SUCCESS PARTNERSHIP PROJECT

Video-Based Reporting of Evaluation Results In Project SUCCESS

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Presented by

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Introduction and Rationale

Project SUCCESS (Structuring a Unique Collaboration for Career Enhancement and Student Success) has completed its fifth and final year of funding. The primary goal of the Project was to recruit, train, and support highly qualified paraprofessionals and mid-career adults to teach in high-need schools in the areas of special education, bilingual/ESL, mathematics, or science.

Written reporting of project evaluation results included memoranda, a 55-page three-year interim report, and a 75-page written technical evaluation report. A 27-minute video was produced to supplement evaluation reporting.

The primary purpose of the video supplement was to enhance the communication of evaluation outcomes. Written technical reports, and even executive summaries, can be tedious and difficult to comprehend and retain. Effectively produced video, on the other hand, is memorable and personable, resulting in much greater audience interest and retention.

The basic production approach was to let the project participants and staff tell the "project story." Project management and staff identified students, teachers, mentors, and administrators whom they thought would be willing and able to participate in the video effort.

One should note that bias is an important issue when using video to supplement evaluation reporting. When developing a written technical evaluation report, the evaluator has the opportunity to produce a balanced and fair presentation, complete with detailed statistical information and appropriate caveats and cautions. Of course, there are at least two down sides to developing a balanced written report. One is that some evaluators do this more effectively than others, and the second is that the written technical report, no matter how complete and balanced, usually imposes serious reading and comprehension tasks on the reader. Hence, in terms of

communication, the best written report rarely achieves anything near its innate potential.

The very nature of video, on the other hand, almost ensures a presentation that will be less complete and one that carries a large potential for the introduction of bias. In the case of the current project, we provided some balance in reporting positive and negative outcomes, but one should understand that video cannot present the detailed statistical information necessary to complete evaluation reporting. Well, actually, it could, but the video would be so long and boring that no one would watch it. Mmmm…that kind of reminds us of written technical reports.

Of course, people selected for inclusion in the video represented a biased sample of participants. In this case, the bias worked to give a generally favorable and positive view of participation in Project SUCCESS, which, in reality, paralleled project evaluation outcomes. Comprehensive evaluation data indicated that participation in the Project was generally a favorable and positive experience. On the other hand, a few participants had negative experiences, and the video did not attempt to capture these. Additionally, one should consider that in general, people are reluctant to publicly express negative comments, especially when on camera (unless the experience was extremely negative, and folks are pretty angry).

The multi-sensory nature of video, compared to written text, multiplies the communicative effect of video. Hence, any one piece of information or data can become extremely memorable for the audience. Video producers therefore have the opportunity to emphasize selected findings or implications to a much greater extent than do authors of written reports.

An invitation to participate in a video interview was emailed (see Appendix) to those people recommended for inclusion (N=12). Two people declined to participate, and three others needed extra encouragement from project management. Generally speaking, people were willing to participate but fairly nervous about being on camera.

Production Methodology

Guided interview questions were designed in terms of selected key evaluation outcomes. A list of the interview questions was sent to interviewees prior to taping so that they might feel better prepared. Directions to interviews indicated that the questions were only a guide to the video interviews and that they had considerable flexibility in how they addressed these questions. There was no expectation to necessarily answer all questions, and interviewees were free to talk longer in response to selected questions, essentially as prompted by the mood and spirit of the interview.

The following lists interview questions.

Novice Teacher Questions

What attracted you to teaching? How/why did you get here?
What makes you a 'good' teacher?

How do you feel about teaching? Do you like it? How do you feel about the kids? Will teaching be a long-term career for you?

How did SUCCESS enable you to become a teacher? Where would you be without the project?

What obstacles/hurdles did you meet in your journey to become a teacher? How did you deal with these?

How did the college coursework and training prepare you for teaching?

What was it like finding a teaching job? How did you feel in your first days on the job?

What was/is it like having a mentor? How did he/she help?

What would your advice be to a first-year teacher?

If you were to become a mentor, what would you always want to remember?

Mentor Teacher Questions

What attracted you to mentoring? How/why did you get here?
What makes you a 'good' mentor?

How do you feel about mentoring? Do you like it? How do you feel about the novices?

What is the mentor/mentee relationship? How does it develop? What things impair/promote the relationship?

What mentor training did you experience? How did the training prepare you for mentoring?

How much does having a mentor advance the success/expertise of a novice? How? What ways?

If you mentor again in the next few years, what will you do differently? the same?

What would be your advice to a prospective mentor?

What do you look for when hiring first year teachers?
What difficulties do you have in finding highly qualified teachers?

How has the SUCCESS Project helped your district/school in finding teachers?
What has been your reaction to the quality of teachers found thru SUCCESS?

What is necessary for a novice teacher to be successful? How does mentoring promote success in novice teachers?

How do you decide when an experienced teacher is ready to become a mentor?
What qualities do you look for in a mentor?

Letting people talk about things that interest and motivate them generally results in good video, so we let interviewees have a lot of freedom in responding to the questions.   Sometimes, we asked an additional and unforeseen question or questions pertinent to comments given in the interview. Also, we assured people that there was no need to be concerned about giving a 'picture perfect' presentation. Post production editing deleted pauses, miscues, sneezes, etc. etc.

We did not formulate a set of interview questions for project staff and management. These interviews were conducted during the second phase of on-site taping. Interviews with project staff and management were designed to 'fill the gaps' in information provided by sampled interviewees.

