



Harnessing Technology to Achieve Total Immersion in the Classroom

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Asking a student today to learn from a blackboard and chalk is like asking me to write with an inkwell and quill. Foreign language class is rarely as popular as physical education class. The task at hand: how to create excitement and motivate students. Solution: enter their virtual world; ever changing, constantly evolving. After all, doesn't language itself mirror that very world?

Utilizing technology in the classroom not only captures the students' interest but also gains their respect; you, as a teacher, are acknowledging their virtual world and thus validating them as independent thinkers. Students' preconceived mindset of "I can't learn a foreign language. I don't want to learn a foreign language. Who needs to learn a foreign language?" is quickly replaced with "This video is cool!" or "Kids have a texting slang in Spanish?" Even the most reluctant student, the computer techie, who challenges, "Profe, did you make this PowerPoint?" comes around - a moment of triumph! The barrier is successfully torn down, the mindset open to learn, the path to embrace foreign language acquisition set in course. Students come to class eager to actively participate and share their enthusiasm: a new song in Spanish to watch on YouTube, an oral presentation on social media-Facebook, Twitter and Instagram-in Spanish. The list is endless.

This technique is fun; however, its effectiveness may be questioned. My students' scores on national and state achievement exams validated this teaching method. Percentiles rose significantly in proficiency on the listening and speaking components of the examinations, as compared to previous years. Students also demonstrated ownership of the language in the writing sections, expressing themselves in a fluid, clear and concise manner while demonstrating correct grammatical structures and adhering to the parameters of the topic.

An iPad is the perfect tool with which to interject today's digital world in the classroom with ease and grace. The resultant excitement in my classroom is palpable! All students are actively engaged and are strongly self motivated.

My 9th grade students read an autobiographical novel in Spanish. Following the author on Facebook added another dimension to the experience: the students enjoyed reading the author's posts in Spanish (which ranged from simple comments on the weather to struggles with character development in a new novel), seeing photographs of her family and comparing the real person to their vision of the character. We also sent the author a personal message to thank her for writing such a wonderful story, along with our comments and questions. She answered, thanking the students and inspiring them to openly express themselves. The use of social media allowed the students to establish a personal connection with the author, which heightened their sensibility and intensified their reaction to the novel. They wanted to know more about her life, and her identity conflict: was she American or Puerto Rican? both or neither? This allowed each student to embrace his own ethnicity and relate to the struggles facing immigrants today. When students see such a real-life connection with their school work, they become engaged, focused and passionate about their learning. Learning must be relevant to their lives and their world. Similarly, I used Facebook to chat with a character from a popular educational video series, Tio Spanish, a very clever finger puppet who finds himself in funny predicaments. My students thought it was hysterical that Tio had a Facebook page and were delighted to exchange funny messages in Spanish, and honestly, Tio was quite amused to chat with a Spanish class of admirers from New York.

Not only have my students had their learning experience enriched through social media, I as a teacher have benefitted as well. Facebook has proven to be an invaluable professional resource. My social media network consists of colleagues located throughout the Spanish speaking world. I can access pertinent scholarly articles, keep apprised of trends and modifications in the language, and engage in various forums.

Immediately noticeable to all is that my iPad is more organized than my life and brain. It is the perfect tool to create folders to group topics by subject, category and function. It is my virtual filing cabinet, personalized and easily modified by adding, deleting, duplicating, moving and/or sharing information, all with a simple touch or swipe. Within a 40 minute lesson, you can easily access documents, pictures,



keynote, and more, switching effortlessly between Apps. For example my Social Folder includes Facebook, Pinterest, Skype, iMessage, Hangouts, Facetime, Instagram, and Google+. My students think it's very cool that they know how to say "Thanks for accepting my friendship" in Spanish.

YouTube App provides more than just viewing of videos. It is a complete lesson plan. Videos can be previewed, to check appropriateness of the content and level of instruction, and then simply added to a Watch Later List to view at teacher's discretion, thus avoiding the embarrassment of an inappropriate selection! Playlists can be created to group videos by category, no need to waste time rifling through video selections. If you like a particular website or video, you can subscribe, and all new videos automatically appear on your YouTube App under Subscriptions, saving you the trouble of searching the internet. History categorizes all previously selected videos and can be referenced at any time, essentially creating a digital lesson plan, perfect for those moments when you can't remember what exactly you used to teach a particular lesson. Viewing Comments that others write in Spanish for videos can be used to expand a particular lesson, increasing vocabulary and reviewing/studying grammatical structure in a fun and contemporary context that interests the students. The students often add their own comments, using newly acquired vocabulary and phrases. Series: BBC produces Extra, a soap opera, in various foreign languages. The actors and actresses are native speakers, but they speak very slowly. My students love the lively characters and following the drama as it unfolds! Students' recommendations: students find song videos in Spanish. We watch videos in class with subtitles in the target language.

