

Empowering student producers: co-creating a learning and teaching podcast

Dr Jenny Scoles¹, Eric Berger², Dr Joe Arton³, Joséphine Foucher⁴

¹Academic Developer, The University of Edinburgh

²Masters student, The University of Austin

³Senior Consultant, The University of Virginia

⁴PhD Student, The University of Edinburgh

Abstract

While extensive research has explored podcasts as teaching tools or assessment methods, limited research exists on the value of podcast production as a means of co-creation and self-discovery in learning and teaching for students. By scripting, interviewing, recording, mixing, and editing a podcast episode that investigates issues in learning and teaching, such as decolonising the curriculum, students can learn how to create new meaning about what and how they learn. The focus of this study is the *Teaching Matters* podcast, an audio resource associated with The University of Edinburgh's learning and teaching blog. Both the blog and podcast provide a platform for staff and students to share their teaching practice and engage with current issues in higher education. The editorial team consisted of two paid student interns (Joséphine and Eric) and the two paid staff editors (Joe and Jenny). For the purpose of this project, they committed to engage in a collaborative autoethnography to reflect on the co-creative organising principle of this podcast project. This reflective method surfaced a shift from staff-student co-creation to Students as Producers, and a move from valuing the learning practice (the editing and production) over the material output (the podcast episode and its subsequent downloads).

Keywords: Podcast, co-creation, Student as Producer, autoethnography, teaching

Summary

This project examines the experiences of a podcast editorial team, which was based on a co-creative organising principle whereby staff and students worked together to produce a pedagogical artefact. While many studies explore podcasting in Higher Education as a teaching tool or assessment method (e.g., Chester, 2011; Hall & Jones, 2023; Hew, 2009; Ng'ambi & Lombe, 2012; and Palenque, 2016), this paper focuses on the potential for podcast production as a reflective learning experience, along with its value for enhancing student experience. For this project, the podcast created was part of the [Teaching Matters](#) blog, a platform to showcase discussions around current learning and teaching in higher education issues hosted by the

academic development department at The University of Edinburgh. The editorial team was purposefully comprised of two paid staff members and two paid student interns. The students' emergent journey as co-creators of the podcast slowly but surely progressed to a role of Student as Producer (Neary and Winn, 2009), in which they took full responsibility for producing and promoting the podcast episodes. Our interest as an editorial team in reflecting on this shift led us to undertake a collaborative autoethnographic approach (Ellis, 2011; Chang et al, 2012) to explore the learning journeys that were emerging in the production process. These included student interns' growing sense of belonging, increased confidence in their skills, and the lessening of perceived student-staff power dynamics.

Project Background

Despite the popularity of the blogging element of Teaching Matters, Joe and Jenny felt that blogging remained a monologic platform and wanted to add another layer of dialogue and engagement to its offerings. With free audio software and digital tools available, including editing software (Audacity) and a podcast-hosting platform (Anchor FM), creating a podcast presented as a low-cost operation. One of the podcast's goals was to share student voices on learning and teaching discussions. However, we quickly realised the value of students' expertise on the production side of creating podcasts, and, from day one, students have been the experts in realising this endeavour for Teaching Matters.

With very little knowledge on how podcasts worked, Jenny met with a university student who ran a successful podcast, who kindly shared their knowledge on branding, software and their top tips on how to publish and promote an episode. Jenny and Joe then set about creating and promoting a Teaching Matters podcast that hosted audio-recorded discussions between both staff and students around their experiences of navigating current issues in learning and teaching in Higher Education. We invited staff and students across the university to be part of these episodes, to act as hosts, guests, topic researchers, and editing consultants, depending on the topic, which was often tied-in to the blog themes running parallel on Teaching Matters.

As well as students adopting these roles as hosts or guests, we wanted to add another element of student co-creation to this project. In 2021, our department funded two internships for the Teaching Matters editorial team: one postgraduate role (Joséphine) and one undergraduate role (Eric), who acted as lead producers and were consistent contributors to multiple podcast series. Joe and Jenny could thus benefit from their expertise in audio and digital skills, while providing them with an authentic learning and teaching experience.

