

Communities as Textbooks:

Tasks to foster language learning through authentic community interactions

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- ❖ Brandeis University, English Language Programs
- ❖ MATSOL Conference, May 31, 2019
- ❖ PPT link: <https://tinyurl.com/y3c75zgc>

The context....

My background

In all contexts, most students were

- ❖ Thirsty for speaking practice
- ❖ Scared of speaking practice



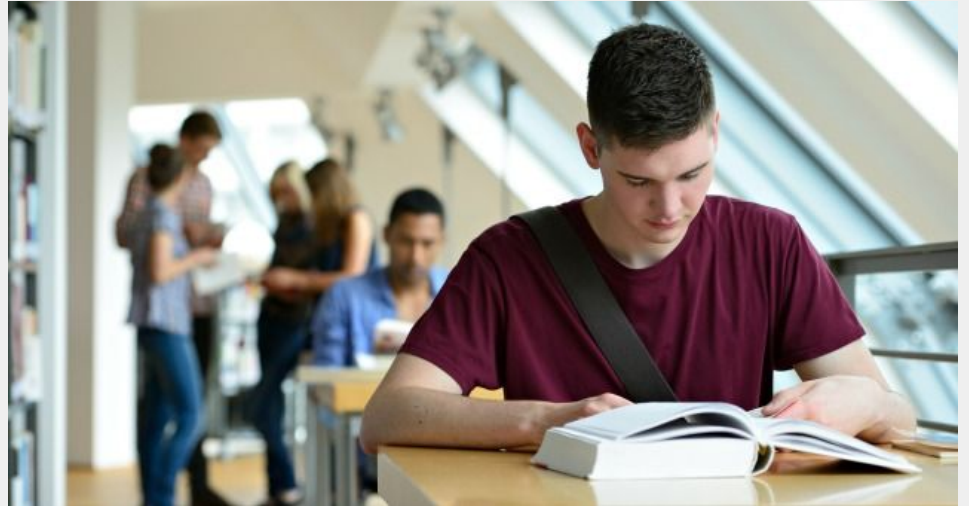
The context....

Story #1: Ordering empanadas in Buenos Aires



The context....

Story #2: Textbook recommendations



The question:

- How I can facilitate my students learning from the environment outside of our language classroom?
- Specifically, how can I encourage them to practice listening and speaking in real life situations?



What had I tried?

- signs & slogans
- guest speakers
- field trips
- interviews
- idiom journal

→ All great, but I was searching for:

- “Gently forced” speaking and listening engagement
- Manageable but challenging real life situations
- Combining information learning with observations about language & use

GOALS/BENEFITS:



**Confidence &
lowering of
affective filter**



**Pragmatics &
culture**



**“Real” & varied
English exposure**



Authenticity



**Sense of
belonging,
community**



**Skill/tool for
future learning**

CHALLENGES



**Safety and
rude/racist people**



Lack of control



**Community and
program
limitations**



Shyness



Assessment



**Time & scope
limitations**



KEYS

PRE

- Read/listen to/discuss background information, vocabulary
- Read/listen to/discuss what to expect, how-to's, tips
- Perform role plays
- Predict the unpredictable - set students up for success



KEYS

DURING

- Create authentic tasks that will lead to $i+1$ situations
- Include “detective” tasks for language and/or culture observations
- Students first record observations, then reflect
- Take photo(s) and other next step materials



KEYS

POST

- Write, record, or speak about experience
- Create something (a letter, an advice column, public art, a vocabulary lesson for classmates, a dialogue recreation)
- Make a goal for next time

Activity #1: Exploring the Waltham Community

Setup:

- “Practicum,” students in groups accompanied by trained student leader
- High intermediate/advanced, newly arrived freshmen

The task:

- Originally an interview, changed to interactive and observational task
- Pre-task: small talk, idioms, question formations, restaurant language
- Worksheet with space for observations and space for reflections
- Focus on basics: train, restaurant, other businesses, small talk

What went wrong the first time:

- *Too many students, not enough Walthamites*
- *Massholes*
- *Interview format focused students on content not language*
- *Writing down responses made the interaction less genuine*

Ideas for the future:

- Pretty happy with the current iteration

Activity #1: Exploring the Waltham Community

Week 1 Practicum Notes & Observations

	Notes: observations, what happened <i>(Jot down notes during the practicum so you don't forget)</i>	Reflection: interpretations, analyses, feelings <i>(Complete after the practicum and bring to class Friday. Use reverse side if needed.)</i>
1. What topics did you chat about with your classmates and practicum leader? Were these similar to the small talk topics that we went over in class? How did it feel to chat in English? What else did you notice about the conversation(s)?		
2. What types of businesses and shops did you notice around Waltham? What else did you notice about the town? How do your observations compare with your idea of Waltham before you arrived?		
3. Which restaurant did you visit? What did you notice about the menu? What did you order? How did you like it?		
4. Ask at least one stranger at least one authentic question , either in a shop or out and about the town. <i>(Some ideas: where to find an item in a shop, directions somewhere, a casual small talk conversation question, a question about the menu or the restaurant, a recommendation).</i> What question did you ask? How did you respond? Did the conversation continue? How was the interaction?		
5. What was one unexpected, unfamiliar, or interesting phrase you heard from one or more of the following people: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The train conductor • A server, cashier, or other employee in a shop/restaurant • A customer you observed • Your practicum leader 		

Activity #1: Exploring the Waltham Community

Student observations and reflections

Activity #2: Drug Store Scavenger Hunt

Setup:

