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Final project assignment

Introduction

In my teaching experience I have always worked on two main goals: Using anti-biased materials and building students' intercultural competence (ICC).

Finding anti-biased materials and resources was a big challenge for teaching Arabic. So, I worked on developing my own curriculum and teaching materials because "Ethnic stereotypes are especially harmful in the absence of positive ethnic images" (Wingfield & Karaman,2002). Moreover, teaching non-native students in both the U.S and Canada helped me develop my own curriculum to tailor my students' needs and interests. I once had a student who worked for the Department of Labor. He came with a newspaper article in hand. The article described that Harvard students were using a depressing stereotyped Arabic book to learn from; this ignited my passion as an educator to teach my students Arabic through texts using non-biased stories. Therefore, I developed my own material to help me achieve my goal of using anti-biased materials.

In addition to teaching in an unbiased way, introducing language and culture together by using an intercultural perspective is invaluable for the learners. Furthermore, teaching culture in a static way and 'essentializing', makes the culture more recognizable because of its national attributes. For example, teaching the big 'Fs' in the language (Fashion, Flags, Food, Festivals etc..). However, it is important to move from the cultural teaching to the intercultural teaching

since culture is dynamic and constantly evolving. Thus, sharing the same language doesn't mean sharing the same culture. In fact, using the communicative competence and having learners build their social persona and expand their language and culture repertoire is extremely important as well. Thus, teachers must be aware of all what I have mentioned above when they design their syllabus and plan their lessons. The aim is to help our students to become language users rather than language learners.

In summary, the unit I created will help me achieve my two goals. Moreover, this unit introduces a theme that students can easily relate to. In fact, students will work on the theme of healthy living and learn about the topics of house duties, morning routines and daily responsibilities. Furthermore, students will compare their house duties with other students of the target language countries. The materials will help students demonstrate an awareness of aspects of culture in diverse communities where Arabic is spoken. Also, they will compare similarities and differences between Arabic and North American communities on the topic of house chores and daily routine. Finally, students will develop their communicative skills by completing the activities and tasks of their unit and by collaborating on discussion posts.

Literature Review

“The key to success in teaching with digital tools is to integrate them into your classes in a carefully planned manner”(Arnold et al., 2019, p253). In other words, technology offers a wide range of activities for different styles and different perspectives. Some learners are good in writing production and conjugating verbs and some others are better in speaking and pronunciation. Teachers must carefully select the necessary tools for their learners to support their needs even if it means shifting their theoretical perspectives. In addition, computer-assisted

language learning (CALL) facilitates language learning because it supports the learner autonomy, provides authentic contexts and real-life situations, enhances learning through and individualized feedback and offers extensive resources for the teacher to build tasks. Therefore, technology is used as a tool or a medium to bridge the distance between the theory and the practice.

There are many skills that CALL offers for learners. My unit design focused on two major things that research has proven their benefits: Multimodal competence and social media literacy.

Multimodal competence

Although language learners need to develop their multimodal competence while acquiring a second/foreign language, integrating appropriate digital tools to the language tasks is important and makes the learning experience more enjoyable and intriguing for students. For example, listening is one of the four language skills that teachers focus on when working with their learners. For listening, the use of visuals with audio has potentially changed the definition of ‘listening’ to ‘viewing’ (Montero Perez, Peters, & Desmet, 2018; Peters & Webb, 2018 in Arnold & Ducate, 2019, p. 155). Moreover, the multimodal availability is viewed “to be more authentic and construct-relevant (Batty, 2015 in Arnold & Ducate, 2019, p. 159) since it represents a more realistic replication of real-world listening” (Buck, 2001, p. 123 in Arnold & Ducate, 2019, p. 159). For these reasons, I included in most of my lessons, videos, and audio activities to develop students’ multimodal competence. Moreover, these activities support learners with creating and shaping their best L2 self and promoting their critical awareness. It is important to carefully create purposeful and meaningful activities that present identity, conceptions of nationality, and perceived ownership of online spaces (Arnold et al., 2019)

Social media literacy

Social media literacy is an important skill to develop among our “digital natives” in addition to learning social media etiquette. “Social media literacies can be equated with the computer literacy needed to use social media tools such as Twitter and other social media platforms- knowing how to curate ones’ profile, how traverse connections, and how to articulate one’s network”(Arnold et al., 2019, p222).

Most of the activities are combining two or more language skills; speaking is combined with writing, reading with listening, etc. because the goal is to teach communicatively and to focus on producing tasks rather than demonstrating a particular language skill. Blake reminds us that “the practice of CALL itself no longer deals with digital writing as separate from reading, nor implements speaking practice in isolation from listening” (Blake, 2016, p137).

