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Foreign Language Teaching, Part 1

Promoting creativity and learner choice in foreign language teaching through technology integration

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Second Language Acquisition



Learning Objectives

- Recognize how technology can help foster authentic learning and student choice;
- Identify common tools to support communication, collaboration, creativity, and student choice.

Technology provides so many ways for students to learn anywhere and at any time, and at a pace that is comfortable for each student. As educators, we want students to be able to connect with the classroom and the resources, as well as to develop global connections in their learning. Finding the right tools to use can take time and the search for a tool to implement in the classroom should always begin by asking the question “Why” integrate technology and “How” will it enhance learning for students. Knowing what tools to use takes time and having resources available to start with, and being able to involve students more in the process will be highly beneficial.

Technology enables teachers to teach from anywhere and the availability of tools which lend themselves to more interaction between the teacher and the students and the content continues to grow. Using digital tools provides more differentiation and personalized learning, and opportunities for students to become the leaders and creators in the classroom. They can create with these tools and share lessons with the class, increasing the resources available to all students, or they can simply use the opportunity to become the creator, as a way to help them to learn the material in a more meaningful and authentic way.

Key Terms

technology_integration,project-based_learning,media_literacy

Authentic Learning and Choices

The use of digital tools means that learning is no longer confined to the traditional time and setting of the classroom. The learning environment can be anywhere , at any time and at a pace that is comfortable for students. When students are given choices in how to show what they have learned, they are more likely to be engaged and excited for learning. They will feel valued. The lesson and learning will be more meaningful because it has been made personal to them. Students can look for and interact with resources that meet their own needs and teachers can use these resources to find out what the student needs are. With the many ways to assess students using digital tools today, data is available instantly, allowing teachers to provide feedback to students when they need it the most.

Student Choices

Having feedback while learning happens is critical for student growth. When teachers give students the opportunity to make choices about the types of activities they are interested in, students become more empowered in their learning and can self-direct. When teachers relinquish some of the control and leave the decision-making to the students to determine how to show what they have learned, or let them create their own homework assignment, they are more empowered in their learning.

In years past, classrooms were teacher-centered. With the tools available today and the goal toward increasing student empowerment, through choices in learning, we move from the teacher-centered classrooms, to student-centered and optimally, student-driven learning environments.

In a student-driven classroom, students have opportunities to lead the activities in the classroom and to do more than just be passive learners. They actively make decisions and have input into their learning experiences. With the launch of the new ISTE student standards last summer, focus is on the empowered learner and student-driven learning. The standards emphasize the importance of providing students with opportunities to do more than just use technology but to “leverage technology” and to create with technology to gain new perspectives, to communicate, collaborate, and become responsible digital citizens.

In particular, [ISTE - Student Standard 6](#) - “Creative Communicator: Students communicate clearly and express themselves creatively for a variety of purposes using the platforms, tools, styles, formats and digital media appropriate to their goals.” Students create, communicate and develop a voice in learning.

Relevant Resources

The advantages of digital tools is that many things are easily accessible. Educators and students can access information anytime from anywhere, the materials stay up-to-date and there are many choices so each student and each teacher can find something that is relevant to them. Continue looking for opportunities to try new tools and methods with students, and to involve the students in the decisions. Ask for their input and let them show you what they can do. By doing this, everyone has a personal investment and we all learn.

Communication through collaboration

There are many options which promote student collaboration and enhance writing skills and student voice, providing students with many opportunities to develop their voice and be creative in communication.

Blogging

Through blogging, teachers can provide support for students and help them to gain confidence in writing and speaking. Some platforms to try are [Spaces](#), [Seesaw](#), [Edublogs](#), which can be used to have students complete writing prompts and creative writing assignments. These tools can be used to open up the communication between peers in and out of the classroom and promote digital citizenship skills for students in a safe, online learning space. Students have the opportunity to make their blog space their own. In the foreign language classroom, this is a great way for students to practice writing in the language they are learning, and sharing their ideas with students in different countries.

