Blended Learning 2.0

PODCAST PROJECT

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APRIL 2020

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1. INTRODUCTION

The project *Blended Learning 2.0* aims to give students a critical and active role in blended learning activities. Blended learning often has a supply-driven approach. Lecturers make knowledge clips, lectures, cases, games or other educational material available digitally. Students learn about this, often individually, and integrate the acquired knowledge into their personal learning process. With this project we propose a development in which blended learning gains an (even) more participatory and social character.

We investigated the possibilities of blended learning 2.0 through the use of student-generated podcasts in education. Student-generated podcasts have the potential to enhance the learning process. Students play an active role in generating, planning, and producing class relevant podcasts. By producing original work, students create class content themselves. This type of active learning provides room for collaboration, team learning, peer review and in-depth discussions. Thus, Blended Learning 2.0 aims to develop higher-order cognitive skills.

The Blended Learning 2.0 project was funded by the Faculty Innovation Fund. This fund assists teachers of the faculty of Law, Economics and Governance (LEG) of Utrecht University in stimulating educational innovations. Projects were eligible for the Faculty Innovation Fund if they:

- Contribute convincingly to the innovation of education and the quality of education;
- Go beyond the normal evaluation and improvement cycle of a programme or faculty;
- (In the long term) (can) have added value for all three departments.

This report presents the insights generated through this project. Findings are based on (1) a desk research about Blended Learning and the use of student-generated podcasts in education, (2) short interviews with students, (3) a podcast-assignment at master level, and (4) oral and written course evaluations.

BLENDED LEARNING: STRENGTHEN YOUR EDUCATION

The definition of Blended Learning

Blended Learning is an approach to educational redesign. It involves a combination of online and face-to-face teaching. Horn & Staker (2012, p. 3) define Blended Learning as: "A formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace and at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home" (see also Figure 1).

Blended learning is…

a formal education program in which a student learns at least in part through online delivery of content and instruction with some element of student control over time, place, path, and/or pace

and

at least in part at a supervised brick-and-mortar location away from home.

Figure 1: Definition of Blended Learning (Horn & Staker, 2012, p. 3)

Blended Learning: the importance of integration

Blended Learning has several purposes when used in educational design (Figure 2). For example, it allows for flexibility, because students can learn at their own pace wherever they are and whenever they like. In their meta-analysis Means, Toyoma, Murphy & Baki (2013, p. 2) show that blended education generated better student outcomes than traditional face-to-face education. The research also showed that blended education could encourage more interaction among learners (Means et al. 2013, p. 36). However, Means et al. (2013, p. 2) contend that the advantage over face-to-face classes was only significant in the studies

contrasting Blended Learning with traditional face-to-face education. There was no difference between traditional education and courses that were completely taught online. Hence, it is important that the online content and face-to-face meetings are fully integrated and that they reinforce each other (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008, p. 7). In other words: the online teaching aspects enhance and support student learning, but do not eliminate the need for a face-to-face meetings (Means et al., 2013, p. 5). Podcasting, for example, could serve as a supplement to the learning experience (Goldman, 2018, p. 5; Heilesen, 2010, p. 1064).

Creating flexibility for students: they can learn at their own pace wherever they are and whenever they like

Attaining different levels of learning

Improving and facilitating communication and cooperation with and among students

Ensuring that student process the subject matter better during face-to-face teaching

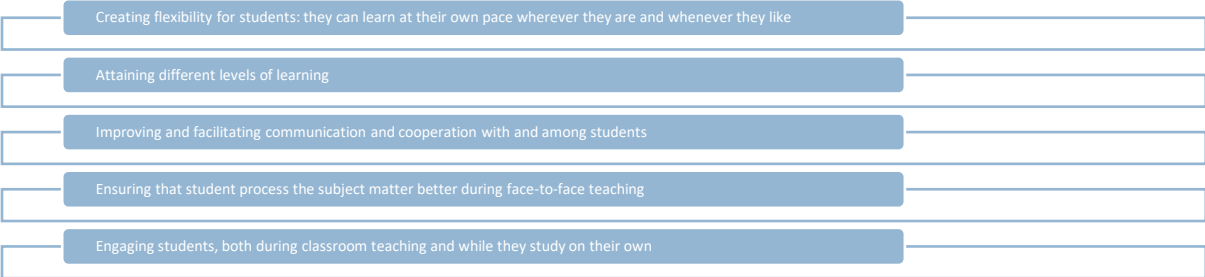Engaging students, both during classroom teaching and while they study on their own

Figure 2: the purposes of Blended Learning

How to implement Blended Learning?

