The “Plinko” Principle and Language Programs: Designing Non-Linear Hybrid Learning Environments and Desiderata for Implementation

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Successful hybrid courses have the potential to benefit immensely from efforts to foster personal, informal learning environments. Informal learning, regardless of age, is almost universally non-linear and multimodal. Unfortunately, the current constraints of educational systems at all levels (in diametrical opposition to our learning habits and personality traits) impose a formal learning model that emphasizes linear learning. This paper will focus on presenting a case for innovative tools and pedagogies that lend themselves to designing and implementing non-linear applications in the language classroom, allowing for more flexible, open learning environments as we adapt our ability to use mental and pedagogical capital appropriately to foster the ability of our students to transfer target language knowledge to novel situations. We will also discuss barriers to implementation, and desiderata for moving forward.

Godwin-Jones (2005) first brought the established concept of “disruptive technologies” to a computer-assisted language learning (CALL) publication to discuss the “new and different ways of doing familiar tasks” in the language curriculum that they provide (p. 9). He stopped short of discussing the disruptive power that these technologies pose to traditional language pedagogies. New media have profoundly affected today’s language learner in critical ways that are not well served by current pedagogical frameworks. Students are socialized in ways that are radically different from previous generations (Prensky, 2001). They require learning environments that allow greater personal latitude in constructing knowledge. Their technological body of practice (games, virtual worlds, social networks) is so unlike what is done in the classroom that it has led to dissatisfaction with traditional pedagogical methods and decreased enrollments in advanced undergraduate language courses signaling rejection of these methods (Davis et. al. 1992). Garrett (1998) observes that we find ourselves at a point where “the tail of technology starts wagging the dog of conventional language pedagogy.” (p. 9)

Indeed, Garrett (1998) maintains that CALL research has had to grapple with the reality that it seeks to prove “that technology can fit into already accepted pedagogical paradigms – rather than setting out to demonstrate convincingly that students learn differently” (p. 8). Carroll (2007) goes
as far as to pronounce that the cultural artifacts of the traditional classroom are “products of a mechanistic past,” hidebound by a top-down, linear architecture that presupposes that learning is a natural outcome of an emphasis on instruction: “The act of teaching, then, is seen as transferring information in a controlled sequence, a process that eliminates context - all learners receive the same content in the same format – but fails to accommodate variations in learner needs” (2nd paragraph).

This image of the language classroom and the ensuing tension between the theory of the image and how it de-evolves in praxis evokes similar tensions in a popular pricing game from American popular culture, and could provide clues for modern L2 pedagogy to “co-evolve with its environment” (Reigeluth, in press), which it has heretofore resisted. Plinko is a game on the American television show The Price Is Right, and is arguably the most popular of all its games. The contestant is given the opportunity to earn round flat discs, called Plinko chips, which they then take up a set of stairs to the top of a Plinko board, which is essentially an enlarged quincunx or Galton board. For each chip, the contestant lays the chip flat against the top of the board and releases it. As the chip falls, it bounces through a matrix of pegs. Each time a chip hits one of the pegs, it can bounce right or left with equal probability. As the chip crosses the bottom row, the contestant wins whatever money corresponds with the slot in which the chip lands ($100, $500, $1,000, $0, $10,000). Of course, a higher value is placed on landing the chips in the $10,000 slot than in the others, so contestants place a high value on “correctly” placing the chip at the outset, and are very vocal in “coaching” the chip toward the $10,000 slot. Ultimately, the efficacy of those efforts is dubious at best.

The same could be said for formal learning environments. These institutionally sponsored, classroom-based and highly structured paradigms are slow to recognize (much less value) learning that does not conform to the “scope and sequence” laid out in a syllabus or textbook. If the learner does not land in the appropriate “learning outcomes” slot of a curriculum or an instructor, they will not earn an “A”, although they may have learned much more than someone who learned how to “game” the system but whose learning was superficial at best. On the other hand, informal learning, while it can occur in an institutional context, is not highly structured, as the control of and value placed on learning contents and contexts rest in the hands of the learner. For instructors, the emphasis becomes not on which slot they landed in, but that they arrived at the bottom of the board and can reflect upon what they have learned on their journey.

As the University of Tennessee, Knoxville (UTK) has embarked on the redesign of its first-year French and Spanish courses to adopt a blended or hybrid format, we set out to design a curriculum and learning activities that, though structured by an underlying narrative, will give learners flexibility to explore language and culture, construct their own meaning, and give them the opportunity to display evidence of their learning in ways more salient or visible than they were before. Essentially, we hope that students’ learning trajectories will very much resemble that of a Plinko chip going down the Plinko board, at both the macro-level (course, learning units) and the micro-level (activities, tasks, portfolio activities). Indeed learners will have to make choices as to which direction they want to go in terms of level of preparation as well as ways in which they want to complete tasks and how they will go about it. Although they will be able to lean on the teacher’s “coaching” through the (pedagogical) narrative of the course/activity or the teacher’s presence (both physical and online), students will have to become
autonomous learners in this hybrid learning environment. By autonomous, we understand not a learner who learns in isolation, but rather a learner who knows how to insert herself in a learning community as well as how to collaborate with her peers and ask for guidance when needed. For each activity, students will have a goal to reach (a learning outcome) and even though there may be a direct path to reach this goal (very much like there is between the top of the Plinko board and the $10,000 slot, students may very well choose to follow – or be led on – a more serpentine path, either out of curiosity or because they encounter problems they need to solve or obstacles they need to overcome (like the pegs on the Plinko board). For each learning activity, students will have access to a wide variety of sources and resources, some of them quite divergent (i.e., different websites – including such sites as YouTube, Google Earth, and blogs but also various learning resources and references – tutorials, games, videos, images, etc.), which they will be able to explore as much – or as little – as they need or choose. Although the “coaching” by teachers might not always prove as effective as we would wish it to be, we are hopeful that students will “fall” for the activities and improve by engaging in them. Students will have some latitude in the medium through which they can complete activities. Additionally, through the portfolio, they will have the opportunity to display language development in areas that are not directly addressed by the curriculum (drawing on the European Language Portfolio model proposed by the European Union as one component of the Common European Framework of Reference for the Languages, 2001), which will be encouraged and rewarded. The hidden agenda on our part is to cultivate, through carefully crafted pedagogical narratives, a taste for intellectual curiosity and desire for linguistic and cultural exploration.

