
FLY EYE MEDIA
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LANGUAGE LEARNING VIDEOS

What immediately comes to mind when you think of language learning videos? Bad acting? Low production value? Stilted and unnatural dialogue? Contrived scenarios? Formulaic/simple set ups?

PROJECT

THE CHALLENGE

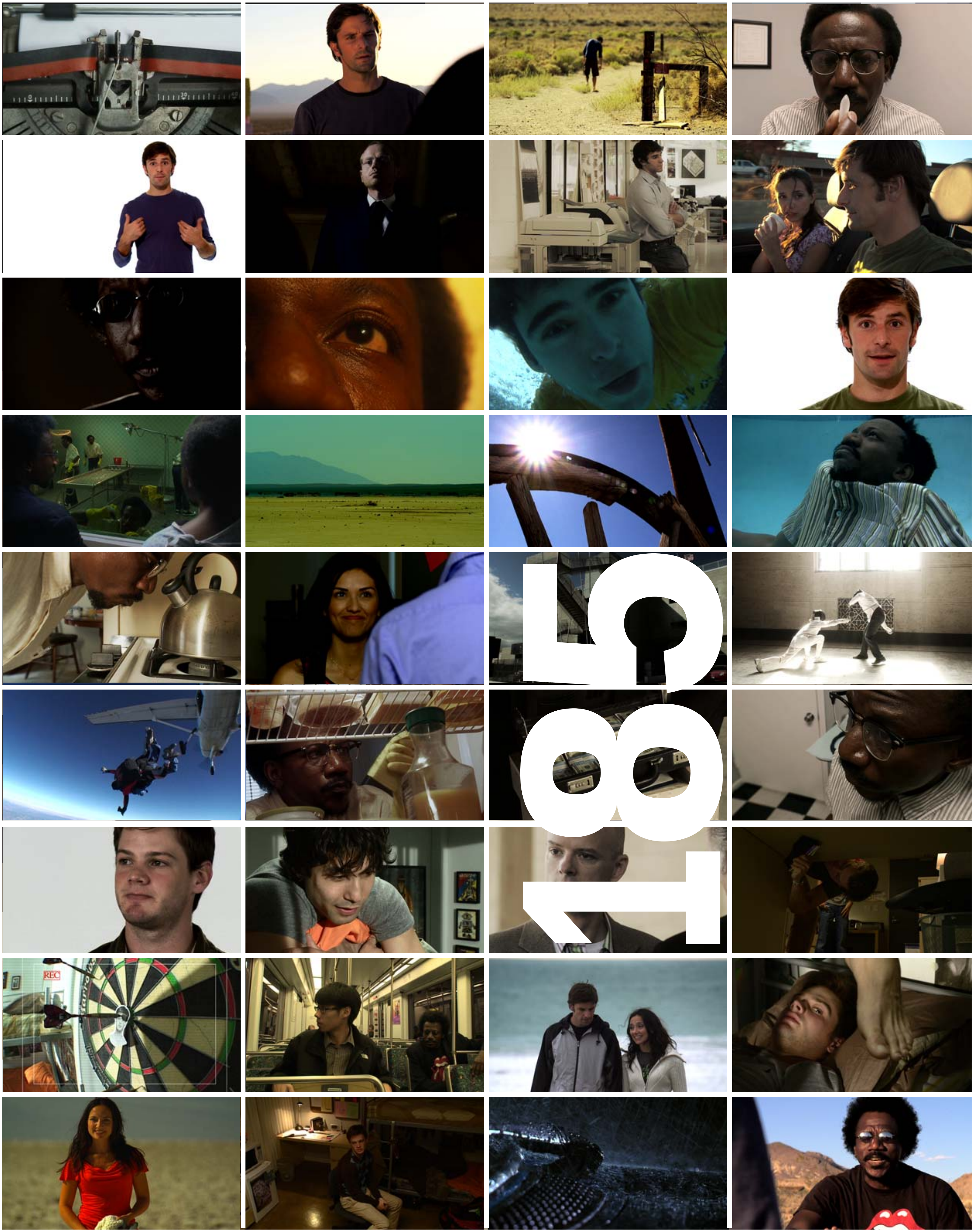
Many learning products leverage the use of video, but, all too often, these offer flat experiences featuring 'talking heads' who merely provide superficial language samples. But language and communication are about so much more than just 'words'.