[Padlet](#)

Padlet is a “virtual wall” which promotes collaboration, communication, creativity and more because of its versatility. Students have created their own Padlet to share projects, create a digital portfolio space, work as part of a team on a group project and to share research findings from a scavenger hunt. Students learn how to interact in the online space more by posting and commenting to a discussion question, adding their own resources for a collaborative class project, working in small groups and using it for brainstorming during the early stages of a project. It is also a great way to connect with other students and classrooms throughout the world by sharing the Padlet link with other educators, opening up ways for students to communicate in a creative way and broaden their perspectives.

Tools for promoting Creativity and Student Choice

There are many ways for students to create presentations and share their information and learning in visual ways. Some of the tools offer multiple ways to create presentations and to even use these tools for other purposes like creating newsletters, signs for the classroom, and more, which can be other ways to have students create with the language and design materials for their learning space.

A few options for having students present information in a visual way, with options for multimedia include the following:

[Book Creator](#) fosters collaboration and enables educators to connect students with peers, even globally, to develop social awareness and in particular, empathy as they learn. Students create a book for use as a journal or digital portfolio as they develop self-awareness and self-management. For PBL, it can be a great choice for an artifact of their learning.

[Buncee](#) can be used for creating presentations, interactive lessons, formative assessments and more, with many options for including different characters, fonts, animations, and video. There are so many options available within Buncee for students to create presentations which include so many relevant and authentic pieces. In foreign language classrooms, students can demonstrate their listening, reading, writing and speaking skills by creating a Buncee. For example, students can record audio to describe their favorite activities, talk about family, narrate a story, or add a

YouTube video to further demonstrate a concept, use the features like drawing, uploading items, sharing a link, or simply taking advantage of all the different stickers, animations and other tools provided within Buncee. With Buncee, students can find everything they need to create an authentic product and will be more engaged in the learning process. Using Buncee is a way to address each of the ISTE-Standards for Students.

[Piktochart](#) is a tool for creating infographics, social media flyers, engaging presentations and more. Students can use Piktochart to create menus, self-descriptions, talk about movies and even create TV advertisements, recipe presentations and anything related to the content material. Their work can even be downloaded and printed for display in the classroom.

[Spaces EDU](#) offers a digital portfolio platform that assists teachers to better understand students, their interests and needs in learning. With Spaces, teachers can create individual, class or group spaces. With individual spaces, the interactions between teacher and student help with self-awareness and self-management as students develop content area skills and in a supportive space. Digital portfolios help students to develop SEL skills of self-awareness and self-management. For educators, join the Spaces Educator group for a supportive PLN and place to share ideas and make new connections.

[Storyboard That](#) is a very authentic tool for telling a story, expressing a concept, and really creating an engaging project. It fosters innovation in designing and empowers students in the learning process. Students show what they have learned in their own personal way. By using Storyboard That, students can select from many templates with diverse options for themes, backgrounds, characters, text, props and more. There are many lesson plans available to implement with Foreign Languages and more. It is a great option to provide to students, because of the variety of options available to express creativity and promote student choice and voice. Deciding how to best use digital tools can be challenging at times, but a good place to start is to hear directly from the students. Involving the students in the classroom decisions and then asking for reflections on their experience with using the tool helps educators to understand if and how technology is enhancing their learning process.

[Visme](#) is a “drag and drop” tool, which is easy to use for creating infographics, reports, different presentations and other visuals that can be used in the language classroom. It has a library full of images, charts and more, making it easy for users to create exactly what they need. Students have used it to share their Project Based Learning work and have been able to create very engaging, authentic projects that show their learning and also promote a more meaningful learning experience.

[Storybird](#) is a tool great for having students narrate a story and have choices in beautiful backgrounds to use for their storybook. The students can be creative and have fun learning in the process so that students can read books created by their classmates, adding more authentic works to class materials. Students can download their creations or can even have the books printed in softcover or hardcover format. These are great to purchase for use in your classroom as learning materials for future classes and this exemplifies what personalized learning and having a choice can do to engage students and increase their learning potential. There are so many options available with Storybird to find something that fits right in with the theme of what students are studying.

