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LEADERSHIP UPDATES

A BRIEF HISTORY OF CALL-IS WEBCASTING IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM
Vance Stevens, Christine Bauer Ramazani, Jack Watson, Abe Rashad, & Jennifer Meyer

Vance Stevens starts the narrative.

Vance Stevens, *Higher Colleges of Technology/CERT/KBZAC, Al Ain, United Arab Emirates*

To start the story, English teaching has had a natural affinity for the online environment, which grows with each new development in Web 2.0 connectivity. The authors are, in order of appearance, as follows. Vance Stevens is a founding member of the Computer-Assisted Language Learning Interest Section (CALL-IS) who has been experimenting with computer-mediated communications tools for the past 20 years in teaching EFL online and connecting colleagues in professional development. Next, we hear from Christine Bauer-Ramazani, who was instrumental in starting both the Electronic Village (EV) Online in 2001 and CALL-IS webcasting in 2006. Then, Jack Watson takes over the story with his succession as the CALL-IS webcast coordinator from Christine and Chris Sauer. He is followed by the next coordinator, Abe Reshad, who initiated a radical shift in our approach to webcasting through skillful utilization of YouTube/Live. Abe passes the baton to Jennifer Meyer, one of our most astute webcasting newbies, who explains how she learned the ropes well enough to take on the role of CALL-IS webcast coordinator from Abe forward to the TESOL 2018 convention in Chicago, Illinois, USA next year.

The story starts with what was likely the first real webcast from a TESOL convention, when CALL-IS went online from Salt Lake City, Utah, USA on 10 April 2002. Pulled off successfully as a proof-of-concept, the event, called "Theory Meets Practice in CALL" was presented by Joy Egbert, Elizabeth Hanson-Smith, Deborah Healey, Vance Stevens, Thomas Robb, and Lynn Hendrickson. Look for details here.

As the story continues, Christine Bauer-Ramazani organized the first official CALL-IS webcasts for TESOL 2006, where she and Chris Sauer functioned as moderators/interviewers. She takes up the story below.

Christine Bauer-Ramazani, *Saint Michael's College, Colchester, Vermont, USA*

The following year at TESOL 2007 in Seattle, Washington, USA six presentations from the EV Fair Classics of the EV were webcast. The six sessions followed the schedule of the EV Fair Classics, with each presentation lasting 30 minutes, then repeated. Participants in the audience consisted mainly of webheads as well as moderators and EV Online participants, but word of these virtual sessions from the EV at the annual TESOL conventions continued to spread, increasing audience participation significantly each year.

2006	2009	2012	2015
2007	2010	2013	2016
2008	2011	2014	2017

Table 1: Links to webcasts through the years (2006-2017)
See Appendix 1 for full links to these webcast portals.

For the 2010 webcasts, the webcasters began using Elluminate, now Blackboard Collaborate, a web-conferencing platform with audio/video. Vance Stevens had arranged access to the "Webheads Virtual Office" Blackboard Collaborate/Elluminate room for use by the CALL-IS, courtesy of a grant from LearningTimes. The LearningTimes

Elluminate room was the tool of choice for CALL-IS webcasting until Jack Watson used another instantiation of it in 2015, made available through his college. Now Jack adds his part.

Jack Watson, University of New Brunswick, Fredericton, New Brunswick, Canada

Boston, Massachusetts, USA, 2010: The way I remember it, I'm seated directly behind Christine Bauer-Ramazani, peering unobtrusively (I think) over her shoulder as she webcasts a session. Webcast audio is delivered directly through the speakers, and the Wi-Fi delivers the message clearly and globally. Presenters speak and shift their PowerPoint slides, and Christine advances the corresponding slides online in the Elluminate program, all the while engaging the online audience through questions and commentary in the chat function. And it works. To me, the event was at once fascinating, challenging, and rife with potential for international access and participation. Twice more I watched webcasters (Chris Sauer and Carla Arena) whose expertise belied the complexity of preparation and execution. I definitely wanted, and didn't want, to do this.

New Orleans, Louisiana, USA, 2011: We had four sessions webcast. The success of more experienced webcasters was not to be my fate. Ambient noise, speaker feedback, the error of having two Elluminate moderator rooms with active mics, and my own inexperience rendered some sessions unrecordable.

Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, USA, 2012: Audio was vastly improved here, but by this time everyone in the convention center had discovered Wi-Fi, causing intermittent connection at best. Another lesson involved the importance of not trying to webcast progressive slides—these transmit only part of the slide, with most unfortunate results. So it was that only static slides would be collected for webcasts.

Dallas, Texas, USA, 2013: By Dallas, I was finally getting the hang of Elluminate. Gone were the progressive slides, audio was markedly clearer at all times, and there was a dedicated DSL for the webcast machine. In 2013, webcast audience members hailed from 24 different countries. With eight sessions webcast, the need for more webcast volunteers and at least two platforms was becoming clear.

Portland, Oregon, USA, 2014: The 2014 iteration of CALL-IS EV and Technology Showcase saw 15 sessions successfully webcast. Up to this point, the webcast team had used a system of paired teams consisting of a lead and an assist. For Toronto, we added a third: volunteer observer, who could watch the webcast team in action, collect a record of online participants' countries of origin, and find in-house technical help when needed. The University of New Brunswick in Fredericton, Canada, lent its Blackboard Collaborate system for use in the EV Fair Classics from Portland.

Toronto, Ontario, Canada, 2015: Abe Reshad began training to take up the mantle of webcast coordinator, and we webcast 11 sessions. Because we now had cultivated a solid core of webcast volunteers, the challenge for the following year would be to webcast every session we could.

Baltimore, Maryland, USA, 2016: With Abe down with a flu, I served as on-site webcasting anchor. Thanks to the growing team of volunteer webcasters (16 in total) and Abe's planning, the challenge of fulfilling duties of CALL-IS chair and webcast anchor could be met. Abe took the helm of an ad hoc committee to investigate, develop, and institute that new approach. Next, Abe relates his experience.

Abraham Reshad, Ohio University, Athens, Ohio, USA
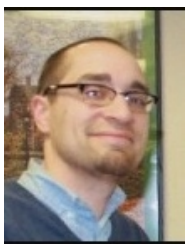
Reflecting on the years of webcasting in the CALL-IS, it seems clear that in the year 2016 there was a critical mass. TESOL 2016 marked a record number of webcast sessions since the CALL-IS began offering webcasts as a service to educators, and this milestone brought with it the need to find a sustainable and customizable product that could meet the growing diversity in both the content being delivered and the web audience being served. The CALL-IS steering committee allocated resources for the aforementioned ad hoc committee. The criteria for the platform were for it to be free, customizable for our purposes, simple (in terms of content delivery), and interactive (with some form of audience/webcaster interaction allowed). Google came to the rescue with its free and robust live streaming services through YouTube Live (Stevens, 2017, explains the process).

Webcasting in Seattle 2017. (From left: Jennifer Meyer, Ellen Dougherty, Christine Bauer-Ramazani, Heather Benucci)

TESOL 2017 quickly came and, despite the hours put into planning for the conference and preparing the team (with instructional videos and live meetings), we immediately encountered a good number of curve balls when we started setting up and testing equipment in Seattle. Not knowing the dimensions of conference rooms and location of outlets makes webcasting prep quite challenging. Fortunately, I have the pleasure of working with individuals who love a challenge. We eventually came up with a decent setup before the first presentation.

Finally, Jennifer Meyer takes over the narrative.

Jennifer Meyer, *Williamson County Schools, Franklin, Tennessee, USA*

In January 2016, I joined the webcasting team through a generic call for volunteers put out by TESOL. My name was forwarded to Abe, the Webcasting Team leader, and he contacted me about joining the group. I really had no idea what I was getting myself into, but it sounded interesting, and I was up for learning something new. Shortly after that, I was invited to an online training session using the Blackboard Collaborate software. Initially, I thought I'd never be able to figure out how to even log in to the meeting, but it was actually very simple. Veteran webcasters were all very helpful and made me feel like my questions were being asked for the first time, even though I'm pretty sure they had heard them several times over the years.

