In the Classroom 7
Using Audio in the Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: When you talk about multimedia development, audio will certainly come up in the conversation, but in actuality, not a lot of us are thinking of it as a tool that we could use to support our classroom. Audio is one of those underrated tools. It's a reluctant superhero, but we use all the time in our classes. When we give a lecture, it is primarily audio. Now naturally, we may have some slides and things to support it, but really, the essence of it is really audio.

Let's take a look at some of the advantages of audio as far as using it at class. This comes from Tony Bates' book, which is an open book, by the way. It's called *Teaching In A Digital Age.* When we're looking at audio as one of those multimedia tools that we can use in our classroom, it's a lot easier to create an audio clip than to create a video clip, or to create a simulation, or an animation. I'm creating an audio clip right now. Just sitting here in front of my microphone and talking, and I'm making an audio clip.

The other advantage or another advantage of using audio is it takes up a lot less bandwidth than video, or certainly, simulations which are really huge. It can be distributed with relatively low bandwidth as long as the audio is clear. You can use audio to also support everything else you're doing. If you have text or equations that you're trying to walk someone through, you can do audio and walk them through those various steps and be able to support it a lot easier.

In terms of using a book for example, if you give students a choice whether they want to read it or listen to it, odds are that they probably will want to listen to it. Although, I can probably read a lot faster than I can listen to something. Giving that extra care where they can speed up the audio, that's also beneficial.

You can help use audio to support students who have low levels of literacy and use audio to supplement that and help them come up to speed. Audio is also something that you can use to change the pace of things. If it's a lot of text-heavy courses, a lot of discussions, by throwing some audio in there, it's a little bit of refreshing.

Also, it allows that humanness where people can get to feel you a lot more than if you just wrote it. I can't tell you how many times when I've read an email that I'm pretty confident it wasn't intended the way it was written. This makes it a little more intimate, they get to hear the inflections in your voice. That helps out quite a bit. In the classroom, one of the things about audio that maybe you're not thinking about is you can actually use a microphone or these other tools for accessibility to help somebody that's hard of hearing, that they can tap into you, and by you having a microphone on you, they can hear you that much better.

Those are some of the advantages of audio, but naturally, we have to also have disadvantages. Probably the biggest issue with just audio is if you have somebody that's hearing-impaired. That if they're not able to hear well, audio can create an issue. There's certainly ways around that. One is volume control, that somebody can have a set of headphones, turn up the volume. That may be useful depending on what kind of hearing loss they have, but you would probably also have to support this with a transcript so somebody can hear you.

Audio can be extra work depending on how you do it. As an instructor, it may cause you to do a little extra work in order to support this. As we'll see in a future episode, we're talking about universal design for learning, having these additional supports is beneficial to the student and makes it more student-centered.

As I mentioned, audio can support. One of the disadvantages I guess is sometimes, it just needs to support something. That sometimes it's not just good to stand on its own, that it has to maybe have some text or video that goes with it. Also, to create audio, you need to have some basic skills on how to do this. How to use, for example, Audacity. That's the program that I'm using. Right out of the gate, it took me a little while to figure it out. It's not necessarily intuitive and you have to learn how to do that.

Also, as you probably noticed from my podcast, that the spoken word is not as precise as the written word. Due to maybe where I grew up, there are certain ways that I use vocabulary that you may be scratching your head. Well, that's just me. It's taken me this long to get at least to that point. I guess we're just going to live with it for a while.

One of the things that's coming out of the research dealing with audio is the fact that having this added flexibility and learning control means that the students will often learn better from pre-prepared audio recordings combined with a company textual material than they will from a live classroom lecture. When you take the time to pre-prepare your audio and support it with textual material, you'll have a better experience than even from a live classroom lecture. There is some definitely strong benefits of using audio.