In addition to interviews of people, production of final video footage required inclusion of appropriate background scenes of school and community settings. A major difficulty of course is predicting precisely which scenes will be needed. The obvious solution was just to shoot a lot of on-site stuff and hope for the best. Fortunately, most schools look very similar, so it was possible to tape selected off-site background scenes to fill the gaps in on-site taping. We ended up with a lot more background than needed, but this process gave us a good 'library' of b-roll material from which to select.

Talking Head Phenomenon

Most video-type people agree that the most boring video footage imaginable is the famous 'talking head,' the scene in which we have a torso shot of someone talking to the camera. As one might imagine, the bulk of video content in the SUCCESS video consisted of talking heads. Production used four strategies to overcome the 'talking head' phenomenon:

1)   varied camera shots during taping of interviews, usually two different camera angles with the subject generally speaking to an interviewer located to the side of the camera,

2)   use of lens zoom special effects during post production editing to create further variety and emphasis for selected interview segments,

3)   mixing and positioning relatively brief <u>interview clips</u> to keep the pace of the composition from dragging and to frequently present the audience with different topics, faces, and voices, and

4)   mixing and positioning <u>topical content</u> to frequently present the audience with different topics and information.

Initial reaction from audiences suggests that the above strategies were fairly effective. The video appears to hold audience attention and capture viewer interest, at least among educators. Additionally, project management reacted very positively to the video and envisions use of this video in other promotional settings.

<u>On Location Production Issues</u>

Subjects taped in the video were obviously volunteers and received no compensation for their time and effort. Accordingly, every effort was made to accommodate the schedules and needs of the interviewees. While this was convenient for the interviewees, it created tons of production issues.

We ended up taping in classrooms, offices, and work rooms. Audio tracks sometimes included background air conditioner systems, ringing telephones, band rehearsal, or pencil sharpeners working on the classroom wall next door. We worked around early morning sunshine streaming through windows, killer overhead fluorescent lights, and space that was too small for both the video equipment and the people. Makeup and wardrobe were informal and pretty much out of control.

The good news is that the above on location issues resulted in video that looks real and seems to have a certain degree of spontaneity. The effectiveness of the video was ultimately due to the people interviewed. They had wonderful things to say. They only needed to forget the camera and just talk to the interviewer. Again, relaxed and comfortable people lead to effective video. We always tried to convince interviewees that there was nothing they could do to hurt the video. We just wanted them to talk to us.

<u>Integrating Evaluation Results</u>

The written evaluation technical report contains extensive text, tables, charts, and graphs, all of which strives to communicate things that were learned in the evaluation process. Selection of data and findings to fit video content was fairly straightforward, but effective presentation of such was a little more difficult. Charts and graphs

require quite of bit of time for mental processing by the audience. We felt that using graphics would detract too much from the pace of the overall video, so our procedure was to use simple bullet statements giving selected evaluation results. Bullets can be read quickly, and the presence of a few numbers, especially in terms of percent values, can be mentally processed fairly quickly.

One consideration is that, while evaluators generally love their numbers, non-evaluator audiences generally have a low threshold for numbers. We feel that it is best to work toward a balance in which the quantitative evaluation data supports and gives credibility to the qualitative evaluation data presented in the video interview material. This seems to be a delicate balance at best.

Post Production Issues

The total video effort yielded about 9½ hours of raw video footage, which post production editing reduced to 27 minutes of final video. A major limitation was our concern that the overall length of the video did not become TOO long; there was certainly much more excellent material that could have been used. We just felt like 27 minutes was pretty much the maximum allowable. However, the Project now has an archive of video material that could be edited into multiple products, targeting different needs.

When planning video productions it is easy to dwell on the video aspect of the production and to think about visual issues like background, lighting, etc. etc. Interestingly, the audio side of the production can frequently be more problematic. We did our on location taping with a minimum of equipment, only a camera, tripod, microphone, and mic stand. While this reduced travel problems and setup time, we gave up control of audio input levels. Our solution was to rely on audio controls in post production editing, and this basically yielded a suitable product. On the other hand, if we had it to do again, there is some temptation to take along extra equipment to give us better control over audio input. Six of one and half a dozen of another, maybe.

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APPENDIX

<u>EMAIL VIDEO INVITATION</u>

Dear Colleague,

As part of the final evaluation of Project SUCCESS, we will be producing a video to help tell the story of the SUCCESS project. Project management has recommended you for possible inclusion in this video. It was felt that hearing about some of your experience in the Project would be a valuable addition to the overall video.

In case you may be feeling a little camera shy, please don't be concerned. The taping session will require no special preparation on your part and will not take a great deal of time. Further, the actual taping will be done in an informal and relaxed mode. I will simply ask you a few relevant questions about SUCCESS, and you will just talk to the camera about your experience. You will have a copy of the questions ahead of time, so there should not be any surprises.

Video taping won't take place until after TAKS week. I plan to start the week of April 23 and hope to finish up before May 11.

I hope to do the taping to fit your schedule at your work location, if that is convenient for you. Hopefully, I will be able tape people before/after school or during a free period. Your actual time with the camera will probably run 10-20 minutes, but I will need some advance time to set up equipment.

Please let me know if you are willing to be included in the video. And if so, give me some possible times for taping. After I hear back from everyone, I'll put together a master schedule. You can reply by email, or if you have questions or want further information, feel free to call me at 903.896.1904 (if you get the machine, just leave a number and time(s) for me to return your call).

Thank you in advance for your contribution and assistance in this undertaking. See you in the movies!

Sincerely.