

**VIDEO PRODUCTION AS A MOTIVATOR
FOR THE ACTIVE INTELLECTUAL PARTICIPATION
OF JUNIOR HIGH STUDENTS IN THE PURSUIT
OF LANGUAGE SKILLS AND AN
AWARENESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES**

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MASTER OF EDUCATION

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Introduction

The major objectives of this project were to create a learning activity that promoted active student participation, encouraged creative thinking, problem solving, and led to the expression and growth of language skills.

This is a rather lofty desire and tough act when working with a group of junior high students who generally find that the social aspects of the classroom or what's happening outside the classroom are far more important than meeting their teacher's objectives. Realizing however, that the vast resources and potential of this group often remains untapped through conventional teaching methods and the confines of the classroom, I sought to accomplish my aims employing unconventional methods and expanding the classroom.

The vehicle that would elicit the fulfillment of the primary objectives, and allow other secondary objectives to be realized, was a focus on the topic, "environmental issues". The tools of choice, which I would put in the hands of the students, were pen, paper, typewriter, video-8 camera, and a television monitor. The setting for the activity included, the classroom, numerous outdoor locations in the Brooks area, and eventually, the Media Center at the University.

The theme, "environmental issues" had been a focus of attention for all of our students and teachers at Griffin Park school this year. The topic had often been alluded to and discussed in my junior high language arts, social, and science classes throughout the year. By the time Ralph Klein, Alberta's Minister of the Environment, visited our school in March, our students were generally familiar with a lot of the issues involved. After the visit our students were ready to do more than just listen. They were ready to become actively involved in the issues. I felt that given the right opportunities and the right tools, the kids were ready to engage their intellects and get personally involved in the learning process, something I had been trying to accomplish, with varying degrees of success, all year.

I had brought the University's video-8 camera into the classroom several times throughout the year. Not only did the kids enjoy seeing themselves on television and using the camera, but more importantly, they usually took the process very seriously because they were very concerned as to what appeared on the screen. Like most teachers when stumbling across something that works, I uttered an "ah ha", and hoped the opportunity would arise to take full advantage of the discovery.

This project was the opportunity to put it all together. The vehicle and tools were there and the kids were ready. The

final tape, which I am presenting as a submission for a one credit creative project, is an attempt to "put it all together."

Purposes and Plans

The final product of this project is a 30 minute video expressing some environmental issues as they relate to the town of Brooks as seen by a group of Brook's junior high students.

In keeping with the design and intention of the one credit creative project the aim of my project was to accomplish the following objectives.

- i) To ensure a personally meaningful undertaking by involving the students that I work with, and focussing on a creative project that involves my present teaching assignment.
- ii) To provide a learning experience for my students that promotes their creative development and expression of language skills in keeping with Alberta Education's junior high language arts objectives.
- iii) To provide an opportunity for the students to have a personal and intimate exposure to environmental issues leading to a greater awareness of problems and solutions.
- iv) To create a video production that could be used as a meaningful teaching tool for future students.
- v) To provide an experience, for students, that provides an awareness of opportunities for political action. (The project involves interviews with town officials to discuss environmental problems and solutions on a local level)

The project began in March of the 1990 school term, evolved through four stages and was completed in August 1990.

1. Preparation:

This stage involved student research in the area of environmental concerns and the development of basic skills related to the operation of a video 8 camera and video production.

This issue served as a starting point and a focus for research.

"HOW CONCERNED SHOULD THE RESIDENTS OF BROOKS BE ABOUT THREATS TO OUR ENVIRONMENT AND HOW SHOULD THIS CONCERN BE DEMONSTRATED IN REGARD TO LOCAL ENVIRONMENTAL ISSUES?"

Students then developed research questions based on the issue.

Their questions generally related to these areas.

- i. What are the major environmental concerns facing us today?
- ii. What are some of the solutions that would encourage changes in our lifestyle?
- iii. What natural resources are used to create products used by our society?
- iv. How is the environment effected by the process of creating finished products from natural resources?
- v. How is the environment effected by the discarding of products that have outlived their usefulness?

The sources of information used by the students included texts, journal articles, and discussions with local workers, business men, politicians and citizens.

2. Planning and Writing:

After the students had developed a good background on the issue, and gained a solid understanding of global and local

implications, scenarios as to what action the people of Brooks could take to play a part in environmental solutions were created.

The students identified five key areas.

- | | | |
|-------------|--------------------|-------------------|
| a) Garbage | c) Water | e) Global Warming |
| -landfills | -problems | -causes |
| -burning | -conservation | -solution |
| -recycling | | |
| b) Paper | d) Ozone depletion | |
| -production | -problems/solution | |
| -uses | | |
| -problems | | |
| -recycling | | |

The students were grouped according to interest and each group developed a plan and a video script that would cover their particular area.

