As the pandemic continues to disrupt our daily lesson plans and assessment schedules, technology offers many ways to stay connected to the curriculum and to the cultures that inspire it. With students transitioning in and out of quarantine and schools announcing sporadic or indefinite periods of remote instruction, it’s important that all learners maintain connections with their classmates, their instructors, and with the target culture.

Instead of having to design a virtual version of a traditional assessment, or reschedule a student presentation due an unforeseen absence, technology-based assignments ensure that students have access to class content regardless of where they are or how the class is delivered. There are multiple platforms that offer unique and meaningful ways to stay engaged in the target language in the interpretive, interpersonal, and presentation modes.

Connecting Classrooms

No matter how much time we spend getting to know our students and checking in with them throughout the year, we can’t fully know what it’s been like to be a student during the pandemic. Some learners may even have felt so isolated during the pandemic that they fail to realize that many other students have had similar experiences. Thankfully, technology can facilitate meaningful interactions between your students and scholars of a similar age in other parts of the world.

Connecting Classrooms, a project of the educational tour company Prometour, establishes a virtual exchange that connects students with peers at a school in Spain or France through a series of short video projects. After filling out and submitting a brief online form, Forum Language Experience (a Prometour brand) reaches out and pairs you with a classroom teacher abroad. This allows you to get to know your target language counterpart and decide which videos students will make in the target language and which ones they’ll do in their L1. Prompts are already written in both English and the target language and are housed on an online platform accessible to both you and your students. Students are provided with opportunities to make personal introductions, share music tastes, discuss their school schedules, teach each other idiomatic expressions, and give tours of their hometowns. If you want to grade students’ work, a rubric is available for each assignment.

All participating students are required to submit a media release form signed by a parent or guardian. If a student does not receive permission to appear in a video, they can still participate in the assignment by helping to generate ideas, script, film, and/or by editing.

Student exchanges don’t have to be limited to just France and Spain, however. To make connections with other countries and cultures, use Flipgrid. You may already have used this platform for interpersonal or presentational speaking tasks, but the GridPals feature offers an easy way for you to find fellow teachers around the world who are interested in collaborating.

When our students can connect with other students and we can connect with fellow educators, we develop global perspectives and remember that we are all in this together.

TalkAbroad

If you want students to have more of a one-on-one experience with L1 speakers than what Connecting Classrooms offers, TalkAbroad is an excellent option. On this platform, students can sign up for 15 or 30 minute conversations (you decide) with trained and vetted speakers of Spanish, French, German, Italian, Portuguese, Arabic, or Japanese. Students read about available partners’ backgrounds and hobbies to find someone with whom they have something in common. It can be almost as much fun for students to scroll through all the profiles and select an interlocutor as it is to actually have the conversation.
Because you write the conversation prompts beforehand, you can ensure that students discuss a topic that’s directly connected to what they’re doing in class. Students can chat with the same person every time or pick a new partner for each conversation, depending on how many you’ve purchased for the semester or school year.

If cost is an issue, TalkAbroad has a biannual curriculum development grant program. Submit a document in July or November describing how you would use the platform in your classroom and you could receive a grant for free conversations. For inspiration, check out some of the many free resources available on the TalkAbroad website: best practices, shared curriculum, research papers, and student testimonials are just some of the documents posted for educators.

Since so many of our interactions and travel plans have been limited or canceled over the past two years, it’s great to have a program that connects our students directly to people from other cultures.

**EDU NOVELA**

**EduNovela**

Have students in your Spanish program confessed to having binged shows like *La casa de papel* or *Élite*? Integrating a TV series into the curriculum might be just the way to connect them to Hispanic culture. If your last foray into Spanish-speaking television was *Destinos*, rest assured there are more contemporary options thanks to EduNovela.

Novice viewers can enjoy the Telemundo soap opera, *Silvana sin lana*, about a wealthy socialite who suddenly finds herself penniless and falling for her working class neighbor. For intermediate learners, the historical miniseries *El tiempo entre costuras* tells the story of a young seamstress who finds herself enmeshed in espionage and romance during the Spanish Civil War. Advanced students can check into *Gran Hotel*, the addictive period drama in which the dashing young Julio Espinosa works undercover at the titular hotel while searching for his missing sister and wooing the hotel’s beautiful heiress, Alicia Alarcón.

Each show is divided into approximately 40 episodes, each of which is segmented into short clips to enhance comprehension. The episodes include subtitles in the target language and glossed vocabulary. Students can take quick multiple choice quizzes to check their understanding, and you can see their scores in an online gradebook.

Each show also has numerous worksheets, games, writing prompts, flash cards, and other resources that you can print and use immediately. A variety of level-appropriate grammar topics are presented using specific examples from each show so that students see the language function in context and practice each structure while also reviewing key information from certain episodes.

All three shows also have a full-length finale that you could show in class or in an auditorium as a fun way to culminate your unit of study. Your students will be amazed at how much they learn just by watching TV.
One of the more humbling challenges of teaching during the pandemic has been to create a sense of classroom community while being unable to gather in person. Routines that foster belonging, spread positivity, and reduce isolation have never been more important, and GiveThx does just this.

The beauty of the platform is its simplicity. Students can send and receive short thank you notes to each other and to you, and they can write them in any language. When you send a message, you must select a hashtag such as compassion, kindness, or integrity, that matches the quality for which you’re thanking someone. You might even ask students to practice a particular language structure in their message.

Students can click a heart icon next to any messages they receive to indicate that they saw and appreciated the note.

You can also assign a brief check-in or reflection prompt for students to complete in English or in the target language. Several ready-made templates are available to give you some ideas for using these short writing tasks at the beginning of class, as an exit ticket, or as an isolated gratitude activity prior to a school break or after a major project, for example.

Amid the lockdowns and quarantines of the past two years, we’ve all craved meaningful connections with one another and to the world around us. In our classrooms, technology keeps us connected to our students and helps them stay connected to their courses, which reduces anxiety about falling behind or not knowing what’s going on when they return to class.

However you choose to use these platforms in your classes, it’s clear that we’ll emerge from the pandemic even more globally interconnected than before it.