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Podcast and its Educational Applications

Anand Valmiki
Department of Education,
Regional Institute of Education (NCERT)
Bhopal.

Abstract

Digital age aspires better learning among the younger generation. Creating one's own content to meet the needs of the learners is the need of the hour. Podcast provides you with the ability to create a virtual-that is, Internet based radio station, in which you can create and/or share information with a particular audience. In this paper an attempt is made to familiarize the readers with the skills to create podcast of their lessons which can be used learners for a better learning in the areas of their interest. Educational implications of podcast are elaborated that will have an impact on teaching-learning process. Podcasting facilitate students and teacher to create their own content, background music, teasers, tag and express their views on critiques and reflections of books, movies, news articles, web sites etc.

INTRODUCTION:

A Podcast is a series of digital media files (audio) that are released episodically and downloaded through web syndication. A podcast allows you to be the host of your own radio station. That is to say, it provides you with the ability to create a virtual-that is, Internet based radio station, in which you can create and/or share information with a particular audience. Furthermore, it allows you to record a “telecast series in which you interview experts regarding solutions to problems faced by your audience. Additionally, Podcasts can also be used to share tips, and other valuable information with regard to a given subject-for example, tips on how to facilitate physically or mentally challenged in you classrooms-with the audience of your choice. All in all, you can be the creator and manager of audio files that are targeted at particular audience.

This module provides you with conceptual framework about Podcasts; it's meaning, and various terminologies associated with this technology. It familiarizes you as how to create

ones own Podcast so as it can be shared with wider audience. The proceeding section elaborates the educational applications of Podcast. Furthermore, it highlights as how to use Podcast in classroom setting. The section on assessment facilitates certain activities that are meant to

WHAT IS PODCAST

The term ‘Podcast’ was mentioned by Ben Hammerly in The Gaurdian Newspaper in February 2004 article, along with other proposed names for the new medium. It is a portmanteau of the words “Ipod” and “broadcast”. The Apple iPod being the brand of portable media player for which early audio files of Podcasting scripts were developed allowing Podcasts to be automatically transferred from a personal computer to a mobile device after download.

Podcasting is the online (on the Internet) distribution of audio or video files, like radio broadcastings and music videos, to listen to on mobile devices and computers. It is possible to

download free Podcasts online to listen to on your mobile device but the big difference between radio on demand and a podcast broadcasting is the possibility of an automatic feed to your mobile device or computer. The best Podcasts are usually the ones that you can subscribe to, after which you receive new content that is automatically delivered to your device without you having to do anything to get it.

Podcasting began to catch hold with public in late 2004, though during the 1998-2001 dot-com era there were multiple Podcasts done by major companies, such as Real Networks and ESPN.com. The most common audio file format used is MP3.

The Difference between Radio and Podcasts

It is possible to listen to Podcasts from different sources on the time that you wish to listen to them, whereas with radio, broadcasts are limited to a certain time and are only provided by one source or channel. Podcasts can be listened to online or on your mobile device (online or offline).

How Does Podcasting Work

A fairly easy to follow procedure must be executed to be able to receive Podcasts. This procedure is explained in the following steps:

The Publisher of the Content Creates Audio Content

For example, an MP3 file (a sound file) is uploaded to a website from where listener or people who have a subscription to a service running from that site can download or listen to Podcasts. On the site these files will be referred to as feeds. Most sites providing these feeds offer these Podcasts on a free Podcasting basis. The feeds will usually show up on the site as a list of descriptions of one or more episodes of the podcast available to the listener.

Publish an RSS File

One of the essential Podcasting basics is an RSS file, also known as the feed. The feeds offered on a website are usually deposited on the site as RSS files, that can be read by computers and mobile devices meant for receiving and playing Podcasts. The RSS file will show information about the podcast that it contains. An RSS description can contain the following information:

- + Date of publication of the feed.
- + Title of the feed.

