



Edmodo and the Flipped Language Class: Bridging the Gap in Language Learning

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Abstract

With the latest social networking and web 2.0 technologies, mobile-assisted language learning, and the recent movement towards flipped classroom models; our talk will present a tool and a pedagogical design that incorporate recent trends in technology use and flipped learning. Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) has evolved tremendously since its inception (cf. Chinnery, 2006). This flipped learning model incorporating online communicative tasks and exchanges was designed to bridge the gap between learning taking place in the classroom and outside of class and works with a variety of mobile tools. In the first part of our presentation, we will review and discuss the definitions and theoretical backgrounds of social networking, web 2.0 tools, Mobile-Assisted Language Learning (MALL) and the concepts of a flipped learning model. The second part of our presentation will present our flipped learning design and the tool Edmodo. The presentation will finish with some sample student tasks from intermediate French courses in the United States.

1. Introduction

Modern technology has taken hold of our daily lives including the way we teach and learn and language education is no exception to this trend. From blogs and wikis to podcasts and social media, web 2.0 tools have become an important part of the modern language curriculum. With these Web 2.0 tools in mind, this paper suggests a design for the implementation of a flipped language learning class using Edmodo (a social educational tool) as the medium for bridging the online and in-class portions of the course.

2. Theoretical background

2.1 Mobile-assisted language learning

Mobile-Assisted Language learning (MALL) (a subfield of Computer-Assisted Language Learning, CALL) has been in existence for the past 20 years [2] but has only in recent years come to become an integral part of language learning. While mobile learning is not new, the newer devices with all of their capabilities dramatically change the interest level of language practitioners to use these tools in their classes [9].

With the continual development of mobile technologies as well as wifi-enhanced campuses and smart classrooms, the integration of mobile tools allows for easier connectivity and collaboration in the classroom. With “the ubiquitous ownership of smartphones and tablet computers among adolescents and adults now makes a Bring Your Own Device (BYOD) approach” [3] possible for integrating technological tools into the language curriculum. It is the “anywhere, anytime” aspect of MALL that makes it most effective. Chinnery [6:13] adds “they can just as easily be used outside the classroom as they can in it.”

With the seemingly widespread use of mobile devices, few MALL implementations have learners engaged in collaborative and communicative learning activities [3,10]. Social interaction is important when designing a MALL project as well as a design that encourages communication with others in a goal-oriented task or project. [14]

2.2 Task-based learning

Task-based learning is seen as the best practice for using new technologies in language learning [11]. Task-based learning, which has held a presence in language learning literature for more than 25 years, has become particularly popular in the last 15 years and was adopted by the Common European Framework for Reference for Languages in 2001 [5]. While there is not one unique definition for tasks, specialists in the field [4,7,13,17] agree that tasks are activities that focus primarily on meaning, activities resemble real-world activities, language is authentic, and there is an outcome to achieve.

2.3 Social media tools

With the surge of social media use in the world, CALL researchers and practitioners have a growing interest in social media [18]. Social networking tools, an example of social media, are of particular interest to students and practitioners are finding ways to implement them [1] As Park [15] points out, “Using Web

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2.0 technologies [...] social networking sites [...] have made mobile devices more dynamic and persuasive and also promise more educational potential.”

2.4 Blended Learning, the Internet Bridge, and the Flipped Language Classroom

Practitioners have been using different versions of hybrid (or blended) learning for years including courses that replace a portion of face-to-face courses with online sessions and others that add online components to an already existing “traditional” (face-to-face) class. Integrating online tools and activities, or implementing an “Internet Bridge” [12], keeps the language use on a continuum. One example for bridging the language learning in between class sessions is by implementing a flipped class.

The concept of a flipped classroom has in recent years come to play a growing role in the designing of a hybrid class. The general setup of a flipped course is designed for students to watch videos, study websites and supplemental materials to learn the “core” part of the material to prepare for in class activities and projects. For language courses, a flipped course design emphasizes communicative tasks and activities in the classroom to take advantage of the face-to-face time for real communication with colleagues and the instructor. For in-class activities with a communicative focus, it is essential that online pre-class activities have communicative value as well [16].

3. Design and implementation

The proposed design of integrating Edmodo into the language curriculum follows the flipped language classroom. In this design, students study the core material outside of class then complete tasks on Edmodo. Instead of relying purely on outside sources and videos to study before class, learners post messages and read their colleagues’ messages during this preparatory phase. The completed activities that are posted online will be integrated into the classroom learning in the next phase of the flipped class design.

While there are many components to a flipped language class, this paper focuses on preparatory activities completed on Edmodo outside of class: the posting of messages (including videos and pictures) to the shared “wall” space. During the classroom phase of the design, learners focus on communicative tasks and activities by working with partners and in small groups.

3.1 Edmodo: a social learning network

Edmodo, an educational platform, is commonly used in primary and secondary schools and is frequently seen as the educational version of Facebook and is coined as a “social learning network” [8]. Many teachers are not interested in adopting Facebook as a tool in their courses [1]. Edmodo, being offered as an alternative, was designed specifically to bridge the gap between learning in the classroom and the social networking taking place in students’ daily lives [8].

In comparison to Facebook, Edmodo has a more simplified setup. Users have a simple profile which includes one’s name and profile image. There is one dedicated class “wall” space (as opposed to each learner having a page). Edmodo keeps the learners’ academic world separate from their outside social world as the space is dedicated for class use. In addition, for classes creating online global simulations (Example 2) or storylines (with fictitious characters), there is no confusion between their characters and their real online profiles.

While Edmodo offers an array of tools available for use (*i.e.* quizzes, polls), in this design, usage of the tool is limited to the “wall” which is the central point for students’ online posts and communication.



3.2 Student tasks and activities



Figure 1: Food Culture



Figure 2: Murder Mystery

Example one: Food Culture

While engaging a theme on Food Culture, students post short messages about their food habits. Some sample tasks include:

- Take a picture of the contents of your refrigerator and post a description (no example shown)
- Post a picture of what you had for breakfast and describe it (Figure 1)

In the first example (Figure 1), the student posts a picture of his/her breakfast during the in-between or preparatory phase and describes in French what s/he had for breakfast. These online messages are posted on the class wall outside of class time and reused during class time to initiate discussions about eating habits and healthy lifestyles. The class refers to the online postings while in class to discuss and compare food culture and habits. Postings can be reused in class as a warm-up activity to initiate conversation at the beginning of class or as part of longer, more in-depth discussions.

Example two: Murder mystery (Figure 2)

While completing a murder mystery, the learners post messages online during the online phase pertaining to their alibis and suspicions about other characters. Claire and Colette (fictitious characters) (Figure 2) post messages to the group wall about their thoughts on suspicious characters in the murder mystery. Claire posts a message to the group about her suspicions about Amélie : 'I think that Amélie is implicated because she has a dangerous, cruel, and sad lion.' While Colette believes: 'I think that its Jacq. Jacq is the kidnapper.'

Following the postings outside of class, the students have group discussions in class to discuss the crime at hand. During these in class discussions, they refer to the messages posted online that include alibis and information about suspicious behavior in order to work together to solve the crime. The online postings are also used during class time as support while they interrogate the suspects.

4. Conclusions

The implementation of modern tools can be enhanced by creating innovative ways to use mobile devices in language learning [9]. With a carefully thought out design, using Edmodo in a hybrid class can keep the language learner engaged. In a flipped class, the use of Edmodo can not only keep students engaged outside of class, it can be used as a bridge and preparation for in class discussions and debates to follow the online postings so that the in class time may be devoted to real-world discussions and communicative tasks.



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