The purpose of this paper is to present the principles (theoretical and pedagogical) that have directed the redesign of our first-year language courses into hybrid language courses. In this paper we use the terms learner and student somewhat interchangeably. Should a nuance be made explicit, a student would be a learner enrolled in a foreign language class at the college level. In that sense, this hybrid model, while designed for UTK’s undergraduate student population, can be adapted to adult learners in a variety of contexts. In fact, the office of distance learning and independent studies at UTK plans to use the model for its online education language courses.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK Theoretical Framework

As we contemplated the transition of our language courses into a hybrid format, we had to ask the question of the theoretical framework(s) that would undergird and guide the design of these new courses. We identified five vectors that would organize the matrix within which our courses are being developed. The first of these sometimes overlapping theoretical orientations is sociocultural theory, which is anchored in the work of Lev Vygotsky. According to Vygotsky (1982), “the central fact about psychology is the fact of mediation” (p. 166, cited in Cole and Wertsch, 1996), that is to say that the relationship between an individual and the world is always mediated. In other words, individuals create psychological tools to learn and to master their behavior. These tools, or meditational means (Lantolf and Thorne, 2006), provide affordances to develop, organize, and regulate the learner’s mental functioning and behavior. Inasmuch as they both mediate the activity and are constitutive of it simultaneously, these tools or artifacts are both concrete (real or symbolic objects) and conceptual. These meditational means, which include a wide variety of tools, signs, and cultural artifacts, as well as concept and activities, influence individuals’ perception of the world, the way they act on the world, and even if they will choose
to engage in certain behaviors. For example, while texting has been a popular practice in Europe and Japan since the inception of cell phones, it did not spread in the United States until the mass commercialization of cell phones will full keyboards.

Among all meditational means that shape individuals’ experience of the world and cognitive development, language plays a prominent and critical role as a culturally marked semiotic system through which individuals, from an early age, start to experience the world through their senses and through speech. Thus, language and thought are interconnected (to paraphrase Dean Acheson, “how can I know what I think until I hear what I say?” – cited in Beisner, 2006, p. 315). As such, language plays a critical role in the development of mental concepts and cognition, as well as self-awareness and behavior regulation. At first, language starts externally through communication with others (e.g., parent-child communication) and is gradually internalized to become self-talk and inner speech. Language is thus the primary meditational means whereby we construct reality and, consequently, social and cultural interactions play a critical role in the development of the individual and of cognition. Learning, indeed, is a social process that cannot be understood independently of the social and cultural forces that influence individuals. Thus, “the educational process must be based on the student’s individual activity, and the art of education should involve nothing more than guiding and monitoring this activity” (Vygotsky, 1997, p. 48). This underscores the importance of assisted learning, that is to say, how to facilitate, for all learners, the scaffolding process that will enable them to move from object-and other-regulation to self-regulation. This guided instruction occurs in what Vygotsky has termed the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is delimited by the range of tasks a learner can accomplish by herself and the potential she can reached under the guidance of an expert instructor.

All individuals are part of communities that shape their development, and individuals, in return, help shape the culture of which they are members. Thus, there is another level in this model, which is the level of social activity. In cultural activity theory (Engeström, 1987, 1999), individuals act on the world through meditational means, but they do so as part of a community, playing a certain role (division of labor) and abiding by certain rules. This constitutes an activity system. Furthermore, activity systems rarely exist in isolation and maintain interactive relationships with other activity systems (see Figure 1 and 2 in Appendix B). Individuals (in this case, learners) are always subjects at work within an activity system. In fact, they are usually involved with several, sometimes overlapping, activity systems, which are culturally situated and organized practices. Using Cultural Historical Activity Theory gives us a framework to envision the interactions at work in hybrid language courses and examines the interrelations between learners and between in-class and online learning activities. Overall, sociocultural theory provides a strong framework within which to design a hybrid curriculum, paying attention to the management of both the face-to-face and the online components of the course to foster learner development in guided activities in which learners will gradually gain autonomy and be asked to produce level-appropriate discourse in oral and written forms.

This leads us to the second orientation of our theoretical framework: usage-based language development. This approach draws on work in cognitive linguistics (e.g., Ellis, 2002, 2008), in particular as regards acquisition sequence for language (formula \(\rightarrow\) low scope pattern \(\rightarrow\) construction) and the idea that if language acquisition is based on general cognitive skills, then
SLA will draw on the same skills. In this approach, language is seen as a system of dynamic symbolic conventions/constructs. The organization of the linguistic system is constantly updated by – and adapting to – language use. In other words, individuals extract language from interpreting and making meaning of their experiences. This is why this approach is sometimes called social-pragmatic approach to language acquisition).

This approach also draws on the work of Michael Tomasello (2003, 2008), who identifies the unique cognitive and cultural processes that distinguish humans from other species and, in particular, apes. In his developmental research Tomasello focuses on enculturation processes, that is to say how social or cultural groups are formed. Language is a powerful tool for this process and is acquired, Tomasello argues, through shared intentionality and pattern finding, in particular through joint attention, pro-social motives, and social norms. It is because they want to interact socially and linguistically, that is to say communicate with and understand others in a culturally marked environment, that children acquire language. In other words, social interactions are critical in language learning. This approach is of importance for foreign language educators as it mitigates the myth of the prescriptive native speaker. It is also particularly useful in the design of hybrid language courses in which we attempt to foster pattern finding and deploy authentic learning tasks that maximize learner-to-learn interaction and explore various kinds of communicative functions.

