



TECHNOLOGY
RESEARCH
COMMITTEE

2007 – 2008 Grant Project Report

Project Title: Movie Magic

Project Creator(s): John Bernhardt
Colleen Heavey

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Contact: jbernhardt@catskill.net

FINAL REPORT
MOVIE MAGIC
April 1, 2008

Introduction

Media Communications is a component of the Senior English class at Andes Central School. One-half of Media Communications involves the production of a monthly school newsletter. All seniors participate in that effort.

Students are provided choices to complete the other one-half of the course. Students elect to participate in a Radio Production component or a Movie Production component to complete their course requirements.

The information that makes up this final report outlines the efforts of the student team who elected to study Movie Production.

Project Goals

I. Total Student Participation

Involving every student in a total education experience is a guiding principle at Andes Central School. For example, in most schools, participation in school plays is competitive. Students with an interest in performing try out for roles in the school play. At Andes, participation in the school play is required for seniors as well as juniors who do not attend classes at BOCES.

Including every student in every facet of movie production was the number one goal of our 2007-2008 Movie Magic effort. With faculty guiding from the side, students have made all production decisions in the project. Even though the overall quality of the project may suffer, the teachers leading the project feel it is critical that students do the work of producing our movie. We are satisfied with our progress meeting this goal at this time.

II. Team Collaboration

Like a professional production team, the students creating the Andes movie work as part of a team. Students discuss each facet of movie production, negotiate ideas, assign and complete project tasks, and share in all decision making. We are satisfied with our progress meeting this goal at this time.

III. Critical Thinking Skills

Movie production requires a great deal of analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. Film ideas are generated, footage amassed, and film evaluated for effectiveness in reaching production goals. Again and again, students are

asked to make judgments about the film they shoot against select criteria. The project theme, the quality of the film shot, and the integration of film footage with the story line and narration must all be weighed carefully. Students use critical thinking skills throughout the process to trouble shoot and to make production decisions. The movie production process requires that students utilize technology in creative ways. We are satisfied with our progress meeting this goal at this time.

IV. Technical Skills

Producing a movie demands a specific and challenging skill set. Creating a final project demands technical knowledge and skills in the use of the video camera and the ability to utilize software functions required of creating a story board, using slide transitions, and editing. This goal has proven to be most difficult. The normal constraints of time and overload experienced in every high school class weigh especially heavy in this area. That reality has forced us to narrow the list of technical skills we originally targeted in the project to a concise list of basics that students could use as foundational skills in the movie production process. With adaptations, we are satisfied with our progress meeting this goal at this time.

Timeline

I. September

Objective: Students will learn filming techniques needed in conducting live, taped interviews at area farms.

Students were introduced to the video filming equipment to be used in the project. Equipment functions were explored with students practicing techniques by completing local filming assignments around the school.

Objective: Students will learn interviewing techniques needed in conducting live, taped interviews at area farms.

Students were prepared to conduct an interview introduction, learned to frame questions for an interview and learned follow-up question techniques. Mock interviews were conducted to refine interviewing skills. Post interview questions and release forms allowing for the use of the visual images of the interviewees were developed.

II. October

Objective: Students will conduct initial interviews with the owners of each of the farms still operating in Andes.

Interviews were conducted at each of the remaining operating farms in Andes. Eight original interviews were taped with sessions averaging over two hours. Technical difficulties required the re-taping of one interview.

III. November/December

Objective: Students will watch all taped interviews and complete word-for-word transcriptions of all interviews.

Previous experience has taught us the importance of producing word-for-word transcriptions of all interviews. Without transcriptions, the editing process becomes a nightmare. Although the process is maddeningly slow and considered to be ‘grunt work’ by the students, the process helps students become intimately familiar with the taped text and aids in all other development and editing work.

Objective: Students will begin to make connections using interview text to generate lists of ideas for movie themes, titles, music choices, etc.

A Student Director was chosen with initial discussions held on using the taped interview text to generate ideas for creating the story line of the documentary. The interview text becomes a driving force in moving the project forward.

IV. January

Objective: Students will analyze interview transcripts and evaluate transcripts against film and sound quality standards to identify potential footage to be included in the film and delete information they believe does not pertain to the topic or theme.

Extensive analysis, synthesis, and evaluation of the written transcripts takes place. Group conferences were held with students evaluating the typed transcript to identify text that might be included in the final movie project. A “bank of possibilities” connecting text with other production considerations was developed.

V. February

Objective: Using word-for-word taped transcripts, students will delete all unnecessary text from film and word transcripts.

Over forty minutes of filmed interviews was compiled at each farm site. Students matched the word-for-word transcripts with the filmed interviews and edited the spoken text based on the quality of the film, sound and lighting factors, and environmental obstacles. Editing decisions saw students delete interview text narrowing the length of saved film on each interview from over forty minutes to ten or fewer minutes.

VI. March

Objective: Students will explore the features of movie production software and master the use of a concise list of movie production skills.

The project focus shifted to movie production software in March. Students explored the multiple functions of the software. Instructors identified a

concise list of production skills (extracting audio, splitting frames, importing over audio skills, transitions, capturing stills from audio, industry fundamentals) and practiced those skills using film footage taken during farm visits.

Objective: Students will begin writing tasks required in the project.

A Student Director was selected to lead the process of writing the narration for the documentary. Rough drafts for the movie introduction as well as short introductions of each of the farms highlighted in the program were crafted.

Follow-up thank you letters to the owners of each farm were written and mailed.

Requests to schedule follow-up interviews were also produced.

Objective: Students will begin constructing story boards; a general storyboard for the movie as a whole and short storyboards for segments highlighting each farm.

Using their word-for-word interview transcripts, students must now begin to shape a concept on how they will construct their movie. Storyboards are used professionally to help directors shape their movie concept. Analyzing their prioritized text, students will build a collection of images to use as the foundation during their next farm visits.

VII. May/June

Objective: Students will complete the process of final film production.

Final film production is challenging. The finishing component includes follow-up visits to each area farm. Having analyzed their interview text and their bank of visual images, the purpose of the second visits is to expand both domains to include specific data that might fill existing gaps in the story board.

After the second farm visits, students will begin the time intensive, painstaking process of constructing and editing the movie.

Notes:

We hope our timeline provides teachers with a glimpse of the thinking and decision making that has guided our process. Movie making in a school setting is a fluid process strongly impacted by the distribution of time. The creative process simply does not work well in forty minutes blocks. Professional film makers (and our teaching instructors who created our first documentary) spend huge amounts of time (after work time in the case of school teachers) making production decisions and editing their work. That is a huge issue in a school project where the students are the worker doing all the work involved in producing a movie.

Movie production of a documentary film holds great potential as an instructional strategy that encourages the use of critical thinking skills. Although students work from a skeletal plan, much of the moment-by-moment work evolves from the quality of the interview text and visual images captured during primary visits. A successful project demands huge doses of reflection, introspection, and negotiation. People skills are a premium during the final stages of piecing together the product.

The movie production process is also a terrific way for students to learn and practice team and collaboration skills. The decision making involved during every step of the process is enhanced when students collaborate and problem solve in groups. It is wise to spend upfront time teaching the social skills you expect students to utilize in these settings.