Childhood Education

Technology in the Classroom: Creating Videos Can Lead Students to Many Academic Benefits

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Creating Videos Can Lead Students to Many Academic Benefits

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Assigning students projects involving video production can lead to many positive academic outcomes, and today more opportunities exist for educators to incorporate such video-oriented projects into their classroom practice. Video-making technology is more affordable, more user-friendly, and more powerful than ever before. Furthermore, many students have cell phones, cameras, and other handheld devices that have video-recording capabilities, thus making these types of projects more feasible for teachers to implement.

Although relatively little research has been done on the academic outcomes of video production for children (Norton & Hathaway, 2010), Siegle (2009) argues that educators would be remiss by not implementing these types of projects because young people are not only surrounded by visual images but also naturally attracted to viewing and producing videos. Unfortunately, teachers sometimes still face impediments when attempting to implement video projects with their students. This article discusses how student-created video projects can enhance motivation, multimodal literacy, problem-solving skills, and content knowledge. Readers will also find examples of video-making activities teachers can implement for students—ranging from primary school to middle school—and a discussion of some obstacles instructors can encounter when attempting to use these kinds of projects.

A Motivating Way to Learn

One of the most important aspects of video-making projects involves the power videos have in engaging and motivating students. Students tend to enjoy viewing videos and seem to be viewing them more often. Nielsen (2009) notes that each year teens are viewing online videos at an increasing rate. Additionally, Spires, Hervey, Morris, and Stelpflug (2012) indicate that a growing number of youth use video to communicate and express themselves.

By providing projects that match this trend, educators can use video production as a method to tap into pupils' interests and thus engage students to learn across the curriculum (Spires et al., 2012). Siegle (2009) contends that in addition to being a great motivator for all students, video also can allow some students to learn a concept more clearly.

Learning Through Video Production

Participating in video-based projects will encourage students to develop multimodal literacy. This form of literacy has been defined as the ability to use various representational formats, including visual, spatial, audio, and linguistic modes, to make meaning (Spires et al., 2012). Norton and Hathaway (2010) mention that although definitions of media literacy vary in the research literature, the term generally refers to the ability to access, learn, analyze, communicate, and evaluate using a variety of formats.

The technology boom over the past 20 years has led to a new demand for educators to teach students in a manner allowing them to function well with multimodal media. Notable literacy organizations, such as the International Reading Association (IRA) and the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) (1996), have added standards emphasizing the need for teachers to use nonprint media, including video, and more organizations will likely add similar standards in the near future.

In addition to promoting the development of multimodal literacy skills, the process of creating videos has potential to lead to many more academic benefits. Students often learn about a topic as they create their own video and can use the video to demonstrate what they learned (Siegle, 2009). The Poway Unified School District (2008), for example, reports that students in the 1st grade at Highland Ranch Elementary School won an award for a movie pupils created that benefited the children academically. The purpose of the movie was to teach others about the strategies good readers use. Mrs. Payne, the teacher for this project, noticed that when her students made the movie, they became more aware of the strategies good readers use and apply when reading new content. Students worked in small groups—each student had a chance to act as a cinematographer, a director, and a spokesperson. The 1st-graders wrote scripts emphasizing six important reading strategies, memorized the lines, practiced speaking well, filmed the scenes, and finally edited the movie.

Advocates of student-created videos, such as Bell (2005), say that developing a video requires students to problem solve, think critically, and apply knowledge from a content

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area. Video-making projects requiring pupils to create a dramatization of a literary work, for example, encourage students to appreciate and learn literature and promote creativity as students use editing software to communicate ideas and feelings in their own way. Furthermore, students learn about the ethical aspects of making a video, which include asking for copyright permission (when necessary) and giving credit to others when using their ideas or help.

Other learning outcomes from video projects include the development of reading, speaking, and writing skills, as well as teamwork and organizational skills (Henderson et al., 2010). Because video-making projects encourage students to communicate their emotions and thoughts, Siegle (2009) states that they are similar to writing projects, and he recommends modifying writing projects to video format in order for students to gain the added benefits of media-based activities. Kirkland (2006) offers a list of activities that teachers can use for video-making projects, including:

Documentary
Documentary videos cover nonfictional topics intended to portray some aspect of reality and can include interviews. Students create a video presenting a political, social, or historical topic accompanied by narration. Documentaries are objective, and students will need to think about how to avoid bias and consider which information and images to include in producing a good documentary.

Dramatization
Dramatizing literary works often promotes better understanding of literature and can lead to a motivating video project. In addition to the literature required by the language arts curriculum, teachers can assign video projects that ask students to dramatize key historical events. Students can work on their media literacy skills as they edit the video and add graphic imagery.

Pre-selected Clips
In this project, teachers break students up into small groups and give each group the same video clips. Students then organize the clips together to convey their own ideas. The class then explores how the results vary. This often helps students learn about bias and point of view. Students need to think critically as they organize the clips in order to highlight the ideas they want to communicate.

Interviews
This format can be used for oral histories in which students interview someone who lived in a previous era. Kirkland (2006) indicates that hearing information from a person is much more effective than relying on a secondary source and provides students with the chance to use primary sources. Students also can interview members of their school or community as a project on current events or community-building.

Demonstration
Teachers ask students to make a video showing that they learned the key concepts of a lesson. This will require learners to decide what to include when demonstrating their learning and helps them create their own meaning of the concepts. Teachers will need to set limits regarding the maximum length of the video and the number of clips students can include. This project can be used as an assessment strategy for what students learned.

Public Service Announcement
In a clearly defined length of time, students are assigned to produce an announcement that calls for change on a social or environmental issue. This activity requires higher-order thinking skills, because students will need to select the best clips in order to create a persuasive message and use clear and strong writing and speaking if the announcement is to be effective.

News Report
Social studies teachers can organize very engaging current events sessions by assigning students to play the role of news reporters gathering new information about recent events in a school or local community and to make a video about them. Students have limited video time, and this allows them to evaluate which segments are most important.

Conclusion
Despite the potential benefits of video projects, teachers sometimes have certain circumstances that make it difficult for them to use this exciting approach of teaching. Norton and Hathaway (2010) report numerous obstacles, including curriculums that restrict the format in which literacy is taught, lack of teacher education, lack of classroom time, and challenges with equipment and personnel.

Issues involving equipment seem to be improving because

video-making tools continually become more sophisticated and affordable. For instructors to teach using multimodal media effectively, however, teacher education programs would likely have to require more intellectually demanding work involving technology. This seems like a worthy cause, considering the strong potential of instructional technology. Additionally, more school districts would need to be more open to allowing teachers to use this format.

If these obstacles are dealt with well, multimodal projects such as video production will likely benefit more students, in many ways, in the near future. When teachers implement student-created videos effectively, they help students stay connected to their world and promote motivation, acquisition of content knowledge, critical-thinking skills, and multimodal literacy.

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