and it was this way that I found the school in Tanzania to work with. Specifically I found them in a group known as 'Mystery Skype', which is a type of subgroup of 'Skype in the Classroom' (more about this further on). Of course, it is very easy (and free) to get in touch with your future partner after having first met in a Facebook group. You can then move on to using the chat function in Messenger, or you can simply exchange contact details and can communicate through the Whatsapp platform.

In our case, the teacher in charge of international projects at the school in Tanzania, (her name is Grace) and I planned our project using Skype and Messenger. However, it is important to note that it can be a bit challenging at times to work with a school in Africa since the Internet connection is not always reliable and often comes and goes. For instance, I soon found out that if it rains there is no Internet nor electricity and it can take a few days before it is possible to connect with the partner school again. Moreover, our partner school only had one working computer so Grace had to use her private mobile phone as a wireless router to provide Internet access for the students' computers. Inevitably, these obstacles created tension, as customarily in Sweden we like to plan everything very thoroughly and with well-established parameters and schedules. We soon found out that this was not always possible when working with the partner school in Africa. This was an important lesson for both the teacher (myself) and the students. These challenges will be discussed in further detail in another section of the chapter.

It is worth noting that this exchange was not completely virtual –we were able to arrange a face-to-face meeting as well. This was possible through the Swedish Council for Higher Education, which is responsible for a number of different programmes that give stakeholders in the entire Swedish education sector – from pre-school, primary and secondary school, to higher education, vocational education and training and adult education – the opportunity to apply for project funding for international partnerships and exchange projects. (The Swedish Council for Higher Education. 2017) The aim is that these international activities will contribute to increasing the quality of education in Sweden. In May 2017 I applied and received funding so that a colleague, three of our students and I were able to visit the school in Bagamoyo, Tanzania in November 2017. In May 2018 Grace, her headmaster and 2 students will return the visit and join us in Sweden.

The beginning of the project: Getting to know each other

This project started with the two schools doing a 'Mystery Skype'. However, before explaining what a Mystery Skype is, I will first describe 'Skype in the Classroom'. This programme was launched in December of 2010 and has quickly become a worldwide phenomenon for teachers and

students to contact and communicate with other classrooms around the globe. Teachers can use the platform to connect with other educators with similar interests, find lessons, meet and arrange guest speakers (e.g. book authors), and even take their classes on virtual field trips. Alongside ‘Skype in the Classroom’, educators can also participate in a ‘Mystery Skype’ game that promotes critical thinking, cultural awareness and geography skills. ‘Mystery Skype’ is basically a competition that can be arranged by a group of teachers who have joined ‘Skype in the Classroom’. For the game, the participating classes have to try to discover where their partner school is located and the first to do so wins. Students are only allowed to ask ‘yes or no’ questions which are asked in tandem with other students who are working with a map and doing a google information search, based on the partners’ answers.

The students may ask questions like: ‘Do you live in Europe?’ ‘Do you live close to an ocean?’ or ‘Are there mountains where you live?’ When a class gets an answer the students then carry out investigative work based on these answers: for example, if the students understand that the other class lives in Europe they use Google maps and circle where they think the class might be located. As the students ask questions and the game progresses, the circle gets smaller and the classes eventually try to guess where the other class is. In the case of small towns such as ours, before the game started the teachers decided which city was acceptable as a winning guess (one that can be more easily located on the map than a very small town).

In our case, the students from the school in Tanzania were the first to guess our location. After the game ended, the students started talking and asked each other different questions to learn about each others’ schools, communities and countries and to get to know each other a bit more. For instance, my students were very interested to know how hot it was in Africa and if there were lions around the school. The Tanzanian students wanted to know if Sweden has snow on the ground all the year round so one of my students took the portable computer and went outside to show them that it was all green and sunny. In short, even in the first brief introduction phase, the students expanded their world knowledge and their cultural understanding of each other.

As the students talked on Skype it emerged that both classes were interested in taking care of the planet. The students in Tanzania told my students that if you live near Dar es Salaam it is impossible to swim in the

ocean because the beaches surrounding the city are covered with garbage and plastic. It is also impossible to walk out in the ocean to swim because the garbage spreads 5 to 10 metres in the water. Even the luxury hotels must deal with this problem. They have employees that try to clean the beaches every morning and evening, but the tourists still cannot go into the ocean to swim; they must stay by the pool. The Swedish students were upset to hear this and together with the students in Tanzania they decided that they wanted to learn more about the problems related to plastic pollution and what can be done to prevent it.