Indeed the language or languages that people use to make meaning has changed drastically in three main areas: our working lives, our public lives (citizenship) and our private lives (life world) (New London Group, 1996). Thus students need to be equipped to deal with these changing, interacting, dynamic constructs and learn to be (pro)active agents in the design of their social future. This is the basic tenet of the multiliteracies framework (New London Group, 1996), the third approach constituting our theoretical framework. James Gee (2000) argues that what is truly at stakes in education for the 21st century is to move away from a knowledge-driven model and into a problem-solving model where teachers are less obsessed with issues of coverage and, in their place, emphasize students’ acquisition of problem-solving skills that they can apply both in and outside the classroom. This, in turn, has implications for learners’ autonomy and the notion of lifelong learning. “If it were possible to define generally the mission of education, it could be said that its fundamental purpose is to ensure that all students benefit from learning in a way that allow them to participate fully in public, community, and economic life.” (New London Group, 1996, p. 60).

Because of the changes in the world, the debate has arisen that the way English is taught in school should be changed to incorporate the new multimodal ways of communication. The New London Group (1996) proposes the teaching of all representations of meaning including, linguistic, visual, audio, spatial, gestural, and multimodal through a balanced classroom design of immersion and personalized explicit instruction. Many teachers try to look at real world careers, and experiences to see what really is important in preparing students for post-graduation life. School can provide opportunities for students because they control access to discourse, more specifically to orders of discourse (i.e., the relationships of discourses in a given social space), to symbolic capital and they can shape civic values, etc. In a hybrid language class model, learners would be guided through online language learning activities in order to infer meaning, linguistic and cultural patterns, and learn how to decipher/interpret the input in order to produce an
outcome that would resemble a speech act likely to be encountered in the foreign culture. Luke (2000) argues that the multimodality embedded in online learning environments can aid learners that could otherwise be hesitant with face-to-face conversations by lowering the affective burden and facilitating cognitive processes (with visual aids, etc.). At the same time, Computer-Mediated Communication (CMC) can provide worthy opportunities for authentic language learning (Felix & Jones, 1996) and the exploration of multiple literacies (Luke, 2000) by guiding students through activities where they will learn and use competences such as keyboarding, searching, putting together media stories, etc. This is, thus, truly a heuristic approach.

We derive from this that a positive aspect of the online component of hybrid courses is that it has the potential to be a continuation of the community of learners constituted during face-to-face interactions. This is the fourth orientation of our theoretical framework: the community of inquiry. In this model developed by Garrison, Anderson, and Archer (2000) the educational experience is located at the intersection of three domains: social presence, cognitive presence, and teaching presence. Social presence is defined “as the ability of participants in the community of inquiry to project their personal characteristics into the community, thereby presenting themselves to other participants as ‘real people’” (p. 89). Cognitive presence is defined as the extent to which participants, through collaboration and sustained discourse, are able to construct and reconstruct meaning, as well as reach and confirm understanding. This entails formulating and testing hypotheses against real-life facts. The third element, teaching presence, is the primary — although not exclusive — responsibility of the teacher and consists in the design of the educational environment (including materials activities), as well as the facilitation of the learning process. As opposed to conceiving education as the sheer transmission of knowledge, the community of inquiry framework is a reflective paradigm that posits the following (Lipman, 2003, pp. 18-19):

- education is the outcome of participation in a teacher-guided community of inquiry
- teachers stir students to think about the world when teachers reveal knowledge to be ambiguous, equivocal, and mysterious
- knowledge disciplines are overlapping and therefore problematic
- teachers are ready to concede fallibility
- students are expected to be reflective and increasingly reasonable and judicious
- the educational process is not information acquisition but a grasp of relationships among disciplines

Although this framework was originally developed to investigate online learning, lessons can be drawn for the face-to-face classroom (it is, after all, rooted in Dewey’s philosophy of education) and, a fortiori for the blended learning environment. It is congruent with the aforementioned three theoretical orientations in that it provides a way to design and examine the learning experience in a manner that focuses on social interaction, teacher guidance and peer feedback, as well as language use and language development in a multimodal environment.

The last theoretical orientation comes from chaos and complexity theory (Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). Although we are not considering designing language courses that are directly inspired by and embrace all tenets of the theory of dynamic systems, we recognize that language itself is a complex dynamic system insofar as it is an emergent process. Moreover, we also
recognize that “the educational context, with the classroom at its center, is viewed as a complex system in which events do not occur in linear causal fashion, but in which a multitude of forces interact in complex, self-organizing ways, and create changes and patterns that are part predictable, part unpredictable. ... Learning is the result of complex (and contingent) interactions between individuals and the environment” (Van Lier, 1996, p. 148). In other words, the process of learning and the agents who engage in learning (i.e. the learners) cannot be usefully separated. As foreign language educators, we need to come to the realization that learning may not be linear, so why pretend? In other words, students need a better reason to learn than “it is the next chapter in the book” (Blank, 2010). Learning a language is a matter not only of learning conventions and reproduction, but it also – if not more – has to be about learning innovation and creation. Language does not exist: discourse does, that is language in use. Meaning-making is always dialogic and the result of (interpersonal) interaction (this is why we could use things such as back channeling to our advantage, for example). Language-learning tasks ought to be viewed as non-static frames but rather evolving through use by the language learner. From sometimes unpredictable interactions, (1) larger structures emerge and (2) learning can and will be different for each individual (Finch, 2006). We are not saying that the learning process should be permeated by a “laisser-faire, laisser-aller,” but rather we are suggesting that while providing a principled, underlying narrative structure, the pedagogical environment allow for free exploration and discovery (Laurillard et al., 2000) in order to maximize learning opportunities.

These five theoretical orientations delimit the space within which we will design our hybrid courses, keeping in mind both components (the face-to-face and the online aspects) as well as the interface between the two. This framework allows us to keep in mind the role of the teacher, the role of the learner, and the role of technology in a way that will hopefully maximize language and culture learning.

**HISTORICAL BACKGROUND**

The idea of replacing some portion of face-to-face instruction with online activities is not a recent idea. It has, however, gained momentum with the difficult economic realities that universities across the nation are facing, which has led administrators to think about ways to do more with less. At the same time, Foreign Language (FL) researchers have been diligently exploring the possibilities offered by new technologies to improve FL instruction. Consequently, we are now in the midst of a real transformation in education, something that seems to be happening overnight. In order to gain an understanding of the context in which hybrid language courses have come to being, we will now briefly examine the history of some of these projects.

