

**Interview with Eiko Kato,
first in the world to apply iPods to education**

Steve McCarty
Osaka Jogakuin College

Original Source: *GLOCOM Platform* - Special Topics - Colloquium #64: March 7, 2006. Tokyo: International University of Japan, Japanese Center for Global Communications

Steve McCarty interviews Eiko Kato, Harvard PhD and 15-year Mac user, who initiated the distribution of iPods loaded with English listening materials to all incoming students at Osaka Jogakuin College from April 2004. This was about a half year before Duke University simply distributed iPods, widely publicized as the first in the world to do so. Professor Kato discusses how the idea originated, before iPods became popular in Japan, and how iPods are being used effectively in the second year. This interview itself is a transcribed podcast from Japancasting, a spoken library for listening by computer or MP3 player at <stevemc.blogmatrix.com>.

Steve McCarty: Today I have with me Professor Eiko Kato of Osaka Jogakuin College. She was the one who was actually first in the world to initiate the use of iPods in education, distributing iPods to all the freshman students starting in 2004, about a half year before Duke University did so, which has often been proclaimed as the first. So let's ask her about her background and how she came to this idea of using iPods in education before any other educational institution in the world. Could you please introduce yourself a little?

Eiko Kato: Hi, my background is in education, but my research area is in mother-child interaction during child-rearing. Another interest of mine is in how computers and technology can be used in education. When I first saw the iPod I thought it could be a perfect tool for English learning. Because when I was a student a long time ago I listened to English tapes, and I had to listen to English broadcasts at home. But with the iPod you can carry it around, anywhere, any time, and anywhere can be a classroom. You can listen to things you like, and the iPod can be a perfect tool for busy students.

SM: Well, that's true. But until recently there were not that many Mac users in Japan.

Haven't you been involved with Macintoshes for a long time?

EK: I've been a Mac user for at least 15 years, and I'm a diehard Mac user [laughs]. I started working on a project with my students. We had a Mac club, and my students and I made cultural movies. We exchanged cultural movies with students in New York City. We got interesting comments from American students. That was the beginning of my contact with education and technology.

SM: Well, it sounds like there was much more to it. And since you started with iPods, podcasting has come along, so we can discuss that as another way of providing content. You had an individual project exchanging movies, but now with podcasting we can potentially reach the whole world of listeners, and we can become providers of new content. Well, how did you first start thinking about introducing iPods here, and when was that?

EK: It happened very quickly after the examination [in early 2004]. We were talking about the opening of the four-year college. Because Osaka Jogakuin has been known as a junior college. We wanted something surprising, something more, something the media should know. And I said, what about iPods for education? Osaka Jogakuin has been known for its English education, and we already had lots of contents, to place them in iPods. So that's when I started talking to administrators and other teachers, and they liked the idea.

At that time iPod was not well known in the Japanese market. People had just started using them, and high school students didn't know about them. So people were surprised that iPods could be used for English learning. We put lots of things on iPod, because we had already developed some materials by ourselves, so we were copyright free [smiles].

For students, because we teach them in English from the beginning of the [first] year, for some students it is hard. So we wanted to have them to listen to English conversations and English expressions used often in classrooms. We placed them in iPods [distributed during the entrance ceremony] and we expected students to listen to them before classes started. That's the beginning.

SM: Yes, it was amazing, because at that time iPods had not become popular, and very few foreign products have really become a boom in Japan like the iPod has become, so

it was a remarkable stroke of intuition to decide on using iPods. So Osaka Jogakuin College did have a whole store of materials and could record more, a number of other conversation strategies and other forms to help kick-start the students in the education in the English medium here, which is also rare, teaching so much in English from the start, which is one reason the students are so good. So, going from the first year into the second year of using iPods in education, how has it evolved?

EK: We had lots of textbooks developed by our faculty members. Audio tapes were available. Video materials were available. But they were not available for iPod use, so throughout the first year we tried to digitize those materials, whether video materials or audio cassette materials, into iPod. Also lots of textbooks come with CDs, and students purchase those textbooks. They can easily install the CD which came with the textbook [into their iPods].

For example, our grammar teachers noticed the difference after we started using the iPod. Students were supposed to practice the target grammar in dialogues. They didn't expect to listen to CDs, and they didn't have time to listen to them at home. They just memorized the dialogue. But after we started using the iPod, probably on their way to school, before the dialogue presentation, they had to listen to the iPod dialogue installed. And then their performance became much better.

Also phonetics teachers noticed the difference. Because students are expected to listen to English sounds and English phonology. Using the iPod they remarkably improved their pronunciation. That's a change throughout the year.

SM: From what I've seen, there are 50 to 100 possible listening files available to students [stored on college servers, aside from CD materials], more available through their schoolbooks, and more that are being created. We can also think of podcasting as another way to provide content, without having to go through studios and so forth. Is there anything else you'd like to add?

EK: In addition to English learning, some students are taking foreign languages here such as Korean and Chinese. They have textbooks with CDs. They install the CD materials on iPod and they also use those materials for their foreign language learning in addition to English.

Also for podcasting there are lots of possibilities. For example, you can record your own lectures. We are all giving lectures in English in the third year and fourth year. If your students have trouble understanding the first time, they can listen to the recorded lecture again and again, and understand the lecture better.

SM: Yes, even at the Japancasting site there's one podcast that was trilingual in English, Japanese and Chinese, good for various learners. And actually, one of my in-class lectures, part of the class, was recorded like that [with a hand-held MP3 format digital voice recorder, then uploaded to the podcasting blog], so students could conceivably listen to lectures later.

The Stanford on iTunes Project is offering a limited number of faculty lectures to the general public through the iTunes program [software free to download]. Stanford on iTunes is not available directly through searches [of the online Apple Music Store, which has a podcast genre with many free including Japancasting], but it can be found at the Stanford Website [itunes.stanford.edu]. In that way they've leap-frogged over the MIT Open Courseware Project: they've gone from the written level and now they've taken it to the spoken level. And so we would also like to be one of the pioneers in that area.

OK, well, thank you for being with us today, Dr. Kato.

.....

Note: For more information on podcasting and screen shots of the interfaces mentioned in this interview, cf. McCarty, S. (2005). Spoken Internet to go: Popularization through podcasting. *The JALTCALL Journal*, 1(2), 67-74.

Eiko Kato is a Professor at Osaka Jogakuin College in charge of English education. Originally a graduate of its junior college, she received a PhD from Harvard University, specializing in the first language development of children. She teaches courses in her specialization along with bilingual education, English reading, and presentation skills. The integrated curriculum of content-based English language education at Osaka Jogakuin College has been recognized for its excellence by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology.

Steve McCarty is a Professor at Osaka Jogakuin College. He is the elected President of the World Association for Online Education, an NPO registered in the U.S., from 1998-2007. He teaches EFL through topic discussion, current events, human rights, Bilingual Education, and Computer Communication. His Website of online publications, with English and Japanese annotated versions, has received a 4-star rating, very useful for research, in 1997, 2001 and 2005 from the Asian Studies WWW Virtual Library. Besides a mobile phone accessible Website since 2000 and a blog since 2003, in 2005 he established a spoken library, the podcasting blog "Japancasting." For links to all the sites, browse <www.waoe.org/steve>.