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FLARR Pages #48: Multi-Media in the Foreign Language Classroom: Let's Get Organized!

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File Under:

- Multi-Media
- Power Point Use
- Consistency
- Authenticity
- Accessibility
- Time Management aid

“Multi-Media in the Foreign Language Classroom: Let’s Get Organized!” Kathryn Droske, Student of French and Secondary Education at the University of Minnesota, Morris

When asked if I would like to collaborate on a project preparing Power Point presentations to incorporate multi-media in the first-year foreign language classroom, I was more than a bit hesitant. Based on my personal experiences as a student in classes with Power Point, I was not fond of the program. Nevertheless, I gulped, accepted, and as work on the project began, I came to see the ways in which Power Point can be thoughtfully employed in the classroom to benefit teachers and students alike.

As foreign language teachers, we are constantly seeking ways to render our subject more real, more relevant, and more accessible to students, particularly in the early years of language study. The incorporation of multi-media in the classroom as a means of supplementing the text, exposing students to cultural realia, and introducing different regional varieties of a language is no longer a new phenomenon. However, teachers may find themselves using these resources sporadically and recreating their collection of materials year after year. This doesn’t have to be the case! Using a program such as Microsoft Power Point (friend to even the computer

unsavvy), to organize and store the collection of songs, sound files, film clips, photographs, literary excerpts, and other media one typically uses to enliven a lesson, one can create a clear, comprehensive and easily updatable portfolio of day-to-day lessons. Such a tool provides a) consistency, b) authenticity, and c) accessibility to students. A.) Consistency: In a beginning language classroom, students are first introduced to many unfamiliar and essential concepts, sounds, and structures. Even some of the most basic capabilities of Power Point can help make the material clearer to students and its presentation more consistent. For example, color coding pronouns and their conjugations, or gender and number agreement with nouns, their articles and their descriptors, is a simple technique to help students visualize the need for agreement throughout the sentence.

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Though tedious to repeatedly prepare when working with colored chalk or markers, color-coded slides are quickly stored for repeated use in Power Point,

and ready for neat, clear, and consistent presentation to students. B.) Authenticity: Textbooks are useful tools, but they alone will never succeed in making a language truly come alive for students. It is the role of the teacher to pull from all sorts of resources to show that the language is an authentic mode of communication. Songs, videos, and web pages are all effective ways to demonstrate the life of a language, and Power Point is a great storage space for these media – they can be imbedded in the presentations and seamlessly incorporated into lessons. Similarly, dialogues, pronunciation guides, and other sound files created specifically for the language learner can be strategically placed in the presentation and stored, eliminating the stack of separate cassettes and compact discs that one must normally catalogue and retrieve. C.) Accessibility: Having thorough, well-prepared presentations makes teachers readier to meet the special needs of different students. For a student who has difficulty note-taking, or misses class due to chronic illness, the presentation can be easily printed or burned to a CD that is made available for self-study in the language lab. For the student who is hearing impaired, the information is accompanied with clear visuals and, as the instructor is not bound to the blackboard, he or she can always face the students while speaking. All students in the class, not only those with special needs, can benefit from the increased accessibility gained through these minor adjustments in pedagogy. In undertaking a project like this—one that requires planning ahead, supplementing a text, and taking time to consider the diversity of learners in a class—teachers offer, consistently, the sort of lessons that they've always wanted: lessons that

consider auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and tactual learners, and include activities that appeal to each type; lessons that captivate gifted students without leaving behind those who are struggling. The initial preparation of such a program will take time, but once completed, thorough, thoughtful lesson plans are in place for years to come.

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Skeptics may assume that a project of such magnitude is a preposterous proposition for an educator with an already over-extended schedule. This may be the case if you take it on alone, but having a student intern collaborate on the task, as I did (with UMM French professor Tammy Berberi) can lighten the work load considerably. I am a future educator, and our collaboration gave me invaluable experience in lesson planning and preparation. Over the course of one semester working approximately ten hours a week, I learned the Power Point program, searched for and collected multi-media to accompany the material, prepared lessons plans, and created Power Point presentations of a full semester of lessons.

So set aside some time, employ student help, give Power Point a try, and get organized!