

Chapter 3.3

Impact of Podcasts as Professional Learning: Teacher Created, Student Created, and Professional Development Podcasts

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ABSTRACT

Until now, research on podcasting in education mostly examined teacher created podcasts in K-12 and higher education. This paper explores podcasts in professional learning across several genres of podcasts. Using a popular typology of podcasts, teacher created, student created and professional development podcasts (King & Gura, 2007), this paper compares, contrasts and reveals the potential of multiple educational contexts and instructional strategies, formative instructional design, interdisciplinary strategies, formal and informal learning, and effective uses of data gathering methods. The significance of the study extends from not only the extensive reach of the data gathering and

production, but also the robust research model, formative and dynamic instructional design for staff development and recommendations for podcasting research strategies.

INTRODUCTION AND NEED

Since 2004, Internet-based new media formats have soared. Prolific Internet use has generated public desires and expectations to be *content creators*. Opportunities such as political and personal blogs and independent podcasts of all flavors as well as ever-popular YouTube® videos flash across users' screens and minds, creating the expectation of self as a new media communicator (Walch & Lafferty, 2006). It is through the recent

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advent of convenient and free Web 2.0 technologies, such as blogs, podcasts and vlogs, and Free Open Source Software (FOSS) (Rajendran & Venkataraman, 2009) that people of all ages and backgrounds are claiming their place and voice on the Web (Frontline, 2008). The great value of podcasting, a new media technology, for education is the ease of custom and inexpensive design, truly flexible, “anytime, anywhere” delivery format. Since 2005, anyone with access to a computer, Internet and a \$10 microphone can freely record, edit, and distribute audio content worldwide. Similarly, anyone with Internet access can hear these archived digital audios on computers or mobile devices, 24/7.

Widespread social and instructional adoption of podcasting has occurred since 2006, including adoption for formal and informal learning. With this increased use, educators and researchers need greater understanding of podcast-related instructional applications, data gathering opportunities, impact, scalability and scope of reach, instructional design, and research opportunities (eSchool News, 2008; King & Gura, 2007; Williams, 2008). For example, there are numerous free data gathering resources to couple with podcast use and yet no mention in the literature as to how schools might use it to demonstrate impact of their programs and services or instructors for formative improvement of curriculum, let alone recommended strategies for educators’ reporting of them. Research studies may also provide recommendations for the design of additional action- based research and inquiry in robust and systematic ways (Devaney, 2008).

By analyzing findings from three related podcast studies, this paper provides a macro research perspective and recommendations in these areas. The work collectively addresses the impact of podcasts on professional learning and uses King and Gura’s podcast typology (2007) as a framework for comparison and differentiation. This paper presents findings, discussion and interpretation of results for the following research questions:

(1) What is the use and potential for podcasting in multiple educational contexts? (2) What instructional strategies are used in the podcast? (3) How is formative instructional design utilized in the podcasts? (4) What interdisciplinary strategies are used? (5) What is learned about uses and formats of formal and informal learning? And (6) What effective uses of data gathering methods are recommended from these studies? The popular typology of podcasts, teacher-created, student-created and professional development podcasts is used in three studies examining the following productions: UEGE, TTPOD/PFT, and DLPOD (see Figure 1).

THEORETICAL BASES

Major theoretical underpinnings of this research include formative evaluation and continuous improvement of instructional design, research design and methods, podcasting and new media as instruction, podcasting typology, and informal learning.

Formative Evaluation Informing Instructional Design

Critical to the approach of this study is that educators can formatively design and evaluate instruction (Caffarella, 2001). Continuous improvement via data gathering, analysis and interpretation provides powerful means to proactively and dynamically chart the course of successful learning as many educators have demonstrated (Jonassen et al., 2003; Wlodkowski & Ginsberg, 1995). Broader and substantial research methodologies frame our thinking for instructional design, inquiry and data collection. These core frameworks include Denzin and Lincoln (2008a, 2008b) on qualitative research, Gall, Borg, and Gall (1996) on statistics and research design, and Hinchey (2008) on action research.

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