

infotech by annette lamb and larry johnson

Podcasting in the school library, part 2: creating powerful Podcasts with your students

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 are a great way to promote technology to reluctant teachers. Dave Fagg (2006), an Australian history teacher, notes that, rather than spend his time confiscating MP3 players from students, he integrates them into 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 will 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, you will want to consider starting with a project that does not 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 would not be available with another medium, such as the intensity of voice found in a commentary or an interview or in 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's second-grade class uses audio as an integral part of its blog. On the topic of seeds, each student shared his or her 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 is important to think about your audience. Ask yourself whether you really need to share the audio projects or whether you would be better off simply storing the audio files on a CD or on 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 are 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 are planning a series of Podcasts, develop a standard format. For example, most Podcasts contain an introduction (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 those of the 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 it 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 about objects that are meaningful in their lives.

WORK IN TEAMS

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

Radio WillowWeb has a formal structure for creating webcasts. It uses planning sheets to help students with planning and organization.

WRITE A SCRIPT

Once you have selected the format, identified content, and assigned work roles, you are ready to write the script. Be sure that students follow the writing process that 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 the responsibility of ensuring that the program flows smoothly and uses consistent language throughout.

CHECK FOR COPYRIGHT ISSUES

If you or your students use copyrighted materials, you will need to get permission before reproducing these materials on the Web. It is okay to include these cited works in personal projects; however, it is a good idea to create original works so that you do not 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 is great if you have a sound-proof 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 do not have room in your center. As a last resort, an old-fashioned study carrel will do the job. Be sure that 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 is a good idea to purchase an inexpensive external microphone. Some people like the combined headset with the microphone. You will want an external microphone if your subject is far from the computer or when there is 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. Unidirectional microphones pick up sound from the direction where they are pointed. These work good for eliminating unwanted background noise. Superdirectional, or *shotgun*, microphones record sounds from far away. Nondirectional microphones work well if you have a small group of people talking at the same time.

USE A DIGITAL AUDIO RECORDER

If you are 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 nonthreatening 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 school library. In film production, a Foley artist captures everyday sounds that fit with the dialog of a story. This station includes resources for making interesting sounds, such as blocks of wood, aluminum foil, bells, and other devices. For example, squeezing old audiotape 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, which runs on Windows, Macs, and Linux. There is also software designed specifically for creating Podcasts. For example, Podcaster helps you to create chapter markers and embed images that can be viewed on iPods.

Keep in mind that Podcasts were originally just audio files. However, today's Podcasts can 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 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 the areas where the project can be improved. After students become confident with Podcasting, they can go directly to their final recording. Explore some ideas for making your projects 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 *um*.

- Think about where pauses might be inserted into the script. Although long pauses can be distracting, a few short pauses allow listeners to summarize and reflect on what they are learning.

- 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 can 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 do not expect perfection in a Podcast.

EDITING YOUR PODCAST

If you have time, 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 start loud, your music should fade in.
- Consider using the same short introduction for each show. For ideas, listen to NPR's radio programs.
- Be sure that you have a clear, concise beginning. Start with questions, problems, and 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 volume of your program as a whole. Balance your audio so that it is all the same volume. Sometimes, one voice can overpower another. However, if you are using background music, be sure that it is quiet enough so that it does not overpower voices.
- Check the recording and playback levels on your computer. You should be able to hear the recording clearly without turning everything to the highest level.
- Save your project as a MP3 file.

SHARING YOUR PODCAST

To share your Podcast, you need a place to store your file on the Web, a web site to create a description and link so that people will be able to

find your Podcast, and a web feed such as a RSS file so that people can subscribe to your Podcast. If you are 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

You can incorporate Podcasting into school library activities as well as classroom projects in many ways. The key is to develop 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 School and High School work with the teacher-librarians to share their Isinglass Teen Read Award Booktalks through Podcasts.

COLLABORATIVE PROJECTS

How can 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 to 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 reenactors are a few of the many members of the community who would be happy to participate in interview projects. If possible, send the interviewee a set of questions so that he or she can prepare before the recording. In addition to asking prepared questions, ask follow-up questions to provide depth to the discussion. Be sure to pause before asking a new question so

that 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 the National Geographic Channel, whereas the children at Radio Sandaig 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 lovehistory project involves a collaboration between a teacher and students to produce short history Podcasts. They incorporate historical footage along with original works. Mr. Coley's class shares its favorite literature circle books and activities; *Fortunately, Unfortunately* poems; and field trip experiences (ColeyCast).

