Student Television as Authentic Context

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For teachers to guide student-produced television projects and use that medium as an authentic context for learning, they must know why and how to create integrated learning engagements. Designing curriculum that values constructivism, authenticity, and inquiry can be achieved with student-produced television. Student-produced television requires a combination of skills to integrate curriculum and instruction and television technologies. This fastback addresses both why and how teachers integrate student-produced television into meaningful learning engagements across the curriculum and at various grade levels. Student-produced television as a tool addresses several education issues, including: 1) relevancy, 2) literacy skills, 3) motivation, 4) assessment, and 5) authentic context.

This fastback provides an overview of the important factors related to student-produced television broadcasts. First, we examine the top five issues in education that student-produced television addresses. Then we describe the authoring cycle and offer the rationale for using it as a curricular guide. Next, we address how to
prepare teachers and students for the television production process, including attention to audio and video technologies. The section after that provides ideas for developing broadcast segments, and the final section describes several examples of schools currently producing television broadcasts.
Creating Curriculum

The phrase, "creating curriculum," for us represents the notion that curriculum is not paper-bound or static, but a dynamic, reciprocal process of engaging learners. Such engagements are based on a specific authoring cycle. This concept of creating curriculum grew out of the work of Kathy Short and Carolyn Burke's 1991 book, Creating Curriculum, and continues to evolve with the work of Short, Harste, and Burke (1995) and others committed to viewing curriculum as a child-centered and authoring cycle-based creative process that empowers both learners and teachers. Short and Burke (1991) led the movement from viewing curriculum as a restrictive, thinking-inside-the-box process to a process of innovation and creativity that opens the classroom to boundless possibilities.

Constructivism in the Television Studio

Constructivist theory emphasizes creating a comfortable learner-centered environment in which students build knowledge, rather than passively receive it from teachers. Teachers design instruction, guide activities, provide examples, and structure opportunities
for practice. For us, constructivism places children first in the learning process; and our television show is produced around the learning requirements of children who learn best through active learning engagements.

These constructivist beliefs fit within Short, Harste, and Burke's (1995) view of creating curriculum and their concept of using the authoring cycle as a process for creating curriculum that values all learners. The authoring cycle is "a process-based curriculum framework for the language arts that is built and draws on the social and psychological strategies children use in language learning" (Harris and Hodges 1995, p. 16). In practical terms, the authoring cycle includes a number of processes that are reciprocal, including such things as: life experiences, uninterrupted personal engagements, collaborating with others, reflection and revision, presenting and sharing meaning, examining learning strategies, and invitations to new engagements.

We wanted a curriculum process that honored television studio models. According to Kauffman, "Valuing the diversity of children's way of knowing is supported through planning an area and times where children have access to many tools and artifacts, just as in an artist's studio" (1995, p. 231). Our principles of teaching and learning value learners and teachers and provide a process for creating curricular engagements with multiple opportunities for authentic literacy experiences. For teachers to guide student-produced television projects and use the television medium as an authentic context for learning, they must know why and how to create integrated learning engagements. Designing a
curriculum that values constructivism, authenticity, and the authoring cycle can be achieved when students produce television broadcasts. Student-produced television requires a combination of skills involving, first, curriculum and instruction, and second, television technologies.

Television production requires an enormous amount of energy and planning. However, current video-production software has made editing accessible and consumer-friendly to educators. In our experience, non-technologically savvy teachers and middle school students with limited experience quickly learned to edit video with Apple iMovie. We began using iMovie software for three years as a means of celebrating exciting projects with our colleagues and the outside community and as a way of countering a negative public perception of urban schools. As each year ended, we began thinking about the next, and we brainstormed a few ideas. We follow Watson's “planning to plan” framework. In her framework, “teachers think about their class in terms of possibilities — potential themes to pursue, resources to gather, strategies which may need to be taught and so on” (Short, Harste, and Burke 1995, p. 356).

While Dewey's earliest works predate the advent of television, his views in The School and Society (1915) are consistent with television as an authentic context for literacy skill development. Dewey wrote that school-rooms with set desks are arranged for dealing with large numbers of students as a group and treating children passively. According to Dewey, "There is very little
place in the traditional schoolroom for the child to work. The workshop, the laboratory, the materials, the tools with which the child may construct, create and actively inquire, and even the requisite space, have been for the most part lacking” (p. 32). Dewey’s request for this workshop is consistent with the way a real studio operates — a place where multimedia texts are produced.

