

Using Technology in a Standards-Based LOTE Curriculum

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In Catherine Romanov's third-year Russian class, students busily prepare for their upcoming summer exchange trip to their sister school in Russia. In this technology-enriched environment, groups of students work together to complete authentic, standards-based activities. To best utilize the technology in her room, Ms. Romanov has divided the class into four groups, each assigned a specific task to complete and share with the whole class. One group surfs the Internet to check an airline's flight schedules to Moscow, the train's schedule to their sister city and the current weather conditions in their host town. A second group watches a CD-ROM which explains the culturally appropriate ways to give gifts to Russians. Since gift giving is an important part of the Russian culture, students must generate a list of suitable gifts as well as the correct procedures for giving them. A third group watches a videotaped broadcast of the previous night's news from Moscow that was recorded off the school's satellite. In light of recent world events, these students are assessing the "political" climate in the country. And finally, a fourth group of students uses a digital camera to create a PowerPoint slide show of their school on Ms. Romanov's laptop computer. When the students travel to Russia, they will use the slideshow to make an oral presentation during the welcoming ceremony.

Today's educators have an abundance of technological resources at their fingertips, including but not limited to audio and video language labs, videodiscs, CD-ROMs, laserdiscs, VCRs, video cameras, digital cameras, scanners, and computers with a variety of capabilities. Via the Internet, students and teachers gain access to listservs, e-mail, discussion groups, bulletin boards, and the World Wide Web. Also on the computer, learners can utilize a variety of multimedia and interactive software as well as authoring programs to enhance the language learning experience. Although these resources are abundant and available, studies show that teachers still struggle to incorporate technology into their lessons (Fidelman, 1998; Armstrong & Yetter-Vassot, 1994; Herron & Moos, 1993). What are some reasonable steps that teachers of languages other than English (LOTE) can take to integrate technology and the LOTE standards into instruction? The primary purpose of this paper is to show how technology can be used to enhance the development of a standards-based curriculum for foreign languages.

There are some key points to bear in mind when integrating technology into instruction. First, technology is not a methodology for teaching languages like Total Physical Response or the Natural Approach. Rather, it is a *tool*—much like a textbook, a pencil, or a chalkboard. And predictably, modern technologies like computers and the Internet will be increasingly incorporated into instruction as were filmstrips and the like in the past. These technologies are not meant to supplant current LOTE methodologies but to support and supplement them. Additionally, the use of technology can be woven into *all* state LOTE standards as it can be used to communicate in the foreign language, to access information on cultural products, practices, and perspectives, to make connections to other subject areas, to provide content for making cultural and linguistic comparisons, and to access target culture communities within and beyond the school setting.

Benefits of Technology in the LOTE Classroom

Technology enhances the LOTE curriculum, instruction, and assessment, and its benefits should not be understated. The abundance of authentic materials, accessible through the Internet for example, greatly enriches the curriculum and provides access to target culture perspectives (Phillips, 1998). Texts, sound, images and moving pictures add an interactive quality to the information being learned (Lixl-Purcell, 1996). Technology also can improve instruction by allowing students to engage in real-life communicative tasks, for instance, by communicating via e-mail with native speakers located around the world; and technology creates a type of "immersion" experience in the classroom (Conelios & Oliva, 1993; Kost, 1999). Finally, Armstrong & Yetter-Vassot (1994) found that computers can improve language assessment by providing the learner with immediate, non-judgmental feedback.

Technology is also accepted as beneficial to learners in general, primarily because it affects students and the learning process in positive ways. It increases intrinsic motivation to learn and provides an abundance of information that can be accessed easily at any time from multiple locations (Ehrmann, 1995). Technology allows for a personalization of the learning process because the student has the opportunity to determine the topics as well as the pace of the lesson in a non-linear manner (Garrett, 1991; Gonglewski, 1999; Blyth, 1999). In addition, students using technology engage in higher order thinking. Armstrong & Yetter-Vassot (1994) claim, "Technology is not about bells and whistles, but empowering students to leave behind the idea that learning is rote memorization. It is about exploration and the realization that there are multiple pathways to knowledge" (p. 483). Furthermore, students who are less willing to engage in oral activities appear to participate more when technology facilitates

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interactions (Beauvois, 1992). And finally, in a study that examined communication patterns, Phillips (1998) found that technology changed the teacher-learner dyad with struggling students receiving greater personalized attention from the teacher when technology was a classroom-component.