Here are some ideas on just using audio. I'm just going to rattle them off. Hopefully, something will strike a nerve and get you excited about this idea of audio. First of all, any foreign language class has audio that's supporting it. That one way or another, they have to hear the language in order to start learning the language. Music. Music is another way that you can use audio where you can also analyze the music. It could be a performance that you can use audio to emphasize certain points in your course, that you give it a supplemental material that you can focus on this.

You may also introduce new points that haven't ever been talked about in your course but you just didn't have time to bring them up in a normal lecture. This could be maybe an alternative viewpoint on a position that you brought into your class. You could be summarizing ideas, you can condense and get down to the key points or major points that you're offering in your course. You may be providing new evidence in your course.

Other ways that you can use audio is interviewing experts. That is a really wonderful way to bring in experts. It could be through a podcast, which we'll talk about here in a

few minutes. Having some experts or key researchers that you're doing interviews with them. You can have a debate or a discussion between a couple of individuals on a specific topic. You could play a primary source, maybe a speech or some key information and then use audio, or maybe even with that, analyze it. Kind of doing a review.

I'm seeing some wonderful reviews on music on YouTube, for example, that we have some individuals going out, they're listening to music for the first time of a special genre and then they're going out and doing a review on it, which has been very cool. Providing breaking news, that you can use this as breaking news. Your announcements for your classes, support them with audio and give it that newsy feel where you can break news. Naturally, you can have your own personal spin on a topic for a course and use that.

Here are maybe some ideas of ways that you can use audio in your class. We've just talked about some topics, topical information, ways, different content that you can bring in. Here are some different ways of using audio in your class. One is recording audio version of a written assignment. Not just put the assignment out there, but also go in and explain it a little better. I've looked at details of assignments and I think we can do a better job there. There are not enough details in there to help the students. By supporting it with an audio track, you can go in there and give your spirit and intent in what you're hoping to gain and all the whys and do that pretty quickly.

One of the things that I do for my class, my students success class, it's my only face-to-face class is I play music as I'm waiting for students to come in. It just sets the mood for the class. That's pretty useful. Sometimes I will ask the students to pick an artist and I will get it on Google Play and use that as a starting point and just get the music we want to hear.

Putting together a podcast. That's what I'm doing right now, is I'm using this as a tool to support my class. Everyone else hopefully is benefiting from this. It's starting out as a tool for a class. This is how I started my blog. I did it to support a class. In this case, I happen to be the instructor, so I'm using this as a way to get more information out to my students. Being able to share famous speeches.

Listening to the audio speeches of Churchill and Martin Luther King and John F. Kennedy and Roosevelt. Those are powerful ways to make the history come alive when you're doing this. If you happen to be supporting a literature class for example, that you can read the poetry. You can read the books. Especially if you're taking them from Project Gutenberg, that you can go out there and pull that information in.

You may want to keep a- -historical diary, like living in the times and streaming this out is episodic over a period of time of what was happening during that period. You can make it as real as you want doing that. Other audio tools that you can use in the class are text-to-speech tools. This is especially useful for individuals who need that type of support that maybe they can't see and they need to hear the text or maybe to support somebody who has low literacy that you can use text-to-speech to help them learn to read. Going out and conducting a virtual field trip. One of the virtual field trips that I remember was going to the national parks, to Gettysburg National Park.

We would basically get a podcast or iPad that was full of information about the park and as we went around the park at each station, you would play a little bit of a clip and they would describe what was going on. Well, you can do this the same thing. You can go to a museum or you can go to one of these parks or you can just take him on a virtual field trip and capture that information. That virtual field trip can also be going through a website and describing a website and walking individuals through that. Lastly, I want to throw out this idea of providing audio feedback to assignments.

That with audio feedback, I may be able to describe something that I'm seeing and just provide some details that would be more onerous trying to type it all out. It's just a quick way to provide feedback but once again, it gets that human aspect to it. One of the tools that is audio that I have just fallen in love with is the idea of podcasts. It has led me to this point where I'm doing my own podcast, but it started much further back. I started to listen to podcast because I was doing a lot of commuting. I just happened to subscribe to a couple. Then I started, when I was going out for walks, I would listen to my podcast. I'm just finding it a great way to keep on learning. I use podcasts all the time.

