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Rationale

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In this paper, you will find the reasoning behind each of the activities and evaluations that I have included in my lesson plan. I will justify my uses of technology, and absence of technology for each item. I will justify my essential question, grammar usage, evaluations, activities, connections to theory, and I will give examples from my work. First of all, I find it useful to define the term “Thinking Together Using Technology”.  Although many people in our class would define this differently, here is my take on it:  I feel that this term embodies many things.  First of all, there is thinking.  There are is a plethora of parts that go into this definition, but it has to do with a person pulling in information, processing the information utilizing prior knowledge, and coming to their own conclusions.  Once a person has done this, they are able to utilize the conclusions that they come to and synthesize these conclusions.  The metacognition that fuses together many personal conclusions and thoughts is what embodies thinking together.   Now, we must pull in the technology piece.  The last part of the puzzle, technology, is utilized to fuse and synthesize thoughts and connections while communicating through digital mediums (Twitter, tumblr, facebook, etc.)  When people come together over these social mediums and make explicit and implicit connections, thinking together using technology is taking place. The main punch line for this paper is to explain the lesson that I have come up with. The main purpose of the lesson is to help students understand “How does one express their voice?” I will clarify each step of my lesson plan, including my activities and evaluations. I will explain the uses of technology that I incorporate, and I will connect to theory whenever possible.

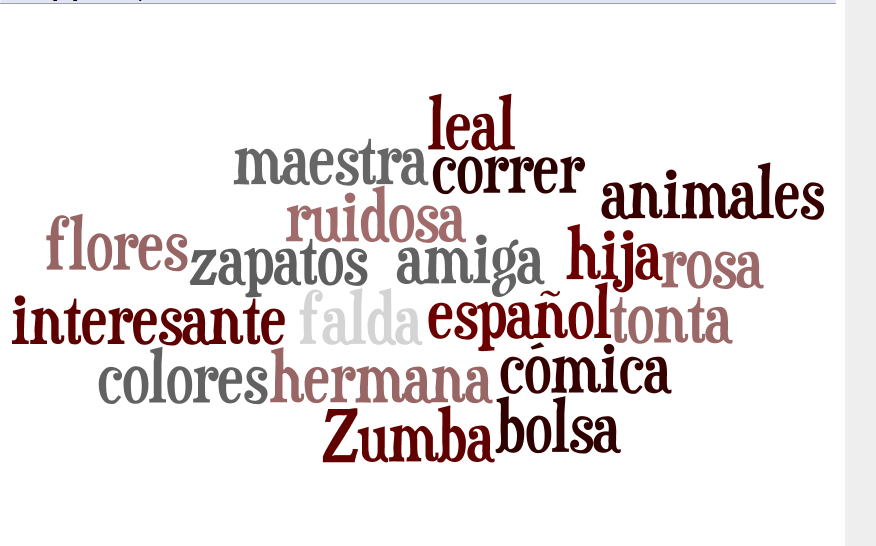
The first step to this rationale is for me to explain my activities and evaluations in English. The first item of business with my lesson plan is to do a brainstorming activity with the students about death on the board. This may sound morbid, but after reading through the lesson, hopefully you will see that it is not. We will then categorize the items on the board into groups. Although some may argue against the use of the board, it is something quick that students are accustomed to. I realize that it would be possible for me to project the words that students come up with, and to categorize them from there. I feel that the immediate changes and erasures that can be done with the board are an affordance, whereas using technology to display the students’ thoughts would be a constraint because of the time that would be wasted. The groups will be chosen by the students. Each student will then write one idea which includes a feeling that they have, and two words from the board. They will share their ideas in their groups, and each group will share their best ideas with the class. A student will write the ideas on the board.

Afterward, the class will break into pairs to complete a questionnaire. They will answer the question with a number between 1 and 5. (1 means that they completely disagree with the statement, and 5 means that they completely agree with the idea.) They need to come to a consensus in their pair. Here are the questions:

* Death is sad.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Death interests me.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* People should cry when someone dies.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* People should celebrate the life of someone who has died.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* Altars offend me.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* A family should remember someone who has died.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* When I think of a favorite item of someone who has died, I feel happy.\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_
* We can express the voice of someone who has died by remembering them. \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

After the students decide their answers, we will find out the number that appears most often in the blanks. We will write down the numbers to see where the class is mentally on this theme. We will discuss the following questions: What is voice? Who has voice? How can one be silenced? I will write notes on the board from their responses. Afterward, we will do an activity in which the students can express their own voices.

