Transcript for Teaching Talk #11: Digital Assessments: Podcasting

Aron Fazekas: All right, welcome everybody, I'm going to get things started. So, my name is Aron Fazekas, I'm an Educational Developer at the Office of Teaching and Learning. So, welcome to our Office of Teaching and Learning Teaching Talks. I think this is maybe the eleventh one that we've offered, but first I want to start off by acknowledging that we are all in various places that are governed by different treaties and relationships to the land and as we consider those relationships, I think it's important to remember our collective responsibilities to each other as we consider how we enact inclusion and respect in our daily lives and actions. So, the webinar today is going to be slightly different, but I do want to make everyone aware that we are going to be recording it so that we can provide a link available to everyone later on. Today we have Lindsey Robinson from the library and Joanne O'Meara from physics and together our panelists are going to talk about digital assessments and podcasting. So during the session we often normally disable the chat functions but today we're going have that on and at various points in the presentation we're gonna ask for your input or your feedback on a few different things and so with that, I'm going to turn it over to Lindsey and Joanne.

Lindsey Robinson: Hi, I'm Lindsey Robinson, I'm just going to share my screen with you, so thank you so much for joining us today. I'm a Digital Learning Specialist at the McLaughlin library and I'm going to be talking to you a little bit about podcasting and integrating it into your courses. And then, what that might look like for the fall and then Joanne is going to be sharing from her experience of integrating it into a course as well and she'll be sharing an example as well as a rubric and the assignment itself. Before we get started, I'd kind of like to know a little bit about what you have done with podcasting, so I have a poll available.

Joanne O'Meara: - Lindsey I just want to jump in and say there's a question here in the Q&A, asking if people should take notes or if we can share the slides afterwards and I don't know about you but I'm fine with sharing the slides afterwards.

Lindsey Robinson: Yes I am fine with sharing the slides and actually usually I get the participant list afterwards and I'll send out an email with all of the resources that I discuss throughout, so yes, you are welcome, you can have the slides afterwards that's fine by me. So if you could just share what you've done with podcasts, so maybe you've created your own past podcast or you assign podcasts in your course to create or to listen to or you listen to podcasts regularly or maybe you don't do any of the above.

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Lindsey Robinson: Okay so it looks like most people listen to podcasts regularly, so that's a great place to start. Some people don't do anything, and some people have actually assigned them in the course to listen to. So that's great it's nice to have a diverse mix of people out there with experience with podcasts. For those of you who don't know, a podcast is an audio recording that utilizes principles of storytelling to present an argument or share perspectives, so it's kind of a very broad definition but basically it sums up that it's something that you listen to and it's enjoyable but also informative. So, for those of you who do listen to podcasts what are some of your favorite podcasts? I can't see the chat right now so somebody else will have to let me know what the answers are. You can just share in the chat box.

Aron Fazekas: So, Lindsey I'll just read off the ones that I'm seeing so far, so Hidden Brain, Super-Soul Sundays, T for Teaching, Revisionist History by Malcolm Gladwell, The Current, Stay Tuned with Preet, Daily, Unlocking Us.

Lindsey Robinson: That's great, there's actually a lot of different variety there - oh, there's more coming through I see. So podcasts can really be about anything, so you have some things that are there specifically about teaching, there's some other things that are about current events, there are some things about history, and kind of looking back over things as well as just informative topics that people might be interested in exploring. So, I've kind of tried to think about how you might categorize different types of podcasts and I've kind of come up with three but that doesn't mean there aren't more types of podcasts. These are just kind of ones that I've seen integrate very well into courses before.

So, first you have an audio essay which could be to explore a topic or theme - it might be more traditional content, and within an audio essay it's just presented in a different way and it's a different style of communication that students would be engaging in. So instead of writing an essay they might produce an audio essay instead. There are also interviews so students would develop questions and conduct an interview; so, similar to a radio program but they would learn to construct a narrative through question and answer. Another option is a sound walk or tour which is about building awareness of space and environment. It tends to be immersive experience connected to a specific place and it sometimes is built around a narrative that can help kind of build more awareness of space as well.

