

Here's What We Have to Say!

Podcasting in the Early Childhood Classroom

Ilene R. Berson

The video clip opens with Leauma, our young host, warmly greeting his audience:

Welcome to KPETV, the podcast where you get to find out what is really going on at Point England School!

Pt. England School is a primary school in the Pt. England neighborhood of Auckland, New Zealand.

In the video selection introduced by Leauma, six and seven-year-old students lip-sync with “It’s a Song about Me,” act out some of the lyrics, and hold up their artwork. The song celebrates all aspects of diversity among children. Students at this ethnically diverse school, with guidance from their teachers, post new audio and video podcasts on the Internet throughout the school year (See **SIDEBAR** on page 10).

The students of Pt. England School invented the call sign “KPETV,” which stands for “Korero Pt. England Television,” to represent their creative video productions. The word *Korero* in the native Maori language means “to chat or to speak.” In years past, a classroom newspaper might have been read by fellow students and maybe a few parents and teachers. Today, elementary students are creating podcasts that can be heard and viewed by anyone with a computer, an Internet connection, and audio/visual software. The potential audience for such podcasts includes thousands of young students in the United States—who could reply from across the globe with a video of their own!

Welcome to the age of podcasting. A podcast (from “iPod” and “broadcasting”) is an audio file published to the Internet for playback on mobile devices and personal computers; the meaning of the term has expanded to include video files, or “enhanced podcasts” as well.¹ Many of our students are already engaged with digital technologies when they first step into our early childhood classrooms. Children as young as three years old are developing the skills to independently use computers, digital cameras, MP3 players, and numerous other technological

gadgets. This situation challenges teachers to create effective and developmentally appropriate learning experiences that optimize young children’s talents and interests so that they can actively share in the learning process. Podcasting can be used to create an enthusiastic and inspiring instructional environment.

Content and Communication

Podcasting provides an exciting method for children and educators to discover and explore educational content—and to creatively express new knowledge. Podcasts are audio or video files that can be saved on a computer (or on the Internet) and then played back at any time. Podcasts may include voice recordings, photos, videos, and sound effects.

Teachers are finding that some professionally produced podcasts offer rich, multimedia resources that enhance teaching and learning. Teachers and their young students can also create podcasts. The basic requirements are a computer, a microphone, and some freely available software. Video cameras can be purchased separately, but many desktop computers and even cell phones now have video recording capabilities. McGraw Hill’s Teaching Today website provides links for tutorials on the basics of podcasting as well as the use of other enhanced features.²

In an early childhood classroom, podcasting can be used to support learning goals associated with technological literacy, cybercitizenship, and socio-emotional development. Podcasting is a great way for teachers to deliver social studies content to their students. Early childhood educators can use podcasts to present images (which can help students review concepts), record books as they are read aloud (which students can follow along as they learn to read), or communicate with parents (who can view videos of classroom activities). Moreover, when students create a podcast for class, they not only learn the content in a creative way, they learn 21st-century communications skills at the same time.

Exploring Podcasting

In collaboration with my class of preservice teachers in early childhood education, I have been exploring how podcasting can support meaningful learning of social studies concepts in young children. In the first phase of implementation, the teachers increased their familiarity with the technology through exploration of professionally produced podcasts that offered rich multimedia resources to enhance learning. We listened to social studies content in podcasting directories like iTunes, viewed online educational media from news providers such as National Public Radio, and sampled several free and commercial curriculum resources on the Internet that have been mentioned in other NCSS publications.³

After this introduction to podcasting resources, the teachers began to explore ways to bring the global community into the early childhood classroom. I introduced them to audio recording and sound effect programs by Audacity (cross-platform) and Garageband (Mac).⁴ These software tools are free and easy to use. Once the teachers had written, revised, edited, and rehearsed their scripts, they recorded their sound files. Some teachers experimented with adding music and sound effects to audio podcasts, and others included images or movies to create enhanced podcasts or video podcasts.

Teachers piloted the podcasts in classrooms of kindergarten children. The setting was an early learning center, and the preservice teachers had been working on an integrated, project-based

curriculum approach as part of a service learning experience.⁵ For example, at one school, frogs were found on the playground, and students wanted to learn about colorful frogs around the world. The first “stop” on this “global adventure” was the rainforest of Brazil. Initially, the children were introduced during circle time to the book *B is for Brazil* by Maria de Fatima Campos.⁶ A preservice teacher worked with me to design an enhanced podcast to accompany the book. We invited a colleague from Brazil who was fluent in Portuguese to narrate the story in a podcast. She assisted us in bringing authentic cultural and linguistic diversity into the early childhood classroom with her engaging recitation of this bilingual book. The podcast was enhanced with Brazilian music and photographic images from the story.

