



# Expand Your Classroom Through Virtual Travel

## Teaching Beyond the Podium Podcast

### Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Hello, my name is Alexandra Bitton-Bailey and welcome to the teaching beyond the podium podcast series. This podcast is hosted by the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Florida. And our guests share their best tips, strategies, innovations and stories about teaching.

### Dr. Crystal Marull

I am Crystal Marull. I am the coordinator for the online Spanish program here at the University of Florida. Previously, I finished my doctorate at Rutgers University where I studied the intersection of cognition and bilingualism second language acquisition in the department of Spanish and Portuguese. Prior to the PhD I had spent extensive time abroad in Madrid Spain working with different study abroad programs. So that's one of the factors I think has most influenced how I approach teaching language in any environment, be it face to face, hybrid, or online. It also shapes how I deal with study abroad programs. I do believe there's a trend or study abroad programs are evolving. And they're going much more from that touristy type of framework to something that's much more authentic and also reciprocal, so that it's not just a student going into a country and just taking advantage of all these wonderful fun opportunities, but they have an opportunity maybe to give something in exchange.

### Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Crystal was your classic student who take any years of classes in Spanish, and she thought she would be a proficient and capable Spanish speaker until she took a study abroad trip and her assumptions flew out the window.

### Dr. Crystal Marull

Well, first of all, from a personal experience, I had been the traditional language learner I started in high school, continued in college, and I had probably done I don't know by that point time five

semesters of college level Spanish plus five years in high school, which would should put me at the advanced low or intermediate high proficiency level. And then I went and studied abroad and it was a real wake up call. Because I found that even though I had the ability to put together grammatically correct sentences to express myself, I was not quick at doing it at all. And I was too anxious to do it. And I would miss my opportunity to communicate with people because I didn't want to say it unless I could say it correctly, because I knew I could.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

This experience sparked in her desire to better understand how students learn languages.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

So I would find myself in this conundrum where I'm in all these amazing opportunities to communicate with native speakers, I have the skills, but I hadn't developed the practical ability to use those skills in real time. And it really started awakening a lot of questions that I had myself about, what is the language learning process really like? Like, why is being able to communicate in real time so much different than what you're doing in a classroom type environment, like Why can I not apply these skills appropriately to this new context?

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

After years of observations and study, Crystal realized it all boiled down to practice.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

Then, those personal questions I had began to evolve a little bit more when I worked with students were coming in abroad. And I would look at the different interactions the students would have with native speakers in the environment and see who ended up actually showing a lot of linguistic growth and who didn't. Typically, it was a student who could get over that anxiety of being incorrect and just throw themselves out there. Even if it was incorrect grammar, not the correct word. They were just willing to let something come out of their mouth and navigate communication. They're the ones who showed a lot more growth than those who were holding back not taking those opportunities. And then there was those also those students who would just cling to the American bubble, they would go to the Irish bars at night, they would stick around with the American friends. And even though they had contact with natives, they didn't really develop any kind of relationships with the natives, versus somebody who would kind of branch out on their own look for opportunities to interact with them local people from that environment in any context. join a group of some type or just do something a little different than

what their peers We're doing that let them be involved in authentic situations. So of course observing this, both in my own experience and the experience with my students raised a lot of questions about language acquisition and motivated my decision to pursue a PhD investigating the cognitive underpinnings of language learning. But the one variable that always comes up over and over again is, however much time you have practicing highly correlates with your productive abilities. So the more you produce, the better you are at producing. So the question is in the language classroom, how much are students really producing? How, how much are they really having an experience an authentic experience with this language to communicate meaning, and that's what's really shaped how I've approached language because it's pivotal, that students are interacting with real human beings to communicate a message and by doing that, along the way, their language skills will improve. So it's not about studying the nuts and bolts mechanics of a language and never practicing it. It's more practicing it And along the way, figuring out the nuts and bolts.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