When presented with the challenge of designing online courseware for a global English language provider, we asked ourselves, "How can we fully engage the 'whole person' in the learning process and involve not only their thinking, remembering and analyzing, but also a whole range of other, less visible things: their wishes, their memories, their moods, their life experiences, their fears, their home backgrounds, their dreams, etc?"

OUR ANSWER

By deeply engaging users through character portraits and task-oriented learning, users can begin to exploit rich contexts and story elements to deduce/construct form, meaning and usage. By transforming users from passive viewers of a media artifact into active participants exploring and contributing to a wider media fabric, a deeper processing of language is encouraged through 'meaningful play', discovery, self-reflection, personalization and connectedness. * This kind of engagement honors the validity and variety of experience that users automatically bring with them to the learning process, thereby activating both the cognitive and affective domains.

CHALLENGE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WHO WE ARE

We are a synergy of creative minds working across disciplines to pioneer cross media experiences in an online/offline environment. We look for creative opportunities where we can design, develop and deploy deeply engaging human experiences.

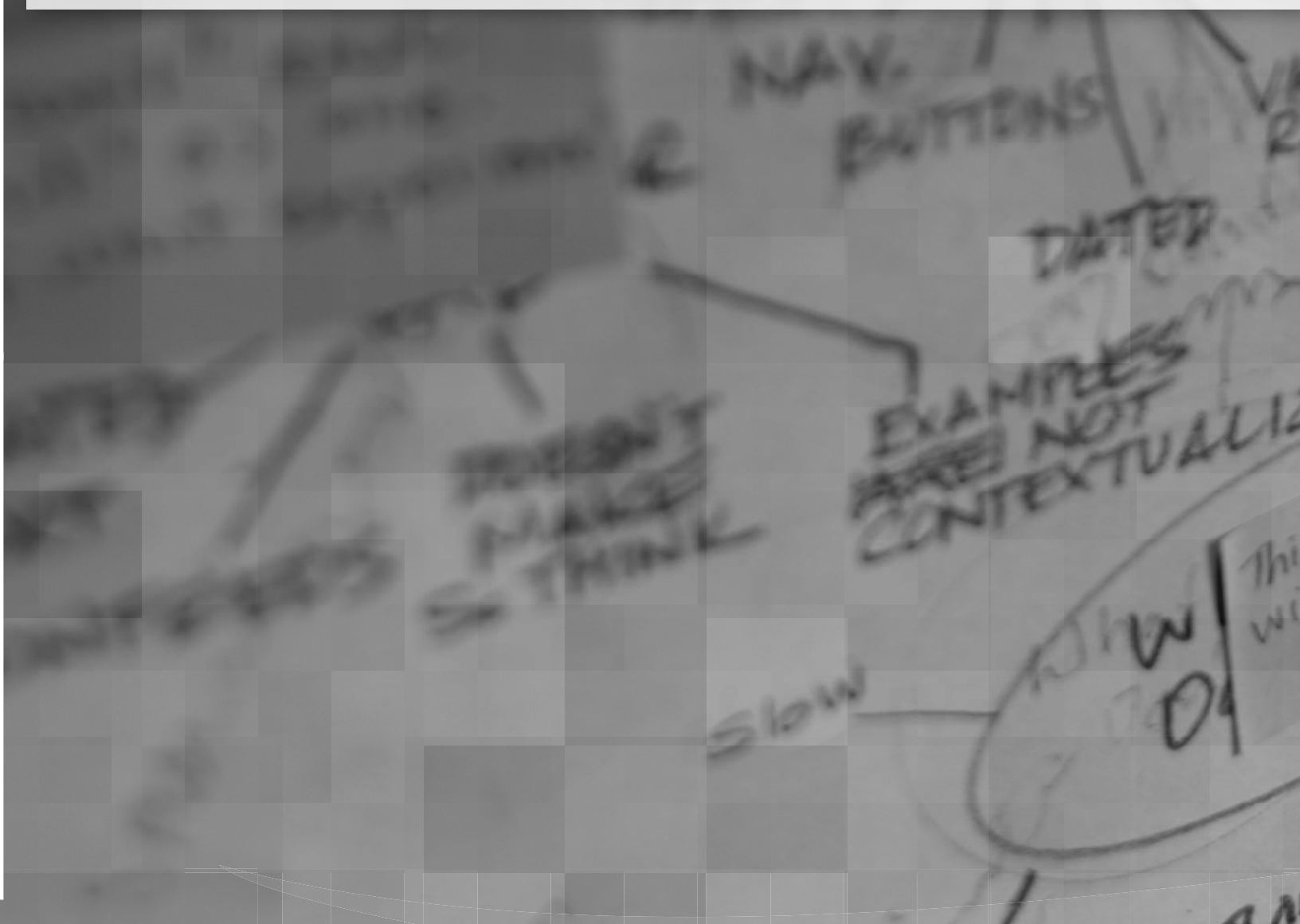
OUR PROCESS

Every challenge is unique and the process to find the solution should be just as unique. We don't use a template process to find a template solution.

