It is frustrating to hear of language programs shutting down, of students left without qualified language teachers, and of language courses that are not allowed to run due to limited interest. I have watched with dismay as many German programs in my own county have been shuttered for a multitude of reasons, leaving students who wanted to continue their studies without viable options. I have also fielded questions from parents wondering why their schools don’t offer German or other language courses; some students have been able to find an online course while others trekked to far away language schools. But for the most part, their needs have gone unmet.

This all changed two years ago when I was asked if I would consider teaching students from other schools. Of course, I replied, but how? By using a robot, was the response. The Jetsons was one of my favorite cartoons as a child, so I jumped at the chance to work with my own version of Rosie the Robot. There were three students who wanted to enroll in my German 3 class but could not travel to my school to attend.

What would it look like? How would it move? Could I still teach in the same way or would I have to drastically alter my lessons to accommodate this new technology?

Double Robot
Meet the Double Robot, which is essentially an iPad on wheels. The iPad is attached to a pole, and the pole is inserted into a round barrel about 8-1/2 inches in diameter that serves as the wheels. The Double stands about 4 feet tall but can be adjusted to “grow” to about 5 feet tall.

The base price for one Double Robot is about $3,800 and includes the charging station. I discovered that my school system, Anne Arundel County Public Schools (AACPS), has one of the largest fleets of Double Robots in the nation. AACPS originally started using the Double Robots to provide equity and access to students with challenges that prevent them from participating in a regular classroom setting. They later purchased additional Doubles to help extend unique course offerings to the more than 80,000 students in the county.

How it Works
Students in the remote classroom log on to a computer at their school, and in my classroom we see their faces on the iPad screen. A camera sits atop the iPad providing students in the remote location with either a regular or wide-screen view of the classroom, depending on the camera used.

Students in the remote classroom have full control over the Double Robot and can move it using controls on their computer screens. Once the robot is in the desired location, students park it, making it virtually impossible for it to be knocked over. Newer versions of the Double Robot show students a map of the classroom; they simply click on a location and the robot moves there independently.

When students in the remote classroom have a question, they can raise the iPad, mirroring how a student would raise a hand. Students and the teacher hear one another via microphones embedded in the iPad and computer equipment at the student’s home school.

Advantages
Since students are able to move around the room and attend class in real-time, the teacher can instruct as they normally would. It is one of the most authentic distance learning environments for learners and more motivating than a traditional online course.

My students have conducted interviews, had conversations with partners, and participated in gallery walks, group discussions, debates and even Socratic Seminars. I can teach as I normally would, just keeping in mind that my students are not physically present. I upload the resources that students need to the Google Classroom, allowing them to view and turn in work digitally.

What new technology tool do you recommend—and how can teachers use it in their classrooms?

This issue’s tip comes from Katrina Griffin, German teacher and World & Classical Languages Department Chair at North County High School in Glen Burnie, Maryland, and 2017 ACTFL Language Teacher of the Year.
The students in the classroom with me love having “the robot” around. They are excited to make friends with students from another school, and the novelty of talking to other students via robot does not seem to wear off.

Most importantly, students can learn any language that is offered in any school in the county, whether or not their home school offers it.

**Pro Tips**

- The Double Robot connects via Wi-Fi. Establish a clear protocol for how students in the remote classroom should contact you if they have trouble connecting the robot to your classroom. I suggest that students text or email you directly, or have an adult in their building contact you.
- All students who attend class remotely should practice “driving” the Double Robot. This ensures that the robot will be active even if some students are absent.
- You (the teacher) do not have the ability to put the robot in park. The Double Robot will start to sway if it is not parked, so make sure that students get into the habit of parking it.
- When students in my classroom are all talking at once, the students in the Double Robot classroom have difficulty hearing. During partner and small group work, I make sure to have a space set up directly outside the classroom or in a closet, so that the students on the Double can hear the persons with whom they are speaking.
- It is a good idea to upload all videos and even audio clips to a site that students can access remotely, just in case there are any connectivity issues.
- Find ways to make the students at the remote schools feel included. Suggestions include:
  - Stopping by their schools to meet them. I have also mailed or dropped off keychains, pens, and other trinkets.
  - If you plan to give the class a German snack, make sure to drop off some snacks for the Double students, as well.
  - Try to have at least one field trip with all students early in the year so that they can meet each other.
- If their grades are good enough, I induct the Double students into our chapter of the National German Honor Society.

