

**Communication Tools: Blackboard Collaborate, Blackboard IM, Periscope,  
Google Voice, FreeConferenceCall.com, Socrative & Evernote**

IT 648 Digital Communications in Education

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## **Introduction**

A group of six students enrolled in IT 648, Digital Communications in Education, worked collaboratively to explore different communication tools available for use in classroom settings. The group selected Blackboard Collaborate/Blackboard IM, Periscope, Google Voice, FreeConferenceCall.com and Evernote, all of which have a smartphone or tablet application and examined the ways in which the tool could be used in the classroom. Each group member interacted with the other group members using these tools so that everyone could have a chance to learn how the tools worked and how they could be of value in the classroom.

As a group, the team also brainstormed and came up with creative and innovative ways in which to use these tools in a classroom setting. The tools not only had several features with which to help students, but also features which could help teachers connect with both students and their parents. An overview of each tool, its usefulness, advantages and potential challenges has been outlined in the report below.

## **Findings**

### **Blackboard Collaborate**

**Function.** Blackboard Collaborate is a collaboration tool provided by Blackboard used by the learning community. It is used to facilitate online teaching and student engagement in real time. With Blackboard Collaborate, the instructor can create virtual classrooms and meeting spaces for engaging learning experiences. Instructors can use Collaborate to deliver live classes, with PowerPoint or video presentations. Both students and learners can share information using the whiteboard feature. Students are able to record information directly from a course and join live classes from either a computer or mobile device. Using Collaborate offers students participating in both online and traditional classes the opportunity to conveniently participate in

group projects.

**Advantages.** There are many advantages to using Blackboard Collaborate. Blackboard Collaborate makes it easy for everyone in your group or class to work together in one central location. If members are not able to meet together in person at the same time or in the same city, it provides users the ability to share documents and other class related documents on screen, including the ability to write messages on the whiteboard for all to see. Another advantage is that members can video or talk with each other via audio and if the video chat option is used, everyone can see each other in real time. Some of the more obvious advantages would be ease of use, increased access and availability to course materials, as well as immediate feedback, something many online learning systems do not provide.

**Challenges.** Our group used Blackboard Collaborate for our first meeting. We met in the conference room where we discovered that one of the drawbacks to using Blackboard Collaborate was that only three of us could have our speaker on simultaneously. However, we did continue our conversation using another collaboration tool, FreeConferenceCall.com. This free tool allowed us to hear each other simultaneously. While we still used some of the features of Blackboard Collaborate, we use the other tool as well. In Blackboard Collaborate, we were able to write on the whiteboard, use a limited version of video chat, and use the chat feature to discuss Project 1.

Besides the one difficulty previously mentioned in Blackboard Collaborate, we discovered that a slow internet speed could have an impact on the quality of interaction for instructors and students.

**Instructional strategies.** Blackboard Collaborate has several features that would be useful in class. Collaborate allows users to screen share, post PowerPoints, and even “draw” on a

shared board. It would be an easy way for teachers of online classes to lecture or demonstrate a process. For example, if a teacher needed to show distance learning students how to find the library database, the teacher could screen share and walk students through the steps of accessing the library's database through the school's website. Students could perform the steps in another window while watching the instructor. Students with questions could use the chat feature to post a question, such as "Where can I search for old newspapers?"

Students can also use Blackboard Collaborate for group meetings, but would have to understand that everyone won't be able to talk or be on camera at the same time. This tool would be very useful for presentations. There is a feature that allows viewers to "raise their hand," so that the speaker can call on them—that would simplify the turn taking process. We tested that feature and found that students who "raise a hand" are just moved to the top of the participant list until the facilitator calls on them to speak. Overall, Blackboard Collaborate is a powerful tool that is best used by groups with a clear host-participant dynamic.

### **Blackboard IM**

**Function.** Blackboard IM is a part of the Blackboard collaboration application that allows teachers and students to be able to interact with and chat with one another online in real time in a messaging program. Instead of having to exchange personal information with students, such as a phone number, a teacher can use this tool in a safe and professional environment to contact students. The application can easily be download to any computer or smart phone.

**Advantages.** Messaging is an excellent tool to use in education today due to the use of mobile devices. Most students own smartphones and the messaging application is always on. This gives students accessibility 24/7. In most cases, it is easier to contact them via text than email or by a phone call. Instructors could use this as a means to give pop quizzes or send

reminders of upcoming class events.

Blackboard IM has a few specific advantages. It lists all classes on the home screen that you are either enrolled in as a student or as a teacher. It also provides a complete listing of everyone enrolled in the class so it makes it quick and easy to access all your courses and contact students. You can start a chat with a student, make a phone call to one or even start a conference call, all from the home screen.

