

THE EFFECTS OF ANONYMITY IN CLASSROOM DISCUSSIONS

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ABSTRACT

Being singled out is one of the most stressful parts of school – both socially and academically. Our classrooms exacerbate this problem by relying on hand-raising for student participation and class advancement; something that can humiliate students in the event of a wrong answer or forced response. This action puts unnecessary stress on students, discourages them from participating, and prevents them from learning as much as they could if these stressors were removed.

In response to this, the researcher conducted a study at Central Magnet School following two senior English classes during the week of 1/27/2020 to 1/31/2020.

Using backchannelchat.com, the experimental classroom was provided an anonymous response system for two separate days of class. This system served as response media for the questions asked of the students in response to short stories that they had read during those class periods. Students were provided post-surveys and the teacher was briefed throughout. The surveys analyzed student stress, introversion versus extroversion, and satisfaction.

As predicted, the average participation in class increased significantly and the technology provided an open channel for the quieter students to speak during discussions. Depth of answers, however, remained relatively unchanged.

This technology in classrooms could provide a more diverse method of student response to capture the ideas and discussions of all students present in the classroom. When supplemented with traditional teaching methods, it would not only aid the learning of students, but teachers as well.

METHODOLOGY

On 1/27/2020 and again on 1/29/2020, the researcher **observed the first classroom, a 9:50 am class that served as the control group.** The researcher sat quietly in the back of the room and **described the students' behavior throughout the class,** taking note of the **types of responses, atmosphere in the classroom, how many students participated per question, and the depth of answers.** The time was also taken for each response session to **average responses per min** without the backchannelchat.com software. The researcher also **observed the experimental class** using the technology in the same manner, recording responses for that day's chats.

These **discussions were then saved to be further studied.** At the end of 1/27/2020, all students were given a 150-word response to their short story, the scores and depth of response on these responses were also analyzed. After the two days of study, the **students were given the post-survey and debriefed.**

