

## LLTI Highlights

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Welcome to “LLTI-Highlights.” This column features a selection of important electronic discussions from the LLTI—Language Learning and Technology International—list server. The discussions posted during the second half of the year 2005 raised interesting issues dealing with language learning centers. All discussions have been summarized and paraphrased by me. Otmar Foelsche, the moderator of the electronic discussion list, has assigned a reference number to each topic that appeared in the discussion list. This number can be used to search the LLTI archives. Instructions on searching the archives appear at the end of this column.

Annelie Chapman initiated a discussion entitled **Rationale for Digital Language Lab Systems (#7954)** in July that continued during the month of August. She started the thread with the following: “...for those of you who are using digital language lab systems (e.g. Sony Soloist/Virtuoso, Can8 Virtual Lab, etc.), I would be interested in knowing why your campus chose to invest in these systems as part of your services for language instruction and learning.” To this, Judy Shoaf replied: “We invested in the system because our old cassette audio lab was both heavily used for classes and testing, and failing, so a replacement was justified, and digital seemed to be the right move.” Francoise Sorgen-Goldschmidt added: “Another advantage (which cost conscious administrators may like) is that this type of technology can turn any computer lab into a ‘language lab’, not to mention the distance (remote) possibilities digital offers, which do not necessarily require a dedicated ‘lab.’ As for the different digital solutions out there [...], Jack Burston recently edited a monograph entitled ‘Digital Language Lab Solutions’ where he reviews eleven products, comparing, functionality, cost, ease of use etc., which can be purchased from the IALLT site at <[http://www.iallt.org/iallt\\_services/iallt\\_publications.html](http://www.iallt.org/iallt_services/iallt_publications.html)>.” Daniel M. Wescovich joined in with a critical observation: “I have been paying attention to the responses to this initial question of the rationale for digital language lab systems because I personally have a different perspective on the rationale for an electronic language lab system of any kind. I think that the language lab system (analog or digital), which basically is going to be some electronic system to enable communication and instruction between teacher and students, is an obstacle to any goals of real, authentic learning. I observe lab sections using the lab system to

communicate with people who are sitting two feet from each other. And it seems to me that in many cases we are placing a physical, technological barrier between the real human beings who are sitting there. Please understand, that I realize the utilization of a digital lab as a virtual lab which can enable communication between people who are in different classrooms, different cities even. And I appreciate this advancement because it breaks down barriers of physicality to enable communication and learning. But why do we insist on using computers to communicate with people who are actually, physically in the same room with us? Doesn't this create a psychological distance between us? Doesn't this hinder, rather than promote, real human communication? ..." Chen Xiaobin objected: "Sitting far away from each other doesn't mean that we are building barriers among students. On the contrary, using the language lab can certainly enhance the learning process. When students are all at the beginning level, it is almost impossible for them to communicate in the target language. At this state, they need to accumulate more materials and be familiar with what they are going to use. If teachers 'force' them to use the target language face to face, they might lose confidence too. Rather, using computers and language labs enables time and space for them to think about. Learning a language is not like learning physics. Understanding doesn't mean being able to put them into actual use. So they need time and space to practice. [...] different people have different personalities. Some are more outgoing and eager to communicate with others. Some aren't. If someone is timid and doesn't like talking with others, they would feel even more embarrassed in front of a teacher if they are not proficient enough in language. [...] I don't mean that language labs and computers are better than a language teacher in every aspect. What I want to say is that they should be used as a supplementary part of language learning..." Carol Reitan: "I've noticed that use of the language lab systems seems to depend quite a bit on the nature of the course and the nature of the language being taught. When it's a phonetics course or another type of course where pronunciation is the main focus, the language lab systems seem to be used more (whether digital or analog). When it's a course in a tonal language or a language that generally takes a longer time to achieve basic proficiency (Chinese and Japanese come to mind), the language lab systems seem to be a higher priority especially in the lower level courses. I've observed at our school that the teachers of Chinese rely on the language lab quite a bit more in the first year course [...] than teachers of French or Spanish. The teachers of French, Spanish, and German require the audio work, but they also are happy when students participate individually in other activities using web-based resources, or CD-ROMs, or video..." Judy Shoaf added: "This is a good

observation. Another point is that small classes don't need the lab much—students have an opportunity to speak to each other and the teacher can listen. But for larger classes, the chance for everyone to be speaking at once while the instructor listens selectively can be useful." Ralph Schultz: "I also see the 'Pendulum effect'. It is new, therefore we need to use it! Sometimes it does not work well as a teaching tool. But it does take trying it and getting a feel as to what does work for you and what does not."