So now Crystal seeks to transform her students into competent communicators in Spanish. This can be very challenging in a face to face classroom with so few competent Spanish speakers. But in the online class, it opens up a ton of new opportunities.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

When I go into a traditional classroom, the challenges there's normally me the one proficient Spanish speaker, and 25 not proficient Spanish speakers, and how do you engage them with authentic content and real meaningful communicative experiences so that they can build those skills that when they have the opportunity to be in a language community of Spanish in this case, that they're productive. And it's a challenge in the classroom, I find it to be a real challenge. So of course, you can bring in authentic materials, you can look for supplementary activities, you can send them out into the local community to do to interact with a Latino population. You look for opportunities that are experiential in nature to bolster skills. But now in the online environment, I am just thrilled to have the opportunity because I'm able to tear down that barrier of it being one, me and the students can find a certain space and time, you take away the element of the space and time. And you can do a lot of really creative things so that the students have more opportunity to use her language productively. And to develop relationships with native speakers.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Crystal sees online teaching in a whole new light as a brand new creative Canvas for language learning. And that is how learning magic happens.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

A lot of people see online as just being very overwhelming and a challenge. And I think the reason for that fear of online is they're thinking how can I translate what I'm doing in the classroom, into this online realm. And if the struggle is to take what you're doing in the classroom and putting it online, it's not going to work because what you designed for the classroom was designed with the parameters of the classroom in mind, even if you weren't consciously thinking about that. You've been prepared all your life to teach them This kind of context. So it's just what comes you automatically. This is how things are done. And now I have to put that online. And it seems like it doesn't fit. It's not working. It's not successful. People aren't engaged. But I truly believe that if you approach online as simply another medium to reach your goals, and you say, what are my goals, I want my students interact with the language, I want them to have real experiential opportunities to communicate in this language, with the target language and with native speakers of this language. So forget what I do in the classroom for a minute, the actual techniques of the classroom, right? My larger goal is this and now this is a space in which I'm going to do it. And instead of it being limiting, I find it to be extremely gratifying because of the creativity that you can involve into this online space.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

One of the challenges for online learning is how to schedule active learning experiences around students schedules.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

Well, number one is look for opportunities that can accommodate all your students and give them opportunities with native speakers. So what does that look like? It can look like many things you could have them set up to go out in their own local communities, do some sort of activity and come back and report on what they've done and how they've done it. And it's almost like setting up individual projects for each one, but with common goals so that it can be assessed from the instructors point of view.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Crystal had some ideas and inspiration for her online class and found a resource that would help her make it happen.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

What I've been able to do is I've been very fortunate to find a tele collaborative company. Now there's quite a few companies out there that offer this Some are free, some are for a certain fee, and they have trained language coaches. So these are native speakers that are currently living in Latin America, in Guatemala, Ecuador, Argentina, and in Spain. They're young professionals, typically in their 20s or 30s. And they've been trained to have conversations with non native Spanish speakers. So native English speakers learning Spanish, and they do this in small groups of three to four students at a time with an accent. Which coach on a weekly basis, they have a half hour conversation, I'm able to send them an agenda so they know what topics of conversation should be covered. And they are indeed professionals, they have all these resources that they use to be able to facilitate the conversation with somebody who doesn't necessarily have the linguistic skills to have a deep conversation they use from green screens behind them where they can project different images. So if they're talking about a unit of food, they can have different types of food that are local to their hometown behind them, and they can point to them and say, This is what I had for breakfast, and it's comprised of eggs and bananas or whatnot. And they use other techniques like sharing their screen, so they can do virtual tours. They'll do Google Earth, and they will drag the little guy down into their hometown, and then they can show the the student all around their hometown and explain here's the library or here's the main plaza. This is my favorite restaurant, and then they can give control to the student as well as they Now show me your hometown So these coaches that I have have really been very creative and how they're able to facilitate a conversation with somebody who has very limited skills, and yet engaged the student into sharing their life with them. So that's one way that I have the element of this relationship based type of communicative experiential learning activity with native coaches. But it gives me such a wealth of material to work with for other types of activities.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Crystal also knows the value of connection to people and learning. She helps students engage with all the course contents and resources.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