Our process is tailored to the challenges inherent in each project. In devising our approach, we draw from these core activities.

RESEARCH

Because we understand that products do not exist in a vacuum, but need to work within a larger system, we take a Fly Eye view of gathering input from a variety of sources and perspectives: academic papers, business considerations, the arts, user behavior, trends and focus groups, to name a few.



CROSS-POLLINATION

As a highly collaborative, cross-disciplinary team we employ integrative thinking to produce unique insights and pathways for discovery. This environment enables us to discover creative opportunities that would have been overlooked in more traditional design or film companies.

EXPERIMENTATION

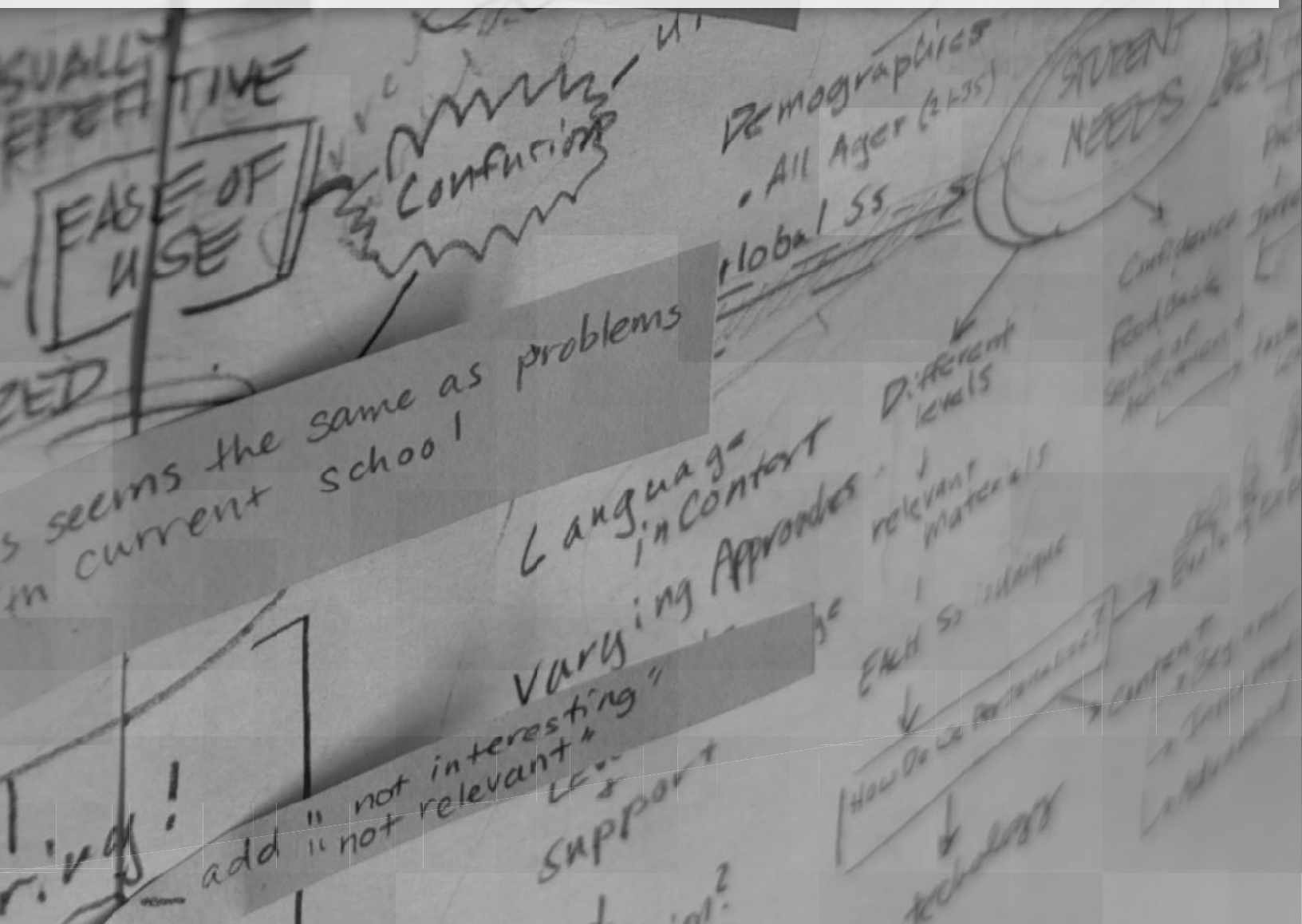
Design is a process of learning. Trying out ideas, making critical observations, drawing conclusions and applying those decisions is a necessary role in ensuring the best possible outcomes.

