

Multimedia and Internet @ Schools

Pipeline Column:

The Proof is in the Podding

By Stephen Abram

I've been following the Duke University experiment in providing iPods to all students. It's pretty interesting and a marvel in the law of unintended consequences. The evaluation report on Duke's 2004/05 academic uses of iPods initiative is available and it's free. ! It's a fairly concise report and worth the read. I've included the link in the sidebar. It's a fairly concise , easy to read report and worth the read. I've included the link in the sidebar.

It must have been a bit of a success since they're continuing it in modified form. What I found most interesting was the surprising and innovative ways (though logical in hindsight) that professors and students found to use the devices. As a lesson reviewing tool (even while exercising or multitasking), it seems more than adequate. It also seems to nicely align with students' natural behaviors rather than insisting they align their behaviors with uncomfortable technologies.

There were the usual shirty comments from lecturers that feared some students would not attend class and just listen to downloaded lectures while jogging. I have to say that if they're providing so little interactivity or visuals in their lectures and so carefully avoid any Socratic dialogue with the students, then how is a recording any worse or better than being there? Perhaps the competition will sharpen up those that fear it! Some of the comments I read were classic! To paraphrase, "everyone should learn the way I learn."

What I enjoyed most was seeing the usage by music students to play recordings over and over to learn; to record their own work for themselves and others to comment and critique; and to share music in the context of discussion. I liked the stories about language students repeatedly listening to lectures to get all the nuances of the language, to get pronunciations right and to study and review. There are many stories like this about the power of these MP3 players in an academic context. There are even quite a few library uses!

I think that iPods and their more generic MP3 players are a bellwether technology. There are things to learn in these experiments that apply to all types of libraries. As we try to adapt our services to the wide range of multi-media technologies like MP3's and streaming media, the services provided by such companies as Apple iTunes, Overdrive and Audible.com and even simple things like the streaming media author interviews in SirsiDynix's enhanced OPAC feeds through DataStream we must remain cognizant of the user experience. A few public libraries are offering audio-books on iPods to borrow and others are recording and podcasting teen and user book reviews. It's a real renaissance

right now where creativity is flowering. Pretty cool and it sure makes their libraries' portals lively

I recently attended a Library Leaders Workshop put on by the Newark New York BOCES (Board Cooperative Educational Services). I had the honor of doing a few sessions but I was particularly impressed with the level of innovation that these folks were attempting. They were doing some pretty good blogging to share insights on a higher level professionally. Christopher Harris' *Infomancy* blog and Jacquie Henry's *Wanderings* blog are great examples.

What I was really impressed with was the presentation by Christine Dowd who has been teacher librarian and now is a K-20 education consultant with Apple. She blew me away with her expansive talk on the uses of iPods and MP3 technologies in educational settings. And she wasn't just a vendor blueskying, she shared real pilots and implementations. This is a major technology with market penetration and economic potential far outstripping just the Apple brand and covers formats and genres beyond music - video, e-books, talking books, documents, and more. Add to this the role played by content-enabled SmartPhones, Internet-enabled gaming devices and other combination MP3 players and you see a future world that is different.

To ignore iPods and their kin in the education space in 2006 is the same as ignoring the Web in 1996 or the Internet in 1986. You won't go extinct but you won't evolve too fast either.

For many, iPod and MP3 players bring music to mind and that's all. Some folks are quite aware of the tiny main player unit with its huge capacity measured in megabytes or songs. Too few are aware of the huge pile of peripherals for these devices that have educational impact. Simple recording microphones, stands, radio broadcasters, and websites like iTunes. Indeed some only think of iTunes as an e-commerce site for selling music rather than as a platform for distribution and management of learning objects like lessons and experiments. An iPod (and some other combination devices) are more than simply a hard drive, a calendar, a contact manager, an alarm clock, a notes reader, an audio recorder, a photo library, a PDF library, a video player, a TV driver and it plays music or any other voice object.

The public iTunes store is well known and as of the beginning of this year had 20,000 podcasts, 11, 000 audiobooks, 2 million songs and 3,000 videos. What many are unaware of is that the iTunes server software can be used to create a private digital school to support curriculum, teaching and learners. It can be hosted anywhere and manage levels of privacy and content protection. Teachers and learners can post podcasts, photos, music, streaming media, voice and text in many formats for use by fellow learners and educators. It's usable by both Microsoft and Mac computers. Christine listed a good list of potential uses for these technologies in the classroom:

- Classroom lectures, transcripts, lecture notes
- Expert presentations
- Home schooling support
- Audio and video tours
- Documentaries
- Digital field trips
- Digital science
- Music (choral or instrumental, lyrics)
- Radio Show / Podcasts
- Journalism projects
- Interviews
- Book Reviews
- Speech and language studies
- Professional Development
- Artwork
- Music Clubs (using Apple's GarageBand)
- Yearbooks on and on.