So, parts of a podcasting assignment: so, this is probably fairly typical of any assignment really. It's just that there's more tech involved in parts of it; so planning and brainstorming, researching and narrowing a topic are kind of things that you would do in lots of different types of projects so then you would have scripting involved, whether that is scripting the way through interview questions or just the voiceover of what the person is going to say, they would have to produce that. We generally recommend that they go through a peer-review process of the script or the interview questions. It's really great to be able to involve their peers through this process and try to make that script better and understand that different perspectives can help improve something.

Lindsey Robinson: They would then have to gather audio, so usually a podcast involves not just a person's spoken voice but also music and sound effects. We usually recommend talking a little bit about copyright considerations depending on what type of podcast they're creating or what media that they're using, there may be copyright that they need to think about, and how that will impact what and how they use it. They would then have to record and edit their audio and then export, publish, and share.

So, I've kind of come tried to come up with a few tools they could use to create their podcasts. Obviously, they don't have access to the media studio; we have a media studio in the library on the second floor, and generally part of my job is to oversee the media studio and people have access to equipment. Obviously, that's not an option for the Fall so I do still think that this type of project is possible for students, it just means that what they have access to is what they have. They don't have access to professional equipment, but they can learn to create things with the equipment that they have at home. So that means that for recording, it's going to be phones and different phone recording, audio recording apps that they have available on their phone or free ones. They could have headphones with a microphone in them, they might be able to use their computer mics for interviews, you could use Zoom. Zoom has an option to record and then it actually spits out the audio file separately. Joanne also recommended Zencastr because any kind of video chat, sometimes connectivity doesn't allow for super smooth recording, Zencastr is actually - you send a link to the person you're interviewing or recording with and it records two separate audio files that you can then combine, and then for editing we often recommend using Audacity. Audacity is a free open-source tool that is available for PC and Mac. We have a lot of support for it at the library. There's also GarageBand so if people are using Macs, GarageBand comes free with all Macs. Before students kind of commit to a tool or an editing platform, we generally recommend that students test them out before they commit, so even if they're working in groups trying to figure out who's phone or computer has the best recording capacity, each device varies greatly in terms of the quality of sound that it produces, so it's great to be able to test that out beforehand before committing and finding out at the end that the sound quality is pretty poor.

So I've had a lot of questions about, you know, about what good audio actually sounds like, so how do you assess something like that, especially if you don't consider yourself an expert in sound or in creating podcasts. But audio, is one of those things that you can tell really quite quickly whether or not it's a good recording or not, we've talked about before in the past about how really if something - when it comes to videos, for example, people spend a lot of time on what a video looks like but may spend less time on the audio recording but the audio recording can really ruin the experience for some people. So if it's poor audio quality, some people will give up listening, right, and when you're talking about a podcast, all you're going on is audio quality, so trying to figure out how best to create that audio, and then for you, as the instructor, how to assess that. So, some of the categories that I like to talk about are simple but the first one is just volume. So is the voice actually loud enough for you to hear everything that they say. Consistency, is the sound level consistent throughout? So, it doesn't get really, really loud at one point and then really, really quiet. So that it's hard to hear. Is there background noise?

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Lindsey Robinson: So, through editing you can remove quite a bit of background noise and we have instructions on how to do that. Music and sound effects, so if they use music and sound to enhance, or is it overpowering the overall audio? Expression, is the voice expressive and engaging, or is it monotone and kind of not really engaging with the audience at all? Clarity, is the voice clear or is there an echo or a muffling? So like I said before, when it comes to audio, they won't have access to professional recording equipment, they'll use what they have, so there may be a little bit of leniency in terms of the expectations for what their sound quality actually is, but there are some things that they can do to ensure that it's the best that they can get.

So, having heard all of that, here's an opportunity that we'd like for you to share what some of your concerns are for setting a podcast assignment, so this is an opportunity that if you want to share something, just raise your hand and you'll be given the option to ask a question over your audio or share your video as well. So, I'm going to stop my sharing for right now.

Aron Fazekas: So, Edie has a question, I'm going to get Shehroze to get Edie control, so that she can talk.

