



CONNECTING BRAZIL WITH INDIA

By Jane Godwin Cury, Hari Krishna Patcharu and Denise Salum Barroso

Online volunteer project in India

In 2018, I (Jane) caught sight of an announcement on social media from Hari Krishna Patcharu who is an English teacher at a school called Z.P.H.S. Ilavaram in Bhattiprolu mandal, Andhra Pradesh, India. In his post, this Indian school teacher was asking for volunteer educators around the world to connect with his pupils online. Interested in cultural exchanges, I wrote to him and have regularly been in touch with this amazing educator and his students ever since. I have learnt a great deal about their culture by seeing how their classroom is decorated (a picture of Gandhi and a painting of the Taj Mahal), what the teenage girls wear to school (saris) and listening to the students talking about their routines and hobbies. Hari Krishna has literally opened up the world to this generation of teenagers from a rural village in India who have connected with young people and teachers from over 80 countries, including Brazil. They have conversed about everything from Geography to English pronunciation and have interacted with many different people from a New Zealand politician to NASA scientists. When I asked Hari Krishna about why he decided to set up this project called

Connecting with Global Educators, he said:

"When I started teaching, I was moved by most of my students, especially their living conditions and their parents' illiteracy rate. I wanted to bring about some changes in their lives so I explored innovative activities to use in my classroom. I realized that my students feared English as they did not have enough exposure. Many teachers here use our regional language to teach English, therefore students are unable to express their thoughts in English freely."



Z.P.H.S. Ilavaram school in Bhattiprolu mandal, Andhra Pradesh, India.

Empowering young people

These online interactions between Hari Krishna's students and their peers around the world have indeed encouraged them to voice their opinions as they have listened and responded to hundreds of people via videoconference. I have witnessed some of these young Indian teens grow into global citizens, who are aware of the importance of learning English and networking for their future. In an interview conducted with Hari Krishna given by two American members of the project, Thomas Whisinnand and Josh Monroe, he mentioned that teachers should go beyond the textbook to show children the world.

"Many of my pupils have personal ambitions about growing professionally, for example becoming a doctor, and these international experiences are instilling confidence in these young people to speak in public in English with people not only of their own age, but also adults who have different accents and speak at various different speeds. If we help students with their English, they can survive in this world, and if they learn to survive in this world with these communicative skills, they can get a good job in the future so that they can feed their families."

Forging ties between Brazil and India

Nine thousand miles away from Z.P.H.S. Ilavaram school is Colégio Miguel de Cervantes in São Paulo, Brazil. Denise Salum Barroso, a talented English teacher from this international school in Morumbi, had heard me talking about the Indian project in the BRAZ-TESOL Intercultural Language Education Special Interest Group, of which we are both members. Denise had a brainwave of connecting 150 Brazilian pupils aged 9-10 years old with a group of Indian students at Hari Krishna's school in two online sessions. This Brazilian school teacher used project-based learning activities that lasted 3 months including reading two books in English called "Children Around the World" and "Families Around the World", asking her students to create comic strips about what they had read and preparing a Powerpoint presentation about Brazil to connect with the Indian students.



Denise Salum Barroso (teacher) and Olivia Telles Camargo (pupil) in the session.

On 30th and 31st October 2023 at 10 am in São Paulo and 6.30 pm in Andhra Pradesh, the Brazilian children, packed in an auditorium with a huge screen, connected with the Indian teenagers via Zoom and talked about festivals, sports, music, history, wildlife and culture. Denise had organized the session in such a way that pairs of students came to the microphone in front of the screen to present their work. They showed their slides and talked about the content, for example, the Indigenous peoples in the Amazon Rainforest. The teenagers in India listened attentively and asked questions. Afterwards, Hari Krishna and his students showed a video about India.



A slide about the Amazon Rainforest that pupils from Colégio Miguel de Cervantes, São Paulo, prepared for the session.

