

# Podcasting at Chepping View

Once you get the hang of it, making a school podcast can be a brilliantly motivating cross-curricular project. **Caroline Twigge** explains

**W**hen we launched the Chepping View podcast we were all excited but had no idea whether we would succeed. We were jumping into a relatively unknown field with very little expertise. Nobody imagined that within a year we would have gained national recognition!

Before the project began we approached a local specialist grammar school, John Hampden Grammar School, to ask for their support in working on a new project, The Chepping View Primary School Radio Show, to help the children research their ideas and record and edit the show. This project enhanced links that already existed between the schools and, we believe, was beneficial to both sets of pupils.

Podcasting has given children from Chepping View an opportunity to explore 'real life literacy' and develop literacy skills through genuine purposeful writing and the necessity for clear and concise speaking and listening skills. In the first year alone the children have written scripts, sent emails, written letters to staff at the school, composed jingles, written to members of the wider community, designed advertising posters, designed surveys and much, much more. Many of the children see podcasting as a 'fun lesson' rather than 'proper work', even though it involves learning and using the numerous aspects of writing.

It is not only literacy and ICT skills that have been used, practised and extended. Throughout the first year the children carried out surveys and analysed the results,

drawing graphs to find the preferred length of time for the podcast and the preferred method of listening to it.

## Fantastic ideas

In September 2008 we selected four children from each year group in Key Stage 2. These children were all able in literacy and had many fantastic ideas, yet often became frustrated by the process of writing them down. All of the children were involved in the writing and recording of the shows and every child chose how they contributed to each show. These



16 children were to become our team of radio presenters.

During our first year the sessions ran weekly. Children left the rest of their class and attended the podcasting sessions. The 'podcasters' then worked in groups and decided what they would like to write and research – my only guidance was to avoid duplication between the groups (particularly as all children seem to love writing and researching jokes!). The children varied who they worked with; either they decided who within the group they wanted to collaborate with, or we chose groups to ensure that all the children were given a chance to work with a range of differently aged children throughout the year. The children were then supported by a student from John Hampden, whose role was to facilitate rather than direct; we strived to ensure that the podcasts were written for the children, by the children.

It was fascinating to watch the children, of very different ages, working on and sharing in the same goal, to see how they dealt with the prospect of deciding what to write and then recording for the first time – which all the children saw as a very exciting opportunity. "You're actually doing it [writing] for real!" enthused Ahmynah.

Technology, time and space were the biggest problems we envisaged in an extremely busy primary school. We were lucky enough to be timetabled one of our small ICT suites to work in during our podcasting session. It was a big help to have the use of computers (although not fundamental), as this allowed the children to independently research their sports news and jokes, send emails and write letters to various people.

As a school embarking on a new and somewhat untested project, we decided to start the project using what we had readily available to us already: school computers, some very lightweight microphones and the Audacity recording software, available for free download, which we installed on all the school computers.

## Not perfect

During the first recordings we realised that the equipment would be adequate for us to achieve our goal and although we managed to produce a good first podcast, it was certainly not perfect. The children identified some of the biggest problems as the new equipment. One recalled how our biggest difficulties came "as soon as we started using the equipment"; another specifically identified the problem as "when the microphone was buzzing" and "when the voices went squeaky"! We were fortunate enough to be given a better quality microphone, which meant that later episodes were less crackly! However, our free, lightweight microphones were good enough to get started. We are still creating our podcasts using a laptop, microphone and free software – special podcasting software and state-of-the-art microphones were not required for our radio show.

Despite having a great space to work in, it quickly became evident that a noisy classroom, with 16 excited children, was not the best place to record a radio show. It was then that we realised that lack of a quiet space was going to be the biggest problem – the technology suddenly



became simple! Fortunately, all of the children involved in the project were so enthusiastic about their podcasts that they were willing to give up some playtimes and lunchtimes to record in a quiet classroom. The recording became quicker as time went on – they began to act as professionals, turning up to their recording sessions well rehearsed and ready to go (either that or they wanted to go out and play football).