In September, Daniel Wescovich launched a new thread of discussions on a similar topic—**Language Lab Software** (#7992)—with the following query: "Can anyone tell me what software can emulate the old language lab capabilities such as real time audio communication, grouping, pairing, etc?..." A first suggestion came from Chris Hall: "I would heartily recommend looking into CAN-8 (<[www.can8.com](http://www.can8.com)>) for real-time audio. It has a great Babylon feature that allows group discussions. I have had fourty simultaneous users here at the French lab and it has never once crashed!" Susan Breeyear cautioned: "...we have had CAN-8 for three years now, and although it certainly has a lot of functions, I've never seen such a clunky interface in my life. We are looking for a new solution because our faculty, with maybe three exceptions, has not been able to learn how to author in the system [...]. The program is unintuitive and bears a strong resemblance to the old DOS system..." Jonathan Perkins had another recommendation: "We are using Sony Virtuoso (<<http://www.sansinc.com>>), which does everything our old audio tape system did [...] plus some nice digital bells and whistles. One of the main reasons we chose this option [...] was to make a smooth transition for those instructors who were used to the old system while opening up the new possibilities of digital delivery to a wider audience. So far we are succeeding in both goals. There is a higher price to be paid for a turnkey system, but if you want to keep the grouping/pairing, monitoring, teacher-student interaction of the old analog lab, this is the way to go in my opinion." Judy Shoaf added: "For a system that really emulates the old Sony or Tandberg labs, I guess Sony and Tandberg might be the best vendors for digital language labs.... We have a Tandberg lab (the company's name is now Sanako) installed in 2001 and it is holding up well. It does all the things that the cassette lab did and more and better [...]. The downside is that it is expensive, as the old labs were, and gets upgraded more often since it has to keep up with computer developments. And you have to buy the computers and replace them etc. too." Karl Fisher agreed: "Check out the Sanako Lab 100 (formerly Tandberg Elice). It does all of that and more, and it is truly a 'plug and play' system. It runs on Windows OS with a Linux server box for the

audio library. Since there is only one computer (students have slave units that are virtual cassette decks), you don't have to get 21 computers running and properly configured at the same time to conduct a lab session. I wrote a review of the system for the journal last year [...]. Jörg Waltje added: „The review is in the IALLT Journal, vol. 36, no. 2, 2004: 49-53.” Sue Otto: “Just to second Karl's posting... We also have a Sanako Lab 100 [...] As Karl says, it not only costed us much less than what we had paid for our last cassette-based audio lab, it does all of what the old lab did plus more. Although it is not the same as being there, we have a QTVR panoramic view of the lab [...] at the following URL <<http://www.uiowa.edu/~lmc/pages/pano/17ph.html>>.

The September discussions on hardware issues were followed by an October discussion on **Fitting Lab Into Language Curriculum** (#8036). This discussion was initiated by Louise Stoehr with the following: “...our Department is currently in the process of examining our lab requirements for beginning language students, and to assist in this effort I am seeking information from colleagues at other institutions. One item of particular interest is how others integrate the lab and its resources into the language curriculum. Do you, for example have a specific attendance requirement for students at any level of language study, or is lab attendance optional? If you do have a lab requirement, how is it implemented? The other issue involves the types of resources you provide students and types of assignments instructors may request be completed in the lab environment [...]” Christine Huhn offered the first suggestions: “...we had put in a beautiful, state of the art language lab, but the students hated it and as a result didn't attend or didn't do the work once they did attend. [...] Some of the things we did to improve the situation: Attendance was required to pass the course, and the work needed to be turned in otherwise the course grade was either lowered or the students received an automatic F. The students also received exam questions relating to the lab assignments...” Judy Shoaf noted: “A lab that would offer logged desk time to all the UF elementary language students would be amazingly large. Back in the early 90s there was talk of somehow replacing a contact hour with a lab hour, but it was just not practical. We usually emphasize that instructors should try to integrate the lab audio into tests and classroom work, so that the students are aware of the benefit of using the materials on their own. Instead, we offer (a) a website with the lab audio for 1st-2nd year students (though this is finally beginning to be replaced for some courses by sites maintained by the publishers), and (b) computer and lab classroom facilities to instructors who have courses or classes that require special software, headsets, or interactivity. The lab tends to be used for speaking tests, pronunciation courses, web-heavy or media-