- + Description of the feed or of the series that the feed is part of.
- + Possibly the author or presenter of the feed.
- + A consumer enters this feed URI into a software program called a Podcatcher.

Checking for New Versions of the News Feed

A podcatcher can be described as a program that is continuously running on your mobile device. This program will download free Podcasts, paid Podcasts and will usually check for new additional feeds automatically at a specified interval like every two hours. If the program discovers that the feed is different from the last time it checked, the program will go to the location of the most recent feed and will download the new one automatically for you. Depending on the software that you are using this can be downloaded to either a mobile device or a personal computer.

Users Listen to Feeds

Users who have downloaded Podcasts or who make use of a mobile device or PC that automatically downloads new feeds can enjoy listening to their program of choice on any given time of the day. The user can set up a list of Podcasts and entire series of Podcasts can be listened to in a sequence. This is one of the Podcasting basics and benefits of the Podcasting system.

How Is Podcasting Beneficial To the Subscriber?

There are multiple benefits to Podcasting over for example listening to the radio and Podcasting can be seen as the new way to listen to media such as books, news and music whenever you want and wherever you want. The history of Podcasting has developed so fast that it is now possible to get basically any kind of educational topic as a podcast feed.

Other ways in which Podcasting is beneficial to the subscriber is:

- + It's easy to receive the information that you are looking for with a simple search and listen to it whenever you feel like it.
- + Unlike with radio broadcastings the listener or user of Podcasts is in control and can use the Podcasting technology for whatever reason they want, entertainment, news or information.
- + It is easy to download free Podcasts, and this possibility opens up a whole new world for users of Podcasting devices as the best

Podcasts feed are in easy reach.

- ✦ It is best to spend a little time to learn and understand about Podcasting if you are interested in using this technology. But once you have spent a short time getting to know the basics, you won't be able to go without it.

Making your own Podcast

If want to make your own pod cast, you should have some kind of motivation. You should have a concept irrespective of whether your pod cast is simple or complex. Then you need several tools and soft ware. The important thing is the pod cast can be about anything but it should be interesting.

The process of creating a podcast can be as simple or as complex as you like. If you can make a digital recording of your voice with your computer or a portable recorder you can create Podcasts. In their most simple form, that's all a podcast really is, but many home-grown producers add musical overlays and sound effects to make their programs more exciting and dynamic. You may get there as well, but let's start with the basics.

The most Important Tool is your Idea

The most basic of all podcasting tools is having a concept. There are few people who can just pick up a microphone and start talking. You need an idea, preferably one that will lend itself to ongoing programs. If you are a stay-at-home Dad, for instance, you might want to share your adventures in childcare and housekeeping. If you're a college student traveling abroad for a year, your podcast may be your travel journal uploaded from exotic Internet cafes in far-flung places. Regardless, before you start recording, have something to talk about!

What Tools do I need to produce my Podcast?

After you have your concept firmly in place, there are some hardware and software tools you'll need to turn your idea into a reality - a podcast published on the Internet waiting for listeners.

Microphone

Of course, if you're going to be making a recording, you'll need a microphone. How much a new Podcaster spends on a microphone is purely a matter of personal choice and personal budget. Radio Shack makes a number of good unidirectional, dynamic-type microphones. Shure, Sennheiser, and Neumann all produce affordable

models for voice recording. Many people just visit their local computer store and select a headset with an attached noise-canceling microphone. This is a low cost alternative and one that can overcome annoying background noises in your environment.

MP3 Voice Recorder

If your podcast will be created at a remote location, a sporting event or maybe a conversation with fellow science fiction enthusiasts at a convention, you may want a portable MP3 voice recorder. Several models of recorder from iRiver have gained wide acceptance in the Podcasting community for their small size and excellent sound quality. There are also microphone attachments that can be paired with your iPod to turn it into a voice recorder. Both Belkin and Griffin make these iPod accessories.

