

* On the Internet *

Worldbridges: The Potential of Live, Interactive Webcasting

Jeff Lebow

Worldbridges Founder

Bow, New Hampshire, USA

with ongoing assistance by the entire Worldbridges Community

Editorial Introduction:

On May 12, 2005 Worldbridges at <http://www.worldbridges.net> started webcasting live to an audience of, well, zero to start out with. Their first listener was a guy named Conrad, and a month later they encountered Webheads <http://webheads.info>, and their audience has been assured ever since. Not that Webheads deserve any credit for that; Webcaster Jeff Lebow and his partner [Dave Cormier](#) have been energetic in finding interesting people to pull into the Webcast mix with regular programs such as <http://www.worldbridges.com/livewire> and <http://www.edtechtalk.com>.

In a field where others are content to podcast pre-recorded programs, Jeff and Dave have chosen to record on the fly by going live through Skype and other telephony links with spontaneous call-in conversation partners who have included Stephen Downes, Will Richardson, George Siemens, and many other ESL, ed tech, and Web 2.0 luminaries. This approach has been so unique that Jeff was surprised to learn, while webcasting live from the recent [Podcasting Academy conference in Boston](#), that webcasters were somewhat narrowly regarded as purveyors of webinars, sullied with commercial overtones. Worldbridges on the other hand has used the webcast technique to inject dialog into podcasting, resulting in numerous informative conversations which are put into the RSS feed-stream and made available for pod-catching.

Despite a confusing proliferation of domain names and projects, Worldbridges's style of media dissemination has caught on with a growing network of educators. In a recent webcast (June 12, 2006, I believe) they started a new domain <http://newmediateaching.net/> on the fly while doing a show. Within a minute of the domain's propagation over the Internet, the domain had 8 subscribers. Obviously, whatever it is Worldbridges does -- and to find out what that is read on -- it's infectious.

Apart from being a valuable resource to those interested in what's happening *right now* in educational technology, Worldbridges provides the community that has grown around it with free training. In April 2006 Jeff started a Webcast Academy project <http://webcastacademy.net/> which attempts to train others (for free) how to Webcast in order to create a larger base of people who, as Dave puts it, will make mistakes that Jeff and Dave

can learn from instead of the other way around. The Book of Webcasting is a must-read for those interested in this technology: http://webcastacademy.net/Book_of_Webcasting. And continuing in the spirit of sharing open source training in open source software, Worldbridges is also starting similar training in the Drupal course/content management system, again as a community service.

Unfortunately, the Worldbridges site was hacked in early 2006 along with several other servers containing Tibet-related content (which Jeff has been hosting since Worldbridges was created). Although all content on the server was wiped out, most of it was back online within a couple of weeks and the Worldbridges team used this as an opportunity to make overdue renovations and of course, learn how to avoid such potentially damaging attacks in the future.

Jeff's and Dave's work is well known in the blog and podospheres, but it deserves wider attention, hence the appearance of this article here in hyperlinked journal format. Knowing that Jeff works well in interview mode, I sent him a set of questions. The result is not exactly an interview, but it is a kind of conversation with Jeff in a medium with which he is not most comfortable. However, Jeff has provided numerous links to sites more in his element, and readers who follow the links can expand their appreciation of Worldbridges by becoming listeners as well as readers. And if you want to hear more you can tune in to the live or recorded broadcasts at <http://www.worldbridges.net>, or subscribe to the podcast feeds you find there.

On a personal note, I have greatly benefited from listening to Worldbridges podcasts on my iPod. Jeff is about to introduce a feed that will allow podcatchers to harvest all the podcasts in one go, although it will still be possible to selectively access individual feeds in order to 'sip from the firehose' (in case you prefer not getting drenched with each update). Myself, I'll opt for the open spigot. I learn something interesting in each program, something I didn't know before, or something that plants a seed that might blossom into an interesting technique for enhancing the learning or professional environment. Certainly, listening to Worldbridges podcasts, one is steeped in a philosophy of education that cojently articulates in opposition to enterprise, top-down, lock-step models of learning. And by listening and informing oneself via podcasts one becomes a proponent of new modes of literacy which indeed have applications in an age of shifting paradigms for education.

On that note, I hope you enjoy this timely article.

Vance Stevens, On-the-Internet Editor

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When Vance first asked me to write a piece about Worldbridges for the TESL-EJ, I was a bit hesitant. Aside from the difficulty of articulating details about an entity that has always been a challenge to describe, I've grown out of the habit of expressing myself in writing as I've spent more and more time producing audio and video for Worldbridges. Fortunately, with some encouragement from Vance and the Webheads, I realized that not only was this a great opportunity to connect with like-minded TESL educators and to make some much needed progress in the public presentation of Worldbridges, but because this is an electronic journal, there is no need to feel 'constrained' by the limitations of text. Interactive media and social networking can be integrated into this article in a way that allows us to not only tell you about Worldbridges, but to show you examples of 'Worldbridging' in action and allow you, the reader, to interact with this article.