It is important to show the advantages of Blended Learning for students. For instance, compared to traditional education, Blended Learning offers more opportunities to develop 21st-century skills. There is plenty of room for more in-depth questions, interaction, collaboration, discussion and the development of an active learning attitude. Blended Learning requires a different attitude from students because they have a more active role in the learning process compared to general lecturing settings. It may take some time before students get used to this. Several suggestions about implementing Blended Learning are given in the E-learning module provided by Educate-IT (see Figure 3).
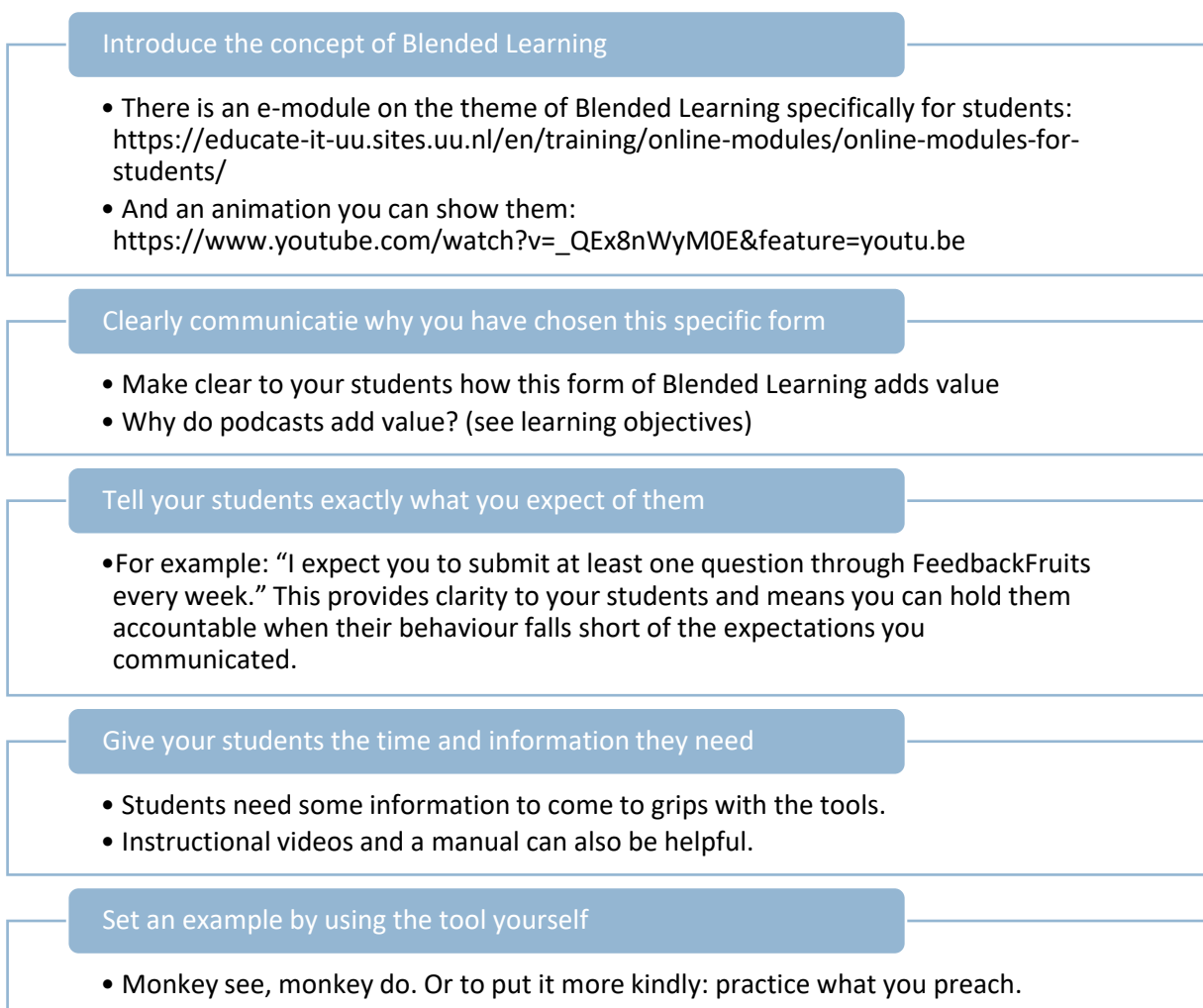
Introduce the concept of Blended Learning

