Telecollaborative conversations have great teaching and learning possibilities with real-world applications for our students, provided they are grounded in pedagogically sound and meaningful activities. TalkAbroad conversations combined with Integrated Learning Practices (ILP) afford students the opportunity to practice the target language and to process their learning of that language. Such a meaningful language learning experience, or “Signature Project,” is supported by assigned conversation topics, free and open conversations of interest, pre- and post-conversation activities, analysis, self-assessment, and reflection that promotes students’ deeper understanding of their language learning process. To that end, I incorporate telecollaborative conversations using TalkAbroad with an emphasis on pre- and post-task reflection activities using e-Portfolio-Based Pedagogy (ePBP). Surveys of students’ perceptions of language learning using TalkAbroad and e-portfolios indicate a positive impact on students’ learning outcomes that include: communicative competence, intercultural competence, social courtesies, confidence, motivation to continue language learning, consideration for study abroad opportunities, digital literacies, autonomy, and student-centered learning.

TalkAbroad (talkabroad.com)
The TalkAbroad Platform for telecollaborative conversations provides students with the unique opportunity to converse with native speakers from around the world in the target language on topics of interest. The user-friendly platform is suitable for postsecondary and secondary institutions wishing to incorporate individual, small group, or entire class conversations. All TalkAbroad conversation partners are trained and supervised with high-quality standards to ensure a positive and productive experience for students. The student platform provides easy access to detailed bios, scheduling calendars and times, instruction manuals, and a “Chat Box” for troubleshooting and support. Students create an account, register for their class with the section name and code provided by their instructor, and select partners based on bios and countries of interest. A convenient text message reminds students of their upcoming TalkAbroad conversation. Each 30-minute conversation practice takes place directly on the TalkAbroad website where students’ real-time conversations are recorded and available for instructor and student review. My student assessment process is based on the Level 1 Speaking Tasks Analytic Rubric, including: task completion, comprehensibility, fluency, pronunciation, vocabulary, and language control (see 2013 Foreign Language Program of Studies, Fairfax County Public Schools).

The professor platform allows faculty to post purposeful assignments and instructions in advance for students and their partners. Assignments are archived for future use. Private instructions directed solely to the conversation partner is a helpful feature that ensures appropriate language-level use, reinforces a target-language-only atmosphere, and provides background on our institution and specific class. A TalkAbroad conversation rather than an “exchange” means that my students no longer share time conversing in English. Conversations focus on any number of topics, for example: our Business French course uses TalkAbroad for mock interviews; and beginning language students practice greetings, likes/dislikes, studies, family, and leisure activities using basic structures and vocabulary acquired in class for real-world applications.

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E-Portfolio-Based Pedagogy

Implementing ePBP into language courses as an ILP transforms the teaching experience and engages students to become self-directed learners from the very process of collecting, selecting, and reflecting upon their “TalkAbroad Artifacts” (recordings, impressions, reflections, cultural understandings, self-assessments, and NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements) as they synthesize and demonstrate their knowledge of the target language and cultures. Such an integrative learning approach helps students showcase their semester-long efforts from multiple contexts. Students are often at a loss to make sense of their learning processes and to connect their classroom experiences to broad life goals. Understanding their own language learning process will engage students to develop competencies, insights, and experiences that can be applied to lifelong learning beyond the classroom. The benefits of ILP, meaningful telecollaborative conversations, and ePBP are considerable. Consequently, students become better prepared as global citizens—able to connect their interests and abilities to their personal goals.

As part of the “Signature Project,” my students create an e-Portfolio using Google Drive or WordPress in order to collect, select, and reflect on their TalkAbroad “Artifacts.” This provides an opportunity for students to process their learning of the target language and cultures. Students outline their strengths and weaknesses, areas of improvement, cultural understandings, awareness of cultural norms and practices, recognition of grammatical forms, language variety, motivation to learn the target language, and intention to improve with a plan of action.

d) NCSSFL-ACTFL Can-Do Statements

for interpersonal communication and interpretive listening from Novice Low to Advanced Low depending on the level of the course. Reflecting on what they “can do,” students become more engaged in their own language learning process and journey. The self-assessment tool enables students to more deeply reflect on their progress throughout the semester, becoming more autonomous and accountable for their learning and, in the end, better language practitioners. Students determine their own goals as lifelong language learners.

e) Final Summative Reflection

For this end-of-semester activity, students reflect back on their collection of TalkAbroad “Artifacts” and their work within the course as they relate to their learning outcomes.

