Using Digital Video Production to Meet the Common Core Standards

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The implementation of the Common Core Standards has just begun and these standards will impact a generation that communicates with technology more than anything else. Texting, cell phones, Facebook, You Tube, Skype, etc. are the ways they speak with their friends and the world. The Common Core Standards recognize this. According to the Common Core Standards website, www.corestandards.org, "skills related to media use (both critical analysis and production of media) are integrated throughout the standards." Therefore, there will be a need for students to integrate multimedia into their schoolwork to the point where they are just as comfortable creating a video piece to get their ideas across, as they are writing a research paper. There is also a need to teach students how to use media responsibly.

First a little about me, currently I work at Farnsworth Middle School in Guilderland, NY. I manage the school's TV studio, help set up, troubleshoot and purchase media equipment for the building and produce and edit video projects. FMS has a working TV studio with professional equipment where the students produce a live news broadcast every morning that is seen throughout the school. I have a background in broadcast communications, working for a few years in local TV news as a producer. I have always been an advocate of media being seen as an art form and something that can be learned from, rather than just a distraction. Just as there are great, important works of literature, there is an abundance of great works of media, such as films, music and television that can be incorporated into the curriculum.

PSA Project Example

Educators understand the importance of integrating media and technology into their curriculum, but it's not always easy to come up with a way to do it. Recently, I collaborated with 7th grade ELA teachers at Farnsworth Middle School to develop a digital storytelling project that could easily be adapted to fit different grade levels, lesson plans and subjects. The team of students I worked with included regular education students and inclusion students, who especially benefited from differentiated instruction. As part of the curriculum, these 7th grade ELA classes read the book *Stargirl* by Jerry Spinelli. A main theme in the book is accepting other people's differences, which is reflected through the main character, Stargirl's free spirit and her relationships with students at her new school. To enhance the lesson and have students produce something to benefit the school community, the classes were assigned a project where they had to write, produce and edit a 30-second Public Service Announcement that would then be broadcast on the school's morning news program. Each step of this project addressed a standard or skill set that students are required to achieve according to the common core.

Think About the Themes

Students first read the entire book, recognized and analyzed the main themes. In this case, emphasis was put on the theme of tolerance and accepting differences. This time to read and think critically about the book met anchor standards for reading, including determining the

central idea or themes of a text and analyzing their development, and analyzing how and why individuals, events, or ideas develop and interact over the course of a text.

Analyze Current Media Messages

Students were assigned the project. They were broken up into small groups and each group was expected to choose a topic or issue they wanted to address in a 30-second Public Service Announcement (PSA) that would be shown to all the students in the school. Before writing their own PSA they watched several examples of national Public Service Announcements in class on the Ad Council website, www.adcouncil.org. This was an excellent way to build students' media literacy skills. Through class discussions about the PSA they watched, students dissected the techniques each PSA used to get the message across in 30-seconds and deciphered what was said. Media uses different devices to capture an audience's attention, such as lighting, sound, color, camera angles and effects, paralleling the way authors use tone, writing style and language, to get their message across. Discerning these objectives provided students with choices to effectively communicate their messages to the school community.

Learn Video Production

Before writing their PSA, students engaged in a mini-lesson about video production basics and techniques. This was an important first step in the project, because the students need to understand that there's more work that goes into a video project than just going out and taping something all in one spontaneous take. Just like any other writing assignment, video production involves research, composition, editing and understanding your audience. As an introduction for this digital literacy project, I provided the students an overview of how to use the school's digital video camera equipment. They were specifically shown how to operate a Flip video camera and tripod. The students were asked to think about this project as if they were a professional production company creating something for a client. They could not just "point and shoot." They had to understand the techniques that go into creating a professional video piece. Groups were required to use a tripod for a steady shot. They were taught to be aware of the lighting in a room and how a too dark or too light location would affect the look of their video. Additionally, they were taught to be aware of the noise in a room to make sure their actors were clearly heard. The students also received an overview of different camera angles they could use (close up, wide shot, establishing shot, etc.) and reasons why they might want to use a particular camera shot over another. I created a graphic organizer that illustrated the different types of camera angles. Students referred to these visuals throughout the process of creating their PSAs. It is easy to find something similar online by searching "camera shot example."

The fun part of this lesson was putting the kids on camera to demonstrate the shots. Most digital video camcorders include a cable that lets you hook the camera up to a TV (just like you would hook up a DVD player) and then when you turn on the camera the TV acts like a big monitor. You can select volunteers to sit or stand in front of the camera, then give a live demonstration to the class on how to frame up the different camera shots. Trust me, the kids usually love to see themselves on camera! Teaching students the steps of creating a digital video gave them the skills to manipulate a digital medium so they could adapt their communication (in

this case a PSA message for their peers) to fit the audience, task, purpose and discipline. They learned to use technology and digital media strategically and capably; something also called for in the Common Core. Learning video production helps students to envision how they want their PSA to look, but also helps them learn to critically analyze all media. Once they know the techniques used to create the message, they can start to think about the reasons why it's used.

