



Dr. Susana Lorenzo-Zamorano
(project holder)

Project: Reaching Out to (New) Readers through the Use of Audiobooks

School: Languages, Linguistics and Cultures

Course: SPLA 30210 (Final Year Spanish Language) **No. of students:** 35 **Level:** UG

Themes: Feedback and Marking, Multimedia, Student engagement in class

Facilitators: Susana Lorenzo-Zamorano, Noelia Alcarazo and Óscar García

TESS 2012

Teaching Enhancement and Student Success

TESS is a University-wide initiative, funded by the Faculty of Humanities. Working with the Faculty eLearning Teams, academics set up projects aimed at developing course content specific to their needs, through elearning tools and skills development.

What was the problem?

“Due to time and content constraints in the language curriculum, literature is only seen fragmentarily inside the classroom and few are the students that take on the task of reading for pleasure. What is more, students nowadays tend to perceive literature as more complex than other subjects and many of them fail to see the connections it has with other topics within the discipline. This distancing effect is actually depriving students from a set of valuable transferable skills and a level of cognitive development that only reading literature can provide, and it is certainly not helping when it comes to language performance. One last point is that the offer of literature courses has narrowed as well as the fact that it is generally the case that final year students tend to request more assessed work.”



How successful was the solution?

“The degree of success and involvement on the part of the participants was very high. We initially recruited 50 students out of 140 and, although numbers went down as students were more aware of the extra commitment they had to make, we ended up with 35. The success in terms of satisfaction was reflected on the student post-project questionnaires, course unit evaluations and informal correspondence. All in all participants valued the extra opportunity to practise creative thinking and writing and improve their oral and aural skills in a more informal atmosphere. One of the outcomes was the creation of a reading community that went beyond the classroom, which was very relevant within the context of the high and increasing student uptake of SPLAS and helped us to address the personalised learning agenda underpinning the Manchester Undergraduate Education Review.

The project also had a positive impact on students’ performance in language and, although it only contributed 10% to the final mark for SPLA30210, all participants except for one obtained a higher mark in both components of the project than in the written and oral exam of the course, and seven participants did see an improvement in their oral mark degree classification.

Although the involvement in the VLE was not as high as we had expected the attendance was very good and students made very good use of our office hours for face-to-face informal feedback and consultation, something which was highly valued in the questionnaires. Finally, it was significant the fact that even after having finishing all their exams, students were still very willing to provide us with a new recording of their short story for publication and some of them did actually put a lot of imagination to it by including appropriate and very original sound effects.”

The Humanities eLearning Team are on-hand to provide advice, guidance and demonstrations to academic staff on the opportunities for using technology in teaching, learning and assessment.

How was the problem solved?

“It was solved by creating a student-centred and task-orientated outreach activity complementing the final year core language classes (SPLA30210) and aimed at engaging students with reading advanced texts and enjoying literature. The main tool to achieve this aim was the use of audiobooks, currently in the spotlight for their general benefits but not extensively used in language teaching in Higher Education. More specifically, the project contemplated integrating a minimum selection of short stories in the form of audiobooks into our language curriculum and expanding it into a wider reading schedule for get-together weekly sessions. Participants had the final task of creating and launching their own audiobook and making it available as downloadable media on our course website and through the use of digital music players. The project also involved the participants’ use of some of the standard features in Blackboard, i.e. Turnitin, wikis and voice tools. The audiobooks used for the project belong to the following collections now available in the Language Centre:

Relatos españoles contemporáneos, colección Audiolibros, edited by Habla con Eñe (2008), Madrid, Libro & CD-ROM, 128 pp. ISBN: 978-84-612-6719-4

Relatos del Río de la Plata, colección Audiolibros, edited by Habla con Eñe (2009), Madrid, Libro & CD-ROM, 128 pp. ISBN: 978-84-613-2794-2

Relatos mexicanos, colección Audiolibros, edited by Habla con Eñe (2010), Madrid, Libro & CD-ROM, 128 pp. ISBN: 978-84-614-1524-3 ”

What did the students think?

“I loved the audiobooks project. It was touted as a fun extra module that would be beneficial and, although the fun element did disappear quite quickly as the workload came, I really enjoyed the classes and the opportunity to do something creative. Although it was extra work, I’m sure my Spanish has benefitted even a little and I would recommend it to other final year students.”

“I really enjoyed the audiobooks project. It was a great idea and it really helped me with my creative writing and pronunciation.”

“I gained confidence in speaking and writing. It’s a good way to get feedback.”