**Challenges.** One disadvantage of Blackboard IM is that some students may have trouble downloading the application due to the speed of their home internet. And some students may not have access to the web at all which puts them at a big disadvantage to other students if they are not able to participate from home. Teachers may struggle to ensure the use of this tool because students already are likely to use a messaging application with their friends and classmates as well.

**Instructional strategies.** After our group downloaded and opened an account for Blackboard IM, we all started using it to communicate with one another. We all found it convenient and helpful as the messaging service is user-friendly and reminded us of SMS/text messaging. Since text messaging has become such a big part of our daily lives, we found this to be a great fit.

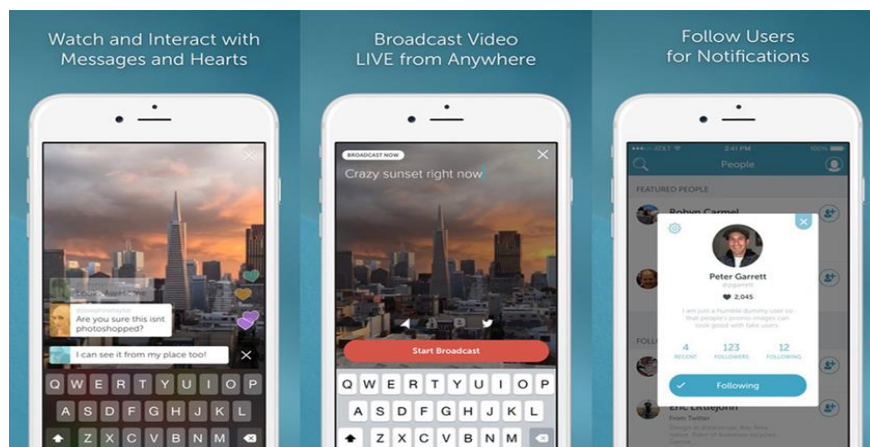
As a teacher, you can post your office hours, note whether or not you're away or available to chat, view saved chats or start a group chat. Once you've clicked on a student's name, a chat box appears like any typical message app service and it contains preferences similar to those on the home screen, except with the added option of being able to collaborate with others on projects. On the collaborate window, you can write on the whiteboard with a pen, upload files, write text, and even share your screen so others can see what you're doing.

## Periscope

**Function.** Today’s learners are digital natives. They are accustomed to getting information and meeting their needs with a click of a button in a user-friendly, personal and customizable way. Future educators will have to face the fact that students will need to learn in a flexible, personalized format – such as a technology-focused classroom.

Periscope is an application which blends well with the learners of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Periscope gives users the ability to stream live feeds/videos from a mobile device or a tablet. This application allows users to share their experience worldwide or while having fun walking down Bourbon Street in the French Quarter or Beale Street in Memphis, TN. That same excitement can be reciprocated in the classroom setting. Students could use this app to broadcast assignments or post questions for their teacher.

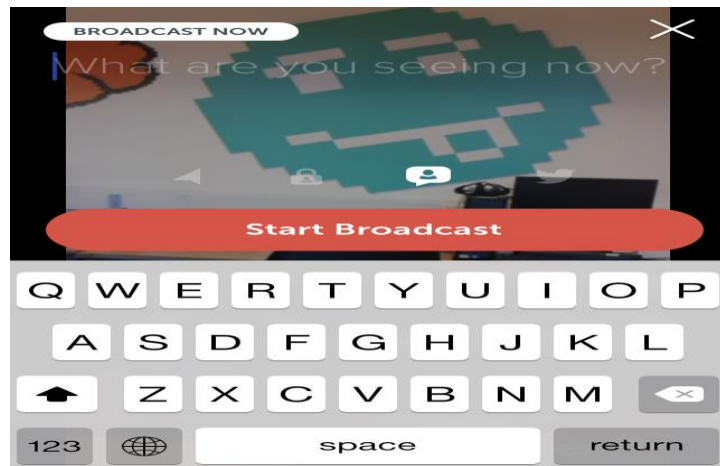
The accessibility of the app could encourage students to participate in the activity of the video. For example, students can provide feedback on the live video stream, which the individual sharing the video can respond to instantaneously (Stewart, 2016). This feature makes Periscope a much more engaging tool, allowing users to take an active role in the viewing experience, especially when you compare it to other ways in which users are exposed to videos.



Streaming video on Periscope is simple. First, open the app and select “Start Broadcast.”

In order to use Periscope to share live videos, the user needs to download the app to a cell phone or tablet and then create an account using either a Twitter account login or a mobile phone number. To start broadcasting, the user must select the camera button on the bottom of the navigation bar, fill in a description of the video and select “Start Broadcast.” All broadcasts are initially public for anyone to see, unless the settings are adjusted (Twitter, 2016).