- There is an e-module on the theme of Blended Learning specifically for students: https://educate-it-uu.sites.uu.nl/en/training/online-modules/online-modules-for-students/
- And an animation you can show them: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QEx8nWyM0E&feature=youtu.be

Clearly communicatie why you have chosen this specific form

- Make clear to your students how this form of Blended Learning adds value
- Why do podcasts add value? (see learning objectives)

Tell your students exactly what you expect of them

- For example: "I expect you to submit at least one question through FeedbackFruits every week." This provides clarity to your students and means you can hold them accountable when their behaviour falls short of the expectations you communicated.

Give your students the time and information they need

- Students need some information to come to grips with the tools.
- Instructional videos and a manual can also be helpful.

Set an example by using the tool yourself

- Monkey see, monkey do. Or to put it more kindly: practice what you preach.

Figure 3: tips from the E-learning module "Blended Learning for teaching assistants"

The popularity of the podcast

Nowadays, podcasts play a vital role in impacting our leisurely time (Goldman, 2018, p. 2). Goldman (2018, p. 2) argues that podcasts are "the exploration of the human intellect". The accessibility and availability of podcasts are widespread, because of the minimum technology requirements. As podcasts fit perfectly into our busy lives, they have gained in popularity in recent years (Ryan, 2018). For example, people can listen to podcasts while doing other activities (e.g. driving, cleaning and exercising), so listeners do not have to compromise their time (Kravcenko, 2016). In other words: podcasts suit modern lifestyles. This is not only the case for leisurely time but also in educational settings. In this report, the advantages of podcasts in educational settings will be discussed. Specifically student-generated podcasts in an educational setting will be highlighted.

Podcasts as a digital learning tool

Heilesen (2010, p. 1064) argues that classroom teaching becomes *blended* when augmented with podcasts. Hence, the use of podcasts in education could have the same advantages as Blended Learning has (see Figure 2). For example, podcasting is a medium allowing students flexible access to teaching materials (Ralph, Head & Lightfoot, 2010, p. 16). Podcasts give students a choice about where and when they would like to listen. On top of that: there is a pause button, so students can learn at their own pace (Ralph et. al. 2010, p. 21). Moreover, students could have different learning styles and podcasts could appeal to a specific group of students that prefer listening to audio material. In this way podcasts accommodate audio-based learning styles, which might specifically suit those students coping with dyslexia or other reading disabilities.

Blended Learning often has a traditional supply-led approach. Chunks of information are typically delivered by a teacher (Lee, McLoughlin, Chan, 2008, p. 509). They are the information senders and students are information receivers. For example, teachers could provide digital educational material, such as a popular available podcast. Students can listen to these podcasts and integrate the individually obtained knowledge into their learning

process. In this case, the use of podcasts in education could be seen as a form of *Blended Learning 1.0.*

BLENDED LEARNING 2.0

In this project however, we propose a development in which *Blended Learning* acquires a more participatory and social character because students will create podcasts themselves. We call this Blended Learning 2.0. The terminology Blended Learning 2.0 is derived from developments in the use of internet. The internet developed from a static web (web 1.0) into an active and social environment in which users participate (web 2.0) (Thompson, 2007, p. 1). According to Downes, the web has shifted from *"being a medium in which information was transmitted and consumed, into being a platform in which content was created, shared, remixed, repurposed, and passed along"* (Downes, 2005, p. 4).

The key elements of Blended Learning 2.0 are characterized by active learning through (team) creation, participation and collective reflection (Downes, 2005, p. 2). In this alternative model, the process and outcome are more important than the output (Lee et al., 2008, p. 509). In other words: the focus is more on the learning process of the students, rather than the quality of the podcasts as an output of the process (Lee et al., 2008, p. 509). By using podcasts as a *Blended Learning 2.0* tool, students are empowered to have an active learning attitude and to gain greater autonomy in their learning trajectory (Downes, 2005, p. 2).