SKITS, PLAYS, AND PROGRAMS

Collaborative teams are a great approach for projects that involve skits, plays, and other radio-type shows. Rather than simply have students read their work aloud, talk with students about engaging listeners and creating ways to make their Podcast voices more dramatic. In an episode of Roadrunner Radio, elementary students incorporate role-playing in discussing the character trait of 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 SCHOOL LIBRARY

Although some teacher-librarians focus on specific projects, such as Podcasts of booktalks,

BOOKMARKIT



RACHELLE
LASKY BILZ

ADULT BOOKS FOR OLDER TEENS

SUSPENSE

Cabinet of curiosities. Douglas Preston and Lincoln Child. Warner Books, 2003. \$7.99. 978-0-446-61123-7. Grades 9-12. Excavation for a New York City building unearths human remains and seemingly resurrects a serial killer from the past. By turns ghastly and entertaining, this fast-paced novel is an entertaining read from this talented author partnership.

Odd Thomas. Dean Koontz. Bantam, 2005. \$26.95. 978-0-553-80249-8. Grades 9-12. One of Koontz's finest characters, Odd is 20, a cook in small-town California, and a terrifically likable guy. Odd's ability to see and communicate with ghosts enriches and complicates his life. This compelling series now has three volumes.

Orbit: A novel. John J. Nance. Simon & Schuster, 2006. \$25.00. 978-0-7432-5052-8. Grades 9-12. Kip Dawson is ecstatic when he wins a trip on a commercial spacecraft. Kip's joy becomes icy fear when a meteor strikes the craft, killing the captain and cutting communication lines. With no hope of rescue, Kip writes an epitaphic blog, which, unbeknownst to him, is read on the Internet.

The ruins. Scott Smith. Alfred A. Knopf, 2006. \$24.95. 978-1-4000-4387-3. Grades 9-12. A bucolic trip for American college graduates turns horrific when they accompany a young German to Cuba to search for his missing brother. Stranded in the jungle and stalked by an ancient pernicious evil, the tourists fight to survive.

Through violet eyes. Stephen Woodworth. Dell, 2004. \$6.99. 978-0-553-80337-2. Grades 9-12. Natalie Lindstrom is a Violet, born with purple eyes and able to channel dead souls. When a maniac starts killing Violets, Natalie is put on the case. This is the first book in a terrific, intelligent series.

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 also be used for school library promotions and announcements. At Book Voyages, an elementary school teacher-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, which 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, D. (2006). The iHistory Podcast Project. Retrieved November 1, 2006, from <http://ihistory.wordpress.com/>

RESOURCES

PODCASTS

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
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
www.dreamextreme.us/Podcast/

Every Object Tells a Story
www.podcastingnews.com

Grandview Elementary Library
www.grandviewlibrary.org/

Hoffman-Boston Elementary School
www.arlington.k12.va.us/schools/hoffmanboston/students/index.html

ilovehistory
www.ilovehistory.co.uk/

Isinglass Teen Read Award Booktalks
www.hopkintonsschools.org/hhs/library/Podcast.html

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

Mabry Podcast Central
<http://mabryonline.org/Podcasts/index.xml>

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

Mr. Jaffe's Web Site
www.cbsd.org/millcreek/jaffe/Podcast/index.html

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

Radio Sandaig
www.sandaigprimary.co.uk/radio_sandaig/index.php

Radio WillowWeb
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
www.ulivewhere.com/

RSS FEED RESOURCES

FeedBurner
www.feedburner.com/

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

SOFTWARE

Audacity
<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>

GarageBand
www.apple.com/support/garageband/

Podcaster
www.kudlian.net/products/Podcaster/

ONLINE TOOLS

Audioblog
www.audioblog.com/

ClickCaster
www.clickcaster.com/

Odeo
<http://odeo.com/>

Podmatic
www.podomatic.com/

SOUND EFFECTS RESOURCES

Freesound Project
<http://freesound.iaa.upf.edu/>

Recordist
www.therecordist.com/pages/downloads.html

Drs. Annette Lamb and Larry Johnson both teach in the School of Library and Information Science at Indiana University, Indianapolis, as part of the Teacher of School Library Media Leadership Online Blue Ribbon Certification program, available to educators around the world (<http://eduscapes.com/blueribbon/>). Visit <http://annettelamb.com/> for more exciting teaching ideas.



RECOGNIZING CHILD ABUSE

2007. 26 mins. Films Media Group. Meridian Education, \$79.95 DVD. Teacher's guide. Grades 9-12.

