

Reflection on Media Creation in School

Alan Windhausen: The Bethel White Alice Tower Story

Through the process of creating my digital story on the White Alice Tower in Bethel, Alaska (<http://youtu.be/0uZyDnXiA7Q>), I found that I used many techniques and skills that may be useful for students in my math and science classes. First among these is the ability to effectively research a topic and cite resources for a project in an appropriate manner. This is a skill that any student who wishes to succeed in a college course will need. From my student teaching, I've seen how a standard research essay is usually groan-inducing for the majority of students, yet a media-based project may be met with something approaching excitement - a rare feat for a large school project. Given the amount of research and the strict adherence to citation in this project, I see a well-planned video as an acceptable substitute for an essay *if* (and this is a big if) the goal of the project is to promote research and citation skills while learning about a subject. Furthermore, the process required for this project (story map -> script -> story table -> video) does teach a valuable path of development (outline -> rough draft -> second draft -> final product), as well as practicing writing skills

However, I would not trust a media project of this sort to teach the students how to draft and format a true research essay, even though the drafting and research involved in this project makes it a good *initial* project to teach the basic skills behind an essay. I would use such a multimedia project in class to develop the skills of researching a subject and drafting a project, then I would have the students make use these skills to write a full, college-level paper a few units later. For Chemistry, such a video project could be about the operation and application of some technique we cannot afford to do in our lab (such as Mass Spectroscopy and Infrared Spectroscopy), or a further exploration of one of the topics in class (plasmas and non-Newtonian fluids, organic acids, color chemistry, etc.).

Overall, I think this is a worthwhile project to pursue, but there are two issues which I would first need to address: the lack of adequate Internet services at students' homes, and the lack of home access to computers with software capable of this type of project. The first issue also prevents students from necessarily being able to download the correct software easily (which would be a simple fix for the second issue). Although most school computers are 3 or so years old now, they may provide a partial solution. However, use of school computers requires additional class time for these projects, which would relegate the project to only being assigned 'if time allows' (i.e. we are ahead of schedule). If students have computers capable of the project at home, and are able to do adequate research on their own time, this could be an easily assigned 14-day project and yield good results. Even if all these conditions are not fully met, the benefits of such a project are enough that it can still be attempted by substituting study hall and homeroom for class time (or through other measures that ensure student access to adequate research).