**Authoring Cycle as Authentic Context**

The authoring cycle shares powerful learning connections with student-produced television. Students will bring what they know to the production or segment topic in a way similar to how students bring what they know to a piece of literature. In the authoring cycle, the teacher extends an invitation to learning by providing a strategy approach to learn more about the story or piece of literature. In student television production, the teacher extends the invitation by helping identify possible segment ideas, sharing production tasks, providing resources necessary to create a segment, and guiding the production process. In the authoring cycle, uninterrupted reading engagements include all of the elements of the language arts: reading, writing, speaking, listening, visual viewing, and visual presenting. These also are the key elements of television production.

As in all authoring cycle-based curricula, the invitation is an open process, inviting learners to plan new inquiries and to take thoughtful action. During television production activities, teachers, students, and community participants will shape the development of segments by providing feedback, assisting in the
rewriting process, and providing technical assistance. In the authoring cycle these learning engagements can be documented by students in their studio journals, describing learning relative to the project materials being read. In television production the studio journal can include statements about what they have learned relative to a topic, drafts of scripts for segments, and technical facts about television production.

The authoring cycle includes a literature circle where everyone comes together to discuss literature. Student television productions also feature coming together, or community-building, that serves several functions, including storyboarding a segment (visual viewing and visual presenting), creating scripts (writing), and researching segment topics (reading). These production meetings can help teams of students build the necessary knowledge base to write a script for production and incorporate speaking and listening skills. Consistent with the concept of studio time in the authoring cycle, groups or classroom production meetings provide opportunities to investigate new perspectives. In the authoring cycle, students also revise. In television production, students must revise scripts, shoot or acquire video footage needed for the script and the segment, edit video footage, make critical decisions about what footage to use, and assess the quality of the footage.

Next in the authoring cycle, authors share their work with others for initial feedback. In student television, students can share their segments with other students, teachers, or community members before broad-
casting the program. This sharing can be an important part of the production process for the purposes of reflection, having fresh eyes look at the segment, and having individuals answer the question: Is it ready for broadcast? The last stage in the authoring process is presenting and celebrating authorship. In television, this step is the public broadcast.

Because the broadcast will have a real audience, the process is an authentic context for practicing skills. The idea or need for the television segment is the prompt that initiates research, reading, writing, and editing. Students make decisions about what they write, and teachers facilitate the process toward final publication.

Making critical decisions, solving problems, and using higher-order thinking skills also are involved in the production of broadcast segments. Critical decision-making is a large part of the writing, rewriting, and editing process. Students learn to edit their television broadcast segments and, in so doing, make decisions about information, point of view, and how to communicate a story or segment content.

Student television production also serves as an authentic context for evaluation of student work. Broadcasts fulfill an evaluative function in several ways because both the script and the broadcast can be assessed. Scripts can be assessed for accuracy, thoroughness, and written expression. Broadcast standards can measure the quality of student television. Often, skills demonstrated in television production are overlooked by norm-referenced or standardized tests. Other factors missed by such assessments include motivation
and the affective domain. Creating television segments can motivate students because of the authentic context, the fun involved in the process, and the pleasure derived from reconstructing meaning.

While summative feedback occurs at the end of the process, literacy skills are used throughout the production activities. Evaluating a finished video segment will include attention to the correspondence between visuals, audio components, and narration.
Why Television?

The relationship between television viewing and school achievement has long concerned educators. Most studies have found a negative relationship between high amounts of viewing and achievement (Webb, Metha, and Jordan 2003). While television has been a mainstay in American culture for decades, educators face a challenge of the appropriate and effective use of television technology in the classroom.

A central criticism of television viewing is that it is a passive experience for most individuals. The notion of the “couch potato” lazily watching programs entered mainstream American life and pop culture many years ago. We agree that this inactivity exists, yet television is a major component of many children’s world.

The utility of advanced communication technologies in education lies in using them effectively as tools for learning. For example, teachers do not just read books to students. Instead, we teach students to read and write so that they can gain personal access to print material. Teachers make reading a book an interactive experience. In a similar fashion, student-produced television and video production activities provide ac-
cess to the medium of television as a communication tool. Educators can harness this tool for effective literacy instruction.

Children are familiar with television and its presentation of ideas. However, the experience is rarely for anything other than amusement. Television production requires a variety of research, organization, visualization, and interpretation skills (Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson 1999). Television production activities are interesting and motivating in themselves, but they also offer opportunities for teachers to embed literacy and technology skills.

