

In the Classroom 115

How to Podcast in the Classroom

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Stan Skrabut: Well, thanks every so much for taking time to listen to this podcast. It certainly means a lot. I know you could be doing other things, but you're now hanging out with me. This idea is what our podcast episode is about today. The fact that you can multitask by listening to a podcast and doing other things. We're going to focus on that. One of the most rewarding learning exercises I have been involved in is actually been creating episodes for this podcast. It initially started as a way to support students. I wanted to show through example on how you could use different forms of media and I decided that I wanted to do a podcast and it was part of a multimedia learning course, grad course.

Well, now we're in our third year. It started out just something I wanted to show my students and I've continued since and I'm having a blast. With this podcast, not only am I learning through the research as part of my learning journey, but 7200 others have also participated in my learning journey. They have downloaded episodes and followed along. This works out to about 63 people per episode. It is far more than I could reach just teaching classes.

I'm excited about this idea of instructional technology and helping educators and I want to share. I think this podcast is a great vehicle for doing that. The fact that I can reach that many more people, is pretty exciting to me. Would I want more? Absolutely, but I'm pretty happy with what's going. First of all, what is a podcast? I know you know what a podcast is. According to the definition, a podcast is a digital audio file made available on the internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device typically available as a series, a new installments, which can be received by subscribers automatically.

This has been extended a little bit that it can be basically any audio file placed on an online location that's accessible to others. It doesn't necessarily have to be a series but probably most podcasts you're listening to are. It is basically a radio show that others can tune into whenever they want. This is a pretty powerful tool. It's a very intimate tool. You're going out with people on their drives. You're going out with people while they're taking walks or just lounging. It's only you and them in doing this, so pretty powerful stuff if you really think about it.

Normal podcasts have a variety of different structures. It could be one voice. I typically do one voice that I'm sharing what I'm learning, and it's just me presenting. Maybe one day I'll do an interview or two, but for the most part, it's my learning journey and I'm just sharing that learning journey with you. Other podcasts could be interviews and conversations. You could be interviewing an expert or a guest speaker as part of your class, or you could just be with somebody else and having a

discussion around a topic, that maybe you have a regular series where you're inviting. You're sitting down with somebody else and you guys are just discussing the topic whatever that is of interest. It's a more unscripted. Maybe there's things that you want to make sure that you touch upon, but for the most part, is having a conversation that others are sitting and listening to that they're eavesdropping on that conversation.

Another way that or structure for podcast is many voices where you go out and do interviews from many different people and you collect snippets and you pull them together in a story and use them as support for that story. You're not necessarily sitting down across from them and interviewing them. Maybe you're just surveying and pulling people and bringing those different points together, a lot of storytelling going involved in that.

Why would you want to use a podcast in your classroom? Well, there's lots of benefits for using a podcast. First of all, it humanizes instruction. This is especially true in online classrooms where learning can just be lonely and isolating. Podcasts can break through that especially if you are talking to your students through this medium where you're imagining that you're right across from a student and explaining something or having this discussion with this student. It helps to humanize the experience.

I already talked about multitasking. You can listen to a podcast virtually anywhere at any time. I use podcasts when I'm driving, and when I'm walking. Those are my two favorite times to use podcasts. I've tried to just sit down and listen to a podcast separately. I'm not very good with that, but if I'm driving, I will listen to a podcast for hours. If I'm walking, I listen to the podcast. They can also be used as a guide while students are performing a task in real-time. You can record yourself doing a task while providing step-by-step explanations maybe things that they're expected to see or steps that they need to do. Then, the students later can listen to that podcast and walk through the same process.

Universal Design for Learning, creating podcast episodes can be very much in line with Universal Design for Learning in the fact that you're providing choice for your students that you may have text, you may have video, but you may also have a podcast. If you're using OER content, Open Education Resources, for example, you could create an audio file of that content with a text-to-speech reader. Then you can use that resulting file as your podcast episode. Maybe you want to introduce the material. Use the text-to-speech to read the material and then close it up. That may be a strategy that you use.

