

Podcasting for Student Agency

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Abstract

This article explores the potential of podcasting as a useful education technology for promoting agency in preservice teacher education programs. We proposed a mixed-methods study to investigate the impact of co-creating podcasts as a holistic pedagogical practice. Reporting on the first phase of this research, podcasting appears to helpfully assess student learning. Additionally, it is a powerful technology that can mobilize knowledge created by preservice teachers beyond the classroom. Next stages in the research will incorporate in-service teachers to provide generative feedback, thereby creating a Community of Inquiry between podcasters and listeners.

Keywords: podcast, preservice teacher, agency, community of inquiry



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Introduction

In teacher education programs across Canada, preservice teachers are invited into a meaningful process of scholarly and professional learning. Yet, despite the effort to provide holistic course design and practicum connections, the voices of preservice teachers are often hidden and not shared beyond the bounds of the university (Gorlewski et al., 2021). Moreover, evidence of learning gathered in a postsecondary context is limited to essays and selected response exams. What if preservice teachers had appropriate affordances for their pedagogical agency (Lachuk et al., 2020)? In response, we asked if podcasting could be a useful education technology to help preservice teachers become active participants and contributors in teacher education programs, and engage in the wider educational conversation.

The Challenge of Agency

Agency is important for learning, emphasizing the dialogical relationship between learner and context. Agency posits that preservice teachers are actors that can mediate or transform their relationship with their own learning (Emirbayer & Miche, 1998). Yet, there are often educational practices that act as barriers, “dehumanizing” pedagogical actions (Pirbhai-Illich et al., 2017, p. 9) that remove agency from students. One way forward is pedagogical inquiry that problematizes traditional notions of education as unhelpful modes of knowledge transmission and suggests a holistic change to inquiry-based engagement (Dewey, 1938). This constructivist framework can actively engage teachers and learners through processes of questioning and reflection, leading to significant learning gains when contrasted with traditional learning models (Furtak et al., 2012).

For educators, personal agency and pedagogical inquiry can continually be developed through the relationships found in (asynchronous) professional learning networks (PLN; Schnellert & Butler, 2020). Drawing on the collective wisdom of networks for learning, educators simultaneously contribute and are impacted by the wider educative community in their own development (Brown & Poortman, 2018; Doh, 2018). While our preservice teachers experience the positive effect of healthy teacher-student relationships on their student achievement, they typically access the wider educative community only as passive participants and observers.

Podcasting in Educational Contexts

We assert that podcasting can be a technological and pedagogical medium to help enact agency and give preservice teachers a voice. Podcasts are a unique digital medium that have affordances for interconnectivity between podcaster (knowledge creator) and listener. A Community of Inquiry (CoI; Garrison, 2017) is formed around the podcast’s constructive dialogue. Collective conversations can be mutually beneficial for continued professional learning for preservice and in-service teachers. Through the last decade, universities have increasingly used podcasts for scholarly teaching and communication. Additionally, there has been continued research and practice into podcast design and usage in higher (Hew, 2009) and K–12 education (Drew, 2017; Vasquez, 2015). In higher education, there are teaching, learning, and administrative strategies for e-learning that encompass a range of technological considerations that include podcasting technologies (Drew, 2017). An analysis of early podcast research from 2005–2009 asserts that the initial conception and practice of podcasting resulted in positive impacts for teaching and learning (Heilesen, 2010). Another study assessing the use of

podcasts for distance education found that they complemented traditional course resources while allowing students to showcase a diversity of skills and learning methods (Fernandez et al., 2009). Podcasts have also been shown to be more effective than written responses when used for evaluation and assessment purposes (Savin-Baden, 2010).

An essential category of podcast research explores opportunities of student-created podcasts (Bolden & Nahachewsky, 2015; Phillips, 2017). A case study of a postgraduate student cohort discovered benefits of podcasting, including acquisition of technical skills, new insights into problem-solving, and enhanced teamwork (Powell & Robson, 2014). Another study (Green et al., 2019) investigated preservice teachers using podcasting and found it helped instill deeper understanding of instructional strategies. Another productive category of podcast research is organized around collaborative learning and inquiry-based learning possibilities. Drew (2017) pointed to the wider podcasting community outside educational institutions that are categorized as educational podcasts. Podcasts such as [Grammar Girl](https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl/) (https://www.quickanddirtytips.com/grammar-girl/) have a wide audience that form an online community centered around the particular podcast. Introducing a collaborative inquiry approach using podcasting for a community research project resulted in community building and personal fulfillment for the students involved in the project (Bruce & Lin, 2009). Felder and Arleth (2016) also highlighted the collaborative learning and team-based learning possibilities of podcasting for student learning and engagement. Although all of these approaches have been shown to be useful in higher education, there is a dearth of research investigating the impact of podcasting on teacher education programs (Kennedy et al., 2014), especially in Canada.