Each section of this article contains links to relevant audio discussions, some of which were recorded prior to this article, and some of which were produced in the course of 'writing' this article. A copy of this article is being posted as a collaborative book at <http://webheadsinaction.org/worldbridges> This will allow for group editing and updating of the article content, and all are welcome to post comments, questions, and audio feedback there.

What is Worldbridges?

Introduction

This has always been a daunting question - partially because Worldbridges is a fairly complex vision with a variety of different goals, but also because we are still very much in our formative stages, growing organically with our evolutionary trajectory being greatly impacted by those who become actively involved in the community. Perhaps a more interesting question than "What is Worldbridges?" is "What can Worldbridges become?". For now, the short answer to the former question is, Worldbridges is a community of communities that use live, interactive webcasting and other 'new media' technologies to help people connect, learn, & collaborate. By 'live interactive webcasting', we are referring to the use of live audio streaming in conjunction with telephony programs (like [Skype](#), [Gizmo](#), or [Yahoo Messenger](#)) and a text chat room to produce interactive, internet versions of 'call-in radio' programs. At this point,



most of our webcasts are audio only, but we have begun experimenting with video and will no doubt be using it more as the technologies involved become more efficient and user-friendly.



[Screencast of how Worldbridges webcasts](#)

Production of these shows is relatively inexpensive, participation is free, and the reach is truly global. As such, the use of this technology has tremendous potential for grassroots cooperation in education, social action, and commerce. Worldbridges aims to use this medium to facilitate global collaboration in all of these areas. We certainly hope to create content that will be of interest to large numbers of people, but we're just as interested in facilitating the smaller 'pleasant' conversations as we are in producing 'hit shows'. As with most other forms of 'new media', because production costs are scalable and quite low compared to traditional media, webcast producers are able to produce the 'long tail' kind of content they and their listeners care about. In other words, Worldbridges is not aiming to produce a few commercially profitable shows that attract large audiences, but rather facilitate large numbers of relatively isolated niche conversations that engage participants in a more personal, meaningful way. Ultimately, the cumulative power of all these 'small shows' is much greater than a few 'big hits'.

History (short version)

Worldbridges began as Jeff Lebow's 1993 grad school vision of a global network for homegrown webcasting. After years of experimenting with non-interactive webcasting while working as an ESL teacher in Korea, and [trying to envision](#) how a homegrown webcasting network would function, production of live, interactive webcasts actually began in May of 2005. One of our first shows, [EdTechTalk](#), which Jeff co-hosts with [Dave Cormier](#), began production in June of 2005. During the first episode, we were fortunate to [virtually meet several members of Webheads in Action](#). Since that first meeting, Worldbridges has collaborated with members of WiA on several projects including the [2005 Online Convergence](#), the [2006 Electronic Village Online](#), [webcast coverage of TESOL2006](#), and [EFLBridges](#). Worldbridges has grown to include a variety of different programs and an ever-increasing number of website based communities, details of some of which are given below. In addition to helping this new medium of webcasting evolve and developing our community of communities, Worldbridges is currently focusing on creating the policies and infrastructure foundation that will be required to support significant scalable growth.

The [About Worldbridges](#) section of Worldbridges.net contains '[The History of Worldbridges - Long Version](#)', as well as information about our [Values &](#)

Links to discussions about Worldbridges

Occasionally, different Worldbridges shows have 'taken a step back' to reflect on what we're doing and where we're headed. Below are links to shows in which we discuss the values behind the Worldbridges vision, how different pieces of the network can be developed, and how this tangle of overlapping communities can fit into the 'the big picture'.

- [EdTechTalk#40](#)
Dave Cormier interviews Jeff Lebow about 'the big picture' behind the Worldbridges Vision.
 - [WebheadCast#5](#)
Vance discusses Worldbridges with Jeff & Dave as part of preparing this article.
 - [Webhcast Academy Town Hall](#)
The Academy interns begin figuring out how an 'open source collaborative learning community' will work.
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Worldbridges Projects

Worldbridges has created dozens of websites and projects that interact with each other to varying degrees. While each community evolves somewhat autonomously, all of our sites share the commons goal of using interactive technologies (webcasting and otherwise) to bring people together to explore common interests and bridge the gaps that divide us. [Worldbridges.net](#) serves as the main portal, with links to each sub-community, features of selected webcasts from different members sites, and a network wide calendar of webcast events. Below is a list of our most active sites and projects.