Knowing that my students have worked with these coaches and are working with these coaches on a weekly basis. I get to view the recordings of what they've done with their coach. They have certain questions of information they have to get out of each session. So it's sort of like a task based type of activity, where perhaps in a certain session that find out talking about food, where's your coach's favorite restaurant? What's it called? What did she have for lunch today? What is she going to have for dinner? What's the typical meal for the holidays in her town? simple questions, but questions they couldn't get unless they interacted with their coach and ask

the questions. And then I do a follow up type of questionnaire to the students of those questions to hold them accountable for their participation with the coach.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

The students really love the ability to connect with other students, with the instructors and the coaches. All of the pieces of the courses are connected.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

When I watch these videos of the students, the students after the first couple sessions where they're very nervous and anxious and anxiety is just through the roof, they start to kind of get comfortable with it. And there's a transformation that occurs. It's no longer a course assignment. It's now like, Oh, I get to have my morning coffee with Medea. And now they're getting to sit down vixa what are you doing today muddy and muddy? Ask them what they're doing. And they begin to start exchanging things about their lives on a much more personal level to like, Oh yeah, well, my boyfriend this and like, Oh, yeah, well My son this, and they'll talk about their family members and their professions and the jobs. And it's all around the the topics of the textbook or the unit that we're focusing on. But from a very personal perspective, which is just, it's really great to see them develop this relationship. And then that gives me material to incorporate other types of activities that have my students doing, because I now know they care and they're engaged. They want to know more about Maria in her hometown of gwanda, Ecuador, or they want to know about the water in medida, Spain, and that the throat Romano and they have concepts. They're like, who who sings at that? tathra Romano. And then if I do an activity on that, they care. They know what I'm talking about. It's not it's not a static culture section at the end of the chapter in the textbook.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

One of the benefits of creating experiences that help students to connect with others is watching them gain a variety of perspectives.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

I think it really opens their eyes up to perspectives that are different from their own, and that they can never really appreciation for cultural differences but yet a respect for that person from a different culture and where that perspective is coming from, for example, we do a unit in our Spanish to class about the assassination of the prosecutor, nice men who was investigating a terrorist attack on the Jewish center that happened in 1994. And he found evidence that the

President was probably involved in the cover up of Iran's involvement in this terrorist attack, right. So the students when they when they read about this case, it from a certain distance, it seems very obvious, or you just assume that, yes, he was assassinated. He did not kill himself like this is very clear that that the present is just guilty. And it's very easy to simplify a political event in another person's country. But yet that when they got to speak with their coach from Argentina, her perspective was very different. She didn't say that that didn't happen. Her attitude was, we don't know. We never know we'll never know. Which was really kind of interesting because it was Flex so much of Argentine history. So through the historical context, her perception of the situation is very different than someone more. I don't know if you want to call it neutral, but we're coming from our national centric view. And we're looking at it and say, Well, you know, it's obvious, right? And she said, Well, who knows? Well, maybe it's the new government that framed her. Now, I don't know if that's true or not, I don't even know if she believes that. But she threw it out there as another possible way of looking at this situation. And it's that nuance that you only get by talking to somebody who's from that culture, and respecting that person. Like, they already had a relationship with this coach who they respect and admire and they know she's good person, and to see that it's not so clear cut. Even though for us, it's very clear cut so it changes perspectives. It really expands your opinion of how you interpret international news. And I'm not saying that the truth is any different but it lets you acknowledge how different perspective are formed from their cultural and historic background and context.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Another tool that allows Crystal to create the carefully crafted community experiences that she puts in her classes is VoiceThread.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