Figure 1. *Student stress perception of Backchannelchat.com*

I felt less stressed participating in class using this technology
16 responses

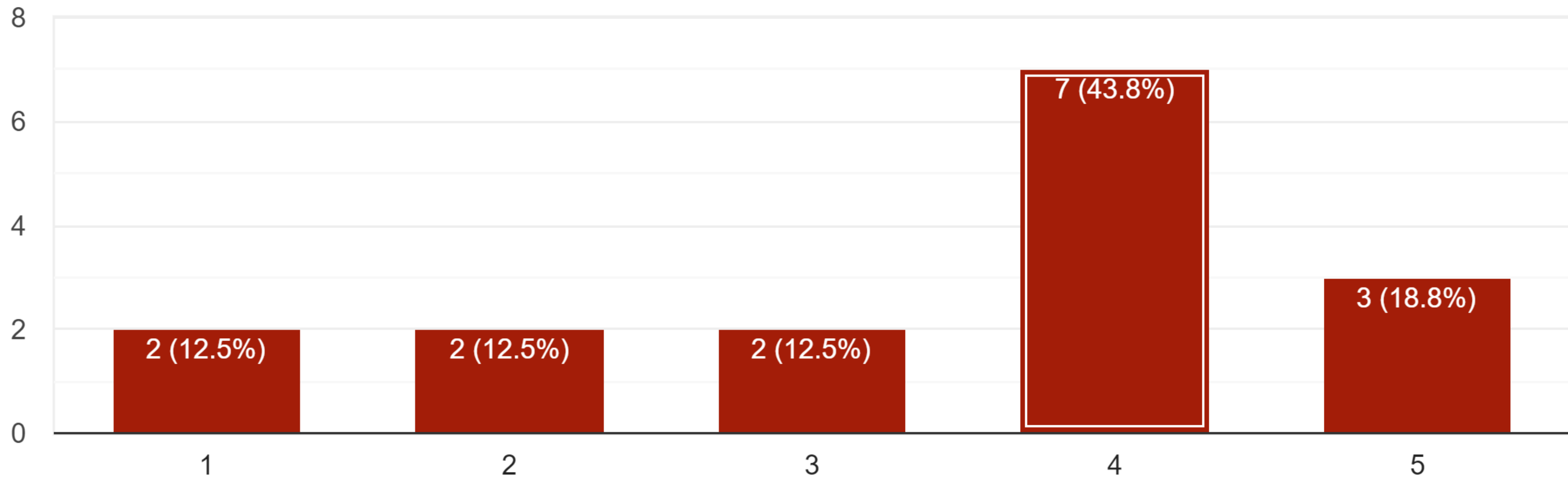
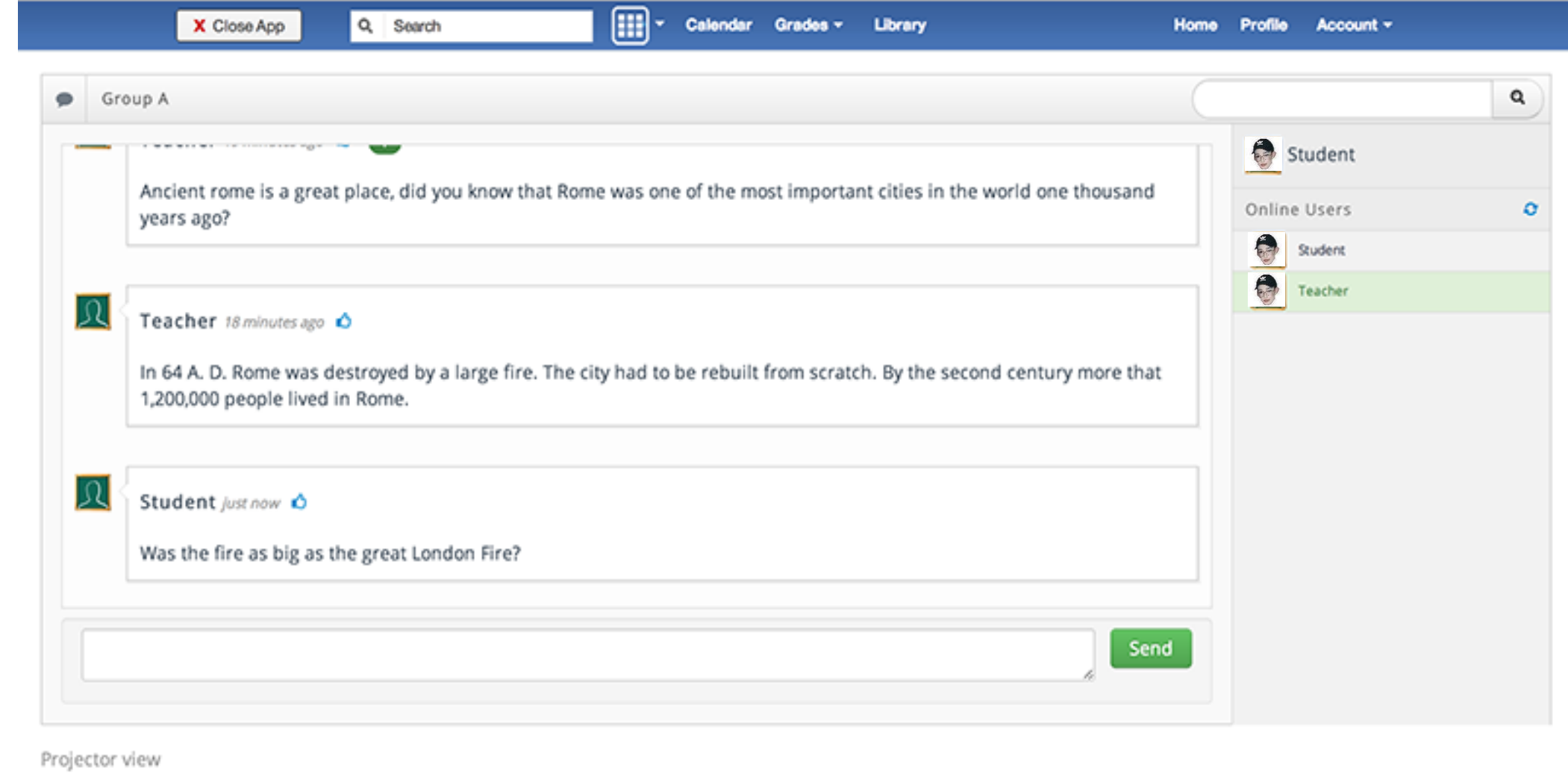


