Handout 3: Creating &using your own resources

There are a number of resources you can create yourself to use in your lessons. These include:

- **Blogs**
- **Podcasts**
- **Wikis**
- **Facebook page or group**
- **Websites**

Each of these can be used, often for free or with minimum expense, to create materials for or to communicate with your learners.

Blogs

Blog is short for *weblog* and is an online journal or diary. It consists of a chronological list of entries, or posts which can contain text, photos, and links to other web pages. If you wish to develop your own blog for free, go to www.blogger.com or www.wordpress.com

Blogs can be used for pre-teaching, for developing language through creating vocabulary lists and grammatical diagrams, for communicating between lessons, for giving feedback and for promoting leaner autonomy.

Podcasts

Creating a podcast is not an activity for an elementary computer user . To do so you need two pieces of equipment – a sound card and a microphone .To record a podcast and then convert it into an mp3 file for distribution you need two pieces of software: the recorder and the mp3 encoder (e.g. a free recorder is Audacity, which enables you to record and edit digital audio (www.audacityteam.org/download). An free mp3 encoder that integrates well with Audacity is Lame (www.lame.buanzo.org/#lamewindl). It enables you to convert the recordings you create with Audacity into mp3 files that can be played by computer media players, digital music players and some types of PDAs and mobile phones.

Podcasts can provide excellent listening opportunities for your learners, from practice in listening to extended speech to short pronunciation items. All language presented can be that taken from the context of your lessons and your learners' specific needs. Podcasts can be used to provide models of how a task might be carried out in task-based lessons. Alternatively, you r learners might create podcasts of fluency activities.

Wikis

A wiki is a website on which the pages can be edited by the users, as well as the creator of the website. The users can change the content by adding or removing information, or editing the existing content. To set up a wiki try one of the following sites:
PB wiki (*PB* stands for *peanut butter*) (http://pbworks.com/wikis.html)
Edit this (http://www.editthis.info)
Wiki spaces (http://www.wikispaces.com)

One of the most powerful benefits of using wikis in language learning is as a collaborative tool. Potentially, everyone in a group could work at changing and editing a document and work towards a final version of a particular text. This can help develop bonds between members of the class and create a community spirit, where learners learn from each other and through their group interactions.

A wiki could allow your class to share notes. The whole class can brainstorm a topic area online in advance of a class.

Websites

Creating a good-looking, easy-to-use website does require some specialist knowledge and there is usually some cost, but there are plenty of websites and books that can offer help with this.

The most obvious benefit to a teacher is having your own website if you are working as a freelancer.

If you are looking to use the Web to communicate with your learners outside of the classroom, the simplest solution is setting up a Facebook page or group or a blog. These are extremely straightforward, less time consuming and cheaper.

Activities

1. Blogs: Giving feedback

Aim: To provide language feedback on classroom fluency activities when there is insufficient time during lessons

Level: A1 – C1

Technology: blog

Rationale: A blog can be used to provide learners with written feedback. Since a blog is on the Web, you can add the feedback, and learners can access it at any time from any computer linked to the Internet

Procedure:

1. Introduce the idea of placing feedback on a blog. Explain the benefits of having this information accessible between lessons rather than wait until the next lesson.
2. Decide how to organise the feedback. The best way is to present issues based on the following and ask the learners whether they have any other suggestions
- What colours to use: for example, black for mistakes, with proposed corrections in red; grammar mistakes in blue, vocabulary mistakes in green, and so on
- Whether or not the feedback should identify who said what by the use of initials
- How much feedback should be posted? As much as possible or only the most important points?
- How soon the feedback should be posted after a lesson. This depends on you and your schedule
3. Once the organisation has been decided, agree on a trial period during which you and the class will use this system
4. At the end of this period, you and the class review the success or otherwise of the feedback blog and discuss any necessary changes or whether to discontinue its use.

2. Blogs: Teaching Vocabulary

Aim: To provide support for learning vocabulary

Level: A1 – C1

Technology: blog

Rationale: A blog can be used to pre-teach vocabulary, to give feedback on mistakes, and to demonstrate using an online dictionary as a vocabulary-learning tool. This activity presupposed that learners are already familiar with using a blog for learning.