**Final Thoughts**

The Double Robot is an amazing product that has essentially removed the walls from my classroom. It has given students in my county the opportunity to learn German when they would otherwise have been unable to do so.

In theory, any person anywhere in the world could attend my class. The easy access and maneuverability of the Double Robot allow students to participate in class as though they were physically in the room, and teachers are able to instruct without drastically altering their delivery method. The Double Robot allows students to learn any language that they desire no matter where they are in the county or the world—it is an invaluable product.

For more information:

- [www.doublerobotics.com](http://www.doublerobotics.com)
- [www.youtube.com/watch?v=lG5i_oAfsI](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lG5i_oAfsI)

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*LEFT: First day with the Double!*

*RIGHT: German 3 students at North County High School and Northeast High School (on the robot) take part in a Socratic Seminar.*
LISTEN UP! A Language-Related Podcast

Radio Ambulante
Sometimes referred to as “This Latin American Life,” Radio Ambulante is a popular Spanish language podcast distributed by NPR (National Public Radio) that is used by many high school, university, and private language teachers. It employs long-form narrative journalism to tell stories about the life, people, and cultures of Latin America. Episodes take place in locations from Chile to Costa Rica to Mexico, as well as the United States.

The stories—about subjects ranging from sports to immigration to the environment—are told by the people who experience them, allowing Spanish learners the opportunity to hear both authentic Spanish-speaking voices and compelling stories, to encounter new vocabulary and different accents, and to engage with social, political, and cultural issues through compelling storytelling.

Teachers create lessons from Radio Ambulante episodes in various ways. For example, in a Princeton University class, students use a guide with questions before listening to an episode, then analyze and discuss the episodes in listening comprehension activities, then place the story in relation to relevant events or issues. In some high school AP classes, episodes are used as discussion centerpieces complementing thematic units.

For the average language learner, the podcast is fast-paced and challenging. Scaffolding and chunking is essential for full comprehension.

Each episode is accompanied by a transcription (in Spanish) as well as an English translation. There is also a private Facebook group and a monthly newsletter to help connect teachers and share resources and lesson plans. The podcast streams online and more than 1,000 teachers have joined the Facebook group while 1,900 subscribe to the newsletter.

Now Radio Ambulante, in partnership with Silicon Valley ed-tech start-up Jiveworld, has developed a new language learning app, Lupa. Designed for intermediate students, Lupa segments each Radio Ambulante episode and layers learning tools over the stories. Selective redaction and user-controlled playback speeds complement full transcriptions and translations to build listening comprehension. Lupa is designed to accelerate the progress of students to complete fluency.

Spanish teachers who would like to evaluate Lupa for their classrooms are encouraged to contact Cecilia Tom at cecilia@jiveworld.com for a complimentary subscription.

WHAT’S THAT APP?

ChineseSkill
chinese-skill.com
A game-based and structured curriculum optimized for English-speaking beginners, ChineseSkill compartmentalizes content to permit studying in fragmented times. It is an innovative way to break down Chinese characters for new learners and features multiple test modes that facilitate memorization and personalize learning. ChineseSkill uses a gentle voice with native pronunciation at two speeds and offers the option to learn simplified characters, traditional characters, or both, on demand. It is also possible to synchronize learning progress across devices.

Human Japanese
humanjapanese.com
Featuring thousands of recordings; clear, down-to-earth explanations; intelligent quizzes and reviews; animations of hiragana, katakana and kanji characters; and much more, Human Japanese provides three levels: Human Japanese addresses the needs of Novice students; Human Japanese Intermediate addresses the needs of intermediate level students seeking to take their skills to the next level; and Satori Reader, which offers intermediate-level reading and listening practice with annotations, SRS, and more.

Anki
apps.ankiweb.net
Anki is not a language teaching app but rather a content-agnostic app that supports images, audio, videos and scientific markup. Anki is actually a program that makes remembering anything easy. It claims to be more efficient than traditional study methods, so it may make it possible to decrease the time spent studying, or to increase the amount learned. Try these powerful, intelligent flashcards in your classroom.