Another reason that you would want to use podcasts is the idea of time-shifting. In the article podcasting, Co-opting MP3 Players for Education and Training Purposes, Kimberly Donnelly and Zane Berge suggest that podcasts can be used for time-shifting. In other words, you can flip your classroom, use your podcast as a lecture while using the class for an activity like recording on your DVD or DVRs, you can time-shift. You want to record a tv show and then watch it later, well, the same thing with podcast, maybe you're not able to be at that lecture, but you can listen to it later.

They can be used as a way for students to make up for missed classes. Those are some why some reasons why you would maybe want to use podcasting.

Podcasting is really not that hard. I typically knock out a podcast in my Sunday afternoon. I will start somewhere around noon by dinner I am done with my podcast. That includes the research that I do, recording it, editing it, getting it posted, all done within that time period. It does take time but you find these processes that work for you depending on what you're trying to do and you can knock it out pretty quick. I would say that the benefits are worth the effort and the energy.

The first thing about doing a podcast is you need some type of recording equipment. At a very basic level, you need a way to record your episode. This would require a recording device could be a computer, tablet, iPad, cell phone. You definitely need microphones. They're absolutely essential. I would recommend an external mic. I am using a Snowball microphone. I have links from my web page to resources that I use but that external mic is certainly part of that. When I happen to be using my cell phone, I use a Lapel mic and use that to record and the reason is capturing sound is critical. People will tolerate a bad video, but they will not tolerate a bad audio. If they can't hear it, they're done. They're moving on.

Also a part of your equipment really comes down to editing software. You need some way to edit each episode. Once you have your raw recording, you need a way to edit it. I use a program called Audacity which is a free audio editing program. There's all kinds of applications available for editing audio files, the max you can look at GarageBand. One of the things that I try to do when I edit is, remove the pauses. When I speak naturally or I'm talking about this sometimes my mind is working out the problem and there's pauses. Well, that just lengthens the podcast episode, so I remove those.

Then also naturally I have those audible pauses Ums and there's some other words that I use frequently. When I notice that I'm using them a lot, I try to edit those out. It's just I think creates a better experience for you. I just make one pass. I'm not perfect at this, but I certainly appreciate you still hanging out with me. Once I get done with that, I do a final compression to make the tone richer. If you were to doing advanced editing, you could isolate different clips and move them around, rearrange them, to suit your purposes. You have recording equipment editing software other things that you may want to think of intros and outros.

These are ways that you can brand your podcast. Typically these are static recordings that you will either prefix to your audio, or a pen to the end of it. You can spice them up with music and it just makes the podcast a little more interesting. Fortunately, as far as the music goes, you can get royalty-free music on the internet. This is one of the things that I have done, and as part of each episode, I make sure I give credit to that individual.

The other part of a podcast is hosting it. You need a way to distribute your podcasts. In my case, I use his podcast program or platform called Libsyn. Once I get it up on the Libsyn, then I embed that podcast episode on my blog and I share it there as well as I distributed on iTunes, Stitcher, Spotify, and Google Play. I try to spread it out as

much as possible, but you don't have to do that. That costs a little bit of money. I spend I think, \$15 a month, just to make sure I can do that. If you're just doing it for your classroom, there's other strategies. You could, for example, upload it to Google Drive or Dropbox and share it to your class with a link or some learning management systems such as Canvas. They have capability to create a podcast feed through announcements or discussion boards that other students can subscribe to those with their podcasts applications. I use a program called Pocketcasts to listen to podcasts. You would have that ability.

One of the things I think is, essential for your podcast is your transcripts. First of all, it helps you stay compliant with the American Disabilities Act. If you're just putting an audio file without a transcript, you may have some individuals who are hearing impaired and they would miss out on that important content. I use a service called GoTranscripts in order to record or get the transcriptions written for my podcast episodes. It does cost me some money, but it's worth the time and energy. To do it by hand is a huge time sink, so I pay for it. The transcripts come back to me very quickly and extremely accurate. I am very pleased with GoTranscripts in getting my podcast recorded or getting transcripts for that.

