Campus Beat: Podcasting in a Classroom

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ABSTRACT

This presentation will show how Campus Beat, a student magazine podcast produced by HKUST students and the Language Center, promotes an effective language learning environment and provides opportunities for cross-curricular activities.

Podcasting is the publishing of audio or video via the Internet, designed to be downloaded and listened to on a portable mp3 player of any type, or on a personal computer. It has many educational benefits. For example, student produced podcasts have the potential for a world-wide audience, giving students purpose and motivation to create a better product.

Segments of the Campus Beat podcast are written and recorded by a student volunteer staff and students from the Language Center's Campus Beat module. In addition to commentaries and campus news, Campus Beat provides an English language learning segment called "Word Power".

Its podcast is used in conjunction with a Language Center module that teaches students how to write various styles of texts. One assignment is to write a news article about something on campus which then evolves into the Campus Beat podcast.

Keywords

Podcasts, podcasting, audio, student, English language, communication, media

INTRODUCTION

Time is a continuing problem in the English language classroom. It occurs on different levels for both teachers and students. For example: the number of school days allocated to language learning may be insufficient; a teacher may not have enough time to cover materials in a lesson; students may not have the time to practice English outside the classroom; and students may not be motivated to spend the necessary time to learn English. At the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, for example, attending two 50-minute English language lessons a week is not enough to effectively practice and learn the language, but that is what many students most likely do. So the questions are, then: how can teachers increase the odds of students studying or practicing their English language skills outside of classroom time? And what is needed to motivate students to do so? This talk illustrates how podcasting can be used to increase a student's time allocated to language learning, and, while doing so, provide a meaningful experience that is motivating, stimulating and useful for a

language learner. The HKUST Language Center's Campus Beat podcast will be used as an example to show how podcasting can be applied innovatively to English language teaching and learning, creating more interaction outside the classroom, thus providing more practical and worthy practice using the target language.

WHAT IS PODCASTING?

Podcasting is the publishing of audio or video via the Internet, designed to be downloaded and listened to on a portable mp3 player of any type, or on a personal computer. As Stanley (2006) suggests, listening to audio or watching videos is nothing new to the Internet: "What puts podcasting apart from other ways of delivering audio online, such as streaming, is the idea of automatically downloaded content. What makes this possible is RSS (Really Simple Syndication). […] Just as RSS transformed blogging, enabling people to manage vast quantities of text content, so a revision of RSS for podcasting has made it easier for people to now leave their homes with pieces of the Internet crammed into their mp3 players."

Podcasting is one term for this new rich media. Others used when applied to specific uses include: autocasting, blogcasting, learncasting, MMS podcasting, mobilecasting, narrowcasting, peercasting, podstreaming, photofeed, soundseeing tour, vodcasting, voicecasting, audio wikinews and phone casting (Tynan and Colbran, 2006).

PODCASTING IN EDUCATION

The potential uses of podcasting in education are numerous. In higher-education, professors can use them in various ways to extend the classroom, by providing recordings of their lectures, review notes, or preparatory material for the next lesson (O'Bryan and Hegelheimer, 2007). Another approach is to have students produce their own podcast about a specific topic related to their studies.

Podcasting is considered part of m-Learning. Tynan and Colbarn (2006) identify this as "a different form of eLearning, as it takes the learner away from a fixed point and 'respects that a user would like to interact with educational resources whilst away from a normal place of learning-classroom or computer'" The idea is that podcasting creates a borderless classroom. By extending the classroom, making it mobile, educators are able to increase the time students allocate to studying.

But podcasting in education is more than this. It enhances the potential outcomes of a course for today's tech-savvy students. As Campbell (2005) explains in *There's Something in the Air: Podcasting in Education,* more students are aware of this technology and know how to use it: "More and more students come to school with these skills. This is a language they not only understand but use often and on a daily basis. […] These are the tools of their native expressiveness, and with the right guidance and assignments, they can use these tools to create powerful analytical and synthetic work". Barnnes, Marateo and Ferris (2007) categorize these students as Net Geners and suggest that "the challenge of evolving pedagogy to meet the needs of New-savvy students is daunting, but educators are assisted by the fact that this generation values education. These students learn in a different way than their predecessors did, but they do want to learn".

PODCASTING IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING AND LEARNING

Language instructors can develop creative ways of encouraging students to practice their language skills outside the classroom through the use of four types of podcasts: ESL podcasts, native-English podcasts, podcasts focusing on test preparation and student produced podcasts. The purpose of ESL podcasts is to teach English as a second language by providing audio lessons or themes, such as "giving directions" or English idioms. Native-English podcasts are produced for an audience fluent in English. Learners of English can do so in an authentic context through these podcasts. Many universities request that non-native speakers pass an English test by approved examination bodies, such as IELTS and TOEFL, before they admit them. Podcasts focusing on test preparation are available for students preparing for these. Student-produced podcasts are different in that they are produced by the students themselves as part of a task.

Podcasting should not, however, be the center of attention in an English language course. Instead, it should be integrated into the curriculum, and, essentially, be invisible (O'Bryan and Hegelheimer, 2007). The advantage of podcasts over other invisible tools (for example, compact discs) is their mobility. For example, a podcast is a tool that can be used to assist with listening exercises, which is similar to the ways a compact disc or projector became tools used in the classroom.