Participatory and social

Student-generated podcasts have social and participatory elements. First, podcasts have the potential to assist in creating a community, because there is a personal element to podcasts (Ryan, 2018). Often, these communities create a feed-back loop: listeners can react to the podcast, which potentially inspires producers to make certain content. Follow this, students can share their podcast with peers, or even a broader audience than the immediate classroom. Students can develop a sense of ownership and pride in their work because of this broader visibility (Sprague & Pixley, 2008, p. 232). Secondly, podcasting is participatory. Students will have to work together and take on an active and engaging role in generating the podcast. The

teacher's role is to facilitate, support and motivate students in terms of relevant content, the use of devices and software and post-podcast discussion and reflection. Consequently, students' role shifts from being a (passive) audience that digests information to active creators of classroom content (Chang, Kennedy & Petrovic, 2008, p. 165).

Knowledge-creation value

The shift to more student-created content may have different effects. In their paper, Chang et al. (2008, p. 166) explore themes that emerged from students' reflections on student-generated podcasts. They argue that the shift to peer-generated content is not always easy, because students may presuppose that lecturer-created content holds superior academic authority (Chang et al., 2008, p. 167). However, this presupposition does not take into account that the result of a student-generated podcast is a creative process. Students may obtain valuable knowledge through the production of a podcast (Chang et al., 2008, p. 168), as they need to analyse and connect different information sources (academic articles, empirical data, expert presentations, real-life cases) to produce a coherent script.

Lee et. al. (2008, p. 518) argue that the knowledge-creation value is the true potential of podcasting because students formulate their understanding of ideas and share these outcomes with an audience they value, such as their peers. In one project students were asked to reflect on their experience with producing podcasts themselves (Ralph et al. 2010). One student noted that podcasts allowed for "deepening and widening of the debate and discussion beyond confines of the seminar." Another student argued that student-generated podcast

> "made learning the subject more of a proactive and engaging process, rather than simply absorbing designated information for analysis, by forcing us to discuss and decide what was worth focusing on, what wasn't and what else we could find that had been overlooked." (Ralph et al., 2010, p. 21)

These quotes show that students have to collaborate to come to collective problem-solving. They have to actively engage in the knowledge building dialogue (Lee et al., 2008, p. 510).

Such an assignment requires higher-order cognitive thinking skills (Bloom et al., 1956), as students collectively create knowledge themselves.

Constructive alignment

The added value of Blended Learning appears when offline and online education is integrated. Independent of this, it is important that the different components of the course are aligned. This is called 'constructive alignment'(Biggs, 1999). What are you trying to accomplish? What is your learning objective? Start from there and consider whether a specific form of interaction will help you achieve that learning objective. What is the educational vision? What are the learning objectives of the course and how are these achieved through the use of student-generated podcasts?

Relevant learning objectives for student-generated podcasts could be:

- developing an in-depth knowledge of the subject area;
- developing critical thinking and progressive problem-solving skills;
- developing professional skills such as public speaking, presentation skills and teamwork.
  (see also Kravcenko, 2016; Lee et. al., 2008)

Lee et al. (2008, p. 513) show that students could have in-depth engagement in idea generation, collective problem solving and reciprocal dialogue. Thus, the student-generated podcasts resulted in the production of knowledge-creation discourse (Lee et al., 2008, p. 513). This is in line with possible learning objectives about student-generated podcasts: students develop in-depth knowledge of the subject; students develop critical thinking and progressive problem-solving skills and students develop professional skills such as public speaking, teamwork and presentational skills (Kravcenko, 2016; Ralph, Head & Lightfoot, 2010, p. 17).

PROS AND CONS OF PODCASTING

Before implementing student generated podcasts in the designated master programme, it was important to explore students' opinions about podcasting. Several short interviews with students were conducted to investigate advantages and disadvantages of integrating the podcast in education. These students were both experienced and inexperienced with podcasts. The pros and cons of a student perspective are shown in Table 1. Several tips and tricks were formulated based on these interviews with students.

