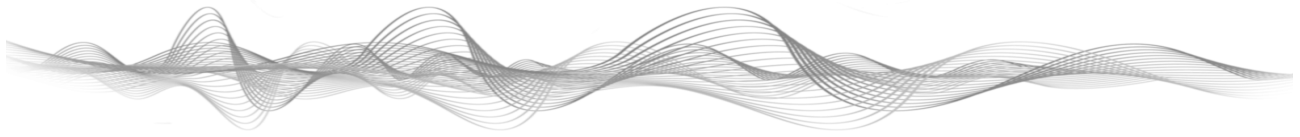# Chapter 1

Beyond Podcasting:
A Paradigm Shift

This chapter presents the big ideas of student-powered podcasting: how it can connect to ideas of 21st-century literacy, challenge existing educational paradigms and become a catalyst for teaching powerful ideas.

Podcasting is the creation and serial distribution of media through the Internet. Audio and video files (often thought of as "episodes") are created and disseminated on a regular basis by a podcaster; a subscriber can easily receive new episodes and episode information, and download, view, listen and transfer the episodes to a variety of portable players. Technical information on how to do these things is clearly presented in this book, but the true subject of this book is what students can potentially *learn* using this technology.

The specific technologies of podcasting offer an accessible and powerful tool that can engage students and give them skills for success in the 21st century. But the benefits of podcasting can go beyond technological proficiency and academic content knowledge, beyond enhancing the existing curriculum, and even beyond podcasting itself. Let me explain.

Podcasting offers an inexpensive way to create and share compelling media that correlates to authentic activities outside of school. Students who podcast become active participants in culture and society. They can create original content as they ethically and effectively collect and remix the work of others. Students can create audio dramas, news shows or audio tours. This book gives directions, assessments, insights and examples for a variety of multidisciplinary projects.

The ideas in this book began in 2006 when I was working with the NJeSchool, the largest online public high school in New Jersey. We were thinking about courses that would work *better* online than in a classroom, as well as broader questions about the types of projects, skills and mindsets that students needed, and the types of activities that they would like to engage in. After research, reflection and some risk taking, we came up with an English class based on student podcasting that has been running ever since. Ultimately, however, we also came to realise that we had struck on a paradigm shift in curriculum development and teaching that correlated to larger social and technological trends and went well beyond the specific technologies of podcasting.

One reason the ideas in this book are a shift is that, as opposed to working from antecedents in education, the content was primarily developed from authentic activities outside of schools. The units in this book do not approach podcasting as an enhancement of the existing curriculum, but rather as a catalyst for reflection and curricular reform. Furthermore, though the technology is critical to the student projects, the ideas here are not simply about technological proficiency. The technology is a seamless part of real-world activities with educational value that connect to several disciplines.

There is, however, a burgeoning movement of Internet-based podcatchers, so keep on the lookout for those. Many aggregators not specifically dedicated to podcasts will let you subscribe and listen to podcasts (e.g. Bloglines and Google Reader), but these generic aggregators usually lack many of the advanced features of client software, such as the ability to automatically set and download files or to transfer them to portable players.

Portable. Another distinguishing feature of a podcast is its ability to be easily downloaded and played on portable devices, such as iPods, mp3 players and mobile phones.

Asynchronous. Podcasts are not intended to be distributed and consumed at the same time. Whether on a portable device or computer, they are intended to be consumed at the discretion of the consumer.

If you haven't already, go out and subscribe to some podcasts! There are podcasts available on almost any topic imaginable. You'll have much better luck understanding podcasting and teaching it to your students if you're familiar with some podcasting examples beforehand. Plus, it's fun!

Syndication

As I previously mentioned, a media file is not a true podcast unless it is syndicated, even if it's available on the Internet. You need to give your podcast the power of "subscribability" so listeners can receive it automatically in their podcatchers or other aggregators. There is a long and ever-changing list of options to achieve syndication, and no single one will fit everyone's needs. I will present some popular, inexpensive and easy-to-use options.

Many schools use commercial content systems to run their websites. Increasingly, these content management systems are coming with podcasting components – specifically the ability to host media files such as mp3 files, to generate an RSS feed and to index the series of podcasts on a website. I suggest exploring this option first.