Now, it's come to this point where some of the folks that I listen to have just been encouraging to go out and create a podcast. In 2019, here's where we're at, I have a podcast. What is a podcast? First of all, podcasts are great because you can take them anywhere. They're very mobile, they're very flexible and how you can use them. But in essence, you are subscribing to a syndication feed rich, simple Syndication, an RSS feed that automatically delivers an audio track to your device, because you subscribe to it. It's typically programmed content that is coming to you. Normally, every device I use a program called Pocket Cast and I subscribe to these different podcasts.

I probably have, I don't know, 20 different podcasts that I'm listening to and I'm woefully behind on episodes, but that's okay. I don't have to listen to all the episodes. I can listen to the ones that I want, but I get to select how and what I want to listen to. I can also go to the websites and listen to specific episodes, but that's just not as convenient. If you're going to get into podcasting, I would recommend that you get a device and subscribe to a podcast or two and then start listening to it. The benefits of the podcast is it's available 24/7. When an episode is ready, I can listen to it whenever I want. It's not like the radio.

When I turn the radio off, the music stops when I get back in it starts somewhere else. With a podcast, if it stops and I start it again, it starts right where I left off. I don't miss any content and I can continue to listen to it. As I said, I listen to my podcast when I'm out driving, I'm commuting. Yes, when I'm out walking, I've been on the treadmill and I've been on the elliptical listening to my podcast. When I've done chores, though, if I'm doing things around the house and I'm in the mood to listen to a podcast at the same time, I will do it then. That's where I listen to it. Now, I'm not very good about listening to it and doing some other things like writing.

I can't have a podcast running in the background when I'm just working, but that's just for me. Now, other people, they're capable of doing that, but that's not for me. When working on a podcast, really, you're in doing three major things or three major activities are wrapped around this idea of podcasting. One is this idea of file production. You're

creating your files and that information and then podcast production. Getting the word out and the information about the podcast. Then finally, that you also have delivery and playback. This is more on the final end. But real quick, I'll touch base on each one of them.

In the final production, things that you want to think about are definitely, you have to plan everything out. What is your podcast going to be about? Roughly how long is it going to be? Who's your audience? All that comes into play. Then you have to research and outline each of your shows to make sure that you can keep things moving and have a flow to your podcast. I wasn't really sure about this until I started actually creating podcasts and I can see the necessity of making sure I have an outline. I have an outline right in front of me that I'm just walking down as I'm talking about this. For a podcast, it's very simple. You need some way to record it. I have a microphone in front of me.

I'm using a snowball microphone and I'm using a program called Audacity which is free. I go ahead and I just use those two elements and I record the podcast. The audacity not only helps me record the podcast, but it also allows me to go back and edit it. I would be sounding like a really total idiot if it wasn't for the capability of editing. There's a lot of long gaps I take out. It's not all of them, but there's certain verbiage that I use over and over that are unnecessary pauses. It's just showing that I'm thinking and I try to clean that up. So it sounds a little more intelligent when I send it out. But then also, once you have your file created, you need to put it on a distribution service.

I use a program called Lipson, which allows me to stream this and put out an RSS feed that I can then send to other programs like Stitcher and Google Play, iTunes, Spotify, and all those and also use that feed in part of my blog. There's a lot of folks that have some detailed instructions on how to go create a podcast. The initial setup may seem a little intense, but it's really not that bad. I would certainly help anyone. If you asked me, I'd help you out a little bit to get you started. I just mentioned this podcast and I would certainly do that. Another way that you can capture audio.

