



21st Century School | Feature

6 Ways Teachers Can Use Google Hangouts

- By Bridget McCrea
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As director of technology for [Groton-Dunstable Regional School District](#) in Groton, MA, as well as a teacher of high school courses in digital and information literacy, [Andrew Marcinek](#) knows what it takes to effectively implement tech in the classroom. One of Marcinek's recent discoveries is [Google Hangouts](#), a free video chat service that enables one-on-one chats and group chats with up to 10 people at a time. For Marcinek, Hangouts provides a new way to connect students beyond the four walls of the classroom. Where students used to need permission slips and school buses to get that “out of classroom” experience, tools such as Hangouts (which educators can join simply by setting up a Google+ page and signing up for the Hangout feature) allow instructors to do all of the following tasks:

1. Broadcast and archive live sessions. This is one of Marcinek's favorite ways to use Hangouts. As part of his high school “help desk” course, for example, Marcinek has students use the application to connect with attendees at an Association of Computer Technology Educators of Maine ([ACTEM](#)) conference. Since attending the conference in person was impossible due to scheduling conflicts, Marcinek set up a Hangout, developed a presentation with his students, and then broadcast the session live to conference attendees. “We were then able to use the application to archive the presentation,” said Marcinek, “and share it with others afterwards.”

2. Share screens and create collaborative demonstrations. As part of that ACTEM presentation, Marcinek's class was able to share its computer screen to help demonstrate key points. Using the Google Drive suite of apps, they were also able to work collaboratively with attendees. They discussed a YouTube video directly through the Hangout box, for example, and then archived the interaction on a dedicated YouTube account for future reference.

3. Create live shows and talks for broadcast. Marcinek's students have also used Hangouts to present bimonthly talks on educational technology and its impact on student learning. Students create scripts, configure sets, and manipulate camera angles to bring their shows to life. “Each student pitches a show to the team, writes a script for that 10-minute show, and then films it live via a Hangout,” Marcinek explained. The idea, he added, is to reach as many viewers as possible while connecting with “students and teachers globally to share ideas and make meaningful connections through this medium.”

4. Create two-way conversations in a digital format. Marcinek sees Hangouts as a good alternative to Skype or FaceTime. Whether the discussion involves an online video, a document, or a piece of literature, Hangouts promote conversation and—because they can accommodate up to 10

participants—brings a larger group in. Marcinek said, “People can easily ‘drop in’ and see what’s happening, interact with the group, and then save everything for later viewing.”

5. Develop rich online portfolios. Because they allow users to save and archive their online interactions, Hangouts also serve as a viable online portfolio tool for Marcinek and his students. “A teacher can create a channel and then develop a repository of videos, work, and presentations that’s accessible to others,” said Marcinek, who has taught kindergarten teachers how to leverage Hangouts in their own classrooms. If a student starts saving his or her work at age 5, Marcinek said, by the end of high school, “He or she can have a digital repository to use as a reflective piece and/or resume. That’s pretty useful.”

6. Leverage the application for professional development. Up next on Marcinek’s agenda: professional development sessions made easier, more accessible, and even longer thanks to Hangouts. The latter is especially critical for Marcinek, who recently found himself getting “cut short” by time constraints at a professional development presentation. The fact that some eager attendees weren’t able to make it to the session prompted the tech-savvy teacher to create a live, on-air event using the application. “I even had a few students come in and help me present the topic again online,” said Marcinek, who has more of these sessions planned for the near future. “I posted the link to Twitter and got an even larger audience as a result.”

To teachers considering Hangouts as a classroom tool, Marcinek said, “Make sure you have the WiFi capabilities to handle the streaming video.” Without that piece of the puzzle, he said the video chat service will quickly become more of a burden than a help. He added that the sign-up process is easier for schools that already use Google Apps for Education. Finally, he said, be sure to obtain permission from parents—a step that should be taken anytime new applications or sharing services are introduced into a K-12 classroom. “Because the videos are published to a broad audience on the web,” said Marcinek, “you want to be clear both with parents and the administration on exactly what you’re doing—just in case.”

About the Author

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