Online Learning Environment Design

Alana White

State University of New York College at Oneonta
Introduction

In today’s technology centered world, it is important that educators adapt to new online instructional practices. Through online learning environments, such as the course described in this paper, teachers are able to transform instruction in order to create authentic online learning experiences for today’s digital native students.

The following online course is intended for a ninth grade Spanish class. The course addresses the topic of “Shopping in Spain” and encompasses not only a reinforcement of Spanish language vocabulary but also direct instruction and student reflection surrounding traditional and contemporary shopping customs in Spain. Following an initial, trial administration of the course in an online graduate course setting, the course was reviewed and critiqued by a colleague of the author, a nine year veteran Music teacher with extensive background using instructional technology in the classroom. Considering this feedback and the feedback given from graduate students in the trial course, the author reflected on the implications of use of this course in future classes.
Course Description

Online Learning Environment

The course is completed entirely online and does not require any synchronous instruction. The online platform of the course is CourseSites, a free version of Blackboard Learn. “CourseSites offers users of all types the ability to experience Blackboard’s newest teaching and learning technologies in an integrated, free solution” (“Blackbord,” n.p.). Students are also required to have a Google Apps account in order to access various activities and assessments throughout the course using Google Sites and Google Form.

Course Outline

The course is designed to span a two week period, meeting twice a week. Therefore the course is divided into four separate sessions: Week 1: Day 1, Week 1: Day 2, Week 2: Day 3, Week 2: Day 4.

On Week 1: Day 1, students are required to log on to CourseSites in order to read the course syllabus and post an introduction to the class using a discussion post. On the same day students are required to watch a video lesson which covers PowerPoint notes regarding shopping customs in Spain. Following the video notes, students are then required to post their opinion regarding the controversy over shopping in small businesses or large corporations. Following the first assignment the instructor will email each individual student a link used to view their ongoing grade report through Google Apps so that students can keep close track of their progress within the course. The video lesson and corresponding discussion post help to enhance student learning in an online environment because rather than just reading an article containing the same information, students can listen to the instructor and gain a more personal connection to the
material. The video lesson also communicates using multiple learning styles as it appeals to visual and auditory learners.

On Week 1: Day 2 students are required to practice Spanish shopping vocabulary using Quizlet.com. Quizlet is an online interactive vocabulary reinforcement website which utilizes flashcards, games, formative, and summative assessments. Students are then required to submit a PDF of 3 screen shots from their online review as proof of practice. This activity enhances student learning because it incorporates content in an interactive environment which students can enjoy. Students can also work at their own pace and focus on the vocabulary terms which they find personally more challenging than others. This individualization of learning is one benefit of an online environment that is not always offered in a traditional course setting.

For Week 2: Day 3 students are to engage in an online shopping WebQuest using Google Sites and the website for El Corte Inglés, the largest department store in Europe which is headquartered in Madrid, Spain. Students are required to submit three tasks in PDF form and through a Google Form activity in order to identify vocabulary, convert American clothing sizes into European sizes, and finally convert Euros into U.S. Dollars. This activity enhances learning by allowing students to use the internet in order to engage in a real-world shopping experience in Spain using the content knowledge they have acquired through the course. Therefore, students are putting their content knowledge and technological skill to use in an authentic situation.

The final day of the course entails an assessment in the form of a two part quiz. Students are assessed on their cultural understanding of shopping customs in Spain and also on their knowledge of Spanish language shopping vocabulary. After the quiz, students are then assigned a course and instructor evaluation survey through Google Form which is graded based on completion not on content. Students can use the same link provided at the start of the course in
order to view their final grade report, total points earned for the course, and converted letter grade for the course.

**Reflection**

**Feedback from Graduate Classmates**

Following the initial administration of the course in a graduate class setting where classmates of the author acted as students in the course, the “students” completed the Google Form survey in order to evaluate the course and the instructor. The feedback was overwhelmingly positive. One student said that the course was her “favorite lesson” from the course and described the course as “very interactive and unique.” Another student who is also a Spanish teacher said that she was able to take ideas from this course in order to implement into her own classes in the future. All students found the course to be well organized and felt that they learned meaningful information while being engaged through technology. However, one piece of constructive criticism that arose from the survey was the lack of collaboration and student interactive in the lesson.

