iPods and English-language learners: a great combination

Four action research studies were conducted, focusing on using Apple iPods with English-language learners (ELLs) to promote reading, writing, and listening skills. The action research projects were conducted in two elementary schools and two middle schools in rural and urban locations. The findings indicate that overall writing skills and vocabulary development improved in three studies, and one study reported a significant increase in comprehension skills as measured by standardized tests.

Cummins (2000) suggests that educators acknowledge the fundamental changes that information technology brings to society and seek ways to use its power for transformative purposes. Teacher-librarians are well aware of the positive effect that technology has brought to the library; the iPod is one of those technologies. Considering the large number of immigrant students entering public schools, one cannot overlook the potential value of the iPod in assisting students who are entering a new school environment, learning English as a second language, and becoming familiar with a new cultural environment. The task and challenge of working with ELLs is compounded by the fact that many are not familiar with the structure of U.S. schools, nor are they familiar with the cultural tools that U.S. students typically utilize. Cultural tools are those items and symbol systems that allow people in a society to communicate, think, solve problems, and create knowledge (Vygotsky, 1993; Woolfolk, 2006).

TECHNOLOGY AND ELLS

By empowering ELLs to take control over the direction of their learning, managing the speed of their learning, maintaining their own pace, and developing their own identity as English speakers, they are more easily integrated into academic and social worlds.

In a recent article that appeared in THE Journal, Briggs (2006) poses the question “What makes a particular technology suddenly popular for classroom use?” (p. 1). A convergence of factors creates a product that becomes viable for use in the classroom. These factors include a savvy vendor, a good distribution system, a willing consumer base, and the right technological tool. The iPod is an example of popular technology that has the potential for academic application. Recently, iPods have invaded teaching and learning as digital methods replace traditional methods of delivering information. Podcasting, for example, enables teachers to upload lectures, materials, and presentations to a Podcasting service, where students can then download the information to their own iPod or MP3 player. This format has several advantages, including allowing students to repeat lectures at their convenience, enabling ELLs to replay lectures to assist in increasing comprehension, assisting students with exam and material review, and allowing instructors and faculty to listen to their own lectures to improve practice (Girloy, 2006).

Teachers are experimenting with integrating iPods into instruction by creating their own Podcasts for student use. In addition, classroom teachers are experimenting with having students create Podcast presentations to share and critique. Other ELL uses in the K–12 setting include using the iPod as a language lab to record vocabulary, conduct question-and-answer conversations, check pronunciation, and store language exercises for instant replay (Becker & Vento, 2005).

Using an iPod as a delivery method is a natural fit for a teacher-librarian. Because
TABLE 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grades and location</th>
<th>Literature titles</th>
<th>Research focus</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 1 Grades K–4</td>
<td>Magic Treehouse Series</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25% ELL</td>
<td></td>
<td>Grammar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 2 Grades 6–8</td>
<td>Shiloh Holes</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45% ELL</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 3 Grades K–4</td>
<td>Hank the Cowdog James and the Giant Peach</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55% ELL</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher 4 Grades 7–8</td>
<td>Ruby Holler Because of Winn Dixie</td>
<td>Comprehension</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural school</td>
<td></td>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55% ELL</td>
<td></td>
<td>Writing</td>
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Overview of Teacher-Researchers. Note. ELL = English-language learner

responses from students.

PROJECT PROCEDURES

With the help of a teacher-librarian, chosen titles were based on availability, quality, vocabulary, curriculum needs, and student interests. Following copyright law and guidelines, audio CDs were purchased because of the unavailability of the audio versions of the books on iTunes.com. The teacher-librarian’s role at this stage was to make certain that teachers were aware of the applicable copyright laws; help the teacher choose titles that connect to student learning; help teachers upload the audio versions of the texts to the iPods for student use; and plan lessons that correspond to the teaching objectives of the classroom and library curricula.

Cost is an issue for acquisition of the needed materials. Copyright law mandates that one CD copy can be uploaded to only one technology at a time. Each iPod or MP3 player needs its own copy of the material. Using generic MP3 players can bring the cost down, and sites such as Audible.com can be used as sources for the books. Just as teacher-librarians buy book sets for checkout, they can also offer audiobook sets to help make this project available to more than one class. Because the library provides equal access and a controlled environment for use and storage, it should be the management and storage entity for the equipment and materials.

Following their plans, the teachers utilized the iPods differently. Journaling activities were created to emphasize writing and vocabulary development. Accelerated Reader tests were used in addition to other reading comprehension tests. The middle school teachers designed literature circles. One class created Podcasts to develop oral communication skills. Because the books and activities varied, each teacher had different results in terms of student progress. The teacher-librarian should participate in the planning stage of the project so that information literacy skills are infused in each use of the iPod and the assignments for assessment. The teacher-librarian can also offer uniformity in the approaches taken in using the technology.

