



The educational issue

The useful role that the modern day fieldcourse can afford by involving students actively in research processes has been highlighted (Healey, 2005; Panelli & Welch, 2005). However, two important caveats have emerged. Firstly, we need to know more about the effectiveness of fieldwork in improving learning (Fuller *et al.*, 2006); secondly, more needs to be done to integrate fieldwork into pedagogic strategies (Scott *et al.*, 2005).

The openness of research topic during either a formal field course or the dissertation makes it inevitable that student groups spend some time doing the "unknown", whether that is the use of a particular piece of equipment, a sampling method or an unfamiliar geographical process. We should also consider the "forgotten" in a field context where the students have no easy access to a text book or concepts previously learned.

This project seeks to develop and evaluate novel digital learning resources that are generic across a range of cognate disciplines such as geology and archaeology as well as geography. We propose that video podcasts will better support students working remotely in the field, building pedagogic bridges from class to field.

Aim: To evaluate the impact of a podcast reference library as a means of supporting evidential inquiry-based student research in the field

The progress so far...

- Discussions with academic staff and technical staff in the Geography Department about which podcasts to create, how they will be used in the field and how they can complement existing and new modules.
- Discussions with academic staff out with the University of Leicester about the expansion and utilisation of the podcast library at their institutes.
- Initial podcast reference library (35 podcasts to date) to Blackboard site.

Podcast category

Podcast category	Finished	In progress	To do
Surveys and surveying techniques	█		
Sampling strategies			█
Field techniques:			
Soil	█		
Water	█		
Atmosphere	█		
Mobile Technology	█		
Data loggers			█

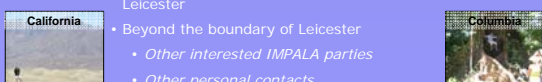
Who uses the podcasts?



... in the Geography Department

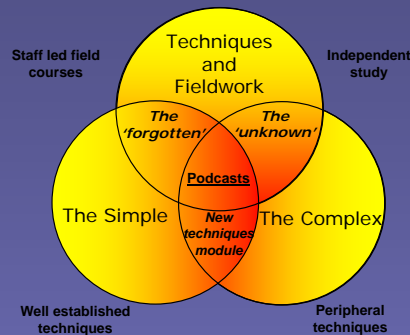
- Undergraduate & postgraduate modules
- Undergraduate & MSc dissertation students
- Undergraduate fieldtrips

... and once the library is established & evaluated

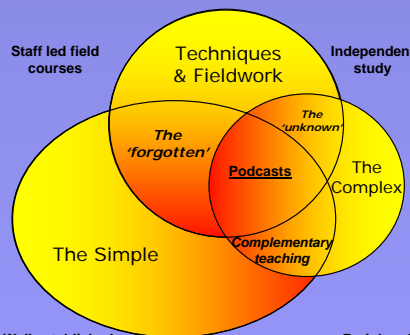


- Other field-based disciplines within the University of Leicester
- Beyond the boundary of Leicester
 - Other interested IMPALA parties
 - Other personal contacts

Before



Hypothesised outcome



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Expected results

Independent learning?

- + "It would be a good first base to rely on information before seeking further help, encouraging independence."
- + (the podcast library) "would help to reinforce my understanding of certain pieces of equipment if no help from university staff was available."
- "I don't think it's quite as good as having someone to demonstrate because if you had a question you could obviously ask the person that's demonstrating it but you can't ask the podcast a question"

Visual learning

- "I believe visual aids are much more effective means of understanding than a long list of instructions."
- "people learn differently, the visual aspect of the podcast is much better than having to sit and read pages of methodology"

When are the podcasts most useful?

- **Preparation** "I'd like it (the podcast) before to know exactly what I was doing especially if you don't know if some of the equipment"
- **In the field** "In the field it was the lecturers that showed us how to do it but podcasts would be useful if the lecturers weren't there or they were busy"
- **As a revision aid** "I used them for writing up my work for the assessments"

Hidden benefits...

Confidence

- "I think it would give you a lot more confidence than just reading how to do the method by actually seeing and hearing someone say it as well"
- "if you just read something you think you can interpret it in different ways but if someone is actually saying it to you... it gives you confidence"
- "after reviewing the podcasts my confidence has grown in relation to the equipment for the units studied"

Avoiding plagiarism

- "I used them for writing up my work for the assessments"
- "it's easier than to put it into your own words"

Initial conclusions

- All students thought the podcast reference library was a worthwhile exercise.
- The reference library particularly appealed to students with a more visual approach to learning.
- Current preference of use: fieldwork preparation, however, this is expected to change after overseas fieldcourse.
- Other than not being able to ask the podcast a question, the students felt they were getting an equal experience with regards to a podcast vs staff demonstration of equipment.
- The students would not want to replace lab demos with podcasts, but are keen to use them in a supporting role.
- Students are more confident carrying out verbal rather than written instructions, therefore improving their independent learning experience.

Scott, S., Fuller, I., Gaskin, S. (2005) Life without Fieldwork: Some Lecturers' Perceptions of Geography and Environmental Science Fieldwork. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 29, 161-171.
Fuller, I., Edmondson, S., France, D., Higgitt D., Ratinen I. (2005) International Perspectives on the Effectiveness of Geography Fieldwork for Learning. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 30, 89-101
Healey, M. (2005) Linking Research and Teaching to Benefit Student Learning. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 29, 183-201.
Panelli, R., Welch, R. (2005) Teaching Research Through Field Studies: A Cumulative Opportunity for Teaching Methodology to Human Geography Undergraduates. *Journal of Geography in Higher Education* 29, 255-277.

