

# PODCAST YOURSELF!

by **Andrzej Zychla**

University of Zielona Góra,

Zielona Góra, Poland

[zychla@poczta.onet.pl](mailto:zychla@poczta.onet.pl)

## INTRODUCTION

The word 'podcast', a blend of the Apple's gadget's name 'the iPod' and the verb 'to broadcast', was declared by Webster's Dictionary 'The Top New Word of 2006' (<http://www.universetoday.com/html/misc/podcast.html>). The arrival of iPod and its followers started a totally new chapter in the Internet history – the Podcasting Era.

Podcasts, according to Wikipedia, are “digital media files (...) for playback on portable media players and personal computers” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting>) and can now be located and downloaded automatically by means of reading 'feed formats' such as RSS or ATOM (the required software is usually included on discs bundled with portable media players or integrated into Web Browsers such as Opera, <http://www.opera.com/download/>). Most podcasts are audio or video files (usually in MP3 or AVI/MP4 formats) but text files are also relatively frequent as well as images and other file types.

## PODCASTING VS TRADITIONAL PROJECT WORK – PROBLEMS AND SOLUTIONS

Though podcasting was initially developed to allow people share their self-made “radio shows”, its potential was quickly recognised by many and the new technology harnessed to perform a variety of tasks. Educators were one of the first to recognize the usefulness of the new medium – to quote Wikipedia again: “Podcasting is becoming increasingly popular in education. (...) It can be a tool for teachers or administrators to communicate curriculum, assignments and other information with parents and the community. (...) Podcasting can be a publishing tool for student oral presentations. Video podcasts can be used in all these ways as well” (<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Podcasting>).

There are a number of general problems in LT that podcasting may help to alleviate:

- **Problem 1:** insufficient number of classes and language exposure – **Solution:** students spend additional hours working actively preparing their podcasts;
- **Problem 2:** students' (over)dependence on teachers – **Solution:** creating their own podcasts and active search for needed information and new topics make students more independent and, consequently, more involved in the learning process as well as interested in their own progress;
- **Problem 3:** differences in school facilities between big, town schools and smaller village

schools - **Solution:** these problems can be overcome as all that is needed to create and share podcasts is basic recording equipment (commonly found in portable audio devices or even mobile phones), a computer (or computers) with Internet access; all of which have become relatively widespread recently, regardless location.

Podcasts may be considered a new incarnation of traditional projects and can be used as a means to 'revive' project work. Some teachers and students may not entirely approve of traditional project work for a number of reasons:

- if project is done in groups or pairs, it is common for one person to do most (if not all of it); there are usually one or two 'responsible' people who carry most of the burden and some lazy ones (the so called: 'silent partners') who just could not care less;
- the outcomes of traditional projects are relatively little publicised in contrast with the time and effort invested (they are usually presented on classroom notice boards, school papers or at school exhibitions, if such are organized);
- projects do not last long enough, which is really disappointing as the effort invested is considerable;
- they require time and effort which can have been devoted to some more efficient tasks.

Podcasting gives students a chance to present things to a wider (if not unlimited) audience and for a longer time (if not for eternity). Students' work can then be copied and further distributed by and to those interested. The access to it is easier and faster – if it has been uploaded to the Internet, it can then be used at any time of the day (or night).

## **SAMPLE PODCAST SITES**

We are now going to examine some of the existing podcast sites and then suggest a few ideas to use with student-made podcasts.

### **I. Podcast Net ([www.podcast.net](http://www.podcast.net))**



SEARCH:

Browse Tags: [A](#) [B](#) [C](#) [D](#) [E](#) [F](#) [G](#) [H](#) [I](#) [J](#) [K](#) [L](#) [M](#) [N](#) [O](#) [P](#) [Q](#) [R](#) [S](#) [T](#) [U](#) [V](#) [W](#) [X](#) [Y](#) [Z](#) [1](#) [2](#) [3](#) [4](#) [5](#) [6](#) [7](#) [8](#) [9](#) [0](#) - [TOP](#)

- |   |   |
|---|---|
| <b>Entertainment</b> (9680)<br>Music, Celebrities, Comedy...              | <b>Business &amp; Money</b> (1550)<br>Career, Investment, Marketing...      |
| <b>Arts</b> (2832)<br>Poetry, Storytelling...                             | <b>Computers &amp; Internet</b> (2536)<br>Hardware, Software, Podcasting... |
| <b>Science &amp; Nature</b> (1266)<br>Technology, Animals, Environment... | <b>Home &amp; Lifestyle</b> (1707)<br>Relationships, Health, Pets...        |

- ### Top 10 Locations
- USA
  - United States
  - UK
  - New York City
  - Los Angeles, CA
  - New York
  - Germany
  - New York, NY
  - London
  - San Diego, CA

**Podcast net** – probably the largest collection of categorised podcast links, some of the material found here may quite easily appeal to grades 4-6 of primary school. It is only a matter of what interests our students and how well they can search for and understand information. The teacher may need to be involved to monitor what students do and perhaps start an electronic newsletter or discussion list through which they can notify each other of interesting material. This service offers the possibility of adding self-made podcasts to the catalogue.

## II. CNN podcasting section (<http://www.cnn.com/services/podcasting>)

**III. ELTpodcast** (<http://www.eltpodcast.com>) This webpage offers a collection of dialogues and other materials in basic English:



## ELT Podcast

ELT stands for English Language Teaching. **ELT Podcast** is the home of several podcasts for learners and teachers of English as a second or foreign language.

