

Chapter 10

Inspiring Inquiry With the i²Flex Model in the World Language Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces different methods for how to incorporate inquiry-based learning (IBL) practices with i²Flex methodology, both virtually as well as in the traditional world language classroom model using updated and relevant 21st century skills. Using the teacher as a constructivist model, the question formulation technique, design thinking, content and project based learning, learning among others are all explored in depth so the WL teacher can apply theory through practical examples that support a global understanding and context. World languages can be ESL, Spanish, Greek, Nahuatl, or any other WL(s) taught and spoken across cultures.

INTRODUCTION

In the United States, students graduating from secondary school, or even university, seem to be less than proficient in a foreign language at the speaking level after receiving the two-year minimum graduation requirement for a US diploma and remain without adequate 2nd language skills. This inadequacy leaves them at a disadvantage when applying for 21st century jobs that require globalized intercultural awareness and competent communicative skills. In the UK, the situation unfortunately is not much different. A report published by the Higher Education Policy Institute (HEPI) cites an EU-wide survey showing that just 32% of young people in the UK are able to read and write in more than one language, compared with 79% of their peers in France and 90% in Germany. Indeed, as Neil Kenny of the British Academy reminded us when Brexit was quickly approaching, “We need linguists more than ever. Languages are vital for effective trade, diplomacy and soft power, social cohesion, social mobility and educational attainment” (Learning foreign languages should be compulsory, 2020).

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Amid a diversity and background of ideas is a unifying theme we need to embrace today as teachers in a globalized classroom. We are in a battle not only for our students' undivided attention, but also to restore joy and passion for learning through curiosity and creative thought. We have to dare to confuse them, perplex them and evoke real and essential questions. It is through these questions that we as educators then have more information that we can use to tailor robust and informed methods of blended instruction.

As educators teaching a generation of students who have not known any kind of life without google, the internet, or mobile 'smart' phones, we have to adapt our methods to fit their needs, as well as their decreasing attention spans. We also have to realize that our students today are bombarded with much instant access to different kinds of information (and not all of it is accurate). What they need to be learning in classrooms, is how to make sense of the information, to wonder about and reflect on the constant change they are exposed to, to synthesize it so they can form a more accurate and broad sense of the world, and to learn to be flexible with this constant change, and different ways of thinking. After all, our purpose is to prepare them for the future, not remain stuck in traditional methods of the past.

BACKGROUND

21st Century Skills

It is this idea of 'change' that leads many pedagogical experts to conclude the focus in education today should be on competencies (C's) of 21st century skills. As Stauffer (2020) claims, of the twelve skills or 'abilities' that make up the 21st century skills (critical thinking, creativity, collaboration, communication, information literacy, media literacy, technology literacy, flexibility, leadership, productivity and social skills), it is the first four abilities or competencies that have been deemed the most important. Historian Yuval Harari (2018) ascertains this idea of change, and that educational objectives should be focused more on "soft skills" and "general purpose life skills", such as learning how to deal with the constant changes facing us every day. Indeed, how about adding a couple of C's to the list? A C for Cultural understanding and awareness, as well as creating a Culture of listening and responding free of judgment. In order for any learning, discussion, inquiry, collaboration, and effective communication to take place, in any language and between languages, we need to first establish a culture of listening to each other, free of judgement or ridicule, so that students can engage in voicing their own curiosities, and be able to 'learn out loud' in a safe environment. Once this has been established, it in turn leads to a culture of understanding and awareness. Hence, when using a technology tool or inquiry-based method to engage or collaborate with another student, virtually or not, being aware of differences while understanding them at the same time is necessary to then effectively collaborate and communicate (C#3 and #4) leading to critical thinking and inquiry.

Therefore, a specified, adapted and extended list of the main 21st century competencies and skills for the inquiry based world language classroom, as a bottom-up development would look like:

1. Culture of listening, and responding free of judgment
2. Culture of understanding, global awareness and reflection
3. Culture of inquiry: Curiosity to learn more, wonder
4. Collaboration in the target language (upper levels), in school language (lower levels)
5. Communication: Use of language for real world purposes and connections

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