

A Journey to Podcasting

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## **Research Questions & Objectives**

Lane Community College's Faculty Professional Development Committee granted me a sabbatical in fall 2006 to help me update my technology skills and search for new technologies which our English as a Second Language Program might use to optimize foreign language acquisition.

The main objectives of the sabbatical were to:

- identify, learn, and determine which new technologies were readily applicable for language learning;
- explore new media options not yet being used in language programs that could be used to optimize language learning;
- identify ways to help students learn and practice their language skills in a more satisfying way;
- learn about a variety of delivery forms to help students more easily retain what they learn;
- address students' diverse learning styles;
- find ways to use new technologies to initiate student-made productions; and
- discover potential funding sources to acquire the technology.

## **Reading the Literature Regarding Current Technologies**

My first step was to immerse myself in the most current technology by reading as many articles and books as possible on the following: using podcasts; using podcast directories (i.e. iPodder, Digital Podcast, Podcastalley, and audio.weblogs); making podcasts and

vodcasts; using Skype, a free Internet-based alternative providing commercial phone service through VoIP (Voice over IP), SkypeCasting and Video4Skype; using blogs, audioblogs, moblogs, and videoblogs; and using Wikis.

### **Learning About and Experimenting with the Technology**

My next step was to explore and learn how to use the new technologies as much as possible. For example, as I read articles and books on new technologies with potential applications in enhancing language acquisition, I also enrolled in the following courses at Lane's In-service in 2006:

- Introduction to Moodle
- Camtasia: Screen Recording & Presentation
- iStream
- Inspiration Software in Teaching & Learning
- Academic Learning Skills Mobile Lab

In addition to participating in the in-service training, I completed the following online courses at Sony 101:

- The Soundtrack of Your Life: Digital Music Your Way
- Introduction to Digital Entertainment
- The Next Level of Portability: Going Extra Mobile
- Unleash Your Inner Director: Podmaking 101
- Getting Started with Digital Scrapbooking

I also attended the course “Blogs, Wikis, & Podcasts: New Applications for Instruction” in the Teaching Effectiveness Program at the University of Oregon. In the first session of this three-part workshop, Mark Blaine, instructor in the School of Journalism & Communication, and Skip McFarlane, Digital Arts Program instructor, explained the use of wikis in creating interactive student learning in university settings. The second session featured Professor Al Stavitsky from the School of Journalism & Communication. Stavitsky demonstrated how he uses podcasting in his large lecture sessions at the university and explained what makes an effective podcast. In the final session, Scott Huette, instructor in Arts and Administration, showed how faculty could use blogs for student journaling and creative writing

After enrolling in the in-service, online and University of Oregon courses, my next step was to locate, purchase, set up, and learn to use the following equipment:

- a video iPod
- an ultramobile PC (UMPC)
- an iPod HomeDock (for viewing and listening to podcasts through a TV monitor)
- an MP3 audio system (for podcast broadcasting)
- a wireless router

### **Scanning the Environment**

In addition to reading a great deal and enrolling in courses regarding the new technologies, I created a questionnaire and distributed it to colleagues at selected institutions. (See Appendix B.) I designed the questionnaire to identify the following:

- the types of equipment their language programs use;
- how they use the equipment;
- effective language learning software programs their programs use;
- how they train students and faculty members to use the technologies;
- how faculty members integrate the technology in their teaching;
- the challenges they face integrating the technology in the classroom;
- how they fund the technology; and
- their predictions of the next “big idea” for using technology for foreign language acquisition in the future.

### **Narrowing My Focus**

As I read a large variety of articles, enrolled in technology classes both online and in the traditional classroom setting, distributed a survey, and located, purchased, and experimented with the equipment, it quickly became clear that there was more than enough information on just podcasting, wiki, and blogging to fill a year-long sabbatical, let alone a three-month period. Consequently, I began to narrow my focus on podcasting as the main technology I could use to enhance language learning in my classes. I chose podcasting because we can use it in a larger variety of our ESL Program skills courses as well as in a greater range of the levels we offer.

