



Level Up Village®

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Case  
Study

# Creating Opportunities


for authentic communication  
and cultural immersion




Pitman High School, New Jersey and  
Instituto Cardenal Stepinac and Colegio  
Agustiniano de San Andrés, Argentina



# Summary



Over the last few years, Shelly Nichols, a Spanish teacher at Pitman High School in New Jersey, has taken steps to incorporate as much comprehensible input as possible in her classroom, focusing on proficiency-based activities and assessments and giving students an immersive learning experience as much as possible. However, creating a curriculum that reflects the immersive nature of language learning has brought a set of challenges. To address these challenges, Nichols implemented Level Up Village (LUV), which provided her students with opportunities to exchange videos with peers in Spanish-speaking countries. As a result of this experience, Nichols' students were more engaged in their work and eager to practice their skills. Overall, LUV provided an immersive experience and added a unique and exciting element to the curriculum.



LUV easily allows for a meaningful global exchange between students and another school anywhere in the world. As language teachers, we can stay in the target language all day long, and have amazing results from our students, but we cannot provide that crucial element of cultural immersion, no matter how much we teach about the history and society and cultural nuances.

**Shelly Nichols**



## ● Challenges



- Limited resources to immerse students in the culture of the target language.
- Lack of authentic input.
- Insufficient opportunities for practice with the target language.
- Complicated process of traditional penpalling.



## ● Solutions

- Adopted the Level Up Village virtual exchange platform.
- Partnered with two schools in Buenos Aires, Argentina.
- Provided opportunities for authentic practice and cultural immersion.



## ● Results

- Students became more invested in their learning.
- The program fostered a sense of global connection.
- Student engagement increased.





## ● Challenges

Shelly Nichols, a Spanish teacher at Pitman High School, in Pitman, New Jersey, faced several challenges while trying to create an authentic and immersive language learning experience for her students. The limited resources available to her made it challenging to offer experiences that would allow students to immerse themselves in the culture of the target language. Additionally, a lack of authentic input made it difficult to create a curriculum that reflected the immersive nature of language learning. While students had conversations about different topics and opinions a few times a week, they were engaging in conversations with other students learning the target language, therefore missing out on the authentic input from

speakers of the target language. Furthermore, providing opportunities for students to practice the target language was limited, and the traditional method of penpalling, which Nichols had tried in the past, was a complicated and stressful process. These challenges were a hindrance to creating authentic and engaging learning opportunities that would prepare her students for the AP Spanish Language and Culture exam as well as the AAPPL test for the Seal of Biliteracy and communication in the real world. To overcome these challenges, Nichols needed to find an innovative solution that could enhance her students' learning experience while still being cost-effective and easy to use.



“My students needed more practice with hearing native speakers using the target language so that they could work on processing, listening for dialect, pronunciation as well as interpreting what has been given to them (working around words they may not know and focusing on context and context clues).”

**Shelly Nichols**



## ● Solutions

Level Up Village (LUV) proved to be an optimal solution to these challenges. LUV allowed Nichols' students to engage in real conversations with native speakers, providing them with real dialects and pronunciations of words, and putting their language skills into authentic practice. This made the class more engaging and real for students, helping them to understand the benefits of learning a second language better. With LUV, Nichols' students not only connected with peers in another country, but they also received a global classroom experience.

In the fall of the school year, Nichols' students partnered with two classrooms in Buenos Aires, Argentina, at Instituto Cardenal Stepinac and Colegio Agustiniano de San Andrés. Nichols and the teachers in Argentina used the Explorer (Level

1) and Adventurer (Level 2) courses, which focused on family, friends, neighbors, celebrations, and music. Nichols started her students out one level below where they actually were so that they could get used to the experience. She repeated the experience in the spring, placing her students in one level higher than in the fall.

Nichols incorporated LUV into her curriculum by using it as a companion piece to her lessons. Students worked on their LUV assignments during their free time after completing their regular classroom activities. LUV videos were created in the classroom or at home, providing students with the flexibility to work on the program at their own pace. The flexibility of the LUV platform and the fact that the video exchanges are asynchronous made

the process easy to implement. Nichols commented: "If we were to try and communicate with another school in the world, time zones and many other factors would make it very difficult. This manner of communication changes all that in the best possible ways."



LUV made the class REAL. We are always working on this skill [speaking] in class, but our class has four walls and limits the way in which students can understand the real benefits of learning a second language—this made the process sink in for many of my students.

**Shelly Nichols**



## • Results



After adopting Level Up Village, Shelly Nichols witnessed several remarkable outcomes in her Spanish language classroom. Firstly, her students became more invested in the language learning process, paying greater attention to the nuances of the language and the cultural aspects associated with it. By engaging in real conversations with peers in Argentina, they honed their listening and speaking skills, and focused on pronunciation and accent to sound like native speakers themselves.

Secondly, the connection with students in a different country fostered a sense of global connection, allowing her students to share common interests and experiences while improving their language skills. Finally, her students exhibited a higher level of engagement, taking the initiative to share their lives with their peers in creative ways. They were motivated to create videos and presentations that showcased their daily lives, interests, and hobbies, creating a

more personalized learning experience. Overall, the use of LUV transformed the classroom experience, making it more engaging, personalized, and immersive for Nichols' students.



“Exchanging videos with kids learning English made me realize I'm not alone in my language learning journey. There are kids out there who are having the same challenges as me learning Spanish. It was incredible to see how much shared experience we all have.”

**Katie, Shelly Nichols' student**

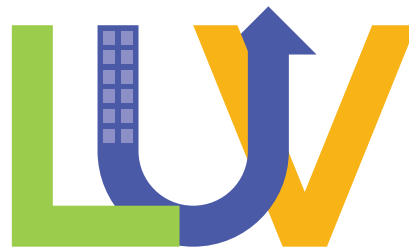


## ● Conclusion

LUV provided Shelly Nichols and her students with a valuable language-learning tool that enhanced the curriculum, student engagement, and proficiency. By incorporating LUV into her teaching, Nichols was able to provide her students with authentic input, practice, and real conversations with peers in Argentina. It also allowed her to teach her students in a fun and engaging way that fostered global connections and cultural awareness.

“Teaching cultural competence is extremely important these days, given the fact that we are increasingly more globalized. To nurture students into aware, global citizens, we need opportunities like this to engage students in conversations that share perspectives and firsthand experiences.”

**Shelly Nichols**



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The mission of Level Up Village Global Connections is to globalize the classroom by facilitating cultural collaboration between students from around the world. Guided by our carefully curated content, students build communication skills and collaborate with their global peers to explore topics in Arts & Sciences or Languages & Cultures through our safe and secure online platform. Through these exchanges, students enhance their understanding of other cultures, strengthen their intercultural communication skills, and gain empathy.



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