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CASE STUDY

MKA Upper School World Languages Department



The Montclair Kimberley Academy (MKA) is a co-educational private school for students in grades Pre-K through 12 in Montclair, New Jersey.

With over 1000 students on three campuses (Lower, Middle, and Upper Schools), MKA is one of the largest private schools in the state of New Jersey. The school, which celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2012, is the product of the merger of Montclair Academy, The Kimberley School, and Brookside. MKA has a number of signature programs, as well as a nationally recognized program for integrating technology into the curriculum through its 1:1 laptop program.

At the Upper School, with an enrollment of around 450 students, all students complete three years of language study in order to graduate. The Upper School World Languages Department offers courses in Chinese (Mandarin), French, Latin, and Spanish from level 1 through AP®. Classes in Chinese, French, and Spanish are conducted primarily in the target language, with an emphasis on active communication, as well as on the relationship between language and culture.

Extempore at MKA

MKA began piloting Extempore during the second semester of the 2019–2020 school year, as part of a larger initiative to evaluate various digital language lab platforms for designing

and administering activities and assessments both in and out of the classroom, as well as semester exams and placement tests. Over the course of the pilot, because schools were closed during the COVID-19 pandemic, teachers also had the opportunity to incorporate Extempore into online instruction. Across languages and levels, Extempore has become an essential part of teaching and learning at MKA and will continue to play a major role in future curriculum development.

Launching the pilot could not have been easier: the process of creating accounts for teachers and students was very seamless, intuitive, and quick, both during our time at school and during our time at home for online learning.

Courses across all levels and all languages used audio, video, text, and image prompts for a wide variety of activities and assessments. As one colleague in the Spanish department put it, “Using Extempore has allowed me to get students who tend to be quiet in class to start talking on a more regular basis without the fear of judgement from their peers.” Another colleague in Latin commented on how “Extempore has made homework assignments much more engaging.” In and out of the classroom, students have had many more authentic opportunities to practice all four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) in new and different ways. Based on the overwhelmingly



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positive piloting experience, the Upper School World Languages Department looks forward to continuing with Extempore during the 2020–2021 school year.

Extempore Activities

In courses ranging from level 1 through AP®, teachers have adopted, adapted, and created a wide range of activities and assessments which take full advantage of all that Extempore has to offer. One of our Chinese instructors explained, “I particularly like the function that enables teachers to give students feedback in both oral and written ways. The benefits of written feedback are obvious and commonly used; however, with the oral feedback, I can point out the mistakes or correct students’ pronunciation more directly and clearly. It’s important and helpful for beginners to listen to me speaking the language and to imitate with the correct tones and pronunciation.” Another teacher in the French department noted how “Extempore is perfect for creating practice AP® exam questions so that students can become comfortable with the format and content before test day.”

The opportunities for designing and administering meaningful and innovative activities and assessments with Extempore are truly infinite—and keep things fresh for teachers and students.

Several colleagues across all levels and across all languages remarked on how much they and their students enjoyed using picture prompts (sometimes quite random!) for both timed and untimed responses, whether students had a limited number or an unlimited number of attempts.

Rollout Process

Because MKA has a 1:1 laptop program, and because all students, faculty, and staff have a G Suite for Education account, the rollout process was extraordinarily simple—certainly much simpler than creating (and then maintaining) any physical language lab. All teachers in the department have their instructor account, and all students simply sign in with their Google login credentials in order to create and then access their student accounts. This means that there are no passwords to create, remember, or recover, which makes the entire experience user-friendly.

Looking ahead to the 2020–2021 school year and beyond, Extempore will play a pivotal role in teaching and learning whether we are fully on-site, fully off-site, or somewhere in-between.

Future Plans

As teachers continue to try out new and different ways of using Extempore for individual activities and assessments, they will also focus our efforts on becoming more adept at using the platform for group activities and assessments, too, from extemporaneous speaking practice and listening comprehension exercises to practice and review for new vocabulary and grammar. AP® teachers are especially eager to make full use of the platform in preparation for next year’s exams.



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Student Perception of Extempore

In survey data collected from across the entire department, students raved about their experience of using Extempore during the pilot. One student wrote, "It makes speaking activities much easier. I really appreciate not having to record through Quicktime and then upload to Google Drive." Another observed, "Questions are easier to be designed and grading can have both written or voiced comments. Besides, it's more targeted on self practice and improvement." Perhaps this student put it best in describing how Extempore creates unbounded opportunities for authentic activities and assessments: "You can practice speaking even if we are not in school and it makes you respond on the spot, without reading off a script or anything."

Future Development Requests

The Upper School World Languages Department is excited to continue to use Extempore next year and beyond. Teachers and students look forward to seeing better integration with YouTube in order to embed hyperlinks for video prompts, system-generated emails when activities have been graded and given feedback, and more developed functionality for group activities, as well as the ability to set specific parameters for individual questions and individual students.