Child abuse is no respecter of social class, race, or religious belief. As educators, we see how it affects young people on a daily basis; we see in our classrooms children who have been physically abused, psychologically mistreated, molested, ignored, and pressured. Unless we can help these children break free from this cycle, they will falter, withdraw, act out, do poorly in school, victimize others, and, ultimately, continue the cycle of abuse when they become parents. This film spells out the four *Rs* of child abuse: the *reality* of its presence; the *results* that it leads to; the signs to *recognize* it; and the proper channels for *reporting* it.

The purpose of this important video is to make educators and others who work with children better equipped to recognize and intervene in cases of neglect and abuse. Too many children slip through the cracks and are not helped when they need it the most, during their formative years, because those around them do not know how to recognize the tell-tale signs or what to do when they see them. www.films.com/id/12798/Recognizing_Child_Abuse.htm

RHODE ISLAND

2006. 60 mins. Bennett-Watt Productions, \$24.95 DVD. Grades 5-12.

Rhode Island may be America's smallest state, but it is not small in culture, recreation, and beauty. This well-made video, which is part of an ambitious series that will eventually feature individual videos showcasing every state in the United States, takes students on a tour of Rhode Island unlike any they would take in person. Via this film, viewers not only visit historical sites of interest, such as Slater Mill, where the Industrial Revolution began, but also experience portions of their histories as well. Viewers are given the grand tour and shown the diversity of culture in this state, including visits to beaches, restaurants, shops, and mansions. This film is useful for students who plan to write a state report on Rhode Island, because it provides an overview of the state's culture, history, and people. <http://bennett-watt.com/prodinfo.asp?number=DVDDARI>

Rachelle Lasky Bilz: Head librarian, Lake Ridge Academy, North Ridgeville, OH; author of *Life Is Tough: Guys, Growing Up, and Young Adult Literature*. bilzr@lakeridgeacademy.org

Barbara Braxton: Teacher-librarian, Palmerston District Primary School, Palmerston, Australian Capital Territory. barbara@iimetro.com.au

Sharon Coatney: Acquisitions editor for School Library Media and Libraries Unlimited and a past president of the American Association of School Librarians. sharonc4@starband.net

Reid Goldsborough: Author of *Straight Talk About the Information Superhighway*. reidgold@netaxs.com, <http://members.home.net/reidgold>

Michele Gorman: Teen services manager of Charlotte and Mecklenberg County's *ImaginOn*, Charlotte, NC, and author of *Getting Graphic! Using Graphic Novels to Promote Literacy With Preteens and Teens*. comixlibrarian@aol.com, www.imagion.org

Holly Gunn: Teacher-librarian, Halifax Regional School Board, Dartmouth, NS. hgunn@accesscable.net

Sara Catherine Howard: Adjunct instructor, Department of Library Science, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX. lis_sch@shsu.edu

Larry Johnson: Professor, School of Library and Information Science, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN. ljohnson@mail.escapes.com

Annette Lamb: Professor, School of Library and Information Science, Indiana University-Purdue University, Indianapolis, IN. alamb@edusapes.com

Teri S. Lesesne: Assistant professor, Department of Library Science, Sam Houston State University, Huntsville, TX. lis_tsl@shsu.edu

David Loertscher: Professor, School of Library and Information Science, San Jose State University, San Jose, CA; president of Hi Willow Research and Publishing; and past president of the American Association of School Librarians. dloertscher@teacherlibrarian.com

Keith McPherson: Lecturer and coordinator, Language and Literacy Education Research Centre, University of British Columbia, Vancouver. keith.mcpherson@ubc.ca

Kate Houston Mitchoff: School corps librarian, Multnomah County Library, Portland, OR. kateho@yahoo.com

Kathleen Odean: Librarian, speaker, and author of *Great Books for Girls* (revised 2002) and other guides. Rhode Island. kathleenodean@hotmail.com, www.kathleenodean.com

John Peters: Supervising librarian of Central Children's Room, Donnell Library Center, New York. cf071@yahoo.com, www.nypl.org

Esther Rosenfeld: President of the Ontario School Library Association, 2007; educational and school library consultant; former coordinator of libraries for Toronto District School Board. erosenfeld@teacherlibrarian.com

Joanne Troutner: Director of media/technology, Tippecanoe School Corp, and owner of Creative Computer Enterprises, Lafayette, IN. troutner@mindspring.com, www.jtroutner.com

Robert D. Wilson: Director and head teacher, Moccasin Community Day School, Groveland, CA. coltrane@lodelink.com, www.simplyhaiku.com

Betty Winslow: Media center director, Bowling Green Christian Academy, Bowling Green, OH. freelancer@wcnet.org