REFLECTION

We believe in openly fostering an awareness of how we work, to reflect on this and to explore what procedures, materials, techniques or approaches would help us become even more effective.

THE INTANGIBLE IS TANGIBLE

We are inspired by objects, theories, the environment, experiences, raw data, anecdotes and well....just about anything. Although we start from abstract and creative realms, we truly value bringing an idea to life. We enjoy translating inspiration into concrete realities through prototyping and delivering the final product.



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PROJECT SCOPE

PROJECT CHALLENGE

How can we create a deeply engaging experience that involves the 'whole person' in the learning process?

OUR SOLUTION

Create an engaging media fabric that activates users' schemata to prime users for learning.

Develop a series of 'learning objects' which allows users to interact and experiment with the content in a low risk environment.

Construct task-oriented simulations in which users can apply their learning in order to achieve real world outcomes.

Product Experience

Evolving Format

In order for content to be engaging, it needs to provide the appropriate level of challenge for the target audience, which is why adults often become bored watching children's programming. If content is not challenging, it becomes a tedious and boring chore; if content is too challenging, it can be overwhelming.

The media format evolves with the pedagogical aims of the course across language proficiency levels. The users' experience of the media feels consistent across the product due to the use of two main devices, namely the use of a white 'studio space' and 'on location' footage. However, the rules governing what occurs in these 'spaces' are closely tied to the learners' needs at a particular level of study.

Beginner Users | Language as a Model:

Aim: To build basic skills and vocabulary through the modeling of high frequency language.

Studio Space: Models language through skits. Language and situations are straightforward and rely heavily on the use of graphics and visuals.

On Location: Provides extra visual support, but no or little dialogue is featured.

Intermediate Users | Language in Context:

Aim: To activate learner schemata and present interactional and transactional discourse through everyday contexts.

Studio Space: Provides characters with a psychological space to reveal their insights and reactions to the events in the outer world.

On Location: Creates a real-world space for well-developed characters to interact in a variety of everyday contexts.

