



Tools of the Trade

**TECHNOLOGIES
GIVE EDUCATORS—
AND STUDENTS—
NEW OPTIONS FOR
LANGUAGE LEARNING**

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The rise of technology on community college campuses means that educators have more resources than ever to deliver education to students, wherever they are.

A survey from technology giant CDW-G says 37 percent of postsecondary instructors have increased their reliance on technology in the last two years. The nation's language classrooms have traditionally lagged behind. But a growing number of language instructors are committed to changing that, using everything from the Internet to video to smartphones, to immerse students in cultures that, until recently, were a plane ticket away.

The Modern Language Association says enrollments in college language programs are up 7 percent in recent years. As the global economy marches on, experts predict those numbers will climb higher still. But are our campuses equipped to handle the surge?

"Thanks to technology we can go beyond having students sit in a classroom, take notes, memorize and regurgitate information," says Alexis Hopkins, lead professor of communications at Butler Community College (BCC) in El Dorado, Kan. "By incorporating more diverse tools for learning, students get the most bang for their buck." >>

That might be true. But not every technology is worth the investment. Looking for ways to integrate technology into your language courses? This special feature shines a light on a handful of innovative community college language programs that are using the latest innovations to improve student outcomes.

Here's hoping they'll work for you, too.

New Levels of Learning

Instructors at Camden County College (CCC) in New Jersey have sought to combine the ubiquity and reach of online learning with the benefits of face-to-face lectures through a blended approach to language instruction.

Administrators say the approach, now featured in all eight of the college's language programs, brings a new level of interactivity and engagement to language learning—a credit to the ways in which teachers and students use the technology.

CCC uses custom ebooks from a company called IXL Learning. The Quia book series offers access to all of the content featured in traditional paper-based texts, plus videos and other resources and ability to distribute curricula online.

Martine Howard, chair of the department of language and culture and assistant professor of French at the

college, explains: "Students can click on a word and hear how it's pronounced, or they can click on a picture and a video will pop up so students can watch two people carry on a whole conversation in the language."

CCC students also have access to online pretests and other resources to gauge their comprehension. A customized reporting system identifies areas of weakness and offers exercises for improvement.

Once students complete these supplemental exercises, they can test their understanding and choose to continue working on certain areas, if necessary, before taking the test that counts toward their grade. This added layer of personalization ensures students get the targeted help they need to succeed, says Howard, who adds, "This is an excellent resource for the student who is serious about doing well."

CCC isn't alone in its use of technology. Leslie Pierson, an assistant professor of foreign language at BCC, is developing a blended language course that will consist of one hour of online instruction and four hours of face-to-face class time each week.

Pierson says the program evolved from a "flipped classroom" model, where instructors provide video-based lectures and other online materials



ahead of class so students can spend face time discussing key concepts, doing drills and practicing, and working in groups.

"The advantage of doing some of this online is that students have more control," Pierson explains of the recorded lectures featured as part of the new course. "They can stop the presentation; they can go back. It's a more personalized format. Also, they're a click away from a number of resources. That's very motivating for students."



MOOCs: Ready for Prime Time?

Massive open online courses (MOOCs) promise a new approach to higher education instruction. These courses are typically offered for free online and give anyone a chance to learn about a particular topic from top professors. Online communities of people with common interests add to the appeal of MOOCs, but some experts say the applicability of MOOCs for language instruction is still in its infancy.

"MOOCs are valuable for people who are motivated self-learners and those who may have some other outside resources to practice the language and receive personalized feedback," says Lauren Rosen, director of the University of Wisconsin System Collaborative Language Program. "But if I were the instructor in a MOOC where there are a thousand students, there would be no way for me to provide reliable assessments for that many people."



The introduction of supplementary video—at home or in the classroom—provides students the benefit of watching native speakers engaged in natural conversation. Students can witness firsthand the nuances of speech, including gestures and movements, and observe that engagement as it might have happened on the street or in a restaurant, for example.

“It’s a lot more interesting for students to watch two young adults interacting in a real-life situation than for me to act out a dialogue from a textbook,” Pierson says. Students can start and stop the videos and review specific sections, or take extra time to look up words in a dictionary. “They become the driver of their own experience,” she says.

The Right Approach

There’s no denying these resources have certain advantages. But no technology will improve student outcomes unless teachers commit to deploying it the right way.

To ensure success with online and blended language instruction, consider the following suggestions:

“WE OWE IT TO OUR STUDENTS TO SHOW THEM WHAT’S AT THEIR FINGERTIPS AND GIVE THEM THE TOOLS TO USE IT.”

—Linda Wapelhorst,
director of Butler Online,
Butler Community College

#1 Identify which approaches work for the different areas of language instruction.