The Technique of Scriptwriting

After the video lesson, students worked in small cooperative groups to write their scripts. Students must be taught the scriptwriting format prior to completing one in their group because it has a different structure and rules than an essay or a report. Writing a short script to create compelling 30-second message forces students to use different narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing and even determining when it is more effective to just show a visual without narrative to get their message across. There was also a research component to this project. Through credible websites and organization, students were required to search for facts related to their topics. They also were asked to find a website to list at the end of their PSA; this would direct people where to go for more information regarding their topic. Engaging in a web search gave the students opportunities to evaluate and discern arguments and claims made on a site, as well as assess whether the reasoning was valid and relevant. Students also created a storyboard to go with their script. A storyboard is used to break down a video into the different shots. Each frame on the storyboard should have a drawing of the visual the audience will see on screen, any dialogue heard, music, and the camera angle. You can find a template online by searching "storyboard template." This storyboard helped students to stay focused on what they needed to shoot for their videos while allowing them to practice designing a visual text.

Time to Film!

The students were given one block of class time to go out and shoot their footage. Throughout their experience, students learned critical academic and life skills such as, time management (working with a set amount of time to shoot all their footage), organization (what order they need to shoot in to get things done) and teamwork (video production requires everyone to do their part to get the job done; it's a "team sport"). While out on the video shoot students had to cooperate. They had to work together to collaborate on the look of the video, solve problems together (technical and otherwise) and work as a team to answer their own questions.

Putting Together the Message

As we approached the final stages of this project, students attended a workshop where they learned about digital video editing. The technology tool that we use at FMS is Adobe Premiere Elements. Students were taught how to import their footage, edit clips, and burn their final PSAs on to a DVD. They also created a video file, which they uploaded to Google docs and then inserted onto a webpage that is part of their digital portfolio, a website where they display work representing all of their subjects. The students used their storyboards to edit their final video piece. By taking part in the video editing workshop and learning how to use Adobe Premiere Elements they became familiar with the strengths and limitations of this technology tool and equipped with skills to determine how to use the program to best meet their communication goals, in this case making a PSA about understanding differences. Through the PSA topic they are also learning to think about others' perspectives and realities. They have to

put themselves in the place of someone being bullied or being picked on for having a physical difference, and then come up with a way to show their peers how this is wrong and how to stop it.

Along with receiving a grade, the final PSAs were aired on the FMS morning news broadcast and local educational access channel. Uploading their work to YouTube would have been another possibility for students to expand their audience. This project is evidence of how educators and students can connect the skills and concepts being taught in school with real world applications. The TV news broadcast itself continues the integration of technology because the students are producing the broadcast and running the behind-the-scenes equipment (cameras, video switcher, DVD players, audio, etc.), while the student anchor uses public speaking skills to read the script and introduce videos like these PSAs.

The process that the students followed to create their PSAs was successful; they really enjoyed taking part in this new endeavor. The language arts teachers who facilitated this collaborative project encouraged their students to invite their families and friends to attend "PSA Night," for a chance to view the students' final projects. The design for this project is something that can easily be modified to fit other curricula / lesson plans. You could introduce different books with themes that lend themselves to creating PSAs for saving the environment, eating disorder awareness, and suicide prevention just to name a few. While we used the editing software Adobe Premiere Elements, which does cost some money, there are other alternative web tools one can use. A majority of the newer computers for example come with editing software already installed, Windows movie maker for the PC and iMovie for the MAC. There are also a variety of online tutorials that students and teachers can use to learn about these programs. Assigning a video project of this magnitude no doubt requires teachers to possess a certain level of expertise and comfort when using technology. Once you get started and take some time to play around with these programs and websites, you will quickly establish a level of confidence for regularly incorporating technology into the curricula. Remember one thing, have fun!

Here are some tried and true sites to get more information:

- www.adobe.com: Here you will find tutorials and free trials of Adobe Premiere Elements and also Adobe Photoshop software.
- www.animoto.com: A free online program that lets you add pictures, music and text then creates a professional looking video for you.
- www.getpaint.net: Picture editing software you can download for free.
- www.windowsmoviemaker.net/tutorials: A great site for tutorials on how to use Windows Movie Maker
- http://www.apple.com/findouthow/movies: iMovie tutorials.
- http://www.apple.com/findouthow/photo: iPhoto tutorials
- http://audacity.sourceforge.net/: Audio editing software you can download for free.
- www.youtube.com: Here you can upload student videos, but it now also features free, basic editing software online.