

**tips and tactics by kathryn b. patten and dorothy valcarcel craig**

## 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 (Gilroy, 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

*Information Power: Building Partnerships for Learning* (American Association of School Librarians & Association for Educational Communications and Technology, 1998) includes technology literacy as a component of information skills, the teacher-librarian employs various technologies in lessons. This tool is a natural fit for a collaborative venture with classroom teachers, providing an enticement to engage teachers with the library skills curriculum. This type of project affects other aspects of school librarianship. The library provides a central location for collecting the products assigned to the ELL students. Podcasts, pronunciation recordings, and language exercises can then be used at any time by any user. Teacher-librarians should create pathfinders or Web-based directories on the technologies involved in this type of project—iPods, Podcasts, RSS. Lists of the literature choices available should be compiled for interested teachers.

### THE E-LITERACY STUDIES

Utilizing iPods and literature books to promote comprehension, speaking, listening, and writing skills among a diverse population of ELLs, four teachers designed the project to use iPods as companion devices to reading the print version of trade books. The projects used the iPod shuffle as a tool for reading and writing instruction. Each teacher focused on individual skills based on unique student needs; therefore, each research protocol was unique. Table 1 provides an overview of teacher researchers, school and grade, location, and literature titles used.

ELLs who took part in the study represented a variety of languages and cultures. Although Spanish was the first language for the largest number of students, there were several who spoke Kurdish, and one whose first language was Arabic. Assessment data were collected with a variety of tools, including pre- and post-Accelerated Reader test scores, pre- and postsurvey responses, literature circle recordings, journal entries, teacher-researcher field notes, and open-ended discussion



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## JUNIOR FICTION

TABLE 1

	Grades and location	Literature titles	Research focus
Teacher 1	Grades K-4 Urban school 25% ELL	Magic Treehouse Series	Comprehension Vocabulary Grammar Writing
Teacher 2	Grades 6-8 Urban school 45% ELL	<i>Shiloh</i> <i>Holes</i>	Comprehension Writing Vocabulary
Teacher 3	Grades K-4 Rural school 55% ELL	<i>Hank the Cowdog</i> <i>James and the Giant Peach</i>	Comprehension Vocabulary
Teacher 4	Grades 7-8 Rural school 55% ELL	<i>Ruby Holler</i> <i>Because of Winn Dixie</i>	Comprehension Vocabulary Writing

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 audio-books and activities.

### SHORT AND SWEET

**Dog diaries: Secret writings of the WOOF Society.** Betsy Byars, Betsy Duffey, Laurie Myers, and Erik Brooks. Henry Holt, 2007. \$15.95. 978-0-8050-7957-9. Grades 4-6. At the first meeting of the WOOF (Words of Our Friends) Society, dogs of various breeds and backgrounds read excerpts from diaries written by dogs from around the world and across time, including Egypt, Pompeii, and the U.S. Civil War.

**The fall of the amazing Zalindas: Sherlock Holmes and the Baker Street Irregulars.** Tracy Mack. Orchard Books, 2006. \$16.99. 978-0-439-82836-9. Grades 4-6. Sherlock Holmes owed much of his success to the Baker Street Irregulars (the ragged gang of neighborhood kids that ran his errands and collected information for him), as this collection of stories demonstrates.

**Ribbiting tales.** Ed. Nancy Springer. Philomel Books, 2000. \$16.99. 978-0-399-23312-8. Grades 4-6. Froggy funny business fills this volume of original short stories, featuring Bruce Coville, Jane Yolen, Nancy Springer, Robert J. Harris, Janet Taylor Lisle, David Lubar, Stephen Menick, and Brian Jacques.

**The Rumpelstiltskin problem.** Vivian Vande Velde. Houghton Mifflin, 2000. \$15.00. 978-0-618-05523-4. Grades 6-8. The traditional Rumpelstiltskin story has many holes: Why did the miller lie about his daughter's abilities? Why did Rumpelstiltskin want the child? These stories offer possible explanations.

**Salsa stories.** Lulu Delacre. Scholastic, 2000. \$15.95. 978-0-590-63118-1. Grades 4-6. These stories, shared during a family celebration, tell of life in various Latin American countries, as remembered by certain family members. Included are recipes and a glossary of Spanish terms used.