The International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) created the national standards for the English language arts (IRA/NCTE 1996). Two of the 12 standards are particularly relevant for student-produced television. Standard 7 says: “Students conduct research on issues and interests by generating ideas and questions, and by posing problems. They gather, evaluate, and synthesize data from a variety of sources (e.g., spelling and punctuation) media techniques, figurative language, and genre to create, critique, and discuss print and nonprint texts” (p. 38). Standard 8 says: “Students use a variety of technological and informational resources (e.g., libraries, databases, computer networks, video) to gather and synthesize information and to create and communicate knowledge” (p. 39). Nonprint texts include television and video production. These standards suggest that, in order to prepare students for the 21st century, we must include the viewing and production
of nonprint texts as a crucial part of literacy development. By including the development and creation of these texts, we are integrating the receptive and productive processes of media literacy.

**Five Issues Addressed by Student-Produced Television**

Student-produced television should be considered a useful part of a curriculum because it can address these five specific education issues.

*Relevancy.* Student-produced television is an important tool that connects learning to the world outside the classroom, provides practice for academic skills, motivates learners, and addresses high standards in an authentic context. Genuine research, writing, and television production activities lead to student products that can be exhibited to the public or within the school community. This process is similar to how actual studio artists work. Student-produced television that directs attention to current world events, such as student-delivered daily news broadcasts, addresses a major criticism of public schooling that goes back to John Dewey (1915) — the lack of usefulness of what students are learning in schools relative to the outside world.

*Literacy Skills.* Student-produced television emphasizes reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing, and visual presenting within an authentic and integrated context. The appeal of television production is embedded in the creation of an interdependent community of speakers, listeners, readers, writers, visual creators, and reflective visual critics working toward
one cumulating, significant moment of production. The national standards expanded the definition of the language arts from listening, talking, reading, and writing to include two additional language arts—viewing and visual representing (IRA/NCTE 1996). These new skills reflect the growing importance of visual literacy (Ernst 1993; Whitin 1996).

Motivation. Using television equipment often increases intrinsic motivation because technology skills are highly valued by a generation of learners raised on TV, videos, and the Internet. Most electronic visuals provide only a passive viewing experience (video games being the exception). Schools historically have provided video production for an active video experience. Participation in the creation of a television segment that will be broadcast can increase extrinsic motivation because students receive praise from teachers, admiration from peers, and unsolicited feedback from their audience. If students help to design the broadcast, generate content, write the scripts, and use the technology, then participation increases because of their investment in the product, particularly if students see the purpose and meaning in the content. In reality, they can claim ownership of a small piece of the video world.

Assessment. According to Stiggins (2002), the importance of high-stakes assessment and the pursuit of ever increasing test scores proceed from a flawed vision. The flawed vision assumes all students will be motivated to pass the test. Stiggins believes that a large segment of our student population, when confronted with this challenge, view the new standards as unob-
tainable and give up. Learners give up when school activities have little or no relevance to their lives or are too difficult to complete successfully. Student-produced television empowers students to participate in literacy and technology activities that integrate academic skills and a variety of education topics. Why limit measures of academic achievement in the 21st century to the same old 20th century assessment models? One cannot assess learning through the receptive processes alone. We do not see learning take shape inside a child’s brain. We measure the receptive processes through evaluating productive responses. The question today is, Can we assess learning through more authentic contexts than standardized assessments? Television production is one way to connect authentic, continuous, comprehensive assessment with important literacy skill development.

Authentic Contexts. Student television productions provide an authentic context for inquiry. Consistent with constructivist principles and practices, student television requires teachers to guide and direct student activities. Students, who work on various projects at varied stages of development, receive formative feedback and coaching from teachers. In this model the teacher functions as an executive producer. The students function as segment producers who construct their own understandings and individual knowledge because they are actively involved in putting ideas together to tell a story from their own point of view. Students develop their vision of a broadcast segment, shape, modify, and edit it — under adult supervision. Teachers directing student-produced segments are
ultimately responsible and must convey that sense of responsibility so that students share it as they prepare content for the airwaves. This model shares similarities with Harste, Pierce, and Cairney's (1985) emphasis on inquiry as curriculum and their authoring cycle framework, which we discussed in the preceding section.

**Academic Benefits**

Helping students develop writing and research skills is why teachers would want to invest time and energy on television production activities. In order to present information using television or video production, writing is the fundamental component. Writers must investigate their story topic, create interview questions, develop background knowledge, analyze, and synthesize their research into a coherent story. While a later section of this fastback refers to story topics and ideas, writing is the focus — whether the story is the morning school announcements, the recreation of a science experiment, or a journalistic profile of an outstanding community member.

