A word in your ear: What do podcasters' experiences tell us about creating podcasts for professional development?

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A R T I C L E I N F O

A B S T R A C T

Podcasting by practitioners in higher education to support the development of peers is becoming more popular and yet, unlike its use in learning and assessment, remains little researched. This paper identifies some of the reasons that bring HE practitioners to podcasting for professional development, some techniques and suggestions for making successful podcasts, and what the characteristics are of the medium that leads to podcasting being an effective tool for professional development. An emergent theme this process uncovered is the key role that playfulness has in podcasting. The discussion cites extensive quotes from interviews with creators of four podcasts aimed at HE practitioners, in order to give a rich account of the experiences of podcasting.

Background

Podcasting was first recognised in 2004 as a convergence of accessible technologies and an established culture of web blogging, forming a boom in 'amateur radio' (Hammersley, 2004). Since then, podcasting as a medium has evolved slowly outwards from isolated and decentralised pockets of individual websites to widely used syndication platforms to general recognition as a component in modern media (Berry, 2015).

Public awareness of, and general engagement, with podcasts in the UK and USA has grown steadily year on year and, while quantitative data collection is scattered (due to commercially sensitive listener data being held either by disparate third parties, or decentralised individual content hosts), several significant public bodies, including Radio Joint Audience Research (RAJAR), Ofcom and Edison Research, have recently included podcasting in their general broadcast data capture activities. The following summaries of the podcast landscape are drawn from their 2020 reports (Edison Research, 2019; Ofcom, 2019; RAJAR, 2020).

The number of podcast consumers has steadily increased in the English-speaking world since the genesis of the medium. Research shows 7.1 million UK inhabitants (~10% of the population) listened to at least one podcast each week in 2019, a 24% increase on the previous year (Ofcom, 2019). This trend is reflected in the US, which reported 24 million weekly podcast listeners (~7% of the population), up 10% on the previous year (Edison Research, 2019), a trend which became even more marked during the pandemic (Adgate, 2021) with the total number of shows numbering over 2 million by the end of 2021 (Winn, 2021). The majority of these listeners fall within the 25-34 age bracket (RAJAR, 2020).

Listeners come to be informed, educated and most of all entertained. Edison research reports Music, News/Information, Entertainment, History, Sports and Food as some of the top areas of interest, although it is worth noting that their research identified 24 categories with 9% or more interest. Ofcom reported a similar distribution, with entertainment, comedy, discussion, news, sport and culture all highly represented. With over 800,000 active podcasts (Agate, 2021) it's easy to see how such diverse interests can be catered for. This demonstrates a shift away from an entertainment/social focus seen in the 2000s (McClung & Johnson, 2010) as the medium matures and diversifies. Podcast consumption continues to mimic traditional radio, in that it is something consumed while driving/travelling, relaxing, working or studying, or engaging in household chores.

As uptake and awareness of podcasting has grown, so too have the options for listeners in how they listen. The technical challenge of finding and utilising RSS feeds has diminished as more and more services have automated and pre-indexed the process. The dominance of Apple's iTunes as the index of choice for podcast listeners, most apparent in the 2000s (Sullivan, 2019), has been gradually eaten into by competing services as others have stepped in to take advantage of what is essentially 'free' content. Ofcom's 2019 report showed YouTube, BBC Sounds, Spotify, Apple Podcasts and Google Play all share a significant portion of the current market, with YouTube now the largest provider across most (adult) age groups.

The use of podcasts in higher education goes back nearly to the start of podcasting. Carvalho et al., reviewing the literature in 2009, note the use of iPods at Duke University (reported in 2005), Charles Sturt University (2007) and at the University of Leicester through the IMPALA project (also in 2007) (Carvalho et al., 2007, p. 417).

The work of Carvalho et al. took place at the University of Minho (Portugal) during 2007 and reported on their colleagues' use. Observations from this study noted the four main uses of podcasts being:

1) To convey information (Informative)

2) To comment on students' work (Feedback)

3) To provide instructions to field work and practicals (Guidelines)

4) Primary data for research such as interviews, news reports, etc (Authentic materials)

Within their study, some factors emerged very strongly from the surveys of students and staff. For students, the opportunity to hear their lecturers instigated a sense of closeness and affinity to them

due to the friendliness of the approach their lecturers had taken. A few felt the podcasts were too long (2 out of the 13 cohorts gave "too long" as the dominant view) but all found them informative.

From the staff perspective, several factors stood out, with 6 out of the 6 research participants agreeing to the following statements:

- Their students responded very positively.

- They wrote the podcast text and rehearsed it.

- The students were motivated by the novelty of the approach.

- The students liked the availability and flexibility of the format.

- The production was time-consuming.

- There was no institutional recognition (Carvalho et al., 2007, p. 424).

Another commonality across the experiences of the podcasters was the length of time of their podcasts: 7 out of the 9 formats for the podcasts were approximately 5 mins in length, the two outliers were 22 and 37 minutes.