Christine also discussed a few special pilots being done by Erie 2 BOCES, Brearley School and State College Area School District. Combined with the higher education experiments at Duke University, Drexel University, Middlebury, and the University-wide iTunes store at Stanford and you have the beginnings of a national experiment to improve education with a few new tools. With the huge increase in ownership of these devices there's an opportunity here. It's different than broadcast TV or Radio since it's personal and can be time shifted to when the learner is ready and available.

And if you're telling yourself this is all too expensive... Christine pointed to free and inexpensive resources like Storynory: iPod ready resources for kids, AudioBooksForFree.com, and Free Classic Audio Books. And we shouldn't neglect to remember the good core content available from Discovery Channel, National Geographic, NPR and PBS. This is not a technology that is looking for a place to happen or one that has too little content or market penetration to pay attention to. Indeed many public libraries are experimenting with loaning content on MP3 players or iPods. It's in the early stages and now is the time to experiment and learn. It's also not just about MP3 files; it's also about video files. Another newish word, Vodcasting is emerging. VOD means video on demand and Vodcasting is video podcasting. It's happening so fast! While it may look like this is being driven by downloaded episodes of *Lost* and *Desperate Housewives*, it's much broader than that in its potential.

We are seeing a few new search engines for podcasts too. Podcasts are not just MP3 files loaded on a website. A podcast is defined by Wikipedia as a method of publishing files to the Internet, allowing users to subscribe to a feed and receive

new files automatically by subscription, usually at no cost. It first became popular in late 2004, used largely for audio files. To oversimplify, a podcast is essentially an MP3 file that has an RSS feed.

Podscope finds podcasts through its search engine. You can search for topics you want and find it through the metadata on each file. It's not that accurate yet and there is a poor recall/relevance ratio but you can see the potential for finding podcasts that meet your needs. I searched "librarian" and found a few interesting files but there were quite a few false drops.

Podzinger searches the spoken word in podcasts. This means it doesn't just search the metadata (indexes and catalogs) but searches the actual words in the 'cast. This gave a much more satisfying result on the search for "librarian". It still didn't pull up some of the ones I might have expected but the scrape of podcasts will grow, I'm sure. I am getting the same feeling I got searching the early days of spoken word searching that I got when I shifted from AltaVista to Google. Interesting.

Anyway, it's a technology worth watching and playing with. I'm willing to bet it will be huge before the end of the decade!

Stephen Abram, MLS, is the immediate President of the Canadian Library Association, and is Vice President of Innovation for SirsiDynix. He would love to hear from you at stephen.abram@sirsidynix.com.

Sidebar

Resources

The Podcast Creation Guide can be accessed at:

<http://images.apple.com/education/solutions/podcasting/pdf/PodcastCreationGuide.pdf>

The Podcast Backbone Guide can be accessed at:

<http://images.apple.com/education/solutions/podcasting/pdf/PodcastBackboneGuide.pdf>

Duke University iPod First-Year Experience: Final Evaluation Report

http://cit.duke.edu/pdf/ipod_initiative_04_05.pdf

SirsiDynix DataStream

http://www.sirsi.com/Sirsiproducts/content_datastream.html

iTunes

<http://www.apple.com/itunes/>

Overdrive

http://www.sirsi.com/Partners/profile_overdrive.html

Audible.com

<http://www.tapinformation.com/SIRSIprop.htm>

Project Gutenberg Audio eBooks

<http://www.gutenberg.org/audio>

NetLibrary Audio Books partnership with Recorded Books

<http://www.recordedbooks.com/>

<http://www.infotoday.com/newsbreaks/nb041101-1.shtml>

Storynory – iPod ready resources for kids

<http://www.storynory.com>

AudioBooksForFree.com

<http://www.audiobooksforfree.com>

Free Classic Audio Books

<http://www.freeclassicaudiobooks.com>

Infomancy blog by Christopher Harris

<http://www.schoolof.info/infomancy/>

Wanderings blog by Jacquie Henry

<http://nlcommunities.com/communities/wanderings/default.aspx>

Podscope

<http://www.podscope.com/>

Podzinger

<http://www.podzinger.com>

Podcast Search Engine List

http://www.masternewmedia.org/news/2005/05/20/where_to_submit_your_podcasts.htm