Chapter 8
Vodcasts!
How to Unsuccessfully Implement a New Online Tool

Andrea Crampton
Charles Sturt University, Australia

Thiru Vanniasinkam
Charles Sturt University, Australia

Natalie Milic
Charles Darwin University, Australia

ABSTRACT

Online technology is increasingly used in higher education and training. Recent advances in information and communication technologies (ICTs) have enabled the implementation of an array of tools, such as online tutorials, videos, podcasts and vodcasts, which are utilised within the education and business sectors. In this chapter the authors describe a study analysing the uptake of a new online tool by a cohort of internal and distance first year microbiology students enrolled in Pharmacy, Medical Science and Biotechnology programs. Key findings included the central role publicising the electronic resources plays in the uptake of new technology. Potential advantages and pitfalls of implementing online ICTs in a discipline that traditionally relies on face-to-face instruction and very little virtual learning are discussed making this study relevant to any field considering the adoption of new ICTs.

INTRODUCTION

A novice microbiologist requires not only the content knowledge of their field but must also develop the laboratory skills necessary to utilise their knowledge in their future workplace. Such skills are developed through training and demonstrations by skilled microbiologists and continued practice by the novice. Thus, skill development is contingent upon access to a skilled microbiologist and time at the bench to practice these skills. However, increasing class sizes (from 198 in 2005 to 540 in 2009) have impacted individuals’ access to experienced microbiologists, and laboratory time. Therefore, an alternative method of supplementing student skill development is required that is independent of the laboratory. Ideally such a resource would allow students to familiarise themselves with a technique...
prior to attending the laboratory, to ensure their
time at the bench and with the experienced mi-
crobiologists were used effectively.

Such a resource would ideally provide students
with the ability to reflect on what they have learnt
and review skills or concepts that they did not
fully comprehend during the laboratory session. This
would be particularly useful to English as
Second Language (ESL) students whose language
skills often infringe on their ability to understand
all of the relevant information during a laboratory
session. Accessing key resources, when required
and as often as required, would enable students to
repeatedly view the information and gather any
additional resources, such as translation diction-
aries, to ensure complete comprehension of the
material. This would allow many ESL students
to achieve a desired level of competence without
having to seek further clarification or help, which
can be a significant issue for many cultures (Park,
2000).

In this chapter we describe the creation of a
set of resources designed to supplement student
skill development and conceptual understanding
independent of laboratory space. To achieve this
we designed seven vodcasts which are short vid-
eos hosted on a central server and distributed to
students via the universities, Sakai based, course
management platform. The term podcast and the
application has become widespread throughout the
globe; podcasting was the New Oxford American
Dictionary word of the year in 2005 (Olanoff,
2006). Podcast refers to the distribution of au-
dio or video, generally to subscribers, often by
Real Simple Syndication feed (RSS). The term
podcast is most often associated with audio files
and the term vodcast used to describe files with
an audio and image content. Audio podcast are
extensively used in the education sector leading
to the development of iTunes University (iTunes
U) by the Apple Corporation. iTunes U is a free
service that enables universities and colleges to
post their educational materials for students and
members of the general community to download
to their computers or portable devices (Brown
& Green, 2008). Educational podcasts account
for at least 7% of all available podcasts hosted
on the world wide web (Palmer & Devitt, 2007).
The attraction of podcasts lie in their ability to
provide students with a relevant reference source
they can access when they want, as often as they
want and, in the case of portable devices, whilst
engaging in other activities.

Unlike its audio predecessor, podcasting, vod-
casting for education is relatively new, with most
of the available vodcasts being clips originally
designed for television or video rather than purpose
built (Brown & Green, 2008). Unlike traditional
television and video recordings used in education,
vodcast are cheap to produce and even cheaper to
distribute to a large widespread audience (Jham
et al, 2007). This makes them a valuable tool for
distance educators. Purpose designed vodcasts are
slowly emerging as teaching tools. While many of
the initial attempts were snippets of live lectures
others are working to develop more practically
orientated vodcasts to demonstrate clinical skills
for dentists (Jham et al, 2007) or enhanced image
libraries for radiologists (Corl et al, 2008).

Although vodcasts are a relatively passive
tool their use promotes an interaction between
the student and the vodcast content. Learner-
content interaction is one of the three modes of
synchronous interactive technology based interac-
tions proposed by More (1989), the others were
instructor-learner and learner-learner. Some have
suggested that of the three modes on interaction,
learner-content interaction is the hardest to mea-
sure. We have attempted to address this through a
structured survey that identifies aspects of student-
vodcast interaction. In particular we attempted to
identify if interaction occurred (between student
and content), how often did it occurred, where did
it occurred and how was it valued? The passive
nature of viewing vodcasts has been argued to be
a barrier to their adoption on pedagogical grounds
the pedagogical value of vodcasts would be en-
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