

In the Classroom

In this issue of "In the Classroom" we feature two articles discussing the increasingly popular use of podcasting in language learning. First, Joseph Magedanz presents an overview of using MP3 players in language education. Next, Katherine Miller describes her personal experience learning about and using podcasting with her high school Spanish students.



How to Get a Student's Ear? Try Podcasting

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With the advent of personal MP3 players and other such devices, the opportunities for foreign language learning are changing dramatically. Today's students have grown up with small, portable devices that do a myriad of tasks. An increasing number of us teach in smart classrooms equipped with Internet access, projectors, and sound capabilities and use some sort of "communicative approach." Delivery of audio material in the target language needs to keep pace with current technology and student expectations. Podcasts fill the bill: They are compact and well received by students.

Content

As with anything given to students—a textbook, film, report, or article—content is also the key to a successful podcast. Students should feel involved in and responsible for the material they use. Ideally, active listening (note-taking, reporting back to class, written summaries, etc.) should be assumed when students are confronted with a new podcast, but given each individual's personal tastes and interests, not every podcast will grab each student's attention. Additional information to learn for the next test, worksheets and questions to answer, or summaries to present to the class are possibilities to help motivate students to listen actively. Whether the content is generated by faculty, teaching assistants, or the students themselves, it should enhance, supplement, and test the students' foreign language experience. Some useful types of podcasts include audio materials supplied by textbook publishers (with appropriate permission secured from the publisher, of course), additional practice and exposure to course materials as presented by instructors, supplemental material as presented by native speakers (teaching assistants or guests), and student-generated material (students who create podcasts present their

instructors with gradable material and their peers with reviewable material, all of which can be incorporated into a given course's syllabus). All of these sources test the development of students' target language skills, and all are suitable for pedagogically sound podcast content. Of course content rubrics are useful, whether they are home-generated or adapted, and are essential in helping set expected standards for the podcasts.

Production

Podcasters work with methods ranging from automated recordings to pieces produced with custom or customizable applications to those obtained from hand-held digital recorders.

For those interested in automated production of podcasts, such as entire or partial classroom sessions, there is a commercial venture, boxpopuli (www.boxpopuli.com), which allows users to "create your own podcasting device from any computer, new or recycled." The system can be used as a stand-alone device to easily convert almost any computer to a podcast appliance to record and convert lectures into podcasts. A security key embedded in the user's USB thumb drive controls access to the service.

For high-end do-it-yourself productions, one might consider doing enhanced (audio, photo, hyperlinks) or extreme (audio, video, text, multiple links, transitions) podcasts. QuickTime Pro provides the necessary tools, and with practice and guidance, one can turn out rather impressive looking podcasts. This is a project for those who like getting deep into an application's capabilities and tinkering with settings and effects, but the results can be impressive (e.g., the work of Kurt Faulknerloser at Riverside Community College District, CA).

For those wanting something on a scale less grand, there is always the WAV file. These are recorded either on a computer or in a personal digital recorder; the files are converted to MP3 format, uploaded and distributed by an online podcasting service such as ClickCaster (www.clickcaster.com), iTunesU (www.apple.com/itunesu), or Podomatic (www.podomatic.com). Some considerations in using these services include:

- **Cost**—ClickCaster announced early in 2007 that it was phasing out its no-cost podcast hosting (it later rescinded that decision);
- **Reliability**—Both ClickCaster and Podomatic can have issues with successfully uploading the final product (it tends to vary from day to day in our experience);
- **Commercialization**—Apple's iTunesU is used by many schools, but it could be perceived as product endorsement.

A simpler alternative is to create podcasts and distribute them through a campus or school course management system such as Blackboard. A personal digital recorder or computer with recording capability can create WAV files that are then converted into MP3 files using tools such as Audacity (www.audacity.sourceforge.net), SnapKast (snaphkast.com), (which produces MP4 files, still images with audio, ready for video iPods or QuickTime; it seems to offer the most for the beginner: merely drag and drop a PowerPoint slide show into SnapKast and add suitable audio), or Tool Factory (www.toolfactory.com). Once the files are converted, it is easy to upload them into Blackboard to make them readily available to any student registered for the given course. The audio files can be used there or downloaded into a personal MP3 device to be used at the students' convenience.



Using Your iPod with Language Students

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Students today are in a state of constant connectivity. They have the latest cell phone, ring tone, iPod, and computer. They flow through school hallways and college campuses listening to their iPods and text messaging. Everyday, students spend hours

connecting to one another. In an effort to draw my students into my classroom to learn Spanish, I also need to find ways to connect with them.

About three years ago I was fortunate enough to take an iPod/iTunes class at the Orange County Department of Education office. The class was for one evening and each participant received an iPod and an iTalk. An iTalk is a microphone that can be used with the iPod to record voice memos, lectures, and more. In three hours I saw more uses for an iPod in my classroom than I had imagined possible. I left with ideas racing through my mind. I had watched my students with their iPods, but I did not understand their attachment to them. I took mine home and hooked it up to my computer. While browsing on iTunes, I thought of various ways to use my new learning tool in class the following day. Like my students, I was enamored with my new iPod.

