Teaching Media Literacy through Video Production

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Abstract: In this presentation, audience will be encouraged to integrate media production into their curriculum. They will be able to outline the difficulties and unique characteristics of media production in K-12 education and discuss the power of video production in developing media literacy skills. It offers creative strategies for integrating video production and media literacy in the classroom with minimal resources equipment, showcases students' video and multimedia projects, presents web based teaching resources, and provides ideas for alternative assessments. Web page for the study will be introduced and provided for the participants for additional classroom materials and resources. http://euphrates.wpunj.edu/faculty/yildizm/EDMEDIA2003
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Media Education

Media production needs to be integrated into the curriculum. Media Literacy and Media Production are listed under core curriculum content standards in some states such as Massachusetts and others, like New Jersey, have just added Media Literacy into their core curriculum standards. K-12 teachers, now need training in the basic video production techniques and understanding of how to integrate media production throughout the curriculum to enhance learning.

Although media production is considered to be a time consuming, d ifficult, and expensive process, educators need to integrate media production into their curriculum in order to prepare new generations for a media -rich culture. Rather than just being technical or peripheral, media production must be simple and central to the learning process.

Robert Kubey and Frank Baker conducted a study[1] on the curricular objectives, educational goals and frameworks developed by each of the 50 states in the US. They discovered that at least 48 state curricular frameworks now contain one or more elements calling for some form of media education, but *delivery* of media education in the United States still lags behind every other major English-speaking country in the world. According to Kubey & Baker, "the educational establishment is still often mystified about how to retool and retrain to educate future citizens for the new realities of communication." Although the Kubey-Baker report outlines unmistakable and hopeful signs of development in the area of media education, we actually find that only a few states included media production in their framework.

Media Literacy was defined at the Aspen Institute in 1989 as "ability to access, analyze, communicate, and produce media in a variety of forms." Media literacy is more than asking students to simply decode information that they experience in the media; they must be able to talk back and produce media. As Ernest L. Boyer said: "It is no longer enough simply to read and write. Students must also become literate in the understanding of visual images. Our children must learn how to spot a stereotype, isolate a social cliché, and distinguish facts from propaganda, analysis from banter, and important news from coverage."

Media Production

The role of media production in media education has been an important topic of discussion among educators. With the help of new media and technologies, students will have more access and power to communicate and produce their own projects, presentations, and portfolios and share them with other students around the world.

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[1] The research is at http://www.med.sc.edu:1081/

As Renee Hobbs states in her internet article "The Seven Great Debates of Media Literacy Movement,"[2] there is controversy over whether media literacy can be learned solely by deconstructing videos or whether it is necessary for one to learn how to create the videos. Therefore from a decontructionist perspective, media production is a waste of time in reaching Media Literacy goals. In addition to hardware and software problems and equipment needs, inflexible scheduling in the school create difficulty for media production. "Child-created video is often resisted by teachers. They feel that there is no time for it after all the other demands on the curriculum are met, but a closer look shows that video tape production need not compete with other activities." (LeBaron, 1981) On the other hand, Adams and Hamm (p 32) encourages both the production and the analysis components of media education. They emphasize the importance of creating personal meaning from the visual and verbal symbols and to be able to produce in the media culture. (Adams & Hamm, 2000)

Digital or analog, the goal is to provide not only instruction but also access to the media production tools so that the students could experience the media from producer point of view. Adams and Hamm continues (p 35) "The basic idea [behind video production] is by constructing visual communications… students could develop an understanding of media conventions by creating with the tools of the trade."

Brunner and Tally argue the importance of exploring the challenges in media production such as learning the medium's language, evalauting the suitability of the medium to the material, and identifying the target audience for the product (p.5). Brunner and Tally emphasize the fact that each medium has its own conventions. Each medium -- Linear or Nonlinear -- has its own unique strengths and limitations. Students and teachers now must master new authoring skills in a nonlinear environment in order to interpret and represent knowledge. (Brunner and Tally, 1999)

Using video technologies activates the senses and symbolic thought, further developing one's intellectual abilities (Bruner, 1986). So instead of passive learners to who read and analyze media texts and production, Potter stresses the importance of providing media tools to students so that they can produce their own media" (Potter, 1998).

The medium should not be the message. If our goal is to prepare ourselves for the media-rich culture we live in, then we need to focus on learning how to identify the message and the audience in order to reach our goal -- to educate students. The participants in my research were encouraged to think that process rather than the product was important in media production exercises. In addition, the participants were required to work on Pre-Production stage including storyboarding, script writing which constitutes the main part of the exercise. Williams and Medoff said (p.235), "…focus of the production away from technical expertise and toward the message and its interpretation."

Research

To date, few scholarly studies have investigated either digital video production in the classroom or the impact of media production on media literacy education. This study attempts to fill the gap by outlining the natural links between education and communication. There is no current study that approaches media education from the point of view of adult learners.

This study describes the video production experiences of K-12 teachers who wanted to integrate video production and media literacy skills in the curriculum. In this study, by engaging in media production activities using camcorders and digital video editing software, participants experienced the power of technology and the unique characteristics of media production in their classroom.

