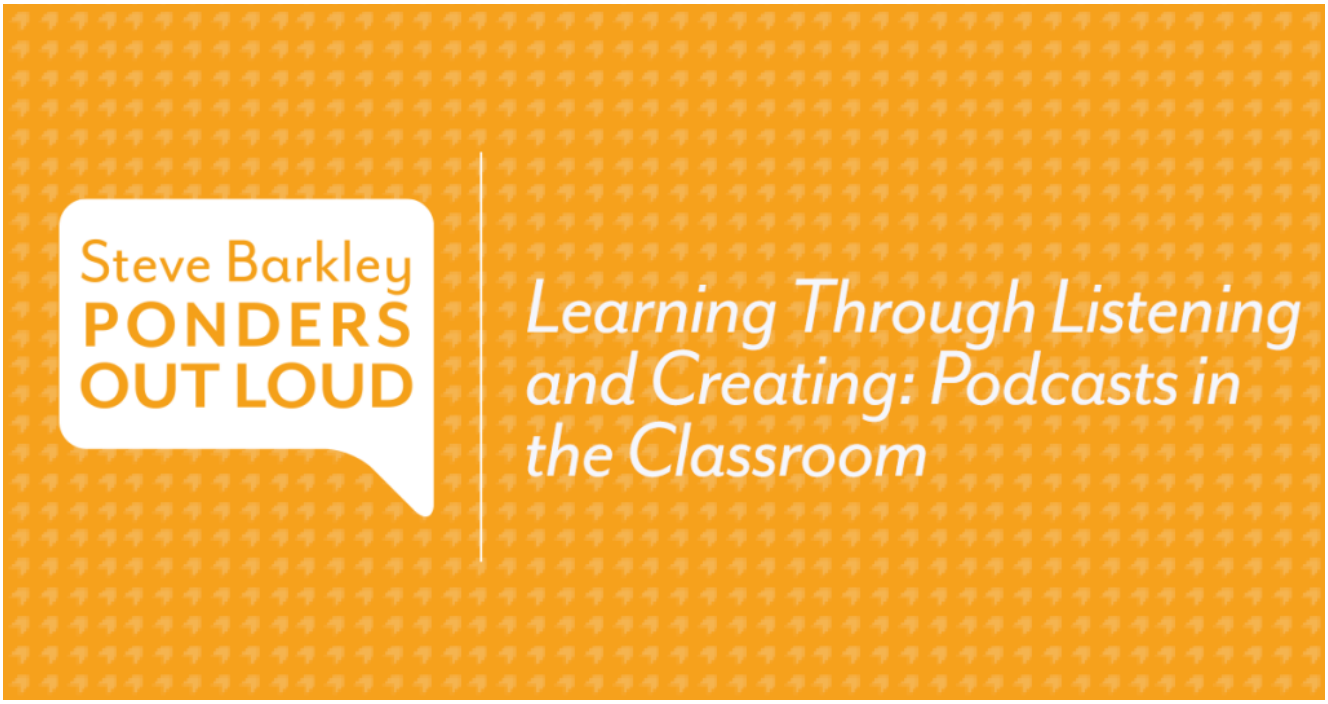
Podcast: Learning Through Listening and Creating – Podcasts in the Classroom



Teachers looking for a strategy to increase students' engagement in learning and instructional coaches looking to support those teachers can find ideas and encouragement from Katie Brooks. She shares her experiences that led her to say:

"By making podcasting a part of my ELA curriculum, I've seen students finally comprehend complex materials, have a blast learning and using their creativity, and take ownership of their learning in a way that traditional assignments don't always allow. Students who struggle with traditional tasks have become more invested in their learning when given the opportunity to express themselves through audio storytelling."

Read Katie's Edutopia article and find her resources here.

Email Katie: katiejoybrooksyt@gmail.com

Subscribe to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast on iTunes or visit BarkleyPD.com to find new episodes!

Podcast Transcript:

[00:00:00.000] – Steve [Intro]
Welcome to the Steve Barkley Ponders Out Loud podcast. As instructional coaches and school leaders, you are tasked with guiding continuous teacher growth to create student success. This podcast looks to support you with strategies from experienced guests, as well as my own insights that I've gathered over the years. I'm thrilled to have you with us. Thanks for tuning in.