In 2008, the book *Podcasting for Learning in Universities* (Salmon & Edirisingha, 2008, p. vii) identified the following uses for podcasts in supporting learning:

1) Recording and sharing lectures
2) To support the teaching of practicals
3) To support off-campus activities (for example geography fieldwork or museum visits)
4) To provide feedback to students
5) To deliver learning content online (both in blended and entirely online courses)
6) To encourage students' creativity (for example storytelling for reflection)
7) To support students' collaborative learning

Many of these activities rely on the mobile aspects of podcasts, in that they can be listened to in a variety of contexts while doing other things, and in 2008 the mp3 player was gradually being supplanted by the smartphone, but both were commonplace (Traxler, 2008, p. 13). Additional reasons for *why* podcasts are valuable to support learning were given by Edirisingha et al., (2007) as:

1) *Learner choice and flexibility*. Students can listen to the podcast while travelling, can repeat them as often as needed and give students control over the pacing of the learning content.

2) *Access to peer knowledge*. In Pal's project, students contributed to the podcasts through conversations with tutors. This provided alternative ways of presenting the knowledge in a way some students found easier to understand, and in a friendly and informal manner which they found more engaging. The dialogue also formed an excellent means to make tacit knowledge explicit.

3) *Incorporating informal learning*. Students found that listening to the educational content was more relaxing, easier and entertaining than formal sessions, enabling them to learn more effectively.

A follow-up project (Popova & Edirisingha, 2010) also found that assessing students through podcasts resulted in greater levels of motivation and reflection.

However, all of the above explore the use of podcasts in education focused on either teaching students, or students creating them as part of peer learning or assessment. In our literature search, no research was uncovered that looked at the role of podcasting in professional development, despite many podcasts being created for that purpose ("Blog 50 best", 2022; "Higher ed podcasts", 2022).

Purpose of paper and methodology

Given the absence of scholarly material in the domain of podcasting for education practitioners, the main purpose of this paper is to begin this dialogue. The basis for the paper originates in a series of professional development workshops started at the Open University and continuing at Durham University; the intention of those workshops being to support peers who were considering podcasting as a tool for disseminating their work to a wider audience. These workshops were based solely on the experience of the workshop convenors, the lead two authors of this paper. The study intended to gather information on the experience of other podcasters as a next step in expanding this workshop content, by answering the research question:

What are the experiences of creators of podcasts *for academic development specifically*?

Given the experience of the lead two authors, that podcasting forms an excellent mechanism for making tacit knowledge explicit (due to the medium's informal and discursive nature), it was decided to capture the experience of other podcasters through podcast-type discussions. This presented the opportunity to capture our own reflections to answer a parallel research question:

Does podcasting present an additional method for conducting research?

The interview questions were:

- Describe your podcast and its format

- What have you learnt about podcasting?

- How has what you've learnt from podcasting had an impact on your practice?

- If your podcast were a cake, what type of cake would it be?

The opportunity to conduct these podcasts presented itself during the Playful Learning Conference 2022, which was attended by creators of four different podcasts (hence the final question which aimed to incorporate some of the spirit of the conference). The podcasters had already been interviewed as part of the conference podcasting, and additional interviews took place for this research paper. A further interview was conducted with the lead two authors of the paper, and those responses used as an additional data set. The sample is therefore an opportunistic one, as opposed to a representative

one, was sufficient to form a preliminary foray into the characteristics of the use of podcasting for professional development. The podcasts were transcribed and analysed using a constant comparative method (Kolb, 2012, p. 84), to create an initial set of themes. This initial draft was shared amongst the collaborators and those data used as a basis for further reflections, with research participants invited to collaborate as authors.

Play: An emergent theme

While the data were being analysed, the theme of playfulness emerged (though this may have been skewed by the context in which the interviews took place). This led to a third research question, which is:

>To what extent can podcasting be described as *play*?

Numerous definitions exist for play, which are to some extent recursive, in that they define it in terms of other characteristics, such as "fun", which are then defined in terms of play (Ferguson et al., 2020). For our analysis we drew on Whitton (2022), in which play is described as any activity engaged in with an attitude of playfulness (p. 30) and consequently can exist in a range of scenarios, listed (ibid, p. 40-41) as "Adrenaline play" (involving fear and danger), "Carnival play" (public and festive activities); "Creative play" (making and building); "Exploration play" (finding and discovering), "Imagination play" (involving fantasy and pretence); "Structured play" (with formal goals and challenges, ie games), "Performance play" (acting, singing etc), "Physical play" (includes sports but also non-competitive activities), "Puzzle play" (solving word and number problems) and "Dangerous play" (gambling, drinking games, etc). Naturally there are overlaps between these categories, and some activities may fall into more than one category. To identify the extent to which the process of creating a podcast could be defined in terms of one or more of these playful activities, we viewed the analysis of the data through this additional lens and looked for commonalities with these definitions.

A note on terminology

The decentralised, democratised nature of the medium results in a broad range of definitions as to what a podcast is, with many seeing it as encompassing video, and less formal genres or styles of production than traditional broadcast audio. Guertin, for example, states in her literature review that

>Originally, the definition of a podcast required a file to be [...] in an RSS (Really Simple Syndication) feed [...] Listeners subscribe to feeds through aggregators and receive automatic downloads of new episodes [...] Today, the definition has been broadened to include any audio file that is placed on any online location that is accessible to others. There does not need to be a subscription to a regularly updated, topic-consistent program. (Guertin, 2010, p. 5)

While acknowledging that this broadened definition may be generally accepted, we should clarify that this paper will use the term as defined in the OED Online: "Podcast, Noun: A digital audio file made available on the Internet for downloading to a computer or mobile device, typically available as a series, new instalments of which can be received by subscribers automatically" ("podcast, n.", 2020). All the podcasts we discuss meet these criteria and the conclusions we draw may well be specific to

the audience relationships established through subscription to podcasts, or being discoverable alongside others distributed via feeds, and may not be generalisable to the broader definition.