If you do not have access to this application on your school's server, there are several free or inexpensive alternatives. These are sites that will host your media files and generate an RSS feed. Four popular ones are Blip.tv (www.blip.tv), Podomatic (www.podomatic.com), OurMedia (www.ourmedia.org) and Liberated Syndication (http://www.libsyn.com). All of these services will create a single page for you that will archive your shows. In this way, listeners can access your podcast simply through a web browser without a subscription, or they can choose to subscribe.

Creating Audio Files

As we've discussed, part of what makes a podcast a podcast is its method of distribution, such as syndication via RSS feed. The other piece of the puzzle is how to create the media for distribution – in other words, how to create the individual episodes. In this book we'll mainly focus on audio, but I do include some information on video files as well.

The software that you will be working with is multitrack audio editing software. This software gives you the ability to collect audio from various sources (the Internet, CDs, your microphone, a portable device) and then purposefully mix it. The tracks are the individual sounds (narration, interviews, sound effects, music) that you will mix into a single audio file. (For example, one track might contain music and another track might contain an interview. You could then mix the tracks so the music plays as background to the interview.)

If you already know how to operate a tape recorder and a word processing program, you have 90% of the skills needed to learn multitrack audio editing. Three of the most popular audio editing programs are SourceForge's Audacity, Apple's GarageBand and Adobe Audition. Audacity is a free download that works with Windows, Mac or Linux operating systems; GarageBand works only on Macs and is a very intuitive program with a library of royalty-free sounds for mixing; Audition is a robust, professional product with many advanced features. Once you learn one kind of multitrack audio editing software, you will easily be able to learn others.

Coming up in Chapter 3 are two tutorials on audio editing: one for Audacity and one for GarageBand.

INTRODUCTION TO THE GARAGEBAND WINDOW

The GarageBand window contains five sections:

1. **The Track Mixer:** displays the individual audio tracks in your session. There are controls for volume and panning (sound distribution between the right and left speaker) as well as volume meters for monitoring each track's volume level. This is the main window. The four windows listed next can be toggled on and off as needed.

2. **The Editor:** where editing is performed for audio tracks and where information about your episode can be added on a podcast track.

3. **The Loop Browser:** used to locate and import prerecorded music and sound effect loops included with GarageBand.

4. **The Media Browser:** used to locate and import media files from iTunes, iMovie and iPhoto.

5. **Track Info:** contains basic information about the track and provides access to audio effects.
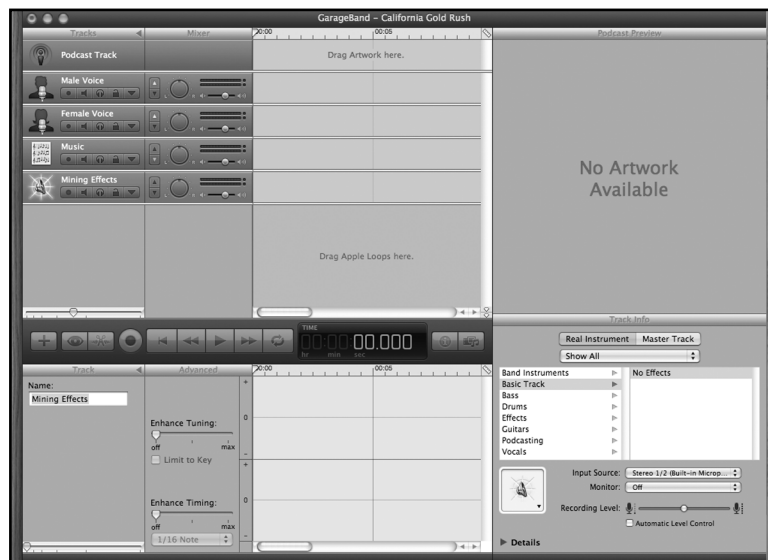
In the podcast template there are five tracks set up for you. The male and female voice tracks contain preset effects to enhance your voice, depending on gender.

PROCEDURES

1. Download the music and sound effects at http://ccmixter.org/files/cs272/15786/.
    They are in a zipped file named cs272_-_Oh_My_Darling.zip. From the zipped file, extract the two audio files Clementine.mp3 and Mining.mp3. You have complete permission to use these sounds for this tutorial.

