

# Chapter 15

## Teaching Foreign Languages in the Twenty–First Century: Lessons from Spanish Hybrid Education

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This chapter explores the case of a hybrid Spanish program where technology, standards, and teacher expertise in foreign language education are merged to bolster students' learning. The chapter identifies the instructional elements relevant to 21st century foreign language education, and depicts the transactional relationship between technology, standards and teacher experience in a Spanish hybrid teaching environment. Finally, we provide a set of recommendations for current and future Spanish educators, as well as foreign language educators in general based on the experiences shared by students, educators, and administrator in the program.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

In our technology-driven and media-saturated world, foreign language educators' role is quickly evolving (Luke & Britten, 2007). Digital communication has become an essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skill for students who are exposed to an increasingly globalized and multicultural world where advances in technology are connecting them to different cultures with an ease that was unfamiliar in past centuries. Spanish language, in particular, is not only the most spoken non-English language in the United States, but is also the fastest growing one, with a 233% increase of its number of speakers since 1980 (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2013). The influence of Hispanic cultures in the United States is indeed visible in everyday life, in the professional world, the arts, and in the entertainment industry. Twenty-first century students are aware that being proficient in Spanish is a marketable skill if they are aiming to develop a presence in a globalized world, as well as to develop an interest for their neighboring cultures (P21, 2011). But

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how can foreign language educators be prepared to face the new challenges of teaching relevant material to students while understanding the reality of today's digital connectivity? How can the integration of technology in foreign language courses—particularly in hybrid environments—help develop students' language practices in and out of school?

The growth of information and communication technologies has generated novel opportunities while creating new challenges for foreign language education. In fact, using technology to access information about the world that surrounds us is now considered an essential 21<sup>st</sup> century skill for students (Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills, 2014; National Governors Association Center for Best Practices, 2010). Because of their increasing online presence (Lenhart, 2015), students' authentic exposure to foreign languages and cultures is occurring increasingly in digital environments (Kessler, 2013). Nowadays, a student has more chances to communicate with someone living abroad through the Internet than through traditional methods of communication. Students are in constant interaction with technology in their personal lives, and it is important for foreign language education to reflect this reality while reflecting goals set by national and international standards in their field.

Building upon contemporary scholarship on teaching in hybrid environments, educational standards, and teacher knowledge, this chapter therefore describes the efforts conducted in a set of hybrid (i.e., face-to-face and online) Spanish courses offered at a small Northwestern college in order to feature its experience in bolstering students' insights into the nature of Spanish-speaking cultures and languages through technology. We describe the case of these hybrid courses through surveys conducted with instructors and evaluations shared by students to highlight teachers' experiences teaching Spanish in said hybrid program. Finally, we conclude with a set of recommendations for current and future Spanish educators interested in integrating technology in their teaching. These recommendations are derived from the lessons learned from this investigation, and supplemented with an administrative perspective through an interview conducted with the course's program director. First, we describe the elements that play a role in the successful integration of technology in foreign language education, namely hybrid teaching environments, standards, and teacher knowledge.

## **BACKGROUND**

### **Hybrid Environments in Foreign Language Instruction**

From online programs to blended, hybrid, flipped classrooms, and MOOCS, computer-assisted language learning (CALL) has been prominent over the years in assisting students' foreign language learning, along with producing research looking at how technology shapes education in that area while enhancing learning processes (Hill, 2014; Kessler, 2009). This chapter focuses specifically on hybrid—sometimes called “flipped”—environments in CALL (Muldrow, 2013). Hybrid programs represent a mixed mode of instruction where traditional face-to-face instruction and online learning are blended (Olapiriyakul & Scher, 2006). “Flipped classroom” is a term that is now commonly used for classes that are a form of blended learning using technology with the underlying intention that the teacher will be able to interact more with students instead of lecturing during class time (Bell, 2015). Garrison and Kanuka (2004) described the flipped classroom as “an integration of face-to-face and online learning experiences—not a layering of one on top of the other” (p. 99). This model represents a mindset where learning is centered

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on students (Bergmann & Sams, 2012) and where instructors are responsible for maintaining a community of learning based on interaction and support.

Goertler et al. (2012) argued that institutions and students alike are inclined to favor hybrid curricula because of their flexibility in space and in time. The advantages of hybrid learning are that: it saves money and space at the institutional level while still connecting with students on campus, it improves a high quality of instruction, it allows access to a broader variety of students, and it engages the youth in a mode of communication that is familiar to them in their everyday life (Goertler et al., 2012). In fact, Kessler (2009) explained that the objective of foreign language education was to accompany students in the development of their autonomous use of the target language. This has been accomplished in hybrid education through the development of online learning labs, which was facilitated by developments in Internet-based self-access to studying languages (Kessler, 2009). While autonomy does not imply the absence of teachers, it does suggest that technology can support students' independence in learning thanks to online discussion, self-reflective or writing activities, to name a few. Technology also permits higher levels of connectivity, which can facilitate collaboration and the construction of knowledge between peers. Similarly, technology lets educators focus on a student-centered approach to learning by allowing students to explore the language in relation to their personal interests (Kessler, 2009). This student-centered approach is also determined by standards in the field of foreign education, which can serve as guidelines for both institutions implementing hybrid learning in their programs, as well as for instructors working in hybrid environments on a day-to-day basis.

### **Standards for Foreign Language Teaching and Learning**

At the international level, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2009) has placed intercultural dialogue as a priority for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Concurrently, a number of additional international organizations, such as the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) or the International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE) have published general recommendations for the integration of information and communication technology in educational settings, along with guidelines and standards aimed specifically at teachers in the area of digital skills, thus underlining the competencies that instructors need to possess to effectively teach with and through technology. We would like to highlight that due to the scope of this chapter, we only focus on standards that were appropriately relevant for foreign language education. Similarly, this chapter was written in the context of Northern American higher education and thus present standards specific to that setting.