The four podcasts

The four podcasts from which these experiences are drawn are

- *Copyright Waffle* (CW) – "Decoding copyright and bringing you enlightenment." The co-creators are specialists in copyright in higher education. Episodes are based around an interview with a practitioner with a particular perspective on copyright.

- *Exquisite Education* (EE) – Based on the Exquisite Corpse game (similar to Consequences but where each subsequent player draws an additional part of a body, while unable to see what has been drawn before). One person brings a topic (the head) which is then elaborated in turns through discussion, based on specific questions referencing parts of the body, for example "does it have legs?" i.e. "is there something substantial here?"

- *Pedagodzilla* (PGZ) – Each episode highlights a learning theory or practice which is then explored in the context of a film, TV show, comic or book, often with a guest with a particular interest in the practice or theory, or the pop culture being discussed. Or both.

- *Perplexagogy* (PPG) – produced as an output of the Digital Learning Team at DCAD (Durham Centre for Academic Development) at Durham University. Members of DCAD, often with a guest from elsewhere at Durham, discuss a confusing or controversial aspect of digital learning.

These podcasts are all produced by people working in higher education, with the aim of discussing and explaining themes in education relevant to those who work in it, both educators and students. Each, however, takes a different approach to achieving this aim. All are disseminated via RSS feeds and available through standard podcasting apps, and all are between 30 mins and an hour long.

Influences and motivations

The drive to start creating a podcast came from a range of starting points. One of these is **to reach an audience for one's work,** to connect to that audience in a way that's not otherwise possible, and to provide information for people who might not otherwise access that information.

> *the idea of audio and having a podcast was just something where we just thought it would be really*
>
> *nice because people seem to quite like listening to us when we go and do a talk. So let's just sort of try*
>
> *this out as a different medium to use. – CW*

people would just not read in a paper or, you know, go onto the website to kind of listen to the podcast, I think. - CW

I think the audience we had in mind was Durham staff in the first instance, and I think we're using it as an opportunity to explore topics that we're interested in and we feel are either important for people to be thinking about or are of strategic importance to the university. - PPG

A second is **to learn about your discipline through the process of talking to other people**

Because we're choosing each guest for something specific they can teach us, the resulting conversations have been excellent and help build an overall picture of the domain. – CW

for me, it's a tool for learning about learning and teaching stuff. - PGZ

For some the podcast was **a mechanism for finding a space for performance, or for using their creativity in a new field**.

it's worth mentioning the amount of time we've put into creating a theme tune / songs for individuals we are recording and jingles - definitely the podcast is a performance and an outlet for creativity and (a) tendency to show off! – CW

I need something creative to focus on or I'm going to go insane. [...] Everything I've done before had been kind of, you know, funny and fun and entertaining and sort of entertainment - PGZ

I've tried stand-up and I didn't enjoy it. I was okay at it. People laughed [...] but it was just a relief that it was over. And I thought "that's not how I want to do (performance)". [...] But to have people say they enjoy the podcast and know that there's a side of me where they're actually enjoying listening to me [...] meets that particular need - PGZ

we are very oral people in Colombia. for example, the main medium for communication is radio. [...] So this is a shock for me to come to a country like the UK, which everything is written when more is to be shown. And so yeah. And my interest in podcasting, well I think that it comes from wanting to tell stories. I feel that I am a storyteller at heart. - EE

The contributors also came to podcasting as a means to **establish some time to communicate with others by co-creating content**

we went all the time in the meetings, like having to do things, procedures, deadlines, etc. But we

didn't have time to talk about the important things: the ethos, the spirit, the main concepts. So we

decided to have a way to start talking to each other. – EE

it's also an excuse for us to goof around as the 15 minutes of content that's going to get cut out of the

first half of this episode indicates. So it's kind of as I say, it's a social thing. – PGZ

Some of the podcasters also pointed to podcasting being chosen due to the **accessibility and affordability of the medium.**

it's probably one of the most democratic media now because audio is so accessible. you know, any old

Joe Numbnuts can buy a thing and stick some microphones into his whatsit and start recording

something. [...] You can get a very usable, cheap microphone for £10. The software is very, very, very

simple to use as some excellent free software available. There's a place where you can publish podcasts

for free. You know, it's a very low cost, very low barrier of entry [...] But you can make something

that sounds so professional with very little skill and very little [...] experience and very little in the

way of tech. - PGZ

Contrasting this, however, is **the cost of time required**, which is often taken on by the podcasters with little or no support from their institutions.

actually for us we've bought quite a lot of equipment, a subscription to SoundCloud and it takes us a

lot of unpaid time to edit and produce. I'd say ideally we need more support from our institutions to

do something that is as valid as writing a book. - CW

From this analysis it appears that podcasting is mainly adopted as a means of expression and as a creative outlet, but one that can be adopted with little cost required to produce something to a professional standard, the only constraint being the personal investment of time that it requires to produce a finished product.

Creating podcasts

The following themes emerged from participant descriptions of how they create podcasts.

The importance of a format

All of the podcasts have a specific format for their podcasts that gives them a structure to work within. However, all of the formats were also loose enough to enable some flexibility within that structure.