Edie (Attendee): Hi, should I be talking now? Yep. Okay, I guess the concern I have is I want to do an interview type of podcast with someone who is in here and you mentioned Zencastr, I guess I'm concerned because of Internet, that we're recording and, you know, it freezes or our lips are - because it's not going to just be a podcast, it's also going to be video, it will be kind of be like a TV show, more than a radio show. So how do I make that not have a problem?

Joanne O'Meara: So, I've used Zoom and I'm using Zencastr for that. During the shutdown, we've been still - the physics departments have been making some fun little videos for kids at home to juice the various little science experiments, and so we've done a couple of videos where we've interviewed someone who is not in my house, so we've done it with Zoom. The challenge with Zoom is that sometimes it has a weird sampling issue and the sound isn't great, so my colleague found a website called Zencastr.com and it is - as Lindsay said you send the other person a link and then they click on that link and then it records two audio tracks. It records exactly what my computer audio is receiving, and it records the other person's computer audio directly from their computer, so it's a lot better sound quality than taking the audio files from Zoom and we've used that – we used the audio tracks from Zencastr along with the video that's recorded by Zoom and put it together that way within - we've used WeVideo to do some video production, which I know is a product that the library supports. And, I'm not sure the other processing technologies that my colleague has used but it has worked well to use the audio files from Zencastr along with the video files recorded from Zoom. If you're recording in Zoom you have to think about whether you're in presenter mode or speaker mode or gallery view because when it records - if you're in speaker view, it's only going to have that one person, if you want to have the side-by-side you have to be in gallery view, in order to have that side-by-side for your video recording in Zoom. Does that answer your question?

Edie (Attendee): Yes, I guess the question I have here is in editing, what do you do for video?

Joanne O'Meara: For video, I've used WeVideo to do like live-action type video, I've used PowToon as well and I know Lindsey did a webinar on that earlier but that's an animated thing, but yes, to do live-action video. I've used WeVideo which is - I'm not a techy person and it is quite user friendly to figure out. So, you can put in multiple audio tracks, you can put in multiple video tracks, you can have transitions, you can have sound effects, it's got a pretty good stock video library that you can pull from as well, but yeah, it's a pretty good, pretty straightforward technology to use, WeVideo.com.

Lindsey Robinson: Yeah, so, the library has a subscription, like an educational subscription, to WeVideo, so we have accounts to use within the classroom. So, if you needed an account for yourself to explore or you wanted to reserve accounts for the fall, for your for students, we do have WeVideo accounts available for classes.

Attendee (anonymous): Is there a link that we could look at it to see - okay, there it is?

Lindsey Robinson: WeVideo. Yeah, I can at the end of this, when I get the participant list, I'll make sure to include that link in that email if you just want to explore, it's just We-Video and you can just Google it to see it, and then I'll make sure to include that WeVideo link in the email that I send out at the end when I get the participants list.

Attendee (anonymous): Great, perfect.

Joanne O'Meara: Are there any other concerns about setting a podcast assignment in your courses?

Lindsey Robinson: I think there were some questions that might have come through the chat. Oh look, there's so many links that people have put in here, okay. There is a question here that says will the technology overwhelm the students such as GarageBand and Audacity? So, I think it really depends on the student. I think a lot of times classes - and Joanne can talk about this too – get around that kind of fear of technology, within certain students, about doing group assignments rather than individual assignments because there's usually somebody within the group who has a little bit more comfort with exploring technology. That being said, the library does offer a lot of supports for learning the technology, so while the media studio is closed we, will still be offering consultations through the fall semester on troubleshooting, kind of selecting the right tool, if you have any questions about finding media. For example, students can book consultations with media studio staff to get help with those types of things. We also have online tutorials to learn Audacity. So Audacity, we created this tutorial where it actually takes them through step by step so they can have the tutorial open on one side, Audacity open on the other, and they can actually use it to edit the whole thing in one go.

