

Chapter 3

Podcasting and Pedagogy

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores the engagement of tertiary students in interviewing “green” experts. Using Engeström’s expansive activity model, the study finds that integrating podcasting into a course with strong links to other activities and resources helped students assimilate and develop the concepts of the course. The project promotes functionalist values of independent, experimental learning and deep engagement with learning material, it invokes authentic field experience, accommodates different learning styles and it provides considerable motivation. The chapter suggests that mobile learning embodies the means to change relationships between learner and expert and that such connecting is a key attribute of contemporary subjective association and recontextualization. The paper provides a brief review of the literature on podcasting in education, followed by the teaching and learning context and the application of Engeström’s “expansive activity model” (1994, 2001, 2002, 2004, 2008, 2010). I describe the student group undertaking the exercises in a Level 5 Sociology course, and the project (which subsequently extended into a later course: “The Sustainable Business Environment”, because many of the podcast students had pre-enrolled in that course). The paper discusses the methodological approach that was used, offering two strands of analysis: students’ use of the podcasts and how the latter were placed in their learning about sustainable development. The discussion section elaborates the model and offers suggestions for advancing the educational use of podcasts. Last, I offer some thoughts on how Engeström’s model might be extended in education to develop not just new objects, but also the new use of objects.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the distribution of web-based recordings has gained wide acceptance in education. The development of mobile technology has encouraged educators towards new ways of engaging learners as part of a fuller blended-learning approach, and podcasting, broadly defined as audio and video recordings that are posted on the Internet, with users being able to download and

consume the content using portable devices or computers, has been positively received by educators and learners alike. The technology itself is not new (Hawkrige & Robinson, 1982; Edirisingha, Hawkrige, & Fothergill, 2007; Edirisingha et al., 2007a, b), but the current use of podcasting in education and the ease of transferring digital content to mobile devices (Campbell, 2005), is innovative, engaging and rapidly increasing, and it offers the potential to transform the learning experience significantly by facilitating the organization and delivery of information in ways

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more tailored than hitherto to individual learners' needs and learning styles. Furthermore, learner demand for convenience, ease of accessibility and different ways of collaborating, coupled with the institution's imperative to maintain and attract students in an age of increasing competition, crowded classrooms, diminishing funding and rising costs, all suggest reasons for learners and educators to embrace information and communication technology.

Podcasting

"Podcast" is an amalgam of two words, "iPod" and "broadcast", coined somewhat misleadingly by Ben Hammersley (2004), since podcasts require neither iPods nor broadcasting (Vogel & Gard, 2006), and include both content and delivery. Podcasting comprises audio, video MP3/MP4 recordings and other media files that can be downloaded directly to computers or to portable devices. Podcasts have web feeds (known as RSSs) that allow them to be downloaded to various podcasting directories like iTunes and played back. Audio podcasts are usually MP3 files and are the most common types of podcasts, while enhanced podcasts may have images and chapter markers, making it easier to skip to different portions of an episode.

Podcasting's capacity to transfer digital material to other devices provides an anytime, anywhere, "wherever, whenever" (McCombs et al., 2006), experience, extending beyond the temporal and spatial limits of conventional face-to-face delivery, and together with the increasing availability of free software and tools to create podcasts, offers the pedagogical benefit of a supplementary means of delivering educational content. The present paper reports a recent study using podcasts in an undergraduate module at a New Zealand Technical Institute, then outlines a model for understanding how podcasts promote student learning through a discussion of their integration in a specific educational context.

There are a plethora of publications discussing the use of podcasting and its effects on learning. If thinking and ideology are reflected in human activities, then Marx's (1845) claim that "life is not determined by consciousness, but consciousness by life" is borne out by the use of m-learning in educational domains. Mobile learning, especially podcasting, enhances the "interactivity effect" (Evans & Gibbons, 2007; Heilesen, 2010), because it allows learners a degree of autonomy in determining the time, place and pace of their learning (Evans & Fan, 2002; Harris & Park, 2008; Salmon et al., 2008), it facilitates active rather than passive learning (Laurillard, 2002, 2012; Copley, 2007), affording plasticity, learner control and personalization (McLoughlin & Lee, 2007), it helps to alleviate student anxiety (Chan & Lee, 2005), it provides opportunities for emotional engagement in collaborative networks (Baird & Fisher, 2006), it allows students to compile records for their own purposes (Copley, 2007), it supports the lifestyle of today's learners and reinforces learning material for all learners (Maag, 2006), and it illuminates Chickering's and Gamson's (1987), principles of success in higher education. Audio comments provide opportunities for students and educators to interact online at suitable times (Siemens, 2005a, b), and they can even be used as a course newsletter (Bell, Cockburn, Wingkvist, & Green, 2007). Tosh and Werdmuller (2004), elaborate how students can use social networking to create their own learning and social communities, which in turn, provide resources, increase engagement with the course content and offer self-directed "network[s] of knowledge transfer". Brittain et al. (2006), Woods and Keeler (2001), and Miller and Piller (2005), report greater student satisfaction with the learning experience. Despite some caveats about the underuse of audio, Lee et al. (2007), shows that students find podcasts are "especially effective in clarifying and enhancing their understanding of the subject," while Schlosser and Burmeister (2006), point out that "the use of audio provides a high-touch learning material that builds a connec-

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