In *Copyright Waffle*, the presenters used to "ask a kind of similar set of questions to all our guests.", although in response to feedback this has since changed.

we've got the same areas, but then we're tailoring it to the guests themselves. So you're involved in this area. We like to talk about this and this aspect of it. So they've got an idea of where we're going to go with it, but is now actually much more naturalistic. - CW

Having a really good show structure, with freedom in that framework I think is another good phrase. Having it so that you're happy with the framework and it gives you enough structure that the show things move along nicely, but that it's loose enough so that you can have fun and kind of explore within it. - PGZ

One of the things that's come out of it has been the role of structure, and I would refer to it as loose structure. And I know you've done an episode on Liberating Structures recently, [...] we've thought that's a nice phrase, actually, even though it refers to a particular approach, but this notion of just enough structure. - EE

what we try to do is focus on a topic that will be useful and is maybe current. So our last episode was on whether or not the VLE is dead. We formulate questions from the literature and then I guess the format [...] kind of depends on what the subject is [...] but it tends to be that we have a question or say four questions that we will answer. We do end up with next steps, which is how do you apply this in practice? – PPG

The role of reflexivity

These formats were arrived at gradually, through a process of reflecting on earlier episodes of the podcast and changing these to create a more effective liberating structure.

we recognised we needed to do something a bit different and that was when we spoke to our radio presenter / journalism lecturer friend he really did sort of say well you're kind of encouraging people to just stick a bit to a script if you do this. So [...] since then we've recorded a couple of others and we've gone much more off - not totally freeform - set - CW

I think a lot of people settle on a show early and then stick with it and that can be the way that some podcasts die because they start with a flawed frame. We've adjusted ours a lot. [...] we reached about a year to come to that, but we came to it quite organically. But that shows the format's not changed much since then because that's when it clicked. – PGZ

we've learnt to move away from that rigorous, that disjointed approach that based so exactly on the

game [...] we've taken (it) and applied it to thinking through ideas and structuring a conversation [...]

So we're quite pleased with that, actually. It seems to work. - EE

previously, we had an interview with a member of Durham faculty. We had an academic come on and

do an interview. More recently, though, we've had a guest come on with us. – PPG

Getting the right balance of preparation

The creation of the right balance between structure and looseness was a theme that was closely connected with other themes discussed by the participants, one of which was the most appropriate amount of preparation.

For example, in their early episodes *Copyright Waffle* began by asking their guests the same questions which they also sent out in advance.

Sometimes what we were doing was sending people a list of questions in advance in order to not feel

like they were being ambushed. And what our journalist friend said to us was, you know, what

happens if you ask people a set of questions, they write down the answers, you get the answers

straight back at you. And actually, that's not really a conversation and that doesn't make great radio

[...] we have still asked some of the same questions, but we haven't sent them a list of the questions in

the way we were doing. We've kind of just said these are some of the areas we want to talk about. And

I think what's happened is we've been able to have better, richer conversations. – CW

the earlier set of questions we gave people was something I did when I was unsure about podcasting - I definitely now feel

like I can have more fun with it and relax and be more playful – CW

Pedagodzilla varied the amount of preparation with the hosts being occasionally under-prepared and the guests occasionally over-prepared.

I think there are a few that we haven't prepared enough, we haven't had any discussion beforehand so

we're coming at it from different directions. [...] So some preparation is important that we have a

preliminary chat about what we're going to chat about. [...] But then there's a point of over preparing

and reading up too much on the subject a little bit. [...] You know, we've had people coming in with a

script and constantly referencing the script, and then it's too tight. You need it to be loose a bit

because that's where the fun comes in for the listener is it's then just two people chatting about the,

the ideas.- PGZ

Exquisite Education has a very precise format, based on the game of the same name, where one person draws a head, the next a body and so on, but only the first person is aware of the specific topic at the start of the episode.

> *one of us will turn up with a question, an idea, a provocation, something that will begin a*
>
> *conversation. The other person doesn't know what that's going to be until the words are said [...] My*
>
> *responsibility, if I'm the second person, would be to say to respond to that, to develop a body, to really*
>
> *check our understanding, develop our understanding, - EE*

Developing presentation skills

As noted in the literature concerning their value in learning and teaching, the value of podcasts in academic development is also the informal and friendly nature of the more conversational approach. Establishing a high enough level of informality took time for all of the participants in this study.

Confidence in speaking was also a skill that needed to be acquired for some of the presenters.

> *We had an idea of why we were doing it, but I don't think anybody ever wants to feel like they're*
>
> *talking as the authority on a subject. Okay. And it's very difficult when you don't want to be the*
>
> *authority to actually be the one who stands up and speaks. And I think we've gotten better as a team*
>
> *of understanding each other's challenges in that respect and encouraging each other to speak - PPG*

> *I think trust and interpersonal connectivity and the nuance of voice, they're still important in, in our interest in*
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> *podcasting with the Exquisite Education podcast. So it's, it's central, it's a presence we create through the microphone –*
>
> *EE*

Presenting also requires a mix of listening, preparing to ask the next question, and thinking of the overall structure of the recording, all at the same time.

