From Thumbs to Fingertips: Introducing Networked Digital Video to Online Learning

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We have turned the corner in 2005, putting video programs on the library shelves behind us and video objects online at our fingertips. Recent breakthroughs in the educational video distribution industry are removing the hard plastic wrapper from video programs, and controls on the use of video are giving way to new freedoms. Now with enabling rights of use and IT applications for users, video is being reintroduced to curriculum as an information resource and as a methodology. Video, now that it is available in digital form online, is finally joining other media in a rich mixture of learning objects for e-learning. There is a substantial difference, however, in the role played by digital video in this mix. In the multiple-format universe of educational objects, video is a new kind of manipulative with which the learner creates meaning and constructs knowledge. This discussion offers a brief overview, or perhaps a "practitioners' alert," about what we can expect from video once we have transferred it from our library shelves to our servers.

Context: Blended Learning

There are few, if any, educational jurisdictions in North America that do not offer some form of distance education. Perhaps the main reason for this is that they can. In other words, e-learning technologies and business models have broken down most obstacles to formal learning anywhere, anytime, and these same technologies are providing enhanced opportunities for resource use in buildings. The Internet has certainly played a key role in providing inexpensive, enriched resources for classroom learners.

To examine some of the new characteristics of digital video, we turn to a scenario in a high school curriculum: a film studies program. Students will be required to produce a short film in the second semester of the course.

To guide the learners toward the successful achievement of the learning outcomes, the teacher will prepare a lesson description with student objectives; select appropriate resources and assign student activities; then test for learning. In the selection of video resources, the teacher consults the list of approved or correlated materials and evaluates others that are

supplementary. A variety of video content with accompanying teaching and learning strategies is available in the digital library for this learning outcome.

How does this work for distance learning? Media on Demand (MonD) is an increasingly popular application for blended learning that facilitates both management of a local digital video library and user access to content with a variety of easy-to-use tools. The course team has searched for appropriate videos for which digital rights are available and has had them added to the school's digital video library.

Learners have online access to the digital library. They use the MonD search engine to locate the video content. They will also use MonD as the desktop interface for playing video and for assembling video clips. The instructional designer has the choice of either creating video (learning) objects from programs in the library and linking to them in the CMS, or he or she may elect to assign the learner the responsibility of creating his or her own clips. In the former example, video is used as a more or less passive reference; and in the latter, the learner will actively create knowledge objects.

Scenario

Learners are directed:

1. To view the short film *Caravan*. They are to take the point of view of the producer, critically examining the cinematographic techniques used by the filmmaker to create sequence, transitions, mood, and so on.

2. To identify and describe the filmmaker's techniques that were learned earlier in their program of studies, especially from such videos as *Film as Text, The Mechanics of Film,* or *The Construction of Meaning in Film.*

3. To create a PowerPoint slide show using clips from *Caravan* to demonstrate each technique.

4. To submit their PowerPoint assignment as an e-mail attachment.

Teachers and instructional designers can employ many variations of this scenario. Collaborative learning exercises can be assigned, with information, content, and knowledge creation shared online. Learners who have only dial-up IP service can access the video(s) on CD or DVD hard copy. Learning management systems can link to CDs off-line, and the video becomes accessible to the learner as if it were streamed.

Summary

Recent developments in digital rights enablement for video, plus inexpensive purpose-built applications such as the Media on Demand system, are

now adding video to the montage of rich media objects for learning online. Video libraries and repositories can be customized and stored on local servers for access by place-based or distance learners as was not possible with analog video. It is time for educators to explore the new possibilities of video as a dynamic, interactive resource. The old paradigm of clumsily using our thumbs on the remote to manipulate the VCR is quickly evolving into new on-demand learning communities where the fingers do the dancing with the mouse and keyboard.

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