Within said context, the American Council on Teaching Foreign Languages (ACTFL) provides the National Foreign Language Standards for Foreign Language Learning, which guide foreign language teaching. Their guidelines are composed of "5 C's:" Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. The goal of ACTFL is that students are "culturally equipped to communicate successfully in a pluralistic American society and abroad" (ACTFL, 2015). One of the standards of interest for this chapter is for students to be able to participate in communities all over the world, and more specifically to "use the language both within and beyond the school setting" (ACTFL, 2015). Today's advances in technology enable this use of language beyond the school setting. As a matter of fact, ACTFL and the Partnership for 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills (P21) collaboratively created a 21<sup>st</sup> century skills map providing guidance for the teaching of world languages through the integration of 21<sup>st</sup> century skills while responding to increasing global economies and communication modes (P21, 2011). P21 (2011) stated that:

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*Global economies, a heightened need for national security, and changing demographics in the U.S. have increased attention to our country's lack of language capability. Every call to action to prepare our students for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century includes offering them the opportunity to learn languages other than English and increase their knowledge of other cultures. (p. 2)*

In concordance with their mission to prepare 21<sup>st</sup> century students, ACTFL also provided guidance on how to train future teachers to address these aforementioned needs. In their standards for the preparation of foreign language teachers, ACTFL (2013) argued that technology should be part of teachers' toolsets for the creation and diffusion of authentic material in the classroom. They also envisioned technology being a way for teachers to help students connect to different communities online, as well as an access to tools for instruction (e.g., multimedia, web-based resources, social networks, mobile devices, etc...). Finally, the standards express that teachers should learn how to use these web-based resources or technologies "to provide authentic input to gather, evaluate, and assess learners' performance" (p. 26).

Taken together, the ACTFL standards and the 21<sup>st</sup> century map place educators at the forefront of the learning process. This collection of standards highlight teachers' role as a guide for student development, as learners become independent learners thanks to technology. Foreign language educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century are required to not only know how to teach the language, but to also take advantage of the technological tools available for teaching, all the while understanding how to facilitate student learning. Teaching foreign languages in the 21<sup>st</sup> century has therefore become a multifaceted and complex combination of knowledge and skills that educators should possess to effectively teach in a world of connectivity and global communication.

### **Teachers' Technological, Pedagogical, and Content Knowledge**

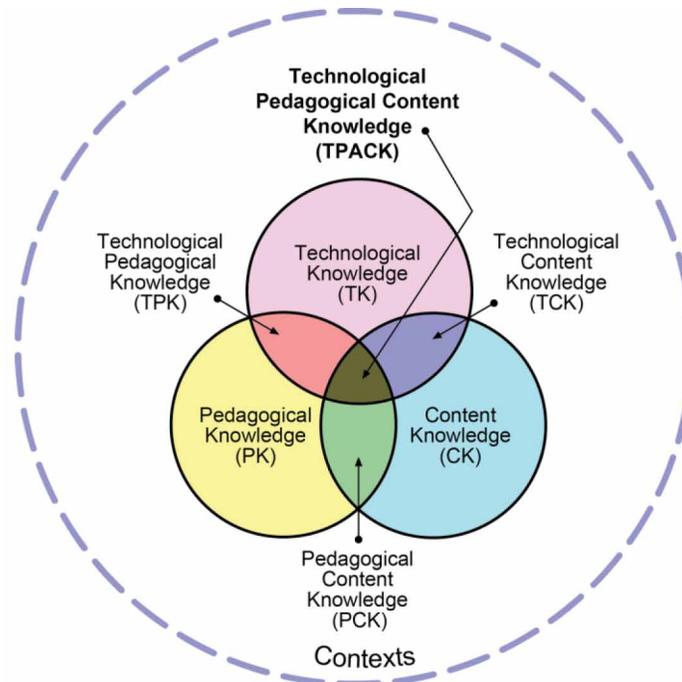
Mishra & Koehler's TPACK framework (2006) provides a theoretical lens to discuss the importance of integrating teachers' technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge in 21<sup>st</sup> foreign language education. The TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006; Koehler & Mishra, 2013) is a teacher knowledge framework that describes effective teaching with technology within specific contexts. The interaction of teachers' technological, pedagogical, and content knowledge is what shapes the understanding that teachers should possess to successfully merge technology in their traditional teaching practices. The TPACK structure represented in Figure 1 highlights how technological, pedagogical and content knowledge are merged through teachers' knowledge about their subject matter, their understanding of teaching methods and practices, and their familiarity with how information technologies can assist in achieving instructional goals—all within a given context.

McGrail (2007) stated that the order in teacher knowledge should be "pedagogy before technology, rather than technology before pedagogy" (p. 81). For that reason, Van Olphen (2008) argued that professional organization such as ACTFL or ISTE play a crucial role in guiding educators to teach in our technological era. Furthermore, she asserted that teaching foreign languages through CALL required understanding how linguistic and cultural concepts could be represented with and through technology, along with pedagogical approaches from student-centered traditions and an awareness of how language competencies develop with CALL. She also added that teachers should acknowledge students' background knowledge in the subject matter and should be familiar with cognitive approaches to learning, all the while understanding how new technologies could help teaching and learning (Van Olphen, 2008).