PROS	CONS
"Podcasting is a fresh experience. It is an original project."	"It could be uncomfortable to listen to your own voice, once you have made the podcast. So, some students might not feel comfortable making a podcast."
"A podcast forces students to explain their subject in a more understandable way. This makes science more accessible to the general public."	"It can take a lot of time to make a podcast. For example, it must be properly edited, because otherwise, the podcast could sound amateurish."
"You can learn how you can convey a message effectively. There is no element of non-verbal communication, so it is challenging to hold people's attention."	"I don't think this is a skill I can use in my future career."
"You can learn how to interview people. This is also a good skill for qualitative research."	"Podcasting is about how to hold people's attention. However, it is also important that the content is academic."
"You have to create persuasive content. With podcasting, you can learn to be creative and convincing. You can use this skill in further professional contexts."	
"It is not 'live', like a presentation. Therefore, you can focus on persuasive content and editing."	

Table 1: Pros and cons of podcasting from a student perspective

WHAT IS IMPORTANT ACCORDING TO STUDENTS?

- Create a safe environment for learning and growth.

- Make a clear syllabus for students on producing and editing the podcast. It is also important to make a clear schedule for students.

- Ensure that the skill is linked with a possible future career, because this makes the assignment more relevant. For example, students can make a podcast for a specific organization.

- Emphasize the advantages of listening to podcasts. For example, students do not have to compromise time to listen to the podcast of their peers, because the podcasts can be consumed while doing other activities and at any location.

- Give students the freedom to choose a topic that interests them. They can use their creativity if they can make their own topic choice.

- Emphasize that there must be a good balance between content and creativity. Podcasting is not only about giving a summary of an article but also about creating persuasive content. It could be helpful to pay attention to the art of storytelling.

- Ensure that the podcasts last 15-20 minutes. If you would limit the time too much, students do not get the opportunity to go into detail. It would be a pity if the theory can only be discussed superficially.

- The Audacity program is easy to use and therefore good for beginners in podcasting. Students also note that Garageband is easy to use.

4. RESULTS OF THE PROJECT

In this Blended Learning 2.0 project, a group of 25 students of the master program Organisations, Change and Management at Utrecht University School of Governance (USG) were prompted to produce a podcast in one of their courses. The students were divided into groups of five and they had to produce a podcast of 15-20 minutes. The podcast had to be relevant for an audience consisting of practitioners in the field of change management (see also Appendix A for the complete description of the assignment). After production, the podcast were uploaded in the course environment on Blackboard. All student had to listen to at least three other podcast. A day after the production and publication on Blackboard, the full class met each other again to have a 'Podcast meet-up' (inspired by the meet-ups of the Dutch documentary series *Tegenlicht*). From each podcast the lecturer pre-selected important and course related themes, which were then extensively discussed in class. Finally, we conducted a reflective dialogue on the experience of using a podcast as both a course assignment and input for classroom content.

Based on this reflective dialogue and using quotes from students that participated in the course, we present several experiences with Blended Learning 2.0. In addition, several scores of the course evaluation will be discussed briefly.

Creating flexibility for students: they can learn at their own pace wherever they are and whenever they like

In the project, students could record the podcast whenever and wherever they would like to (in a given timeframe of four weeks). Besides, they were able to learn at their own pace with a self-chosen format. As a student notes: "Each group has produced the podcast differently. Students chose their path."

Attaining different levels of learning

One of the advantages of Blended Learning is that it accommodates different learning styles. Students underpin this advantage: "My learning preference is auditory because I am dyslexic. The production and the podcast meet-up appeals to this learning style."

The learning process of creating a podcast is different from writing a paper. A student state: "When you create a podcast it is challenging to make it organic and persuasive. It is more difficult to reconsider your words, once you have recorded the podcast."

Improving and facilitating communication and cooperation with and among students

Students, as producers of the podcast, were in interaction with each other during the process and constantly redesigned their product. Students developed a script before recording the podcast, but several groups mentioned they added new elements to the script while recording. Students also argue that they think the production is a process in which you learn together: "It is really interesting to discuss the topics with each other. It is fascinating to hear the perspectives of others on the discussed topic. The discussion contributes to cooperation with other students."

Ensuring that students process the subject matter better during face-to-face teaching

In the last seminar of the course, the podcast meet-up, the student-generated podcasts were discussed. In this class, connections were made between the different podcasts. Students experienced this meet-up seminar as valuable: "In class, the theoretical concepts of the various podcasts became more clear. The interconnections of the podcasts also became more vivid." Consequently, the production of the podcast did not replace face-to-face contact. According to a student, the face-to-face meeting in class reinforced the learning process. The online process and traditional education were fully integrated (Garrison and Vaughan, 2008, p. 7).