The benefit of this is not only do the transcriptions help students who have a hearing disability, they also provide a set of notes for your students. You can search through those notes and if you are sharing your podcasts with a wider audience, transcripts help others find your podcasts because they show up in the search engines.

As you can see, there's not a lot that you need to get started with podcasts. I encourage you to just go check it out, but here's some tips for success. The internet has got lots of ideas for creating better podcasts and podcast episodes, but here's a few things that I want you to consider as you are putting your podcast episodes together, or if you're assigning it to your students. First of all, narrow your focus, try to focus on just one area. In my case, I am focusing on this idea of instructional technology and my audience is instructional technologists, but also educators. Sometimes more educators and instructional technologists, but that's how I'm narrowing my focus.

The big question is, can you find a niche that your potential audience would be interested in? If possible, try to avoid really dense content in your class because individuals may be listening to it while they're driving or walking. It's really hard to take notes. What can you create that they can consume during that period of time to make it useful to them? Which leads to this idea of what is your instructional goal? Are you introducing new material or getting listeners to think about material in a new way.

Also, stay conversational. Pretend you're talking to somebody just across the table from you. Try to be conversational, try to be energetic, rather than script things very heavily. Having an overly crafted script, just use an outline. That's what I typically have in front of me. Some things are a little more scripted, but for the most part, it's just an outline to make sure that I keep going and that I'm addressing everything that I wanted to address. If you're going to do this as part of your course, then you need to make it count.

Is it part of an activity? Is it going to be graded? How is it going to be weaved into your course? Copyright is certainly an essential issue. You don't want to violate copyright with the content or music you use so make sure that you give credit, make sure that you're basically following the basic copyright rules that are out there in fair use.

All right, now, here's some ideas that you may want to consider as you are thinking about podcast episodes. Some of these ideas come from this article called *Creating And Using Podcasts Across Disciplines* from Laura Girton. I put the links in the show notes. I encourage you to go down and check out that those articles for the full details, the authors of these different articles put a lot of time and energy and they're sharing some really good stuff that would just take this idea of podcasting in your classroom just to another level.

Here are some ideas that she had shared. The first is weekly discussions, of course, content. Podcasts can be a great way to summarize your course content at the end of the week,. One of the professors that she used in our article record sessions he has with students as they voluntarily discuss the lecture content in his office. He brings folks together, they sit down, they record it, they discuss it, and that goes out as a podcast. Just having one of these just conversations, multi-individual.

Another idea is, use it for review sessions for quizzes and tests that you can use podcasts to help students review for quizzes. You can share, commonly asked questions, pausing, long enough for students to ponder the answers and then provide solutions. Another way that you may want to think of this is have students ask questions, submitting, maybe text questions, or they could submit audio files with their questions, and you can incorporate those audio files right into your episodes. You may want to use podcasts to alleviate pre-class anxiety. You can share strategies with students on how to best learn the content in your course. You are the expert in the room, so you can alleviate some of that anxiety by maybe providing a frequently asked questions or identifying the pinch points that have students have commonly come against while going through your material and help them get over those humps. Providing a frequently asked questions episode. Each week you collect all the questions that students are asking and recorded an episode and answer them. This is very much in line with this book that I once read, called *They Ask You Answer*, it's very much business book, but the premise is that you will come off as a helping expert when you attend to the needs of your audience.

Your audience wants to solve a problem. If you help them solve the problem, you come off as the hero in that. Great way of using a podcast. As I mentioned earlier, that podcasts are a way to reduce the sense of isolation in online learning. You can humanize your course more when you move beyond the written word. According to Girton's article, students reported the podcast effective in clarifying and enhancing their understanding of the subject, providing a reinforcement of the material recently learned, and supplying guidance on the direction in which to channel their study efforts, good stuff.

