October 12, 2008

Dear Edutopia.org Editor,

Thank you for your inspiring article by Maya Payne, *In One Ear: iTunes U Puts iPods to Good Use*, published October 8, 2008 (http://www.edutopia.org/itunes-u-professional-development). I have searched for reliable podcasts for personal and professional projects. With iTunes U focusing a new emphasis on collecting educational content across the Web into one interface, I can appreciate how valuable this site will be as a repository of resource material to all classroom teachers who implement project-based learning.

Integrating technology into every aspect of the classroom is the priority of all educators concerned about teaching in the 21st century. Putting together a high quality, meaningful instructional design that can work, in the time available, is a challenge. The Edutopia staff describes four key components that an effective classroom teacher has to infuse into learning activities, in the article *Why Integrate Technology into the Curriculum?: The Reasons Are Many.*

> Integrating technology into classroom instruction means more than teaching basic computer skills and software programs in a separate computer class. Effective tech integration must happen across the curriculum in ways that research shows deepen and enhance the learning process. In particular, it must support four key components of learning: active engagement, participation in groups, frequent interaction and feedback, and connection to real-world experts. Effective technology integration is achieved when the use of technology is routine and transparent and when technology supports curricular goals. (http://www.edutopia.org/tech-integration).

The first key component, active engagement, is critical to the other components. Without active engagement, learning is casual and random. Diverse and interesting materials focus the learners' attention and energy. Laura Hunter's series, *SciFi Friday*, featured in Payne's article, is the perfect example of an effective way to "hook" students into learning.

Constructivist educators place a high value on the second component; learning activities that involve students in group participation. Hunter's podcasts are designed to be used as a spark at the beginning of an activity. But this is an empty gimmick with little lasting value without the next step, which has to be taken by the teacher. Instructional plans must first come from the learning goals, and then built around follow up activities that create opportunities for students to make discoveries and work together to gather data from which to draw conclusions.

Learning takes place more effectively and results in deep understanding when students receive frequent interaction and continuous feedback. Podcasts can be viewed again and again as a student needs to reinforce understanding. But information resources, such as the podcasts being collected at iTunes U, only serve as a beginning for a dialogue. The teacher must then provide ongoing interaction to guide learning in the most meaningful direction. As well, it is the teacher's task to supply feedback to assure both teacher and learners that they are on track.

The fourth critical component in using technology to reach the full potential in 21st century teaching, is the universal connection that on-line resources can give to real-world experts. The Web gives students access to needed experts and professionals. Podcasts are available, at no cost, to every student, teacher and school. But teachers cannot accept at face value every podcast available on the Web. The reputation of the participating contributors on iTunes U will maintain the high quality of this growing repository. Experts with credibility and relevance are brought right into the student's world by browsing through just one source. Time constraints, the most challenging aspect of project-based teaching, just got manageable.

Thank you,

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http://mediapete.com/projects/CIT609/class.html