The next difficulty we faced was turning our fantastic recordings into our first podcast. As Audacity has the capability to convert recordings into mp3 format, the battle was not as daunting as we feared. Once the file was converted to mp3, we could easily add the recording to the school website. But we also wanted to turn our recordings into podcasts which would automatically download on to computers. So we used our virtual learning environment, 'Choodle', to host our podcasts. This is accessible to all of the children in the school.

Eventually, after about six hours of work (or was it six weeks?), we had done it! We had managed to make a slightly ropery podcast for our children and families to listen to. From here we knew that we could only get better. Some of the children who were involved in the project listened to the first episode more than 30 times in a week!

As we met after each episode had been published, the

children regrouped and considered things that they decided they would like to include in the next episode, using the previous episodes as a method of evaluation and measuring the successes of each feature. Once again, the children came up with the ideas from school news, more interviews with staff, jokes, reports on school trips and events... the list goes on. They wrote to Chris Powling, a reputable children's author who was visiting the school, and our headteacher Richard Millington, to see if they would both like to be interviewed. Once they had both said yes, the children sent them the questions. The children who interviewed Richard thoroughly enjoyed the privilege of sitting in the headteacher's office, and when I asked of the group what their favourite part of podcasting was last year, I was greeted with a chorus of "the Chris Powling interview!"

### Expectations

As the project has developed – and after interviewing a famous author and becoming national award winners – the podcasters' hopes and expectations have grown. At the end of the last academic year the children began writing



scripts in advance of the new school year. They were keen to get more people from outside the school involved in the podcast and so they have begun drafting letters to a range of people – including Terry Wogan! When I asked them why they wanted to interview famous people they said: "If you interview a few more famous people, more people will listen."

A response I could not argue with! So I asked them how they were going to ask these people and get them to agree to an interview and, again without hesitation, the children replied that they were going to "choose nice famous people" and then "write them a letter and persuade them".

Following our success at the Arqiva radio awards, the children now believe that everything is possible and they constantly demonstrate their determination to achieve. They have high expectations of what they can achieve in terms of the content of the show, and I have high expectations regarding what they have already achieved and what they will continue to achieve as they develop further independence and skills.

Despite the knowledge that replies from Steven Gerrard and Hannah Montana are unlikely, the children are still willing to write a letter and have a go! Yet at the same time they're keen to talk to people within the school community and people who will reply. Some of the children have asked if they could write to some of the parents to see if they would like to come in and be interviewed, to find out what they think about Chepping View.

As a teacher I hope that the children will keep up their enthusiasm and will be keen to develop these links and incorporate the wider school community into our school radio. The larger the audience, the more important the writing and the project become.

**Caroline Twigge is a teacher at Chepping View Primary School in High Wycombe, Buckinghamshire.**

### Advice from Chepping View pupils to other primary schools considering setting up a radio show

Ihsun: "Do it because it's fun!"

Matthew: "The fear of talking into a microphone and putting it onto the internet and hearing yourself on the computer isn't that bad and the microphone isn't that scary."

Vinayak: "I think it's quite good. You have to move on with something new in school. This is quite a fun activity which any other school can do and I think it's really fun."

Leah: "I think it's really good because this is a one-off opportunity because you wouldn't normally get to do this every day."

### Chepping View pupils sum up their first year producing the podcast

Seraj: "Fantastic, because you might talk to an author!"

Hashim: "Really good, because when you do the podcast you can hear it on the computer and your parents can hear what you do."

Ahmynah: "Brilliant because you can interview your teachers!"

Leah: "I think it's really fun because you get to be famous. I told one of my friends that isn't at the school, who lives in London and she listened to it on our website and now I'm famous in London!"

Ummarah: "I think it's really good because you actually get to do it and then people can listen to it all over the world."