Wendy Larsen, chair of the English as a second language program at Tacoma Community College in Washington, says she focuses on striking the appropriate balance between online and face-to-face instruction. “The work that’s best suited for online lessons involves listening, speaking, and pronunciation practice—skills that require a lot of repetition,” she says.

#2 Invest in a strong Learning Management System (LMS). A good LMS can be used to store course outlines and timelines and provide forums for students to have

online discussions with classmates or complete oral assignments. Howard uses an LMS called WebStudy. She also recently implemented the BigBlue-Button, a Web-conferencing option. Together, these tools enable her to give a live in-class lecture—and, with the help of an electronic whiteboard, record the session for any student who can’t attend because of personal or work commitments. Using computer microphones and Web cameras, students can chat with the instructor, from wherever they choose to watch. “Community college students are so diverse, it’s hard to get everyone in a class all together at a particular time,” she says.

#3 College officials should be open to new ways of assessing students. They can use oral assessments conducted via a Web camera, for example, and incorporate the technology to get a better picture of individual student progress. They also have to be wary of certain loopholes that could enable students to game the system. When students take oral assessments, Howard says they should be instructed to look directly into the Web camera, eliminating the possibility that students might write out their presentations or translations beforehand and attempt to read them from their computer screen. Online testing also has its challenges. “We’ve caught people who hired tutors to take tests,” Howard says. To prevent cheating, the college requires students to take mid-term and final exams, which account for 60 percent of their course grade, in a testing center on campus or some other designated facility approved by the college. Before taking an exam, students must present a photo ID to a test proctor.

Going Mobile

Mobile devices—such as smartphones or tablets—can also have a significant impact on language instruction, often

in concert with sound online learning strategies. “Students can access these devices anytime and anywhere to view videos or course content, or use flash cards to review vocabulary,” explains Lauren Rosen, director of the University of Wisconsin System Collaborative Language Program and an organizer of technology workshops for higher education instructors.

Some instructors ask students to respond to polling questions via their mobile devices and use that feedback to guide classroom discussions. “You get a gist of what people are thinking so you can focus the questions on the topics that might be in your textbook,” she explains. “At the same time, you avoid having to say something like, ‘Turn to page 25 and do exercise B.’”

A growing assortment of downloadable mobile apps for use on Apple iOS and Android devices give educators a means to extend their lessons beyond the four walls of the classroom. These apps, from the likes of Rosetta Stone and other providers, include voice recognition tools that enable students to practice their pronunciations and translations on the go, access to core lessons and workbook materials directly from students’ phones, and live conversational practice with native speakers, literally, in the palms of their hands.

Stumbling Blocks

The proliferation of language learning options for mobile devices has also created its fair share of challenges on campus. “You have no control over what technology students have available to them,” Rosen says. “You can tell them what resources they’ll need, but then who knows if they’ll have it all available.”

Colleges Spend Big on Technology

A recent White House study found that U.S. institutions of higher education, including community colleges, have invested close to \$25 billion on elearning technologies.



“Some of our students are older and they don’t have a lot of experience with computers, or they don’t have access to computers and the Internet at home,” Larsen says, adding that instructors must be equipped to help overcome these issues.

That means working closely with college information technology staff. “Many technical support people don’t come from a pedagogical background, so they don’t really understand what the instructor is trying to do,” Rosen explains. “And the instructor may not have the terminology to explain his or her goals well enough. So there’s some difficulty, which can end up as misguided approaches to what’s really needed.”

Colleges have to invest time and money on training staff.

This includes opportunities to learn about available tools and the time to understand how best to implement new innovations for language learning in classrooms. “Everybody has a different style of teaching and a different way of approaching their subject,” says Rosen. “So it’s important for the instructor to have the time to become familiar with how technology can be used for learning in their content area. Unfortunately, some instructors don’t

get enough time or financial support for that kind of professional development.”

The Big Picture

In the end, the successful implementation of online and mobile technologies may have implications beyond even learning a new language and gaining insights into foreign cultures. Educators say the ancillary technology skills that students pick up along the way will make them more competitive in the job market. “Our students are technology savvy in some areas, but many of them need assistance for other skills, including navigating the Web and creating documents,” says Linda Wapelhorst, director of Butler Online at BCC. “I want students to know that technology is for more than just texting, Facebook, and watching YouTube videos,” she says. “We owe it to our students to show them what’s at their fingertips and give them the tools to use it.”

Want to learn about how technology is improving language learning in community college classrooms? Don’t miss our free webinar, Sept. 12 at 2 p.m. (EDT). For more information and to register, go to: www.aacc.nche.edu.