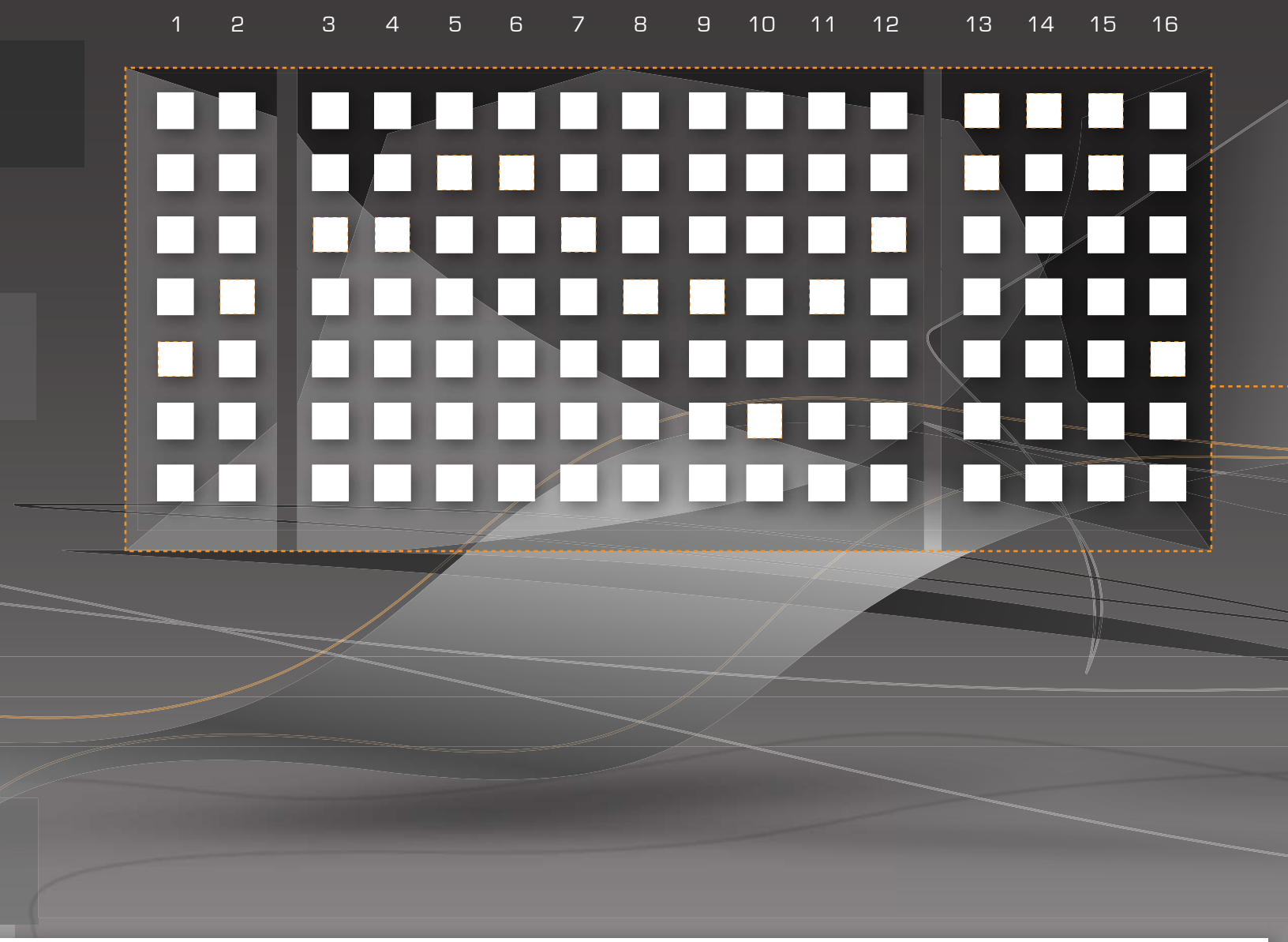
Advanced Users | Language as a Means:

Aim: To provide learners with opportunities to understand and produce language in order to express their views on specialized content subjects.

Studio space: Provides a platform for the character to share knowledge or spark controversy on a sophisticated subject they care about deeply in a presenter-led, documentary-style approach.

On Location: Illustrates or elaborates on what is being presented in the studio space through footage and stills. Voice over is featured, but little or no dialogue is used here.

Instructional Design



Spiral Syllabus

Challenge: The courseware employs a spiral syllabus, which means that a topic or theme is presented several times, but with ever increasing complexity or depth. From a learning perspective this is valuable, as students can revise and extend their previous learning. However, making a media component addressing the same theme/topic over and over again runs the risk of becoming repetitive.

Solution: By planting the characters firmly in a particular world, their portraits can be developed in depth. For example, the syllabus featured many units on health, which led to the development of the Apartment Manager as a lonely hypochondriac with OCD.