Achievements and challenges

Setting up an international session, such as this one, provides students with the chance to communicate in real time. If they do not understand what is being said, they often have to use strategies, for instance requesting the interlocutor to repeat the sentence or ask for help. In order to have effective communication, the speaker may have to paraphrase what he/she said or speak more clearly or slowly. These skills are inevitably part of the language learning process and it seemed that some of the young students adopted some of these strategies naturally.

The three of us were interested in getting some feedback from the students from Brazil and India after the session to find out how they felt so we gave them a Google form to fill in by asking them the questions in Table 1. The table shows some of the most common answers. It should be mentioned that 111 Brazilian children and 13 Indian teenagers answered the questions.

QUESTIONS	ANSWERS FROM BRAZILIANS	ANSWERS FROM INDIANS
Write 3 things you learnt about India/Brazil.	A sport called cricket; religious festivals; there are many different languages in India; monuments; sports; they have a different accent; typical Indian food; the National Anthem.	Brazil is vibrant; it is a sports-crazy nation; around 59% of the Amazon Forest is in Brazil; Brazil's national drink is caipirinha; the Brazilian team has won the World Cup 5 times.
Which aspects of the session did you find most interesting?	Sport; their dreams; the way they speak English; they don't play football; they don't celebrate Christmas like us but they have different Gods.	Brazil has famous beaches; they presented so many interesting slides; Brazilians have a good attachment with their friends.
How did you feel speaking/singing in English? - Delighted - Satisfied - Frustrated	Delighted 55.9% Satisfied 39.6% Frustrated 4.5%	Delighted 69.2% Satisfied 30.8% Frustrated 0%
Were there any difficulties you encountered during the session? If so, please describe.	Yes, speaking English; I had problems understanding their accent; No, as I am fluent; No, the students explained perfectly; I was embarrassed to speak.	I have not encountered any difficulties; No difficulties; when seeing the slides, I thought about it, but I didn't know what it was as I had not seen it before.

One 12-year-old boy called Nanda Kishore said he learnt something about the National Anthem as the Brazilian children sang it (the Indian pupils also sang theirs). He also remarked that it was interesting that Brazil's famous football player was Pele.



Nanda Kishore, a student who took part in the session from Z.P.H.S. Ilavaram school, India

After the session, Denise felt the session was very successful. She wrote the following:

"I am so grateful for this rich and amazing experience. Most parents came to talk to me during the last 'final parents' meeting". They told me how their kids were happy with the "unforgettable session" and so was I. It was real even though my students were not fluent enough to talk to them. They kept talking about it in the following weeks. They wanted to show them more facts about Brazil and ask more about India. Teacher Hari was super helpful during the session and his students were participative, especially in the second session."

Hari Krishna also mentioned that he and his pupils really enjoyed the session. He said:

"I've learned a lot about Brazil. Brazilians are very warm, friendly people. Brazilians love meeting new people and having a visitor is a novelty for them. Brazilians love football. It's like a religion. Carnival is an annual festival held in Brazil that features songs, dance, costumes. So far, I've invited 15 educators from Brazil. My students literally didn't face issues regarding accent, speed and cultural aspects. We only experienced technical issues."

Connecting people

"Whatever the format, an online intercultural exchange anticipates that participants in the community will do more than enhance their purely linguistic competence; there will also be an intercultural component to their learning" (Corbett, J. Dart, H. and Lima, B, 2024, p3). In these online sessions, the participants certainly experienced interculturalism by interacting with peers from another country and learning about their culture. This is priceless!

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THE AUTHORS

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Hari Krishna Patcharu has been an English teacher at Z.P.H.S. Ilavaram in Bhattiprolu mandal, Andhra Pradesh, India for 7 years. He holds an MA in English and a TEFL certificate. He was shortlisted to the top 50 candidates in the Varkney Foundation Global Teacher Prize for his work at "Connecting with Global Educators".



Denise Salum Barroso has been an English teacher since 1992. She holds a degree in Translation and Interpreting, a TESOL Certificate and a Cambridge CELTA certificate. She currently works at Colégio Miguel de Cervantes in São Paulo and is a member of the BRAZ-TESOL Intercultural Language Education SIG.