- Small class field trip or individual homework
- Recently arrived adult immigrants of various backgrounds

The task:

- Pre-task: vocabulary, dialogue reading text, role play
- Originally a scavenger hunt, added some tasks to practice speaking
- Worksheet to record answers

What went wrong the first time:

- *Students didn't ask an employee if they couldn't find something!*

Ideas for the future:

- Can be adapted for so many lessons! Anywhere that has customer service employees - pharmacists, produce department, shoe salesmen, librarians, baristas, etc. - forced to be nice to our students
- Even higher level students can benefit

Activity #2: Drug Store Scavenger Hunt

Drug Store Scavenger Hunt

A. Answer the questions. It's okay to ask an employee for information or for help finding things.

1. What are the directions for the medicine "Pepto-Bismol"?
2. What is something on sale in aisle 5?
3. What is the cheapest kind of deodorant?
4. How much does it cost to print one 4"x6" color photo?
5. What are two types of candy that begin with the letter "s"?
6. What are three different brands of cold or flu medicine?

B. Choose two things from the list below whose location in the store you do not know. Ask an employee where you can find each one. Listen carefully to their response and write down what they say.

prescription pick-up	ibuprofen	cough drops	sunscreen		
light bulbs	paper towels	nail clippers	band aids	the bathroom	
socks	diapers	hand soap	dish soap	coffee	batteries

Write down the location and what the employee said to you:

1. Aisle name & number : _____
Other helpful directions or friendly small talk: _____

2. Aisle name & number : _____
Other helpful directions or friendly small talk: _____

Activity #3: Interview questions/polls

The setup:

- On-campus, students complete individually and outside of class
- Freshmen, have been in the US for several months now, familiar with me and my crazy assignments

The task:

- Pre-task: question formation, asking follow-up questions, how to approach people and “pre-ask”
- Simple: pet peeve; more complex: campus or political issue
- Observation, reflection, and SELFIE! ¹⁷

What went wrong:

- *One student shy and unwilling to try*
- *One student only chose other L1 speakers to interview and translated into English*

Ideas for next time:

- Include a language observation component
- Students create a complementary poll/interview to pair with a presentation
- Post-task ideas - PSA, debate, campus art or info flyer

Activity #3: Interview questions/polls

Interview a minimum of 3 people around campus in English (they should be people you don't already know) using the following questions about school, plus one of your own. Create a visual aid including a selfie with each interviewee, an interesting quote from each interviewee, and a link to a ~4-5 minute reflective recording. (Questions you could address in your reflection: Was it difficult to approach strangers? How did people react? Note any answers that were surprising, interesting, funny, difficult to understand, confusing, exactly what you expected, etc. Did anyone get fired-up talking about their pet peeve? Were there any connections between your interviewees' responses and aspects of communication we have discussed in class? What were similarities/differences between answers? Do not just read from your notes or summarize your interviews; this is your time for a deeper reflection).

1. How do you feel about group work versus individual work? What is your biggest pet peeve when working with a group?
2. Should college tuition be free? Why or why not?
3. In your opinion, how safe or unsafe are schools in the US? How safe do you feel at Brandeis? What ways do you think campuses can be made safer?
4. What have you heard about food insecurity and hunger among college students? Did you know that there is a food pantry here at Brandeis (in the Graduate Student Center in Kutz)?
5. Your own question related to school, student life, or academics: _____

Activity #3: Interview questions/polls

Haoyang's Campus Survey



Franklin from Boston
"Campus feels pretty safe but we still need to make some improvements."



Gabriel from Chicago
"college should not be free because it would lower quality of an academic degree."



Jared from California:
"I prefer individual work because there are too many disagreements in group work."

Activity #4: Attend an event

The setup:

- On-campus, students complete individually and outside of class
- Freshmen, have been in the US for several months now, familiar with me and my crazy assignments

The task:

- Pre-task: where to find out about events on campus; how to start (and escape from) small talk
- Observation notes, reflection recording

What went wrong:

- *Some students attended events not conducive to social interactions (e.g. a performance)*
- *One student made up answers*

Ideas for next time:

- Pretty happy with the current iteration

Activity #4: Attend an event

Attend a social event, club meeting, special event, etc. on campus for a minimum of thirty minutes. Check out the campus events calendar (<http://www.brandeis.edu/events/>), flyers on campus, and talk to your instructor if you have trouble or questions choosing an event. If you attend with another Gateway student make sure you interact with non-Gateway students and speak in English for the entire time. Depending on the type of event you attend, you may need to take the initiative to meet others, engage in small talk, and strike up a conversation. Carefully observe and record the following:

1. your interactions with others (who you interacted with, what you talked about)
2. the interactions you observe between other students and other people
3. at least one new word, phrase, slang or idiom you heard (if you can't figure out what it means that's okay, remember and record the word and ask someone or look it up later)
4. the body language you observe

You will turn in the following two files to Latte:

- A document with details on the event you attended your notes and observations on this event, written immediately afterwards.
- A short audio recording of yourself reflecting on your experience with this interaction. Do not read from your written notes - instead expand on your subjective experience; your impressions, feelings, and reflections during this process. You should also refer to and make a connection to our first TED talk: 10 Ways to Have a Better Conversation. Aim for a recording that is 3-4 minutes long

Activity #4: Attend an event

Student observations and reflections

Thanks!

Any questions?

You can contact me at:
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Credits

Special thanks to all the people who made and released these awesome resources for free:

- Presentation template by [SlidesCarnival](#)
- Photographs by [Unsplash](#)