heavy courses or class sessions, courses with online textbook, class sessions that use or manipulate audio and video (e.g. 'subtitling' video as part of a translation class) [...] the lab is also used by students for listening, viewing, and recording assignments." Mike Ledgerwood added: "...If the work done in a Center is not thoroughly integrated in the 'regular' class, the Center and work done in it will be considered a waste of time [...]. The integration can be through tests and testing, through having Center-used materials be the basis for classroom discussions, presentations [...] once again being sure that this work is reflected in the classroom, too." Other observations about faculty use of learning center facilities came from Jason Vance: "...our lab is used to give students time to practice pronunciation, [...] and listening to the language in action. Also, the instructors have the students work in groups to practice conversations. We also have a classroom management program that will allow the students to record themselves..." Bob Peckham provided further examples for lab use: "In the Muriel Tomlinson Language Resource Center University of Tennessee at Martin Foreign Language students through the third semester in Spanish, French, German and Japanese each spend 2 hours per week. They have a number of choices of activities directly related to class or vitally supplemental to class, according to what their teachers expect. Teachers require that students account for their time, and they test students on what they have done[...]. We have work study students, our own advanced and immersion processed student language specialists, SIs (student instructors = assistants) who work in association with the lab. Also, all of our regular full-time faculty are assigned one of their office hours to be in charge of the lab..." More examples for best practices in lab use came from Bruce Swayne: "...Using Spanish as our example, each class includes four one-hour class meetings per week and also the requirement of a thirty-minute lab activity per week. We provide students with a menu of choices for the lab activity to be completed at a time of their own choosing. These include:

- (a) practice activities from the CD-ROM that accompanies the textbook,
- (b) practice exams from the website of the textbook publisher,
- (c) practice activities from the video CD that accompanies the textbook,
- (d) 'Conversation Lab'— a thirty minute small-group 'NO English' session with a native speaker;
- (e) Study Groups—a thirty minute tutoring session with an advanced student,
- (f) Satellite TV—watching authentic TV and writing a one-page synopsis,
- (g) Movies—watching a feature length film and writing a one-page synopsis,

- (h) Internet news or a cultural site in the target language and writing a one-page summary..."

Charlie Long started the last big discussion of the year during the month of November with a new thread on **Media Distribution and Copyright** (#8076.1). He wrote: "We spend a lot of time implementing ways to deliver and organize copyrighted audio and video materials to and for our students. We make password protected web pages, and post files to course management systems. Students have to get on to our networks and behind firewalls in order to access them. We have to write for permissions, worry about what we are doing is legal, etc. All of this takes time and energy away from teaching and learning. I would like to offer an open suggestion to publishers. iTunes is a wonderful media management system, it organizes, it is searchable, it is cross platform, and it is free! Publishers should make their audio and video available through an iTunes Educational Media Store. A key code [...] could be included with the textbook to allow for the downloading of the material. Alternately, a reasonable fee could be charged for used text books [...]. The advantage to the publishers is great. They would not have to publish and package CDs or DVDs, saving them lots of money, hopefully passing along the savings to the students. Students and teachers alike would have their own copies of the materials to play when and where needed. The built-in copyright protection of the iTunes store limits the unauthorized distribution of the material [...]. I am hoping that there are publishers who read this list and that they will consider this option [...]. Imagine all students having easy access to all the audio and video that a textbook has to offer without the institution having to do anything and without the publisher having to do any shrink wrapping." A critical response to this proposition came from Joseph O Kautz: "Charlie Long makes an interesting proposition and I could not help responding with how this fashionable, campus-in-iTunes approach would affect us. An 'All iTunes' solution would limit how we can use digital media. We incorporate audio and video files from publishers [...]. We also augment the content with text tracks done in Magpie, etc. To do didactization, we need the actual files, not a link into a "free" proprietary content management system. Blackboard used to be free too [...]. Kiss the language lab good-bye on campus with this kind of delivery model. Bean counters would be wise to ask, why do we need a Language Lab when we have iPods and iTunes to benevolently take the place of Language Labs...." Jason Vance inquired about one of the questions raised by Joseph O'Kautz: "Why would you need to augment the content with text tracks?" Gus Leonard joined in with the following: "Why augment the content? Other than for reinforcing learning via various modalities, such as providing gist 'tracks' at various language levels, California and other states are subject to observing the legislation of

