

## Lesson 2: Using Skype for your Classroom

### Using Skype at School

Schools have outgrown inkwells, slates, and typewriters. E-mail, [instant messaging](#), and the [Internet](#) have opened the classroom to the world. Skype empowers students and teachers even further by adding features for collaboration, live video, and instant file sharing.



*Figure 2.1 Skype*

### Connect to the world on a teacher's budget

The impact and benefit of students speaking with students across the globe brings an authenticity to education that adds immeasurably to both textbooks and Web references. Skype makes it easy to connect to other people, other cultures, and other countries. Classrooms may not have telephones, but they are often wired for the Internet.

### What is Skype?

Skype is a service that teachers and students can access using the hardware they already have in their rooms. It's common knowledge that teachers spend, on average, \$500 out of their own pockets to stock their classrooms. Skype fits into a teacher's budget. It's free.

### **Master a foreign language (or practice a phrase)**

A Web-savvy teacher with a desktop and a high-speed line can create a gathering place to reach language learners. Schools from Italy, the United States, Turkey, Sweden, England, and more have connected with each other over Skype to help student's master foreign languages through educator-mediated Web forums. The schools control their projects and connectivity. A main Web site functions like a town square, a place to find kindred spirits and post Skype [contact](#) names.



*Figure 2.2 Students talking through Skype*

### **Have school beyond the classroom door**

A quick file transfer, in mid-chat or mid-conversation, brings assignments from student to teacher in record time. In addition, teachers can use the Mood Message option to post a note next to his or her [Skype Name](#) to let students know what topic is on the agenda, when an assignment is due, or just that they are doing great work. Remote teachers can encourage students with similar interests to work together, encourage older students to mentor younger ones, or simply hold class with the Skype conference facility.

Technology in the classroom: Using Skype:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XqOfQoqMi3E&feature=related>

### **Provide professional development**

Skype brings professional development to the teacher, coach, or mentor when and where they need it. The common model of improving teaching skills gathers teachers in one place for a one-size-fits-all workshop. With Skype, teacher mentors can deliver personalized training directly to the classroom on subjects teachers need. Whether the interaction occurs one on one, through a mini-conference, or on an as-needed advice line, using Skype skips the expense, the travel, and the time out of the classroom for teachers.

### **Encourage student collaboration**

Skype is a natural environment for student collaboration. In one software setup, students can talk with each other and send drafts of files to everyone in the group to review and interject with text comments. Archives of Skype text messaging conversations can bring fellow students up-to-date if they miss a meeting. Students can work on [school](#) newspapers, use video to practice a senior play, try debate strategies, and even organize school events.

### **Use Skype as a homework helper**

Although some large cities have extensive Web sites with live [homework](#) helpers ready to guide a youngster through a difficult assignment, smaller towns may not have the means to set up an after-school resource centre. Skype can double as a quick connection to a teacher, librarian, or even a travelling parent for a child in the midst of a homework crisis.

### **Conduct read-alouds**

One important way to inspire children to read is by reading aloud to them. Schools can arrange to have an author read a story over Skype so that the entire class can enjoy a favourite book and then ask questions for an author study. Other remote readers might be local business owners, elected officials, athletes, or other local leaders. Some local theatre groups get involved in literacy education by offering read-alouds in classrooms. They can expand their service by adding a Skype call to the classroom read-aloud. It would be like the old radio shows that used to broadcast to the world while performing in front of a live audience.

This is Skype's education page: <http://education.skype.com/>

### **Support special-needs students**

Children with special needs often have unique problems that make the school experience difficult. Some children with developmental delays, autism, or speech and language problems cannot easily describe their day when they return home after school. Teachers write notes, phone when they can, and try to make up for the lack of communication during open school night.



*Figure 2.3 Skype logo*

With Skype, teachers can send a description of the day over a chat or file transfer, and offer Skype conference hours after school or during administrative periods during the school day. Teachers can also help direct a parent with a struggling learner by modelling teaching techniques. The parent and child are at home and the teacher coaches through Skype. The natural setting and the convenient, supportive, communication change the very nature of the parent/teacher conference!

Skype can also offer a unique combination of accessible modes of language. Children who are blind can join in an audio Skype conference. Children who are hearing impaired can engage in a written chat. Children who use sign language can use the video mode as well as the chat for maximum flexibility. Children who are homebound can actually join in a school-based classroom without expensive teleconferencing equipment. Skype connects the special-needs student with new opportunities for learning.