

Podcasting grabs grade-schoolers

Birmingham pupils learn computer skills while editing, producing RadioQ

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Jessica Harrison already had quieted down her fellow fifth-graders when she turned to the two podcasters for an update.

"Are you *sure* you're ready?" Jessica, 10, asked Tommy Anderson and David Mahoney.

With their OK, Jessica cued the rest of her classmates, who shouted in unison: "Lights! Camera! Action!"

With that, there was silence, except for the sound of Tommy and David, also 10, recording an oral book review on an MP3. This recording soon would become a podcast.

It's part of a new project that has fifth-graders at Quarton Elementary School in Birmingham taking their lessons in such subjects as math, social studies, science and Spanish and creating podcasts about what they've learned. They're created for RadioQ, their own podcasting station.

Soon those podcasts will be available by subscription through iTunes, fifth-grade teacher Deb Woodman said. People will be able to hear students' takes on such subjects as energy, prime numbers and the great places of the world. Interspersed in some podcasts will be student commercials.

With podcasting, the students create digital audio files that can be listened to, anytime and anywhere. The files can be downloaded onto an iPod or other MP3 player.

Woodman, new at Quarton this year, brought the idea of podcasting to the fifth-grade team, which includes teachers Cheri Crowe and Scott Sheckell.

Financial help came from the Quarton Parent-Teacher Association, which provided about \$3,500, much of it spent on several iMac computers to edit podcasts.

"The most exciting thing is you see the kids. They're excited. They're learning," said Valette Kaufman, PTA president.

Podcasting is an innovative way to build on technology familiar to kids today and help them use it as an educational tool, Woodman said.

But it's also become a tool for teachers to gauge how much students are learning. Woodman said she often listens to her iPod -- which includes the students' podcasts -- in her car on the way home from



Arden Aiello holds a script she and Audrey Elkus are about to read for RadioQ as part of their podcasting project at Quarton Elementary. (WILLIAM ARCHIE/Detroit Free Press)

school.

"It's like I'm assessing on the road," Woodman said.

Crowe said, "It helps us realize which children really understand and which need additional help."

That's because the students are the ones who come up with scripts for the podcasts. In Tommy and David's case, the script was about a book both had read: "Eagle Strike," part of a series of books by Anthony Horowitz.

"It's fun, but it's a lot of work," Tommy of Birmingham said of podcasting. "Me and David had to come in early to work on it," he said.

Jessica and partner Allison Davis, 10, were working Wednesday on a podcast about energy, which they had learned about several weeks ago. They'd already recorded the script, and had to edit it, using the program GarageBand to edit in music and sound effects.

"This is so exciting," Jessica said to Allison as they figured out how to make the end of their clip coincide with the beginning of the music.

Parent Linda Swanson's son Shelby used to have little to say about school at home. Podcasting has changed that. "Now, all of a sudden this is all I hear about," said Swanson, a frequent helper in Woodman's class.

For the students, podcasting is a fun way to demonstrate what they've learned.

"It's better than just writing down on paper with pencil," said Taylor Yanke, 10, of Bloomfield Hills.

"It makes me pay more attention," said Elizabeth Quigley, 10, of Birmingham. "It helps me get better grades in science."

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