The Power of Podcasts – sharing stories to transform teaching practices, learning experiences and academic cultures

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In a constantly changing Higher Education environment, academic staff are under increasing pressure to improve their teaching practices to enhance the student learning experience. This requires them to engage with the scholarship of learning and teaching – not only do they need to keep abreast of recent educational developments, but also measure the successes of their teaching approaches and share their practice with others. This is no mean feat against a backdrop of increasing workloads and an evolving culture of performance.

The growing challenge for Academic Developers is to effectively support staff in their scholarly practice, through the provision of high quality resources and events/sessions. In all cases, the material must be accessible, relevant, inspiring and applied – translating across disciplines, at scale. Yet, too often, we know that resources end up under-used and events suffer chronically poor attendance (Hains-Wesson and Curran, 2014; Woodley, Funk and Curran, 2013).

The presentation will describe the process by which a College Academic Development Group (ADG) developed an innovative strategy to reach a wider audience for staff capacity building. Drawing on the literature on informal learning in the workplace (Boud 1999), we sought to use conversational storytelling as a mechanism for sharing, promoting and exploring teaching practices. We noted from the literature that an informal community of practice (CoP) that encouraged teaching staff to innovate and influence change via the sharing of teaching and learning stories among peers is a cost-effective sustainable model that could easily be adopted and promoted through social media such as, podcasts, blog posts, LinkedIn and Twitter micro-blogging on internet enabled devices (Lefoe and Myers, 2006; Hains-Wesson and Curran, 2014; Warr Pedersen, 2016).

In February 2019, we launched a podcast series called Open Classrooms. In each episode, a member of staff talks about something new or interesting they are doing in their curriculum or classroom. To date, there have been 14 episodes, each made available as free, open resources via Soundcloud and iTunes, and the series has become establish as one of the College's flagship Teaching and Learning resources. By capturing and publishing teachers' stories in podcast format, we have successfully used accessible technology to enhance individuals' teaching practice, professional profiles and catalyse social and cultural change in academic departments.

The presenters will tell the story of Open Classrooms, drawing on audio-visual resources to give the audience a multi-perspective understanding of the project and its impact. We will include a description of the practical approaches we have taken to recruiting interviewees, preparing them for the conversation, recording, publishing and marketing/advertising. Data from our on-going evaluation work will be used to tell our emergent impact story, including formal intended outcomes as well as some of the more surprising benefits to individuals and school cultures. Finally, we will reflect on the experience from our own perspective as academic developers with no previous experience of podcasting.

Keywords: Professional development, podcasting, storytelling, OERs

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