### **Podcasting Defined**

Podcasts are typically short radio broadcasts posted online, and podcasting is the automatic downloading of MP3 (Moving Picture Experts Group Layer-3 Audio) files to a

computer and/or mobile MP3 player. The MP3 format, using a lossy compression technique, reduces the size of a music file by removing redundant characteristics of music or speech through the use of algorithms. By using algorithms, the lossy compression technique allows you to save music or speech in small file sizes and gives you more room on your MP3 player or flash drive, and the human ear does not even notice that the file size has been reduced.

Alternative compression formats to MP3 include ATRAC3 (Adaptive Transform Acoustic Coding), WMA (Windows Media Audio), AAC (Advanced Audio Coding), Ogg (Ogg Vorbis), and SHN (Shorten). At this writing, however, MP3 continues to be the most popular format. The benefit of MP3 is also the ability to subscribe to automatic downloads to your MP3 player or computer. These subscriptions are very often free of charge.

### **The Benefits of Using Podcasts in Educational Settings**

There are diverse opinions regarding the value of using podcasts in educational settings. Some see an MP3 player as another form of a tape recorder, but Robert Godwin-Jones of Virginia Commonwealth University refers to podcasting as one of the “disruptive technologies” because it transforms the status quo of doing a familiar task and has the potential to change the traditional form of radio broadcasting (Godwin-Jones 2005, 9).

The benefits of using podcasts include but are not limited to the following:

1. There are low barriers to entry to use existing podcasts and/or make new podcasts. Little equipment is needed, and the cost of it is low.
2. Most available podcasts are free to download. Web sites offer free material through podcasts as do podcasting directories such as iPodder, Digital Podcast, and Podcastalley.
3. The popularity and consistent use of MP3 players among students continue to rise.
4. Universities and other institutions in higher education are engaged in ongoing experimentation of podcast use.
5. Using podcasts in educational settings helps increase the intensity of instruction.
6. There appears to be great promise in using this medium of technology for language learning.

Gardner Campbell, Professor of English at the University of Mary Washington in Fredericksburg, Virginia and author of *There's Something in the Air: Podcasting in Education*, also touts the convenience of listening to podcast material at any time and in any place as well as the chance to subscribe to regular podcasts:

“What’s new about podcasting is the ease of publication, ease of subscription, and ease of use across multiple environments, typically over computer speakers, over a car stereo, and over headphones—all while the listener is walking or exercising or driving or traveling or otherwise moving about (Gardner 34).”

## **Educational Applications of Podcasts**

### *A Wide Variety of Content*

Using podcasts in an educational setting helps instructors provide a wide variety of content to their students. Podcast content can include downloaded books, textbook study guides, mobile language lessons, audiobooks, interviews, news reports, music, museum tours, stories, and the like. The possibilities are endless. Instructors can also create their own podcasts for students to download from the Web and listen to on their iPods or computers. Finally, students can create their own podcasts for their instructors and/or other students in their courses.

### *Intensity of Instruction*

In addition to providing a wide variety of content, podcasts are excellent for helping instructors increase the intensity of instruction. The greater the intensity of instruction, the more likely the students will learn and retain the course content. A prime example is the experience of Kathy O'Connor, Spanish instructor at Tidewater Community College in Southeast Virginia. Having recently received an \$11,000 grant from the school to lend her students iPods to practice Spanish conversations outside of the classroom, she quickly noticed that intensity of student listening had increased from thirty minutes per week to four or five hours (Read, M. C1). The extra exposure to the Spanish conversations more than likely improved her students' listening comprehension.



*Simulation Experiences*

Instructors can also use podcasts to provide students with simulation experiences. For example, at Temple University, Dr. Michael Barrett, cardiologist, recorded heart murmurs and put them online so his students could download them and listen to them on their iPods. (Read, M. C1).

