Chapter 8
Building a Learning Community: Students Teaching Students Using Video Podcasts

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ABSTRACT

Typically education is a process that is done to students. The work reported here relates to students who collaborate in the education process so that they become educators of later students. This collaboration takes the form of development of re-usable learning objects (RLOs) that are firstly used to assess each student's understanding, but which are then to be used for the education of subsequent cohorts. This approach is based on a range of pedagogic concerns with motivational and social aspects of teaching. Students are given the options of producing a written or a video assignment. They make this decision in the knowledge that their work will be used to instruct students who will come after them. The video is relatively short at 5 – 10 minutes in length. Once assessed the video is added to a library for later use. Students report that they enjoy these assessments and that it is valuable to see the work of previous students.

INTRODUCTION

This chapter relates the practice of one part of Manchester Metropolitan University in using student made podcasts to assess at undergraduate level. The podcasts produced by students are then used to teach subsequent cohorts of students. This is explicit in the assignment, so that those students who take this route know that they are collaborating with the teaching staff in the development of a library of teaching resources. This collaboration is asynchronous.

Podcasting

In the Business School of Manchester Metropolitan University we are making use of podcasts in a number of ways. These can be broadly categorized as mainstream and innovative. The mainstream approach will be briefly discussed to put the in-
Building a Learning Community

novative approach into context both pedagogically, and from the point of view of collaboration. The innovative approach is the subject of this chapter. The innovation is that students produce their podcasts as part of their assessment regime. However, following assessment, the work is used for the education of subsequent cohorts of students. This transforms those students who take part, which is not all possible students, from just being receivers of education into agents who also collaborate with the teaching staff to be providers of teaching.

An understanding of the mainstream approach is useful to put the new approach into context. In the mainstream approach lecturers produce podcasts for use by students. Typically a podcast can be from a few minutes in length, up to approximately an hour. The podcasts make use of video and are uploaded to a multi-media server. Links to the podcasts relevant to each group of students are posted to their course areas on the respective pages of the institutional intranet. This mainstream approach can be further sub-divided into two. The first is based on an edited recording of a live lecture, using a specially set-up lecture theatre. The theatre is equipped with cameras to capture both the activities of the lecturer and the images displayed on the lecture theatre screen. Audio is recorded simultaneously and is synchronized with the video. At the end of the lecture a multi-media file is automatically made available to the lecturer for editing. This enables glitches and interruptions to be edited out prior to release by the lecturer to students via a multi-media server. The benefit of this technical approach is that the overhead of podcast production is relatively low: no pedagogic planning and design is required above what would normally take place for a standard lecture, and the technology is easily managed.

The second mainstream approach is based on the production of short videos, by the lecturer, in a non-theatre environment. Typically these are much shorter than lectures, and are intended to provide clear focus on one academic issue. These may provide a short demonstration of a technique, or a brief overview of an academic author, or similar focused piece. These do require pedagogic planning both in terms of the topic area and the content. The subject of the podcasts has to be recognized as needing this treatment, and the content needs to be designed, executed and simultaneously recorded (typically using screen capture software). Not only is there a pedagogic overhead but there is also a technical overhead, as the production process is entirely the responsibility of the lecturer.

Mainstream podcasts are not collaborative, but are examples of students’ passive receipt of learning resources. The lecturer produces them and the students individually make use of them or not. The mainstream approach is an example of education being “done” to students. The use of automated technologies for managing uploading makes for a semi-industrial approach of reusable learning objects (RLOs). The production is efficient, and their availability is appreciated by students, particularly as revision aids on the approach to exams (Scott, 2008). An aspect of this approach that is particularly useful relates to the benefits gained from blended-learning (Stubbs & Martin, 2003). This is where a mix of approaches and media are used to bring a range of benefits. In a business school, these benefits include: using a mix of media to reduce the monotony that can occur if there is over-reliance on printed media; making use of dynamic demonstrations to illustrate the building up of an equation in a spreadsheet, or the development of a database. Video podcasts can also be used to present real-time situations, such as interview techniques or process control. Within the Business School there have been particular benefits in the area of Finance and Accountancy (Scott, 2008). Students have found podcasts particularly useful as a part of their preparation for exams. Benefits are gained from both conceptual and skill-based RLOs.

Podcasting in education is used under the broader technical umbrella of blended-learning. Though blended-learning is not rigidly defined