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Podcasting in the School Library Media Center Part 2: *Creating Powerful Podcasts with Your Students*

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From children in Nebraska to teens in Australia, young podcasters are emerging around the globe. Poems, book reviews, radio skits, commentaries, interviews, and news are just a few of their creations.

Because podcasts are so easy to make, they're a great way to promote technology among reluctant teachers. Dave Fagg, an Australian history teacher, notes that rather than spending his time confiscating mp3 players from students, he decided to integrate them in learning by involving students in scripting, recording, editing, and sharing podcasts about Australian history.

Because sound files are simple to produce and deliver, audio sharing is great for teaching and learning. The word podcast comes from combining the words "iPod" with "broadcast." Although you'll find lots of audio on the Internet, podcasts are different because they are accessible through a web feed and can be downloaded to portable audio players.

Planning Your Podcast

Although many schools are producing weekly and even daily podcasts, consider starting with a project that doesn't require a rigorous schedule. For example, you might highlight books nominated for regional awards. Create a podcast file yourself to kick off the activity. Then, post student projects as they are completed.

Choose a Project. Look for activities where audio adds a dimension that wouldn't be available with another medium such as the intensity of voice found in a commentary, interview, storytelling, or oral music. Where does voice and sound make a difference? Children at **Cefn Fforest Primary** school create podcasts of their book reviews, poems, field trips, artwork, prose and many other class activities.

Combining text, graphics, and audio into a single project shows the power of this media. **Mr. Gates'** second grade class uses audio as an integral part of their blog. On the topic of seeds, each student shared their written work, drawing, and an audio recording of this project. This is a great way to maintain a comprehensive record of student literacy.

Identify Your Audience. Podcasts are designed to share with the world so it's important to think about your audience. Ask yourself whether you really need to share the audio projects or whether you'd be better off simply storing the audio files on a CD or the school's intranet. For instance, electronic portfolios that incorporate audio narration are a wonderful idea, but may not need to be posted on the web. You can also provide password access to a podcast if you wish parents to visit but want to restrict access by the general public.

Is the project aimed at classmates, parents, community members, or the world? If you're sharing with the world, be sure to identify your school and grade level. However check your school's student privacy guidelines before identifying individual students by name.

Select a Program Format. If you're planning a series of podcasts, develop a standard format. For example, most podcasts contain an intro, body, and conclusion (sometimes called an outro). Think about a title, theme song, and standard structure for your show. Even if the topics vary, consistency makes the production more professional.

Ask students to explore and evaluate podcasts such as **BBC Documentary Archives**. Discuss the format used and the elements that were effective and ineffective. The **ULiveWhere** podcast interviews people who live in different areas of the world and provides maps, satellite images, and photographs about the location in addition to the audio interview. Ask students to think about visual resources that might accompany the podcast.

Keep in mind that podcasts can include many kinds of audio such as sound effects and music. For instance the **Brass Band** is a weekly podcast with brass band music.

Also use existing podcasts to stimulate ideas. The **Every Object Tells a Story** podcast provides a backstory on pieces of artwork. You might ask students to research a work of art and create their own podcast. Learners could also do a podcast about their own work of art or an object that is meaningful in their life.

Work in Teams. Many projects use collaborative teams for building podcast programming. An entire class might brainstorm and select topics. Then, small groups write, record, and edit portions of the show. This approach also works well for news programs created by library clubs.

Radio WillowRadio has a formal structure for creating webcasts. They use planning sheets to help students with planning and organization.

Write a Script. Once you've selected the format, identified content, and assigned work roles, you're ready to write the script. Be sure that students follow the writing process they use for other classroom activities providing time for editing and revision. Multiple voices make podcasts more interesting. Think about ways to incorporate conversations, skits, and interviews.

Try to keep the program short (90 seconds to 3 minutes) or divide it into segments or a series of programs. When students are working on segments independently, assign one person to ensure that the program flows smoothly and uses consistent language throughout.

Check for Copyright Issues. If you or your students use copyrighted materials, you'll need to get permission before reproducing these materials on the web. It's okay to include these cited works in personal projects, however it's a good idea to create original works so you don't have to worry about permissions. For example, if you record music played by your school band, audio from a school play, or a work of poetry, check the copyright before podcasting. Also remember that you need permission to audio record books.

Recording Your Podcast

Select a Location. Identify a quiet space for recording. It's great if you have a sound-proofed video production area; however, a small area such as a meeting room or even a closet will work. A band practice room works well if don't have room in your center. As a last resort an old-fashioned study carrel will do the job. Be sure you have a power outlet nearby to plug in your computer. Look for ways to dampen the sound by using rugs or blankets.

Choose a Microphone. Although you can use your internal microphone, it's a good idea to purchase an inexpensive external microphone. Some people like the combined headset with the microphone. You'll want an external microphone if your subject is far from the computer or when there's unwanted noise in the area. Although you can purchase inexpensive microphones you might want to invest in a quality microphone if you plan to do a lot of recording.