As our relationship as an editorial team progressed, we realised the learning potential for us all resided in the process of creating these podcast episodes, rather than in the pedagogical artefact itself (e.g., how many downloads the podcast episode

accumulated). The team decided to take a collaborative, autoethnographic approach to investigate and analyse the learning moments emerging in this process.

Discussion

In its simplest form, co-creation in the context of podcasting involves collaboration between different individuals or groups to produce a podcast. In our study, co-creation was a purposeful organising principle to bring together staff and students to work in a meaningful and trusting process to produce a pedagogical artefact (Cook-Sather, Bovill and Felten, 2014). This collaboration was evident on multiple levels, including designing and conducting interviews with academic staff members and fellow students, the collaborative scriptwriting, production, mixing and sound design decisions of the podcast episodes, and the co-curation of social media resources for episode release.

The combination of constructivist learning theory and social learning theory provides a useful theoretical framework to understand this co-creation process (e.g., Freeman et al., 2014; Jhangiani et al., 2019). Constructivist learning theory suggests that students learn best when they can construct their own understanding of a topic, and social learning theory emphasises the importance of social interaction and collaboration in the learning process. By interviewing academic staff members and fellow students, Joséphine and Eric had the opportunity to ask questions about the learning and teaching practices under question, such as [‘the hidden curriculum’](#), as well as deepening their own understanding of the pedagogical issue. This process itself of preparing questions, active listening, and asking follow-up questions to elicit more detailed responses allowed Joséphine and Eric to synthesise information, and learn in a more active, generative, and intentional way, with others. At the editing stage, the students assumed an analytical position. They had to consider the different components of the ‘story’, such as the setting, the characters, the conflict, and the resolution, and then reassemble the narrative into a time-delineated artefact. This process allowed a co-produced story to unfold in new ways, which would be different than if created solely by a staff member.

We often reflected anecdotally on the learning moments we were experiencing working together as a student-staff team. We wanted to know how the experience was changing the student interns’ relationship towards learning and teaching using a more structured and analytical approach. Through recorded discussions, and interviewing each other, we applied a collaborative autoethnographic approach to elicit learning moments. For example, we found that Eric and Joséphine felt a sense of empowerment and perceived expertise in their roles. Eric shared that he thought his skillset was valued by both staff contributors and team-members, something he had not experienced during his degree prior to working for Teaching Matters. He also spoke about how making the podcast coherent and accessible for a listener with little experience on an episode’s subject matter was an enjoyable challenge that motivated him to form deeper understanding of the content. They also enjoyed a

more “horizontal” working relationship with staff members. Joséphine reflected that she found working directly with staff to be a humanising experience, and lessened feelings of imposter syndrome. She discussed enjoying a “role reversal”, where staff would trust a student to create a comfortable environment for a discussion and accurately present their contributions to each episode.

Outcomes and Impact

Our findings have important implications for the use of podcasting in higher education. Firstly, students’ involvement in our podcast production is extra-curricular; the learning experience is not part of an assessment, but is seen as an intentional (paid), personalised, and creative opportunity for the students to engage with issues of learning and teaching. Supporting a Student as Producer approach enabled us to transform a traditional digital audio production from a didactic, unidirectional teaching method into a reflective learning practice. As producers, the students learned to, first, guide the tone and direction of the conversation being recorded, and then to translate it, through the editing process, to fit within the epistemological parameters of Teaching Matters as an educational resource. In doing so, they became both educators and storytellers.

The experience also allowed for a deeper relationship between staff and students, breaking down traditional power imbalances where staff were the ‘experts’ in knowledge production. Through the co-curation of social media resources for episode release, students were also able to engage with the broader community of academic development practitioners and disciplinary specialists, and to share their work with a wider audience. This process allowed for feedback from, and engagement with, an international academic community, which further deepened the students’ understanding of the Teaching Matters’ content within the current Higher Education zeitgeist.