Providing your human voice to this, coming across in an informal casual conversational way, makes the students more comfortable in negotiating that

information. Podcasts are just not for you. You can have your students create podcasts. For example, podcasts can be used for student oral presentations. They not just having a visual presentation, but an oral presentation, just as a form of choice. One way to do this is you can have students summarize course lectures. You can have your students work in teams and create podcasts episodes around the key takeaways from each of your class sessions, and different teams will come away with different items. The podcasts are not going to be the same. You can keep them short, anywhere 5 to 10 minutes. If you have a class of 24, maybe you're pairing them up. You have 12 different episodes and they're just focusing on different things. It could be quite interesting to see what students thought were the key points. It helps them synthesize what your lecture was about.

Also, in one of Girton's articles, she mentioned set of researchers who asked students to write proposals for audio public service announcement based on a social issue that was being highlighted in their textbook. They then took those public service announcements and brought them to the class to be critiqued and they further re-edit it and created an episode of these public service announcements that were shared to the class in their final form. You can have peer review as part of this. They do an episode, you critique it, other students critique it, then they'd go back and work on it, create a new audio file. In this case, it's a public service announcement.

Podcasts can also be used for standalone assignments similar to research papers because most of the same elements are required. Students have to research the topic, create an outline, which includes an introduction, a body, and a conclusion, same things that you would require in a written paper, but there's a lot more to this because to create a podcast, students also get to practice their public speaking skills. They need to learn more about technology. If it's going to be a long-lasting podcast, maybe the student takes this and turns it into a lifelong activity. Then they're introduced in how to market it, how to get build their audience to listen to the podcast.

Lots of different disciplines are being touched upon by creating these podcasts or having students create podcast episodes. Here's some other ideas that come from an article from Ramsey Lewis and the article is *The Ultimate Teacher's Guide for How to Use Podcasts to Teach English*. In his article, some of the ideas that he shared was created an audio tour. Students, they act as travel guides and they could give a tour of maybe local destinations. What's key about that? They can also do a podcast episode around a cultural event or a tradition or something maybe they learn from study abroad and share those aspects.

You can do it as a news broadcast where they're talking about local news items or relevant to your particular class, that they have to go research something that's currently in the news and then report it as they would, perhaps on a news show. Students may also pair up and host a debate where one is on one side of the discussion, the others on the other side of the discussion. They get to do point-counterpoint as they work through their particular episode. You can pick a topic, controversial topics tend to work best. You may also ask your students to go out and interview guest speakers, where they find somebody who would be relevant to their class, sit down for an interview and record an episode around that.

These episodes could also be interviewing fellow students and getting to know their fellow students and sharing stories from them.

Another idea is book reviews, podcast reviews, movie reviews that they have to consume some content and report back on it. Lots of different ways that you can have students create podcasts episodes. Another way that you can have students that you can weave podcasts in as the assignment is, have them listen to different podcasts and report out, provide reflections on what they learned. These podcasts you may allow students to go out and find podcasts that interests them, but you may also have a set of podcasts that you want them to listen to and you can provide those podcasts to them as recommendations.

Then finally, last idea that I want to share is you can, pre-teach not only summarize what has happened but also pre-teach on a topic as a way to introduce perhaps new vocabulary. I've talked about vocabulary in a previous episode. Setting the expectations on what students are going to learn, highlight maybe some key points you want them to focus on pre-teach vocabulary, another way that you could use podcasts in your classroom. I am a huge fan of podcasts. I think they are a powerful learning tool. This is how one of the ways that I keep learning and keep growing, even after I've finished with formal education. As an informal learning strategy, I think it's tremendously powerful. I am definitely a fan, lots of ways that you can use it either you can present content, you can use it as small content for your students to consume as part of the course, but your students can also demonstrate their knowledge by using a podcast.

I think it's good stuff. Another informal learning method that I am also a huge fan of is reading. Speaking of reading, I talk about this more in my book, which here is a quick plug for that book.