- [Koreabridge](#)

Worldbridges's first site was [Pusanweb.com](#), a community portal site for Pusan, Korea. It is still one of our most active sites and has grown to include other regional sites like [Seoulscene](#) and [TheDaeguGuide](#), in addition to the nationwide [Koreabridge.com](#). These sites served as a laboratory for early webcasting experimentation, and have recently begun hosting their own live, interactive webcasts as well.

- Educationbridges.org

Educationbridges was built with support from a philanthropic organization that wanted to see if the Worldbridges interactive webcasting format would be useful in bringing together educators and nonprofit, business and government leaders to voice their concerns and opinions on the role philanthropy can play in addressing education-related issues. After hosting 10 shows on the possibilities of using wiki-based online textbooks, the 'Educationbridges Show' is currently on hiatus. Dave Cormier, who is now serving as 'Worldbridges Education Coordinator', has announced plans to bring the show back soon and use the Educationbridges website as the main portal for all of Worldbridges Education related activities (which includes [EdTechTalk](#), [Personal Learning Space](#), [NewMediaTeaching](#), and a variety of other sites and projects that are somewhere between 'the drawing board' and being officially activated.

- WebcastAcademy.net

This has been the prototype for a certain genre of collaborative open source learning community. In this case, the Webcast Academy is designed to teach others to produce live, interactive webcasts and for those who already know the basics, it is an opportunity to develop more advanced skills. Rather than use a 'teacher/student' model of instruction, all participants are considered 'interns' and learn collaboratively by sharing information and resources. Graduated interns will stay active in the community and serve as advisers to future groups of interns. We plan to use this collaborative learning model when we launch The New Media Academy and CMSAcademy in coming months. We are also very interested in applying this model to other areas of professional development for educators.



[WebcastAcademy Experimentation](#)

- EdTechTalk.com

EdTechTalk is our most established and listened to 'webcast channel'. The original show (webcast weekly at midnight GMT Sunday/Monday) is hosted by Jeff Lebow & Dave Cormier. For the past six months, Doug Symnington has been hosting a weekly 'EdTech Brainstorm' Fridays at 1amGMT where all are welcome to Skype in to the 'cyber faculty lounge' and share what they've been working on and thinking about. Recently, the 'EdTechTalk Channel' has expanded to include the [21st Century Learning Webcast](#) (webcast weekly at 4pmGMT on Fridays) hosted

by Alex Ragone & Arvind Grover, and [Teachers Teaching Teachers](#) (webcast weekly at 1amGMT on Thursdays) hosted by Paul Allison, Susan Ettenheim, & Thomas Locke. All of the shows deal with various aspects of educational technology, covering the latest news and resources, and often feature interviews with those making interesting use of educational technology.

- **[Worldbridges Tibet](#)**

As mentioned in the [long version](#) of Worldbridges history, much of the Worldbridges Vision evolved while working with members of the exiled Tibetan community in Dharamsala India. Since that time, Worldbridges has continued to offer server resources to Tibet related organizations. We now host more than 50 such sites, all kept separately on 'Server#1' ever since the Losar Hack Attack of '06. While some of the sites are political, our primary goal is to help preserve and share this endangered culture. However, it is also our goal, as a community of world citizens, to use these live interactive technologies to address the kind of intense political differences that exist concerning Tibet and many other 'hotspots' around the globe.

- **[Eurobridges](#)**

This is one of the newest Worldbridges sites to be developed and will not officially launch until August of 2006. . It is currently being built by Conrad Dwojak, who was the very first person to ever listen to one of Worldbridges live webcasts. As the site name implies, this will be home to a variety of webcasts focusing on European related content.

- **[WebheadsInAction.org](#)**

This site is designed to be a 'Web 2.0' home for the Webheads in Action. Like most Worldbridges sites, it uses [Drupal](#) as its content management system, which allows features such as the creation of member blogs, [aggregation](#) of Webheads' [RSS](#) feeds from other sites, group editing of documents, and commenting on all posts.

- **[EFLBridges](#)**

Since many members of the Worldbridges community come from an EFL teaching background, it was only natural that we apply these interactive webcasting techniques to language teaching. Graham Stanley has headed up development of

the EFLBridges site and is currently hosting a weekly 'EFL Bridges World Conversation Club' via Skypecast. Below are more details and ideas about the possibilities for using live, interactive webcasting in the world of EFL.

Related Media

As part of Worldbridges ongoing effort to build a vibrant, sustainable community of communities, we will be having our first Worldbridges Council Meeting' on July 2, 2006. Representatives from each of the above projects will be present and of course, this will be webcast live and everyone is welcome to participate. Aside from each project leader updating us on their site and community, we will be working together to develop the policies and organizational infrastructure required for Worldbridges to take its next few evolutionary steps. Below is a link to where agenda materials will be posted before the meeting and audio and show notes will be archived afterward.