[00:00:29.460] – Steve
Learning Through Listening and Creating: Podcasts in the Classroom. I invited today's guest to the podcast when I read this statement in an article she wrote for Edutopia: "By making podcasting a part of my ELA curriculum, I've seen students finally comprehend complex materials, have a blast learning, and using their creativity and take ownership of their learning in a way that traditional assignments don't always allow." That quote comes from Katie Brooks. She has a master's degree in teacher leadership and serves in multiple leadership roles in her school. Passionate about fostering creativity, literacy, and Student Empowerment, she is a strong advocate for technology integration, striving to enhance student learning by leveraging digital tools to inspire innovation and engagement. Welcome, Katie.

[00:01:32.620] – Katie
Thank you. Thank you for having me.

[00:01:34.680] – Steve
Well, thanks so much for joining us. I'm wondering, for starters, would you tell us a little bit about your school community that you're in right now, maybe the structure of your school, and then a little bit about your student body?

[00:01:50.660] – Katie
Yeah. Well, I teach at a public school in Texas. So I teach in the fifth grade team, and we have five classrooms in fifth grade. So we have a triad and a duo. I'm in the triad. I teach English. I teach ELA for three different classes of about 23 students. Our student population is pretty diverse. We're right next to a Samsung and Dell headquarters. There's a lot of immigrants, which has been really cool. I love getting to talk to and meet people from everywhere. It's very supportive, very supportive parents, very just community-based school, supportive staff. It's been really a great transition.

[00:02:38.720] – Steve
How did the exploration of using podcast for learning – where did that start?

[00:02:46.600] – Katie
I'm actually very fortunate. I student taught at my first school in Ecuador, and my mentor teacher was really into instructional technology, so much so that she ended up being the following year, an instructional technologist for the secondary school at that international school. I ended up taking her spot in fourth grade, but we still had this really good relationship, and we still shared ideas and everything like that. She ended up moving to secondary, but she kept going to all these different conferences and technology-related PDs. She ended up going to one that talked about podcasting. She came back, and it was around the start of COVID time, she gave all the teachers at that school a PD about using podcasts in the classroom and just some tools that we could do while we're all virtual, something that they could do on their computers. I thought, oh, that seems like a cool idea. We'll just try it out. And one thing I like is that there's a really low barrier to entry. It's very accessible. It could be about anything. It doesn't have to be some giant project with really big production action quality or anything like that.

[00:04:02.200] – Katie
But I just started it as something to do, as a little extra thing for them to do during COVID. And since then, just after seeing all the benefits and how into it the kids get, I've used it most of the years since then.

[00:04:19.140] – Steve
I think when I read your article, you talked about having the kids listen to podcast, and then you talked about the kids making podcast.

[00:04:32.340] – Katie
Yes.

[00:04:33.200] – Steve
Where was your starting point?

[00:04:36.620] – Katie
Yeah. Well, first, when she talked about making podcasts, I would say at that time, podcasts, at least for kids, weren't necessarily as popular as they are right now. I think in my classroom now, a lot of kids have these set podcasts that they listen to. So initially, I just started saying, hey, let's everyone make a podcast. And they were all like, what's a podcast? What are we supposed to be doing? So it was really I had to go out and seek more podcasts for younger kids. And so now, usually, we start by listening to podcasts, whether it be little… There's podcasts with stories in it from around the world. There's podcasts of history lessons and just stories that they would otherwise not hear or just come to life in a different way when presented in that format. Usually, I start by using podcast as comprehension tools, listening instead of just reading the material. Usually, we start with those. Then, yeah, taking it that one step further. Usually, I don't have to say anything, and they ask, can we make one? Or, how can we make one? Or, oh that's cool I could share a story or things like that.

[00:05:50.800] – Katie
Usually, I don't really have to bring it up. It's pretty easy buy-in for them to want to do it.

[00:05:57.960] – Steve
In the article, you said this about podcasts – you described it as one of the most engaging and empowering tools that you've brought into your classroom. What do you think it is about the podcast that makes them that engaging and empowering?

