



## Headphones Help Illinois Students Master Foreign Language Skills

### Issue

Today's media-savvy students are growing up in an ever-increasing global environment; one where success before and after graduation is largely dependent on their ability to communicate cross-culturally with peers and colleagues around the world. Understanding this, it can be argued that foreign language classes in middle and high school are critical because students acquire both language skills and an understanding of other cultures and ways of life.

To help Geneva High School students efficiently learn a foreign language, Julie Williams, instructional technology facilitator for the Geneva, Ill., district, helped educators implement technology that would allow students to practice and master important language skills.

Geneva High School teachers like to use Audacity, downloadable software that allows users to record, slice, edit, and mix audio, to incorporate verbal and oral learning activities throughout instruction. French, Spanish and German classes use the school's language lab to access Audacity through personal computers. Using headsets, students tried to record and play back practice skill sets. However, the headsets originally installed in the language labs were proving to be problematic.

"Unfortunately, the headsets we were using caused problems and interrupted class time," said Williams. "Some were very loud, while others were quiet. We wanted consistency. We wanted to know the headsets we used were going to work when you plugged them into the computer."

Williams and her team decided to look for and purchase new headsets. "Our computers are fairly new with good memory and sound cards," continued Williams. "We knew having better headsets would prevent students from having to redo their work because it didn't record properly the first time."

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***— Julie Williams,***  
***Instructional Technology Facilitator***

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### Implementation

Williams researched new headsets, looking for ones with USB-connections as opposed to headsets that plugged into the headphone jack in the computer. In addition, she wanted headphones that could be easily cleaned because so many students use the labs on a weekly basis. The headsets also needed to be sturdy and reliable.

Based on her criteria, Williams chose to purchase the Califone Deluxe Multimedia Stereo Headsets (3066-USB). The company's most rugged headset, the Deluxe Multimedia Stereo Headset is designed for language learning and distance learning environments in the classroom or the computer lab. In-line volume control ensures student safety, and an adjustable, padded headband with replaceable foam-filled ear cushions helps keep students and educators comfortable and healthy.

## Case Study: Geneva High School Geneva, IL



Initially, Williams purchased 30 units of the headsets. "With the Califone headsets, our students can enter class, record clear audio and play back what they've recorded, without wasting time dealing with the technology. Plus, they were reasonably priced," Williams said.

After the first purchase, she found the headsets were ideal for all her computer labs. "The headsets are heavy duty - the kids are not going to take them out of the classroom. We can clean them easily, plug them right into the USB port to use them, and the microphone allows students to record clear audio," she continued.

Williams applied for funding, through a local grant called Geneva Academic Foundation, and purchased 120 additional units to place in the high school's other computer labs.

### Results

The Deluxe Multimedia Stereo Headsets allow Geneva High School educators to incorporate technology throughout instruction. Most often used for foreign language learning, students are able to record audio using the headsets, save the file and drop their completed assignments into an electronic box for their teacher to review. In addition, students use the headsets to practice and complete the annual Advanced Placement (AP) tests, which require an oral component.

"The important part is that these headsets have eliminated wasted time. Previously, I would be called to the lab to help with the older headsets frequently, and now I am hardly ever asked for help regarding recording audio," Williams said. "In addition, the large earcups block out background noise, which helps students focus and teachers to easily hear students' recordings for assessment."

Williams shared the most important feature of the Deluxe Multimedia Stereo Headset was the USB connection, as the headphone jacks seem to be less reliable than using the USB port.

In addition to foreign language learning, Geneva High School also uses the Califone headsets for special education and computer-focused classes.



## Headphones Help Illinois Students Master Foreign Language Skills *continued*

### Additional Resources

In January 2010, Digital Directions magazine featured an article about designing a school-based language lab. Here are a few tips provided by the magazine:

#### Tips

- Determine whether your district can support the purchase of a digital language lab. Investigate how to raise outside money, possibly through a nonprofit education fund, if enough district money is not available.
- Visit nearby language labs to see whether such a setup would be right for your school or district, and what you like, or don't like, about certain models.
- Identify which technological features would be high priorities for teachers, such as the ability to record student conversations or provide computer analysis of student pronunciation.
- Try to establish a balance between technological priorities and the ability of your school or district to pay for those priorities. More bells and whistles can mean a higher cost.
- Make sure the software will work with the equipment your school or district uses. Many of the products currently on the market work best with PCs, for instance.

To read more from the January 11, 2010, article in Digital Directions, visit: <http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2010/01/08/02languagelabs.h03.html>

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