The teacher introduced the podcast to the class during circle time, demonstrating how to play and replay it on the computer. Each child had a turn to use the multimedia player with the teacher’s support. Subsequently, the podcast was downloaded to the classroom computer, and the children quickly gained proficiency in using the mouse to click to access the content.

When children were first exposed to the podcast, we noted that most passively listened to the recorded material. However, with repeated viewing they became interactive, singing or reading along, anticipating familiar parts. The podcast facilitated high levels of spoken communication and cooperative interaction between pairs of students at the computer.



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Sources Near and Far

After this initial venture into podcasting, we began to explore ways to bring the global community into the early childhood classroom. Podcasts showcase the creative and innovative talents of early-childhood students at Radio WillowWeb in the United States, Radio Sandaig in Scotland, Korero Pt. England in New Zealand, and Ringwood North Primary School in Australia.⁷ Stories from around the world were featured on podcasts in the school's reading center.

The International Children's Digital Library became a valuable classroom resource. It's a free collection of more than 10,000 books in at least 100 languages.⁸ This Internet library's mission is to "to excite and inspire the world's children to become members of the global community—children who understand the value of tolerance and respect for diverse cultures, languages and ideas—by making the best in children's literature available online." There are, for example, 123 books in English in the "ages 3 to 5" category that can be called up by keyword, topic (kid characters, real animal characters, imaginary animals, folk tales, etc.), length, and (of interest to young readers visiting the website) the dominant color of the cover (red, green, rainbow, etc.).

Teachers loaded podcasts (that related to the lesson topic of the day) from various websites onto sets of laptops, iPods, Palm handhelds, Pocket PCs, or other MP3 devices. Students used the podcasts during large group instruction, in small groups as part of the class learning centers, individually at their desks, or at home with their parents (to foster school-family connections).

From Consumer to Creator

The children quickly developed an interest in learning how to create their own podcasts. We explored opportunities to foster social interaction, pursue inquiry and problem solving skills, and engage young children as creators of new technology-infused applications and products.

Even young children who had not yet developed basic writing skills enjoyed telling a story. They became active participants in the design and creation of multimedia materials that were co-authored by children, educators, and sometimes, parents. No longer hindered by the challenges of writing a story with paper and pencil, the children expressed themselves and collaborated with others as they created audio, and later, video narratives.

The first student-generated audio podcast featured the sounds of the rainforest. With the teacher's guidance, the children compiled rainforest sounds into a single podcast. The teacher had a big screen up, and students took turns directing the process.

Compiling sounds consisted of (1) finding a website with rainforest sounds, (2) listening to a sound, (3) recording the sound into our own audio file, and (4) assembling the sounds in sequence. Some children created things that imitated the sounds of rain forests and then recorded those sounds with digital equipment. For example, one group decided to feature rain sticks as one of the sounds highlighted on their podcast. Children constructed their rain sticks using cardboard tubes, tooth picks, tape, and small dried beans (like lentils) or rice.⁹

In the learning center, children challenged each other to identify the sounds, and they became increasingly engaged in exploring the content. Children would imitate the sounds of the animals featured on the podcast, and many enjoyed moving to the Brazilian music that had been captured from podcasts of a radio show (at AvoltaRadio) featuring music from the region.

Narratives and Connections

Subsequently, the children developed extended narratives that allowed them to explore the topic. They were inspired by the "world travelers" at Pt. England School in New Zealand who had created a video podcast about amazing structures from around the world.¹⁰ The five-year-old children in the New Zealand podcast told about what they saw and learned on their journey. After watching and listening to the podcast from

Student Podcasts from Auckland, New Zealand

Audio Podcasts

To hear audio podcasts created by elementary students at Pt. England School in Auckland, New Zealand, visit www.ptengland.school.nz and click on "Podcasts." The students have been audio podcasting since August 2005, and their work earned the school a Computerworld Excellence Award in 2006. The audio recordings are part of the school reading program. In a typical KPE podcast, a student reads aloud a book by a New Zealand author and presents a short review to inspire potential readers. Each weekly episode focuses on one book of interest to primary-age readers. The shows are "entirely scripted, recorded, and produced by students" who record episodes during school hours in a "studio" set up in the corridor outside their classroom.

