

Lucas Maxwell

School Librarian; London, England

Lucas Maxwell, a Dalhousie graduate, works as a school librarian in London, England. Lucas worked at the Dalhousie archives, as well as Halifax Public Libraries before moving to the United Kingdom. Lucas facilitates and runs many different teen programs in his library including Dungeons and Dragons, open mic nights, manga clubs, and podcasting. I met with Lucas to discuss his experiences with running podcasting programming with teens.

What is the best way to go about starting a podcasting program for teens in a library?

When starting a podcasting program with teens, the first step is to figure out who is interested. If you are working in a public library this would require promotion, in a school library this is less necessary as students are already present in the library. It's important to keep the group small to start; we had a consistent group of six students. The next step is to figure out a theme. My students wanted to interview authors about their books as well as each other about what they're reading. A lot of students may not have had the chance to interact with authors and so this gave them a chance to see what it is really like to be a published author. It's really important to stick with the theme, especially if they intend on publishing the podcast. Make sure that you let the teens lead the process. I gave them control to name the podcast, record the intro music, and record the introduction. The more control they have the more they will care about the project.

What are some of the challenges you have had in running this sort of programming?

The biggest challenges we faced were tech challenges. We were lucky to have won a grant to receive all of our podcasting equipment, but no one knew how to operate it. We needed to figure this out, which took some time and was a bit of a learning curve. Now that the core group of students and I know how to use the equipment we can always teach it to any newcomers to the program. Another challenge we faced was scheduling. Teens are extremely busy, and it can be a challenge to keep the group coming on a regular basis. I found that if we did keep the podcast on more of a set schedule, students were more likely to stay interested. It's important to communicate with teachers or parents about the importance of the program so that the schedule can be kept.

Did you find that you had to learn a lot of technical skills?

We did! The main skills we had to master were editing, and learning the positioning of people in relation to the mic stands. We found that you don't need to spend a lot of money to edit the podcast, there's a free program called Audacity which I would really recommend. It's simple to use and students learn very quickly. I would suggest that you seek out any experts you may know to help. I created a partnership with a music technician who gave us a 1-hour lesson on how to use Audacity. Afterwards we were able to edit the podcast ourselves and teach others how to. We found that it was really useful to have a few practice sessions before recording the

official podcast. My students interviewed each other and made sample recordings to practice with levels. This practice also taught us more about mic positioning. We learned that you should be quite close to the mic to ensure the sound turns out. I would suggest investing in good mics if you have the funds as it makes a big difference in sound quality.

What do you think are the benefits of podcasting programming?

There are both periphery and direct benefits from podcasting programming. The program taught them technical skills such as editing, along with interviewing skills. There is an art to interviewing, to making it conversational, to listening. The students learned that the interviewer should do as little talking as possible as interviewees will reveal more if you let them. The podcast improved students writing and organizational skills as they wrote their own interview questions. It also increased their interest in reading. The students had to read the author's books and develop engaging questions about the novels. Students learned how to be a part of a team. Everyone has a different role, whether it's interviewing, writing questions, or doing the levels. Students have told me that the podcast has increased their confidence, it's helped them to believe in their capabilities. A great side effect is it may show them more about what they're interested in and convince them to look for a related career. A program like this gives teens ownership of the space. I want them to feel like it's a safe space for them.

Who does the editing? Is it a complicated process?

The students operate the editing and I help. We use Audacity, on a laptop that's kept at the library. There are other editing programs you could use like Garage Band, but we find that Audacity works for us.

Do you distribute and promote the podcast and if so, how?

We use SoundCloud to host the podcast. After a certain point in time there is a cost to hosting. For SoundCloud it's less than \$10 a month. The school pays this fee for us. You can also use other programs like BuzzSprout to host. The teens use programs like Canva (a free graphic design program) to design the logo. The podcast is promoted through the authors that we interview and their publishers, or through the students or myself. If I am looking for new students to join, I will promote it with our archive of episodes.

How do you evaluate the program in order to determine its value?

It can be hard to quantify the value of this program. I have a few letters and emails from students talking about what the podcast has meant to them, which I have used when submitting reports to the school. These letters show how the program increased students' confidence and helped them to create new friendships. Some students have said they didn't feel like they belonged and were able to make a core group of friends through the podcast. Students have also mentioned increased well-being and feelings of safety. These outcomes can be hard to display on a graph. I can often see how committed students are to the program, the

fact that I don't need to chase them down and they are eager to take part shows the value. In UK schools everything is extremely strict, in that that students are assessed and tested constantly. These exams cause a lot of stress, anxiety and depression. This programming breaks the mold and some of the students rely on this to relieve the pressures they feel. Another valuable impact that I see is students' interest in reading. I might get some students in year 7 that say they hate reading but really want to do the podcast. I see the progression of these students as some become readers and more regular users of the library than they might have otherwise.

Lucas has written a book about podcasting titled [Podcasting with Youth \(2020\)](#). His goal with this book was to provide a step-by-step guide to those looking to create podcasting programming with youth. He touches on how he started, what worked and what didn't, and what equipment was used. If you are feeling overwhelmed by the prospect of starting a podcasting program at your library, I would suggest you pick up his book to learn more.