> *I do get quite nervous, I have to say, when we're recording it and sometimes I can't really appreciate*
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> *what the person's saying to us because I'm kind of quite tied up in the process of trying to go through*
>
> *the questions, thinking of what you're going to say next - trying to think of a direction to push. I'm*
>
> *overthinking it, but I well, I think I'm feeling a bit more relaxed as time goes on. – CW*

> *But within that there is a discipline - and we've talked about this - of not over talking, not talking*
>
> *over each other or anyone else. And that's a little soft rule. And I think we get it right about 99.9% of*
>
> *the time. I would take that idea that we can control the way we talk to each other and listen to each*
>
> *other and be attentive and think and respond. - EE*

Two of the processes the podcasters found helpful with managing the difficulties in presenting were post-production and assigning roles, discussed in the following two points.

Editing

All of the podcasts had a post-production stage in which the recording was edited to various extents. All found this an essential part in the process, not only in making a more coherent final product, but also because knowing this would take place freed them up to make more mistakes in the recording session.

> *That's what I think is helped with and also reassurance that if you're not articulate, James can fix that too [...] it's like a safety net, but not one you necessarily want to lean on. – PPG*

> *if we do end up going off on a tangent, it's not the end of the world, because as long as it's relating to the topic and we can justify why we're speaking about what we're speaking about, we can link back into it and we can sort of, you know, ask the question after we've answered it and have that have our wonderful producer (put the) question before. - PPG*

The editing stage was also felt to be the stage in which the stronger narrative elements within the podcasts were created.

> *So the process of editing, even though it takes me a long time, is I do most of the editing, but I really enjoy that process of reordering what you've got. And it's not necessarily just a linear thing and you can go, Well, actually that bit didn't quite fit, but this bit makes it really good. And then that editing is so integral to kind of creating something which has got a feel to it. And I just I love, I love that. - CW*

> *The blathering and that sort of them messing around sometimes also generates more stuff that's useful for exploring the things. [...] And then making sure that you've got a kind of a story that doesn't go in too many directions, but you've got that kind of throughline from the mucking around, [...] storytelling is in the editing, because sometimes you're pulling a story out. - PGZ*

Assigning roles

Although an informal medium, this did not lead to the podcasters being completely freeform in how the podcasts were organised and put-together. One (*Perplexagogy*) is a consistent group of three presenters and a non-presenting producer/editor, the other three are the creation of a core team of two presenters, one of whom is the producer/editor.

For *Copyright Waffle*, the advice from a professional broadcaster was to clarify the role of the producer.

Our journalist friend was very much talking to us about production. Who is producing you? Yeah. And we said, well, I'm doing the I'm doing the editing. But of course editing technical stuff is different from production. Production is all about the overall creative, what you're what you're creating and having that vision for it. - CW

The role of host is also a key one to establish. Most of the podcasters felt the role of a host, someone to lead the discussion and have a responsibility for the overall structure, also helped with creating the podcasts.

one of the things was having specific roles. I think that's really, you know, because Mike takes charge more or less and he's the one with the sort of the hosting thing. - PGZ

And we have a host who will ask the question and then we'll kind of all contribute to our thoughts or experiences on whatever is - PPG

Relying on the technology to help manage interactions

One of the skills required in developing podcasting is how to interact with the other podcasters. Many encountered difficulties with effectively interacting; balancing allowing others to have a turn while preserving the fun vibrant atmosphere necessary for an engaging listening experience. Some of the features of the platforms used when recording remotely, such as text chat and hand-raising, helped initially. The *Exquisite Education* podcast used a red button, which was pressed to indicate handing on the baton to the next contributor.

This thing about the red button with audio I think is really interesting. It almost defines audio as a learning environment because we press the red button, then we go and you're up for it like we're talking head responding as well as we possibly can in real time and all sorts of things can happen. – EE

So yeah, I think the hand-raising has helped and I think that so we use the hand raise function and we also we use in the chat room. And so we're very fortunate that we have somebody produce our podcast who is very kind and guides us as we're recording and quite often also through suggestions in the chat. And I think we do less of the hand-raising now and now that we're kind of used to talking to each other. - PPG

Having fun and being professional

Another aspect of podcasting, which again reflects the literature about their role in educating learners, is that the medium enables a greater degree of playfulness and informality.

one of the lessons learnt which (we) are now probably better able to articulate [...] was the importance of the ludic aspects, the importance of kind of having playfulness. And I think we naturally got to it. And actually, if you listen to the first few episodes, we're probably we're trying to be a bit more professional than we are. And I think we're still kind of having a bit of fun, [...] but something we've gotten much better at as it's gone through is being a bit looser, leaving in some of the gaffs - PGZ

This ludic attitude (1) gave the presenters more of a permission to not only bring in the performance elements that were a motivation for podcasting in the first place, but to take these further than originally planned.

I felt comfortable putting on stupid voices. [...] So, you know, we're doing Alan Bennett impersonations and so stuff like that. [...] I felt a lot more relaxed about doing (that) a few more episodes in – PGZ

I did feel quite uptight about doing the silly stuff at first and it wasn't helped by getting some nasty feedback from someone online after our first episode. But now I love doing all the mucking about bits. - CW

and (2) were felt to improve the interactions within the recordings, which (as noted in the literature review above) also makes them more engaging to listen to.

a thing I've learnt [...] if we start to go off on a different thing and we're having a good time doing it, just run with it because it can get cut out later. And if it loosens people up and helps them get into that space where they can goof around, then great because a people having a good time makes for better listening. You can hear the smile in somebody's voice. They literally change the tone of somebody's voice when they're smiling. - PGZ

This more informal approach does need to be clarified in advance to some extent, so that the guests have clarity about what the nature of the engagement is going to be.

it just needs a wee bit of thought before you just switch the microphone on in terms of what are we doing here and how are we going to behave? Because that liveliness is very engaging as well and it's tricky. - EE

One of the four podcasts (*Perplexagogy*) is a departmental podcast as opposed to the other three which are generated by higher education practitioners, but independently of an institution. This presents additional constraints for the participants.

