Learning Communities Via the Use of Facebook Closed Groups

Objective: Showing the usefulness of Facebook Closed Group function to further learning in the classrooms.

After observing the omnipresence of technology in the classroom, I decided that it was in my students and my own interest to find a way to integrate more technology in my classroom instead of chastising it as you often see it. Among all the potential tools at my disposal, I decided that Facebook should be my choice as it is a simple and extremely familiar tool for the students in my French classes. The Closed Group function is the perfect tool for my project as it allows me to personally invite students to the group while making sure that nobody else would be able to see it. It also ensured the privacy of students’ work. As expected, the rollout of the project went without any trouble as students knew how accept the invite to the group and were ready for instructions. The group was used in two specific ways:
The first one was to allow me to expand on topics seen in class and give students the opportunity to have a better appreciation of the topics. It also gave me the opportunity to provide additional cultural insights of the French-speaking cultures mentioned in class. With the rich variety of media at our disposal online, I added links to music, radio, television and movies that students could check out and use any time. This allowed me to maximize my class time on discussion of these topics, to add to what we had seen in class or simply to continue a discussion I started on the group.
A refreshing side-effect of the group was that students started to take ownership of it and started their own discussion and provided authentic material to continue their learning. I chose to frame those spontaneous moments by providing a short amount of time in class to sum up what was said and to offer new possible paths to the topics offered. This also resulted in more interest in what was happening in class as students felt a more realistic connection between what was learned and the world in front of them.
The second main use of the group was for sharing their work in the hope that the peer-sharing would allow them to see differences between their respective accomplishments, learn from them and, in the end, improve. I decided that the students would share end of chapter project where they would be able to showcase their knowledge and skills at the end of a major step. The work was submitted in a folder and was part of the stream of news in the main group page. After initial fears that students would not want others to see their work, I was pleasantly surprised by the ease in which they chose to communicate with each other in a respectful and courteous way. Comments ranged from the congratulatory remarks (e.g. “Bien”, “Super”) to constructive criticisms (e.g. “Don’t forget your accents!”, “S is not pronounced at the end of words.”). Students were given the chance to see others work before submitting theirs one time and would submit their work earlier on the next time so that the same students would not always be in charge of providing examples. They mentioned repeatedly that they like this format of submitting their work as it allowed them to see what their peers were able to produce while being able to learn from them.

Improvements to the groups are to be expected but, presently, these groups offer the opportunity for students to create a learning community with their peers, where they can expand what was seen in class but also improve their performance thanks to the help of their peers. Overall, the objective of furthering class learning has happened.