[Worldbridges Council Meeting #1](#)

TESL Related Possibilities

As mentioned above, many of those involved with Worldbridges are current or former EFL teachers and it is easy for us to see the tremendous potential for using live, interactive webcasting in many aspects of the profession.

Professional Development

One of the greatest challenges for all teachers is finding the time and resources to engage in meaningful professional development. Some of the most gratifying feedback we've gotten in the past year comes from teachers who have listened to EdTechTalk or our Webhead related shows and told us that it was the most useful professional development they'd experienced. Because there are no geographic limitations and no fees for participation, webcasting allows educators to essentially attend global workshops with colleagues from around the world. As Worldbridges and the webcasting medium expand, there will be a greater variety of shows to meet the long tail of teacher's professional development needs.

Conferences - Virtual and On the Ground Webcasting

Personally, these have been some of the most

exciting experiences of my web career. We started experimenting early on by 'virtually' webcasting the [Pan-Asian Tesol Conference in 1998](#) and live webcasting parts of the [Kotesol Conference in 2003](#). This past year, Worldbridges participated in virtual conferences like the [2005 WiA Online Convergence](#) and the [2006 Electronic Village Online](#) and provided webcast coverage from people 'on the ground' at [TESOL2006](#) and the [Podcast Academy](#) at Boston University.



Live Video Webcast
Kotesol 2003

In the case of virtual conferences, I was struck not only by how useful the online workshops were, but also by how much 'in the hallway' social networking was achieved as well. If anyone doubts that 'real' emotional connections can be built online, please listen to the [Becoming a Webhead Graduation Ceremony webcast](#). Of course, another virtue of virtual conferences is that because everything happens online, they are quite easy to record and archive for asynchronous consumption later.

As far as webcast coverage 'on the ground', we've only begun to tap the potential, but I'm convinced that including online participants in a conference adds value for all those involved. A stuffy conference room becomes much fresher when listeners Skype in questions from around the world. One of the biggest challenges of providing meaningful coverage of conference presentations is providing a visual component. Commercial programs like [Elluminate](#) or [GoTo Meeting](#) can be helpful and we continue to explore possibilities for including visual components in our webcasts.

Instructional Applications

Aside from an abundance of authentic language practice, live interactive webcasting can provide English learners with a great source of motivation. It's one thing to practice your language activity with a buddy sitting next to you, it's quite another when your partner is on the other side of the planet. We have done some experimentation with these possibilities, notably a discussion between Buthaina Al-Othman's and Rita Martinez's EFL classes in Kuwait and Argentina and Graham Stanley's EFLBridges webcasts, but the frontier of EFL webcasting remains mostly untouched. Possibilities include EFL game shows, multi-class discussions about a pre-assigned topic, student hosted presentations and talk shows, and 'oldtime radio' style dramatic readings.

Related Media

[EFL Webcasting Discussion](#) - a discussion (following the publication of this article) with Graham Stanley and the Webheads about how best to develop EFLBridges and other EFL-related webcasting possibilities

What can Worldbridges become?

For much of its 'history', Worldbridges has been little more than a grand vision and a handful of people experimenting with low cost webcasting tools. During the past year, it has evolved into a global community of people building genuine connections with each other and sharing in a vision of using collaborative technologies and working together to make the world a better place. I know that sounds trite, but it is ultimately what Worldbridges is all about, and in a world that too often seems full of conflict and despair, actually participating in global conversations that allow people to collaborate on goals they share and civilly address those they don't, can bring out the optimist in anyone.

What can Worldbridges become? We shall see. The potential benefits of using these new media tools in a spirit of global collaboration are tremendous. What role Worldbridges will play in reaping those benefits remains to be seen. Our short term goals are to broaden our range of content and build scalability into the system. It's one thing to stay true to our organizational values while sustaining a few sites with a dozen shows and hundreds of listeners. It's another to do so with dozens of autonomous, yet harmoniously integrated sites with hundreds of shows and thousands (someday millions) of listeners. There will certainly be some challenges along the way, but with a global community working together to figure things out, it is easy to imagine a day, in the not too distant future, when people can channel surf Worldbridges and see everything from a *Cook-along show from Tia Maria's Cocina in Mexico* to *Ahmed & Itzhak's Middle East Political Roundtable* to *Mrs. Kim & Mrs. Watanabe's 8th grade Social Studies Super Show*.

There is no doubt a lot of interesting webcasting and bridge building ahead. All those interested in joining the adventure are very welcome to register at any of the Worldbridges sites, tune in and participate during shows, send email (by clicking 'Contact' on the left menu of any Worldbridges site), or leave a voice message via one of the [MyChingo](#) voice message interfaces. Comments and questions about this article can be posted at <http://webheadsinaction.org/worldbridges>

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