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Figure 1. The TPACK framework

From <http://tpack.org>



Furthermore, Zhao (2003) described the potential benefits that technology-rich instruction and curriculum could yield, including providing students with high-quality linguistic and cultural materials, more communicative opportunities, and in-time and individualized feedback. He however underlined that teachers must be adequately prepared to best integrate technology in their teaching practices and that for that purpose, it was important to remember that teachers' creativity in the use of technology was more important than technology itself. This is why the TPACK framework can inform technology use and guide teachers' practices. As noted, technology itself is not teaching a course, but teachers' mastery of the course's content, along with their pedagogy and their way of creatively teaching content is what can make a course a successful experience for students. In addition, Kang and Li (2010) highlighted the fact that it is difficult for students to be in contact with native speakers of a language, and that teachers can help students use technology to meet and interact with natives outside the classroom. An effective teacher would thus be able to flexibly navigate the space defined by knowledge of technology, pedagogy, and content areas and the complex interaction among them in specific contexts (AACTE, 2008) while integrating standards for language and for 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.

However, for such model of integration to be successful and to provide students with an immersive experience that will positively translate to their personal, academic and professional lives, teachers need to be adequately prepared to combine multiple approaches to teaching Spanish or foreign languages in general. Moser and Ivy (2013) demonstrated that indeed, few of their teacher participants had had formal courses specific to the integration of technology in the World Language classroom, and that many were unaware of standards in their field. They therefore suggested that professional development or teacher preparation could fill those gaps. In this next section, we explore the particular case of a Spanish hybrid

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program in the United States that has integrated traditional teaching with an online language lab. We report accounts shared by instructors and students about their experiences in the hybrid program, along with the benefits and challenges that they emerged from these experiences, before inferring recommendations for teacher training based on the lessons learned from this investigation.

### **THE EXAMPLE OF A HYBRID SPANISH COURSE**

An example of the integration of technology in language learning is a Spanish language program at a small Northwestern college, which has incorporated an online component to its Beginner (Spanish I and Spanish II) and Intermediate (Spanish III and Spanish IV) Spanish courses. These courses follow the model of a flipped classroom, where students read the materials and perform online activities at home, and then meet face-to-face with their instructor twice a week for an hour and 40 minutes. The language textbooks used in said Spanish language courses, *Panorama* (2013) in the introductory level, and *Anda* (2013) in the intermediate level, come with an online package, which is a complementary online lab with resources for each traditional classroom meetings. Both the textbooks and the online component have as their primary purpose to foster communication, cultural knowledge, critical thinking skills and strategies for learning; and were designed in accordance with the ACTFL “5C’s.” These standards guide both the course design as well as instructors’ focal pedagogy in this hybrid course, and each chapter identifies for the teacher which of the 5 C’s are addressed. Thoms (2011) stated that while ongoing research continues to shed light on how hybrid foreign language courses affect students’ linguistic development, little research has been done to look at how students and instructors perceive their learning and teaching experiences in a hybrid-learning context. Consequently, we conducted surveys with instructors and gathered evidence from student course evaluations to understand their experiences in the hybrid course. After describing the hybrid course components, we then discuss their views of the program, and point out the benefits and challenges that students and instructors identified regarding their participation in Spanish hybrid learning.

#### **Course Material**

Since traditional classrooms present time restriction for teachers, the online lab aims to provide students with an opportunity to continue using Spanish outside the classroom. For this, the online lab supplies:

- Readiness checks for each chapters
- Practice activities including flashcards, exercises and games
- Practice tests and oral practice exercises
- Student resources including a pronunciation guide, media files, videos and web links, announcements, discussion forums, and a calendar providing deadlines
- A summary of students’ progress
- A full electronic textbook with the ability to do exercises, highlight, and add notes.

The homework, which is assigned by the instructor, has to be done in the online lab. When students log in to the online lab, they automatically see which activities have been assigned and when they are

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due. Some of these activities are due the day before the material that the activities cover is taught, which prepares students to understand the upcoming chapter of the textbook, and therefore permits the instructors to not spend time explaining the material from scratch, but instead clarify students' doubts. In addition, it encourages students for a self-exploration of language uses at their own pace. Other activities, on the other hand, help students review the material before a chapter's test. In order for students to get enough practice, each homework is allowed to be submitted three times, and the last attempt is the one that counts toward their grade. Activities that are not assigned can be given as additional practice.

Besides these activities, the online labs offer the opportunity for students to create a blog, which according to Gedera (2012) increases the potential for student interaction. In fact, Johnson and Johnson (2009) showed that collaborative and cooperative-learning methods can improve students' time on tasks and motivation to learn, and that learning is more effective when it is a social activity (Domalewska, 2014). The blog-based activities are course-related information in the form of reflective journals, stories, or discussion topics. Students can also peer-review and comment on other students' work, and collectively prepare written assignments or projects. Furthermore, the online lab comes with an online-chat tool that can be used by students to communicate with their instructor and classmates who are online at the same time. The blog-based activities and online chat thus allow for collaboration to take place not only inside the classroom, but also outside the classroom. Students can therefore improve their Spanish skills thanks to the connectivity and their constant interaction with culture through authentic media.

Nevertheless, while students have the freedom to explore materials on their own, the instructor's role is not diminished. On the contrary, teaching in a hybrid environment requires teachers to adapt to new challenges while maintaining their teaching creativity and prepare to interact with students in innovative ways. For teachers, the online component offers general resources, including:

- A user guide with a philosophy of the textbook
- Teaching tips, sample syllabi, lesson plans and grading rubrics
- Cultural background notes
- A gradebook with an overview of students' assignments completion and notifications of assignments that need grading
- PowerPoint presentations and testing materials
- A full electronic textbook with the ability to add notes
- The ability to assign, un-assign, manipulate, or add exercises, and the ability to send emails to the entire class and/or post announcements.

Furthermore, most of the activities are graded by the online lab system, therefore allowing the instructor to spend less time grading the homework and to spend more time on meaningful interactions with students and on the creation of relevant activities for class.