A Periscope account is not needed to view Periscope videos but is needed to sign up if the user would like to broadcast or comment on a video. Videos can be streamed from a cell phone, tablet or laptop, either through the app or through Twitter. Periscope users create usernames and profiles and those details are publicly available. Users are encouraged to follow friends and other interesting Periscope users to engage and view their videos.



Twitter governs Periscope so its confidentiality and privacy policy is similar to the terms and conditions of Twitter. As with Twitter, users must be at least 13 years of age. All activity is public, unless the settings are adjusted. It is not possible to post or watch videos on Periscope anonymously (Twitter, 2016).

**Advantages.** There are several advantages of using Periscope in a classroom setting, including the following:

- **Live Broadcasting:** Ability to stream video from the touch of a tablet or smartphone.
- **Interactive viewing experience:** Real time comment and chat options.

- **Map view:** The interactive map feature gives particular emphasis on global experience; users are allowed to broadcast globally.
- **Replays:** Videos broadcasted on Periscope are saved automatically and can be replayed for up to 24 hours after the initial broadcast.
- **Twitter integration:** Twitter owns Periscope. Users are allowed to connect with other Twitter followers and notify their Twitter followers of their Periscope broadcasts.
- **Ephemeral:** Periscope is available only for a limited time before it disappears. Unless the settings are changed, streams are available for a maximum of 24 hours before they expire (Fuller, 2016).

**Challenges.** This tool has many advantages, but it also has a few disadvantages. This includes draining a phone or tablet's battery life, poor audio for smart phone, poor video quality, and that videos delete after 24 hours.

The group tested this application to see how it would work in everyday use. After setting up accounts and doing several broadcasts there wasn't much left to explore. The reviews came back mixed on this application. We all agreed that the application was easy to use but really didn't provide a lot of challenge for student growth. The broadcasting of information was informative and an excellent way to provide reminders for students. Also, teachers could answer questions from students. Overall the group thought it was more of a social network link for students but could still be used in the classroom setting.

**Instructional strategies.** Teachers can use Periscope as a way to share new ideas with other teachers. Periscope can also help teachers become more familiar with technology, thus turning this communication tool into a professional development tool (Hutchings, 2016). Teachers can broadcast clips of activities from lesson plans without even leaving their



classrooms. This tool could broaden the way lesson objectives are delivered and the way students engage in classroom-related activities. Periscope can be used as a helpful tool for students as well. Teachers can leave short instructional clips to assist students with assignments. Students can even use Periscope to broadcast projects, assignments, and even talk about current events that may be related to their course work.

This tool is not only useful, but also a great way to encourage students to participate and engage with the coursework and their classmates, but also in the development of their communication skills. Most importantly, it can help teachers brainstorm different ways to engage with their students. The communication tool Periscope can be easily incorporated into a classroom setting. Teachers must be willing to learn to use the tool in order to engage and interact with students.

Periscope allows students to interact both in and out of the classroom. Whether they are doing their classwork or homework assignments, it can be used to supplement the text and instructional materials and add engaging content. Periscope users have the option to Tweet out a link to their live stream. These users choose whether to make their video public or private, meaning it would only be viewable to certain users. Periscope is free, easy to navigate and has many users.

### **Google Voice**

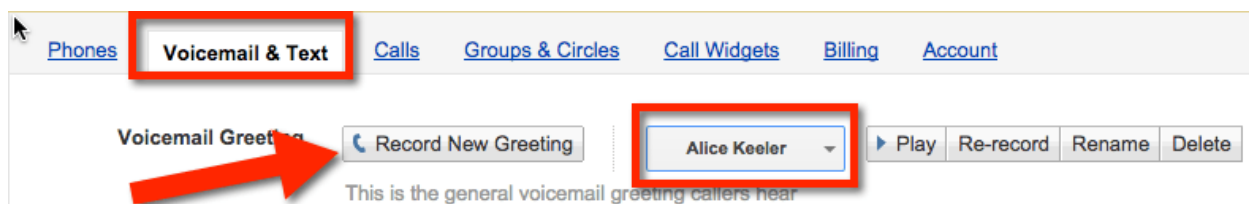
**Function.** Google Voice is a service provided by Google that allows the user to use his/her own telephone number and have a unique Google number for free. The unique Google number can be linked to your Google account and calls can be routed to a cell phone,



landline, work phone, or other number, regardless of the service provider. Any time a user changes cell phone carriers, he/she can route his/her Google Voice number to that number.

Google Voice also allows for text messaging. A user can send a text message with photos to multiple contacts from his/her desktop computer. For example, to a cell phone. With Google Voice a user can receive text messages from anywhere in the world and reply. Replies from text messages are received by phone and the Google Voice desktop application (Google, 2017).

