Chapter 19

Foreign Language Activities on TIMeS: A Sampler of Ideas From the Spanish and Korean Modules

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ABSTRACT

In an increasingly blended environment, language instructors now have to take on the additional responsibility of designing online language modules and tasks. Although they acknowledge that technology is a good tool for the teaching and learning of foreign languages, for instructors who are just starting out with designing their own online activities, the task might seem daunting. One of the biggest challenges instructors face when designing their online activities is the lack of ideas, or even a lack of a model after which they can mould their own modules. Therefore, this chapter aims to give these instructors a sampler of ideas, a “starter pack” of sorts, to inspire them to create meaningful and engaging language activities online using TIMeS, the Moodle-based learning management system used at Taylor’s University. These samples are taken from the Spanish and Korean language modules offered at this university.

INTRODUCTION

As many people around the world have experienced, learning a new language is not an easy task, and it is even more so when one is learning a new language, in a foreign context. According to Moeller and Catalano (2015), “a language is considered foreign if it is learned largely in the classroom and is not spoken in the society where the teaching occurs”. Therefore the learning of languages such as Spanish and Korean in Malaysia is considered to be in a foreign language context as both these languages are not spoken in Malaysia. Moeller and Catalano (2015) also mention that “foreign language education
refers to the teaching of a modern language that is neither an official language nor the mother tongue of a significant part of the population, which is exactly the case with the teaching and learning of the Spanish and Korean languages at Taylor’s University, Malaysia.

With the advances in technology and computer programs, many industries have moved towards the utilization of current technology in its practices and processes, and the education industry is no exception. The use of technology in the classroom is also known as blended learning. In general, blended learning is defined as the incorporation of technology, with an emphasis on web-based programs and computer based technologies, into the traditional face-to-face in-class instruction (O’Flaherty & Philips, 2015; Bliuc, Goodyear & Ellis, 2010 as cited in Parra Pérez & Medina Riveros, 2014).

Language Learning, Computers, and Technology

The use of technology and computers in language learning, in particular, has had a long history. It is more commonly known as Computer Assisted Language Learning or CALL, for short. Language instructors and researchers are known to quickly latch on to the latest available resource to use in their teaching, mainly because instructors are always looking for better methods to impart lessons, and for their students to apply and use the language they are learning, whether during the dedicated class time, or outside the class time.

Publications that focus on language learning and teaching with computers and technology have been around for many years. A few important journals in the area of CALL are that are worthy of mention are: Computer Assisted Language Instruction Consortium (CALICO), which is an international organization dedicated to research and development in the use of computer technology in language learning; The International Association for Language Learning Technology (IALLT), an organisation that provides leadership in the integration of instructional technology into the foreign language classroom; and EUROCALL, supported by the European Commission, brings together researchers, developers, and practitioners who share a passion for languages and the use of emerging technologies in the teaching and learning of languages.

Therefore, it is safe to say that language instructors and researchers are no stranger to the use of computer and technology in language teaching and learning. We have certainly come a long way from using PowerPoint slides to deliver lessons, and have moved onto the use of web and mobile applications (apps) to aid the teaching and learning of language.

Moreover, in institutions of higher learning such as Taylor’s University which uses the blended learning approach, all the modules on offer must have a minimum 30% online component, up to a maximum of 79%. Suffice to say, at Taylor’s University, there is a strong emphasis on the use of online technologies to enable students to learn anywhere, at any time.

Instructional Design

Gene Roche, in his blogpost entitled “Blended Learning Courses Challenge Teachers to Shift Thinking from What They Do to What Students Do”, says that it is not about content delivery, but designing activities, and that conceptualizing and designing activities are the most meaningful and important processes of creating a blended course. In a way, instructors now have an additional hat to put on - that of a course designer. The blended approach pushes instructors to be more deliberate in applying and using technology in teaching and learning. This, according to Roche, requires course designers (who at times may also be
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