Video Podcasts

"KPETV" is the name of Pt. England School's weekly video (or "enhanced") podcasts in which students invite viewers into their classes to see what they have been up to. For more than ten years, the school has hosted a brief in-house television show to celebrate student learning. In more recent years, the school has been broadcasting a weekly show, schoolTV, to the Auckland community on the Triangle Television station. Now students are able to use podcast technology to make some of their work available to a world audience. The easiest way to view the video podcasts is to visit www.trueveo.com and search on "KPETV."

Students and teachers at Pt. England School are eager to hear from listeners and viewers. Send e-mail to kpe@ptengland.school.nz. Also check out kpetv.blogspot.com for related discussion.

New Zealand, the kindergarteners suggested creating a similar podcast to celebrate their own learning about places near and far.


Podcasting opened up opportunities for bridging the children's home culture and experiences in their early childhood classroom. Teachers recorded children's stories about their "Brazilian adventures," then compiled podcasts into individual portfolios and downloaded them onto an MP3 player. Parents could readily access the audio or video files by visiting the classroom webpage, which helped them to be actively engaged with their children's learning experience.

Working on the podcasts enabled the classroom teachers to listen to each child, focusing on their interests and strengths, while teaching new skills and subject matter content. Student-created podcasts became a multifunctional tool that could document children's learning and development as well as strengthen family-school connections. The resulting audio files democratized learning by empowering young children to have a voice in the classroom that could extend to their home and community.

Conclusion

Classroom podcasts give young children confidence in expressing their views. Students shift from being passive consumers of technology to producers of content. The podcast experience provided an opportunity for children to relate to subjects of personal importance. As a result, they were engaged in active communication and reflection, which extended the learning opportunities.

Podcasting sparked these children to discover and communicate their ideas about the world in ways that motivated them to seek out information and create connections with each other as well as their families.

This process has the potential to democratize learning and generate new possibilities for community and human interaction on a global scale. The students at Pt. England School seem to sense that exciting things for their generation can come from this new technology. The motto for their KPETV enterprise is "We want you to SEE what we have to say!" 

Notes

1. The terms "video" and "enhanced podcast" are used interchangeably in this article. An enhanced podcast is a podcast multimedia format that allows images to be displayed in time with the audio signal. Enhanced podcasts also are able to present chapter markers within a file much like a DVD movie can allow users to jump to predetermined spots in a presentation.
2. McGraw Hill's Teaching Today, teachingtoday.glencoe.com/howtoarticles/beyond-podcasting-basics.
3. iTunes, www.apple.com/itunes/overview; NPR, www.npr.org/rss/podcast/podcast_directory.php; George B.Lipscomb and Lisa Marie Guenther, and Perry McLeod, "Sounds Good to Me: Using Digital Audio in the Social Studies Classroom," *Social Education* 71, no. 3 (April 2007): 120-125; Tony Vincent and Mark van't Hooff, "For Kids, by Kids: Our City Podcast," *Social Education* 71, no. 3 (April 2007): 125-129.
4. Audacity, audacity.sourceforge.net; Garageband, www.apple.com/ilife/garageband.




5. Judy Harris Helm and Lilian G. Katz, *Young Investigators: The Project Approach in the Early Years* (New York: Teacher's College Press, 2001); Lilian G. Katz and Sylvia C. Chard, *Engaging Children's Minds: The Project Approach*. 2nd ed. (Stamford, CT: Ablex, 2000).
6. Maria de Fatima Campos, *B is for Brazil* (London: Francis Lincoln Children's Books, 2004).
7. Radio WillowWeb, www.mpsomaha.org/willow/Radio; Radio Sandaig, www.sandaigprimary.co.uk; Korero Pt. England, kpetv.blogspot.com; Ringwood North Primary School, www.ischool.net.au.
8. International Children's Digital Library, www.icdlbooks.org.
9. Instructions at www.enchantedlearning.com/crafts/music/rainstick.
10. The podcast "World Travellers @ 5 Years Old" is available through www.truevo.com/search.

ILENE R. BERSON is an associate professor of early childhood education at the University of South Florida. She can be contacted at iberson@coedu.usf.edu.