



Suzi Bewell looks at using free Web 2.0 tools and

Apps both within the MFL classroom and to help make your MFL homework more engaging for students



HOMEWORK IN any subject can often be perceived by pupils to be a form of punishment, but this seems particularly the case in modern foreign languages (MFL).

Teachers often set it at the end of a lesson in a rush to ensure that a carefully executed plenary takes place, adding to pupils' feeling that it is almost an unimportant "add-on".

Homework should provide challenge, extend or reinforce the learning and be contextualised in a relevant way for today's pupils. When careful thought is given to MFL homework, it can be a fantastically useful opportunity for pupils to further develop what they have learned in the lesson and creatively explore how to use the target language for real purposes beyond the classroom walls.

One way to make homework more relevant is to incorporate technology and the Web 2.0 revolution. This can be surprisingly easy. Many children these days possess portable computing power in their school bags. So why not embrace this and use it to our advantage in the MFL classroom and beyond? Vocaroo is a free Web 2.0 voice-recording tool, one of many such tools available.

Vocaroo appeals to me as an MFL teacher as a fuss-free online tool that allows pupils to record audio content (without the need to log in, share any personal details or download any software) and send this via email to a teacher's email account.

The audio content is stored in the "cloud" until the teacher is ready to download it via a link to the recording sent to the teacher's inbox. A new feature also allows the teacher the option of downloading the content as a Waveform Audio File (WAV) which

allows them to create individual portfolios of speaking work.

You can use Vocaroo in an MFL homework context towards the end of a unit of work such as the topic of "School". Pupils could be given some question prompts in the target language along with a clear guide as to how the voice recording will be assessed. The teacher also has the option of leaving instant feedback for the pupil using email or a Vocaroo message.

Vocaroo does not provide professional quality recordings but it does offer a free and easy approach that can get pupils speaking. This is the important message here – Vocaroo and similar free websites allow our MFL students, who are often reluctant to speak up in front of their peers in lesson time, to practise using their language skills in the comfort and safety of their own home.

Audioboo. Voice recordings made using these Apps can be accessed instantly via the interactive whiteboard in the classroom by logging onto the website.

In my experience, pupils really enjoy using these sorts of voice recording websites for MFL homework, as it is something a little bit different and they are often very quick to submit online homework.

I have equally found that pupils take particular pride in their homework if they know that high level work is going to be published on an MFL blog. For some examples, see further information.

The late Professor Eric Hawkins, a passionate advocate for language education, said that teaching a language is like "gardening in a gale" – you plant your language seeds within the MFL lesson and then the seedlings are blown away by the gale of English from outside of the MFL lesson.

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Speaking for homework makes a really welcome change for pupils from the traditional homework tasks in MFL which more often than not focus on writing and reading, vocabulary learning and revising. Vocaroo can be used with any year and ability group. It is particularly useful in year 9 when getting pupils ready for the requirements of GCSE controlled speaking assessments.

Pupils' voice recordings can also be used for Assessment for Learning purposes, where pupils peer-assess each other's work in a follow up lesson and make useful "WWW" (What Went Well) and "EBI" (Even Better If) comments to allow further reflection on how progress is to be made.

Teachers also have the option of recycling the recordings of very good pupils by using them with a parallel group or the following academic year as a worked example, therefore modelling for pupils exactly what you expect them to do.

Vocaroo is not the only free voice-recording tool out there. Other Web 2.0 applications that present possibilities for speaking homework are Mailvu, VoiceThread or Audacity and there are also useful note-taking tools such as EverNote and Google's Catch (see further information for all links).

Many of these applications are now available as free Apps that can be downloaded onto most Smartphones. For schools which have invested in iPads and iPod touches, other free App options include iPadio and

By setting speaking for homework in MFL using these websites and other, we are doing our bit to fight the good fight against this torrential gale. **SecEd**

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Further information

Vocaroo

- MFL teacher Angelo Maclean talks about how he has used Vocaroo successfully to set homework for pupils: www.tinyurl.com/VocarooSphW
- For ideas on how Vocaroo can be used in the MFL classroom and for homework, see Suzi Bewell's blog: <http://tinyurl.com/DoUVocaroo>

Other Web 2.0 tools that could be used for speaking homework in MFL:

- www.mailvu.com
- www.voicethread.com
- www.audacity.sourceforge.net

Note-taking tools:

- www.evernote.com
- www.catch.com

Free App options for iPad/iPod Touches:

- www.ipadio.com
- www.audioboo.com

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