It was as recently as a few years before the turn of the millennium that the University of Illinois, funded by the Sloan Center for Asynchronous Learning Environment Efficiency Projects (1997), had placed the first FL workbook online using a homegrown course manager called Mallard. An electronic version of the activities manual was the stepping-stone toward the creation of a hybrid format for its first-year Spanish program, which subsequently resulted in significant cost savings for the University of Illinois. The first-year program, which had met four days per week, in the hybrid format met only two days per week, allowing the graduate students to teach twice as many courses without increasing their workloads; they no longer had to grade the workbook exercises because they were automatically graded by the computer.
Today, blended learning has marshaled the power of technology to reduce instructional costs and maintain instructional quality at the college and university level. The Center for Academic Transformation, which is today the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT), had begun as early as 1998, to engage higher education in some kind of virtual university effort. One year later the Pew Symposia in Learning and Technology was created to foment an ongoing national conversation about issues related to the intersection of learning and technology based on the redesign efforts of a few universities, including the University of Illinois. Subsequently, the Pew Charitable Trusts awarded the NCAT $6 million over three years (1999-2002) to explore ways to achieve cost effective and quality learning environments in higher education via technology (Twigg, 1999; 2001, 2002).

The University of Tennessee, Knoxville was the first state university to receive one of the 30-35 $200,000 grants to redesign its first-year Spanish intensive review course and a year later Portland State University was the second. Both Spanish programs were redesigned to achieve cost-savings and maintain quality instruction. Appendix A provides information over the various universities that participated in the Pew Charitable Trust grant or in the NCAT Road 2 Redesign program, an outgrowth of the Pew Learning and Technology Program (but without the major funding initiatives). By the time the Portland State University redesigned course came online, publishing companies had begun providing commercialized electronic versions of their first-year Spanish activities manuals. In these early redesigned courses, the online material/homework had relied heavily on the electronic version of the activities manual. The latter is significant in this discussion because without the advent of the electronic workbook, the blended learning format might not have evolved as quickly.

The research associated with the two redesigned courses at UTK and Portland State University indicated that, for the most part, there were no significant differences in language proficiency outcomes between the traditional course format and the redesigned format (Young, 2008; Sanders, 2006), but there were significant differences based on particular language skills. In Young, participants in the redesigned course scored significantly higher on oral language use (measured with a SOPI) than the participants in the traditional format but there were no other differences on achievements measures. In Sanders study the participants in the traditional format scored significantly higher on measures of writing proficiency than participants in the redesigned format but no differences were found between groups on measures of oral proficiency (OPI).

In a time of economic constraints in higher education, a growing number of universities have embraced the hybrid/blended learning course format. Penn State University and the University of Utah are two more recent universities that redesigned their introductory Spanish programs to cut instructional costs. In other cases the online workbook continues to be used to replace face-to-face classes (See Sagarra & Zapata, 2008). The electronic version of the activities manual, however, should no longer replace face-to-face classes because the electronic workbook has become a staple in FL programs in their pre-redesign format. The online learning in redesigned FL courses, which had depended heavily on computer graded workbook activities that provide automated feedback, came to offer online engagement in the FL based on chats, computer-mediated communication, discussion boards, web-based material and multi-media material but the models are typically linear in nature.
INFORMAL ENVIRONMENTS AND INSTRUCTIONAL ELASTICITY

We will now offer a couple of practical examples of how we identified elements for our proposed hybrid model that provide potential solutions to challenges we have discussed. They embody neither an exhaustive list of tools, nor do they represent pedagogical imperatives. Instead, we intend to suggest a small illustration of active and dynamic learning possibilities using emerging technologies. The choices are not particularly original, yet they do offer novel suggestions about technology that can enhance informal L2 learning environments in and out of the formal classroom.

Prezi

Many L2 instructors have become quite adept in adapting their teaching transparencies or clever instructional interventions into PowerPoint slides. Unfortunately, the pedagogy behind PowerPoint slides is no different than the pedagogy behind transparencies – the instructional perception of these teachers by their students has largely graduated from “death by transparency” to “death by PowerPoint.” Rare is the occasion that an instructor is not straining to jump from slide to slide in a very non-linear fashion using a very linear tool because class needs did not follow the instructors plan for the day. In stark opposition to the linear model of Powerpoint is the “information booth table” model of Prezi (www.prezi.com). Prezi’s spatial layout helps to better convey messages and encourage audience involvement by moving across the canvas according to the desires of students. Content can be arranged and rearranged, and even embedded in a course management system or other webpage for later perusal by students, who retain the capacity to steer the presentation in any way they desire.

Twitter

For students, the Internet is a constant presence in every aspect of their lives. The traditional instructor stance has been to regard computer-mediated communication as a wonderful tool to encourage students with higher affective filters to engage with their classmates and teacher… but only in an extramural context. This stance becomes increasingly absurd as social networking sites like Facebook (www.facebook.com) and Twitter (www.twitter.com) have become the standard for communication. One way that this technology can be used in the foreign language classroom is by leveraging the concept of the “backchannel” that has become popular at technology conferences in general, and at CALL conferences such as IALLT and CALICO. At these conferences, a backchannel involves a group of individuals using the Internet to conduct a synchronous conversation alongside session speakers. Historically this venue was used to fact-check presentations or as a way to politely carry on a conversation about the presentation (or anything else) without disrupting the speaker. Soon, savvy presenters were taking advantage of this backchannel to address topics posed in these forums, and perhaps also to assess audience engagement. Penn State University has explored the implications this practice could have on student participation in large size classes (Du, Jiang, Rosson & Carroll, 2010). This technology seems a perfect fit for a discipline that is sensitive to the affective needs of students and concerned with student disenfranchisement.
Cloud computing

Cell phones and/or “smart” devices (think iPod Touch or iPad) have become virtually ubiquitous on college campuses, as have the networks to keep them connected. As companies like Google, Dropbox, Flickr, Evernote, Grooveshark and others develop applications to access resources, software, and information users have stored remotely with them, the potential for collaboration and distributed learning become real. Already, webquests and augmented scavenger hunts via apps such as Google Earth are becoming established practice, as are the instructional and collaborative flexibility afforded by Dropbox and Google Docs. Ultimately, the ability to supplement traditional instruction with more authentic interactions with people and realia via free and accessible technology encourages students to move beyond discrete knowledge of a language acquired in class to holistic communication, problem solving and critical thinking.