I now experience the most rewarding student success stories using TalkAbroad and e-Portfolio-Based Pedagogy as an Integrative Learning Practice that moves students toward communicative competence and an appreciation for Francophone cultures. The “Signature Project” elevates classroom activities to real-world relevance for our students and enhances the quality of students’ reflective learning and engagement with a comprehensive e-Portfolio that showcases their achievements over the semester.

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Duolingo Bots

Say hello to new Duolingo Bots—the latest way to practice language from the popular app Duolingo. Virtual language tutors, such as Chef Roberto, Renée the Driver, or Officer Ada, are powered by artificial intelligence and react to thousands of possible answers. Best of all, the more you practice, the smarter they get. Currently available for Duolingo’s French, German, and Spanish courses—with other languages coming soon. Download Duolingo for iPhone at tinyurl.com/duolingo-bots.

TripLingo

Helping international travelers stay safe, productive, and savvy during trips abroad, this app offers a Culture Guide, Safety and Travel Tools, and a built-in WiFi Dialer allowing the user to make international calls when connecting by WiFi. Features include a voice translator, phrasebook, tip calculator, and more. Of particular interest are the learning tools, including audio lessons, interactive flashcards, and an intelligent quiz mode, which make it easy for travelers to spend downtime learning key phrases. Download TripLingo from the iTunes App Store (tinyurl.com/itunes-triplingo) or Google Play (tinyurl.com/google-triplingo).
LISTEN UP!
Language-Related Podcasts

30 Minute Italian
player.fm/series/30-minute-italian
Boost your confidence in speaking Italian in a half-hour or less with the 30 Minute Italian Podcast. They cover expressions and culture through personal travel stories and detailed examples.

Radio Ambulante
radioambulante.org/en
Radio Ambulante is a Spanish-language podcast, distributed by National Public Radio, that tells Latin American stories from anywhere Spanish is spoken, including the United States. They work with a talented community of storytellers and radio producers from different corners of the continent, while taking advantage of technology to produce, distribute, and exchange stories.

WEBSITES to Watch

Authentic Listening with TuneIn Radio
tunein.com
Listen to radio stations from around the world with TuneIn Radio. TuneIn enables people to discover, follow, and listen to sports, news, music, and talk radio in multiple languages, including many less commonly taught languages. TuneIn provides listeners access to over 100,000 real radio stations and more than four million podcasts streaming from every continent. Explore it by region and find a variety of listening options in virtually every language taught.

Meredith’s ASL YouTube Channel
tinyurl.com/meredith-asl
Videos are offered for new learners and for students to review ASL vocabulary and grammar, to complement (not substitute for) class lessons, including vocabulary, grammar, culture, and history. The signer in these videos (Meredith) is a certified instructor of ASL with an MA in Teaching ASL as a Foreign Language and BA in Linguistics with a focus on sign languages.

UtellStory
www.utellstory.com
Check out this multimedia storytelling and sharing community that allows people from different ages and backgrounds to easily tell stories and share topics including photos, videos, voice recordings, and music.

Goethe-Institut Teaching Resources
www.goethe.de/de/spr/unt/kum.html
The Goethe-Institut is the world’s leading provider of German teacher training and advisors for curricula and teaching materials for hands-on learning. They offer an extensive program of teacher training, including distance learning and their site includes materials for teachers to use in the classroom.

Resource for Wordless Videos
tinyurl.com/wordless-videos
Animated videos with no words can be useful for lessons, such as practicing description, vocabulary practice, or inspiring conversation in any language at any level.

Bonjour de France—Try Karaoke
www.bonjourdefrance.com
The website Bonjour de France is a free educational “cyber-magazine,” offering a number of different activities for learning and practicing French, including Karaoke. Simply click on “KARAOKÉ FLE” to try out this tool, which mixes watching a music video and filling out a cloze form of the lyrics.

Majid for Arabic Learning
majid.ae/magazines
The Emirati website Majid.ae hosts electronic editions of Majid magazines and the Majid cartoon TV series. The Majid series is aimed at and features Arab children characters, and is produced in Modern Standard Arabic. Access issues of the magazine, as well as four TV series (majid.ae/video), all shared openly.

These and other web resources can be accessed through the Publications area on the ACTFL website at www.actfl.org/publications/all/the-language-educator/tech-watch