**JOHN  
PETERS**

## PICTURE BOOKS

### WORDLESS (OR NEARLY)

**Adventures of Polo.** Régis Faller. Roaring Brook Press, 2006. \$16.95. 978-1-59643-160-7. Grades preK-3. Near disasters are narrowly averted over and over with fortuitous twists and encounters in these adventures of a small floppy-eared dog with a backpack and a zest for new experiences. Chasing a thief, he visits evermore out-of-the-way locales in *Polo: The Runaway Book* (Régis Faller, 2007, Roaring Brook Press).

**Discovering nature's alphabet.** Krystina Castella and Brian Boyl. Heyday Books, 2006. \$15.95. 978-1-59714-021-8. Grades 1-3. Carefully framed but not arranged or retouched, the 26 letters are captured in leaves, branches, vines, a lizard's tail, and other objects.

**Flotsam.** David Wiesner. Clarion, 2006. \$17.00. 978-0-618-19457-5. Grades 1-3. A mysterious undersea world is revealed through a camera that washes ashore in this year's Caldecott Award winner.

**Lola and Fred.** Christoph Heuer. 4N Publishing, 2006. \$15.95. 978-0-9741319-8-6. Grades K-2. Having a yen to fly like the birds, a turtle and a frog try boosting themselves aloft on a rocket, with an oversized rubber band and more in this hilarious Swiss import.

**Marvelous misadventures of Fun-Boy.** Ralph Cosentino. Viking, 2006. \$15.99. 978-0-670-05961-4. Grades K-2. In 12 mini-episodes, with each one related in four big sequential cartoon panels, an enterprising lad encounters such perils as a playground slide on which a bird has left a sticky deposit.

**Once upon a banana.** Jennifer Armstrong. Ill. David Small. Simon & Schuster, 2006. \$16.95. 978-0-689-84251-1. Grades 1-3. A runaway monkey throws a banana peel onto a busy sidewalk, setting off a hilarious chain of spills and thrills.

### 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 AND FINDINGS

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 AND FINDINGS

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 2**

Open-ended questions	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?
Student response	Teacher: 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.

**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

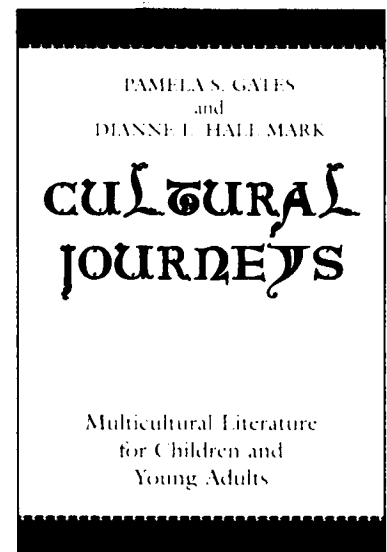
comparison of movie to book after all students finished the reading.

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-



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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.

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gies such as desktop computers. Mobile Learning and English Language Learners 375. Perhaps the most well documented affordances of mobile devices are their inherent portability and their wireless connectivity. The combination of mobility and accessibility provides students the opportunity to draw connections to previously learned content knowledge, gain new knowledge and further develop problem-solving skills. Learning, giving students a greater sense of ownership and responsibility for their own learning (Kervin & Hindle, 2007; Ridenour, Blood, Simmons, Crouch & Johnson, 2011). Reflections of an English Language Teacher. Menu. Skip to content. I did have a few lessons but dropped out fairly early on because of a combination of lack of time and being driven slightly mad (much as it was interesting to see the classroom from the learner point of view!). I was, however, very motivated to learn, so worked my way through an A1/A2 coursebook and picked up some useful stuff and some less than useful (the only time I've needed to describe my daily routine at length was in a speaking test which formed part of an entrance test when I was thinking of joining a class again! (Which underlines how important it is to help learners discover that they can use language "a bit like the budding readers in my classes have done with reading in English") Successful language learners keep on learning outside the classroom, and this is where personal learning techniques really make a difference. Study technique is a personal thing and most people benefit from varying techniques from time to time. Boredom is the enemy of good learning. Three highly important elements of language study are relevance, understanding and repetition. Not only is this a great experience, but you automatically achieve relevance, understanding and repetition. Your skills are tested all day long and through this challenge you will make progress. Our courses are in some of the world's most fascinating places too, from dreamy surf towns to megacities, so you will take much more than language skills home with you.