**Advantages.** Google Voice users love the voicemail feature. The user receives an e-mail notification that he/she has received a voice message and Google Voice messages are automatically transcribed into the e-mail message. The message can then be forwarded via e-mail



to others. Other popular features include conference calling, call screening, blocking unwanted calls and voice transcription to text (Unuth, 2016).

Calls from PC to PC, PC to cell phone, and cell phone to cell phone are free within the United States and range in price from \$.01 to other countries which provides users with an affordable alternative for international calls that would cost much more to landlines and cell phones. As long as text messages are sent through the free Google Voice number, text messages are also free (Google, 2017).

Through the settings in Google Voice, users can opt to have their messages transcribed, voicemails and missed calls forwarded to their Gmail account where they can reply to them as if they were regular e-mails. Also, through the settings function, users can record calls. Of course,

this feature can be disturbing to some, but Federal Law states that as long as one party gives permission for the recording it is perfectly legal. In other words, the only way this could be seen as illegal is if one party is not aware of the conversation (Lenahan, 2010).

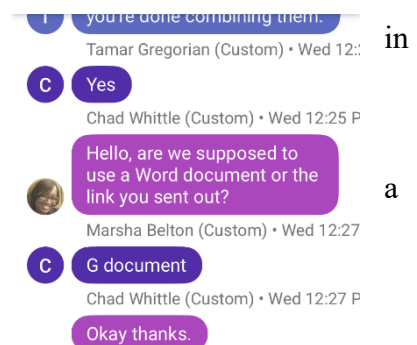
**Challenges.** The disadvantages of Google Voice include the fact that if the user is relying solely on Google Voice for their primary phone line, they are not able to make 9-1-1 calls. Another disadvantage is that although pictures can be sent as SMS messages, they are sent in a link as opposed to being directly embedded into the message (Grech, 2016). One major inconvenience happens during the registration process. Users must select a Google phone number; that number probably will not match the user's cell phone number. This can cause initial confusion and delay the setup and syncing process.

**Instructional strategies.** Teachers enjoy using Google Voice because they can obtain a separate phone number for free and do not have to give out their personal phone number to parents and students. Since calls and voicemails can be recorded and transcribed, teachers can also have a record of all the calls, which can be saved and e-mailed (Ed.Tech., 2015).

Teachers can incorporate Google Voice into their lesson plans several ways:

- Students can call in and record essays, which could put a different spin on the way students learn to inform and persuade.
- Students can conduct interviews for job skills with people in their community
- Students can practice debates with classmates

Overall, Google Voice is a useful tool to be used in the classroom. Our group has used Google Voice to communicate with each other on many occasions. We used Google Voice to



coordinate and distribute responsibilities to our group. If one of the members had a question about the assignment, we were able to easily communicate. The time of day was not a problem. We discovered if we were not on our mobile device, we could still communicate on a computer. Each of us installed Google Voice on our personal cell phone and realized the benefit of having voice messages transcribed. The voice message is automatically saved in an e-mail and can easily be forwarded to another member of the group.

### **Free Conferencing Corporation (AKA FreeConferenceCall.com)**

Harris Polling conducted a survey (AtTask) and reported that U.S. employees spend only 45 percent of their day conducting their primary job duties. Out of those 45 percent, 14 percent of their day is



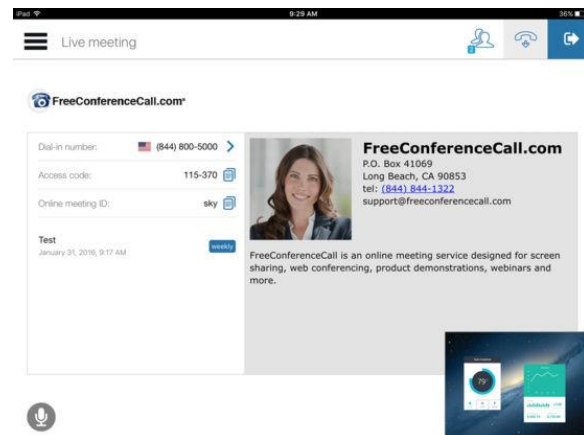
spent communicating on email. The other 55 percent of their day is spent in meetings (Lam, 2014, para. 3). According to the National Statistics Council, an estimated 11 million meetings take place every day. Thus, coupled with the time spent away from primary tasks and the fact that people spend an average of 8.7 hours at work, the need for effective and efficient meeting tools are necessary. Aside from the time it takes away from their other job duties, the cost of meetings are rising; thus, organizations are trying to host most of their meetings online via conference calls (National Statistics Council, n.d.). According to Erickson, conference calling is a \$4 billion business and as the technology continues to evolve, more applications are developed within these tools (Erickson, 2015, para. 9).