There are three main types of microphones. First, uni-directional microphones pick up sound mainly from the direction where they are pointed. These work good for eliminating unwanted background noise. Second, super-directional or "shotgun" microphones record sounds from far away. Third, non-directional microphones work well if you have a small group of people talking at the same time.

Use a Digital Audio Recorder. If you're planning to do interviews or field work, consider using a digital audio recorder or adding a recording unit to your iPod. They are easy to carry and non-threatening for interviewees. Many of these recorders have a place for an external microphone. These files can then be transferred to your computer and opened in your editing software.

Create Sound Effects. Students love to work with sound effects. Free resources such as **The Recordist** and **The Freesound Project** can be used to download MP3 audio files of sounds such as broken glass, thunder, or rocks sliding. **Mr. Jaffe's** sixth grade class incorporated the sound of wind, doors creaking, and an assortment of other effects for their *Into the Mummies Tomb* podcast.

Consider setting up a Foley stage in your library media center. In film production, a Foley artist captures everyday sounds that fit with the dialog of a story. This station would include resources for making

interesting sounds such as blocks of wood, aluminum foil, bells, and other devices. For example, squeezing old audio or videotape makes a sound like fall leaves crunching.

Select Software. Of course you can use purchase software such as Apple's **GarageBand**, but the most popular software for sound recording is an open source solution called **Audacity** that runs on Windows, Macs, and Linux.

There's also software designed specifically for creating podcasts. For example, **Podcaster** helps you create chapter markers and embed images that can viewed on iPods.

Keep in mind that podcasts were originally just audio files. However today's podcasts can also include pictures, video, and animation. For example, **Barrett Project Interaction** is a blog-based project that incorporates audio, video, and animations.

Rehearse the Performance. You'll want to practice the podcast before making your final recording. You may wish to record your rehearsal and talk about the aspects that went well and areas where the project could be improved. After students become confident with podcasting, they may go directly to their final recording. Explore some ideas for making your projects more professional:

- Talk with students about their speaking voice. Discuss whether the podcast calls for a formal or informal speaking voice.
- As you evaluate the rehearsal, listen for problems with using the words "like," "you know" and "ummm".
- Although long pauses can be distracting, a few short pauses allow listeners to summarize and reflect on what they're learning. Think about where pauses might be inserted into the script.
- Encourage students to use interesting voices. They may even wish to invent characters or "podcast personalities" for themselves. Talk about the use of soft and loud voices, laughter, and sounds to make the project interesting and conversational.

You could record the project dozens of times and never get the perfect performance. Instead, record the program three times and pick your best. Then, use the editing process to fix any errors. People don't expect perfection in a podcast.

Editing Your Podcast

If you have time, it's a good idea to edit your work. Editing allows you to add music, cut out errors or unwanted segments, and tighten up the program. As you edit your work, consider the following tips:

- Keep any introductory music short. Rather than starting loud, your music should fade in.
- Consider using the same short introduction for each show. Listen to NPR's radio programs for ideas.
- Be sure you have a clear, concise beginning. Start with questions, problems, or other hooks to draw in your audience.
- If your program is more than a minute in length, provide an overview to the segments. Each component should have its own short intro and outro.
- Wrap up the program with a concise conclusion.
- Be sure to give credit at the end.
- Carefully listen to the sound volume of your program as a whole. Balance your audio so it's all the same volume. Sometimes one voice can overpower another. However if you're using background music be sure that it's quiet enough that it doesn't overpower voices.
- Check both the recording and playback levels on your computer. You should be able to hear the recording clearly without turning everything to the highest levels.
- Save your project as an MP3 file.

Sharing Your Podcast

To share your podcast, you'll need a place to store your file on the web, a website to create a description and link so people will be able to find your podcast, and a web feed such as an RSS file so people will be able to subscribe to your podcast. If you're using a blog server an RSS feed is probably available automatically. If you need to create

one, simply use a tool such as **ListGarden** to create the required file. If you want more extensive feed management resources, try **FeedBurner**.

Podcast Project Partnerships

There are many ways that you can incorporate podcasting into library media center activities as well as classroom projects. The key is developing partnerships with students and teachers. Explore a variety of podcast projects.

Book Reviews and Booktalks. Book-based projects make great partnership projects. Students at Hopkinton Middle and High School work with the school librarians to share their **Isinglass Teen Read Award Booktalks** through podcasts.

Collaborative Projects. How could you involve students across grade levels or schools? Consider using podcasts for collaborative projects. In the Sharing Math project between **Jamestown Elementary** and Hoffman-Boston Elementary, children recorded math story problems for their peers solve.

Events. From science fair to sporting events, think of ways to capture the excitement of events through your podcasts. **Mabry Podcast Central** highlighted the annual science expedition. Think about connecting podcasts to library promotions such as book fairs, banned book week, and summer reading programs.