3. Video Production

Following this format each group was responsible for developing and preparing a five to ten minute video segment that focussed on their particular area within the confines of the original issue. The students had the option of producing live, on location reports, a sound track accompanying appropriate video, or a combination of the two.

i. Planning

- Based on prior research

ii. Script Writing

- As a group they had to consider various forms of presentation and make decisions as to the most appropriate way to present their material within the six to ten minute time frame.

iii. Individual Assignments

- Every member of the group had to participate as a commentator, camera operator, or set designer.

iv. Shooting and Location Schedule

- The Kinsmen community van was available to us for transportation between shooting locations, but we were limited as to its availability and the amount of time we had for out of school taping.
- As a result, students had to develop shooting schedules make contacts, and be prepared and rehearsed enough to make a finished video production limited to only two or 3 takes.

v. Voiceovers and Narration

- Prepared on audio tape and were inserted where appropriate during final editing stage.

4. Final Editing

- The final editing, voice-over and music dubbing was done at the university media center, using the EVO 720 editor, during Summer Session 3 of 1990.

The Process

Personally I am not an expert in the use of the video 8 camera, nor have I had any special training, but an important first step in the project was to pass my skills with the camera, on to the kids. I wanted the students to take some ownership of the project, and to do this, they had to direct and take most of the camera shots. Of course there is danger in this approach as the camera work may lack some quality or the equipment may be damaged. As it turned out, the camera work does at times hint of inexperience, and although I held my breath from time to time, the equipment was treated with the utmost respect and suffered no damage.

As mentioned, the Kinsmen allowed us to use their van for on location shooting. We were quite tightly scheduled however, as we had to fit into the timetable of the school and could only get the van for a few hours every two weeks. Often the availability of the van and the weather conditions were not compatible. During one of those incompatible times, we had

to film during the worst wind Brooks had experienced all year, which is rather obvious on one segment of the tape that could not be redone.

When Mr. Klein, Minister of the Environment, visited, we taped his speech, and decided to open the production with some of his words of wisdom. Following Mr. Klein's contribution, time was devoted to a discussion of how the project came about and the process that the students went through in completing the video. Since the students spent time practicing in front of the camera and had so many laughs at their "bloopers", and the environmental hazards that were encountered when shooting on location, a little of that footage was also included in the introduction.

The first scene was shot in front of the Town Office. At this point the students wanted to create an awareness that our environment is continually undergoing changes, that all of the changes were not good for the health of the planet, and that humans were responsible for the changes. At the end of this segment the reporters present the audience with three criteria with which the products produced and used by humans should be viewed.

- a) Natural resources used to produce the product.
- b) Environmental damage done by the process of making the product.
- c) Disposal of the product after use.

The scene shifts to the town dump where the students begin to examine specific areas of concern starting with problems related to disposal and the type of garbage being disposed.

Plastics, aluminum cans, glass, and paper are discussed in regard to the three criteria with a focus on solutions involving recycling, reuse and reducing demand.

It came to our attention that the city of Edmonton was involved in a recycling program aimed at reducing the need for landfill garbage disposal areas. A phone call to a colleague in Edmonton produced a tape presenting the Edmonton plan. Some thought had been given to laying our own narration over the video portion of the tape, but we decided that it would play better if we used segments of the actual tape and the voice of my colleague. The kids had hoped to discuss the Edmonton plan with some local town officials, on camera, and although they were cooperative in providing information, they were reluctant to be taped.

The production goes on to examine the areas of water conservation, global warming, and ozone depletion with emphasis on the concepts of reusing, reducing demand, and recycling.

At all times attempts were made to use only factual, verifiable information, to look at problems on a local

level, and allow the people of Brooks to identify local solutions which were directly stated or alluded to.

Reflections

I was very pleased with the student response in terms of academic and social progress during the project. Using the video camera and video production as a motivator for learning, produced much enthusiasm, opportunity for development and expression of creativity, progress in the development of language skills and the expression of those skills. The personal interaction with the great environmental issues of our day developed an awareness and appreciation that will likely affect future behavior. I also felt that providing an opportunity, that encouraged active engagement in an intellectual activity, by an age group not particularly noted for that behavior, created a situation where the challenge for independent thinking and responsible behavior, that we give our young teenagers, was met with vigor and triumph. Kids with reading and writing problems, or those with esteem difficulties, particularly came alive during this production. I can safely say that for some of the kids, the reading, composing and performing, provided a challenge, successfully met, that was more demanding than any they had taken up up all year. The great potential for the application of video production in other classroom activities has definitely been demonstrated through

this project. An activity that can so easily engage the imagination and thought processes of students while promoting academic and social progress were the key points used to convince the administration of our school to invest in a video 8 camera for the coming term.

The students have not yet viewed the final production. I will work with this group in the coming year in grade eight science and will give them a chance to see their final production. Also, informal discussions with the personnel at the local cable station, indicates that they are anxious to show the completed work on the community channel.

In conclusion, I discovered, not for the first time, that doing something out of the ordinary with these kids was a very rewarding and enjoyable experience for me, and that perhaps when viewing the final product, some of my colleagues may feel more comfortable and see the value in engaging their students in some unconventional learning activities.

Ball, Ronald H (1990)

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