**Function.** FreeConferenceCall.com is one of the world's top conferencing brands. The company's website reports that there are nearly a million businesses including Fortune 500

companies who are using the service worldwide. The tool offers a wide variety of services including HD audio and video conferencing, audio and video recordings, customized greetings, security features, screen sharing, calendar integrations as well as mobile applications with Android and Apple devices (FreeConferenceCall.com, n.d.).

The tool allows for conference features that include hosting up to 1,000 callers on the phone or VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol) with domestic and international numbers. The service also provides U.S. toll-free numbers if a user requests one. Recording features allow for the calls and video conferences to be recorded, shared and played back. Conference hosts can control the meeting with the site's applications and the tool interfaces with Outlook and Google Calendar, both of which are widely used among organizations worldwide. Other benefits of the tool include video and screen sharing capabilities, which adds to the flexibility and usefulness of the tool. This not only helps with meeting retention, but also allows for an added level of engagement, providing that face-to-face element that so many statistics suggests is necessary for success. The tool also allows for remote desktop control, video playback and recording (FreeConferenceCall.com, n.d.).

FreeConferenceCall.com elevates itself with features that allow users to customize the “meeting wall” and add a personal landing page complete with photos, logos and descriptions. The host and users can chat with one another, add documents to the wall and watch, download and share recordings of their meetings. Users who sign up for free



accounts get 1GB of storage for free. The host can even reach a larger audience through streaming options live over the Internet (FreeConferenceCall.com, n.d.).

While all of the above features are free for users, there are paid (premium) features as well such as having a dedicated 1-800 phone number, eliminating the access codes that are generated in the free service; a custom greeting, curated hold music, as well as extra storage space to keep an archive of all the calls and video conferences, shared documents and more (FreeConferenceCall.com, n.d.).

David Erickson founded FreeConferenceCall.com in 2001 in Long Beach, California. He purchased the website's infamous URL for \$10 and says it changed his life forever. He built the business without any private equity or venture capital and says he learned a lot about "bootstrapping" and networking with industry leaders. "I knew back in 2001 that word of mouth was absolutely imperative when trying to turn an idea into profit. I was always an 'idea guy' and as I began putting those ideas in action and seeing results (especially making money), it created a strong desire to do it again and again" (Erickson, 2015, para. 1).

With growth attributed to word-of-mouth, the company grew "organically" and Erickson claims to have started this "movement" thanks to his clients who used his services and spread the love. He says the name is responsible for "almost 80 percent of our new customer sign-ups" and he worked to develop software that would provide these free services to his customers with attention to quality (Erickson, 2015, para. 3).

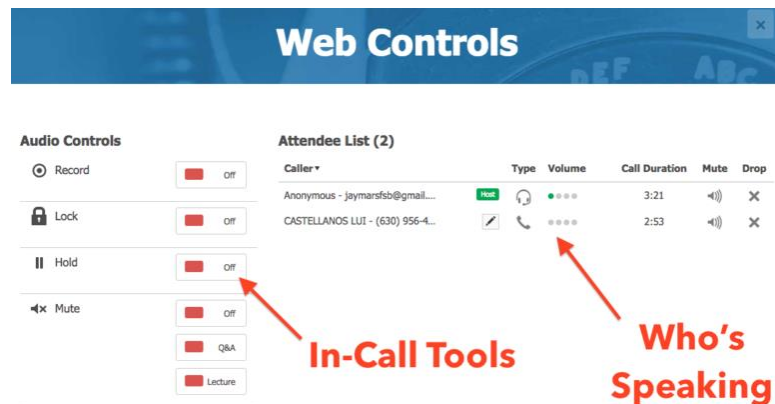
Erickson decided that instead of charging customers for the calls they make (which most conference call providers do), he would "cut out the customer fee and just share the toll revenue with the phone companies" and "turn [that] into meaningful revenue" (Erickson, 2015, para. 6).

The company now employs more than 100 employees who handle nearly 2.5 million calls a month (Erickson, 2015, para. 8).

One of the obvious questions our group had was how this service could be free of charge? Is the name a marketing gimmick? Answer: The service really is free, to a certain degree. The features that our group used were free; however, there are some features in the app that require a paid (premium) subscription to use. However, our group did not need to use the paid features and found that the free features were plentiful and suited our needs.

We used FreeConferenceCall.com to keep ourselves organized and begin the discussion on how we would complete Project 1 for this class. We used both the free call in number and the web version to get started and share documents. Quite frankly, our group liked using the app more than we did Blackboard Collaborate because it was easier and our calls and communication ran smoother than they did when we used the Blackboard Collaborate feature.