Research Methodology

To address these concerns for agency, connection, assessment, and feedback, we have deployed a university podcast, [The Inspired Educator](https://yulinglee.com/?page_id=728) (https://yulinglee.com/?page_id=728), for empowering preservice teacher voices. Our research adopted a mixed methods approach (Cohen et al., 2018) to discern the way actors in a podcasting network could influence each other. Specifically, we were asking how podcasts and preservice teachers could be active participants in our teacher education program. Additionally, we asked whether preservice teachers could engage the wider educational CoI through podcasting.

The educational podcasts are co-created by preservice teachers and curated by education professors. Each episode presents a discussion about transformative student learning. Currently, we have published four episodes where preservice teachers reflect on their learning, especially as it relates to assessment. K–12 in-service teachers were invited to participate in our research. Involvement included listening to a minimum of one podcast episode (30 to 45 minutes) and completing an anonymous reflective online survey (15 minutes). Their participation in this study recognized the value of learning from emerging teachers, provided discerning feedback about what preservice teachers learn in teacher education, and explained how listening to student voices impacts their own professional learning. Responses were shared anonymously with the preservice teachers who were also featured in the episodes, and they reflected on their own agency and their contributions.

Results

Through this co-creation process, we note that podcasting is an academically effective medium for holistically assessing student learning. The digital platform serves as a public medium for

personal and communal reflection. The preservice teachers identified their educational development, including areas for improvement. Additionally, the shared dialogue in several podcast episodes demonstrated a communal reflexivity whereby preservice teachers were able to collaborate and offer feedback for one another. Much like Ketonen and Nieminen (2023), we noted that the podcasts were authentic, complicated conversations, seeking dialogical encounters with one another. The audio captured nuances that would be otherwise missing in typical evaluations such as tests and papers. In this way, student agency was affirmed in the conversation as recorded, demonstrating relational and holistic ways of assessing student learning.

A second important idea is that podcasting is an educational technology that has easily mobilized knowledge created by the preservice teachers. At the time of this writing, there have been over 300 downloads of the four episodes featuring the preservice teachers. Through the experience of recording and publishing the podcasts, these preservice teachers are also beginning to learn how to effectively communicate with the wider educational Col. Similar to the ways they have been learning to teach effectively in our teacher education program, the preservice teachers are also learning, through podcasting, how to take their learning and create engaging and interactive content with a wider audience. This demonstrates that their voices are an important part of the educational conversation which in-service teachers should consider listening to and learning from.

Continued Research

The next stage of this research explores how these podcasts translate preservice teachers' interconnection to the wider network of educative Col. Currently, we have anecdotal evidence that the preservice teacher podcasts serve as a valuable resource that is shared through various educational PLNs, especially among in-service teachers.

Several in-service teachers have remarked that they have gained a deeper understanding of the experiences and perspectives of preservice teachers by listening to these podcasts. They have gained inspiration for their own teaching practices, and have learned new ideas and strategies for their own teaching practice.

Our intention is that the next phase of our research is to recruit in-service teachers and provide feedback to preservice teachers on the topics covered in the podcasts, offering suggestions for improvement and sharing their own experiences and insights. This valuable step will help preservice teachers grow their PLNs and connect with in-service teachers even before they become certified. This is a mutually generative relationship whereby preservice and in-service teachers can collaborate and help each other grow professionally through the podcasting medium.

Authors' Contributions

Yu-Ling Lee is principal investigator and conceptualized this research. Nina Lui is co-principal investigator and initiated the inquiry into preservice teacher reflection. We both contributed to the technical recording and publishing of the podcasts. We both also contributed to the writing of this manuscript.

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Ethics Statement

The authors received approval from Trinity Western University Human Research Ethics Board for research.

Conflict of Interest

The authors do not declare any conflict of interest.

Data Availability Statement

Student podcasts are available at https://yulinglee.com/?page_id=728.

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