Taking inspiration from these sessions of the coaches are having their students, I use a multimedia sharing platform called VoiceThread, which is an asynchronous type of sharing platform, which is very experiential in its nature of using it. So if you envision like a PowerPoint type of presentation where you can embed media and images, and that each student has like an avatar that pops up like on the side of the PowerPoint slide itself, where they can leave a voice comment, a video comment, a text comment, they can draw on top of the slide itself. So each student can come in at a different time and look at the prompt on the slide, or maybe it's a video and then they can leave a comment. So maybe you want to share a news story with them and then they can come in and react to that news story. So in the online environment where you can kind of create this class community feel because we're all working together, we're all working on the same things together. But it allows for students to do it asynchronously or when it's convenient for them to sit down and get their work done. But yet, you can still have a debate, you know, I could respond to someone else's comment, they respond to yours. It sounds similar to a lot of the discussion threads in different learning management systems, but it's so much

better because it's so much more dynamic. And it allows not just for a written type of comment, but you have the audio visual, you can leave the video comment you can play for example, if there's an embedded video, I can play the video and in my comment, I can play that video, pause it, draw on top of the video point something out. So there's really creative ways that you can have students it's almost as if they're physically holding on to these media that's being presented to them. It's really a dynamic experience. It's experiential in of itself, the the setup of this platform, and then the way you can be creatively using it to incorporate Different types of delivery of content.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Just like in face to face classes, Crystal recommends keeping the content relevant and interesting.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

Some instructors might be thinking, well, that means I have to redo it every single semester. That's an enormous amount of work. But once you have the framework, and I found this myself, like, let's say I'm doing a unit on whether, and I chose to originally do it on hurricane Harvey, right, and I have, I don't know, news clipping and then a video clip and then have an interview or something like that. And the students have to do some sort of activity with it. Well, the next semester or the next year, maybe I want to change it to be about hurricane Maria instead of Hurricane Harvey. But I still I say, Okay, I need a news clip. And I just find a news clip that's a hurricane Maria or I need a video clip. And you can, it's not as hard to update as it is to create it originally. So once you create some really cool dynamic activities, using this asynchronous tool, I don't think it's that much work to maintain it no more so than if you're teaching a traditional class and you had to update your lesson plans. I think the number one point is find something relevant and engaging, engaging going on now. That contextualizes that unit so that when they're going through from one slide to the next or one activity to the next, there's some sort of thread that's connecting it all together, and that they're doing it for a purpose at the end, like there has to be either something that's unifying it to now you can produce a product at the end of it, or now you'll be able to take all the skills you've developed to go and do x with it, maybe go out and do an interview, or whatever it is. in your field, that would be an appropriate type of culminating activity. But everything needs to be contextualized connected, and it needs to be clear the transitions and why you're done it.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

She helps her students become independent learners through self evaluation, and shares her easy to use strategy.



## Dr. Crystal Marull

It's huge to know why am I doing this? So having clear objectives, what am I going to get out of doing this? Right? So then when they get to the end of the task, they can evaluate themselves? Like I was supposed to learn this or I was supposed to be able to do this by the end of this task, can I or can't and what am I still struggling with? So a huge component of my online course. is self evaluation on a weekly basis? My students have to respond to five questions I have the same. What did I learn? What am I good at? What am I struggling with? What can I do to be better? And what can my instructor do to help me? And that five point self evaluation has been huge, because one, they do it in a discussion thread. So their peers can chime in to like, Oh, I'm really having a hard time with that too. But I found this resource Have you checked out this? So they create this learner community community, even in the online environment to help each other out and they realize that they're not alone with their struggles. And then for me, it gives me feedback to to know, oh, okay, they're having a harder time with this, or they like this type of activity, they found it to be very beneficial. So I'm gonna incorporate more of that. Going forward.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Crystal also tries to give students agency along with independence. This way students can have an experience that is tailored to their interests.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