**Advantages.** There are so many advantages to using FreeConferenceCall.com, which include the comprehensive nature of the tool. A free (in our case) app that combines both audio and



video capabilities, as well as a user-friendly system that does not require the user to download any applications, makes for stress-free collaboration. Also, the app has great mobile applications that allow the user to connect from wherever he/she is at any given time. Our group used the app to keep track of our progress throughout the few weeks that we worked on Project 1. We used the call-in number and the web feature to share documents and address questions that our group

had regarding their specific portions. It really provided an easy way for us to connect, share documents and archive our conversations. This was a great way to track what we were doing, where we were with the project and what we still needed to get done. It serves as a great repository and way to archive the work that had already been done.

**Challenges.** The advantages of using the app outweighed the challenges or disadvantages. While it is possible that someone who is not computer savvy may have problems using the app, guidance and practice will no doubt make he/she more comfortable and allow him/her to explore the features the app provides. Also, it may confuse some people that there is both a call-in number and web access to attend the meeting. Thus, while this may be an obstacle, if the meeting organizer provides specific instructions to the users, it would clear up the confusion. For example, if the host of the meeting sends out instructions on how to call in and when/where to login, it would clear up the confusion. However, if the host relies solely on the email generated from FreeConferenceCall.com without providing any instructions, the users may be confused as to whether they need to call in and/or use the web-based feature.

Our group really enjoyed using FreeConferenceCall.com and will no doubt continue using it to get Project 2 done as well. It really provides a robust platform for us to use to stay on top of our project and communicate with one another. That being said, we are really good at communicating with one another via our other tools as well including Google Voice, Blackboard Messages, email and SMS messaging. We definitely are connected and that makes us all feel engaged.

**Instructional strategies.** While the group used FreeConferenceCall.com to communicate with one another, we also discussed how we could use the tool for educational/teaching purposes. For example, many of us implement group projects into our classes and thought that



the tool could be used to help keep our students on track and engaged. The fact that the tool had so many free features makes it attractive to students. They can use the tool to keep track of their role and the roles of their classmates with regard to the group project. The app can help them keep on track to finish the project and keep them accountable for what they said they would do. They could use the call-in feature to have weekly conference calls and provide one another with status reports and updates. The recording feature also serves as a “paper trail” of sorts and the video conferencing allows for more engagement and accountability.

The app can also be used to encourage students to attend sessions that will help them with homework, upcoming exams and finals. Class time can easily be taken up with lectures, exams and quizzes and the instructor can find him/herself with no time to finish a lecture in class. Thus, he/she can use FreeConferenceCall.com to finish the lecture or add bonus lectures to help students throughout the semester. These bonus lecture opportunities will not only help students, it also allows for an added level of engagement and lets the instructor track how many and who attends the online sessions.

One of the other great uses for FreeConferenceCall.com is to aid students in conducting research. Research is a big part of the instructional process and what better way to incorporate technology into the process than by conducting in-depth interviews and focus groups. Not only does the tool allow for multiple users to connect at the same time, but it also has the capability to record and playback the call. This would truly make the record keeping process so much easier. The tool is also very user-friendly, thus making it seamless both for the host and the participants.

The app can also allow the instructor to invite guest speakers from across the country (and even the world) to “come into the classroom” via the web. Once again, there are a lot of useful tools that allow for the same thing such as Skype and FaceTime, but using

FreeConferenceCall.com keeps things more streamlined and professional. No one has to worry about trying to remember his/her Skype name or worry about giving out personal emails or phone numbers. Instead, the host and guest can use FreeConferenceCall.com, which keeps things professional and the recording ability of the tool makes it even more attractive.

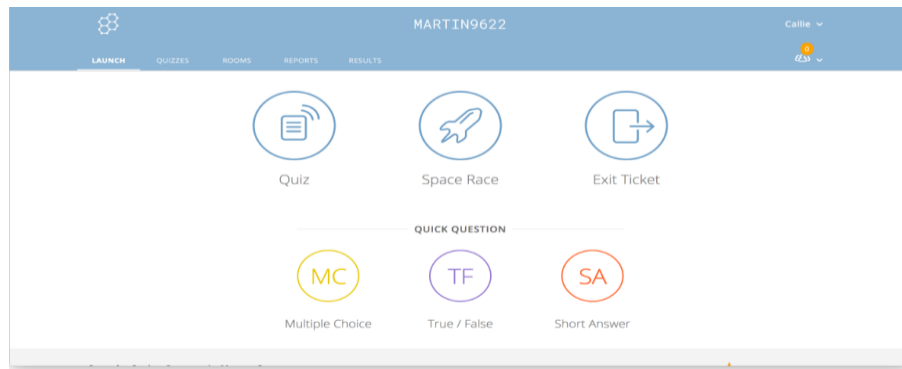
Finally, FreeConferenceCall.com can help instructors reach students who may not be able to attend the class but want to audit a class or two. Obviously, this would be a situation in which the instructor and student would have to get clearance from the school, but it would really make a big difference for the student who may not live in the same city that the class is taught in (assuming this is an in-person class).