As Joe and Jenny reflected, in such a co-creative organising principle, they often positioned themselves as the learners, challenging who was the expert in the relationship. For example, it was evident that Eric’s role as a student producer not only allowed him to take on the role of an expert in the production process but also gave him the opportunity to research and critically interrogate the content being discussed. Through his work in editing and producing [a five-episode series about Wikimedia](#) at The University of Edinburgh, he became a subject matter expert (SME) in his own right, providing valuable insights and perspectives to his Teaching Matters peers, Jenny and Joe. When students like Eric took on the role of SME, the traditional power imbalances between staff and student were challenged and this had a positive impact on the scope of the Teaching Matters podcast. It became a model for a more collaborative, co-created and inclusive learning community, where students were actively engaged in the learning process, and were empowered to critically reflect on their own learning.

Conclusion

This study examined the experiences of a student-staff editorial team who produced a learning and teaching podcast in a formal academic development environment. Our collaborative autoethnographic approach allowed us to unpack the multiple layers of learning and development that occurred for us an editorial team, which resulted in the production of a pedagogical artefact - the podcast. Through this analytical process, we were able to identify the shift of the students' role as one from co-creation (working closely with Jenny and Joe at the beginning to create the podcast) to that of a more autonomous Student as Producer', where they were responsible for the entire creative process. Their positionalities as students were seminal in making Teaching Matters a space for reflecting - in action - on the process of knowledge production and creation.

This paid student internship is now a well-established tradition within Teaching Matters to ensure authentic student-staff co-creation. It is important that this is a *paid* opportunity for students, highlighting the need to reimburse students for their time in learning and teaching production, and creating an inclusive and accessible environment and removing the barriers to student-staff partnership work to produce knowledge production (Symonds, 2021). This hopefully sends a strong message across the other University departments that 'best' practice should consider how staff and students can work together to produce learning and teaching resources for the betterment of the pedagogical output.

In conclusion, as a community of teachers, learners, and higher education professionals, we need to recognise the value of co-creation and to provide opportunities for students to engage with learning materials in more collaborative, sense-making, and creative ways, paving the way for them to become Students as Producers.

References

- Chang, H., Ngunjiri, F. and Hernandez, K-A C. (2012) *Collaborative autoethnography*. London and New York, Routledge.
- Chester, A., Buntine, A., Hammond, K., & Atkinson, L. (2011) Podcasting in Education: Student Attitudes, Behavior, and Self-Efficacy. *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 14(2), pp. 236-247.
- Cook-Sather, A., Bovill, C. and Felten, P. (2014) *Engaging Students as Partners in Learning and Teaching: A guide for Faculty*. San Francisco, CA. Jossey-Bass.
- Ellis, C., Adams, T.E. and Bochner, A.P. (2011) 'Autoethnography: an overview'. *Historical social research/Historische sozialforschung*, 36, pp. 273-290.

Freeman, S. et al. (2014) 'Active learning increases student performance in science, engineering, and mathematics', *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences of the United States of America*, 111(23), pp. 8410-8415.

Hall, N., M & Jones, J.M. (2023) 'Student-Produced Podcasts as a Teaching and Learning Tool', *American Journal of Distance Education*, 37(1), pp. 53-65.

Hew, K. (2009) 'Use of audio podcast in K-12 and higher education: a review of research topics and methodologies', *Educational Technology Research and Development*, 57(3), pp. 333–357.

Jhangiani, R., Troisi, J., Fleck, B. and Hussein, A. (2019) 'Undergraduate students as co-creators of open educational resources: The role of faculty and librarians', *The International Review of Research in Open and Distributed Learning*, 20(2), pp. 61-80.

Neary, M. and Winn, J. (2009) 'The student as producer: reinventing the student experience in higher education'. In L. Bell, M. Neary, and H. Stevenson (eds) *The future of higher education: policy, pedagogy and the student experience*. London, Continuum, pp. 192-210.

Ng'ambi, D., & Lombe, A. (2012). 'Using Podcasting to Facilitate Student Learning: A Constructivist Perspective', *Journal of Educational Technology & Society*, 15(4), pp. 181-192.

Palenque, S. M. (2016). The Power of Podcasting: Perspectives on Pedagogy. *Journal of Instructional Research*, 5, pp. 4-7.

Symonds, E. (2021) 'Reframing power relationships between undergraduates and academics in the current university climate', *British Journal of Sociology of Education*, 42 (1), pp. 127-142.