Chapter 11
What Audacity!
Decreasing Student Anxiety while Increasing Instructional Time

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ABSTRACT

Promoting student engagement in the second language classroom can be difficult for teachers. Multiple obstacles such as perceptions of the irrelevance of authentic language applications and the affective barriers (e.g. performance anxiety speaking before peers) tend to hinder student oral language performance. For teachers, especially for beginners, other obstacles appear such as being given the most challenging assignments with little to no professional support. Many times these educators scramble to squeeze the most out of every minute in the classroom for instructional purposes while trying to increase student achievement. Three free and open source software options are presented and findings from two studies of focusing on the use of Audacity indicate multiple benefits for both teachers and students. Afterwards, the authors demonstrate how to use Audacity for oral language assessment and discuss its implications for the world language classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Fostering student engagement in the classroom is a challenging endeavor, particularly when teachers face so many obstacles that decrease teacher instructional time in the classroom. First, and in no particular order, are the bureaucratic impediments, such as large classes, complex work schedules, unnecessary meetings, and little say in school policy, all of which complicate the daily reality of teaching (Futernick, 2007). Secondly, the testing requirements inherent in *No Child Left Behind* can seem overwhelming to teachers as they lose precious instructional time due to off-task preparation and administration of the exams (Zellmer, Frontier, & Pheifer, 2006). A third factor, which

has remained unchanged throughout decades of education as noted by Goldman (1991), must be acknowledged as loss of classroom time and student focus due to sports and extracurricular activities.

Concurrent with struggling with these difficulties, all educators, regardless of their discipline, must also endeavor to capitalize on every minute in the classroom for instructional purposes while trying to enhance student achievement. Second language instruction faces these same challenges while adding an additional component of a multiplicity of manners in which proficiency is assessed. At its core, second language instruction in the communicative classroom is dedicated to the ideals, if not the practice, of developing second-language proficiency in the Three Modes of Communication: the Interpersonal, the Interpretive, and the Presentational (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999). Formerly known as the four skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking), the Three Modes of Communication are three parts of a single goal of communication rather than any one skill in isolation. While proficiency in reading, writing, and listening are measured mainly through common assessment instruments such as written exams, the assessment of students' oral language skills has continually presented numerous challenges, including the development of useful and flexible rubrics (Foster, Tonkyn, & Wigglesworth, 2000) and the time expended in individual learner assessment (Flewelling, 2002).

Additionally, unlike assessments for reading and writing, oral assessments, traditionally conducted in the classroom, do not leave an archivable assessment artifact. This lack of an artifact impedes overall performance evaluation, as an artifact could be used to measure similarities and/or differences in learner progress towards proficiency goals, can materially support assessment outcomes, and can be presented as concrete evidence of language proficiency to stakeholders and third-party program evaluators or accreditation certifiers. In an effort to address these concerns, older language laboratories are being transformed to accommodate digital recordings that can facilitate whole-class concurrent, archival recordings (Flewelling, 2002). Presently, researchers are investigating the manifold uses of emerging technologies and their potential uses within the context of oral proficiency and assessment (Chan, 2003; Egbert, 1999; Volle, 2005).

BACKGROUND

Because younger teachers are more likely to have grown up in a technology-rich environment, their comfort and skills with technology may lead to an increased use of computers for instructional purposes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2000). Furthermore, many of these novice educators are confident using technology but perhaps lack the time and resources to develop technologically rich lessons (Pierson & Cozart, 2005). Even with an abundance of available software, hardware, free ware, and webware, Cuban (2001) finds that school systems have not been restructured fully to support the integration of technology for instruction. In an effort to balance student security and privacy with access to instructional technology, schools have restricted access to a plethora of opportunities for students and teachers, including many interactive web tools, such as blogs, *Skype*, and *YouTube*. Furthermore, it is not uncommon for teachers to lack the administrative privilege to install or configure software, even free or open-source software, on their classroom computers.

For language teachers, the inability to use cutting-edge technology for instructional and assessment purposes forces them to continue to use traditional assessment methods that were espoused decades ago. Specifically in the area of oral language assessment, teachers rely on time consuming face-to-face interactions in the classroom, which diminish precious instructional time.

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