These are a few tools that will be used as we design the online component of our learning activities for the hybrid language courses. They will be used in addition to more traditional tools such as blogs, wikis, and voice tools (e.g., voice boards, recording audiovisual tools), all of which are already part of our traditional learning environments. Like all tools, these are means to an end but, without giving in to toolism, they deserve a close look to envisage the pedagogical possibilities that they afford. As Garrison and Vaughan (2008) point out, the technological tools that are being deployed at any point of the blended course curriculum cannot stand in the way of learning. When redesigning the curriculum, considerations about tool choice ought to be integral part of the conversation along with other issues such as instructors, course management, face-to-face vs. online components, and assessment procedures (see Appendix C for a non-exhaustive checklist of such design considerations).

SAMPLE ACTIVITIES

The design of our hybrid courses is multifaceted. In addition to the face-to-face classes (two fifty-minute sessions per week), students will engage in online activities designed to last for a total of fifty minutes. In the face-to-face portion of the class, the focal point of instruction will be a traditional combination of communicative activities, grammar reviews, vocabulary lessons, cultural discussions, with an emphasis on student-to-student interactions through oral and written communication. The online activities will consist in part of grammar tutorials, exercises, and vocabulary reviews, but the emphasis in the design of these online learning activities is to deploy a wide assortment of tasks also designed to maximize peer interaction and create a community of learners that is a continuation of classroom instruction rather than merely ancillary or a supplement to it. Part of the online materials will also consist in tutorials designed to assist learners in navigating both the technology (e.g., video tutorial on how to edit a wiki in Blackboard, the course management system currently in use at UTK – see Appendix D) and the course curriculum (e.g., each week, students have access to a Prezi detailing the materials they will cover in that particular unit, what they have to do to prepare, what assignments are due, complete with visual aids and study guides). The majority of the online learning activities will be a combination of short activities reminiscent of what students may be used to in the classroom (see Appendix E) and more substantial activities, envisioned as a culmination of the work for each unit or chapter (see Appendix F), in which the driving force may be cultural exploration. Students will compile the best of their short activities as well as their long ones in an electronic
portfolio designed to feature what they can do with the language, that is to say their proficiency (the assessment part is not discussed here). In both sample activities described here, it is clear that the only guiding force for students is the narrative associated with accomplishing a certain objective. Within the frame of the activities, students have latitude to explore elements that may be of interest to them and create their own meaning.

CONCLUSION

The redesign of the French and Spanish first-year language courses at UTK as hybrid courses has been an involving and engaging enterprise. Based on what we hope to be a sound theoretical framework that allows us to envision pedagogical praxis and the use of technology in a critical way, we have striven to design learning activities that take into account a wide array of variables: desired program learning outcomes, student needs and technological penchants, the new affordances provided by technology, feasibility, and instructor workloads. It is our hope that these considerations can be helpful for FL educators that find themselves in a similar situation or wish to explore the many opportunities offered by blended learning environments. One of the positive outcomes of the wave of program redesign that have occurred in recent years, sometimes resulting from economic constraints, is that it has forced FL educators throughout the nation to envision new pedagogical practices through a new lens, so that the integration of technology into this new form of curriculum does not become another example of reform without change (Cuban, 1999), but truly enhances learning and development and opens possibilities for students beyond the FL classroom.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A

Information about Participants in Program Redesign

Program in Course Redesign (PCR), Round 1, 1999-2001
University of Illinois redesigned Spanish course, even though it was not part of Round 1 efforts.

Program in Course Redesign (PCR), Round 2, 2000-2002
The University of Tennessee replaces one contact hour with online activities from the workbook (which it put online via Blackboard) and cooperative online tasks.

Program in Course Redesign (PCR), Round 3, 2001-2003
Portland State University

Roadmap to Redesign (R2R), 2003-2006
The University of Alabama
Texas Tech University
Montclair State University

Colleagues Committed to Redesign (C²R), 2007-2008
The University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill
The University of North Carolina, Charlotte

Mississippi Course Redesign Initiative (MCRI), 2007–2010
The University of Southern Mississippi