[Educreations](#) is a digital tool that enables students to use an interactive whiteboard space and add drawings, images, text and also record audio to their lesson. This is a great tool to use to have students teach a lesson as part of a more authentic practice or for an assessment, and it is also a way that students can create projects. For example, drawing and narrating about one’s dream house or creating a family description.

[Adobe Express](#) is a free online tool for creating videos, images, and other presentations in a very visually engaging way. Students can use Adobe Spark to tell a story, create a video presentation and record audio, or make infographics for class. With tools like Adobe Spark, students can find everything they need to represent their ideas and be creative in the process.

[Powtoon](#) can be used to have students create animated cartoons with comic characters and a lot of other add-ins, audio, text and much more. It is easy to create with PowToon and students can find all of the images, fonts, icons, and

visuals they need to tell their story. This can be great for retelling folk stories from the culture students are learning about, or for telling their own stories in the language they are learning.

[Flip](#) is another video response tool that enables students and teachers to interact with a variety of discussion topics. You start by creating a “grid” and then adding a “topic.” A grid could be one level of a course or all students. Students go to the grid to see new topics posted for discussion and then have time to record a response and even reply to their classmates. Flip launched more updates this summer and it now integrates with Microsoft and Canvas. You can have students record short videos of 15 seconds or even longer up to 5 minutes. There are many attachments that can be added to the topic. Teachers can also set up the topics in advance and set when they post and freeze, making scheduling easier. Flip is also a way to connect students with other classrooms or even professionals in different fields, to connect with real-world applications of the content material.

Telegraph is a very easy site to publish a stand-alone web page, which can be used to have students create a sign, a newsletter, a journal entry, or anything as an alternative format to pen and paper or using a Word or Google Document. It is easy to use and create with Telegraph. Students start by typing in the website, adding a title, their name, and even some pictures or posting links to other websites. When students have finished, they publish it and it will have a unique web address that can easily be shared with anyone.

What are the benefits of these tools?

The point to remember is that it is not just about using the tool in class. There is a difference between technology use and technology integration. Going forward with bringing technology into the classroom, it should serve a purpose that benefits student learning. Each of these tools promotes more personalized and meaningful learning for students. These tools can be used to enhance, amplify and facilitate deeper and more authentic learning. Using technology just for the sake of using it is not a good choice. But using it to help students find their voice, learn what they want to do, what they can do, and what they need help with, does make sense. When technology is used with purpose, learning opportunities will amplify.





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Rachelle Dené Poth is an edtech consultant, presenter, attorney, author, and teacher. Rachelle teaches Spanish and STEAM: What's nExT in Emerging Technology at Riverview Junior Senior High School in Oakmont, PA. Rachelle has a Juris Doctor degree from Duquesne University School of Law and a Master's in Instructional Technology. She is currently pursuing a second doctorate, focused on Educational Technology. Rachelle is an ISTE Certified Educator and a Microsoft Innovative Educator Expert. She is a past-president of the ISTE Teacher Education Network and served on the Leadership team of the Mobile Learning Network for five years. She received the ISTE Making IT Happen Award in 2019 and has received several Presidential gold and silver awards for her volunteer service to education. She was named one of 30 K-12 IT Influencers for 2021. In 2017, Rachelle was selected as the 2017 Outstanding Teacher of the Year by PAECT (the Pennsylvania Association for Educational Communications in Technology, the PA affiliate of ISTE) and by the NSBA as one of the "20 to Watch" educators. Since 2019, Rachelle has written seven books. Her newest book "Things I Wish [...] Knew" includes the voices of 50 educators from around the world. She has also contributed to eight other books related to education. She presents regularly at state, national and international conferences and provides professional development and coaching for educators. Rachelle is a columnist for Getting Smart and a blogger for Defined Learning and NEO LMS. She has a podcast ThriveinEDU and is the host of a PBL Podcast by Defined Learning on the BAM Radio Network. Rachelle is also a host of ThriveinEDU Live and leads a community of educators on Facebook.

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