So, after some discussion, we (the teachers involved in the project) decided to develop our plans based on the 'global goal number 14': Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development. The 'global goals' (also known as the sustainable development goals) are summaries or bullet points derived from the seventieth UN General Assembly in which an expansive and ambitious set of development goals were established with the intention of ending poverty in all its forms by 2030. These parameters succeed the previous 'Millennium Development Goals (MDGs)' of the United Nations in their initiative for advancing basic living standards in the world and addressing a range of issues, including armed conflict, climate change, and equality.

While we recognize that these development goals are open to some criticism such as being too broad and overly ambitious, we felt that they could be used to identify specific learning challenges for our students who must learn life skills for the problems that they will face as citizens of the future. Thus, we decided to focus on the two transversal aims of learning about 'life under water' and of course, to provide purposeful communication situations to help develop our students' skills in English (as a foreign language).

Once we had decided on a general topic, we then agreed that we wanted to raise public awareness in both countries about the problems of plastic pollution. Both schools retrieved lesson plans and materials to work with for the lessons from the webpage called 'The Worlds' Largest Lesson' which provides ready-made lesson plans that teachers can use straight away.

Finally, Grace and I decided that the theme needed to be like an umbrella, which for us meant that we had the same topic but we could add content that suits our own curriculum. We felt that made it is easier to plan and the classes could continue working even if there were no Internet connection.

It also implied that the classes did not have to do exactly the same activities during the lessons and in the event that a class fell behind (due to Internet breakdown, for instance) the students could catch up when the connection was working again. We planned the project in a shared Google document, but we also used Padlet.com, Skype and Messenger as well.

Classroom activities

As mentioned above, Grace and I planned our classroom work mostly via Messenger, but also via Skype. It was hard for her to plan since her class only had one working computer and even then she could never be sure if she would have reliable Internet connection. However Grace is a very resolute individual and she was determined to finish the project. She also was unwavering in her commitment to providing her students with as many opportunities to work with technology as possible. So the digital tools that we finally decided upon and were able to use in both countries were:

- **Edpuzzle.com:** This is a video platform for teachers and students where students can watch videos and answer questions. Teachers can follow what the students do from the teacher's account.
- **Padlet.com:** This is an online virtual "bulletin" board, where students and teachers can collaborate, reflect, share links and pictures, in a secure location.
- **Flipgrid.com:** This is a video discussion platform, where you can upload a film and a topic. People all over the world can join your discussions.
- **Skype:** This is a platform where you can make video and audio calls and exchange chat messages
- **Messenger:** This is the chat app that belongs to Facebook.
- **Google document:** This is an online tool for writing documents. Students and teachers can collaborate and work in real time.
- **Wordpress.com.** This is a blog portal.
- **Instagram:** This is an internet-based photo-sharing application and service that allows users to share pictures and videos.

- Imovie; This is a video editing software app available for Apple (Mac) users.
- Youtube: This is a video sharing website.
- Bookcreator.com: This is an online tool you can use to create E-books.

How these tools are integrated into the different learning activities are described in the general description of the planned tasks.

The first activities: Learning about the topic and learning about each other

To start off the learning activities, students in both countries began working on the chosen theme by watching a documentary film from *National Geographic* that related what happens in the oceans when humans throw plastic into them. The film was uploaded on Edpuzzle.com so the students in both countries could watch it and answer the questions that the teachers had created together.

After watching the film the students were divided into groups of four students – two from each country. The small groups of four worked together in Padlet.com, writing down their thoughts about the film and also adding information on what they were interested in learning more about after watching the film and working in Edpuzzle.

Padlet.com was chosen because of its many features that provide excellent affordances when executing an international project. For instance, it works as a digital pinboard where you can upload pictures, videos, audio files or add text messages. These different means of communication allowed the students to upload their ideas in different formats so that their partners could access them at any time.

This was extremely useful because the Internet connection was often poor for the students from Tanzania. This also meant that they were not able to upload as much content as the Swedish students, but on the whole the amount of work done by both sides was impressive. Both schools were able to read what had been written by everyone else and this stimulated a lot of creative thinking. In this way the students at both partner schools were prepared for discussion of their ideas before any of the planned Skype sessions.