CAMPUS BEAT

Campus Beat is two things: a student magazine podcast produced by HKUST students and a course offered by the Language Center. Segments of the Campus Beat podcast are written and recorded by a student volunteer staff and students from the Language Center's Campus Beat course. The volunteer staff writes stories related to entertainment, academics and current events at HKUST, in Hong Kong and worldwide. Students enrolled in the Campus Beat course write two news segments, one related to Hong Kong current events and one to HKUST, as an assessed task for the podcast. All stories are broadcast on the Campus beat podcast. In addition to news, Campus Beat provides an English language learning segment called "Word Power".

Campus Beat: the course

The Campus Beat course teaches students news writing. The purpose: to help them become better critical readers of English, to introduce them to the various styles of writing, and to write more effectively. Students are taught basic news writing skills and theory, such as news values, and they practice their own writing skills through two assigned tasks. The first assessed task asks students to work in groups of 3-4, find a newsworthy story in Hong Kong, paraphrase it if it is taken from a newspaper, record it and submit it to the teacher who will include it in an episode of Campus Beat. This task is a part of their participation mark and is used primarily to allow students to become familiar with podcasting and news writing. The second task is an individual assignment. Students must write a newsworthy story about something occurring on campus, record the story and submit it to their teacher who will include it in an episode of Campus Beat. In addition to language skills, students have the chance to adapt technical skills as they are required to record and edit their voice using Audacity, a free audio recording tool for podcasting. Because Campus Beat has a real audience, that is an audience outside the classroom, these tasks give students a chance to

work in a real life situation.

Campus Beat: the podcast

The Campus Beat podcast is a platform for students to practice their English writing, speaking and listening skills. In addition to the stories written by students taking the course, it has other segments marketed towards a university audience. These include commentaries, entertainment news, English language tips and English-language music. Each episode is approximately 30 minutes long. Students and staff are invited to contribute stories for, or comment on, the podcast. In addition, commercials for student organizations, such as NAUTY, and the Language Center's *Check My Worlds*, have been included in past episodes. The goal of this podcast is to create an English speaking community on campus and to provide interesting, entertaining, and newsworthy information for students and staff. To date, the average download rate is over 600 per episode. This includes listeners from HKUST and other countries, such as Japan and the United States (students and instructors from a university in Japan have left comments about Campus Beat on the Campus Beat website).

Motivation factors

As mentioned in the introduction, motivating students to practice English outside classroom time is often difficult to do. Podcasting may assist with this problem. There is a potential for podcasting "to foster a more seamless integration of in-class and out-of-class activity and materials, in addition to the wealth of authentic foreign language material freely available for download" (Thorn and Payne, 2005). O'Bryan and Hegelheimer (2007) also suggest that podcasting has the potential for creating intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in students. Stanley (2005) suggests that students who produce podcasts for assessed tasks "will probably take more care with the preparation, knowing that it could be potentially listened to by people all over the world. After discussing and planning the contents, the learners should be involved in writing and rewriting scripts which they will revise with their classmates (and later their teacher) ensuring that the content is understandable and there are no mistakes. They will then rehearse the show before finally recording it." The Campus Beat course attempts to create both intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in students through listening and writing activities (see Table 1).

Cross-curricular activities

The Campus Beat course model is not only applicable to one language-learning course; it can be applied to any discipline and any course. In addition, the podcast has the potential to be a hub for information, activities, or announcements related to HKUST. That is, professors in any department can request students to produce a segment related to their studies to be included in a Campus Beat episode.

CONCLUSION

Because time is a factor involved with language learning, and classroom time is limited, it is important to find new ways to motivate students to practice their language skills as often as possible. Podcasting offers a way to do this. This tool can be integrated into the language learning curriculum, providing students with authentic and simulated environments that can be used to practice their language skills. It offers a chance for students to be motivated, and,

at the same time, it makes them more accountable for the work they produce. Campus Beat has been well-received by students, and an increase in motivation to practice their English skills has been seen during and out of class time. As one student enrolled in the module said, "I think Campus Beat is an excellent tool to improve one's language skills – it's also a great test of creativity. I for one have thoroughly enjoyed the course."

TABLE 1: Use of podcasts in the Campus Beat module

Content	Type of task	Type of student activity	Type of feedback	Teacher's roles	Position of podcast in curriculum	Position of podcast in lesson	Motivation
Integrated listening podcast	Short-answer response, comprehension	Frequent interaction with students. Some interaction with computer through the lesson.	Interpreting, evaluating, commenting, stimulating thought	Facilitator Manager	tool for learning; normalized integration into syllabus; adapted to learners' needs	Assigned as homework; smaller part of every lesson.	Intrinsic and extrinsic
Integrated writing podcast	News story, descriptive or argumentative essay, technical report (video or audio)	Frequent interaction with students. Some interaction with computer through the lesson.	invention, content, grammar, revision, peer, and formative	Facilitator Manager	tool for practicing; normalized integration into syllabus; adapted to learners' needs	Assigned as homework; assessed tasks	Intrinsic and extrinsic

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