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<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Pre-design format</th>
<th>Redesign Format</th>
<th>Technology</th>
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<tr>
<td>University of Tennessee</td>
<td>Three days per week meeting time.</td>
<td>Meets two days per week and face-to-face (F2F) time emphasizes interactive, collaborative oral and written communication. The workbook corresponding to ¿Sabías que? was put on Blackboard. Automated feedback and computer grading of most activities were provided. Asynchronous interactive online activities were added to promote negotiation of meaning between students.</td>
<td>Online workbook and asynchronous interactive online activities created.</td>
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Selected Papers from the Eighth Annual Conference on Technology for Second Language Learning
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<th>University</th>
<th>Pre-design format</th>
<th>Redesign Format</th>
<th>Technology</th>
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<tr>
<td>Portland State</td>
<td>Three days per week meeting time. In class instruction mimics older teaching practices focusing on language structure (grammar) rather than functional language acquisition, practice, and proficiency.</td>
<td>Meets two days per week and F2F time spent in the crucial area of interactive speaking. Moved testing, writing and grammar instruction, and partner/group activities outside the classroom using multimedia materials and reduced in-class time for students clearly performing above standards. (With remediation in class for others). The primary instructional material is a multimedia version of the comprehensive proficiency-oriented introductory Spanish program &quot;¿Cómo?&quot; produced at Portland State University.</td>
<td>Online workbook, multimedia materials, Web CT chat and Discussion Board feature</td>
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<tr>
<td>University</td>
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<tr>
<td>Texas Tech University</td>
<td>Comprehensive Spanish Review First Year (5 credit course) Met five days per week - two in class and two non-traditional versions of the course—two large (110 students) lecture/discussion and one online/TV version (90 students)—are offered.</td>
<td>Sections meet physically three times a week with class time devoted to communicative exercises emphasizing oral skill development. Workbook, grammar, and writing components moved online. Students spend two hours of online practice in grammar with automated immediate diagnostic feedback and write weekly compositions that are semi-automatically graded with diagnostic feedback. Students participate in one hour of language lab weekly. Studio sessions taught by GTAs are held for students scoring less than 80% on the first exam.</td>
<td>Online workbook</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>University</td>
<td>Pre-design format</td>
<td>Redesign Format</td>
<td>Technology</td>
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<tr>
<td>University of Alabama</td>
<td>Each course met five hours per week. Supervised by a Language Coordinator, Graduate Teaching Assistants primarily taught course. Instructional technology assistance was provided by a Language Resource Center.</td>
<td>Redesign replaces one class hour per week for Introductory Spanish I and II, and two hours per week for the Intensive Review of Elementary Spanish (two semesters in one). Students practice vocabulary and grammar via computer graded with automated feedback activities from online workbook. Students complete self-tests and take an oral test three times per semester.</td>
<td>Online workbook</td>
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<tr>
<td>Montclair State Univ.</td>
<td>Met two days a week for two 75-minute periods or once a week for 150 minutes rather than three days a week. Most in-class time is used by faculty to explain grammar and vocabulary—limiting student opportunities to develop their communicative skills.</td>
<td>Classes meet two days a week for fifty minutes. These two sessions are primarily devoted to communicative &quot;real-life&quot; tasks and cultural awareness and are supplemented with a fifty-minute online session. In the online sessions, students study the grammatical and lexical information necessary to perform in class. At the same time, they practice and enhance their listening, speaking and reading skills and concentrate on the more mechanical aspects of language acquisition through homework assignments, online workbook exercises, and other web-based materials.</td>
<td>Web-based material, online workbook exercises</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNC-Chapel Hill</td>
<td>Met four days per week.</td>
<td>Meets two days per week, one with instructor and the other day with undergraduate student assistants in small discussion groups. In short, replace three of the four weekly contact hours with alternative activities, reducing the amount of time students spend in the classroom. Two of the four contact hours shifted to an interactive, feedback-rich online program. The third hour replaced with weekly, small group conversation sessions led by undergraduate student assistants. Currently 20 students per class.</td>
<td>Online workbook/e-book</td>
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<td>University</td>
<td>Pre-design format</td>
<td>Redesign Format</td>
<td>Technology</td>
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<td>University of North Carolina Charlotte</td>
<td>Met twice a week for 75 minutes with an online workbook component. An online textbook system, Centro, provided diverse types of interactive learning activities as well as presentations of grammar and vocabulary. Instructors used some of the online materials in class sessions and gave online homework assignments, which was 10% of the grade.</td>
<td>Meets once a week. Online workbook continued to be used. Instructors provide individual assistance to students through e-mail feedback and counseling meetings with those students who are not keeping up with assignments. Classroom time focuses on facilitating proficiency-oriented communicative learning activities such as role-plays, dialogs and writing assignments. Students are able to practice every skill area of language proficiency. Assignments, exams and class announcements are handled electronically. All students have the same course materials and lesson plans. Instructors are required to participate in ongoing orientation and training sessions on how to deliver the course in a consistent way.</td>
<td>Online workbook</td>
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<tr>
<td>SUNY Fredonia</td>
<td>Met three days per week. Two three-credit courses of first-year Span.</td>
<td>Condensed two three credit courses into one intensive, five-credit Spanish course. One section of the traditional course continues to be offered for true beginners, i.e., students who have no previous language experience. The redesigned course has two components, online and in-class. Practice of grammar, vocabulary, listening, reading and writing take place online with assignments completed before each class. Students are able to repeat online exercises as often as necessary, receiving automatic feedback and references to material for further study. The instructor can focus on meaningful communication activities such as conversation and oral practice during class. Section size is reduced from 30 to 22 students, which allows a greater level of student active participation. Students’ progress is monitored to identify specific problems, which the instructor addresses either in class or with the individual student. Language lab staff will is available to provide assistance in grammar and vocabulary.</td>
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Online workbook |
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<tr>
<th>University</th>
<th>Pre-design format</th>
<th>Redesign Format</th>
<th>Technology</th>
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<tr>
<td>The University of Southern Mississippi</td>
<td>Met three times per week -12 minimally coordinated sections of 30 students each</td>
<td>Meets three times per week but with an increased number of students. Redesign to six coherent sections of 60 students each semester. All sections are taught by a coordination team of two faculty instructors of record, supported by graduate and undergraduate assistants. Direct student interactions with course concepts via online learning replace one traditional lecture per week; the remaining biweekly class meetings emphasize oral communication.</td>
<td>Online workbook/e-book</td>
</tr>
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<td><a href="http://www.educationsector.org">www.educationsector.org</a></td>
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<td>Introductory Spanish MCRI (2007-2010)</td>
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<td>(Averages 1620 students per yr)</td>
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APPENDIX B

Engestöm’s Cultural Historical Activity models

Figure 1: (from Engeström, 1987)

Figure 2: (from Engeström, 1999)
APPENDIX C

Checklist of Considerations for Hybrid Curriculum Redesign

Going Hybrid? Here are some considerations customized for an Introductory Spanish Program
D.J. Young, The University of Tennessee

Curriculum
① What are the curriculum goals for first-year Spanish?
② Will your curriculum goals stay the same or will they need to be modified?
③ How will you reconfigure your curricular goals?
④ How can you use technologies to achieve your curricular goals?
⑤ What will be the blended learning format of the first-year course? (i.e., two F2F sessions instead of three; two F2F and one small discussion group; one F2F, one small discussion group and the rest online).

Instructors
① Who are the personnel for your first-year courses?
② How will their workload be redistributed?
③ What new training will they need (pedagogical and technological)?
④ When will this training take place? How often? Who will lead the training?
⑤ How is the role of the instructor reconfigured?
⑥ What responsibilities will instructors have outside of F2F sessions?
⑦ How is workload made equitable for instructors?