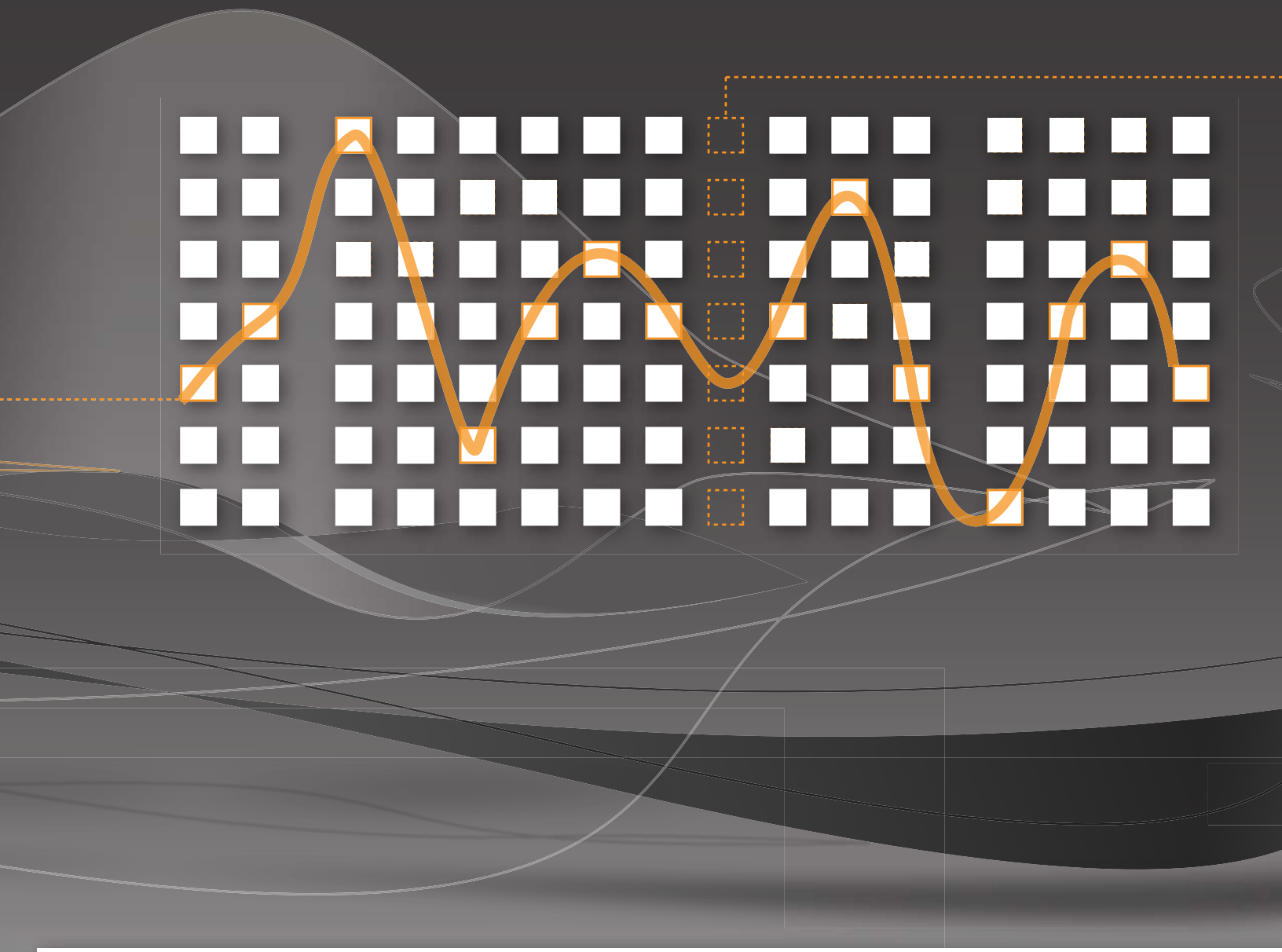
At other times, characters were threaded across repeated themes in order to add variety, which means that different approaches to the topics can be developed. For example, the theme of travel is repeated throughout the courseware. This theme is visited by a variety of character groupings, including the Travelling Couple, the 3 College Kids and the Boss and the Apprentice.

Media Fabric

Challenge: Users' entry points into their study program varies according to their level of language ability, so it is important that users are able to watch any movie at any point in their study, and not feel that what they are watching is dependent on something that preceded it.

Solution: By focusing on character and experience-based groupings and associations, we set out to construct believable worlds and to develop characters without having to resort to traditional beginning-middle-end narratives.

Mosaic Character Structure



Thus, users may proceed through the materials in any order they choose and still retain a sense of meaning (story) and developing character, thus boosting user interest and engagement.

Longevity

Studies have shown that when new language is presented in a rich and memorable context, it is much more likely to be committed to long-term memory. Language arises out of context. By creating engaging characters which operate within a particular world and who experience specific real-world situations, we are able to create a rich context from which users can learn. Users can store the language with the context in an elaborative associative neural map, which makes it easier for them to retrieve later on.

Character mapping

Challenge: There are a wide variety of divergent topics and themes represented in the syllabus and the media needed to address each and every one of them.

Solution: By starting with the syllabus, patterns of themes and topics began to develop. These themes could be clustered together to create a world or environment for a particular type of character. For example: the house, the future, families, food, jobs, retirement, gossip and life landmarks, suggested a particular kind of world. From this world, different characters emerged. We were then able to select characters with the most potential.

Units were mapped out and clustered together in a variety of configurations to create nine distinctive worlds. These nine worlds are woven throughout the Intermediate levels.

Character-Driven Worlds

At times different characters' worlds collide, with the core characters moving in and other of other characters' worlds.

Why a character-driven format?

