TIPS FROM Educators

This issue’s tip comes from Gay Rawson, Professor of French and Chair of the Department of World Languages and Cultures at Concordia College in Moorhead, Minnesota, and recipient of the 2020 ACTFL/Cengage Postsecondary Award for Excellence in Foreign Language Instruction Using Technology with IALLT.

What new technology tool do you recommend—and how do you use it in your classroom?

Using Technology to Access Authentic Resources and Connect with Culture

I have a confession to make, although it might not come as a surprise: I love technology. There I said it. Before you judge me, let me explain. Even after a year that forced many of us online, I still find new and powerful ways to leverage different technology tools in my classes that help motivate and engage students.

Applying gamification theory to my classes has created an environment that lowers students’ affective filter, focuses on what they can do rather than on what they can’t do, and puts students at the center and in control of their learning. It makes my class period exciting for them—and for me. It has allowed me to apply the STARTALK Principles for Effective Teaching and Learning and the ACTFL Core Practices for World Language Learning in new and exciting ways. Technology, when used properly, is a powerful tool, connecting students to one another and connecting content in meaningful and effective ways.

I would like to ask you to challenge yourself to think about how you might use technology in deeper ways. Instead of just using tech tools to drill vocabulary or verb conjugations in a fun but teacher-centered format, what if you wove culture into the lesson and found ways for students to communicate, choose, collaborate, create, and connect with communities next door and around the world? What might that look like? How might that work?

I’m going to share four of my current favorite tools and authentic resources, applicable to all languages and levels. You may already know about some of them, but I will focus on ways that these tools can connect students with cultures, keeping the ACTFL Core Practices firmly in place.

These resources begin with the interpretive mode but easily lend themselves to extensions in the presentational and interpersonal modes. Students can explore the resources and share their findings, in writing or in an oral presentation. They can incorporate sounds in their presentations or explain an article that they read. They can discuss their findings with partners.

One of the things that I like best about the tools highlighted here is that my students and teacher colleagues are nearly spellbound by them. They reported listening to the radio or street sounds, looking up the headlines in another part of the world outside of class, and sharing these sites with their friends and families. The sites stimulated their intellectual curiosity and started to get at perhaps the most elusive, and most cherished, aspect of the World-Readiness Standards: lifelong learning. Technology connected them to cultures, and they started using the language for enrichment and enjoyment outside the classroom. À suivre!

Radio Garden radio.garden/visit/tours/WSYuYu8q

This site features a giant interactive globe that allows you to easily navigate to any green dot, each of which represents a radio station somewhere in the world. Students can easily listen to the radio in any location and scan for stations in far away rural areas or large urban metropolises. The link directs listeners to a station in Tours, France, but it is easy to navigate to any place on the planet. Radio Garden is also a powerful yet simple app that can be downloaded to a portable device or phone.

In my class we sometimes choose a station in the part of the world we are studying for background music while students are writing collaboratively or working in groups. Other times we evaluate what kinds of music are being played in a country we are studying: What patterns do we notice? What kinds of music do we hear? Instead of just memorizing a list of vocabulary words about different kinds of music, students go on a scavenger hunt, searching the globe for different examples of various genres. They present about the kinds of music they hear in a certain country and then talk about their favorite genres. We sometimes follow...
up on this activity by using Lyrics Training (lyricstraining.com) and FluentKey (fluentkey.com) to listen to some of the songs we’ve heard, learn the lyrics, and then analyze and evaluate their meaning.

**Audio Mapa** [www.audiomapa.org](http://www.audiomapa.org)

This site is in Spanish but is applicable to all languages. A flat map of the earth with orange dots is featured. Many of the dots have numbers on them, indicating how many recordings are available in each geographic area. As you click on each dot, the map zooms in until you can see the actual houses and neighborhoods where the sounds were recorded. You can access labels on the map that indicate restaurants, notable landmarks, and street names. The labels are linked to Google maps so you can click on them to be taken to related websites and more. What you hear when you click are the soundscapes of that location!

This project began in Latin America with the goal of mapping the soundscape of that part of the world. Researchers took sound trips and shared their recordings with the site, which has expanded to include more of the world. Travelers are invited to contribute sound files to the map. Not all parts of the world are represented yet, but it is already an impressive collection. Imagine how much more powerful this resource might make teaching about cities and directions. Instead of a static, generic map, what if students chose a part of the world where the target language is spoken and zoomed in to listen to the sounds of the streets in that location, navigating the neighborhood, and imagining the daily routines in that part of the world?

**Kiosko.net** [en.kiosko.net](http://en.kiosko.net)

There are Spanish, English, and French versions of Kiosko, but the resources include many other languages. It provides easy kiosk-like access to authentic newspaper and magazine covers from around the world, usually in the target language. Keeping in mind the adage “change the task, not the text,” even beginners can
look at the covers and describe the photos, comparing coverage of the same story in different parts of the target language-speaking world, noticing what is covered and what is not in different areas. Intermediate and Advanced students can read and analyze at a higher level. Superior and native speakers may just appreciate the organizational structure and ease of accessing these constantly updated resources.

Ancient Earth tinyurl.com/36ncvuaj

This site has really captured the attention of my students. It is another floating globe but here you choose Earth time periods, from 750 million years ago to the present. You can enter any city in the world and see what the earth looked like during the time period you selected. Current national boundaries are in the background making geographic orientation easy.

Our first unit in intermediate French is about ourselves, which usually includes nationalities and countries. At the most basic level, we are using Ancient Earth to review numbers, geography, and countries, tracing over time how the land masses behind today’s designations have changed and developed. However, there are many possibilities for connecting to other disciplines, especially the sciences, to learn about the species that might have been alive at the time, or what the climate, weather, or natural disasters might have been like. What kinds of animals do students imagine first lived in that area?

This globe moves us from primitive species to animals and eventually to people. How and why might people have moved from one area to another? We are thinking about nationalities, stereotypes, and belonging. What does it mean to be Francophone, French, or American? Who belongs? Who decides who belongs, and who doesn’t? We discuss issues behind the term “American” referring only to people from the United States. As we think about migration, immigration, and the movement of people over time, we think about the first nations that were here before us. We bring in history, politics, environmental studies, and socio-economic factors to understand more deeply.

We play powerful simulation games to understand the impossible choices that many refugees face. The United Nations Refugee Agency has great resources and teaching materials to help teachers and students understand the differences between refugees, migrants, internally displaced people, and so forth. These advanced extension activities require careful planning and debriefing as they often elicit emotionally charged responses.

The Ancient Earth site is in English, but no words are necessary, and one can keep it simple, allowing the images to capture the imagination and tell a story. It could be a springboard for a non-confrontational and apolitical way to engage in profound discussions of borders, diversity, and migration even at lower levels of proficiency. Beyond being a catalyst for discussions involving issues of human social justice, this site also lends itself to conversations about sustainability and the earth’s changing resources.