[00:06:13.920] – Katie
I think creating their own podcast just gives them so much autonomy and choice in, sadly, a world that's very test-centric. I think they're used to doing a lot of tests or fill this out or do this activity. Even though we try to make it as teachers, autonomous, and we try to give them as much choice as possible, we still have to go buy a state curriculum and all of that. But just having them come up with ideas for the podcast, be the ones to write their scripts, be the ones to know, okay, what should I say here? I think the whole project aspect of it, they get really into it, and they feel like, oh, I have responsibility for this, and this is something that I can see from the ground up, from the very beginning of, what are we going to do our podcast on until the end of, oh, wow, now the whole class gets to listen to this podcast, or now this is on our Google Classroom for the whole class to hear. I think they get really excited about seeing that finished product. They're the ones responsible for researching. They're the ones responsible for proofreading.

[00:07:19.260] – Katie
It just really combines all the aspects of ELA into one project. Then they get to hear other people, and they get to bounce ideas off of each other. Whenever I say, oh, it's time to work on a podcast, there's usually not a lot of, oh, I don't want to do that. Usually, they're really excited to get going. I think there are a lot of projects where one person

ends up taking all the work and other people can cruise by. But I think with podcasts, it’s one that each member has to be very involved in.

[00:07:53.400] – Steve
I have to tell you a reinforcing story of another person that I on a podcast. She was a secondary teacher.

[00:08:03.520] – Katie
Oh, yeah.

[00:08:04.420] – Steve
She announced to her students, untruthfully, she announced to her students that they had the choice for the next assessment of either making a podcast or writing the traditional essay response to this question. All of her students but 1, signed up to do the traditional essay.

[00:08:34.680] – Katie
Really?

[00:08:35.740] – Steve
And then she informed them that it was a survey, and they really didn’t have the choice. They had to do the podcast.

[00:08:45.180] – Katie
Interesting. Okay.

[00:08:47.100] – Steve
And at the end, when they had all finished their podcast, she came back with the survey, and if you had it to do again, and this time, all but one kid picked the podcast.

[00:09:04.200] – Katie
Oh, that’s really cool.

[00:09:06.020] – Steve
Yeah. She had written an article about assessment could be fun.

[00:09:11.540] – Katie
Yes.

[00:09:12.520] – Steve
That’s really interesting. Initially, the kids knew that making the podcast would be more work than the traditional essay to answer the questions. So they went the other way. But when they got engaged and had the pleasure from it. So when I read your article, it really reinforced that for me.

[00:09:35.420] – Katie
Yes, that’s really interesting. I have wondered what it’s like in secondary. I know that a lot of the high schoolers now can just be like, okay, whatever I can do by myself that’s the least amount of work or interaction. I think also just been, fifth graders are very social – if there’s ever a chance that I’ve seen for them to work together, they take it. They love working with partners or trios. I think that’s really interesting to see how it’s different over that. But they love it. I think it’s encouraging to see them work with each other and encouraging to see how they do feel empowered by it. They do feel like, oh, this is my responsibility. This is something that I’m making that I can see from just the idea of conception until the final product. So it’s interesting.

[00:10:29.100] – Steve
Your article identified several different ways that you use podcasts to engage students differently in the ELA skills. I’m wondering if you’d share some of those for us.

[00:10:40.460] – Katie
Yes. As mentioned before, every skill that you imagine that goes into ELA can be involved in the podcast right from the beginning. Analyzing podcasts and using those comprehension skills is a big one. Even just when you make your podcast, you have to write out a script, you have to listen to others, you have to just critical thinking, what is it that I’m going to choose to say, summarizing, researching skills when you’re

doing the research. I think it depends on the podcast as well. So one that I really enjoyed is we do a unit or novel study on this book, “Schooled” by Gordon Corman, that the kids love. So one of the comprehension activities or assessments at the end is they can choose two in the book to do a podcast. And so they pretend to be those characters, and what would their podcast be about? So really getting in the minds of other people, which then involves empathy, right? Trying to have those empathy critical thinking skills. What would these people say? What would this person’s response be? So that’s really interesting. And then when they have more research-based podcast to do, it’s really interesting to see a okay, well, there’s the whole research aspect of it.

[00:12:02.740] – Katie
What should we include? What should we not include? Are we getting our information from credible sources? How can we rewrite this into our own words? How can we make it engaging so people will want to read it? At the beginning, I think when they started listening to their podcast, they realize, oh, I’m really monotone. I’m really going over everything in a very boring way. Then by the end, to do another podcast, it’s much more engaging, they’re learning about public speaking. They’re learning about listening to other people’s podcast. It’s really great to incorporate pretty much everything they’ve learned throughout the year.