> *The tricky balance is between facilitating something that is natural, conversational and allows people*
>
> *to imbue their personality into the product, but being aware that the podcast is distributed by or*
>
> *representing an academic institution! - PPG*

For some of the podcasters this ludic approach is an essential part of the content of the podcast. For example, the *Pedagodzilla* podcast requires the suspension of disbelief within a specific frame of reference, described by Huizinga (2016) as a magic circle and throughout the rest of this paper as a ludic space.

> *That magic circle thing is, is that it gives us the licence to, to talk about these movies as if they were*
>
> *real. And I think that's part of the appeal of it as well, is that for an hour, whatever, it's like, let's talk*
>
> *about Yoda as a supply teacher. And we all know Yoda is really a character[...] but we[...] have that*
>
> *whole kind of space where[...] it's basically suspension of disbelief that we have to sustain, but we*
>
> *encourage the listener to come into to sustain as well. - PGZ*

This idea of the podcasts being a separate conceptual space that gives permission to be playful was echoed by the other podcasters. *Exquisite Education* found the idea of a *liminal* space, a space that sits between two other well-defined spaces where roles and identities are mutable (Schechner, 2006, p. 66), as a useful descriptor for their practice.

> *locating these [...] before work is a liminal space between our own time and our (work) time. And we*
>
> *use this as a sort of device for organisational learning or personal development. - EE*

> *it's very casual too. We will go with the flow and yeah, so it's very important for us to have this a*
>
> *space that is our space to make sense of the world around us. And we hope also that the people who*
>
> *are listening to us use this space to make sense of things that are happening in their jobs. - EE*

Unique nature of voice as a tool

Another idea that emerged from the interviews was that the use of voice as the sole tool also led to podcasting having unique affordances in content creation.

> *the thing about voices is that it can go where it wants to go or where it needs to go. It can be*
>
> *impulsive, immediate, spontaneous, reactive and all of these things. [...] And in the context of play,*
>
> *there's a very similar question. You know, to what extent do you structure play and how much*
>
> *structure is too much? – EE*

This identification of the unique properties of voice as a medium encapsulates much of the discussion about the creation of podcasts. As a sound-only medium it requires simpler technology and fewer technical skills to create a product at a professional level. As the podcasts draw on the familiar social playful dynamic of conversation, they are fun to create, and therefore engaging to listen to, and as the podcasters are invisible this enables people to perform who would not otherwise feel comfortable with an audience. The simplicity of editing also means the participants are free to make mistakes, and therefore communicate in a more relaxed environment. For professional development, podcasts must be informative, but also entertaining, and through the trial and error that a low-cost medium enables, the podcasters have all found an effective balance of these two elements.

Impact of the podcasts

The participants also discussed the impact their podcasts had on their audiences and on their own practice.

Informing and entertaining

The ludic elements discussed in the previous section were perceived as key in reaching audiences, as they conveyed information but also drew people because they are entertaining.

> *they want to learn a bit about pedagogy[...] but I think it appeals to people that also want to hear*
> *about pop culture and also want to hear three or four people chatting to each other, having a good*
> *time as well. - PGZ*

Size (of audience) doesn't matter

Another element that emerged from talking to most of the podcasters was that, although the intention for them is to reach an audience, the podcasts were not created with reaching a large audience in mind, but solely with connecting with some people who might find the content useful in their practice.

> *But then, of course, you know, the implication is, as with educational audio, there is going to be a*
> *listener. Well, you don't know that. In fact, someone yesterday asked me how many listeners we had*
> *and I never thought to look into that. But of course, we are working for an audience. So there is at*
> *least a pretence that someone is going to listen to this - EE*

Impact on practice - expertise

Many of the podcasters stated that they had learnt more about their discipline by doing the podcasting.

> *it's sort of fulfilling [...] because it was never about other people listening to it. It was always a bonus.*
> *[...] the objective was I wanted to learn about learning, teaching, pedagogy and doing it in an*
> *accessible way that works for me. And I wanted to build confidence in the area and I wanted both of*

those things that would draw them back into my practice. - PGZ

Impact on practice - empowerment

The podcasters also found that podcasting had an impact on their confidence and in having a voice, and in learning the skills of communication. They found that the use of voice, and the appreciation of the ludic potential of having conversations and sharing these, was emancipatory, both for themselves and potentially for others. Others felt supported and liberated by the attention given to their podcasts and how peers valued them.

We want to make it but have to be more intentionally politically inclusive, emancipatory and empowering, but we are in this process of learning, you know. But regarding what to say about the microphone, I think the microphone is a very empowering thing that even you can have this conversation. - EE

that's really pulled me into the community as I am a shy, antisocial sumbitch and I [...] find the whole concept of networking horrible and alien, but I now am kind of feeling like I'm a bit more part of this wider learning community - PGZ

I do this podcast and [...] people actually value it and people that I work for value it as well, which is even more important maybe, but that I think that's what I learnt is that yes, you can do the things that you enjoy and put energy into those, as well as the stuff that you feel you ought to do. - PGZ

when I very first started podcasting [...] I was terrible. And I say that because I [...] just didn't want to speak. So I guess for me, I came into it because from a development perspective, I'm not great (at)[...] let's call it public speaking. And I wanted to push myself. I think what I didn't really think about was the reality of doing that on a podcast and needing to speak and not wanting to speak. And that was a massive barrier for me to overcome. - PPG

I love talking [...] but it's been a real learning process for me to realise that as soon as the recorder is on, I can clam up and become very nervous. I'm getting better at listening to the person and responding in the moment, but I've surprised myself and I find it hard to relax when we are recording – CW.