Intercultural competence

In addition to using the language communicatively with the multimodality of the tools that are used in this unit, the lessons include intercultural competence elements such as interpreting and relating, comparing and contrasting, and showing knowledge and reflecting. Arnold and Ducate (2019) argue that, “in order to move beyond information retrieval, learners should start reflecting, comparing, and analyzing cultural artifacts together with their classmates” (p116).

Therefore, the online discussions included reflective questions for students to elicit deeper thinking and to have students investigate the representations of both Arabic and North American culture in the photos, and videos that were used.

Design rationale

Although teachers have a distinctive role in knitting the fabric of the target language and culture that is being created continually with their students within and beyond the classroom, (Liddicoat & Scarino, 2013) students also bring their personal experiences and interpretations to the classroom. However, do these interpretations project a static view or a dynamic view of culture? How do language teachers construct the ‘images of culture’ in an innovative way? What effective and efficient approach(es) should they use to teach both language and culture at the same time? What tools can enhance the language learning experience for students? And what affordances come with these tools?

To find answers to some of these questions, I had to investigate and try out many technological tools to see which of their affordances may leverage my students’ learning and help them achieve their communicative goals.

The unit is designed for students who are currently in the advanced level of Arabic and who are in grades 11 and 12 at Appleby College. Moreover, it is specifically designed to meet the standards of the HyFlex model. In this unit, there are 8 lessons for students to complete. Students work on the theme of healthy living and learn about the topics of house duties, morning routines and daily responsibilities. While I include several activities and a variety of instructional materials, one of the most important aspects of my course is the use of visuals with audio activities and YouTube videos. It is helpful to have visuals, with proper instruction about the topic. These materials are incorporated into the classroom as listening or ‘viewing’ activities for students.

In addition, I use video projects that were created by former students, then, I ask students to design their own video projects by offering them a range of digital tools to choose from such as iMovie and Movie Maker.

Picture discussion is a powerful activity in the language classroom. Particularly when you use tools such as Gapminder and Wakelet. These two digital tools help students to observe images, analyze different perspectives, and expand on the topic of domestic duties. Students use their speaking strategies to communicate their ideas in the target language, justify and explain information about aspects of culture in Lebanon and UAE and compare them with their communities. For example, having students compare pictures (lesson 4) and then asking them to submit their answers on a Venn diagram or discussing these pictures on discussion boards is invaluable. Being intercultural doesn't come by experience, it comes when you start comparing between your own culture and the new cultures that you get exposed to and observe their communities. By watching videos and using websites like Gapminder students start noticing differences and similarities, and when they take a step back to reflect, they develop new thoughts and new perceptions. They can then minimize the differences that they are aware of and recognize things that are different but also accept these things and adapt to new conditions. I noticed that this is how student might build resilience and not only intercultural competence.

Another tool that I believe is important is using Twitter. In one of the lessons that I have designed in lesson8, learners create and participate in a Twitter – mediated global simulation and interact as their assigned characters in their Twitter posts and Tweets. Students need to integrate that participation into their online L2 identities. Moreover, they will learn how to use different social media tools strategically and in different purposes. As research has suggested, when

recounting events from their unit, students use post-typographic and multimodal expression such as using emoticons, posting images and intertextual linkages to other media and all this is done in the target language. By using their multimodal semiotic repertoire that Jewitt (2017) talked about will help them complete such tasks. In addition, using a digital practice they already use and are familiar with will develop not only their communicative skills but also their cultural competence and social skills (Jenkins et al., 2006). Accessing diverse reading content is important for students to notice and analyze different perspectives. Thus, “social media can serve as windows onto the L2, playgrounds for its practice, and gateways to participation in it” (Arnold & Ducate, 2019, p215).

For my fourth design I developed reflections on Forms and created online discussions on Canvas in lessons 1-2-3-4-8. These discussion boards and reflections not only scaffold the lessons and foster critical thinking but also provide an opportunity for students to reflect on the materials and express their opinions. As an instructor I can design tasks that are founded upon strong SLA pedagogy, yet it is up to the learner to take hold of the language and internalize it. Therefore, using metacognitive strategies and encouraging learners to reflect and recognize their zone of proximal development is paramount.

Finally, the lesson objectives and success criteria that are posted for each of the 8 lessons in the Introduction section were inspired by the ACTFL Can Do statements (American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages, 2017) and the 4 Cs by World-Readiness Standards for Learning Language. Each lesson builds up from previous lessons’ objectives that was studied in this unit. It combines the skills that were developed by the activities used in this unit to promote its major

goal : To talk about one's own domestic duties and to compare and connect cultural values to those practices with that of other students who live in the target language countries.

Conclusion

Let's not forget that teachers bring their culture to the classroom. They teach who they are, and their thoughts and experiences guide both their actions in the classroom, and their interactions with their students. Although it is important to incorporate technology as a target of instruction (González-Lloret, 2014), digital tools become more efficient when the teacher designs tasks around them and integrates them into the curriculum. If there are used as stand-alone tools they may not be as effective.

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