

# THE Journal

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### Building a Better Podcast

by Matt Villano

*Everything you wanted to know—plus a few things you hadn't even thought to ask—on how to best bring the technology into K-12 curriculum.*



**STEVE JOBS GOT IT RIGHT.** When the Apple CEO introduced the company's iPod in October 2001, it was the first portable media player of its kind, and he predicted the technology would change the educational landscape forever. Today, more than six years later, a growing number of educators are using the iPod and a bevy of other tools to supplement lessons with that digital file-sharing activity, podcasting.

Still, while anyone can podcast, creating podcasts with true academic value can be tough. How can K-12 educators make the content unique, and relevant to teaching and learning? Technology coordinators from districts all over the country say there are nuances to making worthwhile podcasts, and simple tools that can empower teachers to turn run-of-the-mill podcasts into compelling educational exercises.

### Be Prepared

Content-wise, podcasting is a lot like speechwriting. Educators must train students to know their audience, pick a theme, research talking points, and practice. Organization is key too. Like speeches, podcasts require a beginning, middle, and conclusion. Many K-12 podcasts suffer from lack of focus, with content that rambles and is difficult to follow, says Raleigh, NC-based educator and technologist David Warlick.

"You can't just plop kids down in front of a microphone and say, 'Okay, now it's time to talk about this' or 'Read this,'" says Warlick, who runs the Education Podcast Network, a database of education-related podcasts. "When you spend time up front preparing them for what the podcast is all about, the better your podcast ultimately will be."

In most cases, podcast preparation begins with a standard lesson. Beyond that, Warlick says educators can develop special curricula or games that enable students to find additional information. In many cases, podcasts are the result of a day or two in the library, where students are encouraged to research a

particular subject as they would for a term paper. For example, a history class is studying Martin Luther King Jr. in advance of MLK Day. The teacher has his students research King in the library, talk to people about him, then record a podcast on the subject and put it online. The difference, of course, is that in researching and preparing a podcast, unlike a term paper, students are required to work together and the finished product is a presentation.

Interestingly, much of podcasting's educational value comes from this research process. Yes, the medium is fun, but by researching material well enough to present it via podcast, students are receiving a broader educational experience. Tim Tyson, principal of **Mabry Middle School** in Marietta, GA, and a podcasting maven, says the editing and revision processes help students internalize the content, and adds that podcasting can be an excellent example of beginning with the end in mind—a strategy also known as backward design.

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