A key element of this emancipation is how podcasting focuses on the use of voice. This was what made podcasting daunting for some of the participants in the study, but for all this use of voice alone was what ultimately made it a liberating medium, encapsulated by this quote:

So the power of the voice is an unexplored and I feel that through the podcast we are trying to get

more into that power of the voice. - EE

Long term usage

Some impacts noted by the podcasters were longer term, in that the podcasts would eventually have value as a record of an evolving area of expertise.

We've actually called our podcast an 'archive of chats' and really hope that in future it will be a great

resource for ourselves but perhaps other researchers to mine to understand how copyright was seen at

a moment in time. – CW

The title of the paper implied that the purpose of the podcasts being discussed were to create content that supports peers' professional development. The actuality from analysing the participants' responses is that this is, in fact, a serendipitous by-product of the initial intention. All the participants reported their experiences with podcasting had benefited their own development, through increased confidence, acquiring communication skills, and recognition within the wider learning community.

Conclusions

What are the experiences of creators of podcasts for academic development?

Where the role of podcasts in academic development mirrors the literature on the use of podcasts as part of the curriculum, is in the dominant theme of friendliness and informality. The spontaneity available through the simplicity of the technology and the use of voice, combined with the inclusive and social nature of conversation, results in a medium that the creators thought would be both engaging and informative for listeners.

For example, post-production of the recordings meant that the podcasters were free to make mistakes, take unproductive divergent paths and not self-censor during recording, since they knew that any mistakes they made would be fixed before the podcast was uploaded. Establishing the specific role of a host meant that guests could take their narratives in any direction, but there would be someone to provide structure to the eventual narrative. Managing interactions, using a red button or hand-raising to handover who is talking, enables everyone to participate easily. Furthermore, the role of reflexivity and adaptation, mentioned by all of the podcasters, enabled this balance to be constantly monitored and improved.

The final element that all the participants mentioned was their own professional development. Podcasting gave them a space for thinking, for co-creating, for having fun and being playful. The podcasters had acquired confidence, either in knowledge gained through creating content, or in confidence in expressing themselves to an audience (or both). They also valued the recognition and value within the learning community that their podcasts had acquired.

Through drawing on the natural familiar process of conversation, with its spontaneity and informality, but placing this within a structure, podcasting offers a unique set of opportunities for professional development, both drawing on elements of an oral tradition, but developing this in new ways to engage and inform the wider learning community.

A selection of tips for aspiring professional development podcasters, drawn from the experiences and insights within this paper, can be found in the Appendix.

Does podcasting constitute an additional method for conducting research?

The methodology for this paper, using podcast-type conversations as a data capture method has, when compared our previous experiences of conducting research, not varied significantly from the semi-structured interview method in the nature of the data gathered. The deeper reflective positioning from interviewees is attributable to the nature of the sample rather than the research tools, in that the interviewees are known to each other and peers, and were offered the opportunity to be research collaborators, lessening the power imbalances that often occur in semi-structured interviews (Karnieli-Miller et al., 2009, p. 280).

Also because all the participants were experienced podcasters, this meant they and the interviewers

1) Were familiar with the recording equipment, and being recorded, so less inhibited by the presence of microphones,

2) Were used to expressing themselves through the interview-style conversations,

3) Shared a common understanding, experience and language for sharing ideas (Seidman, 2006, p. 42).

To what extent can podcasting be described as **play?**

Participants made specific references to playfulness and a ludic attitude in informing their approach to making the podcasts. In these terms playfulness underpinned concepts such as looseness, and informality, both creating a safe space for experimentation.

Playfulness was both in tension with, but also permitted by, the structure required to make the podcasts informative. Striking the right balance in the amount of preparation, the formal elements of structure, post-production and role-assigning were not in conflict with spontaneity and playfulness, but in fact facilitated these (Figure 1).

Figure 1. Podcasters gradually worked towards an optimum amount of structure that provided the most potential for play. Too much structure and the play is constrained, too little and the podcasters cannot express themselves fully.

Reviewing the testimonies of the research participants alongside's categories of play enables us to identify what specific types of play podcasting draws on. Podcasting is usually conducted by two or more people sitting on chairs in front of a microphone, which evidently rules out "Adrenaline play", "Carnival play" "Physical play" and "Dangerous play". However, two of Whitton's categories are evident throughout the accounts of podcasting.

One of these is performance play. Performance is a key motivator for the podcasters interviewed. Participants talked about creating theme tunes and songs, being funny and entertaining, about being a storyteller. Being part of this oral tradition was a key rationale for wanting to create them. Podcasts for academic development are a performance space as well as an informative space, and the assumption of the podcasters is that their audience listens as much to be entertained as to learn about

aspects of professional practice. *Copyright Waffle* takes this a step further through creating musical items and performance pieces as part of the podcast design.