[00:12:40.840] – Steve
You also talked a little bit about how folks from other contents… I mean, the ELA, as you said, jumps out that all your standards are there. You want to share a couple of ideas you had for people from other contents?

[00:12:55.720] – Katie
Yes. When I was in Ecuador, I didn’t just teach ELA. I taught every the subject. My first podcast experience was doing it with renewable energy sources. They had to pretend. I think it was in groups of four. They had to pretend that one person was

the mayor of a city, trying to think of which energy source would be best. He was interviewing all these experts. One person pretended to be a solar energy expert and the wind energy expert. They had this interview, and they bounced ideas back and forth. For this city, it's on a plane, so there's lots of wind that comes in. It was really interesting to see. Honestly, they went off script. They had, of course, the points that they what I planned to do, and they had their script, but it was really engaging to see how they… Oh, actually, I didn't think about that until just now, and so how they went about that. That was my first project. Then I realized from there, wow, there are so many, first of all, a podcast already out there for so many different types of subjects. One of my favorites is The Past and the Curious.

[00:14:11.580] – Katie
It's a history podcast for kids. That they really love to listen to. They love to hear stories. I think a lot of the kids, when I ask them the beginning of the year, what are you interested in learning about? They usually say the Titanic or World War II, very specific. Then after hearing these podcasts, they're like, Oh, that's so interesting. I never even thought about that. Or they think, oh, I don't like social studies until they hear some of this story. That has been really interesting. I think analyzing those and then also being able to see, hey, what am I interested in that I could share with the world? And getting those storytelling tips, public speaking tips, and putting that all together is interesting. But it could be used for anything – math, science, social studies.

[00:15:03.180] – Steve
The word that jumped out at me as I was listening to you was their thinking.

[00:15:08.580] – Katie
Yes, that's very good. They're doing a lot of thinking.

[00:15:11.330] – Steve
I didn’t think of that till now. So It’s a good indicator that the podcast has got you making something happen that you want to make happen.

[00:15:20.220] – Katie
Yes, that’s very true. They have to be engaged, really.

[00:15:24.620] – Steve
Thoughts for teachers that haven’t haven’t ventured into this area before as to what might be a good starting point?

[00:15:37.240] – Katie
Yeah, I would say two things. I would say the first one being, if it’s intimidating, you can start by listening to podcasts. I put in my article several different examples that they could to start by listening and just asking questions to the kids and comprehending. There are some that are only 5-6 minutes, so it could be used even as a morning or first portion of class activity. Then second thing that they could sometimes find it intimidating would be it’s really not this big production. I think sometimes we hear a podcast and we hear, oh, we have to have sound. We have to have all this big material. Maybe we have to pay for a subscription service. But truly, we just use this website, vocaroo.com. It just records it. There’s one button on the home platform. They just record on there and an easy copy link to Google Classroom or wherever. But it doesn’t need to be this huge production. It could be starting as, hey, let’s share our favorite books. It’s just a 5-10 minute podcast sharing your favorite books. A lot of times, teachers will do activities like, hey, write a diary entry from the perspective of this character.

[00:16:56.220] – Katie
Or maybe instead of a diary entry, why don’t you do a podcast with the character interviewing somebody else. So I think it really can be scary at first, but I think the first time you do it, you realize, oh, okay, this isn’t bad at all. It’s

really easy, and the kids will enjoy it.

[00:17:16.660] – Steve
Well, I know that you had those resources in your article, so I will put the link to your article in the lead into this podcast. Make it easy for folks to find. If people want to learn more about what you're or follow up with questions that they might have, what's the best way for them to be in touch with you?

[00:17:37.140] – Katie
Yeah, they could email me. My email is katiejoybrooksyt@gmail.com. Then I have an education Instagram called msbrooksandherbooks.

[00:17:51.720] – Steve
All right. We'll put the links to those in the podcast leading as well.

[00:17:56.960] – Katie
Thank you so much.

[00:17:58.240] – Steve
Thank you so much. It's It's delightful. I hope that you've, through this podcast, get a chance to spark some other teachers to have their students get engaged. Thank you.

[00:18:13.240] – Katie
Thank you so much. It was great to meet you.

[00:18:17.000] – Steve [Outro]
Thanks for listening, folks. I'd love to hear what you're pondering. You can find me on Twitter or LinkedIn at Steve Barkley, or send me your questions and find my videos and blogs at barkleypd.com.