Reading and literacy skills also are fundamental components of television and video production activities. Students must read their scripts, research their topics, and think of audio and visual elements to accompany their writing. Reading narration and doing voice-overs are established components of news broadcasts.

**Media and Technology Benefits**

The power of technology to expand the way humans communicate is undeniable. Desktop computer video
production has moved the technology from Hollywood studios and network affiliates with large budgets to local-access cable channels, middle schools, and high schools with budgets as small as $1,500. The growing access to the world of video production and subsequent demand for media and technology skills cannot be ignored. Teachers and students undertaking projects will need to develop comfort, confidence, and competence with cameras, microphones, computer editing software, VCRs, televisions, and other related equipment.

There is no escaping that at some point the academic aspects of writing scripts combine with the technological aspects of creating broadcasts. According to National Educational Technology Standards for Students, performance indicators for grades 3-5 state that students will “use technology tools for individual and collaborative writing, communication, and publishing activities to create knowledge products for audiences inside and outside the classroom” (ISTE 2000, p. 20), and indicators for grades 6-8 state students will “design, develop, publish, and present products (Web pages, videotapes) using technology resources that demonstrate and communicate curriculum concepts to audiences in and outside the classroom” (p. 22). Student-produced television projects are well suited to reaching these important performance indicators.

Public Relations Benefits

Public relations presents another viable reason to produce television segments. Some school districts may receive “bad press” for declining test scores, over-
crowded classrooms, or other unflattering attributes. Television productions can communicate positive messages about students, faculty, and school programs. Schools can announce their contributions to the education of the whole child by drawing attention to accomplishments, awards, or performances. Individual achievements, such as outstanding poetry or stories, can be shared through television productions.

Information communicated to the community can influence how the schools are viewed and raise community awareness about school performance. Television is a widely used and accessible technology. School broadcasts on local access television stations may reach many of the local citizens who vote on school-related matters.

**Demonstration of Competencies**

Television and video production promotes students' ability to demonstrate competencies. Because television segments are published documents, they can serve an evaluative function not only for technical merits but also writing qualities. Students can use video projects as a vehicle to display their skills. Educators can document proficiency with video production, improvements in reading and writing skills, and progress toward content-area, state, national, and technology standards.

In many cases students may exhibit skills that may not be effectively measured by commercially made tests, state- or districtwide assessments, or other evaluation measures. Video artifacts can be compiled into a portfolio to show growth over time. Our experiences with
middle school children indicate that teachers can design assessments sensitive enough to show progress by weak or reluctant readers and writers immersed in the literacy experiences associated with television production.
Teaching Students to Produce Television

When the commitment is made to introduce television production into the curriculum, it is necessary to understand the roles of teachers and students, the interaction of legal and social issues, and the uses of technology. We touch on each of these aspects and then provide some starting points — ideas and brief descriptions of potential segment topics.

Teachers' Roles

Teachers' roles can vary in their complexity. Educators with video-editing software on one computer and one video camera have successfully produced video and television shows. English teachers collaborating with media teachers have produced more technically sophisticated productions. Given the range of resources, time, and technical skills, the intricacies of teachers' involvement can vary; but some fundamental functions remain consistent.

Regardless of their skill level and resources, teachers can guide and advise student television productions
either in classes or in an after-school media club by turning attention to communications skills inherent to the production process. Teachers will have responsibilities for managing equipment, such as cameras, tripods, and microphones. In schools where the equipment already exists, the teacher may arrange to borrow gear from the library or media center. In schools where the equipment is not present, teachers may arrange to borrow equipment from local cable access providers.

In many ways a teacher’s role as executive producer means that he or she will assist students in all phases of segment production. Familiarity with all aspects of the production process, from idea generation to writing, storyboarding, videotaping, and editing, will facilitate progress on productions.

While the teacher is fulfilling these roles, he or she still has the primary role of educator. Designing lessons and practice opportunities for segment production will be an important job. We have found that providing a script and a shot list can serve as a helpful practice exercise. Students can learn many technical skills from a practice script, then analyze their segment and learn from their first attempt. Another helpful tip is to speak in a language that is accessible to the students. Many aspects of video production are technical, and teachers need to translate jargon and terminology into language suitable for students.

**Students’ Roles**

Students also will participate in many aspects of the production process. A major component of student-
produced television is story or topic selection and creating ideas for segments. Students can participate in brainstorming ideas for broadcast. Students will turn these initial ideas into scripts by handling academic tasks, such as researching topics, writing, and revising. In addition, students’ roles include writing letters to invite guests or community members to participate in a segment. Technology-related activities handled by students include using a camera, editing, lighting, and placing microphones. Some teachers require that students participate in a job application process to secure their roles because there are many different jobs.