Another theme of play that informs podcasting is "Creative Play"; Whitton expands the definition of creative play to include physical creation activities such as improvisation, musical or theatrical play (Whitton, 2022, p. 40). We've described how podcasting is essentially *conversation*, drawing on the unique nature of voice to create content, and where there is an audience, conversation is essentially improvised theatre, employing many of the same characteristics (Newman & Grigg, 2005). Newman and Grigg describe a statement within a conversation as an "offered narrative element" where the other participant can consequently "accept the offer, block it, or make a counter-offer" (p. 1); ie respectively rejecting the idea offered, accepting the idea, and offering another idea building on the first. Through enacting this process, the participants in podcasts develop ideas to an extent that perhaps would not be possible in a scripted show.

Though these types of play are inherent in all podcasts, some draw in other elements. The *Pedagodzilla* podcast uses a ludic imaginary space where fictional subjects are treated as if they were real, e.g. Yoda as a supply teacher. This is evidently "Imagination Play", listeners are invited into an imaginary world where fictional situations are treated as real learning scenarios. The *Exquisite Education* podcast makes its playful pedigree explicit by referencing a specific game, that of Exquisite Corpse, and appropriating much of the structure of the game in the format of the show, it therefore has the "prelusory rules to create challenges for the players to overcome" (Whitton, 2022, p. 40) required for "Structured Play" in this case the formal rules of a parlour game.

The effect of these opportunities to play, and to do so in a safe space with colleagues, was for all of the participants, one of empowerment. The podcasts had a greater impact for being playful, and the podcasters received recognition from their communities for activities to which they had brought their authentic selves. For these reasons all the participants found their actions in the field personally affirming, in that it justified them being playful within a professional sphere.

Limits of the methodology and suggestions for further research

Two factors particularly limit the generalizability of these findings. The first is the small sample size, only eight creators contributed data from four different podcasts (two from each). Furthermore, the opportunistic sample being taken from the Playful Learning conference biases the sample towards those who prefer an informal and playful approach to their professional practice. However, given that the aims of the paper were to identify an extended range of advice for colleagues planning podcasts beyond those of the lead two authors of the paper, and to make an initial foray into establishing a literature of podcasting for professional practice, then this methodology meets these criteria. However, further research would need to be conducted, both with more creators of podcasts and extensively with audiences, to identify a generalisable set of principles for podcasting for professional practice.

Acknowledgements

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Appendix: Tips for producing a professional development podcast

The following suggestions draw on the experiences and insights discussed in this paper, and are intended to provide a primer and set of considerations for those wishing to produce a podcast to enable or enhance their professional development.

Is podcasting right for me?

Start by considering your motivations for podcasting, and what you are hoping to achieve with it. Podcasting can be a useful tool if you are looking to:

- Reach an audience, such as colleagues and peers within your professional sphere.

- Communicate, collaborate and co-create with colleagues and peers,

- Use conversation as a process to explore your discipline,

- Expand your performative and creative abilities and experience,

- Create within an accessible medium, with a low technical barrier of entry,

- Understanding what you hope to achieve can inform your thinking as you start to design your podcast.

Where do you start?

Aside from the basic technical aspects of setting up a microphone, recording and then publishing your content on the internet, one of the most challenging aspects of starting podcasting is designing and evolving your show to fit your needs and context. The following tips are drawn from the experiences of the podcasters in this paper:

- Assign roles within your team, ensuring you have (as a minimum) a producer with oversight of the creative vision, and a host to facilitate discussion and guide recordings through your episode format. These could be the same, or multiple people.

- Consider creating a liberating structure for your podcast, a format with sufficient bounds to keep episodes focused on the intended outcomes, but with space to play, flex and expand within

- Plan to reflect on and iterate the structure of your podcast.

- Find the level of pre- recording preparation that is right for you, balancing preparedness against spontaneity and organic discussion,

- Practise active listening, structured discussion and presentation to build your confidence in speaking in a broadcast context,

- Prepare to manage interactions, by setting ground rules between hosts and guests around how discussion will be mediated and aligned to the overall structure,

- Trust editing in your process, to bring out the narrative in your discussions, remove mistakes and craft a final product you are happy to share,

- Have professional fun! Give yourself and others permission to play, and establish a ludic space within the formal structure of your professional podcast. Rely on the post-production phase to edit out anything that might get you sitting nervously outside the door to HR.

What are the benefits?

While your mileage may vary, the podcasters discussed shared benefits they had encountered through podcasting. It can allow you to:

- Inform and entertain yourself and an audience, without necessarily needing to worry about the size of that audience,

- Create a digital artefact and record of your professional development,

- Increase your digital media literacy,

- Develop expertise in your discipline,

- Emancipate yourself, building confidence and a voice within your discipline.

What are the challenges?

While the technical barrier for entry is low, there are some challenges to consider that may place limits on the scope and quality of your podcast, and/or your ability to engage with it as an activity:

- Producing a podcast can be time consuming. Aside from the recording itself, planning, any scripting and post-production can be elastic in terms of the demands they can place on your time - particularly when you are getting started

- While basic recording equipment is ubiquitous (most smartphones and laptops include a built in microphone, and the rise of online meetings means many have access to a headset), and basic editing software and publishing platforms are free, if you wish to aim for a professional quality podcast then you may need to purchase additional equipment, software and hosting.

We wish you good luck, and happy podcasting. If you'd like any advice on developing a podcast, then contact the authors for advice.