

Podcasting and Vodcasting in Higher Education – Perspectives from the Cross-Disciplinary Research Group (CDRG)



Dr Rolf Wiesemes

Dr Rolf Wiesemes co-ordinates, supports and develops all VLL projects and capital VLL initiatives across the University of Nottingham in collaboration with the VLL core and management teams. Rolf's past and current research work focuses in particular on the use of video conferencing in schools and for teacher training and development through his work in the Teaching and Learning Observatory. As part of his role as Visual Learning Lab co-ordinator, Rolf is currently developing case studies of visual learning in theory and practice.

Rolf Wiesemes from the School of Education discusses ethical and practical factors in using podcasting in an HE context, and gives top tips for colleagues in other disciplines considering this approach.

What is podcasting?

Podcasting is the automatic transfer of audio files from a server to a client. It is being used increasingly in Higher Education as mobile learning gains popularity. Vodcasting is the video equivalent. In practical terms, this means that podcast users simply subscribe to these podcasts (like a magazine subscription) online, often via i-tunes, so that whenever you plug in your MP3/4 player your subscriptions are automatically updated.

What did you intend to do?

The Cross-Disciplinary Research Group (CDRG) seeks to promote and facilitate research dialogue across the disciplines and enhance research effectiveness by developing a support network of researchers across the University of Nottingham. Focusing on both the theory and practice of cross-disciplinary research (CDR) as well as practice issues, it seeks to broaden the notion of research skills training. This initiative set out to capture all CDRG talks as vodcasts and make them available to a wider audience.

What problems did you encounter and what have you learned?

Most speakers at CDRG events present original (and often unpublished) research data. This has highlighted some of the issues associated with the capture and subsequent broadcast of new research data which are important for future projects of this kind.

A lot of the work presented at the CDRG seminars by an individual researcher was produced as part of a larger research team effort. This raised the issue of who the owner of the work was and whether the work could be put into the public domain in the form of a pod- or vodcast at this stage of the research.

Initial preparation for the vodcasts was problematic: the quality of audio-recordings varied from one event to the next and it was not always possible to get copies of all the Powerpoint presentations used as part of individual CDRG talks.

Further processing of these talks has been problematic. It takes a long time to develop a process of preparing a vodcast that is not too time consuming for a non-technical member of staff, and which allows you to retain control of the preparation and editing process.

“Ethical issues are important. Podcasters need to be aware of whether data can be made publicly accessible or not”

What were the learning and teaching outcomes?

Whilst the original aim of producing pod/vodcasts of all CDRG seminars was not achieved, this has been an extremely useful longitudinal process because it has resulted in the development of vodcasting preparation procedures, and an exploration of what is possible and realistic within a limited period of time.

Part of the outcome comprises a simple 5 step guide to the vod/podcasting preparation process, summing up the technical preparation for producing a pod/vodcast. This includes pre-recording and recording setup, turning a Powerpoint into jpeg files, converting and editing audio data for MP3 format, producing a film ready for vodcasting, and converting a film into a vodcast. Similar principles apply to producing audio-podcasts which might in some cases be more appropriate and accessible.

What are your future plans?

More advanced and more interactive ways of vodcasting are planned, reflected in further project funding awarded by the Centre for Integrative Learning. The project will explore new and innovative ways of preparing new teachers for the teaching of sensitive issues such as genocide, and specifically the Holocaust, in secondary schools through the production of monthly podcasts by a range of educational experts.

Do you have any top tips for academics in other disciplines considering making vodcasts or podcasts?

This work has shown that preparation is key and technical support is a necessity! Good quality podcasts need to be made in the right environments, and using the best equipment possible. It is also really important to consider ethical issues. Podcasters need to be aware of whether data can be made publicly accessible or not.

It is also important to devote sufficient time for post-production before publication of podcasts. It is unlikely that podcasts will simply be recorded and broadcast. A range of post production procedures (such as editing audio/visual, synching powerpoint slides to audio, producing transcripts, writing relevant webpage content, providing appropriate links) all take time, but are a crucial part of the process.

