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Grounded Tech Integration: Languages

By Marcela van Olphen,
Mark Hofer, and Judi Harris

This is the fourth article in a series on grounded technology integration. See Resources on page 28 for the full list of previous articles.

Wikis, blogs, YouTube, iTunes, virtual field trips, and Web radio offer world language teachers and students many easily accessible opportunities to experience distant cultures and languages. When integrated into a student-centered world languages curriculum, these educational technologies can help enhance language learning and teaching in ways not previously possible. However, the increasing number and expanding possibilities of new technologies for language instruction may obfuscate their most appropriate instructional uses and distract from learning goals.

How can we channel our efforts so that we truly integrate technology into world language instruction instead of using it as an add-on? What does it take to use technologies meaningfully without losing focus on content and pedagogy?

Matching Tech to Lesson Planning

One way to help teachers integrate technology effectively is to focus on instructional planning. Quite simply, we suggest matching technology-integration strategies to existing lesson-planning methods, rather than asking teachers to plan instruction that exploits the opportunities offered by particular educational technologies.

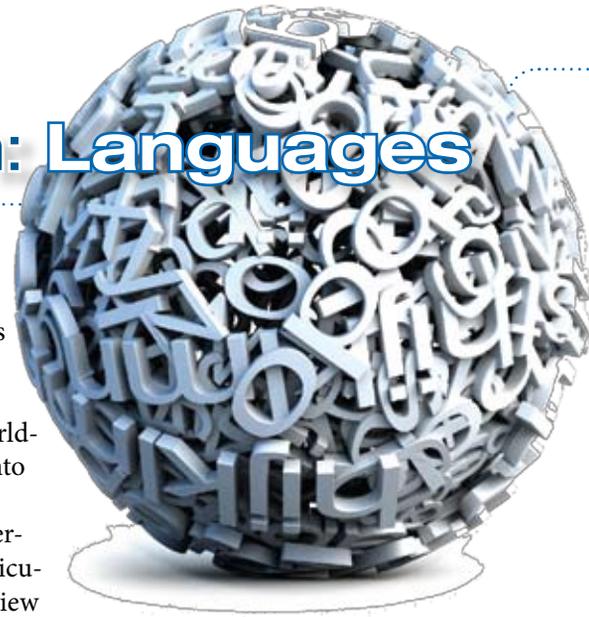
A conceptual tool that can assist with technology integration during planning is a comprehensive set of

learning activity types for each curriculum area that specifies the particular educational technologies that can best support the learning goals within each activity.

We have organized the many world-languages learning activity types into subcategories to build an informal taxonomy. Once teachers have determined the learning goals for a particular lesson, project, or unit, they review the activity types for that content area, selecting and combining the activities that will best help students achieve the selected learning goals. Teachers then choose from the multiple educational technologies listed for each learning activity type to support the instructional plan. We consider this grounded technology integration, as it is based in content, pedagogy, and how teachers plan instruction.

Using Learning Activity Types

The process of learning to communicate in a foreign language involves three modes of communication: interpersonal, interpretive, and presentational. Because students must develop multiple skills that span all three modes of communication, we have organized the world-languages activity types into five genres that address different skill families: listening, speaking, reading, writing, and viewing. (Note that we have added viewing to the four skills that are typically discussed, to include visual world-language learning.) We have identified 56 activity types so far. Due to space constraints, we can't share them all here, but readers can find the complete taxonomy of activity types on our wiki. The tables on page 27



provide examples of activity types in each of the five skills genres, with brief descriptions and illustrations of the technologies that can be used to support each.

Combining Activity Types: An Example

Although each of these activity types could be used independently, when combined, they can help teachers make world-language learning more efficient and engaging for students. By combining activity types in an instructional plan, teachers can address the five organizing principles (communication, cultures, connections, comparisons, and communities) of the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages standards while attending to the three communicative modes.

Here is an example of a combination that can be used for foreign language learning in elementary schools:

Creating a class dictionary can be an engaging way to learn new vocabulary without resorting to rote memorization. To help elementary students develop their vocabularies, a teacher can plan a project involving the classroom, the school, and students' homes by combining five activity types. The project is divided into three phases.

Listening Activity Types

Seven activity types support students' development of active listening skills in their target language (L2). For example:

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Listen to a story	Students listen to a story and read aloud in L2	CD, Web, YouTube
Listen to a broadcast	Students listen to a broadcast in L2 (radio, television, news, performance)	Web radio, YouTube

Speaking Activity Types

Thirteen activity types focus on helping students build their speaking skills in their target language. For example:

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Create an audio/video recording	Students create a recording (a commercial for an invented or real product, a how-to demonstration, a song, or a rap)	Audio recording/video recording, podcast
Have an informal debate	Students debate an issue in L2	Audioconference/videoconference, audio recording

Writing Activity Types

Twenty-one activity types focus on supporting students' development of writing skills in the target language. The activities address both expository and creative writing skills. For example:

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Create a comic	Students create a comic strip to apply grammar functions, culture, or vocabulary	Word processor, drawing program, comic creation software, Photoshop
Create a newspaper/newsletter/news magazine/brochure	Students synthesize information from textbooks, encyclopedias, or websites and develop a print or electronic periodical	Word processor, desktop publishing software, Web authoring software, wiki

Reading Activity Types

Ten activity types support students' development of reading skills in the target language. For example:

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Read a diary/journal	Students read entries from peers' diaries or journals posted online	Web, blog, wikis
Read a comic or political cartoon	Students read a comic and relate it to the cultural and/or political realities represented ("Mafalda," "Maitena," "Asterix," "Ramón")	Web

Viewing Activity Types

Five activity types allow students to experience the target language and its culture visually. For example:

Activity Type	Brief Description	Possible Technologies
Watch a performance	Students attend a live performance or watch a recorded event (DVD of an indigenous performance)	Web, DVD, YouTube, streaming video
View an exhibit	Students take physical or virtual field trips (art museums, cultural artifacts, other students' works, school exhibition)	Web, Web-based virtual field trip, videoconference

Learning Activity Types Wiki: <http://activitytypes.wmwikis.net/World+Languages>

Students first identify and label objects that are important to them at home, school, and in the classroom using a word processor. They keep a list and create a table of all the objects they have labeled using a word processor or spreadsheet. They then read the table to their teacher aloud.

Students scan images or download digital pictures to create illustrations accompanied by text, using drawing and/or presentation software. With students' help, the teacher then compiles all the entries into a paper-based or electronic dictionary, creating a book. In the final phase, students deliver presentations of their entries orally to the class, supported by the visual aids that they created. The teacher then assesses the presentations based on a rubric developed in collaboration with the students.

Note that the activity types used in this example helped to make vocabulary learning more student centered

and active. Although the same learning goals might be met through other activities and using different technologies, this particular combination helps students make and reinforce connections between language and familiar objects in multimodal ways.

Invitation for Collaboration

Given the dynamic nature of language, plus advances in curricula and technologies available for learning, the range of learning activity types will change over time. We invite you to help us expand, refine, and revise the world-language learning activity types taxonomy. Please visit the Learning Activity Types Wiki and share your ideas via the online survey.

Resources

ACTFL National Standards: www.actfl.org/i4a/pages/index.cfm?pageid=3392

"Grounded Tech Integration," *L&L*, September/October, 2009, pp. 22–25

"Grounded Tech Integration: Math," *L&L*, November, 2009, pp. 24–26

Learning Activity Types Wiki: <http://activitytypes.wmwikis.net/World+Languages>
"Tech Integration in Social Studies," *L&L*, September/October, 2009, pp. 26–28



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