Interviews. Local public officials, wildlife experts, and historical re-enactors are a few of the many members of the community that would be happy to participate in interview projects. If possible send the interviewee a set of questions so they can prepare before the recording. In addition to prepared questions, ask follow-up questions to provide depth to the discussion. Be sure to pause before asking a new question, so you can easily edit for length.

Students of all ages can produce interviews. In their **Reptile Podcast**, an honors biology class conducted an interview with Dr.

Brady Barr from National Geographic Channel, while the children at **Radio Dandaig** interviewed a local storyteller.

News Programs. Many schools do a daily or weekly news program. Why not digitize the audio or video and share it on the web? **Planet Sunflower** is a daily broadcast of an elementary school in Kansas.

Original Works. From music and poetry to storytelling and persuasive messages, podcasting is a great tool for sharing original student work. The **Cranbrook Composers' Podcasts** features student musical compositions. The **ilovehistory** project involves a teacher and students collaborating to produce short history podcasts. They incorporate historical footage along with original works. **Mr. Coley's** class shares their favorite literature circle books and activities, *Fortunately*, *Unfortunately* poems, and field trip experiences.

Skits, Plays, and Programs. Collaborative teams are a great approach for projects that involve skits, plays, and other radio-type shows. Rather than simply reading their work aloud, talk with students about engaging listeners and ways to make their voice more dramatic. In an episode of **Roadrunner Radio**, elementary students incorporate role playing in discussing the of character trait, fairness.

Virtual Tours. Consider projects that can be done "in the field" such as field trips to the local museum, park, or zoo. Use digital audio recorders to chronicle the experience including recording local sounds, recording directions, and documenting the experience.

Podcast in the Library Media Center

While some school media specialists focus on specific projects such as podcasts of booktalks, others are working with a variety of classes on many projects. The Dutch Fork Elementary School Library Media Center sponsors the **Bookin' It** blog as a tool for posting podcasts of students work including interviews, author studies, and student projects.

Podcasting can be used for library media center promotions and announcements. At **Book Voyages**, an elementary school librarian discusses topics related to children's literature.

At the **Grandview Elementary Library** blog podcasts are used to share audio clips from books. The first grade classes then made their own audiobooks that were posted on the 1st Grade Huckleberry Room blog.

Use the power of podcasting to engage students and teachers in exciting, audio-rich projects that can be shared both locally and globally.

References

Fagg, Dave (2006). The iHistory Podcast Project. Available: <http://ihistory.wordpress.com/>

Software

Audacity

<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

Podcaster

<http://www.kudlian.net/products/podcaster/>

Online Tools

Audioblog

<http://www.audioblog.com/>

ClickCaster

<http://www.clickcaster.com/>

Odeo

<http://odeo.com/>

Podmatic

<http://www.podomatic.com/>

RSS Feed Resources

FeedBurner

<http://www.feedburner.com/>

ListGarden

<http://softwaregarden.com/products/listgarden/>

Sound Effects Resources

The Freesound Project

<http://freesound.iua.upf.edu/>

The Recordist

<http://www.therecordist.com/pages/downloads.html>

Resources

1st Grade Huckleberry Room

<http://huckleberry.edublogs.org/>

Barrett Project Interaction

<http://barrettpi.blogspot.com/>

BBC Documentary Archives

http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/programmes/documentary_archive/

Bookin' It! DFES podcast!

<http://bookinit.wordpress.com/>

Book Voyages

<http://odeo.com/channel/4750/view/>

Brass Band

<http://www.brasscast.com/>

Cefn Fforest Primary Podcast

<http://cefnfforest.podomatic.com/>

ColeyCast

<http://coleycast.blogspot.com/>

Cranbrook Composers' Podcasts

<http://cranbrookcomposers.blogspot.com/>

Dream Extreme

<http://www.dreamextreme.us/podcast/>

Grandview Elementary Library

<http://www.grandviewlibrary.org/>

ilovehistory

<http://www.ilovehistory.co.uk/>

Isinglass Teen Read Award Booktalks

<http://www.hopkintonschools.org/hhs/library/podcast.html>

Jamestown Elementary

<http://slapcast.com/users/Jamestown/>

Mabry Podcast Central

<http://mabryonline.org/podcasts/index.xml>

Mr. Jaffe's Web Site

<http://www.cbsd.org/millcreek/jaffe/podcast/index.html>

Mr. Gate's Second Grade Class

<http://lms.saisd.net/cblog/index.php?blog=6&cat=84>

Planet Sunflower

<http://stream.usd385.org/~Sunflower/Site/Podcast/Podcast.html>

Radio Sandaig

http://www.sandaigprimary.co.uk/radio_sandaig/index.php

Radio WillowWeb

<http://www.mpsomaha.org/willow/radio/>

Reptile Podcast

<http://ghshonorsbio.blogspot.com/2006/05/reptile-podcast.html>

Roadrunner Radio

<http://rowland.podomatic.com/>

Room5's Podcast

<http://room5.podomatic.com/>

ULiveWhere

<http://www.ulivewhere.com/>