After our successful webcasting in Baltimore, the team discussed some of the limitations and problems with hardware and software. As Abe mentioned previously, he put together a committee to explore other options for webcasting for Seattle 2017. James May, Heather Benucci, Abe, and I started researching different solutions and met several times to hash out details. We settled on Open Broadcaster Software (OBS) to encode videos to webcast using YouTube Live. Some reasons we chose this configuration were ease of use, universal accessibility, and, best of all—price. It is free of charge: free to stream, free to record, free to archive, free to publish information about, and free to watch.
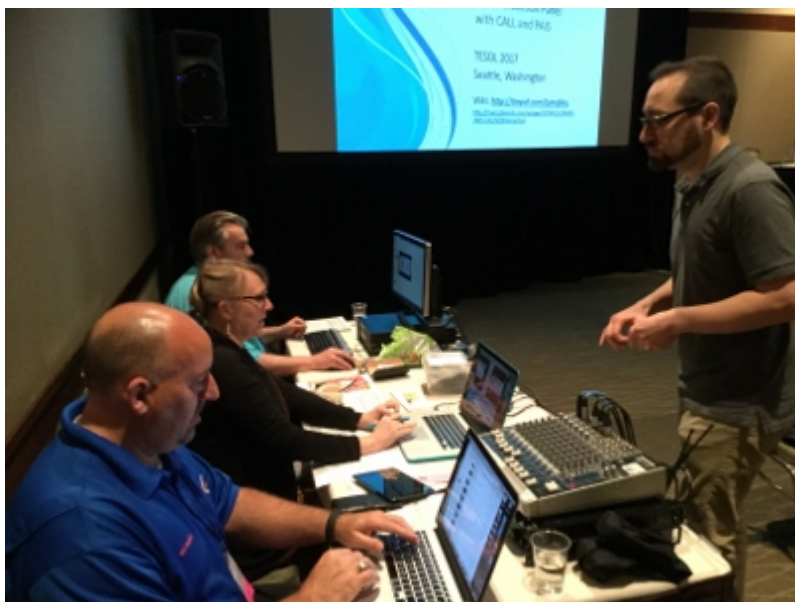
Seated front to back: James May, Jennifer Meyer, Jack Watson, Abe Reshad (standing)

At the end of the conference in Seattle, Abe stepped down as team leader and I took on the responsibility. We held an online meeting a month after the conference to reflect on our experience and to plan for optimization for next year's conference in Chicago. Major points from this discussion included budgeting for hardware to webcast most efficiently and professionally. We also discussed the organization of sessions and reorganizing these to more easily facilitate the different hardware configurations needed to live stream. Finally, we discussed branding our webcasting with graphic design to use on our YouTube channels and as a part of the live streams that we webcast. As always, it is the contributions of the entire team that make us so successful and make the collaboration enriching and enjoyable.

Note: This article has previously been published and is available in a much longer format: Bauer-Ramazani, Meyer, Reshad, Stevens, & Watson, 2017.

References

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Jennifer Meyer is an elementary ESL Specialist at a public school in Brentwood, Tennessee, and a PhD student in Literacy Studies at Middle Tennessee State University.

Jack Watson is the ELP E-Learning Coordinator at the University of New Brunswick English Language Programme. Now CALL-IS Past Chair, he has delivered several webcasts from Technology Showcase and Electronic Village Fair Classics, and served for four years on the TESOL CALL-IS Web Cast Development Team, including two years as Coordinator. During his tenure, the number of mentored webcast volunteers increased from four to fifteen, and the number of webcast sessions increased from four to fourteen.

Christine Bauer-Ramazani (MBA, MA, MEd) is a 40-year veteran instructor of English and teacher trainer, former CALL-IS chair, author of articles and chapters, frequent presenter at conferences around the world, designer and teacher of several online/distance courses, and co-founder of the Electronic Village Online (EVO) of TESOL.

Abraham Reshad serves as a Lecturer and database/CALL coordinator in the Ohio Program of Intensive English (OPIE) at Ohio University. For three years, he has utilized mobile media to augment classroom instruction in terms of reading and vocabulary. Now, he focuses on augmented reality mobile applications and Ohio University's Holodeck.

Vance Stevens teachers EFL at the air college in Al Ain, UAE. He is founder of Webheads in Action, edits On the Internet for TESL-EJ, hosts a podcast series Learning2gether with over 360 episodes, and serves TESOL CALL-IS Electronic Village Online as coordinator, plus founder / co-moderator of EVO Minecraft MOOC.