A traditional beginning-middle-end narrative places the plot at the front and center of the experience, which is especially problematic in the random-access environment of online courseware. A character portrait, however, draws the users to empathize, interpret and personalize the characters' world through subtle revelations and insights. The users create a bridge from observation to contribution, allowing them to better navigate the task environment to achieve a real world outcome, speculate on the reasons behind the characters' behavior and to share their insights collaboratively through a community of users.

In order to help users connect with the 'why' behind characters actions, we created characters that are complex, compelling and have real world issues.

Emotional Response

Learning is not a cognitive process only. It also includes affective factors as well. Character-driven content, which gives insight into the character's dilemma activates the user's empathy for the character, promotes intrinsic motivation for users to study longer so that they might be able to follow the character's dilemmas. Rich contexts and character worlds also facilitates cross-cultural processes through the social and psychological integration of the user with the target language group.

Cinematic Structure

On-Location

Rich visual context

Studio Space

Phychological Point of View

On-location

Users are voyeurs, looking in on characters' behavior and activities in the outer world.

Studio space

Studio space provides a psychological space where the character engages the user directly and addresses the camera. Characters give personal insight and commentary on the events occurring in the outer world.

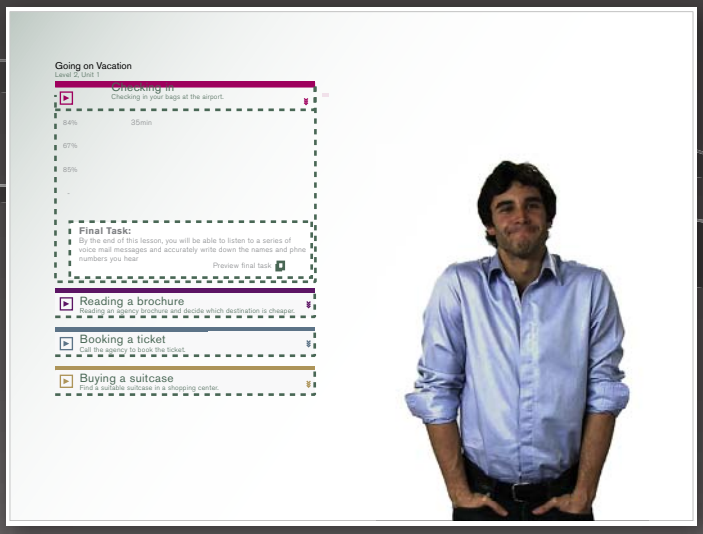
Schemata

Psychology and cognitive science have influenced approaches to language learning through Schema Theory. This learning theory views information as being organized into an elaborate associative network, in which new information is processed, filed and stored according to our understanding of the world so that it can be easily retrieved at a later date. In language learning, the richer the context in which language is encountered, the deeper the association with the language is made and the easier it is to retrieve from long-term memory.

Placing the media component at the start of each lesson works to activate users' schemata and thus primes users for the language/learning in the subsequent lesson. It also helps the learner see how language arises out of context and how language is actually used, including paralinguistic features which work to reveal subtext, such as body language, gestures, facial expressions, tone and pitch of voice.

Lesson Structure

Landing Page



Users can see the lesson aims and preview the final task.

Unit Landing Page

When users reach the unit landing page, they are presented with the topics of the four lessons. Users can decide which, if any, of the lessons they would like to try first. For this reason, each of the media sequences at the start of each lesson is self-contained, but yet still make sense within the larger framework of the unit and the overall character thread. Once users click on a lesson, they will see an overview outlining the learning points and final task for that lesson.