Overall, FreeConferenceCall.com was definitely a big hit with our group. It provided the group with an efficient way to communicate as well as an opportunity to explore the plethora of features that it provides. The use of this tool allowed the group to realize that it could definitely function in the classroom as well as it does in the workplace. The tool's features provide an efficient and engaging way for instructors and students to communicate, as well as a free tool that the students can use to accomplish their tasks not only in the classroom, but also in the workplace. It truly provides an opportunity for the students to be able to see how what they learn in the classroom can be applicable in the real world.

### **Socrative**



**Function.** Socrative is a free, easy to use student response tool that teachers can use in class for live assessment. Teachers create online questions that students can answer in real-time through their phones or laptops. Students can easily participate in teacher-led individual assessment or group-based competition (Meet Socrative, n.d.). Teachers can create different types of assessment, including quizzes, team tests, exit tickets, and quick questions. This tool is a simple, fun way to use technology in the classroom to further student engagement.



**Advantages.** Socrative is especially useful for the classroom in many regards. First, the tool is free to use and does not require students to register or follow cumbersome installation instructions (Agee, 2016). After the instructor logs in and creates a “room,” students can use a simple access code to connect directly from their laptops or phones. Accessibility through multiple devices is another advantage of Socrative. Students most likely already have their phones in class, so Socrative gives them the opportunity to use the devices to learn. Socrative shows student feedback instantly, which helps instructors know whether the class has understood the lesson or whether more instruction is necessary. Socrative also generates detailed reports based on students’ responses that allow instructors to track learning over time (Socrative user, n.d.). Immediate and measured feedback is extremely helpful to both teachers and students.

Click a question to see the results for that specific question.

Student names and current progress. Sort by name or change progress to score via the toggles.

Select "Finish" to End the Activity and be prompted for your reports

Class % correct for each question. Click on the field to go to a detailed view of the question

\* Results will constantly refresh as students navigate through the quiz!

Name	Progress	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6	#7	#8
Harkness, Jack	100% ✓	B	Idaho	False	B	D	A	Travel	True
Mott, Wilfred	100% ✓	C	Idaho	True	A	E	A	Wagons a	True
Pond, Amy	100% ✓	C	Tennessee	False	A	D	A	The trail	True
Reid, Albert	100% ✓	C	Idaho	False	B	E	A	A place	True
Smith, Cara	100% ✓	C	ID	True	A	D	A	A trail	True
Tyler, Rose	100% ✓	C	ID	False	A	D	A	When set	True
<b>Class Total</b>		<b>83%</b>	<b>83%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>100%</b>		<b>100%</b>

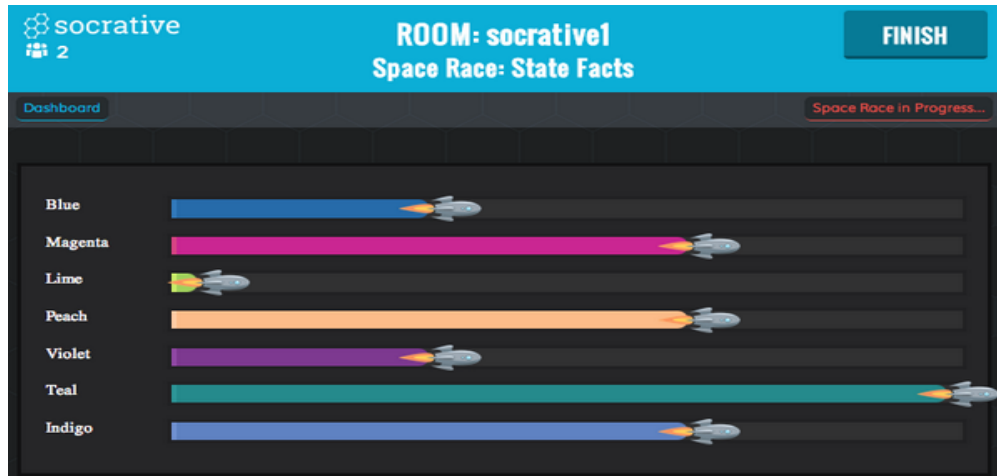
**Challenges.** Socrative has a few limitations that teachers should be aware of which includes the fact that unless teachers purchase a premium version, they are only able to create one class or “room.” This means instructors with multiple sections of students will have to combine them into one Socrative space. Although that is not ideal, having all student results in one place may help teachers see the “big picture” of students’ learning and understanding. Another difficulty is that assessments have to be created manually, which can take time (Hiltz, 2012). Teachers would need to plan ahead to create and use longer quizzes. Another limitation in the on-ground classroom is that students can access Socrative quizzes and activities without actually being present (Agee, 2014). Because it is an online tool, it can be accessed anywhere. Teachers can avoid unwanted participation from absent students through the use of a “room code” which takes the place of roll/attendance. Weighed against the advantages, Socrative’s disadvantages are minor.