Podcasting Software

Finally, you'll need some kind of Podcasting software. Later on this will be the tool that will let you add music and sound effects to your creation. In the beginning the software will help you make sure your file is in the correct format and that it has the necessary ID tags to identify it to the listener's audio program or player. We'll be talking about a piece of free software, Audacity, but other programs include iPodcaster Producer and GarageBand.

So what are the Basic Steps to Create Podcasts?

You may be surprised at how there are few steps to create podcasts from the time you start talking until your audience starts listening. Podcasting, especially in the absence of a lot of special effects, is a fairly straightforward business.

Install Your Software

The first step in "how to make podcasts" is to acquire software that will let you create and manipulate audio files. Many new Podcasters choose to work with Audacity podcast software because it is a free product with a short learning curve but one that also includes advanced features. Also, Audacity comes in versions for Windows, Mac OS 9 or X, and Linux/Unix.

Download instructions for Audacity can be found at www.audacity.soundforge.net. Although Audacity saves files in .wav format, it will give you the option to export your finished recording as an MP3. Podcasts utilize MP3 because it is the format most compatible with software and hardware based audio players.

Check Your Mic Level

After downloading and installing your software the next step in creating Podcasts is to check your microphone level. Make sure your microphone is plugged in. Assuming you are working in Windows, go to your Control Panel and double click "Sounds and Audio Devices." In the box that opens, click the tab for "Voice" and under "Voice Recording" click "Volume." Make sure the "Select" box is checked. The slider will control your microphone's volume.

Open Audacity and make a test recording, adjusting your microphone levels as needed. The Audacity interface features easily recognizable play, record, pause, and stop buttons. Once your levels are sounding good, you're ready to record your content. As you become better acquainted with Audacity, you will be able to lay down multiple tracks for intro music, sound effects transitions, and the like.

Have a Script or Some Notes

The greatest mistake most beginning beginners make in creating a podcast is to just start talking. That strategy rarely plays out well. If you have not written out a script, at least generate some kind of outline to give your podcast some direction. When you finished your recording and you are satisfied with it, export it to MP3 format.

D Tags

Audacity will ask you to provide a title, name the artist, and name the album (your program title) when you export your recording to MP3 format. You can also select a genre and add a comment if you like. These items are your ID tags. Make note of the information you enter since you will need it later for your RSS feed. When you have exported your MP3, listen to it in some audio program (RealPlayer or iTunes, for example). You should see the ID tags you entered as the file plays.

FTP

If you are creating your own podcast, chances are good you have your own website and are familiar with file transfer protocol or FTP programs. To publish your podcast you will need to ftp the audio file into a directory on your server. Again, make note of the exact location of the file, as you will also need this information for your RSS feed.

RSS Feed

An RSS feed is simply a text file with the

extension .rss. You can name the file anything you like. The file itself must include several XML tags. It is perfectly acceptable to find an RSS file on the Internet, copy the contents into a simple text editor like the Windows Notepad, and alter the content to the details of your podcast.

Your .RSS file will need to be published on your server as well, most likely in the same folder where you uploaded your audio file. A quick and easy way to validate your RSS file is to go to rss.scripting.com, type in the address of your RSS file, and click Validate. The site will tell you if your RSS file works or not. (Another free validator can be found at validator.w3.org.)

Make your RSS Feed Available to Listeners

Once your RSS file is validated all you need to do is to provide the address of the RSS file to anyone who wants to subscribe to your podcast. You can do this with a simple descriptive link on your blog or personal website.

Subscribers use free podcast aggregators that utilize the RSS feed to determine when a new podcast is available and then to download the file. Don't forget that each time you upload a new podcast you will need to update your RSS file as well.

Often people say that when they create Podcasts for the first time they are immediately hooked. It's an intriguing and powerful idea to be able to produce and distribute your own audio program for little to no expense. Before you know it, you may have a wide listener base. But above all, remember, creating a Podcast should be fun.