I'm capturing audio sitting in front of my desktop, but another way that you can do it is simply with your smartphone or maybe an iPad with you that you can just mic up and capture it through those particular tools. Then you can go back and edit it with an editing program. But if you happen to be trying to capture a lecture, for example, in your classroom, you can just mic up, capture the lecture, and then go back and clean it up. If you're going to use this for say, a classroom situation, one of the things that you want to consider in this file production or planning time is what prompts?

What things are you going to require your students do in order to ensure that they are in fact going to listen to your podcast? Those are the things that you want to consider. Another way of capturing a podcast, not only just sitting in front of a computer and recording or miking up when you're giving a lecture, but you can also strip the audio from a maybe a video that you captured. Maybe want to reuse that video. Video is a great place to start that you can do a screencast, you can capture that information, but then you can strip the audio from it and turn it into a podcast. You can repurpose that audio by getting a transcript and then start creating a blog post.

You can create a lot of different elements just from starting maybe with a video. Once you get your audio captured, certainly, you're going to want to edit it. Make sure you clean it up and then upload it to this podcasting server. Like I said, I use Lipson to do that. Things that you're going to want to put on the podcast. Make sure you have a good title you have a description and decide when you want it to release into the world. Once you have that file produced, the next step is into the podcast production. Part of that podcast production you only have to do once and that's making sure you get a good RSS feed.

That you're going to send to those different sites I talked about like Stitcher, Google Play, iTunes, and your own personal website. When you release an episode, one of the things you want to do is go back and create a blog post for that. After you put up on the-- each episode, you're going to put up on your podcast server, but then you need to go to your website and also create a blog post around it, which may contain some show notes. It may contain a transcript, other ways that individuals can find information in your podcast. Then it's a matter of letting people know that your podcast is out there.

Going out and posting it on the socials, Twitter and Facebook and put it in Pinterest, where have you, but also sending out an email to all your- -followers or you can set up an automated process where they subscribe to your podcast and then it kicks out an email automatically when the new episode comes out. Also if you're doing, this supporting a class you want to make sure that you put out announcements to let students know that there's a podcast out there. Part of that is also posting links back to your podcast in different ways that they can connect to them, so make sure that you're promoting.

On the last piece or last activity for podcast is delivery and playback. This can be pretty automatic as I said that they subscribe to the site where the podcast is and they use a tool called the podcast aggregator, I use one called Pocket Cast where that episode will automatically be downloaded and then people just listen to them as they're released. Ideally, though they'll listen to them right away but in my case some hundreds of episodes behind. I hear about great giveaways that I never get to because I'm not up on the latest and greatest.

Why would you want to use a podcast for your class? Well, a podcast is a way that you can reach students. It's just another way to reach students, that's basically it. You can use it to supplement your online class as I noted before. The nice thing about a podcast is students can listen to it over and over and over again. They can listen to an episode, it's kind of like a video, they can see it again and again. You're also contributing to the world's knowledge, you're going out there and helping other people. This whole world of podcast has been fascinating because there's just people that just want to help other people and it's amazing what they're sharing.

Podcasts just like audio same issues that it can be difficult for individuals that are hearing impaired, and it's also just a one-way communication channel that there there's not going back and forth having a dialogue, that's one of the limitations. For Instructional Technologies you need to also create support mechanisms for both

faculty and students not only how to create podcasts but maybe also how to consume podcasts and so you want to make sure that information is out there.

One of the fascinating things that came up in the discussion is why some faculty don't want to use podcasts is they're afraid that students will no longer show up to class. I have to-- Fortunately, the research that's also coming out is students actually do show up to class that they're using this as a review mechanism as opposed to a way to get out of class. That's certainly a concern out there. Here's some specific educational uses for using podcasts and they're broken up into really three major areas, one is archiving classroom lectures.

The other one is providing support material and finally having student-generated podcast. With the archiving classroom lectures, it's an opportunity for students to catch up on missed lectures. If they missed something and they can just go listen to the podcast. It also provides an opportunity for an instructor to review the homework and the results and be able to walk through different parts of whatever the homework was and have an opportunity to re-emphasize things.