Lindsey Robinson: These aren't kind of super-advanced tools, we do try to choose tools that are more beginner level, so they aren't getting thrown into super professional tools, although they can be used for more-for creating professional types of things, but I would say that we do try to provide supports to students in order to learn the technology, and we don't want to make it about learning a specific tool. It's about learning those digital literacy tools that can be applicable in other areas as well.

Joanne O'Meara: There was a question here from Shannon, saying can you offer some suggestions of how podcast assignments have been successfully employed in different disciplines?

So as a physicist, I can tell you how I've used it in in our physics program; we actually require a science communication course in third year for all of our physics majors, and that is a course that focuses on communicating science to non-technical audiences. So, we do a lot in our program to encourage students to develop their very technical, writing and oral presentation skills, but we felt that we really needed to help them develop the communication from the non-technical perspective. So this course runs in the fall and we do have a lot of discussing different modalities and they have a podcast assignment, they have a video assignment, they have two written assignments and then they have a group project at the end of the semester, which in the past couple of years has been partnered with the Guelph Civic Museum and we've run STEM Week for visiting elementary school students. So the students, their group project is they have a budget and they have to build a museum-type exhibit, science-based for grade six, seven, eight students and we run some week during the last weeks of the semester. So it's a very different course, it's not your classic quantum mechanics for third year students, but it's a great course for them to develop those skills that they really don't have a chance to do you in their more core, mainstream courses. So I can tell you a little bit, I think we're going to talk a little bit more about the particular podcast assignment in this course a little bit further in, is that right Lindsey?

Lindsey Robinson: Yeah. I can tell you about a few other courses that we've supported, so we've been involved in language courses, they've used podcasts before. They did a podcast about French music, and so it was kind of like an essay looking at how French music did whatever it was - what their topic was, and then integrated music into the podcast for a specific song. We've also had interviews; a UNIV1200 class on varsity athletics, Jason Dodd had them interview different - either an athlete or coach, somebody on that staff. We've also had it in an Environmental Science class as well, where they had to - I can't remember what it ended up being, but I'm pretty sure it was a connection with the Arboretum. So, they ended up doing some type of tour. We've also had it in a Theatre Studies class, where they had to create, kind of, an immersive - it was that soundwalk that I had talked about earlier, an immersive experience with the environment more specific, on campus. So, podcasts are pretty adaptive; anywhere you'd have a written assignment of some kind, you could look at adapting it into a podcast. Are there any other questions that we have missed that came through the chat, or does anybody have anything else they'd like to share before we move on?

Lindsey Robinson: Okay, so I'm going to go back to sharing my screen. So, I just thought I'd let you know. So, it can be intimidating to think about new assessment types and integrating them into your courses. We, at the library, through the media studio, will be offering a lot of support. So, there'll be online consultations. For you as instructors, I offer, kind of consultations on assignment design, or if you have questions about what type of support we can offer specifically for your class, or if there's a different assignment type you'd be interested in discussing, I'd be happy to do that. We also offer consultations on troubleshooting, so if somebody is having trouble with a tool, we can do that. Choosing a tool, copyright, and finding media. We also have a lot of self-directed help as well. So we have online tutorials like that Audacity one that I mentioned, help guides as well as videos that can help students navigate this process. I'll also be offering some tool-based workshops through the library in the fall as well, online obviously. I'm still kind of working out how that will - how it will happen and what it will look like, but that will be something that is available through the fall. So now I'm going to hand things over to Joanne. I'll keep this up for now and then you can give a little intro to your course and then we can share the example.

