POINT/COUNTERPOINT

Should Podcasts Replace Lectures?

Yes

As a teacher, I want just one thing year in and year out—more time. More time in the classroom to have conversations, to cover interesting content, and to help students understand the course material. For years I had been searching for a method to free up time so that, as a group, we could gain deeper comprehension. But the structure of my classes—providing new content through lectures and assigning homework—was keeping me so busy that we could not get to the important questions; there was always more content to cover. I needed a way to quickly convey the information to my students so I could find more time for those important questions. It turns out that the answer was right there in front of me—poking out from my students' shirt pockets: the ubiquitous iPod.

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Podcasting is the perfect tool for sharing information. I can prepare material and deliver it to students outside

No

Though critics often argue that lectures are not the most contemporary way to address the needs of all learners, it is not yet time for teachers to do away with lectures altogether. When used judiciously, lectures still serve as effective ways to not only engage learners, but also to develop positive relationships with students by tapping into their various emotional and cognitive intelligences; attending to unanticipated student concerns in a timely manner; seasoning lectures with timely questions to keep students active and attentive; and creating positive, academic, democratic, and supportive group environments where students listen to us as well as one another.

Effective lectures possess several positive characteristics that many podcasts do not. They are live, three-dimensional, synchronous events; most podcasts are not. Lectures are often spontaneous, adaptable, nonlinear, and unpredictable; most podcasts are not. Lectures are often interactive; most podcasts are not. And lectures are communal by nature; most

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of scheduled learning time. By covering basic course content in a podcast, I now use class time for group discussion, problem solving, and question-and-answer sessions.

Course time is available now to look into current events like global warming and the chemistry behind nuclear energy, "clean" coal, and other alternative sources of energy. We can talk about the people behind the science, including Nobel prize winners and scientists involved in current research. Instead of school being a place where students watch adults work, it becomes a lab where we all work together.

Students' time at home can be spent learning and reviewing the podcasted material. The podcasts allow students the freedom to go over the information at their own pace. And if a student gets stuck, the podcasts can illustrate how to work out sample problems.

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Our class time is dedicated to the problem-solving approach. Modeling problem solving is as important as the practice of problem solving because the teacher becomes a guide or a facilitator of learning and not a constant presenter of information. Students work collaboratively on processing course content, receiving guided help, and solidifying understanding with the teacher and peers during the scheduled learning time.

Replacing lectures with podcasts brings contemporary technology into the curriculum. We can show students that technology is not about gadgets but about tools that help us learn and understand. Students experience real-world uses for technology.

There is possibly no better way to convey the process of whole-life learning than when teachers show they are also learning through their teaching. The production of course content can be a collaborative effort between teachers and students. As we encourage our students to continue learning outside of school, podcasting allows course content to be accessed anytime, anywhere.

Unlike a traditional lecture-based format, podcasting moves learning from school to learning anywhere. How valuable is that for the students to see?

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podcasts are not. By default, we lecture for substantial, if not uniform, periods of valuable classroom time. We inform, share, guide, direct, and lead. When our lectures are modeled correctly, our students often become effective lecturers too.

Because lectures are live, synchronous events, they require students to be present for, not absent from, class. Thus, they necessitate that students be routinely responsible. Podcasts are not yet holographic, but lecturers are sentient, three-dimensional human beings who move dynamically through time and space, appealing to students' innate bodily kinesthetic, linguistic, interpersonal, and visuospatial intelligences and varied learning styles. During lectures, effective teachers purposefully move up and down aisles through space and time, making eye contact, often tapping on students' desks to keep learners focused and attentive. Podcasts do not.

Effective lectures are live, immediate, in-your-face events that are not meant to be carried out primarily over long distances in asynchronous fashion.

Despite the popular notion that daily classroom lectures are carefully scripted events, effective lectures typically possess the qualities of spontaneity, adaptability, and nonlinearity. Podcasts do not. As we all well recognize, serendipity and schooling go hand in hand. Adolescents often ask questions that are both divergent and unanticipated. Effective lecturers welcome appropriate student queries in order to rephrase or clarify a point; are willing to shift to new lines of reasoning based on students' spontaneous insights; message and improve each successive daily lecture based on discoveries they make via the corrective feedback they receive naturally from their students each period; and "reshuffle" cogent points they wish to make to address the needs of their random learners in an on-the-spot, just-in-time fashion, adapting and tailoring lectures for each unique class, which possesses collective as well as individual abilities, maturities, and personalities. Podcasts do not.

Effective lectures are live, immediate, in-your-face events, that are not meant to be carried out primarily over long distances in asynchronous fashion. The two-dimensional asynchronous podcast, although a viable alternative to the lecture, especially as it applies to distance learning, has its rightful place in schooling, but it does not yet altogether replace the effective, live synchronous lecture. It should therefore not be eliminated.

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