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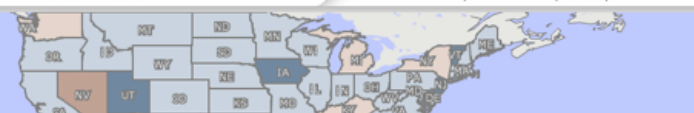
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INTERVIEW

Classroom Podcasting 101

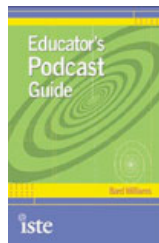
Bard Williams, Ed.D. was a middle school teacher and adjunct university science professor before managing education technology at the district level in suburban Atlanta. After a decade in public education and prior to opening his own education-technology consulting firm in California's Silicon Valley, Williams worked for Apple Computer, specializing in education marketing. He has written more than a dozen books.

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Published by ISTE, Williams' most recent book, **Educator's Podcast Guide**, is both a how-to manual for first-time podcasters, and a useful teacher resource. The book lists more than 125 student friendly (or student produced) podcasts on the core subjects, physical education, foreign language, and news.

We recently spoke to Williams via e-mail about the nuts and bolts of podcasting for the classroom.

What is a podcast?

A podcast is audio or video content distributed—either live or downloaded for later listening or viewing—via the Web for playback on a computer or mobile device like an Apple iPod or other mp3 player. Think of it as topic-focused radio (or video), on-demand created by everyone from broadcasting wizards to people just like you and me.

Why is podcasting good for the classroom, especially for kids who need extra learning time?

As "consumers" of podcasts, students can listen to or watch content at their own speed, when and where they need it. Content-focused podcasts offer an opportunity for review, enrichment, research, and often, just plain fun.

As a "podcast producer," students can work alone or in groups to produce content and learn about the technology surrounding podcasting.

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Podcasting offers a new “digital era” tool for capturing the minds and imaginations of teachers and learners alike.

Why are students more likely to want to use a podcast, or any other form of technology, rather than wanting to listen to a teacher live?

Podcasting, or any other technology for that matter, is no substitute for a focused one-to-one or one-to-many learning session with a motivated and qualified teacher.



Bard Williams

That said, podcasting does offer an opportunity for learners with diverse learning needs and different learning styles to learn new content or review other content and that might increase learner comfort. If the podcast is a video podcast, it offers the visual learner an option for review and reflection. The auditory learner can play and replay content indefinitely. The kinesthetic learner can play the time-shifted content outside of school when movement is free. Podcasts can be a boon to those working with students who have special learning or attention needs, too. So, podcasts are just another alternative to engage the “digital student.”

In your book you mention the reduced attention span of students—now clocked at about 15 minutes. How do podcasts address this issue?

Effective podcasts are often presented in bite-sized chunks, like chapters, and offer learners the opportunity to review at the tap of a key or click of a mouse. As podcasting matures, production values also improve, so we’re getting podcasts with catchy opening music, excellent sound quality, and “audio-friendly” speakers. This means that solid content can be presented in a way that’s attractive to and expected by “digital natives.”

Talk about the usefulness of integrating podcasts into the curriculum, particularly with concern for content standards.

Podcasting fits nicely as a tool for meeting a variety of standards, both state and national. Since the process of listening to, or planning and creating, a podcast involves communications, those standards dealing with reading, writing, listening, and speaking are very appropriately met with the right activities.

As students move from consumers of podcasts to producers, they’ll gain knowledge and experience that track well with many components of widely recognized technology standards (such as **ISTE NETS**), and the experience can offer some very useful workplace skills.

What are some of the clever or unusual ways educators are using podcasts, including for professional development?

Just about any way a teacher incorporates podcast resources into the classroom is clever. The technology is still relatively new and the tools to create and use podcasts are improving literally every day.

Before writing the *Educator’s Podcast Guide*, I spoke with many educators who used the technology to meet everyday needs, like sharing school news and archiving lessons. Others took things a few steps further using podcasts for research or building libraries of podcast resources to support a topic of interest.

Bard Williams' Favorite Podcasting Resources

- [EduPodder.Com](#)
- [Apple Education Products](#)
- [learninghand](#)
- [ed-cast](#)
- [How to Podcast](#)

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The “cutting edge” educators use the process of creating podcasts, coupled with research or a few sparks of inspiration, as a learning activity to enrich and enhance their curriculum. Some have produced their own podcasts to share content, their thoughts on education, or life in general.

What is a podcatcher?

A podcatcher is a software tool, like Apple iTunes, that allows you to search for, subscribe, and automatically “catch” (save) podcasts. One of the greatest benefits of “time shifted” content is that someone can record and upload a podcast at midnight and, if you’re subscribed to it, the file’s ready and waiting for you to listen to with your morning coffee.

What are some of your favorite podcasts?

That’s kind of like asking what my favorite radio station is. A good answer is “it depends.” If I’m in the mood to listen to high-tech news, I’ll listen to one of the many podcasts from **NPR**. As a former science teacher, I love to listen to the **NASAcasts** like “This Week at NASA.” **National Geographic** offers “National Geographic Minutes” (every Friday)—that’s a great 60-second report on the wonders of science, culture, and the environment. I’m (still) trying to learn Portuguese, so I’ve found a few podcasts that help with that. Finally, I love to launch iTunes and just click around in their podcast directory and listen to education podcasts covering just about every imaginable topic (category: education).

What advice can you offer for teachers who are technophobes?

I don’t really believe any educator is a true technophobe. I just think they haven’t had the right opportunity to learn, or haven’t yet seen a technology so compelling that’s worth the effort to find out more. Podcasts are a terrific way to put a toe into the technology stream.

If teachers have a Mac or PC and iTunes, they have all they need to find and listen to podcasts. And it’s (usually) free. Later, when their class takes up a collection and buys them an iPod, they just plug it into their computer and take the first steps to “going mobile” with the content. More often than not, those first steps won’t be their last and they’ll be “tech-evangelists” before you know it.

—Elizabeth Rich

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