Engaging the online learner: Student reactions to the use of audio podcasts in off campus courses

Maria Spies
Australian College of Applied Psychology
Organisational Context

• Small private college (~4000 students)
• Disciplines – counselling, psychology, coaching
• Vocational and Higher Education
• Approximately 60% of students study by ‘flexible delivery’
• Adjunct teacher base (practitioner & academic)
Student Profile

- Ave age – mid 30’s
- Approx. 75% female
- Study part-time & working
- Geographically dispersed
- Career change / upgrade
- Long time since last formal education
Teaching & Learning Context

- History of on-campus and distance education
- Flexible delivery now combines DE & Online
- Online classrooms using Moodle LMS
- Still heavily text based
- Higher drop out rates than on campus
- Concerns about student experience
- Various initiatives underway
Audio Podcast pilot

Why audio podcasts?

About the project

Student Feedback

Educator training, resources and support

Educator Feedback
Why audio podcasts?

• Ease of use - to make and to listen
• Widespread access to technology
  – free to download Audacity
• Suitability for asynchronous delivery
• A ‘new’ media
• Use of educator ‘voice’ missing in text environment
  – personalisation & connection
• Benefits of mobility were less important
• Peer-led model
• Initial pilot with 9 volunteer educators
  – Teaching across 35 classes (620 students)
  – Identified champions
• ‘High touch’ support, training and resources for volunteer group
• Volunteer presentations
  – Seminars and webinars
• Audio podcasts used as an adjunct to existing content and practice
Educator training, resources and support

• Sandbox site for educators
  – How to... , real examples, peer support & feedback
  – Personalisation and connection
  – Including resources developed by educators
  – Assign Peer mentor

• Working closely with volunteer group

• Webinars
  – Co-facilitated by EdTech staff and educators

• Workshops
176 educators ‘enrolled’
120 contributions made to discussion forum
1282 views to discussion forum
Student feedback

• Online survey to 620 students
  – 73 responses (12%)

• Questions focused on
  – Podcast frequency and type
  – Learning processes (Task & Social orientations)
  – Motivational factors
# Podcast frequency and types

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Generally, how often are audio podcasts used in your class?</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
<th>Response %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Once or twice in the term so far</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Several times a week</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>How has your educator used audio podcasts?</th>
<th>To announce weekly requirements</th>
<th>To explain complex concepts</th>
<th>To provide guidance about assessment</th>
<th>To add information related to the content</th>
<th>Response Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>34 (48%)</td>
<td>32 (45%)</td>
<td>56 (79%)</td>
<td>41 (58%)</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What did you find most useful?</td>
<td>24 (38%)</td>
<td>30 (48%)</td>
<td>51 (81%)</td>
<td>32 (51%)</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>How would you like podcasts to be used in the future?</td>
<td>40 (62%)</td>
<td>52 (80%)</td>
<td>54 (83%)</td>
<td>53 (82%)</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Orientation and motivation

**Audio Medium**
- I like to learn via listening (95%)
- I enjoy listening as an additional way of learning (96%)

**Personal**
- I feel more connected to my educator through the podcasts (93%)
- Podcasts make the learning experience more personal (96%)

**Motivation**
- Podcasts make my learning more varied and help keep my attention (94%)
- The podcasts reassure me that I’m on the right track (92%)
- Podcasts make the topic more interesting (88%)

**Use in learning processes**
- The podcasts help me to focus on what is important (93%)
- Podcasts add depth to my learning (87%)
- Podcasts help me to better understand some of the concepts in my course (91%)
“Fantastic innovation...it gives us an opportunity to feel closeness, and relate to our educator” (Student feedback, 2011).


Educator Feedback

- Sandbox
- Focus group

“Give it a go, students love it and it's a great way to interact” (ACAP Educator, 2011).

Students were comforted by educators' voices.

Let students be comfortable and "podcast" speakers.

Time impact on students

Powerful impact on students

Just be natural and yourself.
Main conclusions
Main conclusions

• Podcasts have the potential to improve engagement for students studying at a distance
• Podcasts could have a positive effect on student motivation
• Audio can provide an effective addition to text-based communication and content
• Responses more positive with increased frequency of podcasts
• Technology doesn’t seem to be a barrier
Further research

• Analyse audio podcast uptake and use across the college
  – Further analysis of type and frequency
• More detailed feedback from educators and students about use
Questions and discussion