Integrating Technology into Standards-Based Instruction: Some Examples

In the planning stages, a teacher will undertake certain obvious steps to insure instructional readiness (e.g., identifying targeted program goals and knowledge and skills) and technological readiness (e.g., assessing equipment availability and personal proficiency in using it). In the example that follows, a teacher decides that she wants her intermediate-level students to focus on Communities, one of the more challenging program goals, as they learn about target culture holidays and celebrations. By selecting Communities, she also hopes to capitalize on the wonderful language-related activities in her city. The following activity shows how technology allows her students to capture the richness of the experience and illustrates a framework for integrating technology that is used in the subsequent sample activities at the novice and advanced-levels. Finally, a section on technology/learning stations describes a versatile technology option for classrooms with only one computer.

Sample Activity for the Intermediate Level: Community Celebration

(Activity adapted from one used by L. Voelzel at Bailey Middle School in Austin, TX)

The following activity targets the program goals of Communication, Cultures, and Communities. Technological tools used in the activity include an audiotape recorder, a digital camera, and a computer for word processing and the creation of an e-zine (electronic magazine) using PowerPoint.

Students have completed a unit on holidays and family celebrations in the target culture and now attend a celebration in their local community. During the event the students interview several participants who speak the target language. They take notes and/or record the interviews for analysis. Using a digital camera, students also take pictures that capture the essence of the celebration. Later, working independently or in small groups, students use a software package such as PowerPoint to create an electronic magazine in the target language showing what they have learned from their experience. The magazine includes pictures as well as sections such as location of the celebration, the people in attendance, major events that occurred during the celebration, a list of the food that was available, and the weather during the event. Learners also attempt to describe target culture perspectives on the event, based on the interviews they conducted. For technologically advanced students, authentic sound may be added to the presentation. The slide show is presented orally to other groups in the class.

In this activity, students use language at the intermediate proficiency level both within and beyond the school setting to socialize and obtain and present information on everyday topics. They participate in a cultural event in the community, and use the language to demonstrate an understanding of the practices of what people do as well as how they are related to the perspectives of the culture.

Developing an activity such as the one described above obviously requires familiarity with the technology and applications *and* time for planning—both of which may be in short supply. In order to maximize the benefits of time spent preparing lessons and learning to use technology, teachers should “adapt the task, not the text” (Garza, 1996, p. 18). In other words, teachers can use authentic materials at any language level by simply adjusting the task that the student is supposed to complete. In the aforementioned activity, the teacher can increase the difficulty of the task to make it appropriate for advanced-level students or decrease the difficulty for novice-level students. For example, students at the advanced proficiency level could participate more fully in the interviews in culturally appropriate ways and report their findings in coherent paragraphs—orally or in writing. Novice students, on the other hand, could ask simple questions prepared together in class or conduct the interview in English rather than the target language.

Once established, a framework for integrating technology into a standards-based lesson can be used with different topics. In the community celebration activity, students experience the target language in authentic settings and then use information gleaned from the experience to create a presentation. The next two examples—one for the advanced level and one for the novice language learner—also compel students to acquire information and then use it in a presentation. These activities illustrate how a basic technology framework can be adapted for different proficiency levels and with different topics.

Sample Activity for the Advanced Level: Virtual Tour of an Artist's Life

This activity targets the program goals of Communication, Cultures, and Communities. Technological tools used in the activity include a digital camera and a computer for word processing, creating a PowerPoint presentation, and accessing the Internet.

An Advanced-Placement French class has completed a unit on several artists and their works. The goal is for students to research additional information about an artist of their choice and then share the information with their classmates in the form of a PowerPoint presentation. Working in small groups or independently, students select an artist and create a virtual tour of the artist's life. They gather information using available print and electronic resources including the Internet and are able to discuss their projects with keypals from their sister school in France. The different sections of the presentations might include a biography of the artist, pictures of the artist's hometown, and summaries or descriptions of the artist's works. Students may role play a scene based on a selected work, take pictures of the dramatization using a digital camera, and write summaries in the target language to accompany the pictures. In addition, the students may want to include links to related Internet sites in their presentation. Finished products are shared with classmates. Similarly, students could research an author, rather than an artist, and include audio clips of readings from the author's work.

In this activity, students use language at the advanced proficiency level to communicate within and beyond the school setting. They understand the main ideas and most details on a variety of topics as they research, and they narrate in coherent paragraphs as they develop their virtual tour. Using technology to communicate, students can demonstrate an understanding of target culture products and how they are related to target culture perspectives.

