Using Gather.Town to Re-Imagine Interaction in Virtual and Hybrid Language Learning

PRESENTERS
Frederick Poole
Amanda Lanier
Bruna Sommer-Farias

Michigan State University
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PRESENTATION OUTLINE

Virtual and Hybrid Language Learning

Re-Imagine Interaction

Using Gather.Town

Recommendations and Resources

DEMONSTRATIONS

• Sharing persistent “third spaces”
• Creating compelling experiences
• Reclaiming classroom activities
What can a language classroom look like?

- Rigid desks in pairs and a few computers
- No desks and no electronics at all
- Chairs on wheels for any configuration
What can a language classroom look like?

A digital avatar and a 2D map with...

- A café
- A conference room
- A lounge

https://gather.town/app
Using Gather.Town to Re-Imagines Interaction in Virtual and Hybrid Language Learning
Shared Space in F2F Classrooms

Course Content

Interaction

Assignments and Tasks
Shared “Space” in Online Courses

Learning Management System

Course Content
- Content Delivery
- Feedback
- Grades

Share Materials

Manage Tasks

Interaction
- Lectures
- Breakout Rooms

Software and Applications
- Engaging Material
- Assessments
- Content Reinforcement

Video Conferencing Tool
Virtual and Hybrid Language Learning

Three aspects of engagement in an online course or program

Social Presence & Interaction

Interaction is essential to learning – in language classes and even in content courses – but ...

Why is it so hard in virtual learning contexts?

Creating the educational experience is like creating a world

Adapted from Figure 1: Elements of an educational experience in Rourke, et al. (2001)
“Language teachers are often masters of using the physical space in their language classrooms, rearranging furniture, groups, and artifacts to facilitate meaningful encounters with and among learners” (Guillén, Sawin, & Avineri, 2020).
Virtual Course Participation

Software & Apps for Sharing Content

Video Conferencing Tool

Face-to-Face Course Participation

Interact in person – but only in class?

Physical features – walls, chairs, boards, paper

Hybrid Course Participation

Learning Management System
How can using Gather.Town increase engagement?

Supplement This

Learning Management System

Expand and Enhance This

Software & Apps for Sharing Content

Replace This

Video Conferencing Tool

Face-to-Face Course Participation

Reclaim this!

Virtual Course Participation

Hybrid Course Participation
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What is Gather.Town anyway?

**Spatial chat software**
- Video conferencing
- Text chat
- Game-like 2D environment
- Personal avatar to explore it
- Customization of space and objects

**Walk up to someone to share video.**
“Technology serves best when facilitating human connection, allowing learners to engage more intimately with ... those distant in space, time, and culture” (Guillén, Sawin, & Avineri, 2020).

“I like this platform because it is a better alternative than other video conferencing tools (like Zoom) for those days where most of our activities are interactive and could be otherwise constrained by only using breakout rooms” (Saez-Fajardo, 2021).
Virtual Learning in Gather.Town

Reclaiming Interaction in the Online Space

- **Grouping**
  - Difficult to place students into groups

- **Autonomy**
  - Difficult to give students freedom to choose groups and manage tasks.

- **Monitoring**
  - Difficult to move between groups to monitor group work.

- **Engagement**
  - Difficult to keep all students active in task.
Virtual Learning in Gather.Town

**Grouping**
Students can choose groups and move among them on their own

**Autonomy**
Persistent environment allows students to come and go freely and explore choices

**Monitoring**
Teachers can move among groups by simply moving their avatar

**Engagement**
Environments can provide scaffolding for a wide range of activities
Creating Spaces in Gather.Town
Creating Spaces

Start with a ready-made “template”:

• Office Spaces
• Seasonal Spaces (e.g., Christmas)
• Social Settings (e.g., Restaurant)
• Conference Spaces
• Educational Settings (e.g., Classrooms)
• Fantasy Environments

• Log in on a computer
• Use Chrome or Mozilla

• Invite others (e.g.):
  https://gather.town/invite?token=UCL5vWbQ5PkyuwgMiz1DN1By27XfCqln
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Mapmaking

Customize your new space if you want – but leave the super-detailed visual designs to the experts!
Using Gather.Town

Wayfinding

Make your space user-friendly – add instructions, labels, and signs
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Inviting & Guiding Students

Up to 25 at a time for free

- Invite is not required – you can just share the URL from the address bar
- DO Send Invite if you want to add an editor
- DO Send Invite if you want access to end after a certain time
Using Gather.Town to Re-Imagine Interaction in Virtual and Hybrid Language Learning
Re-Imagine Interaction

What we can re-create and discover

Persistent Spaces
• Create a “third space” where students can meet and collaborate

Embedded Experiences
• Offer experiences that inspire language learning

Classroom Activities
• Translate your activities from physical to virtual spaces
Gather.Town Demonstrations
Persistent Space
Persistent Spaces…

- Provide learners with a common ground for socializing
- Can embed instructional material much like other LMS
- Can promote a sense of community
- Can provide learners with a sense of autonomy in online courses
Unique Experiences

- Scavenger Hunt
- Mystery Mansion
- Escape Room
Experiences...

- Allow students to explore unique worlds
- Embed language learning into the digital environments
- Can be leveraged to promote in-class communication
Bringing the physical activities into the virtual world
Speed Dating

Information-Gap Activities

Jigsaw Activities
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RECOMMENDATIONS FOR YOU
“Any tool or application may be used provided that the following elements are present in the course:

(1) learners receive ample comprehensible input in the target language,

(2) learners have opportunities to produce output in the target language, and

(3) learners have interactions with others in the target language”

(Russell & Murphy-Judy, 2021).
Recommendations for Building & Teaching in Gather.Town

**DO**

- Rely on the Gather.Town spaces that are already created for you
- Keep the spaces small
- Remind invitees to use Chrome or Mozilla
- Create routines around entering Gather.Town
- Take advantage of the students' mobility
- Allow students to become co-creators of the space
- Design synchronous activities that involve small groups, choices, and 2-way exchanges of information
- Design asynchronous activities that make use of information found within Gather.Town

**DON’T**

- Don’t go crazy with editing spaces at the beginning
- Don’t access Gather.Town with a phone or tablet
- Don’t clutter the spaces with objects
- Don’t use Gather.Town for lectures or lengthy whole-class activities
- Don’t count on video or audio recording the whole event or small groups (unless you use another tool also)
- Don’t link out to other apps or websites much – use what you can build into the space
Thanks for Joining Us!

What questions do you have?
About the Presenters

Bruna Sommer-Farias
fariasbr@msu.edu

Frederick Poole
poolefre@msu.edu

Amanda Lanier
alanier@msu.edu

https://maflt.cal.msu.edu/faculty
Gather.Town How-To Materials

- **Gather Website - Help and Training**
- **Community of Gather Users**
- **Gather Intro Video:**
  
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JePchzu_USM&t=4s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JePchzu_USM&t=4s)
- **Using the MapMaker:**
  
  [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxXzCcV_xhE](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QxXzCcV_xhE)
Spatial Chat in FLTMAG


- “GatherTown Brings Mingle Activities to Online Language Teaching” (Saez-Fajardo, 2021) - https://fltmag.com/gather-town-mingle/

References and Resources