Joanne O'Meara: Sure yeah, so before I do that, I do want to add just to what Lindsey was saying about supports for your students. I cannot say enough about the support I've gotten from the digital media studio in running this science communications course. They've come in the last, what, two-three probably three years now and done workshops with my students on doing animated videos, doing live action videos, using the studio in the library, using the audio recording studio to do the podcasts, storyboarding scripting. They've been super fantastic and amazing, so if you're thinking about doing anything like this, I completely, wholeheartedly encourage you to get in touch with Lindsey and her team and see how they can help you out, because they have been really great. So as I said, we have a podcast assignment, a video assignment, two writing assignments and a group project. So, all of those things, except the writing, are group projects. They're group assignments and students can work with the same group of students throughout the semester, if they want, they can mix it up. Typically, they'll tend to work once they've formed their core group at their beginning in the semester - they work together all the way through, but it doesn't always work out that way. These are all third-year physics students and they're not really super happy about the course at the beginning of the semester, because you know that nobody is really necessarily all that naturally comfortable with public speaking and communicating, and as I said, this is not kind of a conventional third year quantum mechanics course. They're actually expected to come to class and discuss things and share their opinions about things which is not something that we really do a lot of in our calculus and our core content. So, it's kind of an interesting experience for everyone, but by the end of the semester they've certainly embraced the idea of what we're trying to accomplish in the course. So the podcast example, I've chosen one from I think - not this past fall, but the fall before and I chose this one because they did such a great job with the medium itself, like recognizing that this is an audio-only medium, they chose - so the assignment is create a 4-6 minute podcast on any science topic that you'd like; doesn't even really have to be physics.

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Joanne O'Meara: Any science topic to any audience, although it has to be a non-technical audience - can't be explaining it to somebody else in your program or, you know, faculty member. It has to be to a non-technical audience. So I chose this one because this is done by Adam and Kelly and they chose the subject of audio illusions, which I didn't actually know anything about before they did this podcast, so we've chosen just an almost - not quite - one minute clip. They do a great job of this podcast, there's intro music, there's outro music, there's sound effects throughout. It's done as sort of a mock interview, Kelly is pretending to be an expert in something and Adam is the interviewer, and so we're going to jump in here without sort of the preamble, but this just to give you a sense of what they did.

Kelly (Student): So, for me, my research is currently focused around music and why it can make us feel the way it does.

Adam (Student): Awesome, it's a really, really cool topic that has a lot of really interesting applications, and from what you were telling me earlier, you've done some consulting work for various movies, helping to put together to the soundtracks. You want to just tell us a little bit about that?

Kelly (Student): Yeah, so, I worked on Dunkirk with Christopher Nolan, most recently, and a big part of the development of that film was incorporating the Shepard tone audio illusion into it.

Adam (Student): Yeah okay that's really cool. Do you want to just explain to us what the Shepard tone effect is?

Kelly (Student): So, the Shepard tone effect is an illusion of an endless scale that sounds as if it's ascending or descending infinitely, when it's really just a continuous loop of a manipulated scale.

Joanne O'Meara: So when we're doing these assignments, the students have the rubric that they're given - well they're given all the rubrics for the semester, at the beginning of the semester, on Courselink, so they know how it's going to be assessed, and for the podcast and the video assignment, they are doing peer evaluation. Oh, I forgot! There's also another assignment, there is one assignment at the beginning of the semester that they have to do independently which is sort of like a three-minute thesis idea. They have three minutes, one slide, and it's individual. So that's the only one where they have to stand up and do it by themselves, and that's right at the beginning of the semester. So the three-minute thesis idea, the podcast, and the video are all peer evaluation. So the students have the rubric that they're going to be evaluated by from their peers, and I will share my screen now just so you can have sort of a quick look, and I'm not going to go into great detail on this, but if you're interested in having a more detailed look at the rubric later on, please just let me know and I will send it to you, for sure. So, the student indicates who they're evaluating and who they are and then we look at two categories: we look at content and we look at production and delivery.

Joanne O'Meara: So exceeds expectations, meets expectations, and so on and these are all the sort of the criteria that we have already been discussing in the weeks preceding our listening session where we listen to all the podcasts that the students have created. We spend several sessions before this listening to a bunch of different podcasts that I've carefully selected, and critiquing them as a group, so they kind of have some experience before we jump into the peer evaluation and then the delivery and production, same idea, exceeds, meets, approaching, significant improvement needed, and then everybody is asked to comment on what did you like about it, what could be improved and then I collect all of that feedback and I type it up. So, the students receive their evaluations from all their peers, but they don't they don't know whose. It's anonymized so I can also filter, if I feel that that's necessary, although generally speaking, this is a great group and that hasn't been an issue.