Students’ roles also include learning how to use equipment, such as cameras, microphones, and lights. Teachers and students alike will be concerned about the safe use of equipment so that damage can be avoided. Reading manuals and receiving training from media specialists or local access cable providers will help individuals learn these important skills.

There are many opportunities to study mathematics and science within the context of audio and video production, particularly when it comes to studying how computers digitally handle audio and video data. Students can study sound waves and recording principles while learning about microphones. And they can study the properties of light while learning about light placement and cameras.

While students analyze their own video work, they also can study cable television, network television, and local-access television productions for technical quality to help develop their technology and storytelling skills.
The analysis of professional and, in the case of local access, amateur television productions will greatly assist students as they learn about camera placement, microphone placement, and lighting.

Legal and Social Issues

Another important topic for students and teachers centers on legal and social issues inherent to student-produced television. Segment topics may require a level of responsibility for word choice and journalistic standards. Principals and superintendents may desire for student-produced television to approach potentially controversial or sensitive subjects with grace and respect. Other social skills include collaborating with peers, being accountable for meeting deadlines, and using equipment responsibly.

Copyright is an important legal topic. The legal and ethical use of the airwaves includes having appropriate media releases and consent forms for adults, children, and copyrighted music or video material. Cable television is regulated as a public utility, and so codes of conduct exist and should be studied and followed.

Technology Considerations

An initial technology consideration is how will the broadcast be shown? There are multiple choices: 1) the classroom, 2) schoolwide showcases or film festivals, 3) the school broadcasting network, 4) the Internet or CD-ROM, and 5) local access television. Classroom presentations can be made with VCRs or LCD data projectors. Displaying video projects through this for-
mat is an excellent choice for critical analysis within the classroom production environment. It also is a good choice for those just starting out in broadcasting. School-wide showcases or film festivals can be made in school auditoriums with data projectors. This format is an excellent choice for reaching the school or community audience. It also is a fine choice for highlighting accomplishments of students. Providing movie files on the Internet or from compact discs are publication options. These formats are well suited for distribution to parents or relatives who may not be able to visit the school. Attention to appropriate use policies and permission slips is important for these formats.

Local access cable companies also present student-made video productions. Local access cable providers are an excellent source of information, training, resources, and equipment. Many states have agreements with cable companies to provide local education access without charge to users. In our experience with our local provider, NutmegTV in Plainville, Connecticut, the staff have been very supportive of our efforts to broadcast. NutmegTV provided teachers with free classes, certified teachers to produce segments, and qualified teachers to borrow equipment. Local access providers may have rules or procedures about securing a time slot, a rotation schedule for your show, and which tape format they will accept for broadcast. Check with your local access cable company for the resources they provide to educators and the public.

Many schools have a school network for broadcasting video. This network broadcasts only within the
school. In these situations each classroom is wired with coaxial cable that connects to a television. Elsewhere in the school a central media controller feeds programs to the televisions in the classrooms. In some cases the central controller may have more than one channel, requiring the classroom television to be set to the correct channel. Some schools also have a studio with lights, camera, sets, videotape recorders, video switcher, and character generator.

Another technology consideration is sources of media for the broadcast. When developing a segment, television production teams need sources of media, whether they are live or edited. These sources can be video from archived tape footage or from a live camera; graphics from still images, computer files, or a character generator; or audio clips from microphones or pre-recorded voice or music. The technical director in a live broadcast or the editor in a edited broadcast may pull together these various sources to help tell the story of the segment.

While recording live, direct to tape with multiple cameras and a video switcher, students can intersperse shots of talent, video, and graphics similar to television news or talk shows. A detailed script is a requirement for such a production. The script will tell the director what media sources are going to be aired and when. Alternatively, digital video editing on computers may provide more flexibility for students and teachers. With a computer equipped with the necessary hardware configuration, students can build a show for broadcast by assembling digital files in software known as non-
linear editors. Perhaps the most well-known introductory digital video editor is Apple's iMovie. However, there are many others that are appropriate for intermediate and advanced students, including Apple's FinalCutPro and Adobe's Premiere. Software such as these allow students to bring in multimedia elements from a video camera or other sources and edit them. Many editing techniques can be performed with the software, including shortening video clips, sequencing clips, separating audio from video, or adding transitions. At the end of the process the software allows the show to be printed back to tape for delivery to a local access provider or for broadcast within a school network. Two books that introduce considerations for video, audio, lighting, and more are Herbert Zettl's *Sight, Sound, Motion* (1999) and *Television Production Handbook* (2003).