the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Section 508, and other local and state legislation on making content accessible. This extra layer of support is critical with deaf learners, but also (as I'm learning) very helpful for ADHD and other learning disabilities I didn't necessarily think of in the ADA context. The CA community college system has been leading the way out here and our state university system schools are in the position of catch up now. I hope this thread can lead to some good dialog related to legal, pedagogical, ethical, etc. issues around why we might want to "augment" digital content." Judy Shoaf was skeptical: "I am not sure about any of this. First, I think at least some of the publishers are way ahead of iTunes technologically and /or pedagogically. A couple of our courses have switched over to publisher-provided lab audio. Students have Quia exercises and online workbooks and lab manuals with linked audio and self-checking. These are (probably) superior to doing the paper manual with longer lab files either in the lab or at home or using an iPod (and checking the answers in the back of the book). They've developed an integrated approach that goes beyond what any one lab should have to try to do. Georges Detiveaux: argued: "With regards to online workbooks and lab manuals, it might also be useful to consider an argument that has certainly been made before: there is something to be said about paper and pen practice and manipulating a real book in front of you, especially when learning a new language [...]. Our Spanish courses use the Quia service for their workbook and lab manual, and I must admit that I am very impressed with the grading features and the one-stop-shopping environment [...]. Yet, I am reluctant to switch to it for our traditional in-person French courses for this very reason above. Don't get me wrong: I embrace technology whole heartedly and exploit it when and where I can [...]. I just can't see myself doing away with the practice of pen-to-paper writing altogether. As long as my tests are on paper, so will at least some of the necessary preparations for them...." Janice Rodriguez joined in with the following: "...as to the problem of copying the answer key in workbook manuals, I tell my students to use it. I explain that doing the work and subsequently correcting their answers in a different color ink shows me that they are on the path to becoming life-long learners, surely a buzz word at other colleges besides mine. Students who show no evidence of self-correction with the answer key get a lower grade on their workbook assignment than those who do show evidence." Samantha Earp added: "Apple is actually already exploring the use of iTunes in the educational context. I would like to refer you to an article in the 11/4/05 edition of the Chronicle of Higher Education ('Stanford makes podcasts of lectures available through Apple's iTunes') that spotlights Stanford's use of this tool. Duke, Michigan and others in the Apple Digital Campus group are also working on this effort

[...]. You can view Stanford's use of iTunes for this purpose at <<http://itunes.stanford.edu>>.”

The discussions of the Language Learning and Technology International (LLTI) list server have been archived and posted on the web. These LLTI archives can be accessed from the IALLT Home page, which is located at <<http://www.iallt.net>>. A link to the LLTI list server appears at the top level of the IALLT Home page. The LLTI list server page gives instructions on how to subscribe or unsubscribe to the list server. In addition, there is a link to the LLTI archives. These archives can also be directly accessed at <<http://listserv.dartmouth.edu/archives/llti.html>>.

To search the archives, type the subject in the first search field. The search engine will match the subject with the subject headings of the archived messages. You may also type a key word or words in the second search field. This search will look for the key words in the body text of all messages. If the reference number that has been assigned to a discussion topic is entered in this field, the search will bring up a complete list of all discussions dealing with the topic. You may also want to restrict search by limiting it to a specific author or by entering beginning and ending dates. Such a restriction is particularly useful for searches on frequently occurring topics. Any questions or comments related to the LLTI list server may be addressed to Otmar Foelsche, the moderator of the LLTI discussion list. Otmar can be contacted at [otmar.foelsche@dartmouth.edu](mailto:otmar.foelsche@dartmouth.edu).

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