What's Spotify got to do with Education Research? Podcasting for Research Dissemination

A thought-piece by Sara de Sousa, Student Success Lead at the Hertfordshire Business School, and 3rd year EdD student, University of Hertfordshire.

Two unacquainted people sit at their laptops thousands of miles apart, readying themselves in different time zones. They straighten their headphones, pull out the mic and click the link. Suddenly, they see each other from across the continents. This is the scene at the start of a podcast. A modern phenomenon of transglobal communication, the discussion of ideas and ideologies from different parts of the world, podcasts can be easily digested on a car journey home, or a lunchtime walk with a smartphone. Anyone can make one, anyone can listen.

The podcast interview is a popular format, replicating the familiar dyad seen on television and heard on radio over much of the past century. However, the ease of accessibility and the platforms which make anyone an editor and producer have enabled four-fold growth in output of podcast interviews over the past five years (Shepherd, 2023) with 21 million UK listeners (Statista, 2023) spoilt for choice on any subject matter. The strings of the broadcast industry are shifting from the hands of an elite few to anyone and everyone, with free facilities like Zencastr available to record and distribute conversations worldwide over platforms like Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Castro, Overcast and others.

But what does all this have to do with research in Education? Well, take the Viva; that revered conversation at the end of your doctoral research. Outlining an argument, justifying a standpoint, countering challenge, acknowledging other ontological perspectives and paradigms whilst providing a case for your own – these are all elements of a Viva Voce, and of a podcast too. With 46% of the global podcast listenership holding a degree or higher qualification (Newman et al., 2023), podcast listeners want to be stimulated and enhance their own understanding of topical issues, to explore different lenses on the world, to formulate opinion and inform action. What

better way to share your research with an interested audience than in a short podcast episode?

But where to start? For many experienced researchers, podcasting may be a technologically 'new-fangled' step too far. Yet for those who have grown-up with YouTube and social media, the short-form video and audio format are appealing and accessible in the small spaces afforded by complex lives (think gym, school-run, commute). Podcasts, too, are relatively easy to create without the need for an IT Support Team on standby. Take these examples and try it for yourself…

Do Better Research, a podcast series by Dr Suzanne Albary, interviews various researchers at different stages on their research journey, offering insights into the choices they have made about the methods they use, and their methodological approach to research. I was interviewed for this podcast series, back in October 2022, where I discussed the reflexive arts-based methodology I had employed for my EdD study into the lived experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students on campus. I had only recently recovered from Covid and was discussing the impact of decolonising methodologies on my approach – both markers of a very particular era in which I was collecting my data.

Inspired by the technological ease of participating in this interview, I went on to co-create a podcast series for the University of Hertfordshire. The Diversifying and Decolonising UH Group explores and profiles examples of diversifying and decolonising the curriculum and other parts of the student experience, both within UH and beyond. The group has a website through which the podcast series can be accessed, as well as on Spotify etc. The method of podcasting lends itself to the work of decolonisation, through democratising access to knowledge which might otherwise only be accessible behind paywalls for journals and academic association memberships. In this open access podcast series, colleagues and students are interviewed about their ongoing work to make UH a place where students from diverse ethnic backgrounds feel a sense of belonging and see their heritage reflected within their studies.

It has been my great pleasure to platform the research of EdD student Frederica Brooksworth, in an episode where Getrude Acheampong, Race Equity Student Advocate, interviewed Frederica about Fashion Education in African nations.

Frederica is researching aspects of coloniality inherent in the higher education system across previously colonised African states. Her research will inform an expansion of the university curriculum to celebrate African talent in fashion and promote educational trips to recognise the unique contribution of African fashion to scholarly work. Another episode saw EdD student, Kate Voss, interviewed about her research into the school placement experiences of Black, Asian and minority ethnic students, using the arts-based method of portrait collaging. This episode was a conversation between two EdD students (myself and Kate), researching a similar topic; and is potentially a template for a future EdD formative learning activity.

Podcasting in universities is increasing in popularity, offering students an authentic form of assessment, a study tool which can be adjusted to individuals' pace of learning and access to tacit learning (Salmon & Edirisingha, 2008). Some universities use podcasting as a method to broadcast 'you said, we did' responses to student concerns (Long & Edwards, 2010, p99); perhaps our UH podcast could interact with our audience in a similar way through gathering student voice on decolonising the university, then discussing the points raised in a podcast episode with senior leaders.

In summary, I have found podcasting, as both an interviewee and an interviewer, to be an ideal vehicle for sharing research, exploring critical pedagogy, increasing critical consciousness and broadening my own and others' worldviews (Ferrer, Lorenzetti & Shaw, 2020). The reach of our UH podcast series extends to Canada, US, Uruguay and much of Europe, and we hope to keep expanding the range of our impact. My next foray into the technology of podcasting will explore ways to interact with listeners to further develop the ideas discussed in each episode and keep the conversation going. Watch (or should I say listen to) this space…

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