*Lecture Postings*

Some instructors may elect to post their lectures on their web sites for students to download to their MP3 players. University officials in various parts of the United States are also taking note of the educational benefits of podcasting. For example, Stanford University and University of Wisconsin-Madison are now members of iTunes U, which allows professors to post lectures and allows students to download them for free (Chinnery 12).

*iPod Experiments at Duke University*

Duke University first experimented with iPods in 2004 after giving its entire freshman class free iPods with voice recorders. Though university officials assumed that the primary use would be audio playback, their research showed in the first year that students and faculty were mostly interested in digital recording capabilities. 60 percent of the students in the first year of use reported that they had used their iPods' digital recording capabilities for academic purposes.

Faculty at Duke had identified five categories of academic use of the iPods for courses that were planning to pilot their use: course content recordings; classroom recordings; field recordings; study support recordings; and file storage and transfer. A few language courses, namely Turkish and Spanish, piloted the use of iPods during the first year.

Activities of special interest in a Duke University Spanish class using the iPods included listening to podcasted recordings of students' verbal responses to oral quizzes, the instructor's weekly vocabulary words for students, and authentic Spanish related to class readings. Students also recorded their own audio journals and submitted regular audio files in which they spoke Spanish (Duke 15).

## **Accessing Podcasts**

### *Getting Started*

The first step is to discover what podcasts are available and learn how to access them by following these guidelines:

1. Visit podcasting directories such as iPodder, Digital Podcast, Podcastalley, and audio.weblogs. You can also go to iTunes and click on the podcast link.
2. Listen to podcasts with themes that interest you.
3. When you find an interesting podcasting site and would like to get regular updates of that podcast, you can subscribe to it if you have a web browser, a news aggregator, or a news feed reader that supports RSS (Rich Site Summary). There are many ways to subscribe, but iTunes tends to be the easiest.

The next step is to immerse yourself in readily available podcasting content. Remember the beauty of podcast use is that you do not need an MP3 player to participate. You can use your computer to access the podcasts. Listen to as many podcasts as possible. Do not limit yourself to language learning podcasts. Try accessing podcasts of authentic language materials which could be useful for educational application as opposed to restricting yourself to language-learning-specific materials. If you are not in the field of language learning, consider materials outside of your field which could be useful for certain class content.

### **Assessing Podcasts**

As you listen to a variety podcasts, identify what you like and dislike in a podcast. Consider those podcasts to which you have a strong negative reaction. They, too, are very instructive as to what makes a good podcast. Consider the optimum length, sound quality, content, delivery form, and so on of the most effective podcasts you have heard. Compare those characteristics with the most ineffective podcasts you have heard. This information will help you better select effective podcasts for your students.

Once you have identified what makes podcasts effective and ineffective, start experimenting with using podcasts in your classes. You can use them in your classes with a computer and LCD projector. You can also download them to an MP3 player and connect your MP3 player to a TV or VCR with a special kit such as DLO's HomeDock for iPod. Finally, you can set your iPod on an iPod player such as a Bose SoundDock Digital Music System.

There are numerous instructional training materials related to podcasting available online.

You can access free tutorials such as *Create and Share Your First Podcast* at

<http://my101.learningcenter.sony.us/tutorial/index.jsp>. You can also view *An*

*Introduction to Podcasting for EFL/ESL Teachers* by visiting

<http://beewebhead.blogspot.com/2005/06/introduction-to-podcasting-in-eflesl.html>

To see the TEFL Podcasting Forum's blog on using podcasts for teaching and learning in

EFL, you can visit <http://teflpodcasts.blogspot.com/>

Finally, you can also see <http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcasts/> to view podcasts

on the Internet TESL Journal's TESL/TEFL/TESOL/ESL/EFL/ESOL Links.

If your field is not in language learning, you may want to Google your subject matter

followed by "podcast." You are likely to find some listings from your professional

association. (See Appendix E for further resources.)

