

Rubric: **Technology & Telematics Committee**

Subject: Update your movie selection with the help of (free) media
playing software

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Update your movie and audio selection in the classroom with the help of (free) VLC media playing shareware software

Are you a foreign language teacher who is not yet familiar with the VLC shareware? The VLC is a shareware software that will help foreign language teachers override some of the *technological* and *resource* associated problems. As far as movies are concerned, teachers encounter two types of issues: restrictions for content and technological/resource issues. Issues such as “restriction for content” of the kind of movies that can be shown in class are unique to each teacher’s experience and have an individual solution. The technological and resource issues, such as “we don’t have the equipment” or “we don’t have the money to buy the resources” often times are easily resolved and are more of general in nature.

This column aims teachers to help solve the technological issues by addressing them and offering a simple software solution. First of all, the lack of availability of recent foreign language movies in the US is still a major issue - despite the larger selection offered by services such as Netflix and Blockbuster online. In general the selection of foreign language movies still remains limited to the great or the well-known directors and the classics of cinema. Although public libraries sometimes offer a good selection of foreign language movies, they too are generally limited to the well known directors and the classics of cinema. Even though “classics” are excellent and have many pedagogical uses in the classroom, they may not represent the diversity of France (and other

countries) today. In addition, sometimes "classics" are usually too far removed from today's students' experiences and therefore may not catch students' interest. This is generally the case also for movies accompanied by study guides which are included in collections offered by educational companies. Although there are some recent movies in these "study guide" collections, most fit into the above-mentioned categories of "classics" and "well-known" directors.

Again, "classics" and "well-known" directors are excellent and have many pedagogical uses in the classroom. Nevertheless, wouldn't it also be excellent if FL students, especially those enrolled in general language courses -as opposed to film courses- could see "new releases", the movies they would currently see at cinemas if they lived abroad? Wouldn't the "new releases" perhaps more easily catch students' attention, as they could more easily relate to those stories?

In order to show the most recent movies, some teachers resort to acquiring movies abroad, an excellent idea which however, as many have found out, poses the problem of zoning. We know that US produced and distributed DVDs are "zone 1" whereas those produced in other areas of the world have a different zone. This means that unless teachers have a multiregion DVD player available they have difficulty using these movies in the classroom. One option includes using the computer by changing the zone on the computer settings. But, especially if using a shared computer, teachers may not really want to change the zone every time, at the risk of it freezing on the last zone used. In case you are

not aware, most computers with DVD player capabilities allow for only a limited number of zone changes.

The good news is this “zoning” problem is no longer an issue. The software called Video LAN media player enables us to play DVDs of any zone of the world through our personal computers. At the moment this software is shareware and therefore it is free and it is legal. The website for downloading the software, as well as the steps for installation, is included in the "how-to" guide at the end of this article; it is an extremely easy and quick process.

I'd like to briefly mention the benefits of this software. This software not only helps French teachers, but all foreign language teachers, so it will benefit the entire school. As I work with many high school teachers, most of them told me that schools already have a projector; some schools even have one in each classroom. Many classrooms also have a computer and if not, the teacher has an available computer, either the school's or a private one. Once the VLC software is installed on the computer, it becomes possible to view any movie produced outside the US, and thus not “zoned” for US distribution. The teachers must still buy the desired movies during one of their trips abroad or through the internet.

The excellent technical benefit is that the VLC is not only designed to play movies that are not zoned for the US but also to play other file formats. In fact, some audio file formats used on the internet, including many of those used by news broadcast companies are not supported by certain media player programs like QuickTime or iTunes. Most of these non-supported file formats can however be played by using the VLC software. As a concrete example, some

videos from YouTube (those with extensions like ".flv" or ".irv", to name a few) fall into these non-supported file formats. They can't be played by opening them with Quicktime, RealPlayer or iTunes but they can be played by opening them with the VLC.

Using this free shareware software will then allow teachers to update the current movie and audio selection that they use in the classroom. As a consequence, more aspects of culture that are represented in movies, music and other audio/video multimedia can be approached in the classroom. Evidently, in general, today's cultural issues and themes differ greatly from those present in other periods of history. It is also easier for students to understand and identify with today's issues and movies: if this weren't case there would not be so many "remakes" of classic movies from previous eras. Furthermore, if teachers are not able to keep up to date with music CDs, this free software will allow them greater freedom in using music in the classroom, as almost any song they desire can be found on the internet.

Finally, as already briefly mentioned all foreign language teachers can benefit from this software, as it is not language specific. If it is installed on the school's computers, teachers of all languages, and perhaps even other subjects, will be able to benefit from it. In many schools and labs, the lab technicians could install the VLC software on every laboratory computer or in every SMART classroom. (SMART classrooms are those in which there is a multimedia *pod* with computer, VCR, DVD player and other technologies). In those schools that do not have the most up-to-date laboratory or do not have the opportunity to have

SMART classrooms, the VLC free shareware software allows the classroom to become a little more technological.

The "how to" guide for VLC shareware

- Go to the following website: < <http://www.videolan.org/vlc/>> (You can simply do a Google search for “VLC” to find the address.
- Under “Download VLC” click on your general operating system (Ex: Windows or MacOS)
- Once the general operating system is chosen, click on your current operating system (Ex: MacOs 10.4 or 10.5, Windows O.9.2, Windows 95)
- On the same page choose your country as well. If you don’t already see a list of countries click on “show full mirrors list.”
- Click “download” next to you country. It’s done! It’s downloaded!
- Now install the software. For some, like Macs it is sufficient to double-click the logo, for others, there may be extra steps.
- Once your program has correctly installed, the VLC icon is represented by a “traffic cone”. It’s done! It’s installed! That is it! The operation is complete. You are now free to view any movie from anywhere in the world and use many, many audio file formats! So make your classroom more technological and your students' learning a complete hands-on experience.

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