Course Management
① Have clear expectations been set for learners and instructors for the course structure, organization and direction?
② How will the syllabus be organized (what information and where)?
③ How detailed is the syllabus (are the due dates for the Wimba recordings indicated)?
④ How will the interface of the various components of the course be configured? (Blackboard Course Site, Angel, WEB CT, + e-book/online workbook, such as Centro, WileyPlus, MySpanishLab, etc.) + e-Portfolio Tool, such as Expo Site).
⑤ Is there sufficient time between F2F sessions to manage out-of-class activities/tasks?
⑥ How many interactive tasks will you have?
⑦ How will you set up the pairs and groups for online interaction?
⑧ What default mechanisms are in place for students when a group member does not participate?
⑨ Who will maintain the Master Course for the program (whether via Bb, Publisher Course Management System)?
⑩ What will each instructor need to add/adjust/change to his or her individual course sites?
⑪ Where will online tasks be stored and how will they be set up?
⑫ Will there be a location online for students to offer feedback about the hybrid course?
⑬ Will student guides to technological tools be provided and where?
How are the various grading components and tools interfaced?
How might you reduce the ripple effect caused by new editions of the program textbook?
What technologies will students be required to own/use in the hybrid format that are not currently required in your Introductory Spanish Program?
Will there be additional student support, such as drop-in tutoring, online office hours, etc.
What type of long-term personnel will be required to maintain technological components of the hybrid course?

F2F Sessions
What purpose do the F2F sessions have in the blended learning format?
Have the pedagogical goals for the F2F sessions changed/been modified?
Will lesson plans be provided for instructions for the F2F sessions?
What physical requirements will F2F classrooms have?

Online Learning/Activities/Tasks
What different purposes do the online material (i.e., e-book, online activities manual, Bb course site, e-Portfolio) serve?
How do the various technologies in the blended learning course format support the curricular and pedagogical goals of the course?
Are task instructions clear, consistent and scaffolded (if necessary)?
Are the tasks gauged at the right level?
Is the purpose of each task clear and expectations well established?
Do learners have the right amount of opportunities to obtain written and aural input online to engage successfully in F2F interpersonal activities/tasks?
Do learners have the right amount of opportunities to express themselves orally online?
Do learners have the right amount of opportunities to express themselves in writing?
Do learners have an appropriate number of interactive/collaborative activities/tasks?
Is there an appropriate amount of online homework (whether via activities manual, book, interactive tasks, E-portfolio assignments)?
What purpose does the e-Portfolio serve?
How much time will online activities/tasks take?

Assessments
What forms of assessment will the blended learning format include and how often?
What assessment formats will the blended learning format include?
Will students have opportunities to “self-assess” their language proficiency and cultural knowledge?
Are the criteria for all forms of assessment available to students?
Will F2F assessments have a different purpose than online assessments?
How many assessments will be made available online?
Has student accountability for online assessments been accounted for?
APPENDIX D

Example of a possible tutorial to post an audio recording using Wimba.

IB.15 ¿Cuántos hay?  
Tool- Wimba Podcast  
Location: Online Assignments  
Record by 8/27; Due date is 8/30  
Location: Online Assignments

Paso 1: Draw a fictitious classroom and include as many objects as possible (using IB vocabulary for class objects). Be prepared to turn in this drawing to your instructor.

Paso 2: Then, click the Assignments button in our Bb course site and record a description of your drawing using the following model.  
“Hay 10 sillas en la clase.” “Hay 11 estudiantes en la clase,” etc.

To record your responses, click “New”. Type in activity number (IB.15) followed by your Initials (in my case this would be djy). Click the red button to record and square button to stop recording. To listen to your recording, click the green arrow. If you are satisfied with your recording, scroll to the bottom and click “Post”. Your recording should now be listed.

Paso 3: Listen to two of your classmates’ recordings and draw the classrooms based on their descriptions. Turn in your original drawing and the other two drawings to your instructor.

1. On a blank sheet of paper, draw a fictitious classroom.

2. Record an oral description of your classroom drawing by going to the Assignment button. Click open the Wimba folder and locate IB.15. When you click this, you will arrive at the Wimba Podcast Tool.

3. Listen to two the descriptions recording by two of your classmates and draw their fictitious classroom.

4. Turn in to your instructor all three drawings: your fictitious classroom and the two based on your classmates’ descriptions.
APPENDIX E

Example of a short learning activity

3A.8 De preguntas generales a perfiles personales
Tool: Bb Wiki Tool/Blog
Location: Under Online Assignments
Answer questions online by 9/11
Due date: 9/13

Paso 1: Go to our Bb course website, click on Online Assignments and locate task 3A.8 Wiki. Click “View” to open this assignment. You will see a chart. Click “Edit” in the upper right corner to edit the document. Type in your name in the first available space in the chart and then click “Save” as a way to avoid being bumped off if another student is answering the questions at the same time. Then, click “Edit” again to return to the chart and answer the questions within the chart. Be sure to click “Save” when you are finished to save your work.

Paso 2: Analyze the student responses in the Wiki above and then blog those results in your Blog. Title this blog 3A.8.
APPENDIX F

Example of a long, end-of-chapter activity

Estudiar en el extranjero (Weeks 3 and 4)
Tool: Internet Search / Google Earth / Wiki / Blog
Pasos 1 y 2 by 8/??     Pasos 3, 4 y 5 by 9/??     Pasos 6 y 7 by 9/??

Paso 1: Is there a particular country where you would like to study abroad? Visit the University of Tennessee’s Programs Abroad website and investigate what options are available to you using this link: https://studyabroad.utk.edu/

Click the “Find a Program” icon to begin your search. In the “Country” drop-down box, select the country where you would most like to study abroad. Click “Search” at the bottom of the page to see a list of programs available in that country. Browse through the available programs to find the one that interests you most. You might especially consider looking at the UTK summer program in Santander, Spain, which allows you to complete Spanish 211 and 212 in five weeks.

Click on the name of each program to open a page with specific information. You will want to explore different options in different countries before selecting a program. Read the information about the program you selected, including the “Fact Sheet” and the “Program Description.”