Engaging students, both during classroom teaching and while they study on their own

At the start of this project, there was a lot of enthusiasm among students to produce the podcast. In the first seminar, a student said: "We aim to make a podcast which makes us proud." In the podcast meet-up, students note that it is also very interesting to listen to the podcasts of their peers. "You often write a paper on your own. You do not always get to see the papers of your peers. You can experience the choices that were made in the production process when listening to a podcast from fellow students."

Formal course evaluation

In addition to the face-to-face evaluation of the project, it is interesting to look at the scores of the course evaluation (see Appendix B). Students answered different questions about the course and the teaching methods. Although the scores are also influenced by other learning experiences in the course (e.g. a challenge based case, a serious game), we believe they do reflect the potential that Blended Learning 2.0 has to offer to higher education. Relevant evaluation question were:

1. *The chosen course formats stimulated me to engage actively.*
2. *The course assignments were adequate for this course.*
3. *How many hours did you spend on average per week during this course (please include all study-related activities in your estimate)?*
4. *In the podcast assignment, I have learnt to explain scientific research in an understandable way for the general public.*

84% of the students indicate that the chosen course formats stimulated them to engage actively. One of the benefits of Blended Learning 2.0 is the engagement of students. The podcast assignment can lead to engaged students.

Besides, most students indicate that the course assignments were adequate for this course. 87,5% of the students remark that the podcast assignment contributes to explaining scientific research to the general public.

80% of the students have spent at least 15 hours per week on this course. 32% of the students indicate that they have spent more than 20 hours per week on this course. These figures show that most students have had an active learning attitude during this course and the podcast assignment may have contributed to this.

TIPS FOR LECTURERS

The pilot has some implications for lecturers that would like to use podcasting in their courses. Based on this specific project, we have come to the following recommendations:

- Once the podcasts have been produced, teachers can organize a podcast meet-up seminar. Various fragments from the podcast can be selected by the teacher and played in the classroom. This will kickstart the discussion about the podcasts. By doing this, the podcast is integrated with the face-to-face meeting and this reinforces the learning process.

- Students can listen to the podcasts of fellow students and answer several questions. This allows a more in-depth discussion during the meet-up seminar.

- According to the students, it would be helpful if the teacher would have sent course-related podcasts in advance so that these podcasts could be discussed in class. Students may be inspired by these podcasts for their own podcast production.

- Students can submit a document in addition to the podcast in which the underlying thoughts of the podcast can be explained. Students note that it is helpful to be able to justify the choices they made.

- It is recommended to discuss the mutual expectations for this podcast assignment since the assessment criteria used by are less clear and familiar than the criteria used in a paper assignment. On the other hand, students can develop their problem-solving skills better than in simple and structured tasks because authentic tasks are complex and unstructured.

- It is important to inform students that they must prepare the podcast well before they start recording. This allows students to effectively use their time in a recording studio or when recording at home or online.

- The focus on spreading the results of the podcast to a broader public or peers could be valuable (Utrecht University, n.d.): "Disseminating academic knowledge to a public of peers has become an essential skill for the graduates of the 21st century". Students can learn from spreading their results and could inspire others (Utrecht University, n.d.): For more information about student research, see:

  https://www.uu.nl/en/education/students-research-for-society

5. CONCLUSION

Students as co-creators

The various examples, quotes and implications discussed in the above sections show that Blended Learning 2.0 has the potential to strengthen higher education. In Blended Learning 2.0 the process of knowledge-creation becomes more tangible for students. As one student in our our reflective dialogue put it: "I understand the subject matter better, because of the group discussions that we had during the process. I have gained a more in-depth understanding of [previously] unfamiliar themes." Students formulate their understanding of course themes in the various podcasts. Through this effort they come to collective problem solving and engage in a knowledge building dialogue. As Lee et al. (2008, p. 501) state: "It stimulates both individual and collective learning, as well as perspective-taking and negotiation of meaning that underpin knowledge creation."

To conclude, student-generated podcasts are a powerful way of implementing Blended Learning 2.0. Through Blended Learning 2.0 students become co-creators of their collective classroom learning experience.