The possibilities for accessing podcasting and using them are growing daily. Therefore, it is important to start with small steps and not allow yourself to become overwhelmed by the seemingly endless number of available podcasts. Try using some short podcasts in your classes to determine what works. See how students respond to the podcasts and the learning objectives you have in mind for using those podcasts. Take note of which podcasts are most effective. Then consider making your own podcasts and having students create their own as well.

**Conclusion**

It was a long journey of reading many articles and books and taking courses on the latest technologies before I decided to focus on podcasting as the best new technology with great potential for language acquisition. My sabbatical allowed me to read 33 articles, four books, enroll in five in-service technology workshops, five online courses spanning four to ten weeks, and one three-week workshop through University of Oregon's Teaching Effectiveness Program. I also learned how to set up a wireless router system, use an ultramobile PC (UMPC), use a video iPod and iPod accessories such as the audio broadcasting system and HomeDock.

Collecting completed surveys was a challenge. However, since the information is valuable, I would like to redistribute the survey this year to gather information from institutions that did not respond for one reason or another, from institutions whose technology use has changed, and from institutions I did not contact in the first round of the survey distribution. I found the respondents' recommendations of effective software programs and their predictions of "the next big idea" for technology use in language acquisition especially interesting. (See Appendix C & Appendix D.)

Despite certain challenges such as the need for technology troubleshooting, the short timeline to address the subject matter, and difficulties in getting surveys returned, the three-month sabbatical allowed me to explore the new technologies so that I can apply them and take a more innovative approach in delivering my lessons. I plan to make the

most of what I learned by thinking of creative ideas to enhance my lessons by using available podcasts and eventually make my own.

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**Appendix A:**

Courses Taken:

2006 Lane Inservice:

- Introduction to Moodle
- Camtasia: Screen Recording & Presentation
- iStream
- Inspiration Software in Teaching & Learning
- Academic Learning Skills Mobile Lab

The University of Oregon Teaching Effectiveness Program

- Blogs, Wikis, and Podcasts: New Applications for Instruction

[www.sony101.com](http://www.sony101.com)

- The Soundtrack of Your Life: Digital Music Your Way
- Introduction to Digital Entertainment
- The Next Level of Portability: Going Extra Mobile
- Unleash Your Inner Director: Podmaking 101
- Getting Started with Digital Scrapbooking

**Appendix A, Cont'd:**

## ▪ Equipment Used:

- a video iPod
- an ultramobile PC
- an iPod HomeDock (for viewing and listening to podcasts through a TV monitor)
- an MP3 audio system (for podcast listening)
- a wireless router

## Appendix B: Survey Distributed

Objectives of Research:

- To identify the best uses of new technologies for optimizing language learning in English as a Second Language and foreign language programs.
- To answer the question: What new technologies exist, and how can they be applied in language acquisition to enhance learning?

Name:

Title:

Department:

Institution:

Address:

Telephone:

Fax:

E-Mail:

1. What types of technological equipment do you use to enhance foreign language acquisition? (Please check all that apply.)

<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital Camcorders			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital Cameras			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital Chip Recorders			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Computers			
<input type="checkbox"/>	MacIntosh			
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCs			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Laptops			
<input type="checkbox"/>	MacIntosh	Wireless	YES	NO
<input type="checkbox"/>	PCs	Wireless	YES	NO
<input type="checkbox"/>	Tablet PCs			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Ultra Microcomputer PCs (UMPCs)			
<input type="checkbox"/>	MP3 Players (iPods or others)			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Personal Digital Assistants (PDAs)			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Cell Phones			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital Dictionaries			
<input type="checkbox"/>	DVD Players			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Digital Video Recorders (DVR)			
<input type="checkbox"/>	TIVO®			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Televisions			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Radios (Standard)			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Radios (Satellite)			
<input type="checkbox"/>	Other (Please specify.)			