This preparation was essential for the synchronous activities like video conferencing, especially given that some of the Tanzanian students only spoke Swahili and these students in particular struggled to be able to

communicate in English. All the students needed to be very well prepared to talk to each other so the teachers created support materials to scaffold their communication efforts. For instance, the students were given sentence prompters (e.g. the beginning of standard sentences; formulaic language chunks as reminders for conversational bits) to help them plan what they wanted to say during the Skype calls and of course the teachers intervened whenever students had evident difficulties in their communicative efforts.

After watching the videos, the next sessions of the project aimed to help the students in the partner classes get to know each other. This was not easy since it was a challenge to have a scheduled time with the school in Africa. For instance at one point the teachers had planned for the students to talk on Skype, but when the class from Sweden called there was no answer. A few hours later the class from Tanzania called and expressed surprise that the Swedish class had not waited for them to call. Clearly this was an example of cultural expectations and norms that often come to the fore when carrying out international telecollaborative projects. Although the students were not able to Skype as often as initially planned and desired there were a few times during the project when the classes managed to get in touch and this 'human factor' was a very important part of the whole learning process (as well as understanding and accepting different norms about timing and work schedules).

Moving forward: Getting ready to create a film together

During one session, the students discussed possible final product formats and content and agreed that they were interested in achieving three things: to create a film in Imovie, upload it to Youtube and disseminate it on Flipgrid and in other social media.

To decide the content for the Imovie, Skype was used in different ways; at times the students were able to talk together about different subjects and at other times they simply left written messages for each other. Sometimes the students also worked on Google documents to create the script for the movie about the need to stop polluting the oceans with plastic. In order to decide what should be included in the script of the film, the students gathered information about threats to the ocean from different web pages such as: digitalexplorer.com, National Geographic.com, ecokids.ca and worldwildlife.org. They then synthesized the information and posted the

most relevant points in the shared Padlet. Additionally, the Swedish students wrote a newspaper article about the problem of plastic pollution in the oceans and any possible solutions. The writing was stimulated through this prompting text²:

Yesterday you met a scientist and the research focus is #stopplasticpollution.

Imagine that you are a journalist and you make an interview with the scientist.

You are very interested in taking care of our planet and you write articles for the National Geographic and newspapers that buy your texts.

You have been on vacation and you found out that it was impossible to swim in the ocean. You found dead animals on the beach, covered in oil, and you also saw a lot of waste on the beach and in the ocean. You met the scientist at the hotel and you started talking.

You decide to write an article about the situation. When you write your article make sure you include the answers to the 5 W- questions:

- **Who** was involved?
- **What** happened?
- **Where** did it take place?
- **When** did it take place?
- **Why** did that happen?
- Some authors may want to add a sixth question, “how”, to the list: **How** did it happen? (Bruun, 2017)

The students first wrote a text together in a Google document in small groups and then the groups exchanged texts to give each other feedback and help each other develop and improve their texts. They were given specific phrases to orient them on giving feedback (Annex 1). The students then got their texts back and re-wrote them. The final versions of the texts were published in the E-book which also served as reading material for the Tanzanian students.

It must be noted that corollary to the project, we detected a need to hold several discussions about what are reliable sources of information and how an Internet user knows whether a webpage can be trusted or not. After some discussion, it became apparent that Facebook was used by most of

2 Bruunsklassrum.blogspot.se

the students as a main source of information sources in both countries so an entire Skype session was dedicated to talking about whether everything shared on Facebook is reliable and verifiable information.

More importantly, students were given guidelines in order to know if a Facebook post was a reliable source for information or not. The guidelines were taken from easybib.com. According to this website, the main questions students should think about are:

- Who is providing the information?
- What do you know about the author and their credentials?
- Are they an expert?
- Can you find out more and contact them?
- Search for author or publisher in search engine. Has the author written several publications on the topic?
- Have other credible people referenced this source?
- Is the language free of emotion?
- Does the organization or author suggest there may be bias? Does bias make sense in relations to your argument?
- Is the purpose of the website to inform or to persuade towards a certain agenda?
- Are there ads? Are they trying to make money?
- When was the source last updated?
- Was it reproduced? If so, from where? Type a sentence in Google to verify.

Following the discussion about the guidelines the students went back to their Padlet posts and checked their sources one more time to make sure the information was reliable.

Next they began to write the film script. Using the facts that they learned from their different sources, the students worked collaboratively on the script in Google document. The writing process was done differently in each class. The students in Tanzania worked on the script together as a whole class, with considerable much guidance by their teacher whereas the Swedish students worked more autonomously, in groups of four. In both cases, whenever the students needed help with the teachers helped the students with grammar and vocabulary and when the Swedish team was in Bagamoyo, there was a special focus on practicing pronunciation, intonation and body language.