**Ideas for Segments**

Teachers and students have produced a wide variety of segments on a diverse list of topics. Following are a variety of story or segment ideas and brief descriptions.

*Daily News and Announcements.* Many schools broadcast daily news and announcements over their television networks. While traditionally schools have done morning announcements with only audio, more and more schools are broadcasting school news in a format more consistent with television news.

*Science Lab Experiments.* Some schools have connected television to science by videotaping students' science lab experiments. These segments are particularly educational when students explain the science topic or
content, instead of just demonstrating the experiment. At the Naylor School, a K-8 school in Hartford, Connecticut, students visited a pond to conduct science experiments, and teachers and students made a video segment out of the research process.

Book Club/Discussion. Some students have chosen to produce segments in which several students discuss a book that they all have read. This segment idea integrates literacy, critical thinking, and communication skills.

Special Events. School media clubs frequently cover special events in the school community, such as concerts, sports events, club events, or invited guests. Drama club performances, ski club trips, and technology club activities all can demonstrate what students are learning at school and also be used as a vehicle to recruit new members.

Heroes. In the heroes segments, students interview local veterans, survivors, people facing adversity, police officers, firefighters, and others. These segments often allow students to connect social studies topics to real people in their community and to make history come alive.

Parents at Work. Another common segment idea is related to vocational exploration. In these segments, parents or other community members are interviewed about their occupations. Guests share their insights, perspectives, and experiences; and students have the opportunity to investigate different career paths.

Health and Safety. Students report on issues and topics related to adolescent mental and physical health and staying healthy for life.
I Want To Visit. In these segments, students report on places in the local community, such as museums, science centers, libraries, monuments, and parks. Students often learn to write from a persuasive point of view because they are highlighting the benefits of visiting the sites.

Student Chefs. Students can demonstrate techniques learned in cooking class.

Short Films. More suited to high school, short films offer budding filmmakers an opportunity to showcase their works.

Student Arts Expo. In these segments, student artists and their work are highlighted. Visual art portfolios and commentary from the artist, as well as the art teacher, can demonstrate skills. Some schools feature a "Poet of the Month" and show the featured poet reading his or her work.

School Administration Feature. In these segments, interviews with superintendents, board of education members, and principals are broadcast. These segments can be informative, such as explaining the type of role the person provides to the school system; or they can be more provocative, with students asking questions about topics the schools are facing.
Three Model Programs

In this section we examine examples of teachers and students who have produced video and television segments. This section contains interviews with educators who have successfully integrated video production into the curriculum to provide literacy experiences for their students. While these interviews provide insight from teachers with varying amounts of experience in this process, many other examples are available at http://education.apple.com/education/ilife.

John Cowger: Adventures in Reading, Park 6 School, Cody, Wyoming

John Cowger is a reading specialist and reading and language arts consultant we saw at the International Reading Association conference in San Francisco, California. Impressed by his presentation on “Adventures in Reading” (A.I.R.) and digital video productions with upper elementary school students, we interviewed him by telephone.

Cowger has received an award from the International Reading Association for his efforts on this project. From across the United States, he was one of
seven regional recipients of the 2001 IRA Presidential Award for Reading and Technology. For four years, Cowger has been using video production with students. He first became interested when an 80-year-old friend described her community television production that involved reading books on the air. Cowger took this idea, combined it with his Reading Rainbow activities, and Adventures in Reading (A.I.R.) was born. Originally he conducted A.I.R with gifted students, but later he opened it to all students.

Cowger reports that the benefits for fourth- and fifth-grade students include motivation for participation in the program (and to be on television) and successful experiences with books. He reports that obstacles include too many students being interested in participating. He had to develop a permission slip recommendation process. In this permission process, children had to request a permission slip from their other teachers. This process helped ensure that only the students who were seriously motivated became involved. Another obstacle is time because A.I.R. occurs just once a year, in springtime, as a club during lunch or recess. Another problem was that students were reading without an audience, and they were not as animated for the camera. To solve this problem, Cowger invited first-graders on the set, and the fourth- and fifth-graders became more enthusiastic reading to the younger children.