SUGGESTIONS FROM THE FIELD

Several patterns emerged at the beginning of each study and were consistent in both the rural setting and the urban. These early patterns included the earbud pattern and the hot factor.

THE EARBUD PATTERN

In both of the elementary classrooms, students fidgeted with the earbuds to the extent that traditional headsets replaced them. The teachers could not determine if the earbud distraction was due to the uniqueness of the buds or the fact that the earbuds did not fit securely in little ears. Once the earbuds were replaced by the traditional headsets, the students were able to focus and concentrate on the audiobooks and activities.
THE HOT FACTOR

In the two middle school classrooms, students viewed the iPods as a hot commodity. The classroom became the cool place to be and the iPods the "it" tool to work with. Students in both middle school classrooms went through a period of playing with the iPods before settling down and viewing them as a learning tool. For example, the shuffle option was turned off so that students could move from chapter to chapter. However, the middle school students began turning the shuffle option on and off moving from chapter to chapter in a disorderly fashion. They were also heard bragging to their English-speaking peers and boasting that, because of their native languages, they were getting to play with iPods.

At the culmination of the school year, three of the projects were complete, with all data collected and analyzed. The remaining project continued through the summer of 2006 and extended into the ELL summer school that took place during June. The following information reflects findings from the first three completed projects.

BRANDI'S PROJECT

Based on pre- and posttest scores (Accelerated Reader and state writing assessment), the writing scores improved significantly, with an average score of 4.5 (out of 5.0). However, on average, many of the Accelerated Reader test scores remained the same, with a few showing improvement after using the iPods. Because of these results, the teacher-researcher administered a student survey and engaged the students in an open-ended discussion regarding the iPods and literature books (see Table 2).

The teacher-researcher delved further and asked the students what other activities they would like to try with the iPods. Student responses included the following: listen to important stuff on the news; listen to what people are saying; listen to more music; sound out words; listen to my voice singing; and make up stories and put them in the iPod.

Some limitations with this age group included the time involved, student absences, noise as a distraction when sharing a classroom with another teacher, and lack of supplemental materials for literature books.

JOHNNA'S PROJECT

The middle school students successfully read two literature (i.e., chapter) books during the study. Before reading, students were asked to write in their journals and express their thoughts in words and drawings. The journals were then used to record discussion questions, summaries, and illustrations of the two literature books as an avenue for comparison. Students began reading Shiloh (Naylor, 2000) together and completing discussion activities. Groups were then formed—one iPod group and one read-aloud group. The groups engaged in literature circle sessions focusing on the first book. Once the first book was completed, the groups switched so that both groups were able to utilize the iPods. At this point, the groups began reading Holes (Sachar, 1998).

The field notes, student journal entries, recordings of literature circle sessions, online discussion forum postings, PowerPoint projects focusing on the literature books, and samples of student book projects were used as assessment tools.

<table>
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<th>TABLE 2</th>
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<tr>
<th>Open-ended questions</th>
<th>Which did you like best: listening to the teacher read the book or listening to the book on the iPod? Why? What did you like best about using the iPod?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Student response</strong></td>
<td><strong>Teacher:</strong> Because you read slow; the teacher reads faster; my teacher reads good. iPod: Because it is so much fun. The sound; the song at the beginning; listening to it; the author’s voice.</td>
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**Student Responses to Open-Ended Interview**
Both groups engaged in discussions using the same set of focus questions for each book. All students kept journals and completed the same literature-based activities. Findings were organized around three themes:

**Vocabulary:** Use of content- and literature-based vocabulary was apparent in student journals. The frequency of academic vocabulary was higher after the project than before. However, because there was no control group, we found it difficult to determine if the frequency of use was higher because of the iPods being integrated into the activities.

**Depth of discussion:** Discussion within the small groups was in-depth and on target. Students remained on task and focused throughout the small literature circle sessions for both selected literature titles. It is hard to determine if the on-task behavior was due to the use of the iPods or to the quality of the literature.

**Quality of writing:** Journal entries indicate that students used a higher frequency of descriptive language, and writing was more focused on prompts. With the focus on an upcoming state writing assessment, we once again found it difficult to determine if the quality improved because of the iPods.

**SHARON’S PROJECT AND FINDINGS**

Ten middle school students read *Because of Winn Dixie* (DiCamillo, 2000). There were nine Hispanic speakers and one Japanese speaker in the group. Each student had an iPod. Test scores on the Accelerated Reader test, student journals, and Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program reading scores were used to determine the student progress. Student tasks included the following:

- whole class discussion on previous day’s reading;
- task cards that allowed students to work independently;
- read-along with iPod version of the book;
- comprehension testing (multiple choice);
- journal entries on guided questions;
- supplemental enrichment activities;
- Accelerated Reader test on the book; and
- comparison of movie to book after all students finished the reading.