Podcasts along with video can be a way to flip your classroom so you can provide the lecture portions of your class which I mentioned very early that podcasts are great for-- That lectures are basically audio and students can listen to your lecture at another time and then come into your class. The University of Washington has a specific program where they capture lectures as podcast and automatically put them out where students can subscribe to them.

I don't know a lot about that but that was exciting looking at that that they've figured out how to get it and automatically mic up an instructor, capture the podcast and distribute it in pretty short order. Podcasts are also great for providing that supplemental material, not only archiving your classroom lectures but supplementing material.

You can provide instructions for maybe a lab or how to use a certain piece of equipment that you can use that audio or that podcast to go specifically listen to that. You can be using podcasts for a guided tour that maybe the art department or the art gallery, they have regular different shows, they can use a podcast to support that and you can tune into that particular episode to look at that exhibit or set of exhibit.

Getting experts into your classroom. There are some wonderful educational podcasts that I listen to and many of them have experts that come in and just to simply talk and share their wealth of knowledge in the class. You can use podcasts both pre and post your class depending on what you want to do. You can provide material prior to your class in a flipped instruction method and that's a way that you can provide some of this supplemental material to get your class started.

Supporting another language. Middlebury College used podcast for their language courses. They created hundreds of mini-episodes that were all put together and students went through those podcasts to work on different aspects of the language that they were learning. You can also use it for supporting vocabulary. The nice thing about podcasts is you can always look at the metrics and see what's working and

what's not and be able to make adjustments based on that. When you go ahead and provide this supplemental material.

It's also important that you provide prompts right. You just don't turn it over and say, "Here, listen to this." Give them something to focus on, maybe questions that are going to be addressed during the podcast that you want them to be able to answer. Then you have the last piece is student-generated podcasts. That you can have students go out and create their own podcast where they are say, recapping a week's lessons and or focusing on a topic and being able to discuss about that particular topic.

Make it a way that they can use podcasts to review material that they are creating the lessons that are going to teach their fellow students. One case study that was mentioned when students created their first podcast, it was pretty straightforward, it was pretty boring and pretty dry, but by the end of the class students started adding these bells and whistles and had intros and outros and really enhanced this and they were showing other students how to do this.

A lot of learning was taking place you as they were having fun creating these different episodes. This could be the launch of a career for a student that there are lots of individuals I know that are making a very good living based with you know podcasting as a central component to their livelihood and this is a great tool that you can use, another tip or ways to make all this successful. Those are different ways that you can use it maybe in your classroom but here's some tips for success.

First of all, do not assume students know how to consume a podcast. You're going to have to provide supports out there to help them how to find a podcast aggregator, how to install that on their phone, how to subscribe to a podcast, how to use it, activate it and all those things, so providing good support. With the podcast, having good audio is just the basics and that's regardless of audio. You can get away with having bad video but you can never get away with having bad audio.

Audio is absolutely essential. It's important to also keep it relevant, keep it relevant to the class, nice to go on a tangent every once in a while but make sure that your podcast is going to be relevant to the audience that you're intending it for. When you're doing your class, one of the ways that you can do this is actually just to record your lecture and that's certainly something. The supplemental material should not necessarily be repeating your lecture but should do in fact that supplement it.

Really probably the biggest one and that's what I'm doing right now is experiment. I'm putting up some pixels and digital content out there, either it's successful or it's not, and if it's not that's okay too, it means I've learned something and I'll be able to move on. I'm a huge fan of podcasts and that's what I use primarily my audio for but I also go back and use audio to provide feedback and I provide audio to provide the basis for some videos that I'm creating that I will put together slides and I'll walk through the slides and and get the audio the way I want it and then I'll put the slides in there and turn it into a video.

There's different ways that I use it but right now I'm experimenting with this podcast, I'm having fun with it and that's where I am right now. Before I cut you loose I would like to put a quick plugin for my book.