**Feedback from Teacher Colleague**

Feedback from the author’s colleague, a veteran Music teacher who uses technology in her classroom on a daily basis, was also overwhelmingly positive. First, she pointed out that the videos provided by the instructor which not only cover notes but also tutorials on how to complete assignments, were very important because they give students more of a personal connection to the instructor and to the material. Second, the author was commended on the use of Google Apps for Education, seeing that the school district for which the course is intended, Stockbridge Valley Central Schools (S.V.C.S.), is transitioning to cloud computing through Google Apps and also the implementation of 1:1 technology in the form of Chromebooks.
One piece of constructive criticism given where improvement to the course could be made was in the lack of an authentic assessment. The ten question quiz administered through a word document worked fine for test run graduate student subjects, however she believed that the assessment needed to be altered in order to be more meaningful for actual Spanish students. She also noted that because CourseSites is not currently the learning management system (LMS) in place at S.V.C.S. that it will be necessary to either convert the course to My Big Campus or to conduct the course strictly through Google Apps for Education.

Conclusion

Implications for future classroom use

Based on the suggestions made by the author’s classmates and colleague, slight alterations to the lesson will be made for future classroom use. Mainly, the changes made will be due to the fact that the actual course that the author teaches does not occur in a strictly online setting. Therefore, because this course is intended for a ninth grade, traditional classroom in which online learning environments are a supplement to a traditional curriculum, several aspects of the online course will change in order to accommodate synchronous instruction. First, the introductory section of the course will not be necessary because students will already be acquainted with one another by the time this lesson occurs within the curriculum. Second, student collaboration will be an important addition to the lesson in the form of an authentic assessment. In addition to the two part quiz, groups of students will also be required to use Google Docs in order to collaborate on a written script for a skit in Spanish based on a shopping scenario in Spain. Then, because the course will take place in a traditional setting, students will be able to act out the script they have written using Google Docs. Third, in order to simplify the
fact that the course uses various Google applications and that S.V.C.S. does not recognize CourseSites as a district wide LMS, the lesson will instead be conducted strictly through Google Apps for Education. According to Rowe, Bozalek, and Frantz who engaged in research in order to evaluate how instructional practices change with new technologies, Google Drive was an ideal tool when focusing on student collaboration and the production of authentic work because of the many collaborative and formative assessment features offered (Rowe, 2013, p. 597). Also, it was found that using Google Drive made students develop as more metacognitive learners, thinking critically about the real-world implications of their learning (Rowe, 2013, p. 603).

Overall, the initial administration of the course was a success, however in order to effectively incorporate this lesson into the proposed traditional setting it would be necessary to make the course follow a blended learning style which incorporates synchronous instruction and student collaboration rather than implementing an online class focusing solely on asynchronous instruction and student work.
References


doi:10.1111/bjet.12063
## Appendix A

### Course Outline & Modalities Implemented

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Day</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Assignment Details</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 1, Day 1</td>
<td>Introductions</td>
<td>Student will introduce self to class.</td>
<td>Assignment: Blackboard Post (2 pts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modality: Discussion Post (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1, Day 1</td>
<td>Shopping Customs</td>
<td>Student will watch lesson notes video and complete discussion assignment to demonstrate understanding.</td>
<td>Assignment: Discussion Post (5 pts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modalities: Video Lesson (2), PowerPoint (3), Discussion Post</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 1, Day 2</td>
<td>Shopping Vocabulary</td>
<td>Student will practice Spanish vocabulary for shopping through Quizlet.com</td>
<td>Assignment: PDF document with 3 screen shots as proof of practice (5 pts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modality: Online Interactive using Website(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2, Day 3</td>
<td>Online Shopping WebQuest</td>
<td>Student will conduct an Online Shopping WebQuest using El Corte Inglés’ website and Google sites</td>
<td>Assignment: WebQuest (10 pts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modalities: Online Interactive using Website &amp; Google Site, Handouts (5), Google Form</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2, Day 4</td>
<td>Assessment</td>
<td>Student will demonstrate understanding of material learned.</td>
<td>Assignment: Quiz (10 pts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modality: Assessment (6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 2, Day 4</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
<td>Student will provide feedback pertaining to course experience.</td>
<td>Assignment: Survey (3 pts)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Modality: Google Form Survey (7), Final Grade Report using Google Sheets</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix B

Standards Addressed

N.Y.S., L.O.T.E. Modern Languages: Checkpoint A
- Standard 1: Students will be able to use a language other than English for communication.
- Standard 2: Students will develop cross-cultural skills and understandings.

N.Y.S., Technology
- Standard 2: Students will access, generate, process, and transfer information using appropriate technologies.

I.S.T.E. Students
- 2. Communication and collaboration
  - a. interact, collaborate, and publish with peers, experts, or others employing a variety of digital environments and media
  - b. communicate information and ideas effectively to multiple audiences using a variety of media and formats
- 5. Digital Citizenship
  - a. advocate and practice safe, legal, and responsible use of information and technology
  - b. exhibit a positive attitude toward using technology that supports collaboration, learning, and productivity
- 6. Technology operations and concepts
  - a. understand and use technology systems
  - b. select and use applications effectively and productively
  - d. transfer current knowledge to learning of new technologies