The courses thus incorporate the use of technology with students' 21<sup>st</sup> century skills through the use of culturally relevant information in the form of media and authentic documents. The hybrid class could be considered, in a way, a microcosm that mimics students' personal lives and familiarity with digital forms of communication. The time spent in the classroom through face-to-face learning, in addition to online independent learning and collaborations with the instructor and classmates, give students the opportunity to practice their language skills in real contexts. Indeed, by having a constant and continuous access to Spanish resources, and by giving students the opportunity to merge their personal use of

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technology with academic goals, the online tools in turn influence their use of newly-acquired skills in their digital practices. Before examining instructors' insights into the course, we look at how students rated their experiences in the hybrid program.

### **Student Perspectives**

We analyzed students' evaluation of their hybrid courses at the end of the academic year 2014-2015 for the 97 students enrolled in the Beginning I, Beginning II, Intermediate I, and Intermediate II Spanish language. All respondents were undergraduate students enrolled in the course to fulfill their majors' language requirement. Given the scope of this chapter, we focused on items directly related to their evaluation of the hybrid program per se. When asked to evaluate the hybrid course, (i.e., "Overall I rate this hybrid course") students responded on a five-point scale (i.e., 1= very poor, 5= excellent). Students' rating of the Beginning Spanish I (n=25) course was 4.4; rating of the Beginning Spanish II (n=23) class was 4.65, the Intermediate Spanish I (n=24) obtained an average rating of 4.64 and the Intermediate Spanish II (n=25) was 4.5. In addition, students shared their thoughts about the course by answering an open-ended question asking them to discuss their experience in the hybrid class. Their responses expressed the benefits as well as the challenges that they faced in relation to the hybrid environment during the semester.

### **Benefits**

Many of the students reported a positive experience with the course. One student expressed that "the course offers a valuable way to learn further technical skills in the Spanish language." Students agreed that the online activities in particular offered opportunities to interact with course material and resources, thus leading to greater engagement and enhanced opportunities for learning Spanish. For instance, one student explicitly said that "the most valuable element of the course was the online lab activities," while another added that "the online assignments help the student learn the language and culture behind it."

In addition to finding the online lab valuable for learning the language, students also appreciated the online environment for practical reasons. For example, they liked to practice homework online, and found that "the most valuable element was having the homework be the lesson that we were going to learn the next day, so just in case I had questions I could ask in class and not be lost." Students also liked the availability of a variety of organizational and learning tools online. One student shared that "the most valuable elements were the online grammar resources," while one said that "the online lab was very helpful for practice and extra help if you needed," and another one agreed that "I loved the online activities, and that they showed the due date and the grades."

Furthermore, students seemed to value the availability of online resources for in-class classes. One of them expressed that "the online activities helped me the most to prepare me for upcoming class work." Having access to online resources at all times provided them with a repository of available knowledge to use, to either prepare for class or to later test their own knowledge, as expressed by this student who said that "the online work really did test my knowledge on the chapters we were learning." Overall, students communicated that the hybrid system was beneficial to them as it presented them with information in multiple ways and allowed more flexibility in a constantly available learning environment.

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### **Challenges**

Nonetheless, some students also recalled challenging instances in the hybrid course. Some complained about encountering technical issues with the online lab, which impeded their overall learning experience. Generally, most negative experiences with the course were related to preview activities that were assigned as online homework before starting a lesson on a new concept or topic. One student admitted that “the preview activities were sometimes too advanced since we didn’t learn it yet. I didn’t always understand how the book explained things.”

Many students would have preferred to see the material in class before being required to complete online assignments. Indeed, some students stated that “it was hard to do the online activities when we hadn’t learned the material yet. The online activities make more sense after going over the material in class first,” or that “I liked the online assignments but I wish we did them after we already learned the material. It helped having preview materials but I didn’t like being graded on something I hadn’t learned yet.” Furthermore, as one other student described: “it’s pretty hard to do the online homework before we have the material on class. I understand the idea, but because it’s another language, it’s harder.” Students’ experiences in the course are important to consider in light of teachers’ role in hybrid contexts and their views of these pedagogical issues. We address these issues in the following section by looking at instructors’ experiences with teaching the hybrid course.

### **Instructor Perspectives**

We asked instructors to share their views on the benefits and challenges that a hybrid system presented for them. A survey was given as part of an end-of-the-semester evaluation to the four Spanish language instructors who had taught in the hybrid language system. Each instructor was teaching a different Spanish language level at the time of the survey: Beginning I, Beginning II, Intermediate I, or Intermediate II. Instructors were asked to answer a series of open-ended questions about their experiences teaching in the hybrid program. The four instructors were divided into two categories based on their teaching experience in general, and with a hybrid system in particular. The two categories were divided into experienced, and novice. Two instructors fit into the first category, and were teaching the intermediate courses. One of the four instructors had taught Spanish courses for seven years, of which she had used the hybrid system for five years. The second instructor had spent ten years teaching Spanish, and nine years with a hybrid program. The two other teachers were considered novices and taught the beginning level courses. Before teaching in her current program, one instructor had only taught occasionally, and had never used the hybrid system before. The other instructor was in her second year of teaching overall, both years being with the hybrid program.

A line-by-line analysis of their narratives was performed using the qualitative software Nvivo. A content analysis helped generate an initial list of 22 codes, which were merged into four overarching categories: (i) affordances of the hybrid environment, (ii) pedagogical advantages of the hybrid environment, (ii) perceived student experience, and (iv) challenges of the hybrid environment.

When asked about their general impression about the use of a hybrid system in a foreign language course, instructors shared many positive impressions. They felt that the hybrid method helped them reach more students through a variety of learning styles. They also argued that the online language lab was a useful tool for students as well as for themselves because the online components allowed for additional

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preparation time of materials and the creation of supplementary in-class resources. Majority of instructors also indicated their preference for a hybrid course over a traditional course because of its combination of traditional teaching methods and web-based teaching. The instructors explained that the online lab was a complement that reinforced language learning, while the traditional system helped students to interact with their peers and with the instructor. They felt confident that the hybrid method helped them reach many students thanks to the multiple learning options that the system affords.