Procedure:

1. Take a mistake frequently made by your learners, e.g. confusing words, like *summarize* and *resume*
2. Create a blog posting which presents these two words in context, such as a sentence or short piece of text
3. Use another web browser window to go to an online dictionary (e.g. http://dictionary.cambridge.org) and look up *resume*. Once you have a definition displayed, highlight and copy the address of that web page from the address box at the top of the browser window
4. Return to the blog entry; highlight the word *resume* and click on the LINK button; paste the address of the dictionary page into the link box and click OK. This creates a hyperlink form the word *resume* to the dictionary definition
5. Repeat the procedure with *summarise*
6. Make sure the rubric of the entry instructs your learners to click on the links and note the difference between the two words
7. Once you have added the hyperlinks, you can post the entry to your blog

Follow on:

You should do a fluency activity in class so that your learners have the opportunity to practise using the words in a speaking task

3. Blogs: Teaching Idioms

Aim: To provide support for learning idioms

Level: C1

Technology: blog

Procedure:

1. Take an idiom or a set of idioms that you want your learners to focus on
2. Create a blog entry which lists these idioms but without any explanation
3. Highlight each idiom in turn and create a hyperlink to the definition of that idiom in www.usingenglish.com/reference/idioms
4. In a subsequent lesson test your learners on the meanings of the idioms or challenge them to use the idioms appropriately in a fluency activity such as a role-play

4. Podcast Project

Aim: To create podcasts

Level: B1 – C1

Technology: software & equipment required for creating a podcast

Rationale: This project-style activity can be scheduled to take place over many weeks. It works best with technology –literate students who can focus all their attention on the language content of the task and not have to grapple with the technology. It also provides learners with a degree of autonomy to create something of interest to themselves and their peer group.

Preparation: Ensure you are familiar with the equipment and procedure for making podcasts

Procedure:

1. Explain to the class that they are going to create podcasts. Divide the class into small groups and tell them to discuss and agree on the topic of their podcast.

2. Issue a Project Planning Sheet to each group and ask them to fill out as many of the parts as they can at this stage. How the podcast is to be delivered can be considered later in the project. Introduce the class to a programme such as Audacity and show how it can be used to record and edit audio.

3. Groups prepare scripts for their podcasts (in class or for homework). Provide them with as much language support as is needed at this stage

4. Groups record their podcast

5. The recordings are edited and any music or sound effects are added. The finished podcasts are converted into mp3 files and posted in the VLE or emailed to students

6. Each group listens to the podcasts of other groups and then gives its evaluation of the other podcasts. This can be done as a class discussion or using a Podcast Evaluation Sheet

Variations: The class can create a single magazine-style podcast with short reports from each group which are joined together to make a single programme. One student can be the 'presenter' who introduces it and does the links between the reports

5. Wikis: Questioning a Text

Aim: To raise awareness of the possibilities of using a wiki in class

Level: B1↑

Technology: wiki

Rationale: This task is designed to show the collaborative possibilities of using a wiki. It allows learners time to process and question a text in advance of a lesson. This reveals areas that learners may need to work on, providing a focus for the face-to-face class. By selecting a particularly dense or challenging text, the learners will benefit from each others' contributions, fostering an idea of working together to understand the text.

Preparation: set up a wiki using Wikispaces. Have the URL available to distribute to your learners. Post a text on the website for learners to read and edit.

Procedure:

1. In class provide the URL to the wiki and tell learners to read the first text. If there is something they do not understand in the text they can add a comment. You will need to check that learners know how to do this, either through an in-class demonstration, or by creating a handout with instructions. Ask the class to visit the site two or three times during the week, and to try to add a comment or an explanation to any queries they find from others in the class

2. Before the next lesson, visit the site and see which areas learners have had problems with. Click on History to view site changes

3. In the follow up class deal with the areas which remain unsolved. Tell your learners that the time spent in class dealing with the text may well be reduced because of the pre-work they have done

Variation: post a list of leaner mistakes on the wiki (don't put any names though!). Ask learners to correct at least one before the next lesson. Deal with any errors which your learners have no t been able to answer