The Problem:
Listening practice is essential to learning a foreign language. However, research shows college students do not have sufficient listening practices in and out of classes, thus their listening proficiency often lags behind other skills such as reading. Besides the shortcomings with listening materials (too difficult or irrelevant to course content), my surveys reveal another problem: students do not have the habit of listening to audio materials in the target language.

Description of the innovation:
To address to the above issue, teachers must think outside of the box – looking for ways beyond the traditional textbook-type listening assignments. We believe podcasts can become an innovative learning tool to realize the following purposes.
1. Listening practices can be easily incorporated into students’ increasingly mobile and always-connected lifestyles.
2. Authentic and current listening materials will help engage students and make them realize the importance of spending time on listening.
3. Student-centered and student-led episodes will not only create opportunities for learning but also alter students’ roles from passive consumers of information to active producers of the language.

Rationale:
There has been growing research suggesting podcasts provide numerous pedagogical benefits for language learners. For example, podcasts can break classroom boundaries and increase students’ learning time by providing them with convenient access to course-related listening materials anytime and anywhere (Aldrich, Bell & Batzal, 2008). Second, podcasts can promote autonomous learning by allowing students control of how they engage with materials. Research also suggests that podcasting has positive effects on students’ study habits (Abdous, 2009), and their interest in the language they are learning (Dennin & Myers 2010).

Impact:
1. Students’ listening habits

2. Students’ perceived difficulty of and confidence in understanding Chinese audio materials

3. Students’ perceived usefulness of listening to Chinese podcasts

4. How do students evaluate their experience of participating in making podcasts?

Lessons learned:
- Teacher-led and student-led podcasts are equally important to students.
- Common interest and course relevance are the keys to keeping students engaged and motivated to spend time consistently listening to them.
- Assessment of students’ progress in listening proficiency remains a challenge to teachers.

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