I will take the students to the computer lab, and they will have the opportunity to make a Wordle. This technology allows students to input whatever words that they would like, hit create, and it will make a concrete technological artifact that they can use to describe themselves. They can include adjectives, verbs, nouns, etc. They should not use their names in their Wordles because we will guess whose they are. The use of Wordle in my plan is helpful to my students because it gives them an outlet to express part of themselves while also utilizing words that they are comfortable with. As is argued in *Language Learning and Technology,* “Data visualization tools have recently generated increased interest in multiple disciplines due to their ability to present and summarize data in ways that appeal to different types of learners.” (Baralt, 2011). It is helpful for students to be able to utilize the Wordle to tap into their different learning styles, and for them to create a unique artifact to which they can refer. After students complete the wordles, they will upload them to a class Wiki. We will look through them as though they are art, and they are hanging in a digital museum. After students have had a chance to look through different Wordles, we will use our powers of deduction to guess whose Wordle belongs to whom. The idea of looking at the students’ work as an exhibit in a museum, and then guessing the identity of the person in the target language would constitute critical framing. Students are interpreting the social context of a design of meaning: the Wordles. Students also get a sense of togetherness from the exercise while still showcasing the beauty of their differences. This would be a community of learners. They will take a screen shot of their Wordle, and upload it to our class Wiki. Here is an example of a Wordle:



Here, I will describe the first evaluation that appears in my lesson plan. The first thing that students will do is choose someone who has died whom they admire. It may be a family member, friend, hero, athlete, etc. They will find out words to describe this person as homework. The students will create another Wordle using the words that they have discovered about the person. We will print the Wordles, and the student will present their Wordle to the class, and they must include the answers to the following questions in their presentation:

* Why did you choose this person?
* Why is this person important to you?
* Why did you choose these words?
* In what ways do you express this person’s voice?

Wordle works for me here because students are able to include words that pull in the meanings that the students are trying to convey. The Wordle serves as an artifact that students can refer to during their presentations. After students have shared their Wordle with the class, we are going to upload the Wordles to a Flickr gallery. Students will be able to comment on one another’s Wordles as well as presentations, and the gallery can serve as an exposition in a digital museum. Students will be the artists of the work. This helps to promote a community of learners because students can interact with their classmates, and can get feedback on ideas. Conversations can be furthered on the topics of why students chose the people that they did, and why those people are important to them.

The next activities in the lesson plan focus more on Day of the Dead. The students will visit this website: <http://www.colby.edu/~bknelson/SLC/ofrendas/entrevista.php> . The students will watch the interview with the Ecuadorian woman without subtitles, and without sound. They will note their feelings and observations in a Tweet, but if Twitter is not available, they will write me an email. I will project their Tweets in front of the class. The students can react to their classmates’ feelings and observations by Tweeting. Twitter is a useful source because students can give short teasers of their thinking, and can see their classmates’ first thoughts on the interview. Here I would like to tease out some of the ideas on framework. The New London Group came up with the synthesis of the ideas of designs, redesigns, semiotic codes and available designs. Available designs here would include the items that students are accustomed to in school. For example: The teacher writing bellwork on the chalk board would be an available design. Students might utilize this design, chalk boards, to create the new. The redesign might be how students would utilize a SMARTboard. They would understand that writing on a board was a way to show information to the class, they would process this information, and then utilize it to make a redesign in their heads: presenting on a SMARTboard. (New London Group)

Next, the students will listen to the interview with sound and subtitles. They will write notes of feelings, customs, and how they feel in a blog entry. After this, students will visit this website: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4YIEVvAnyZ4> . Students will listen to the interview with the Mexican man. They will note their feelings, the customs, and their observations in their blogs. They will fill in a Venn diagram with similarities and differences between how people in Ecuador and Mexico celebrate this important holiday. There are many reasons for utilizing the interviews instead of a less interactive technology. Students are able to go back and watch the interviews again if they need to. This allows for students to work at their own pace, which would count as situated practice. Students immerse themselves in the language experience of seeing, hearing and feeling what the person is expressing. Students can relate to the interviews by seeing people their own ages giving offerings to the dead. Youtube is a useful technology tool because it helps to bring students a small snippet of authentic material. They are able to connect to material that would otherwise only be possible in person. Youtube has many affordances, especially in the foreign language context, because it connects to students’ life worlds, and it showcases different avenues of thought. Venn diagrams have the affordance of being a graphic organizer in which students can situate their thoughts. It is an easy way to see similarities and differences spelled out in a concise manner. After completing the diagram, students will have an easier time allocating their thoughts for the comparisons that they will make in the final evaluation.

The last evaluation is as follows, and it has multiple steps. Students will choose groups of 3. Each group will be assigned a country to research: Mexico, Ecuador, Peru, Guatemala, Venezuela, Nicaragua, Honduras, or the United States. They will look for information about how their country celebrates Day of the Dead. Each group will create a Wiki for their country. They must show practices, perspectives, and products of the country with a focus on Day of the Dead. After the groups have created their Wikis, each student will visit them. The use of Wikispaces is important for many reasons. It is helpful because students are able to upload multiple types of media, and part of the requirement is for students to incorporate products, practices and perspectives. The students can upload photos of products and practices. They can also include perspectives, and to do that, students can upload artifacts such as interviews. “Wiki sites can be created for specific projects with a set group of allowable users and provide an excellent collaborative environment, since changes are logged along with identification of the author. In fact, a wiki type site could be ideal for a community of practice.” (Godwin-Jones, 2003) The use of Wiki in my classroom helps to achieve a community of practice because it tries to help improve their learning over time, and the students’ knowledge and competence in Spanish is improved.