Figure 2. *Sample of Backchannelchat.com interaction*



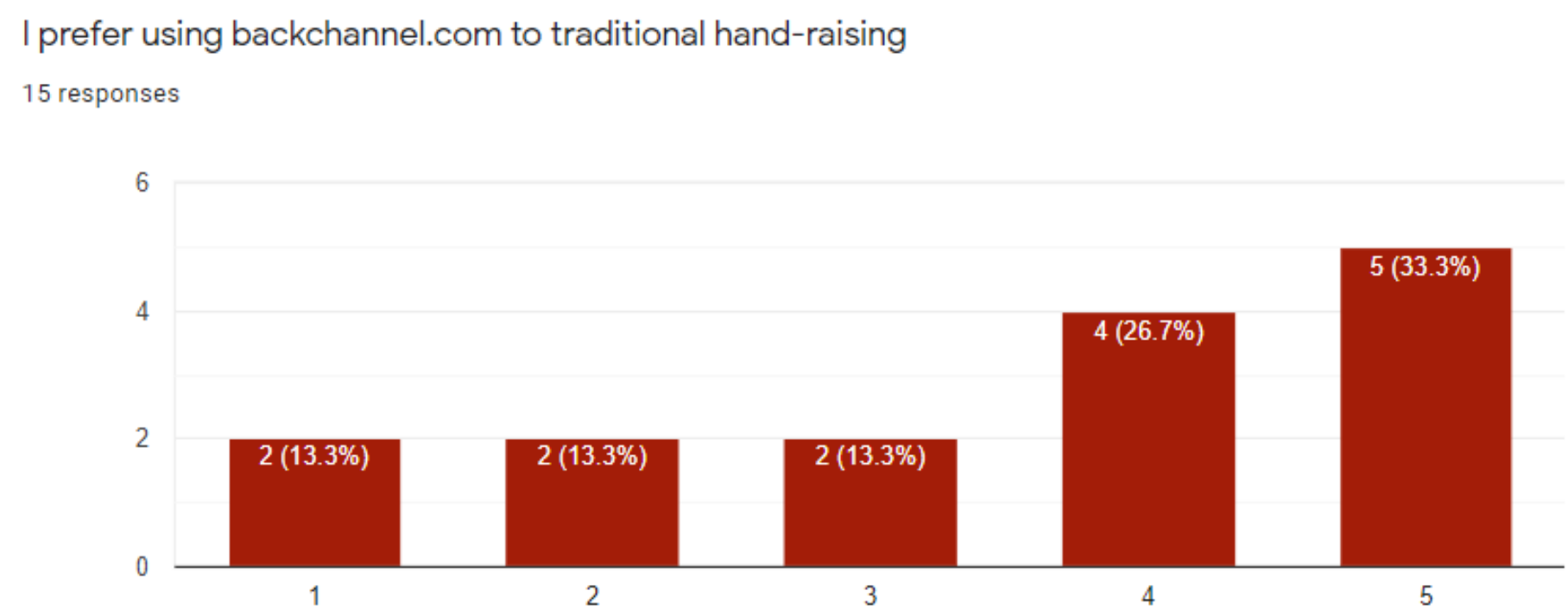
RESULTS

Responses per min increased from 1.6 to 3.5 per min, proving an increase in student participation and engagement with the material

Depth of answers, however, stayed relatively the same. This indicates that, while backchannel allowed students to participate more often, it didn't necessarily allow them to participate more deeply with the material.

As visualized in the chart, according to the accepted definition of extrovert and introvert, there was no real difference in satisfaction based off sociability

Figure 2. *Student answer preference*



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CONCLUSIONS

Shown in the post-experimental survey results and the post-experimental teacher interview, this technology had **positive effects on learning in the classroom** and was very **easy to use**.

The anonymous response system **increased student response participation and willingness to speak in the classroom** and had general positive feedback. One surprising result, however, was that the **depth of answers stayed relatively the same**. This could be due to the speed of the chat, the ability to copy answers posted previously in the chat, or simply one of the consequences of de-individualization (Festinger, L., 1952).

This technology could be widely implemented as a **supplemental classroom tool** in ways similar to the teacher's final decision of future use – as an additive resource for response in the classroom.

This would be especially **helpful in lower income classrooms**, where access to school computers, new technology, and intrinsic improvements are difficult (Gbollie, C., & Keamu, H. 2017) (Goudeau, S., & Croizet, J.-C. 2017). The **free site, existing hardware, and easy access could improve the places who need it most** and help the children in the most need achieve to better their community (Moore, K. 2017)

LIMITATIONS

- Resource limitations
- Only high school English classes observed
- Small sample size
- Short run time
- Classes taught by the same teacher, in the same school, in the same state, which could lead to cultural and personal bias
- Sample classes had 2 absent students on various days. Their data could not be accounted for.
- Other missing data was the result of a few students' failure to complete the post-experimental survey
- Control group had class at 9:52 am while the experimental group had class at 2:13 pm, therefore possible that communication occurred between groups

MONDAY CHAT



WEDNESDAY CHAT