There are many tools which facilitate teaching. When I find an interesting image on Pinterest or Facebook, I save the image to my Photostream on my iPad. I then add the image to various photo albums that I have created. For example, my Food Album includes posters of food groups, posters of verbs associated with food, restaurant menus, comic strips about food, and expressions that use food vocabulary.

Quizlet. Is an amazing App that students use for every subject. I opened a closed class account so I can check which students sign on and open an account. Again I group by category rather than level of Spanish or by class, this allows students to review material at their own pace. Students often ask me to create a certain folder based on a need and or their interest.

Keynote is a simple and quick App to create professional presentations. Tools, such as transitions and animation, are simple to use and add pizzazz to any lesson. Color and drop in animated text boxes are highly effective when diagramming sentences and when demonstrating singular to plural constructions and irregular verb conjugations. I also download presentations from the internet or other sites, like Slideshare, which are easily converted to Keynote.

Spanish dict. I utilize the Spanish Dict. to demonstrate how to look up a word in the dictionary. The advantage of the entire class seeing the entry on a large screen is evident. I demonstrate how to choose the appropriate entry. We evaluate the part of speech and/or gender. Older students who have grown up with spell check and other writing tools no longer possess the necessary dictionary skills to be able to select the correct entry. Frequently, this causes frustration and they revert to Google Translate. I have had success with the visual method, and the students have demonstrated progress which translates into greater success with syntax of the language.

Other highly effective tools are videos and animated cartoons. I highly recommend www.señorwooly.com, a site created by a middle and high school teacher in Chicago, Illinois. He clearly understands the teenage mind! It includes a wide variety of topics presented in an entertaining format, graphically crafted in a way that is sure to capture the students' interest. The video No voy a levantarme is about a high school boy who doesn't want to get up, brush his teeth, wash his face, and get dressed. Yes, you guessed correctly, it's a lesson on reflexive verbs, sung by the teenaged boy with Nirvana blasting in the background. I guarantee every student will be amazed that you know Nirvana and will learn the reflexive effortlessly! All videos can be viewed with English, Spanish, both or no subtitles at all. The site includes Pop Up information, ranging from how the cinematic tricks are performed to personal information about the student actors. A teacher subscription to the site includes 24 hour access to all videos and the teacher section, which includes fantastic resources for each video. Students are given the teacher access code and then need to create an account. The teacher has the ability to track students, ensuring that they have set-up their account. The question, "Did everyone watch the video, which was yesterday's homework assignment?" might be answered by A sea of si! , but a quick check might reveal that not all students had created an account. Students quickly learn that you are computer savvy and that they cannot "pull the wool over your eyes". A moment of triumph and validation!

Music is a key to foreign language. My level one students sing songs from videos which include the more advanced preterit past tense. They do not even question it. Instead of fixating on a word or verb tense

they have not learned, they instinctually move on with the song, focusing on the whole, without getting lost on word by word translation. This highly interactive, visual method has allowed the students to embrace the foreign language without barriers and begin to freely think in the target language, the same way a young child first acquires language. The increased interest in and comfort with the foreign language that results from this practice have inspired them to perform skits and short plays, often from their own scripts. Music can be used in perfecting pronunciation as well. The melody and rhythm of a song can help a student correctly pronounce the words of the song. Singing can also lessen inhibitions. Songs, of course are excellent mnemonic devices, as well. I have observed that my students sing the foreign words naturally, as if singing in their native language, thus bypassing the expected obstacles of apprehension and embarrassment when speaking, which often lead to mispronunciation and a reluctance to speak out loud. My students have overcome this hurdle through the use of music. Rap videos have proven highly effective when learning verb conjugations. Students easily memorize the rap, thereby mastering the conjugations. Of course, watching a Shakira music video in Spanish immediately engages all students, and opens the doors to numerous discussions: critiques of the Spanish vs English version and studies of the words used in Spanish vs English version from both a cultural and syntactic point of view.

Homework Portal Initially, the sole purpose was to post homework assignments. Out of repeated parent requests for recommendations of websites and Apps, students claiming not to be able to complete a particular homework assignment because they could not remember how to conjugate a verb, or in response to "What are we doing in this unit?" my homework portal grew into a means of communication. My homepage includes general information, written in Spanish and English, while each individual class link includes specific information, written in Spanish. Pictures, posters and other visuals introduce each topic. A grammar section reviews the concepts covered in class. Test dates and project deadlines are posted. Oftentimes during a lesson a student will ask if I can post a certain chart to the class portal. This allows the student to focus during class instruction while not having to worry about copying information.

The art of harnessing technology to achieve total immersion in the classroom is critical in the 21st century. Our challenge as educators is to captivate the minds and imaginations of our students by bringing foreign language into their virtual everyday life and to prepare them to enter the future in a world without borders.