Results on the assessment instruments were positive, with 90% of the students passing the Accelerated Reader test. Pretest scores showed a 60% pass rate, with some of the students having never passed an Accelerated Reader test before this project. When the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program reading was administered, all students in the project achieved a proficient score. “Some more advanced ELL students that had chosen to stay in the regular reading class last year did not score proficient. I think the exposure to differentiated instruction, such as the iPods, made a big difference” (Sharon Hargrove, personal communication, September 19, 2006).

The participating teacher commented on the dedication of the students, as illustrated by completion of all activities during the class period and by reluctance to leave the classroom. When asked what they liked about using the iPods, students mentioned the ability to control their learning experience (independence), the intimacy and privacy of the experience (a person reading just to you), and the ability to interact with advanced technology (Sharon Hargrove, personal communication, September 19, 2006). The students were proud of their success in the use of a cultural tool to help improve their language abilities.

**HEATHER’S PROJECT AND FINDINGS**

Heather’s project was the fourth and final study. The classroom structure—designed to serve over 50 students each day—provided services to students operating at the beginner, intermediate, and advanced levels of English-language learning. Students involved in this project were all at the intermediate and advanced levels. Groups consisted mostly of male students enrolled in the third and fourth grade who worked with two literature titles; half of the group read *Hank the Cowdog* (Erickson & Holmes, 2003), whereas the others listened to *James and the Giant Peach* (Dahl, 2002). Students engaged in litera-
ture activities and kept journals.

Approximately halfway through the project, several problems emerged. These problems included a limited number of available iPods; large numbers of students rotating in and out of the ELL classroom for services; varying language proficiency levels of students; and high numbers of student absences. The teacher cited these recurring problems as obstacles in the research process, which prompted her to donate her iPods to the middle school teacher working on a similar project. The teacher continued to use the literature titles with small-group reading instruction. Heather collected a minimal amount of data during the beginning stages of the study, which included samples of student journal writing, recordings of book talks, and student test scores on Accelerated Reader tests. An analysis of these data showed an increase in student interest in reading, an increase in the amount of depth in journal writing, and an increase in comprehension and vocabulary use.

**DISCUSSION**

As with any classroom application of technology, it is good practice to follow simple guidelines for integration, such as the following:

Consider learning goals—where would this fit into your information skills curriculum?

Think in terms of integration, not addition.

Remember that with technology comes complexity in terms of learning curve, knowledge of use, and technological literacy skills.

Determine degree of student involvement.

Consider availability of technology support.

The role of the participants must also be addressed. The role of the teacher-librarian starts with consulting and planning throughout the project—helping to cement collaborative attitudes. Using the literature in both formats during library time reinforces and enhances learning. The teacher-librarian integrates literacy skills within the project and becomes part of the “coolness.” Libraries offer an organized, consistent process to collect student and teacher products and make them available to other users.

The role of the teacher includes the responsibilities of researcher, who must analyze and examine the best forms of technology that will assist in achieving learning goals and who must design learning protocols, observe, collect data, and examine findings.

The role of the student includes the responsibilities of taking an active role in the learning process, using the technology in an appropriate way, and sharing and conversing with peers.

Findings gleaned from the completed studies offer a small window into the possibilities of using iPods for reading and writing instruction. Teacher-librarians should be eager to embrace their use as a tool for promoting information literacy.

**REFERENCES**


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Four of the world's greatest language learners attempt to learn a language in one hour. Follow their progress, and prepare to be astonished! The One Hour Language Challenge is over and the results are truly astonishing! Check out the teaser video below to get a taste of what went on, and then scroll down for the longer version of the challenge and the live coverage; you're bound to pick up a few language learning tricks along the way. BY Ed M. Wood. Sep 1, 2016. Old English describes the origins of the English language from around 450 - 1100. English is Germanic in origin, although over half of its words have derived from contact with the Latin and French languages and some from Scandinavian influence. English has spread across the globe and is now the first language of over 50 countries and the world's most commonly spoken second language. The words 'English' and 'England' derive from one of these tribes, the 'Angles'. Words from North Germanic origin also flooded into the English language, especially in the north of England, due to the Viking invasions, which started in around 850. If you are interested in the Old English language, Beowulf is a great place to start. Next: The Norman Conquest. Attributions. Learning a new language can be beneficial for you in many ways. Find out more about all the advantages and benefits of language learning. However, according to research conducted by Brian Gold, learning a language increases brain flexibility, making it easy to switch tasks in just seconds. Study participants were better at adapting and were able to handle unexpected situations much better than monolinguals. That's great. But the real question is why were they better? The plausible explanation is that when we learn a new language, we frequently jump between our familiar first language and the new one, making connections to help us retain what we're learning. This linguistic workout activates different areas of our brain.