After visiting all the Wikis, the students must answer questions on a google.doc in different colors. Here are the questions:

* What was your opinion about the idea of death at the beginning of this unit?
* What is your opinion about the idea of death now?
* How has your view changed? Please site examples from your classmates Wikis when appropriate.
* How can you express the voice of someone who has died?
* Do you express the voice of anyone who has died? How?

The next portion of my rationale will include my answers to why I chose the activities that I did. First, I would like to discuss my essential question: How does one express their voice? I want to focus on this question because voice and silence are the themes for our Spanish class at Bennington, but also because there are many avenues through which students can explore the meaning of voice. I would also like to explain my sub-questions. Another question is: How is death related to voice? I want the students synthesize their thinking to this question, and I will utilize activities in which students can come to their own conclusions. The last question is: How do you treat the subject of death? I want students to ponder this question so that they can see the differences in perspective of Latin American people and Americans on this subject.

I would like to discuss the purpose of my activities, and why I chose them. In the first set of activities, I tried to utilize scaffolding with the students in order to lower their affective filters (VanPatten and Williams). “Learners who are comfortable have a positive attitude toward language learning.” (VanPatten and Williams 28) If I begin with a low pressure activity, and gradually make the activities more difficult, students will have a higher comfort level with the material. For this reason, I began with an activity where students simply state words in Spanish. Afterward, they make sentences utilizing given words. They have a chance to share within groups, and then people can share sentences.

My use of Wordle in my activity and evaluation are useful for “going digital when it counts.” I feel that my students get to showcase their learning through the use of this technology because they can upload words to describe themselves, and have the opportunity to change it and make it truly their own by clicking the “randomize” button. They are able to change the color scheme and the setup of the words to make it best fit with their personalities. I feel that Wordle is useful in my first evaluation because students can exploit the expression of voice within their Wordle. This relates to thinking because students reflect on the words that they included, and they must showcase their reasonings behind their choices, and through the use of Spanish, they can reflect on these items. Students will upload these Wordles to a Wiki for the class. The Wiki will help the students to be a digital community of learners because they will share about one another’s Wordles. They can get feedback, and the Wiki will be a digital artifact that students can refer to at any time. The use of the words which students choose embodies the idea that “words, sentences, and texts are containers of meaning” (Kern 48). Students chose the words that they did because they seem to express the important things that students wanted to communicate.

I would like to explain the reasoning for which I did not utilize technology in my first evaluation. Although my students use technology to make a Wordle for part of their evaluation, I preferred that they presented their reasoning for choosing the person/words/rationale. Although technology can be a useful tool for many things, I felt that my students would get more out of hearing their classmates’ voices when they describe the subject of their project and their reasoning behind it. Many activities which utilize technology can be memorable, but I feel that the heartfelt nature of these presentations is close to the students’ hearts, and seeing the expressions is an affordance for this exercise. I would see it as a constraint if students could not see each other’s expressions in the activity.

I feel that in my second set of activities, technology is very useful. For instance, students are able to get in touch with authentic materials (interviews with native speakers) which would not be possible without the use of technology. I do not feel that my students could get the same authenticity and feeling from listening to a CD, or from reading what these people are talking about in a book. I have students react to what they see/hear/feel in from the interviews utilizing technology. I feel that Twitter is a viable source for this activity because students can write impressions without feeling that they need to write too much. Here, I am utilizing digital scaffolding, and Twitter’s character limit is an affordance because their affective filter is lowered. I also think that the use of Twitter is appropriate because I can project their responses in front of the class, and they have the opportunity to respond to one another’s comments. I feel that the use of the interviews is aligned with situated practice. Students are immersed in a cultural experience through the use of technology, and they respond to the videos utilizing something from their own life world- Twitter. The usage of the interviews also aligns with critical framing because students interpret social and cultural contexts of the popular Latin American holiday Day of the Dead. Students stand back and view videos as spectators, and must react critically in their Tweets to what they observe.

The evaluation also includes group work and the use of technology. Students must utilize technology to research their country’s practices, perspectives and products with reference to Day of the Dead. Students use a Wiki to present their findings. This would be a use of transformed practice. Students must take what they find about countries, and show the meaning to others through technology. Students are a member of communities of learners within their own groups, as well as within the larger class through the use of Wikis.

Once students get a chance to synthesize the whole lesson at the end by writing a blog entry about what they have learned about Day of the Dead practices, perspectives and products, and get a chance to tell how their views have changed or stayed the same, students really get a sense of situated practice. Students immerse themselves in the perspectives of people who practice this holiday, and they can tell how it relates to their own life world. This would also be an example of transformed practice because students react to one another’s Wikis and views, and must synthesize the entire experience into a blog entry. They tell how they have learned and grown throughout the experience, and they can utilize their new definition of their personal views to construct new meanings for themselves. I feel that the use of blogs to act and react to one another’s opinion is supported by the idea that “people’s interactions with computers, television and new media are fundamentally social and natural, just like interactions in real life.” (Blake 3) Some argue that computers are not people, however, students are accustomed to communicating through digital means, and they are therefore comfortable with such interactions.