Chapter 35

Digital Media:
Opportunities for Voice and Empowerment in Adult Learning

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ABSTRACT

Digital media, podcasting, digital video, and blogging all provide great opportunities for adult learners to become actively involved in expressing their knowledge and skills through project based learning. While this deep learning experience involves research, critical thinking and 21st Century learning skills, it also provides substantial opportunities for the cultivation of much needed affective benefits. Soft skills have long been recognized as a valid and valued realm within career and technical education (CTE), continuing education and adult education. This chapter reveals how to use digital media in instructional settings to cultivate voice and empowerment among adult learners. The author includes details of outcomes and practical strategies and processes.

INTRODUCTION

Digital media is comprised of several Web 2.0 technologies, all of which provide free tools for users to create rich media (audio, video, text) content housed on the web and available publicly. When discussing digital media, people are usually referring to digital audio and video as well as digital dialogue. Today these technologies are referred to by the names of what we create and access on the web: podcasts, blogs, and vodcasts or video podcasts.

These digital media have been found to be an excellent fit with educational settings because they can be easily and inexpensively (including free) created and integrated to become substantial interdisciplinary learning experiences. Moreover, students of all ages become deeply invested in the digital media projects and demonstrate ownership, more time on task, and are motivated to do their very best work because they are aware and excited about its public display. Rather than isolating learning in classroom only activities,

digital media truly situates learning within a global context that is reached from our classrooms (or desks) and connects to a global audience.

This chapter is organized in the following way. The background section will describe the different digital media. The next section describes how digital media can be used to create opportunities for cultivating voice and empowerment among adult learners. Model for Practice is a discussion of how such learning experience may be created, and finally, the chapter describes the future trends in this area and the conclusions drawn from this material.

BACKGROUND

In order to provide sufficient background for the discussion of this chapter, this section provides an overview of each of the primary digital media types to be discussed: Podcasting, video podcasting, blogs, and wikis. The first section, podcasting, will be discussed in greater depth and will set the stage and context of the other Web 2.0 media discussions. Together, the types of digital media have provided tools to launch a transformation of communication via free, easy to use, highly participatory technologies.

Overview Podcasting and Web 2.0 Technologies

Podcasting debuted in September 2004 as "audio-blogging." However, since those isolated beginnings, the technology has evolved into a mainstream technology with wide societal adoption (Geoghegan & Klass, 2005; Herrington, 2005). The public awareness of podcasting was probably accelerated more by the integration of podcasting into Apple's iTunes than anything else. During the early 2000s, the downloading of music became the new web-based entertainment and in June 2005, Apple's music platform iTunes added podcasts to the menu of selections (Lafferty & Walch, 2006).

Still, it was not until 2006-2007 that widespread popular adoption among non technical users became noticeably prevalent (Li, 2007). At this point in time the iPod® portable media device was a prominent fueling device for podcasts. But soon, a host of less expensive generic MP3 players and handheld digital recorders began to flood the market and the era of customized playlists, portable talk radio and everyday disc jockeys had arrived.

Podcasts are digital audio files which are posted on servers connected to Internet. They are connected to sites like iTunes with a specialized code- a scripting language - which enables the automated delivery of the new episodes to users. Podcasts are usually produced in a series so that there are multiple episodes that are all related. And the scripting language, XML (Extensible Markup Language) and RSS (Really Simple Syndication), enables updates of the series to be sent to the listener's computer or wireless device automatically (King & Gura, 2007).

Podcasting provides a powerful means to bring a long desired reality of learning – just in time learning - to a broad base of users. Podcasting may, in fact, be viewed as another vital development within the constellation of distance learning options. Indeed, it is not until the last twelve years that distance learning has become a powerful and sometimes demanded alternative among college students and workplace professionals (King & Griggs, 2006).

The impetus and roots of the podcasting movement were originally dubbed "Democratization of the Media." Podcasting emerged in the technology field in 2004 three years after Dave Winer and Adam Curry discussed using the Web, XML and RSS formats to deliver audio and video in 2001 (Lafferty & Walch, 2006). Although Winer created the technology, it was actually Andrew Curry who popularized the podcasting format in 2004 with the release of his tremendously popular podcast *The Daily Source Code* and the first podcast listening software (Lafferty & Walch, 2006). Previous to this, Adam Curry had been known in

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