Most of the project was done together and online, but the final version of the manuscript and the recording and editing of the film was finalized during the Swedish team's visit to Tanzania³.

The project was also documented in a blog called 'Global Goals'.⁴ The task of documenting the entire process was distributed differently between the two partner schools. Given that the Tanzanian students had more limited access to the Internet, it was principally the Swedish students posting the documenting of the project process in the blog. But at the same time, these same blog posts, because they were written in English served as materials for reading practise for the Tanzanian partners. The Swedish students also created an E-book in Bookcreator.com. This book was written in Swedish during the Social Science lessons and compiled all the knowledge they had learned regarding poverty, starvation and the importance of having clean water⁵.

What was assessed?

As with any project, teachers must assess how things are going and how much the students are learning. In our case, we decided to evaluate the students differently due to different curricula and learning objectives. Moreover, the sizes of the classes were very different. Teachers in Bagamoyo sometimes have 50 to 60 students in one class, which makes teaching and assessing specific areas of language use quite difficult. Thus, in terms of language learning, the Swedish students were assessed on: writing (a newspaper article about stopping plastic pollution), speaking (a debate in class and the Skype calls) whereas the students in Bagamoyo were assessed on reading (the newspaper article written by their partners), speaking (the Skype calls) and writing (the script).

3 Anyone interested in watching the film can view it here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IS3iBb4J1ko&feature=youtu.be>

4 Global Goals: <https://globalgoals1718.wordpress.com/>

5 Global Goals – the book: <https://read.bookcreator.com/h5AXqHfrv0fCKBja9lCdZ4YcgDk1/S8zmi7C3Reevrlnka2EM-A>

Problems that emerged and how they were resolved

A key incident that emerged was the challenge for the Swedish students to understand the extremely low economic level of the students in Bagamoyo. To facilitate their comprehension, a guest speaker from Kenya was invited to speak to the class through the Skype platform. The guest speaker belonged to the MEDF⁶ Teaching Farm whose goal is to empower the farmers with the knowledge and training they need to make informed decisions about alternative horticulture and husbandry to the traditional farming they have been practising.

The guest speaker showed the class how they taught poor families to clean water just by using PET- bottles that were put in the sun. The water was heated, the germs disappeared and the water became drinkable. The lesson was an exceptional experience for the students and they learned a lot. They found it really unbelievable that there were no taps for drinking water and when the guest speaker told them that during the driest months people could not even take a shower the Swedish students almost fainted! The lesson truly raised their awareness of poverty in other parts of the world.

Other problems were related to the poor Internet connection in Tanzania. Admittedly, there is little than can be done about this situation except arm one's self with patience. Internet access inevitably returns with time. As it has been explained above, at times Grace was able to share her Internet connection from her private phone, which helped considerably, however, given that the teachers in Tanzania have very low salaries and buying data on a Sim card is expensive, Grace was understandably reluctant to spend her own money on this. While visiting the school I had the opportunity to speak with the district officer who is in charge of all the schools in the Bagamoyo area. During our conversation, I made the suggestion that if the municipality paid for a mobile phone with an Internet connection that could be shared, he would be able to promote the school as one of the in Tanzania. He seemed to be intrigued with the idea and indicated that he would take it into consideration.

6 MEDF is registered under the Kenyan Ministry of Gender, Children and Social Development. They empower the farmers with the knowledge and training they need to make informed farming decision. The mission is to develop an economic farming model that provides for and nurtures a sustainable village life on 1/4 acre. (www.mitahatoedf.com)

Another challenge that we encountered was the fact that some of the students from Tanzania only understood Swahili. To provide them (and other students with less command of English in both countries), we provided them with sentence starters and other similar materials to scaffold their English comprehension. Additionally, an unexpected outcome of this situation was the initiative of the Swedish students to use Google Translate and try to learn words in Swahili. They were also creative in the communicative strategies: they combined English, gestures and some key words in Swahili to be able to communicate. Their strategies included the use of technology as a communicative strategy as well: they used Google translate on their phone (from Swedish or English to Swahili) and then showed the Tanzanian students their cellphone screen with the translated word via Skype.

