Introducing iPods
in the Second Language Classroom

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In conversational English classes designed for high intermediate level learners, teachers must motivate students to learn the second language by meeting the student's goals and interests. Providing access to new learning resources helps round out a student's education and promotes their marketability upon graduation, motivating them to continue onto the next class activity. For this purpose the teacher is compelled to bring meaning, relevance, and a feeling of engagement to their lessons.

Theoretical Considerations

For motivational needs like the ones described above, the use of iPods in the classroom is becoming a new choice of ESL learning instrument. Particularly, the iPods offer students relevant, real English in different formats that students can relate to their personal lives. Connecting a student's personal interests with their school work is a method of eliciting interest in the content being taught and motivates students to increase their comprehension of new material and increase on-task motivation. The introduction of new material with a connection to something they already know promotes understanding (Brown, 2001; Murphy and Byrd, 2001).

Therefore, in classes where students have already reached an intermediate, functional level of fluency, it is important to challenge them with relevant, real-English material they relate to their own lives, is purposeful and meaningful to their personal goals and interests (Brown, 2001; Nunan, 1999). The ability for a teacher to take a student's head out of a traditional learning textbook at some

point in the lesson plan and relate the day's material to the student's own life then becomes a vital motivational talent (Dornyei, 2001).

A brief survey of iPod usage

The iPod was introduced by Apple in October of 2001. It had a 5GB hard drive and cost $399 (US) and was originally intended for music files only. What distinguished it from other types of players on the market was the ease of use, the large storage capacity, the high price tag, and for Mac users only, the integration with iTunes, and Apple's software for managing digital music.

Since that time, Apple has introduced many new models, added support for Windows users, created the iTunes Store online, and integrated that with iPod synchronization, added the ability to store pictures and, most recently, videos. It is enormously popular, and with each new enhancement to this product, it becomes interesting and useful to a wider audience of people, especially university level students.

One of the first institutes of higher learning to use iPods in their curriculum was Duke University's Center for Instructional Technology, North Carolina. At Duke, students explore the components of music by comparing how diverse musical compositions are experienced in a range of settings. The iPods allow students to listen to musical pieces in a variety of environments and share songs during class discussions as examples of topics that arise. For the final project, students use their iPods to record samples of everyday sounds, which they then use to produce a sound collage, or "sonic essay."

Another Duke class is using the iPods with a sociological focus. Each member of a group will record a narrative account of an event from at least three individuals, using the iPod with a microphone attachment. Groups then write papers identifying patterns in the accounts they collected and suggest ways that further research might examine how these patterns are linked to official historical accounts and the interests of particular institutions.

Students at Lehigh University use the iPod to create a recording by using a sound recorder device and upload files to a webpage/course management system. Similar to iPod use at Duke, students use the iPod to listen to *podcasts*, recordings of news programs and information networks.

The Apple iPod education website also offers other suggestions for using the iPods. As previously mentioned, iPods can record speeches or lectures that students can absorb on their train rides home, and store music to discuss in class, but on some models, they can also record images, which makes discussions of photos an invaluable vested interest in the student's learning material.

In the July 2006 edition of The Language Teacher Journal, Professor Lin Lougheed recommends using the iPods to listen to audio books. This is an excellent platform for speech writing, cultural discussions, and group evaluation.

Classroom Applications for 4-skill Classes

The following points should be considered before introducing iPods in the ESL classroom:

• Model of iPod
• Prep time for, amongst other things, finding useful podcasts
• Ability to download and time to do so
• Use and protection of peripherals: USB cords, earplugs, microphones, and protective cases

Practical applications for iPods would need to take into account which iPod model students and teachers have access to. Some can only be used for small data downloads, like podcasts or recordings, while bigger memory models are capable of holding videos.

Another practical consideration is prep time for teachers to type up any lectures or work papers they want the students to have, then download them to their own iPod. But once the initial work is done, the material can be used or manipulated for future use very conveniently. A similarly convenient course curriculum plan, outlining which podcast materials can be used at which parts of the year, is a necessary first step in iPod class use.

Prep time also must be considered when teachers are trying to find the

right podcast for the right lesson. Many podcasts now have limited information, move too fast for beginner learners to comprehend the L2 sufficiently, or have too much use of Japanese and too little English. Teachers also must familiarize themselves with downloading everything from recorded interviews to music. This is not extremely difficult but it is time-consuming to learn before starting a program using iPods.