The qualitative research process was used to investigate the experiences of the participants in the area of media production. Computer groups (CO) and Camera Groups (CA) were given 8 video production techniques to produce in their video magic activity. For each technique, two or three hypothesis and predictions were generated.

Video techniques for the magic exercise
1. Using Camera Lens- Zoom in/ zoom out and Close up
2. Shaky Camera - Rotate the Scene and Change Orientation
3. Cut and Jump cut
4. Transitions-Swish pan and Soft wipe---Match action/ color/ shape/ texture by focus/ defocus and fade to

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[2] The article is at http://www.medialit.org/reading_room/article2.html

5. Special Effect- Filter/ Blur
6. Special Effect- Key hole- Adding Credits, Title, Graphics and Text
7. Voice Over/ Music
8. Animation

A number of students said they learned more than the video production. One CA group participant said, "I am happy to have met you, because you have given me much more to think about than just the content of this class." Another one wrote, "More than learning video production, this course gave me chance to reflect on my own viewing habits and learned something about myself." They found the media literacy exercises and the resources were helpful in understanding media messages and its unique characteristics.

The participants from CA groups did not need so much instruction whereas CO groups needed the teacher present, show examples and practice their work in order to produce their projects. Learning the software for CO groups was much more difficult and needed more guidance than CA groups.

The purpose of the magic exercise was to put the students behind the techniques. One of the CA groups participant wrote, "The effect that the magic exercise has only TV viewing is that I am more observant as to which techniques are being used and analyzing why it's being produced in that particular way."

Camera production was highly motivational indeed because the participants enjoyed working in creative ways to use the camcorders. The participants repeatedly said in their reflection papers how much they enjoyed working with the camera. As one said, "I don't believe what you see on television. All these statements are untrue, after recently producing a commercial, I believe anything is visually possible with the help of fancy equipment." On the other hand, CO groups emphasized the need for detailed step-by-step instruction and more time to master the skills. Although "the instructor was enthusiastic and easy going", students found the software confusing and frustrating.

Participants in CA groups created lesson plans integrating video production into the curriculum, whereas CO groups focused on lesson plans deconstructing ads, newspaper analysis, or unrelated topics such as butterflies. CO groups did not see the importance of video production in the classroom. They pointed out they prefer using the ready-made videos to use in the classroom. As one participant said "I wish I could take the time to develop a video but I know I would get frustrated and end up just looking for a video already made to fit into my unit" And added "It is better to deconstruct, constructing takes so much time and frustrating."

'The camera never lies', 'seeing is believing,' and 'what you see is what you get' were accepted expressions. However, what we see on TV, or hear on the radio are constructions and they reflect the producers', authors', and camerapersons', journalists' point of view. By actively involving participants in producing media such as PSA (public service announcement), they understood the conventions of the medium. As they became the producers of their own media projects, they developed media literacy skills, and became informed consumers and citizen of the world.

Based on the participants reflections, media journal, class observation notes, common themes emerged. The table below compares CA and CO groups.

Tasks	Camera (CA) Groups/ On Camera Editing	Computer (CO) Groups/ On Computer Editing
Magic exercise	Positive experience	Confusing, frustrating
Ideas for integrating into the curriculum	Recognized the importance of integrating media production into the curriculum. Media production is a key to learn media literacy.	Found the media production time consuming and difficult
Effect on response to media	The magic exercise put the students behind camera. "Media activities have made me less of a passive viewer and more of an active viewer of media."	No significant effect detected. Only one student said, "The activities made me feel like I could be more of a producer, not just a viewer."
Cooperative Learning	Group work was highly appreciated. They	Participants were editors. They found the group

	enjoyed exploring and learning from each other. Participants took distinctive roles during the production. Groups more than two is highly recommended.	work challenging. More than two person in the group generated problems.
Discovery Learning vs. Trial and error	Discovery occurred while trying the various buttons on the camera.	Drill and practice- teacher presents how to and students practice.
Class Discussion	Created dynamic and productive discussions among the groups.	Generated discussions among the group but they frustrated each others editing style.
Each medium provides different dimension. (Potter, 1998)	CA groups experienced cognitive, emotional, as well as aesthetic dimensions of the project. Transparent learning occurred.	CO group focused mostly on aesthetic dimension of the project.
Students' Level of Technical Proficiency	It did not required technical skills, students who considered novices also excelled.	Students who had previous technology skills considered themselves intermediate or expert did better on their production.
Focus	Process oriented Focused more on the story of their project	Product oriented Focus was on the production, learning the technical skills.
Storyboarding / Concept Mapping	Storyboards were more elaborate and detailed. Original stories stayed close to the end product.	They spent did less time on storyboarding more time on learning the software.
Suggestion for Improving the class	Emphasized the need for more time.	Step by step instruction and easy to use software

Table: Comparison between the CA and CO groups

The most important lesson from this study is that video production is not only a great teaching tool for cooperative learning but is also highly effective in teaching point of view. Media production projects are important in enriching our curriculum. A media production project generates interest in the topic being studied, includes research, writing a script and storyboarding, and encourages group discussions. Students' media projects not only develop problem solving and interactive collaboration skills among students but also enhance learning, providing project-based, experiential and hands-on approaches to the media theory and its applications in the classroom.

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