Incompatible school calendars and timing were also problems. The Swedish students had classes scheduled two times a week and since a few of the booked Skype meetings and other tasks were cancelled because of different reasons, this disrupted the progress of planned classes. The reasons for cancellation were disparate: One day it was raining in Bagamoyo and the students were unable to make it to class (the roads were impassable). Another day the tide so many of the Tanzanian students had to help their families collect shells to sell and catch fish to eat. Again, we had to go with the flow and follow the African way of doing things. We had to postpone our plans and just relax, which was easier said than done at times, especially during our visit because we only had 5 days in Bagamoyo! As a teacher, once you are involved in a project like this, you learn a lot (not just the students). We found we had planned too much; there were so many things we wanted to do together but when time ran out we had to accept that there was nothing more that could be done.

As with any international telecollaborative project, problems need to be solved. Luckily, my partner Grace in Bagamoyo is a problem solver and she understood the cultural and social differences and how they can affect the collaboration and we tried to make the best of it. Both classes learned a lot about differences and the need to compromise to be able to fulfill a project like this.

Tips and tricks for other teachers

My experience has shown me that a theme and project need to have a real underlying, social purpose in order to motivate the students. When they see that there is a reason for communicating in a foreign language with someone outside of their school, community and country, they are more motivated than when they only are reading a text in a textbook. However, the project must always have central theme that ensures students feel will truly have an impact on their learning. Additionally, the teacher must encourage them to understand they need to be interested in their future and this process of learning is one way to do that (Bruun, 2016).

I really recommend other teachers explore working around themes through telecollaboration. Working with classes in other countries can add important values to your teaching. Your students learn a lot and get a deeper understanding about the world around them. And nowadays, teaching English through different online tools is a relatively easy way to open your classroom towards the world. Today we have access to many digital tools for communicating and collaborating with other classes and countries. This is the basis of any good language pedagogy: In your classroom you need to focus on communication and to have real recipients of your information. As van Patten explains communication is "the expression, interpretation and sometimes negotiation of meaning in a given context. What is more, communication is also purposeful" (Van Patten, 2017, p.3).

Van Patten also highlights the fact that you do not automatically have a communicative approach in your classroom just because you see and hear that the mouths of your students are moving (Van Patten, 2017, p. 14). He argues that teachers need to create tasks and themes that motivate their students to communicate and that digital tools can help teachers in this aspect. By using digital tools the voice of every student can more easily be heard and connecting with other classes all over the globe can be done.

In our project, digital tools were essential to be able to achieve our goals. We worked together virtually in Google document, Padlet, our blog and on Skype, among other tools. Arguably it might have been easier to work with a class in a country in Europe. When working with a school that is quite different culturally and socially, you really need to be patient and a problem solver, but it is my opinion that both teachers and students learn

more when they are thrust into the unfamiliar and discover that everything is not as easy going as it normally is.

The students need to discuss and apply critical thinking to be able to carry out the project and they learn that the world consists of a lot more than the school, municipality and country they live in. We, as language teachers need to focus on more than grammar and vocabulary. We need to give the students different perspectives of the world and an understanding of other cultures. By using digital tools you can easily give this to your students.

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Annex

Examples of materials

Stars

Variation and vocabulary

Your language is varied.
You vary your language well.
Your vocabulary is very varied.
Your language felt very much alive.
You have a varied language and don't repeat yourself.

Clarity and coherence

Your text has good flow.
It's easy to understand your text.
The content of your text was clear with good details.
The content was very clear.
Your text has a clear line of argument.
There was a clear line of argument in your text, making it easy to understand.
Your text is coherent and clear.
You reason with good arguments to support your point.

Adaption

Your writing is well adapted to your theme.
You adapt your language to different genres.
You adapt your text to the receiver and situation.
Grammar and spelling:
 Good sentence structure and descriptions.
 You write with good grammar.

Wishes

Variation and vocabulary

You could vary your vocabulary more.
You could use more difficult words and sentences.
Try to read more difficult text to learn how to write like that.
You need to expand your vocabulary.
Try to make your language come alive more.

Clarity and coherence

Your text could have better flow.
You could develop your reasoning more.
Try to make your text more coherent.
Next time you write a text, make sure it has a clear line of argument.
You can work with clarifying your text.

Adaption

You could adapt your language more to your theme.
You can think about adapting your text to the receiver and situation.
You should try to adapt the language to your genre.
You could adapt your language more to the purpose.

Grammar and spelling

You can improve the grammar in your text.
You need to improve the sentence structure.
There are some spelling mistakes, read through your text once more to find them.
Think about what tense you use (verbs). (Bruun, 2015)