Sample Activity for the Novice Level: Creating a Web Site of Two Cities

This activity also targets the standards of Communication, Cultures, and Communities. Technological tools used in the activity include a digital camera and a computer for word processing, creating a PowerPoint presentation, and accessing the Internet.

This beginning-level class has completed a lesson in which they learned the names of many buildings and sites in a typical city—both at home and in the target culture. To provide a context in which learners can use that information, they are given the following scenario:

A group of exchange students from your sister school is planning an upcoming visit to your city. When they arrive, you and your classmates will share with them some of the most interesting local sites. As a gesture of good will on your part, you and your classmates will also create a web site revealing what you have learned about their hometown.

Working independently or in small groups, students create a web site that highlights local points of interest. Using pictures captured from the Internet or taken with a digital camera, they label each location using the target language. They also use the Internet to research the city where the sister school is located and include that information on their site. Students get feedback from their classmates when they present their web site.

In this activity, students use learned words and phrases to label the pages and/or sections of their web site. Using technology to communicate, they demonstrate an understanding of target culture products and hypothesize about target culture perspectives related to them (what is suggested by the way a city is laid out, etc.)

Technology/Learning Stations

Many LOTE teachers now have at least one computer in their classroom. But how can they integrate technology into the standards-based curriculum with a single computer? One solution is to establish technology/learning stations. Rather than teaching the language lesson as a series of whole-class activities, Voelzel (2000) proposes dividing the lesson into smaller parts and creating several stations around the room at which students work in small cooperative groups. The number and kind of stations are limitless: a listening center where students develop their skills, a speaking center where they practice using the target language, a writing center where they respond in writing to authentic situations, and so forth. After the teacher has modeled the use of each station, students rotate among them as the instructor monitors their learning. Rather than having to design additional activities, the teacher only need change the *organization* of the lesson and make students more responsible for their own learning while he or she oversees, advises, and assists. As a follow-up or to increase the complexity of the task, students or groups can create their own linguistic and technology stations for their classmates.

Technology/learning stations can be developed in a variety of ways. For example, an effective unit of study should, among other goals, promote and cultural understanding and the development of all language skills. A good way to make sure that the student is increasing the proficiency of each skill is to create a center which highlights each skill. Another option is to create centers which emphasize each of the Five Cs. For example, the teacher could create several

Communication centers (listening and speaking; reading and writing; reading and speaking; etc.), a Culture center where students investigate the practices, products, and perspectives of the target culture, a Connections center where students study the unit's theme as it relates to another subject area, etc.

The one-computer classroom can also draw on a variety of technologies as stations are designed. At the computer station, students could work with software provided by the textbook publisher, surf the Internet for specific information, create a web page to demonstrate their understanding of a particular topic, create a PowerPoint presentation, draw a concept map with a mapping program to show the relationship between various ideas, manipulate photos taken with a digital camera, scan photos and information to create a presentation, or update their electronic student portfolios. At listening and reading stations, students might listen to an audiotape or CD recording, watch a video clip from a satellite transmission, or read materials and other realia printed off the Internet. At speaking and writing stations, students could videotape a role play, record speech samples onto cassettes which can later be transferred to an electronic portfolio and/or burned onto CDs, draft e-mail messages to their keypals, or prepare web-based or PowerPoint projects that they can complete when the computer is available.

Summary

Using technology to implement a standards-based curriculum is highly feasible, and most LOTE teachers realize that students are more motivated to learn languages when an activity involves technology (Kost, 1999). In addition, LOTE teachers know that computers increase students' accessibility to native speakers, to authentic texts, to target culture perspectives, and to timely information in the target language. Besides accessibility, computers foster communication both within and beyond the classroom (Ehrmann, 1995).

What is the best advice for beginning this process? First of all, begin with the standards, and identify targeted knowledge and skills at the proficiency level that you teach. Second, select the technology with which you are most proficient, and integrate it only where it enhances the students' overall learning experience. And third, keep it simple. After you and your students become more comfortable in a technologically-enhanced learning environment, you can then increase the variety and quantity of technology usage in your standards-based curriculum.

Questions for Reflection

1. With which computer programs are you most proficient? Create an activity at the desired ACTFL proficiency level which requires students to use technology to acquire more knowledge and skills in the target language.
2. We live in a technological world. What role do LOTE teachers play in preparing students to live and work in a technological society?
3. Which challenges prevent you from using more technology in your LOTE curriculum? What are some steps that you can take to address these challenges?

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