

Running head: Vignette #2

Analysis of vignette #2

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How can movie be used to produce curriculum stories?

In the video created with elementary students mentored by a video artist, learning is experiential. First and foremost, the learning experience seeks to develop knowledge in a specific context, which in this case is the environment. The theme is related to a clear problem, littering, and focuses on a goal: a change in attitude. The role of the story, therefore, is to provide a narrative that will create an emotional impact, allowing the information to be accepted and processed by the audience. The objective is to enable the video producers (in this case the elementary students) to communicate a message that will entice the viewers (and themselves) to actively alter their behavior and adopt the solution suggested by the film.

The choice of project

The production is called: "*The Trash that Came from the Can*". This title is chosen with care, using words that children can easily visualize, pronounce and remember. The Trash Monster appeals to kid's imagination. The mood of the film is light, even though the message is serious. This approach allows students to open their minds to complex ideas behind a seemingly simple and entertaining adventure.

In this type of project, the learning environment involves the use of technology (cameras, tapes, tripods, microphones, editing systems) and a collaborative and constructivist approach. The role of the teacher or mentor is to facilitate the collective discovery and the construction of knowledge. The process usually entails the pre-production (scripting), production (filming) and post-production (editing) phases. During these stages, students are encouraged to take ownership of their learning by searching information about the problem at hand. They select a genre that

best suits their interest. Whether they choose to create a comedy, a thriller or a drama, students benefit from participating “in discussions if they are to be successful”, (Palloff & Pratt, 1999).

By exposing students to the various components of media production, they come to realize the influential power of this type of communication technology. In the film analyzed in this paper, the students chose to dramatize the story by having the Trash Monster take control of the school. This dramatic storytelling device allowed them to present a scenario in which they, as the actors of the story, changed their attitudes and cleaned up their environment. The indicators of learning are apparent in the way that students took responsibility for acting in the film as well as preparing the props. The dismantling of the monster at the end also gave the children a tactile experience directly linked with the concept of taking the problem apart and finding a resolution.

Technology & learning: advantages and limitations

As long as the technological tools are used to facilitate learning rather than for their own sakes, the technology enhances learning. However, in circumstances where teachers are not familiar with the tools it becomes more complicated to focus on the content. These limitations often create frustrations from the part of the instructor as well as the students. Therefore, this type of project necessitates a great deal of planning and some support from educational institutions for the professional development of teachers. According to So & Kim (2009), who observed teachers using technology, the biggest problems comprise:

- “a. generating authentic and ill-structured problems for a chosen content topic,*
- b. finding and integrating ICT tools and resources relevant for the target students*
- and learning activities, and*

c. designing tasks with a balance between teacher guidance and student independence.”

They continue by offering suggestions to better link the content, pedagogical, and technological knowledge such as: providing teachers with integrated modules as well as models of project-based technology. Bransford, Brown & Cocking (2002), report the need for a continuous synchronized effort ranging from “pre-service education to early teaching to opportunities for lifelong development as professionals” (p. 205).

Conclusion

The technology played an obvious role in this vignette, since the story and the message depended on the use of cameras, angles, lighting and sound. The technological tools also allowed students to experience learning actively, by acting and participating in the various phases of the production. Provided that technology does not overshadow the educational objectives, the motivational benefits of such projects are inherent to the dynamic process of discovering a solution and communicating it to others effectively.

References

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