We asked John Cowger about support that he had received or needed. He reported that he was primarily self-taught. The Apple computer and the iMovie software made it easy to do. He had not tried advanced
software at this time. For equipment and resources, he wrote a small grant for the camera and some books to get started. He made his own set, and he conducts the videotaping in his classroom, relying on only his digital video camera and one Apple iMac.

He feels that it is pretty easy to get started each year. He just explains the task and demonstrates the software, and they begin. Sometimes children edit the video, sometimes he does. Time constraints are a problem. It is a powerful experience if the children edit. The area high school has a television program, and he sees this activity as a feeder for that program.

Cowger shared some tips for teachers interested in this process. First, he suggests getting help, because at times it can be overwhelming to juggle all of the responsibilities. Children often ask him if they are going to do A.I.R. television this year, which helps keep it going from year to year. Because he handles the entire project himself, he has considered teaming with the high school media teacher and having some high school students serve as peer tutors for his younger students. He believes this would be a powerful experience for all involved. To facilitate the public-access television broadcast of A.I.R. television, he drops off his edited iMovies to the high school media teacher, who prepares them for broadcast on local-access television. A.I.R. television is broadcast as a 30-minute show.

Cowger doesn’t worry about the technical sophistication of the piece. It is the students’ project, it looks like a student project, and it is aired as the students’ project. While he is open to suggestions for the pro-
duction, he currently does not see a need for advanced training.

The student's reaction to their broadcast is a feeling of pride in their work. When they watch the broadcast on local access, sometimes students make the typical "I look stupid" comment; but a pervasive sense of pride in their accomplishment is evident. The main audiences are three elementary schools and parents. In Cody, Wyoming, the local access is broadcast just in the town, and so not everyone sees it on their home televisions. Cowger says that all of the parents want a copy of the tape. He believes, based on their comments and reaction, that they like the nature of A.I.R. television.

The school administrators have reacted in a very positive manner. They tout the project in publications and on the school website. They provide real support for the project.

Cowger has not worked these activities into the regular curriculum. He does see the possibility and could see it being coordinated, especially through a theme or novel that students are studying. The students do not receive any grades for their participation in the club. Their motivation is purely intrinsic. They participate in a learning process and the finished product exists, but no evaluation is conducted.

Carolyn Turner: The Tell-Tale Heart on Trial, Bellizzi School, Hartford, Connecticut

Carolyn Turner is a recent graduate of the Central Connecticut State University teacher training program.
She is a new teacher with one and a half years of experience and less experience integrating video production into the classroom. Impressed with her idea to put the main character from Edgar Allen Poe's *The Tell-Tale Heart* on trial using video, we wanted to include her reactions in this fastback.

The students read the Poe story and tried to answer the question: Is the main character mentally ill or simply a killer? The class was divided, and so Turner decided to take the question one step further and take the murderer to court. The students staged a mock trial, for which the students had to read and reread the story, write out courtroom scenes, and identify who would act as judge, jury, defendant, and so forth. The story drove this writing process. Research was conducted online to find similar cases using the insanity plea.

We asked Turner how she became interested in using video in the classroom. She indicated that she thought students would be interested in using video cameras in the classroom. She is an English teacher, and she wanted students to be able to read, write, and practice more with the text. She told her students that they would be on camera and would need to be proficient with the Poe story to look competent on camera, and that seemed to help maintain interest and motivation.

We also asked Turner if there was support at her school for such projects. She indicated that she could borrow cameras and equipment and ask for technological support and training. She indicated that she was uncertain if she could request training on specific technologies.
Turner said that she and the students were unsatisfied with the court video. On watching their video, the students commented that they needed more practice, that their voices weren't loud enough, and that the teacher's voice, giving directions, was too prominent. But they were extraordinarily motivated. Five to six months later the students still talked about the project and asked when they were going to do it again. The activities motivated them to read, write, and edit. Turner indicated that generally students dislike editing and revising on paper; but for this project, they willingly edited and revised because they wanted to get their production correct. Then, when they saw the final piece, they wanted to do so much more.

Turner mentioned several obstacles to using video. While students had written drafts and plans, one teacher handling everything alone in only 50-minute classes made it difficult to manage. Next year, she plans to overcome the time obstacle by collaborating with a social studies teacher and integrating language arts, history, and video production. She believes that social studies and language arts go hand in hand and are a natural choice, and the two 50-minute periods can be combined into a 100-minute block of time.

