Project Year

2016-2017

Project Title

Portuguese Interactive Language Open Textbook (PILOT)

Project Team

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Audience

This program targets students planning to enroll in *Portuguese Elements* (AS.210.177 and AS.210.178), a year-long introductory course that focuses on basic reading, writing and speaking skills with a strong emphasis on the latter. Enrolled students have various levels of pre-exposure to the Portuguese language, with many studying the language for the first time.

Pedagogical Challenge

Language learners enrolled in *Portuguese Elements* come from a variety of academic backgrounds, have varying levels of exposure to the language, and are diverse in their interests and needs. Language textbooks tend to arrange topics in such a way that while logical in form and robust in content, is often incongruent with an individual student's immediately desired learning outcomes. Consider, for example, a student enrolled in an introductory course who plans to travel to Brazil for field work studying city planning in São Paulo the following term. A semester spent learning basic grammar and vocabulary about school and family may be of little use for their desired application. If, instead, one could imagine a course focused on the mechanics of the language which allows the learner to choose the specific application/context, the learner could ostensibly apply basic language skills and vocabulary more directly upon conclusion of the course.

Solution

Our solution has three components. First, basic grammar, vocabulary, and cultural content will be disseminated online in an immersive, interactive environment with lessons centered around the lives of Brazilian animated characters living in Baltimore and adapting to a new culture. Practice content, including grammar and verb conjugation exercises, will be available online free of charge. The second component will be an inverted classroom. Students are expected to arrive in class having already reviewed each week's online materials. Students will then break into groups and create dialogue based on the current week's grammar lesson and a bank of character scenarios. Teams will orally present their dialogue in addition to submitting a written copy. After revision, select dialogues will be used as online practice content. Third, student teams will complete projects that incorporate course content, animated characters and technology (film, music, etc.) to tell a story.

Assessment Strategy

At the beginning of the course students will be given a questionnaire to assess their familiarity with the Portuguese language, knowledge of other romance languages, and preferred learning style (i.e. in groups, through brute memorization, etc.). After completing the course, enrolled students will be given

a similar questionnaire to assess whether or not they feel the course materials and structure have improved their familiarity with the language, how the course compares to other romance language courses, and if the content delivery catered to their learning style. These assessments will also be given to students enrolled in the traditional introductory course for cross comparison. In addition, both courses will give identical midterms to test if students have mastered the desired content. Students will respond to prompts based on materials covered in both the traditional and modified courses. Test results should yield an unbiased gauge of each course's efficacy in delivering course content.

Faculty Proposal

Since I assumed leadership of the Portuguese Language Program, I have implemented new initiatives to improve the curriculum and attract more students. The efforts have been successful and the program is expanding substantially. The Portuguese Program attracts students from different areas, from Latin America Studies to Public Health. Currently, we offer *Portuguese Elements* in both Fall and Spring. I have also implemented Intersession and Summer Abroad programs to Brazil. I now wish to concentrate on the pedagogical front and offer students an even more enriching learning experience.

Portuguese is a less commonly taught language and for this reason there are few available textbooks. Our textbook is considered one of the best and most accurate. However, the book is expensive and the material is not engaging. The ideas presented in this project would create a virtual textbook based on our students' experiences and goals. I have three aspects I would like to address with this project: (1) students should communicate orally from day one; (2) in-class use of technology should have a purpose, and (3) the learning experience should be meaningful to the student.

Using Task Based Language Teaching (TBLT) I will first map students' needs to their language goals. Then, as a group, we will select topics to explore and expand students' knowledge. Students will work autonomously outside of the classroom reviewing aspects of grammar; in class they will work cooperatively creating dialogues based on the current week's grammar lesson. Groups will orally present their dialogue in addition to submitting a written copy. As well, students will develop two web-based projects which incorporate course content, animated characters, and technology (video, music, etc.) to tell a story. This will push students to engage in the course and encourage them to communicate.

Once developed, content will be available online and adopted as the *Portuguese Elements* course book. It will be accessible to any student interested in learning Portuguese. I will maintain, improve and continue its development.