Assignment

- Students are divided into groups of four or five people.
- Students have to produce a 15-20 minute podcast (3000-5000 words script) on an assigned or chosen topic/ question.
- The content of the podcast must (1) contain an overview of the topic, (2) state the relevance, (3) highlight the most important debates and (4) conclude with a discussion of the implications.
- Students record and edit the podcast (in a DIY studio or) with the free software Audacity (and Zencastr).

It is also possible to add extra challenges in the assignment, for example, students could be encouraged to record and include expert interviews, add Jingles in the podcast or interesting audio tracks with quotes. Moreover, it is possible to discuss with students if they would like to share their podcasts on social media, for example, on a specially created blog or an upload to SoundCloud. Many schools are posting their podcasts on the internet (Sprague & Pixley, 2008, p. 231).

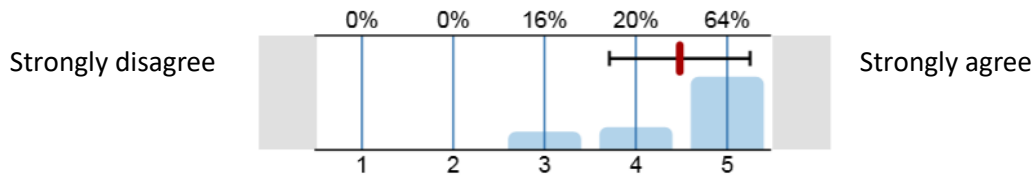**Tips or recording and editing the podcast:**

- Downloading Audacity :
  http://audacity.sourceforge.net/.
- Basics: recording, editing, mixing: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ClwSNm362E
- Audacity editing tips: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8zJhVE3bw2o
- Make your voice sound better: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TYF5ytMDFpA en https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dQCB72S64L4
- Students can find royalty-free music at: https://www.bensound.com/royalty-free-music or https://www.youtube.com/audiolibrary/music

Tips for storytelling:

- The clues to a great story:
  https://www.ted.com/talks/andrew_stanton_the_clues_to_a_great_story?referrer=playlist-how_to_tell_a_story
- How to start a podcast: every single step: https://www.thepodcasthost.com/planning/how-to-start-a-podcast/#part11
- The art of creating an invisible podcast script:
  https://www.thepodcasthost.com/planning/the-invisible-podcast-script/
- Podcast scripting: How do I write a podcast script:
  https://www.thepodcasthost.com/planning/podcast-scripting/

1) "The chosen course formats stimulated me to engage actively."

	0%	0%	16%	20%	64%	

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5

N = 25
Average = 4,5
Deviation = 0,8

2) "The course assignments were adequate for this course."

	0%	4%	12%	32%	52%	

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree
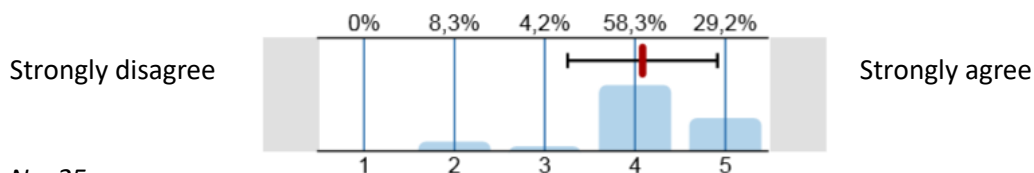
1 2 3 4 5

N = 25
Average = 4,3
Deviation = 0,9

3) "How many hours did you spend on average per week during this course (please include all study-related activities in your estimate)?"

< 5 uur	0%
5-10 uur	4%
10-15 uur	16%
15-20 uur	48%
> 20 uur	32%

N = 25

4) "In the podcast assignment, I have learnt to explain scientific research in an understandable way for the general public."

	0%	8,3%	4,2%	58,3%	29,2%	

Strongly disagree

Strongly agree

1 2 3 4 5

N = 25
Average = 4,1
Deviation = 0,8

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Short interviews with students (both experienced and inexperienced with podcasting).

Experiences with podcasting as an assignment in the master program Organisations, Change and Management, https://www.uu.nl/masters/organisaties-verandering-en-management

Experience as a member of the international podcast 'Talking About Organizations', https://www.talkingaboutorganizations.com/