2. Open GarageBand and select Create New Podcast Episode. This template is set up specifically for podcast production. To customise the template for the purpose of this project, do the following:

    a. Create a new track by selecting Track/New Basic Track. This track will be named No Effects by default.

    b. Toggle between the Track Editor and Track Info windows to rename the tracks.
        In the Track Info window, rename the No Effects track to "Mining Effects". Then select the Jingles track in the Track Editor and rename it to "Music" in the Track Info window.

    c. You may change the instrument icon on your Mining Effects track in the Track Info window.

Unit 11
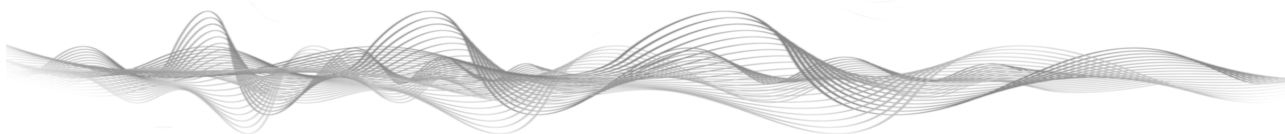
Audio Tour

This project was inspired by the Art Mobs Project (http://mod.blogs.com/art_mobs/), an initiative that had students create original and engaging audio tours of museums in New York City. The podcasts of the audio tours were then available for download and use during the physical tour of the museum. It was a great opportunity to capitalise on the gap between ubiquitous audio tours of museums, which could seem distant and disconnected to students, and the students' desire and ability to impress meaning on places that were important to them. It was also an innovative and increasingly popular use of podcasting.

SUMMARY

Students choose a public place that has meaning to them and create an audio tour for it. They combine their personal interests and experiences with historical information and interviews with other people who had experience with or insight into the place. Past choices have included a restaurant that a student's family went to every week in Chinatown, a student's church that was converted from an old movie palace, and a local park where a student would spend time with his brother.

YEAR LEVELS

Years 6–12

OBJECTIVES

- Select an appropriate location for tour that would interest a particular audience
- Describe main features and supporting details to engage a listener
- Research appropriate background for tour
- Synthesise interview with relevant person on tour site

TIME ALLOWANCE

5–8 days

RESOURCES

At least one computer with multitrack audio editing software and a microphone

TIME ALLOWANCE

Two weeks to entire school semester

RESOURCES

At least one computer with multitrack audio editing software and a microphone

I found the following websites to be very helpful in finding information about journalism and forming journalism clubs or newspapers.

Web English Teacher website
www.webenglishteacher.com/journ.html.

Beginning Reporting website by Jim Hall
http://www.courses.vcu.edu/ENG-jeh/BeginningReporting/

These are just two of the many sites available on the Internet. The amount of useful information was quite stunning, so you can explore yourself if you have more specific goals.

Procedures

Here are the general steps it takes to run a journalism podcasting unit.

Permissions

The very first thing you must do is make sure that podcasting fits in with your school's Acceptable Use Policy (AUP). You must hand out any necessary permission slips and tell students that those slips must be signed and submitted before they or any interviewee has their voice uploaded to the Internet.

Journalism

The students will want to dive right in, interviewing everyone at random, with no permissions or forethought. The first session, therefore, has to be about prewriting and researching. Since the students are learning about journalism, review types of journalism articles and roles that students will play in the podcasting process. Review copyright and the rules for interviewing (no secret interviews, interviewee must give permission). Some of the article types and roles I have used are:

- Features Reporter – interviews with teacher of the week

- Sports Reporter – cover school sports event

- News of the school

- Entertainment – reviews of current movies, etc.

Have students form writing groups according to interest. In the event that all the students want to report on sports or interview teachers, you can set this up on a rotating basis. Once students write their own stories, you will review them before recording.

Recording

Let two students demonstrate an unplanned interview while you record. When you play the recording, students will be able to see that it did not come out very well. Now have the students plan an interview with you; they must set up the questions and get your permission. The next step is to have students plan their interviews with their intended subjects, get the subjects' permission, and record their interviews.

The students must take turns recording, working on a separate project while other students are using the computer. If there is more than one computer, several groups may record at once, as long as the noise does not interfere with the other groups. Once all the recordings have been made and saved, editing will begin.