Bookmark the information page of the program you selected for use in later steps. Take notes below to use in a later step:

_________________________________________________________________________________
Using the flight search engine, find flight options from Knoxville or a nearby city to the city where the study abroad program you chose takes place (or a major city in that country). Search for a round-trip (de ida y vuelta) ticket that will be going there soon. Type the city you would leave from in “Salida desde” and the city you would arrive at in “Destino.” For “Salida” and “Regreso,” select the dates on which you would leave and return. Click “Buscar” to search for flight options. You will see a list of flight options from cheapest to most expensive. Since this is a Spanish website, the prices are listed in Euros (€), the currency used in Spain. Browse the various flight options, checking the price, times, airline, and if the flights have any stopovers (escalas) or connecting flights (conexiones). Click “Elegir este vuelo” (“Choose this flight”) on the one that you consider the best option to open a page with more detailed flight information. You might want to print a paper copy of this page, or save the page as a PDF file. Fill in the spaces below with information about the flight you chose.

Línea area: ___________________________ Precio del vuelo: ___________________________

Información de ida:
Fecha de ida: ___________________________
Salida desde: __________________________ Hora de salida: __________________________
Destino: __________________________ Hora de llegada: __________________________
Escala(s) en: __________________________ Duración total del vuelo: __________________________

Información de vuelta:
Fecha del regreso: __________________________
Línea area: __________________________ Precio: __________________________
Salida desde: __________________________ Hora de salida: __________________________
Destino: __________________________ Hora de llegada: __________________________
Escala(s) en: __________________________ Duración total del vuelo: __________________________

Now, return to the “Estudiar en el extranjero (Wiki)” activity. Click “View” to open the Wiki page. You will see a table. Click “Edit,” and then add the flight information you recorded in the appropriate space beside your name.
**Paso 3:** Para este paso, utilizará Google Earth para explorar la ciudad donde su programa de estudio en el extranjero se realiza. Primero, descargue e instale Google Earth en su sitio web: [http://earth.google.com/](http://earth.google.com/)

Si ya tiene Google Earth instalado, asegúrese de visitar ese sitio web para descargar la última versión. Después de instalar el programa, desea ver el tutorial de video sobre el uso de Google Earth en nuestro sitio Blackboard.

En Google Earth, en la sección “Layers”, asegúrese de que los siguientes elementos estén seleccionados: “Panorámicas”,”“360Cities,”, y “YouTube” (los últimos dos se encuentran en “Gallery”) En la sección “Fly To” del cuadro de búsqueda, escriba el nombre de la ciudad y país donde su programa de estudio en el extranjero se realiza. Haga clic en el icono de lupa para volar hacia esa ciudad.

Use la interfaz deslizante en la parte derecha de la pantalla para acercarse a la ciudad. Puede hacer clic y mantener el botón del medio de su ratón presionado en la parte central de la pantalla para desplazarse en la ciudad. Haga clic en los iconos de fotos Panorámicas para ver imágenes de la ciudad. Haga clic en los iconos de YouTube para ver videos de la ciudad. Finalmente, haga clic en cualquiera de los botones 360City para explorar vistas interactivas, 360 grados de calles. Explore la ciudad!

Antes de pasar al siguiente paso, escriba una descripción en español sobre sus impresiones de la ciudad.

**Modelo:** *Santander, España es una ciudad muy bonita y _____. Está en el norte de España y tiene playas increíbles. Las fotos de Santander son muy bonitas.*
**Paso 4:** Now visit the 360Cities website using this link: [http://www.360cities.net/](http://www.360cities.net/)
In the search box in the upper right corner of the screen, type of name of the city and country where the study abroad program you chose takes place:

![360Cities search](image)

Click on any 360-degree views of the city that you find. Select one that you would like to share with your classmates. Click on the picture to open the 360-degree view. Copy the URL at the top of your web browser to share with your classmates. You can bookmark this copy, copy and paste the URL, or write the URL in the space below:

URL: __________

If you cannot find a 360-degree view of your city on this website, search a YouTube video of the city this website: [http://www.youtube.com/](http://www.youtube.com/) Use that URL instead.

**Paso 5:** Locate and open the “Estudiar en el extranjero (Wiki)” activity. Click “View” to open the Wiki page. You will see a table. Click “Edit,” type your name in the first available space in the table, and then answer the questions about the study abroad program you chose in the row beside your name. Use the notes you took in the previous steps to answer the questions. Be sure to click “Save” when you are finished to save your work.

To insert the URL link to the 360-degree view of the city (or to the YouTube video), do the following:

- Click in the Wiki table to place your cursor where you want the link to appear.
- Click the “Insert Wiki link” icon in the interface (it looks like a chain).

- In the “Insert link” box that appears, select “Link to an external website” and then copy and paste (or type) the URL of your 360-degree photo or YouTube video. Then click “Insert” at the bottom left of that box.

- Click “Save” at the bottom of the screen, and you will return to the main view of the Wiki. **Click your link to make sure that it works.**
Paso 6: As soon as the majority of students have posted to the wiki site, analyze the results and view the 360-degree photos or YouTube videos. You may want to use Google Earth to explore some of the locations posted by your classmates more in depth. Take notes on what you read and see in order to address following questions.

1. ¿Cuáles ciudades y países son los más populares?
2. ¿Qué tipo de clases quiere tomar la mayoría de los estudiantes?
3. ¿Los vuelos son muy caros (expensive)? ¿Cuál línea área es la más popular? ¿Quién tiene el vuelo más corto (short) y el vuelo más largo (long)?
4. What aspects of the study abroad programs were most appealing to students in general?
5. Después de ver las fotos de “360 grados,” Cuáles otras ciudades te gustan? ¿Por qué?
6. Find a student who chose the same study abroad program that you did.

Paso 7: Return to the Blackboard site and locate and open the blog tool. Blog about your class based on what you learned from analyzing the Wiki table answers and viewing the 360-degree photos or YouTube videos.

Modelo: Las ciudades y países más populares en mi clase son _____, _____ y ____. La mayoría de los estudiantes quieren tomar clases de _____ y ____. En general, los vuelos son muy caros. _____ es la línea área más popular. _____ tiene el vuelo más corto y _____ tiene el vuelo más largo. Después de ver las otras ciudades, me gusta Santander, _____ y ____. Son ciudades muy bonitas. Etc.