Educational Applications

Before starting a podcast I believe it would be to the students advantage to hear some of what can produced. So select a few Podcasts or ask students to listen on their own in a computer lab time. If the students have a clear view of the purpose and what is expected of them they will have a much better chance of producing a quality podcast. Listening to student podcast before you start could also get them thinking of what they would like to do for their own podcast.

The first idea for using reading and Podcasting involves the idea of "Radio Stations" and is more of a class management scheme for junior classes to help the teacher manage the production of the podcast elements. "Radio Stations" is just that, stations within the class that students work at to research and create (not record) the elements of your "Radio"/Podcast broadcast.

If each "Radio Station" is given a set of clear instructions (possibly in a work sheet format) with the needed materials to read and produce then small groups of students can work independently. The teacher could then work with each group as needed. I would suggest a thorough modeling and explanation of what is expected for each "Radio Station". I have given general explanations of what is required, but it is up to every teacher to fit curriculum into their own class in their own creative way. Depending on your grouping selections, or if you let the kids choose based on their own interests, make sure that students rotate to different stations after each podcast is produced.

How to Go About It: Curriculum and Class management

The internet and technology in general has given this generation of teachers a new and unique way to, "custom-tailor literacy activities to the interests, learning styles, and motivations of boys." It is believed that Podcasting fits this special mix of technology and literacy activities on a level that has not been used on a wide and useful scale up until the past couple years.

Below are outlined several quotes from the publication "Me Read? No Way!" A practical guide to improving boys' literacy skills. This publication recognizes several IT and Internet based activities that address Boys Literacy. My hope is that by addressing some of the key statements in "Me Read? No Way!" we can clearly see why Podcasting fits a literacy model that will help increase the interest boys have in literac

By going public with their responses, boys increase the connections they can make with those who are reading alongside them, where individual responses are both shared and altered by the contributions of the members and often by the nurturing support of the teacher."(Booth, 2002, p. 53)

If boys are asked to read and respond to literature in a podcast they will be sharing with a worldwide audience, thus creating a potential connection with the world, with unlimited amounts of responses and feed back potential.

Evidence now supports the importance of oral language as a foundation, and an ongoing Support, for the development of reading and writing skills. Dorothy S. Strickland and Timothy Shanahan (2004, p. 76) argue that the development of oral language skills is facilitated when children have many opportunities to use language in interactions with adults and with one another. Oral language skills are strengthened when children:

- interact with others, both one-on-one and in groups;
 - engage in frequent, extended conversations with adults;
 - listen and respond to stories read and told to them.
- These activities enable children to describe events, build background knowledge, and enhance their vocabulary.

Podcasting is the use of language to produce child centered content. Teachers and students can use podcasting to hold interviews, talk about research, interpret news stories, read aloud, respond to literature, the possibilities are as limited as the student and teachers imaginations.

Strickland and Shanahan suggest that young students should also be provided with Opportunities for the following kinds of activities to support their developing oral language skills:

- creating sounds by singing and through other forms of music making
- listening and responding to music, stories, and discussions
- listening for various purposes – for enjoyment, to follow directions, to engage in dialogue with others, to identify patterns in language
- engaging in oral language activities that are linguistically, cognitively, and verbally stimulating

Podcasting allows for students to create background music, teasers, tag lines or just fun noise! A common topic on many student podcasts are reviews, critiques and reflections of books, movies, news articles, web sites etc. Other than producing podcasts there are many great podcasts for students to listen too.

What could be more real than creating an actual broadcast that, your class, school, parents, community and the world will have a chance to listen too. Students will feel real ownership and pride in their productions, knowing they did something that was authentic where they were able to apply class skills to do something fun and challenging. Students can compare and see how their broadcast compares to professional radio and podcast broadcasting, and be proud of how close they get. Students will then be enthusiastic to read in preparation for their podcast assignments and roles.

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