#### **Affordances of the Hybrid Learning Environment**

Instructors agreed that a hybrid course could combine the advantages of web-based learning with the benefits of a traditional classroom. As one of the novice teachers highlighted:

*As an instructor I feel the hybrid approach provides more opportunities to use class time to engage students with the language in ways that reflect their interests and ability levels. The hybrid approach enhances and enriches the traditional classroom. Through the use of preview activities on the web site students are exposed to vocabulary and new language structures and given the opportunity to practice them in a variety of formats with immediate feedback. This affords me the opportunity to use valuable class time for clarification and enrichment, for student-centered communication activities that elicit the production of the target structures and vocabulary.*

The benefit that instructors saw was that the hybrid system provided opportunities for practicing the language outside of class periods, and that the hybrid tools could serve this function for the days when they did not meet with their students in the classroom. For, instance, the other novice teacher said that:

*As an instructor, the hybrid system provides opportunities for course reinforcement outside of our in-class meetings. For the levels that I normally teach, I am a firm believer that language acquisition can only be achieved through daily interaction and engagement. Our hybrid tools can be used to serve this function for the days that we do not meet as a group.*

Similarly, some of the instructors felt that the hybrid course helped them reach students through practice outside of class so that they could focus on other concepts during class time. A novice instructor described how, for her:

*I prefer the hybrid system. I feel that students actually learn more as we can cover more material and also “practice” and “review” it. The hybrid system provides a framework that promotes independent learning to the degree that is expected of college students and necessary for them to really internalize the material. I feel that I am able to use classroom time to create an interesting, engaging learning experience that maximizes opportunities for interaction and communication in the target language.*

Through the use of activities on the web site, students are exposed to vocabulary and new language structures and are given the opportunity to practice them in a variety of formats with immediate feedback. This enables the instructors to have the opportunity to use valuable class time for clarification and enrichment, and for student-centered communication activities that elicit the production of targeted structures and vocabulary. When asked which method he preferred, this experienced instructor explained that “I

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like both. The hybrid system is just a complement to reinforce the language while the traditional system helps my students to interact with their peers and the instructor.” It is indeed thanks to the affordances of the hybrid system that instructors are able to create a stronger community within the classroom by having the opportunity to focus on students instead of aspects of the material that students can work on independently online. The other experienced instructor neatly summarized the complementarity of the hybrid method saying that “it [the online lab] takes the core of what I do in the classroom and expands it outwards in multiple directions.”

### **Pedagogical Advantages**

Not only did instructors perceive the hybrid system in a positive light in terms of learning environment, but they also expressed that it allowed them to focus on pedagogical matters such as class preparation or teaching resources. In one case, a novice instructor expressed that “generally speaking, I do like the hybrid approach. As an instructor, I feel that it gives me a much more varied methodology than textbooks alone.” One of the experienced teachers also agreed that “I value very much all the materials and teachers’ resources.” The online resources can indeed free time for teachers during class time because students have access to material at any time. As the other novice instructor put it, “I love the fact that they [students] can reinforce my classroom teaching with the online tutorials.”

The supplement that students receive online also allows instructors to adapt their teaching. In one instance, an experienced instructor shared that “I enjoy teaching my courses in this format. It allows for additional preparation time of materials and creation of additional in-class resources.” That is, the online component does not stand alone, but is integrated with teachers’ pedagogical intentions. The online component of the course can therefore be seen as an extension of the instructor’s work, which in turn also helps them to alter their pedagogical approaches. For example, this novice instructor commented on the fact that “I am also able to review the on-line grade book prior to class so I can tailor classroom instruction based on student performance.” Being able to understand students’ performance through the online tools can benefit teachers in the sense that they can modify their lessons based on students’ needs.

### **Perceived Student Experience**

As a matter of fact, one of the main features of the hybrid program is that it allows teachers to observe students’ comprehension and struggles. Surveyed instructors attributed many benefits to the online lab in how they perceived their students’ experience of the course. Availability of class content is a major advantage, as one experienced instructor highlighted: “my students are able to learn, review, and practice the Spanish language anytime and anywhere. They can always login to the online lab and follow their own progress and be part of their own learning.” Such individualization of learning is favorable to learning, according to this experienced instructor who articulated that:

*The hybrid system allows the student additional practice, lab capabilities and other learning resources that they can access at their own pace. It provides them additional time to work on materials, which often leads to additional in-class questions, and further explanations and discussions.*

In a similar vein, the advantages of accessibility to knowledge through technology was alluded by the following novice instructor, who expressed that:

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*It is wonderful to have the textbook come to life in the classroom. I continually tell the students how lucky they are to have the language lab, the textbook, videos, dictionaries, flash cards, cultural films and multiple reading options available all in one place, from their laptop or mobile device!*

In addition, technology in the hybrid language course could also benefit students' different learning styles. For one novice instructor,

*With this array of linguistic options, they [students] can do quick bursts of studying when the opportunity arises, whether that takes the form of a "Flash Cultura" or a practice grammar exercise. For some people those frequent dips into the language work better than long sessions in the library.*

Furthermore, the online lab enables students to feel comfortable with their learning process, something that in the traditional classroom might not be possible. Case in point, this novice teacher pointed out that "another bonus is that students who are embarrassed to speak up in class can listen and do guided practice of their oral skills online on their own." Ultimately, instructors who were surveyed felt that the hybrid system worked well for students because of the availability of its content and the variety in language practices that students could experience to learn the language. One experienced instructor concluded his views of the hybrid system by affirming that "my students do better on their exams because they have practiced a lot by doing the assignments; therefore, they feel comfortable speaking the language during class time." In light of these positive benefits of the hybrid system for teaching and learning, it is also important to mention some of the challenges and limitations that instructors observed.