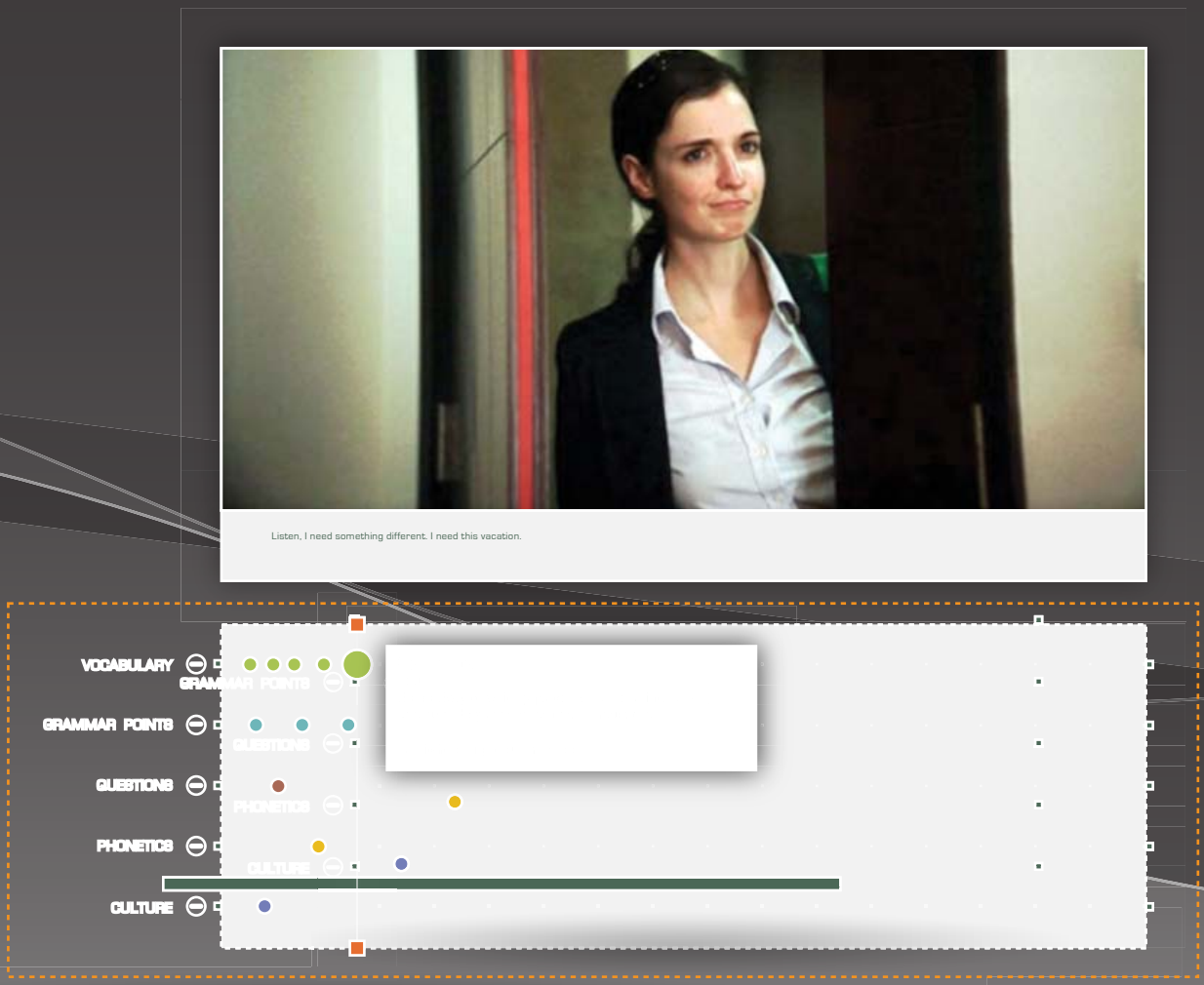
User Experience

After watching the movie sequence, users do activities to practice language skills such as vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and so on. Once they have completed the required 'learning objects' successfully, the final task is unlocked. The final task requires users to draw from the language and skills they have developed throughout the lesson to achieve a specific, real-life outcome.

Learning Objects

Users have control over what to practice and what to skip in this non-linear experience. They can experiment in a low risk environment. Students receive feedback on their progress and scores are only kept to suggest a plan of remediation and to unlock access to the final task.

Interactive Media Timeline



Media Component: Timeline Tool

When the user selects a lesson, the media timeline tool is automatically launched. This can be viewed as a cinematic experience or the user can opt to explore and interact with the media component through the instructional tools or interactive activities. As users watch the movie, they see a box below the screen which has different 'time bars' for different language skills or topics. As the movie progresses, the users see a dot appear which means there is an opportunity to click on it and see information revealed about that particular language skill or topic. These can be audio files, images, text or videos. Each item will be relevant to something that comes up in the movie at that specific moment. The student can examine the different layers of the English language while they are seeing examples of it in use.

Meaning Density

The media timeline tool achieves a healthy ratio of meaningful content to the overall amount of time spent exploring. Users can quiz themselves on the content of the video and receive extra support and guidance through replaying the specific section of video linked to a particular question. In addition to the karoke-like subtitles, users can also get a gloss on language and culture with information that is synched to a corresponding moment in the clip. Users can also share their opinions and ideas through a feature which polls students on their reactions to the content, which can be compared to the answers of other users online. Classroom teachers and users can take the language from the clip offline, by printing the transcript of the video.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