**Instructional strategies.** Socrative is a flexible tool that can be used to support any classroom activity. Teachers can use one of the Quick Question options to conduct a pretest

before beginning a new lesson. For example, a teacher can post a short answer question asking “How far away is the sun?” to assess prior knowledge before beginning a science lesson on the solar system. Socrative will display answers anonymously for teachers to show to the class (see image of short answer question). The teacher can keep the answers anonymous or select “show names” to see who responded.

Socrative can also be used to conduct pop quizzes. Teachers can assess students on the information they were assigned. In the same way, teachers can use pop quizzes to gauge student understanding before moving on to another topic. For example, my group participated in a pop quiz about the state capitols. I, as the “teacher” created a short-answer question survey. My question (or prompt) was, “List one state and capital that is not your own.” Students (group members) answered by using the Socrative app on their phones. The responses given were cities and states from the southern United States, like Florida and Tennessee. If I were a teacher of a geography class, I might look at the survey results and decide to spend extra time teaching about the northern states. From this quick interaction, the group was able to show their knowledge in a more fun and engaging way.

If one student indicates confusion about a topic that the instructor had already moved on from, the teacher could immediately poll the class to see if other students were also struggling. For example, if thirty minutes into the solar system unit, one student asks how many planets rotate around the earth, the teacher could stop, poll, and then know whether or not to just start over. The “Space Race” feature allows teachers to conduct team competition through a Q&A format that would make any lesson more fun and interesting. The ability to see live results (see image) provides incentive for students to participate and do well. Socrative can be utilized in endless ways to promote fun and learning in the classroom.



## Evernote

**Function.** Evernote is a cross-platform application that is designed for those that need to keep organized. It can be used for several different purposes, with the main one being note-taking, organizing, and archiving. The application allows the users to create a note, which can be a piece of formatted text, a full webpage or excerpt of a webpage, a picture, voice memo, or even a hand-written note. These notes can then be sorted into different notebooks which creates a more organized system of note-taking and allows the user easier digital access.

**Advantages.** This tool has several advantages in a multitude of different arenas such as business, education, or everyday life. In the business world, Evernote can be advantageous by allowing the user to create agendas for meetings, write memos, and create presentations.



Educationally, it can be used to keep up with lecture notes, clip or highlight articles for academic research, and plan or coordinate collaboration for group work. One specific example of how Evernote can be incorporated into your education is through the use of tagging. This means if you use the program for research, it knows to create tags for each research note whether it be

text, document, internet search or image. This would save valuable time when digging back through all your research at a later time. I find that this example would be very helpful for educators, researchers, and students.

In the everyday world, Evernote is very useful in creating to-do lists and personal checklists, setting reminders, capturing thoughts for later use, or even planning events such as weddings or holiday parties.

**Challenges.** The only disadvantage that I see in using Evernote effectively is understanding its vast capabilities and learning all of the tools that are included in the application. It can be a bit overwhelming. To overcome this, a simple web search of “how to use Evernote” will lead to multiple tutorials, articles, and blogs which lay out the top uses and even provide instructions and videos to teach you the basics. It really is well-established in the online community and has millions of users today.

**Instructional strategies.** In the classroom, I see Evernote as like having a personal assistant. It can be used prior to class, during class, or after class. Before class, teachers can use Evernote to plan or organize classes, create a standards database, stockpile templates, or even prepare the substitute teacher in case you’re absent (by having all your notes available). During class, you can create a notebook which can be shared with your students. You can also take pictures of the whiteboard as class is progressing to document what you were working on at any particular time. And after class, it can seriously save you time by saving graded and scanned tests and allowing you to enter them in your preferred spreadsheet at a later time.



Overall, Evernote is like having a personal assistant at your side at all times. In this busy world that we live in today, its uses are extremely valuable. Organization of notes, the ability to

create checklists, and planning events ultimately make Evernote a top-notch application and a very handy one for those in the educational world.

### **Summary**

The goal of this project was to gain experience using these helpful communication tools so that we, as educators, can know how to better utilize them in a classroom setting. While each group member had different opinions of each tool and will probably use each one in a different way, the group agreed that each tool was useful and has great potential for use in the classroom.

Each tool can be used for different class activities, and depending on the style of the teacher and the way in which the students learn best, one app may be better to use than another. For example, Periscope would be great to use for individual video projects while FreeConferenceCall.com may be more beneficial to use for a class activity that involves a large group of students. Teachers have so much going on in the classroom and in school; these tools provide them with the ability to use modern technology to make not only their lives easier, but also the lives of their students. We hope that fellow classmates and educators will consider using these useful tools in their classrooms to help further the learning experience of students.



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