2. Which of the following technology applications are used in your institution?  
(Please check all that apply.)

☐ Voice Messaging  
☐ SMS Text Messaging  
☐ Skype  
☐ Skypecasting  
☐ Video4Skype  
☐ Blogging  
☐ Audioblogging  
☐ Moblogging  
☐ Videoblogging  
☐ Podcasting  
☐ VODcasting  
☐ Web Page Creation  
☐ Digital Scrapbooking  
☐ Digital Audiorecordings  
☐ Digital Videorecordings  
☐ Distance Courses  
☐ Course Management Systems  
☐ Blackboard  
☐ Moodle  
☐ WebCT  
☐ Other (Please specify.)

3. Which language-learning software programs have been successful for you in:

- Pronunciation
- Vocabulary Development
- Listening Improvement
- Other (Please specify.)

4. How are instructors trained in the new technologies prior to teaching with them?
5. How are students trained in the use of new technologies?
6. How do the instructors integrate technology into teaching?
7. What challenges have staff members faced in integrating technology for foreign language acquisition?
8. How have you secured funding to purchase and integrate the technology in your program?
9. What do you predict is the “next big idea” for using technology for foreign language acquisition in the future? Why?



## Appendix C

Summary of effective language-learning software programs from survey respondents:

Grammar:	Focus on Grammar - Basic Focus on Grammar - Intermediate Focus on Grammar - Advanced Super Tutor Grammar 2.3 Grammar 3D
Keyboarding	Mavis Beacon Teaches Typing Typing Quick & Easy Typing Test
Listening Improvement	Connected Speech – North American English Interactive 1 & 2 Focus on Grammar Issues in English Learn to Speak English Live Action English  <a href="http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/listening.html">http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/listening.html</a> <a href="http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/listening2.html">http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/listening2.html</a>  Online video clips Some foreign language textbooks which are publisher-driven and are using Moodle to do exercises.
Pronunciation	American Accent American English Pronunciation American Speech Sounds Better Accent Tutor Connected Speech Fluency Practice (Mac only) Pronunciation Power <a href="http://www.soundsofenglish.org/">http://www.soundsofenglish.org/</a> <a href="http://international.ouc.bc.ca/pronunciation/">http://international.ouc.bc.ca/pronunciation/</a> <a href="http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/english/frameset.html">http://www.uiowa.edu/~acadtech/phonetics/english/frameset.html</a>
Reading:	New Reader (Mac only) Spell It Plus Ultimate Speed Reader

**Appendix C, Continued**

Test Preparation:	<p>Cambridge Prep for the TOEFL  Delta's Key to the TOEFL  Heinle's Complete Guide to TOEFL  Longman Complete TOEFL version 3.0  Longman Introduction Crs. TOEFL, version 2.0  Longman Next Generation TOEFL iBT  Super Success for the TOEFL  TOEFL Mastery (2 CDs)  TOEFL Mentor  TOEFL Power Prep</p> <p>GRE, Kaplan  GRE Power Prep  GMAT, Kaplan</p> <p>Longman TOEIC Preparation Interactive  Longman Student 3.0  Cambridge Preparation for the TOEFL  Longman Preparation for the TOEFL iBT</p>
Vocabulary Development	<p>Academic Word List (Mac only)  Action English  Longman Dictionary of American English  Longman Interactive Dictionary  New Lexis (Mac only)  North American Idioms  Rosetta Stone  Side-by-Side Interactive  Super Tutor Vocabulary 2.0  Triple Play Plus  Ultimate Word Attack  Word Attack  <a href="http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/vocabulary.html">http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/vocabulary.html</a>  <a href="http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/vocabulary2.html">http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/vocabulary2.html</a>  <a href="http://www.quia.com">www.quia.com</a></p> <p>Foreign language course textbooks with CDs and a specific website.</p>
Writing	Inspiration 6

**Appendix C, Continued**

Other: Nicenet ([www.nicenet.org](http://www.nicenet.org)),  
Blogger ([www.blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com))  
Tom Snyder Decisions series  
Subject Samplers, Treasure Hunts, WebQuests,  
Scenarios  
See <http://www.kn.pacbell.com/wired/fil/formats.html>  
Various resources at  
<http://www.lclark.edu/~krauss/toppicks/toppicks.html>

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*Tim Van Slyke, ESL Instructor, Developmental Education/ESL, Chemeketa  
Community College*

*Judy Reed, Director, Intensive English Language Program, Portland State University*

*Molly Williams, ESL Department Chair, Clackamas Community College*

## Appendix D:

Summary of survey respondents' predictions of the "next big idea" for technology use in language acquisition:

- Cell phones.