Driving to school the morning after my class, I was anxious to put my new tools to work. My Spanish II students were studying vocabulary words for food, which lends itself well to radio commercials. I gave each group of four students one vocabulary word and told them they were going to write a radio commercial for their group's item. My requirements were that each student should speak, and the vocabulary word had to be stated once by each student. I unveiled my new iPod and iTalk and immediately had their attention. I explained that we would be recording each commercial onto my player. The students were delighted at the thought of being able to hear one another's commercials. While giving the class a few minutes to collaborate in their groups and to practice their commercials, I asked an experienced iPod user to be the recorder for the class. One by one, the groups stepped outside of my classroom to record their radio commercials.

That night while listening to their commercials, I was in awe of what we had accomplished with one simple electronic device. I loaded their radio commercials onto my iTunes and the following class meeting we listened to them. The students were delighted. They applied their new vocabulary words in context and they learned from one another. Some groups created jingles that

deserved real airtime. Remembering some of them, I am astonished at the creativity of the students. All their radio commercials connected well to our lesson. Using the iPod, my students and I learned together. We also gained a newfound respect for one another. I saw their creativity and they saw me trying to teach them by tapping into their interests.

This positive experience with my students led me to think about all we could accomplish using an iPod. I continued to have the students record voice memos. I also started taking pictures of different activities we did in class which they could use to narrate or describe an activity or scene. I created PowerPoint projects linking their recorded voices to the pictures. The students enjoyed seeing their pictures and hearing themselves as narrators. Working together, we shared our love of this new medium and we continued to learn from one another.

My enthusiasm for using an iPod in my classroom has grown as I continue my education in the master's program at California State University, Fullerton (CSUF). One of my courses at CSUF focused on using technology in the classroom. At our first class meeting I was thrilled to find out we would be learning how to podcast. Watching students everywhere with their iPods inspired me to increase my knowledge of iPods and iTunes. I knew that podcasting was the next step in using an iPod with my classes, but I needed guidance to do so.

My professor shared various podcasts with us, some on iTunes and some on other educators' personal websites. I also learned about the different types of podcasts: audio, video, photo, and those created by synching photos and audio together. Through browsing iTunes, I was excited to find the large variety of podcasts currently available online, from educational ones to movie and music reviews.

My time spent on iTunes reinforced my belief that podcasting is an effective way to connect to my students. We can create a podcast together, produce it, and share it with other students and our school. My students will be able to download podcasts to their own iPod and/or iTunes, and tune in anytime, anywhere. They can walk, bike, or run while listening to a podcast on their iPod.

In order to make a podcast that my students could use to learn on the go, I needed to decide how I was going to create my first podcast. After comparing the ways to make a podcast on a PC to those on an Apple computer, I chose to use an Apple computer. I knew that the applications on Apple computers work seamlessly with iTunes and iPods, two important aspects of a podcast. I went onto Apple's website and saw that each Apple store offered free classes on their different applications. I located the schedule for the store near me and found an hour-long class on creating a podcast.

The class walked us through, step-by-step, how to create a podcast using Garageband, which is one of Apple's applications used

to record music, radio talk shows, movie scores, and podcasts. After the class I practiced working in the program on my own. I recorded my own audio tracks and practiced adding pictures into my Garageband files. Soon it was time to bring my computer to school so my students and I could create our first podcast.

I decided to focus on the cultural celebration of *el día de los muertos* [the day of the dead] that my Spanish II students had just finished studying. We studied the cultural practices of *el día de los muertos* in Mexico, and the students made *tumbas* [tombs] and *ofrendas* [altars] to commemorate important people and pets they had lost in the past. I took various pictures of the students' *tumbas* and their *ofrendas*. Following the celebration, I asked my students to write about their experience in Spanish. After reviewing their sentences they came up to my desk, one by one, and we recorded the audio track in Garageband for our podcast.

At home, I synched the photos I had taken with the tracks we recorded in class. Using Garageband, I chose to produce my podcast through iWeb, an Apple application used to create websites. iWeb let me choose the colors and layout for the website that will host my podcast, and then it produced my website using my ".mac" account. Once produced online, iWeb provided me with the URL so I was ready to share my website and, if I wanted to, produce my podcast on iTunes. (I decided to produce my podcast only on my website and not through iTunes.) When visiting my website my students can watch and listen to our podcast, or they can download it. By choosing to subscribe to my podcasting website, each time I upload a new podcast, my students' iTunes will also upload it.

My goal is to podcast on a regular basis with my students. I've talked with them about recording their own music to accompany the reading of a poem, hosting a talk show, narrating a fashion show, and commentating a school sportscast among other things. The students who worked on the first podcast with me were eager to see the final product and to create a second podcast. I feel that the enthusiasm for creating podcasts will continue to grow as we make more of them.

I have shared my podcast with other Spanish teachers at my school, and now they are also sharing it with their students. As a department we would like to create a school podcasting group in Spanish. The group would produce a regular podcast, similar to a radio talk show, where our students are using Spanish to discuss the happenings at our school.

Our students are in a constant state of connectivity and, as a teacher, I too want and need to be connected to my students. Using podcasting has not only been fun, it has been educational for all of us. My hope is that we continue to learn from one another and use this tool to make learning fun and interesting.

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