### **Challenges**

Most of the instructors agreed that the hybrid system, and particularly the activities that were due the day before the material was covered in class, presented some difficulties for students. One of the experienced instructor admitted that "I find many students get frustrated with getting low scores on our current preview activities," while another novice shared that "many students have expressed their total exasperation with the preview activities (several have spoken of feeling 'overwhelmed') and it is clear to me that they would prefer to have homework based on concepts they have just been taught." These statements align with some of the comments that students expressed in their own survey. Instructors opined that for beginner students who are trying to absorb a lot of new material, it can be frustrating to not have the opportunity to consolidate what they have just learned in class and instead have to move on to the next set of concepts before completely assimilating the previous ones. Some instructors have noticed students' frustration, as the material gets more complex over the semester.

Furthermore, a novice instructor conveyed that not all students in her class used the online resources as intended. She shared that:

*Unfortunately, I don't believe many of them take full advantage of the online material, other than doing the basics required of them. For example, when I recommended watching the online tutorials to reinforce at home the grammar concepts we were covering in class, I realized that many of the students did not know that the tutorials were there, and in one class only one student was actually watching them.*

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While this struggle might be specific to this novice instructor's class, it raises the issue of the role of the teacher in instructing students on how to take advantage of the available resources online while continuing to teach during the face-to-face periods. In one case, actually, one novice teacher also reflected on some of the challenges that the system was creating for her. She observed that "overall I really like the hybrid system. However, I will admit that, given the pace of the syllabus and what I have to cover in any given day, I rely mostly on the textbook/blackboard/group activities and handouts than online material in the classroom." Taken together, instructors' perspective on the hybrid program reveal important facets of teaching and learning a foreign language in a hybrid environment.

Overall, instructors perceived many benefits for teaching through the hybrid system. First, the Spanish language can be with them at all times, it is portable and easily accessible. Second, the hybrid system provides a framework that promotes independent learning to a degree that is expected of college students and that is necessary for them to internalize the material on their own. Third, the hybrid system allows students to have additional practice, and to access other learning resources that they can process at their own pace. It also provides them with additional time to work on assessments, which often leads to in-class questions, and further explanations and discussions of the reviewed concepts. Fourth, the online tutorials can reinforce classroom teaching as the animated online tutorial avatar gives a different and sometimes more light-hearted presentation of the material through visual reminders of concepts. Fifth, the automatic grading of homework makes it possible for students to practice and get immediate feedback to support their mastery of the concepts. As one novice instructor put it: "I can't imagine how we could accomplish that in a traditional format in which students submit homework for manual grading and there is a gap in feedback." Sixth and last, students who might not be comfortable speaking up in foreign language classroom can follow guided practices of their oral skills online on their own.

What the surveys conveyed was a sense of usefulness of the hybrid program for teachers to focus on students' learning needs, while highlighting the importance of the role of the teacher in guiding and monitoring students' progress. Lastly, it is important to note that the hybrid system does not minimize teachers' instructional practices. On the contrary, it asks them to continually adapt and find ways to help students learn the language, all the while letting them evolve at their own pace. One experienced instructor concluded that "for me, a combination of 'old school' teaching methods and web-based learning is the optimal approach, and I feel confident the resulting hybrid product helps us reach many more students with their myriad learning styles than one methodology or the other on its own." As a result, the upcoming section is a discussion of the lessons learned from instructors' experiences in the course, supplemented by an administrative perspective on the hybrid program. We explore how these lessons can be used to shape recommendations to guide the preparation of teachers who might teach in hybrid courses. These lessons learned, along with their subsequent recommendations, illustrate the essential role that technology integration plays in students' understanding of language, culture, and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills simultaneously.

### **LESSONS LEARNED: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PREPARING FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATORS**

The observations presented in this chapter are by no means generalizable to the larger population of foreign language teachers and programs. Our sample represented a specific case in a higher education context in the United States that was limited in scope and size. Altogether, the experiences shared by

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instructors and students in the present case can help understand the assets as well as the drawbacks that some instructors may face when teaching hybrid language classes. Given the increasing presence of online and hybrid environments in language learning (Kessler, 2009), understanding these experiences can help current and future teachers or administrators be prepared to teach in an era of technology, whether they will teach solely online, in hybrid contexts, or simply if they wish to integrate technology in traditional language classrooms.

Here, we propose a set of recommendations for educators (i.e., instructors or administrators) who aim to incorporate technology in foreign language teaching. These recommendations emerged from the experiences shared by the instructors and the students in the Spanish hybrid program, in addition to an administrative perspective on national standards and TPACK. In order to obtain an administrative perspective regarding the hybrid courses, the program director was interviewed about his perceptions and experiences with the classes. The program director, a Ph.D. in Spanish linguistics, had taught Spanish language classes for ten years, including four with the specific hybrid program at his institution.

### **1. Define Technological Needs**

Whether an instructor decides to integrate technology in her teaching or an administrator thinks about implementing online or hybrid classes in her institution, it is important to clarify the rationale for using technology in the classroom (Kitade, 2015). When asked about his institution's choice to implement the hybrid course in Spanish, the program director of the courses described in this chapter explained that it had become a necessity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. He explained how:

*Our Spanish language program had to be updated. In language courses, technology has become a complementary tool and resource to real-life learning. Now, more and more language course books come with a convenient and effective online supplement that introduces new and innovative ways to learn Spanish. Unfortunately, in previous traditional language courses, students were not exposed to the language long enough since they only met their instructors face-to-face twice a week for a short amount of time. So our students could not practice, and retain the material they learned in the classroom. With the online lab, our students have the opportunity to continue using Spanish anytime they want without the physical presence of instructors.*

Echoing the research literature on the growing presence of online labs for language learning, the program director understood that in order to stay competitive and to adapt to students' needs, hybrid programs could provide the right balance between traditional face-to-face interactions with an instructor and current technological communication for learning. In a similar fashion, he acknowledged that the course also had to reflect students' use of technology on a daily basis in order to encourage their language acquisition outside the classroom. He further observed that "practicing Spanish in the hybrid course is a transition between learning languages at school in the traditional system and learning in authentic settings during students' personal time. It allows them to see the link between what they do at school and what they can do at home on their own."