"Cell phones. Speech is the final frontier."

- Concordancing and the Use of the Corpus

"Students and teachers need to know how language is used, in what context, and the frequency of use of the forms in focus."

- Increasing Use of Student-Created Technology

"Since the advent of cheap and easy-to-use web editors, the trend has been toward more student-created technology. Now, podcasts and other forms of digital audio are becoming increasingly usable by novices, and increasingly easy to create. Audio blogs are easy to set up now. Outside the US, text messaging and content delivered via cell phone (texting) are growing areas of interest – but they don't pay for text messages, where we do."

We've talked for a long time about 'anytime, anywhere' learning. It's getting more do-able all the time now, with ever-smaller and more capable devices and broader access to wireless networking. If the US went to free text messaging, the use of cell phones for learning would likely be the next big idea, as far as I'm concerned."

- Internet Telephony (i.e. Skype)

- Podcasting (recording lessons via MP3 files that students can listen to on their portable music players)

- Videochat to Link Classes at a Distance

- Virtual Language Labs & Online Voice Applications

"In my opinion, it is the concept of virtual language labs and online voice applications such as those provided by Wimba. The most exciting aspect of this for me is the ability for instructors to prompt students and then receive asynchronous responses (i.e. in an audio bulletin board or forum). In this scenario, students have time to record their responses (and often re-record multiple times), and the instructor has time to evaluate each response remotely and provide both audio and text feedback to students."

- Writing Papers on PCs in the Classroom

"Perhaps with the age of wi-fi, writing students will be able to use personal computers while in the classroom to write their papers. However, we'll have to deal with plagiarism issues along with this."

## Appendix E

### Podcasting Resources

#### ESL/EFL Podcasts

- Breaking News English (<http://www.breakingnewsenglish.com>)
- Internet TESL Journal's TESL/TEFL/TESOL/ESL/EFL/ESOL Links  
<http://iteslj.org/links/ESL/Listening/Podcasts/>
- English Idioms & Slang (<http://englishcaster.com/blogs/>)
- The Bob and Rob Show (<http://thebobandrobshow.com>)
- ESL Teacher Talk (<http://www.eslteachertalk.com>)
- ESL Pod Cards (<http://www.eslpodcards.com>)

#### Media

- Newsweek (<http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/7078547>)
- The New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com/ref/multimedia/podcasts.html>)
- National Public Radio ([http://www.npr.org/rss/podcast/podcast\\_directory.php](http://www.npr.org/rss/podcast/podcast_directory.php))
- BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk>)

#### Podcast Collections

- iTunes (<http://www.apple.com/itunes/podcasts>) See categories of interest.
- Easy Online RSS Reader for English as a Second Language (ESL) Podcasts (<http://a4esl.org/p/>)

#### Podcasting Directories

- iPodder
- Digital Podcast
- Podcastalley
- audio.weblogs

#### Recording Programs to Make Your Own Audio Files

- Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>)

#### Scheduling Automated Podcast Updates

- Juice <http://juicereceiver.sourceforge.net/>
- iPodder.net (<http://ipodder.net.sourceforge.net>)

#### Tutorials

- *Create and Share Your First Podcast*  
<http://my101.learningcenter.sony.us/tutorial/index.jsp>.
- *An Introduction to Podcasting for EFL/ESL Teachers*  
<http://beewebhead.blogspot.com/2005/06/introduction-to-podcasting-in-eflesl.html>
- TEFL Podcasting Forum's blog on using podcasts for teaching and learning in EFL  
<http://teflpodcasts.blogspot.com/>