Another point that teachers need to concern themselves with is protection of the iPod and equipment. In some instances students borrow the iPods from the school for the term. Also, teachers need to spend some informing students that they are responsible for the return of the school's iPods, in the same condition as when they were lent out.

For reading skills classes, choosing audio book recordings is a very productive activity for intermediate to advanced level classes due to the vocabulary being used in the texts. The recordings can then be summarized and talked about in pairs or groups.

For writing classes, choosing text material for reports, critiques, or essays will prove productive. Recording academic writing lectures given by the instructor can also aid students in their efforts to produce just what the teacher wants. Again, recording music for peer written reviews is a common choice now being instituted in English learning circles.

Instructors in speaking skills classes could use the iPod by having students record their speeches or interviews and bringing them to class for review and discussion. In the same way, students in listening skills classes could benefit by listening to what other students have already recorded. These recordings can be manipulated again. Musical recordings again are good for listening classes, where students listen and copy the L2, or translate the words from Japanese, then compare them with their partners or with other groups. Also, speeches are available or can be made, copied, then listened to for comparisons and discussions.

Additionally, there are usually general notes, rules and instructions, common across learning levels, which teachers need to put into the student's care. In this case, the teachers can write them on their websites and have students transfer them to their iPods.

Much of how the iPods are to be used in the classroom depends on the

expectations of the instructor. However, the most practical method for the initial introduction of iPods is to use them in smaller advanced classes of up to fifteen students.

How iPods Benefit the Language Learning Participants

Current research into iPod use in the L2 environment is limited. In a recent iPod presentation, Robert Chartrand submitted that in his L2 classes at Kurume University, the podcasts students use are subject and/or interest-specific, and resources, like videos and recordings, offer authentic native use of English.

Another benefit of using the iPods in class or as a homework exercise is that students are not reliant on going to the library, checking out books, and returning them on time, or getting there before it closes or opens, or going to a language lab with similar restrictions. Access to the internet is done on their home PCs and podcasts are then downloaded onto their iPod units. Students can download TOEFL exercises form the iTunes podcast site, listen to two people talking about their school days and then copy the questions and answers for discussion in class. After a comparison of what students wrote of the recording, they can ask each other the following questions:

1. Who was your best friend when you were in high school?
2. What was your best friend in high school like?
3. Did you have any unusual friends in high school?
4. What made them unusual?

Another TOEFL podcast discussion concerns TV shows the speakers watched as children. The students write questions in class before downloading the podcast and answering questions. The next lesson they can discuss their own answers or interview someone outside of class and report the answers back. The following are examples of questions about the podcast:

1. What are they talking about?
2. What did she love doing when she was young?

3. Did he love to watch TV, too?

4. What TV show did he like to watch?

5. Did he like the Star Trek movies?

6. What other TV shows did she like?

The effective and easy use of the iPod for digital recording of interviews, field notes, small group discussions, and self recording of oral assignments makes it very beneficial for the classroom. Also, there are a number of programs that allow student to manipulate material to generate what they need to meet the requirements of their classes.

Also benefiting the learning environment is a greater student engagement and interest in class discussions, lab research, and independent projects with the before mentioned and invaluable vested interest in the content material. Students personally like the learning material, find it in the chosen form, and figure out a way to produce it for class discussions and activities.

As some students learn at different rates and in different ways, the iPods provide enhanced support for individual learning preferences and needs by allowing them to choose how they want their classmates or instructors to see the information they found or what they find interesting to choose from. A needs assessment form could be useful here to aid in locating just what students like to study combined with what the teachers want to provide them.

A very important fact is that iPods prepare large classes with listening practice before and after the lesson with lecture or news webcasts, thus creating more direct interaction time in class. In addition, as most students are carrying iPods around, they spark innovation and curiosity among other students, who may want to learn using these new tools.

Lastly, both students and teachers who have used them have claimed that they are a change from the traditional textbook lesson. This change may be what triggers the "coolness" factor/tag benefit with students, which is an important motivational benefit.

Conclusion

Becoming proficient in a language takes time. Work involves time from a

teacher preparing a course and the homework needed to be completed by students to keep knowledge in its place. IPod use offers this opportunity, utilizing the student's free time, to learn. With all its benefits contained in this paper, it seems that the best benefit is getting real information into our English language classrooms.

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