McKeeman and Oviedo (2015) concurred that "blending communication within the context of culture via technology paves the path for the development of students' 21<sup>st</sup> century skills" (p. 106). For that purpose, they designed a technology evaluation rubric for cultural competence for teachers to help them assess whether technology can support learning outcomes as well as students' demonstration of cultural

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competences. Their rubric, Figure 2, can be taken as a first step to evaluate whether using technology would benefit students' learning.

The hybrid courses that we described in this chapter, for instance, would fall into the category of *highly supportive* level of classroom technology. That is, technology allows the integration of culture in the course with an authentic cultural perspective involving participants' interaction and timely feedback. Again, language instructors and administrators must keep in mind that technology is neither a replacement for a live teacher nor is the focus of the class, but is instead an extra tool aiming to reinforce language teaching and learning. Instructors should therefore first define their lesson objectives, and then select an appropriate technology to fulfill their pedagogical purposes, as indicated in the aforementioned rubric for technology evaluation.

Figure 2. Technology Evaluation Rubric  
Source: McKeeman and Oviedo (2015)

Technology Evaluation Rubric for Cultural Competence (Products, Practices, & Perspectives) (TERCC-P <sup>21</sup> )				
		Highly supportive	Moderately supportive	Unsupported
Part 1	Products	Technology allows cultural products to be integrated, embedded and/or highlighted. Technology allows participants to interact with and/or annotate the cultural product.	Technology offers participants the ability to observe and/or analyze cultural products.	Cultural products cannot be addressed.
	Practices	Technology allows participants to participate within cultural practices.	Technology offers participants the ability to observe and/or analyze cultural practices.	Cultural practices cannot be addressed.
	Perspectives	Technology allows integration of diverse and authentic cultural perspectives. Participants can interact with these perspectives, and/or contribute to them.	Technology offers participants the ability to observe and/or analyze the different cultural perspectives.	Technology only allows for a singular perspective to be offered. Cultural perspectives are discussed but not offered.
Part 2	Authenticity	Technology encourages/ supports the integration of resources that are culturally authentic (Resources that are made by native speakers, for native speakers)	Potential exists for the integration of culturally authentic resources. Technology is used either by or for native speakers— semi-authentic.	Cultural resources are informative, but not authentic.
	Feedback	Technology offers participants timely feedback. There is ease of use when giving or receiving feedback.	Technology offers limited opportunities to provide or receive feedback.	The opportunity to give or receive feedback is unavailable.
	Language/ Culture Connection	Technology encourages/ supports language learning through cultural competency.	There is limited connection between communicative competence and cultural competence.	Cultural competence is isolated from further language learning.

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### 2. Be Familiar with Standards

Technology and foreign language standards can provide teachers and administrators with an initial set of guidelines for blending technology and language learning. The International Society for Technology in Education (ISTE), the International Technology and Engineering Educators Association (ITEEA), the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) as well as the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) each provides standards in technology for teachers. Additionally, each country possesses its own set of standards to be observed in terms of technology standards as well as foreign language standards.

For instance, in addition to adapting to 21<sup>st</sup> century technology use, the hybrid courses described in this chapter are also aligned with national standards in foreign language learning. When asked how these standards played out in the course design and structure, the program director answered that:

*Every Spanish instructor in our program knows that the overarching goal of our program is to be able to interact in Spanish (Speaking, Listening, Reading, Writing) and to work towards the corresponding level of each course according to the ACTFL guidelines. Furthermore, our courses are designed based on the 5 Cs of ACTFL: Communication, Cultures, Connections, Comparisons and Communities. These standards are therefore present at different levels of instruction: in the overarching structure of the hybrid system, in the textbooks—which are designed based on ACTFL’s standards—and also in the way instructors teach the course on an individual basis.*

We highly encourage current and future instructors to familiarize themselves with standards relevant to their field in order to become informed educators in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. It is also important that instructors look at specific standards before deciding what kind of activities they will be implementing to help students learn the language and explore its culture under all its digital forms. These standards can be used as guidelines, as more and more language courses shift towards a blend of face-to-face and online instruction where many teachers find themselves in unfamiliar territories.

### 3. Provide Technical Guidance

While some teachers have worked for years developing strategies and techniques for the traditional classroom, many may have little experience as either a student or an instructor of online environments. It is also common among teachers to say that they do not have time for learning how to use technology or to implement technology into the classroom, and to ask themselves why they should change and why they should put the energy into something novel (Ertmer et al., 2012). However, we live in a digital era, which means that becoming a skilled language teacher in the 21<sup>st</sup> century involves mastering technology and its corresponding competencies for the sake of students’ skill development. Accordingly, it has become increasingly necessary for teachers to provide similar support to their students. For instance, one of the surveyed instructors in the hybrid program expressed that “I feel that it would be really worthwhile to spend at least part of the first class of the semester going over the online content (maybe including new teachers) so that everyone understands just how much it can offer them—other than just doing the homework.”

Speaking of instructor training, the program director explained how the latter were prepared to teach the hybrid course. He explained that

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*To help language instructors make the transition to hybrid teaching, our Spanish language program offers language instructors a professional development workshop. The purpose of this workshop is to guide the instructors to get ready to teach courses that are partially online and partially face-to-face. They have to learn how to successfully manage online interactions and to incorporate the assessment available on the online lab into the classroom. Our language instructors, however, do not need to learn how to configure the online homework and gradebook, since as the Spanish program coordinator I take care of that. I am also available during the semester to answer their questions, concerns, or issues.*

In their study of hybrid French and Spanish courses, Chenoweth et al. (2013) also found through their qualitative data that students needed guidance from their instructors and that both students and instructors could benefit from continuing technical support.