Turner's tips for teachers just getting started with video production in the classroom included doing it because the students love it. An after-school component might be one solution to overcome the time obstacle. Parents loved the project. Two parents visited during the activities and were very supportive. On the other hand, the administration was concerned about how the project fit in with district-level assessments.
Donna Morin: Video and Literacy, Pulaski Middle School, New Britain, Connecticut

Donna Morin's start with using digital video to develop literacy skills began in 2001. A veteran teacher, she learned of a colleague who was working with digital video for literacy skills and investigated the use of this tool to reach her middle school students. Morin collaborated with her colleague and several other partners as she began the process of becoming comfortable with digital video and integrating it into classroom activities.

Morin contacted local university faculty and she participated in Pulaski Middle School's Professional Development School (PDS) Partnership with a local university school of education. She developed a partnership with an online virtual Professional Development School network that included the use of action research to investigate the efficacy of using digital video for literacy skill development. She used her online PDS relationship to capitalize on the PDS contact with the local university and used funds from a federal grant to purchase cameras and miniDV tapes. In addition, she collaborated with two university faculty members to write another grant that was funded by the Hartford Courant Foundation. (The Courant is the main newspaper in Connecticut's capital.) Also, she began a relationship with NutmegTV, the local-access cable provider in Plainville, Connecticut. All of these alliances, partnerships, and relationships provided instruction, support, and resources for her and her students. Combined with her excitement, enthusiasm, and willing-
ness to learn, these resources prepared her for using
digital video to build literacy skills with her students.

After Morin developed these relationships, she be-
gan to feel more comfortable and confident in the use
of video for literacy skills. Her recommendations for
teachers just starting are to be unafraid, to enjoy the
process, to overcome obstacles, and to learn from
mistakes. She believes deeply in the process because
she saw firsthand many advances in the literacy of her
students. Students' willingness and excitement to read,
write, and revise for the purposes of video development,
in turn, provided excitement for Morin to continue
learning and using this tool. Over the three years, her
reliance on others for support has diminished, and she
has become independent. Now she is sharing her
techniques with colleagues. She views the use of video
technology for literacy skills as completely infused
and integrated into her curriculum — another tool that
she can use to motivate and reach learners, rather than
an add-on or after-school activity.

Morin has had students read and reread an African
tale for the purposes of video development. She
says that by asking the students to reread the tale, they
became proficient readers of the story. Normally her
students would refuse to read the same story again,
even though it would help build fluency and compre-
prehension. But because the students had to be good be-
because of the videotaping of their reenactment of the
tale, they were willing to reread. Morin says the
activity disguised the learning. Furthermore, the stu-
dents had to write scripts and storyboards for their
reenactment. They had to rehearse the lines they had written and revise when appropriate. She took the students on a field trip to NutmegTV studios to prepare for the taping. And she involved others by asking an art class to design props and scenery for the production.

A second major video project was the video postcard to Iraq. A paraprofessional in the school was serving in Iraq, and the students wrote and created a video that they sent to the soldier over the Internet. Prior to e-mailing the video file, her students wrote and performed an original rap. During the composing phase, students realized that certain lines of the rap did not fit, and so they asked questions about adding, deleting, and revising lines. This greatly impressed Morin because students typically do not seem motivated to practice revising skills. On returning, the soldier visited the school and personally thanked Morin and her students for their thoughtfulness.

Throughout the process of using video for developing literacy, Morin has received the support of her school administrators and her students’ parents. One parent told her, “I’ve never seen my child so excited about coming to school or sharing so much about what’s going on in school.” Another parent indicated that she recently saw her child pick up a book on his own for the first time without being told to do so.
Conclusion

American public education is at a crossroad. The increased emphasis on high-stakes testing may produce a generation of stressed citizens whose major strength is taking tests, and little else. In media production, creativity and innovation count more than do test scores. John Dewey’s concerns at the start of the 20th century were that America’s schools were out of touch with the world outside the classroom, and here at the dawn of the 21st century we are expressing the same concerns with schooling.

We believe that shifting to learning engagements that are rooted in the new productive outputs of the 21st century requires new ways of viewing classrooms as centers of multimedia production — centers where the language arts are integrated naturally into the curriculum. The students in today’s schools are growing up surrounded by an explosion of multimedia and telecommunications. We face the possibility of not reaching this generation of children because much of society’s views of teaching, learning, assessment, and literacy are locked in the past. Young people do not need the old doomsday rhetoric of we will not be able
to compete if we do not pass the test. Instead, they need an education system that frees schools from outdated thinking. Children are highly motivated by teaching and learning that immerses them in the world of television production.
Resources


International Reading Association (IRA) and National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). *Standards for the English Language Arts*. Urbana, Ill.: National Council of Teachers of English, 1996.


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