

“Podcasting Degree Zero:” The construction and reception of a custom-built media and cultural studies podcast for first-year students

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What’s your research question?	Can the development of a discipline-specific podcast series effectively support student learning?
Main point of your idea...	We are three teaching and research academics who have produced a podcast series that explores key theories and ideas within the disciplines of Media and Cultural Studies. Given the increasing popularity of podcasting (in terms of both production and consumption), we are investigating whether this popularity can be harnessed to support the learning experience of first-year students in Media and Cultural Studies units.
Importance of your idea...	This research is significant as it offers practice-led analysis of whether podcasting functions as useful supplementary material for students learning complex theories in a university setting.
What is the context?	We each teach in first-year units that introduce students to complex theories from Media and Cultural Studies. We have each also been asked by students to recommend podcasts that explore these ideas; this suggests that students see podcasts as an important medium for supplementing their understanding outside the classroom. The informal tone of many podcasts perhaps suggests that students believe they will benefit from a more casual approach to complex theories, as well as the more traditional modes of discussion occurring within the classroom setting.
Does it require a methodology? If yes, what is it?	We have recorded and published several podcasts on key ideas within Media and Cultural Studies to undertake a practice-led research project. We intend to undertake a qualitative exploratory case study, specifically through holding a focus group with first-year students who have listened to one or two episodes of the podcast. We will recruit students that we have previously taught, and will attempt to recruit from Edith Cowan University, the University of Western Australia and Curtin University. We will also produce written questionnaires for the students to complete.
What (if any) are the meta issues?	<p>There are several issues:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - How representative of the whole learning group is the focus group? The results may be skewed in favour of highly-engaged student behaviour, and so not give a clear indication of how podcasting may “catch” the students who fall through the cracks of traditional teaching styles. - Podcasting also presumably has to differ in form/content than a traditional lecture, as most universities already record their lectures – we have constructed our series as a conversation between knowledgeable friends, which lends an informality and casual tone to the dissemination of knowledge. This may be difficult for units with one teaching staff member, or units with weaker relationships between staff, to replicate. - Discoverability: we are looking to host the podcast external to the university, and so how can we make it accessible to both students and the public?

<p>What are the implications for SoTL?</p>	<p>It is a supplementary form of engagement that taps into practices that students are already undertaking outside of the classroom. If discipline-specific podcasts are able to mimic/reflect the casual tone of the podcasts the students are listening to for enjoyment, then we may be able to encourage a greater level of understanding of complex theories, and therefore enhance student retention within the classroom.</p> <p>Students who struggle in a traditional university environment may find the informality and simpler language used in the podcast helps support their learning, and give them the confidence to start using theoretical perspectives within class.</p>
<p>Is there a professional practice outcome and is it applicable across disciplines?</p>	<p>Yes – podcasting is a practice that can be made relevant to particular units, majors, even degrees. Teaching staff within a particular unit could collaborate to produce podcasts as supplementary teaching materials – these would only need to be updated as the unit is updated. It is also possible that teaching staff within a particular discipline could collaborate and produce a series of podcasts to cover the main theories of particular majors or degrees.</p> <p>It can also, depending on the level at which the podcasts are pitched, be accessible to people outside the institution, potentially developing outreach beyond the university.</p>
<p>What is your key question to or insight sought from the ‘critical friends’?</p>	<p>Do you have any tips for facilitating an effective focus group? How might we effectively measure the importance of tone in podcasting?</p>