I think that's where we're going in the future and what I'm trying to do as much as possible as much as I can give my students agency in the decisions of what they're learning and why they're learning, the better So, going forward, one thing I'd like to do at an intermediate level, I'd like to create an intro to Spanish for the professionals, right. And in that case, we would each unit would be maybe from a different perspective of a different profession, but that the student could choose their language coach that they're working on based on the language coaches background. So if we have a language coach who has more experience in law, you know, that would be for my criminology, my law majors, I have one who has experienced with journalism or or the medical sciences, so that way they they can be more individualizing. Their experience, but still meeting the core schools because still the expressions in the project projects could be the same. The exams and assessment could be the same going throughout the course, but that they're learning it through the lens of their particular interest. it's beneficial for them and doesn't affect anything necessarily on my end, if I create it appropriately, so you have to construct, I think when you can construct courses like that where you have a common type of assessment, but that that knowledge can be gained. through different types of activities, that's when you're you're, you know, hitting gold.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Crystal's classes are considered large enrollment courses. But she works really hard to make students feel like they're part of a small connected community.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

A very large classes for language have 80 students in each of my courses. And I think this would be relevant for any of the other disciplines too, that have large enrollments. Students want to feel like they matter. They want to feel like they're known, and that they have connections with other human beings. This isn't face to face or online environment. And one way I found to do that is within my larger class, I break my students from the very beginning into smaller learning communities. So they're always interacting with no more than 10 peers. So I have groups of 10. So everything they do in these discussion threads, or my voice thread activities, or even with the coaching sessions, which are capped at four, they're only working with these 10 individuals. And by only working with these 10 individuals, they have the sensation that they're in trouble class with individualized attention, right? It's the same people over and over. They build bonds even with their their peers, even if it's always asynchronous communication. They see them week after week after week, and they develop a relationship with them. And then my interaction with them even though I had the same with all 80, they feel like it's more personalized because they're in a group of 10.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

So what do the students think of all of this?

## Dr. Crystal Marull

I had one student send me an email, he had to do some makeup sessions because he had missed some. He's like, I just got off of two back to back sessions. And I've never had more fun in my life was Spanish she said it was fantastic. He did say it might have helped that he drank a beer ahead of time he. He is over 21. So that was fine. And I do recommend do whatever they need to do to lower their anxiety before their sessions. But they really just, if the more time you spend with anyone, you build a connection and the more you have a connection with someone, the easier it is to spend time with them. And I think that's how they work through it and the end of the semester. The students always Tell me that it was one of the most important elements of the course for them, and that they wish they had more sessions.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

Crystal loves teaching, but what she loves best is giving students a brand new view on the world around them.

## Dr. Crystal Marull

I think, especially teaching languages, it's opening that door that many monolingual individuals never open of seeing a whole new, like almost parallel universe when you can see it through another language and another culture when you can truly step inside another culture and another language. It's a different different world and to have the opportunity to witness that within your own being is really life changing and transformative. It happened to me and I've seen it happen to so many of my peers who for no reason of necessity, they started studying language and for whatever reason they get hooked on it And next, you know, their life is 180 degrees different than than it would have been continuing down. This monolingual path. And you must begin to feel like you're missing out on life if you only speak one language because there's so many rich opportunities, but you can only appreciate it through the language that you can go and travel abroad. But if you can't understand what's what's being communicated, you're missing it, you're missing that, that extra perspective that's very unique and embodied in language. And even if you're just learning one other language, the going from monolingual to being bilingual is a huge transformation. And it allows you to say, Okay, I don't speak your language, but I can understand when you say we see it differently. I know what you mean by saying that because I'm no longer trapped into one language system, I can appreciate it from another language and cultural system. So what I enjoy most is when I see my students begin that transformational process, so they may come into my class out of a requirement because I have to get through Spanish but if I do my job well, they will be so hooked on to it that they They're going to continue even after after my course and after they fulfill the requirement because they're going to get a taste for that other world and they're going to want to explore it too.

## Alexandra Bitton-Bailey

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