Fortunately, there are many ways through which instructors can become familiar with the use of technology in a language class. First, both preservice and inservice teachers can take methodology courses or professional development workshops that prepare teachers on how to integrate technology in their curriculum. These courses develop preservice and inservice teachers' skills in using the tools of international communications for today's global instructors, and teachers can learn to use these tools to create material through projects directly related to the target language. Some examples of the technology can include: presentation software, Web-based resource, real-time communication (voice and video conferencing), apps, or authentic media, to name a few. ACTFL has a resourceful page on their website called "Tech Watch," that can help educators keep track of new technology tools for teaching foreign languages.

#### **4. Emphasize Teachers' TPACK**

Integrating technology, with pedagogy and content knowledge emphasizes the role that teachers play in teaching foreign language in an era of digital and hybrid learning environments. Teaching with and through technology is complex and often ill-structured, as Koehler and Mishra (2009) underlined, stating that "understanding approaches to successful technology integration requires educators to develop new ways of comprehending and accommodating this complexity" (p. 62). As the hybrid program director explained in his interview, this implies that "instructors should not spend too much time explaining the material, but rather clarify the more difficult aspects and answer students' questions." As such, the program director agreed that hybrid courses created a shift in instructors' role, which merged their technological, pedagogical, content knowledge in novel ways.

Some of the news ways in which teaching has evolved was expressed by some of the hybrid instructors. One of them explained how, compared to traditional courses, "a whole world of Spanish can be with them 24/7, totally portable and easily accessed." This accessibility, representative of 21<sup>st</sup> century teaching and learning, is one of the examples of adaptive instruction that instructors have to face. Unlike past centuries, teachers do not hold knowledge anymore. Information is available at all times, and teachers need to readjust their role to focus on student learning. However, this online presence of information should be seen as supplemental rather than an impediment to teaching. For example, another instructor described how "I sometimes refer back to one of these cartoon-type online tutorials and replay it in class to refresh their memories on something we did a while ago." The use of technology, in that case, is merged with the teacher's pedagogical knowledge through the content of the course. We strongly encourage educators to view hybrid environments as an opportunity to integrate technology, content,

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and pedagogy in innovative ways, all the while encouraging student learning, as this hybrid instructor points out: “I strongly encourage my students to maximize all the online possibilities (which I would have loved to have had at their age) and push them to test their knowledge.”

## **5. Build Communities**

Building communities of practice is central to teaching and learning foreign languages, and are important elements of connectivity for both instructors and students. Communities of practice are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger et al., 2002). Communities of practice provide a model for connecting people in the spirit of learning, knowledge sharing, and collaboration as well as individual, group, and organizational development. According to Cambridge, Kaplan, and Suter (2005), communities of practice are important because they connect individuals with shared interests; provide a context for communication and a platform to share information and build understanding; support interactivity between people; engage individuals to learn through mentoring; provide people with best practices in their field; and foster collaborations that adapt to changing needs and technologies.

Instructors are responsible for creating a community of practice within their own classroom setting, as well as for connecting with communities of professionals in their field. One way to participate in a community of practice at the professional level is to locate other educators who are interested in incorporating technology in the language classroom or are already using it as a pedagogical tool. While the online lab mentioned in the hybrid Spanish course already provides community discussion forums for instructors to exchange best practices, ideas, syllabi and course materials with other educators around the country, social media such as Facebook, Twitter, blogs, or forums can also be set up to create informal groups for language instructors or to locate existing groups. Instructors may then sign up for said groups and develop individual relationships with others in their community. These communities not only can build a sense of belonging for teachers and students, but they also reinforce the idea that teaching and learning foreign languages helps build intercultural dialogues. As one of the hybrid instructors concluded, “after all, learning a language is for building a community.”

## **CONCLUDING REMARKS**

In this chapter, we looked at various perspectives and experiences in a hybrid Spanish course. Altogether, the viewpoints expressed by instructors and students reflected on the benefits and challenges of said hybrid program. While benefits ranged from the availability of a variety of learning tools and resources online to pedagogical advantages such as practice time and teaching flexibility, some challenges included instructors’ lack of agency over homework material and student assimilation of novel concepts. Combining these experiences with the course administrator’s experience with the program, and with national standards and current research literature in the field of educational technology, we then proceeded to providing recommendations for the preparation of future Spanish educators, particularly those teaching in hybrid or flipped environments.

In closing, it is essential for teachers to keep in mind that technology integration, along with foreign language and technology standards and 21<sup>st</sup> century skills, aim to benefit student learning. Foreign language teachers of this century need to be prepared to facilitate not only student learning but also student

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independent learning. By teaching students autonomy through technology integration in the classroom, teachers will help them with their own learning processes when navigating the Internet on their own (Kessler, 2009). Additionally, becoming familiar with using a foreign language in both a physical and digital environment will help them feel comfortable when communication with native speakers in person or interacting with them in digital spaces. They will be able to “practice” culture and language instantly and use the knowledge that was modeled and acquired in class into the “real” world (Evans & Gunn, 2011; Kessler, 2013). And what the “real” world is currently reflecting is a growing presence of the Spanish language online. Spanish is indeed the third most used language on the Internet as of June 2015, ranked after English and Chinese (Miniwatts, 2015). It is one of the top languages that are used in 2% of the one million most visited webpages online in 2015 (W3Techs, 2015). By fostering a student-centered approach to teaching and learning, foreign language instructors therefore play a crucial role in helping students understand the cultural underpinning of the messages that they might come across online, which in turn will foster cultural understanding and dialogue, one of the main missions of the ACTFL, and of 21<sup>st</sup> century education in general.

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