Promoting Language Fluency Through the Use of Voiceovers
by Alexandra McCourt and Sylvia Schumann

One of the major obstacles of language learning is the transition from the silent phase to oral language production. In order to engage students and promote language fluency, teachers need to incorporate activities that encourage speaking in English. Oftentimes, English language learners are reticent to speak in English for fear of making errors, mispronouncing words, and/or speaking with an accent. However, communicating with others, *communicative competence,* is far more important than perfect grammar and pronunciation. Focusing on interpersonal communication outweighs speaking with native-like proficiency, as the primary goal of language is communication (Lessow-Hurley, 2003). Voiceover programs are a great vehicle to use in motivating students to speak and fostering more language interaction. Three programs that promote oral language development through the use of voiceovers are Google Voice, Sock Puppets, and Voicethread.

Google Voice

Google recently came out with a new application called Google Voice, which is basically a high-tech voicemail system. The program allows teachers to obtain evidence of oral language progression. Teachers using the program can choose to use their own telephone numbers or be assigned a new number that can forward calls and has its own voicemail system attached. When students leave a message, the voicemail system dictates the oral messages and emails them to the teacher, thereby providing the teacher with two ways to assess language. Even though the teacher knows the students best, and is able to decipher the messages, the program clearly shows mispronunciations and errors in structure and syntax. Students are able to review, delete, and rerecord messages as many times as they would like, which encourages repeated practice for fluency. In addition, the teacher is able to give feedback through text messages, emails, voice recordings, and notes.

Sock Puppets

Sock Puppets is an application for tablets that allows students to create and practice dialogues through the use of Sock Puppet characters. It is a program that has students choose characters, a setting, and props to create a scene, and then records the students' dialogue while changing the voices to an animated tone in the replay. This program is particularly engaging for students, as it is fun and allows them to be creative. In addition, the fact that the voices are changed to a cartoonish tone in the replay relieves stress and pressure about having their voices recorded, heard, or identified by others. Sock Puppets is an enjoyable application for all ages and is great with reticent English language learners.

Voicethread

Voicethread is a program that can be used on both a computer or a tablet. The program allows users to upload a wide assortment of documents and images, then comment on each through multiple venues, such as: telephone, text, video, and voice messages. The variety of ways that students are able to comment allows for differentiated learning and the strengthening of multiple skill areas. Furthermore, a Voicethread can be shared and commented on by several people at the same time. Students are able to create presentations, communally analyze a document or image,

build off of each other's ideas, and critique their work. Teachers are able to monitor the comments, and witness the oral and written language production of the students. The Voicethread program is an innovative way to engage numerous English language learners in differing contexts and modalities.

Summary

Using voiceover technology addresses a main issue for language teachers: how to provide learners with systematic practice that develops their oral language production and fluency. In particular, it provides English language learners with current and engaging experiences, which will enable them to relate form to meaning, while becoming more aware of the anomalies of the target language.

References

Lessow-Hurley, J. (2003). *Meeting the needs of second language learners: An educator's guide.* Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development.

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