### ELT Podcast - Basic Conversations for EFL and ESL

Theme-based conversations and language practice for students of English, such as EFL, ESL and ESOL. The dialogs have two or more speakers. Read transcripts and listen to mp3 files.  
 See all episodes of this podcast.  
 Robert Chartrand and Bill Pellowe

Some schools want to make group of podcast pals exchange materials. Here is an example of one appeal for podcasting penfriends (primary school):

#### IV. Pencaitland Primary Blog (<http://edubuzz.org/blogs/pencaitland>)

\*Healthy \*Active\* Happy\*

- Home
- Headteacher
- Web sites
- Parents
- Cluster map
- Event Calendar

### Podcast Pals



Hi ! We are the podcast pals from primary 6 and we have been making podcasts for Red Nose Day. We have been interviewing 6 people from each class in the school. The topic to talk about is what makes you happy for Comic Relief. If you would like to tell us what makes you happy send a comment to the blog and we will be happy to read them.

### Recent Posts

- [Exploring Our Senses](#)
- [Learning about using a mouse](#)
- [End of summer term](#)
- [End of term service](#)
- [P7 show based on Othello](#)
- [Primary 1 new parents induction meeting](#)

## PROCEDURES - PODCASTS CREATED IN CLASS

To record audio material, basic equipment might be used (portable MP3 recorders, mobile phones, etc.), though the quality is significantly better when computers and appropriate software are used. Audacity (<http://audacity.sourceforge.net>), for example, is freeware that can be used to edit audio in a relatively sophisticated way. The program is constantly improved and new versions made available regularly. It is intuitive, user friendly and fun to use.

Podcasts can be recorded on-line by means of services such as ODEO. Odeo

[\(http://www.odeo.com/\)](http://www.odeo.com/) is also a collection of millions of free MP3 files and links to thousands of audio channels. Once a podcast has been made and reviewed by the teacher and other students, it may be uploaded to one of the many podcasting collections available on the Internet and appropriately tagged so that other people can easily find it and use it.

## **OPPORTUNITIES FOR THE LANGUAGE CLASSROOM**

Podcasts can be created by both teachers and students. Let us have a look at a few examples.

**Idea 1** – The teacher may ask someone to record parts of the class e.g. grammatical explanations, a story/joke that s/he is going to tell a simulation/roleplay/speech that students prepared in class and later make it available on the class/school webpage or some external service such as YouTube (<http://www.youtube.com>). Students may benefit from the teacher's explanations more if they are given a chance to watch and re-watch it and they may be more eager to participate in class activities if they know that their peers (or parents) can then see it on-line. **Technical note:** Cheap digital cameras can be used to record the material and files can be watched and re-watched and analysed both in class and at home. A series of interesting lesson sequences, including a maths teacher, exists recorded in one of the Polish Comprehensive Schools (X LO) and published on YouTube ([http://www.youtube.com/results?search\\_query=XLO](http://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=XLO)). A mobile phone was used to make the recordings.

**Idea 2** – The teacher might keep students informed about long-term homework assignments and revisions by posting feeds on the classroom webpage. If the announcements are in simple English, students get additional exposure to the language and meaningful practice. Students might be encouraged to make their own announcements (preferably in English) to share with other students.

**Idea 3** – Students might record mini-presentations (speeches) and share them with other students (those can be in audio or video format). Such presentations may include descriptions of processes, people, buildings, stories, funny TV commercials, jokes, etc. Suggested topics:

- An interesting person.
- My favourite singer/band.
- My hobbies/interests.
- How I spend my free time.
- My favourite room.
- My every day.

The presentations might last between 1 and 5 minutes and some students may want to embellish them with extra sound or materials. The most interesting speeches might be made available through the class or school webpage to a wider audience.

**Idea 4** – In-class simulations or role plays can be recorded to give students time to reflect on the

language they used (its good aspects as well as the mistakes they made). School plays or sketches might also be made available so that students have a feeling of achievement and something to refresh their school memories in the future.

**Idea 5** - Podcasts may also include series of self-made mini-radio-drama episodes, comic strips, parts of a story, songs or poems. Such open-endedness and freedom might give some opportunity to open up and talk about their interests in an amusing way.

Students might be asked to keep a journal of their extra activity on the Internet in which they are required to add at least one new entry every week. The contents of the material they read or listen to should be left to them (they are responsible for the subject matter). To make work more smooth, 5-10 minutes a week in class should be devoted to exchanging new information students have added to their journal (pairwork/groupwork). Alternatively, the journals can be kept electronically and information exchanged over the Internet (via email or discussion lists). Such journals should include comments on what their colleagues' podcasts as well.

A page from such a journal might look somewhat like this (what is to be recorded can be first negotiated with the group):

<b>Date:</b>	<b>Title/Link:</b>	<b>Brief description (2-3 sentences)</b>	<b>New vocabulary (5 words/phrases in context)</b>	<b>Other comments:</b>

## **CONCLUSION**

Podcasting is a very promising, new tool for rehearsal of old material as well as for additional personal practice. It is also something that can help us to see project work in a totally new light. It would be a waste of opportunity not to make use of it in class and outside as often as possible to give students' creativity a boost and add an extra dimension to both language teaching and learning.

## **FURTHER READING**

Fried-Booth, D. (2002). *Project Work (New Edition)*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.  
 Hutchinson, T. (1991). *Introduction to Project Work*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.