

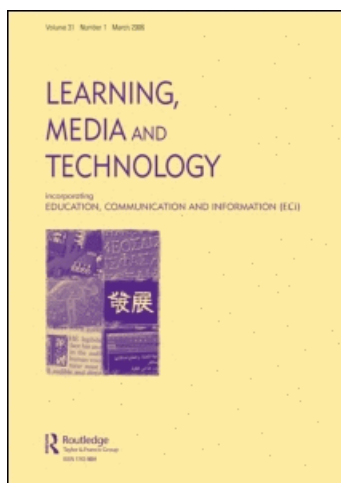
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### The role of media/video production in non-media disciplines: the case of health promotion

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## VIEWPOINT

### **The role of media/video production in non-media disciplines: the case of health promotion**

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Media creation has been almost exclusively a domain of media and communication fields. Traditionally, non-media fields, such as public health and health promotion, do not typically include media creation courses. As media technologies continue to advance, however, opportunities arise for the development of new pedagogical models based on new conceptions about teaching and learning that are commensurate with and mindful of these advancements. In this context, digital technologies are not viewed merely as a convenient tool to produce, disseminate, and receive information but as part of a pedagogical method that allows students to learn concepts while they explore, experiment, and create specific messages. This approach is particularly significant in public health and health promotion, fields that not only recognize the wide range of impacts media and media messages have on people's perceptions, attitudes, and behaviors, but also engage in the wide use of media, especially videos, to inform and educate the public, and to communicate health messages. Requiring students to create media messages provides them with opportunities to think critically, produce appropriate health information, and become media literate both as future public health professionals and as ordinary citizens.

### **The educational potential of digital video creation**

Advancements in digital technology have transformed the information production and consumption process. Digital videos, for example, can be relatively easily produced and distributed even by those with limited technological skills. Tools for compositing visual images (i.e., video, graphics, animation, etc.) are almost as ubiquitous as word processing tools. Students can learn to use the technology quickly and creatively to tell stories without being overwhelmed

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by its complexity. The process is ‘no more about using the tools than the pen and paper is about writing’ (Meeks and Ilyasova 2003).

Increasingly, video production, recognized as a key emerging educational technology (Horizon Report 2008), is being incorporated in fields other than the ‘usual suspects’ of television, advertising, or documentary filmmaking, due in large part to the analog-to-digital shift that has resulted in dramatic reductions to the learning curve and production costs. Educators are beginning to recognize the multimedia/video production process as a learning and critical thinking tool (Horizon Report 2008; Meeks and Ilyasova 2003; Shewbridge and Berge 2004) – even in non-media fields such as public health and health promotion.

The actual creation of visual media affords students an opportunity ‘to develop a critical understanding of it and perhaps gain some degree of power over its intrusive nature’ (Shewbridge and Berge 2004, 33). Multimedia content creation engages multiple literacies such as technology literacy, information literacy, and media literacy all at once alongside health literacy. It has been noted that ‘students seem to revise early and often without direct provocation from the instructor, and they come to appreciate revision as a vital part of the composition process – two rare phenomena when students write and rewrite essays’ (Meeks and Ilyasova 2003).

### Engagement theory

Engagement theory can be helpful in framing the pedagogical discussions. The theory, as conceptualized by Kearsley and Shneiderman (1998), suggests technology as a catalyst to facilitate deeper learning through purposeful student engagement in group projects with a practical outside of the classroom use. Best summarized as ‘Relate–Create–Donate,’ the theory builds on three core ideas that: (1) learning occurs in a social context (*Relate*), (2) coursework should be hands-on and project-based (*Create*), and (3) the project must have an authentic ‘real world’ focus (*Donate*). Simply stated, ‘successful collaborative teams working on ambitious projects [that are] meaningful to someone outside the classroom’ (Kearsley and Shneiderman 1998, 20).

The team approach (*Relate*) requires students to exercise their planning and social skills as they work together on projects, engage in group discussions, explore difficult concepts, and learn from each other while working on a topic for a common purpose. Although difficult to manage, ‘teamwork is often a strong motivating factor’ (Shewbridge and Berge 2004, 38).

Learning *from* technology used to imply learning was a consequence of receiving information. Technology’s greater potential, however, lies in learning *with* computers where students are engaged in a process (e.g., content creation – *Create*) that uses technology as a tool for collaborative problem-solving through reflection, discussions, and critical thinking: the power of technology in this vision ‘is not simply its potential to replicate existing educational

practice, but its ability to combine idea and product technologies to encourage students to engage in deeper cognitive activity' (Hooper and Reiber 1995, 163). When used as a 'cognitive tool,' the technology can facilitate cognitive processing and advance students' critical thinking skills. The complex process of multimedia construction requires students to 'generate multiple solutions, cope with uncertainty, demonstrate nuanced judgment with media selection and adaptation ... and put considerable effort into structuring information': all characteristics of higher-order thinking (Brown 2007, 107).

The *Donate* component stresses the value of student engagement with members of the community outside of classroom to create products that affect real people. It encourages students to make useful contributions to society while learning and fosters student motivation, which leads to higher levels of student satisfaction and diligence.

### **Theory to practice: from concept to production to learning**

As a practical example, we will briefly review an ongoing media integration model at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. In 2004, several faculty and students from multiple disciplines were brought together by the Media Services director (the first author) and the director of a campus program on sustainability practices to use video technology to integrate the concept of sustainability (i.e., production and use of natural resources such that the well-being of all current and future inhabitants of the planet is ensured) into their respective disciplines.

The media production process held the promise to enhance multiple literacies across several disciplines while helping students develop crucial academic skills such as writing, critical thinking, problem-solving, and communication – skills recognized as essential for producing effective citizenship, leadership, and work in the Information Age (Partnership for 21st Century Skills 2003). To date, the project has been implemented 29 times in 18 courses across nine disciplines (English, Health, Nursing, Management, Economics, Education, History, Art, and the Department of Regional Economic and Social Development) involving 12 faculty members resulting in nearly 200 student video projects.

In 2007, the video production process was formally integrated into an introductory course in health promotion as a service-learning project and has been implemented over six semesters. We focus on this particular course more closely because it fully embodies all three components of engagement theory. The course covers the core concepts in health promotion: history, philosophies, health education practices, models and theories, ethical considerations, roles and responsibilities of health educators, etc. The theoretical concepts are linked to service-learning video projects requiring the students to work collaboratively with local community organizations and health agencies, like local boards of health, to produce short health promotion videos for the organizations. The

students (mostly freshmen and/or sophomores) work in groups of three or four. They interact with the organizations' staff and explore the goal of the video, its message, and the intended audience. The projects build on well-established relationships between the faculty (second author and the course instructor) and the partner organizations.

To create the video, students must review the literature, conduct preliminary and on-camera interviews, learn to write scripts and operate video production equipment, and edit the final video. Thus far, several waves of students (88 in total) have worked with 11 different local organizations to produce a total of 27 videos. The videos cover wide varieties of health topics such as opioid overdose, drinking water contaminations, tuberculosis, lead exposure, adverse impacts of US military recruitment strategies, second-hand tobacco exposure, and community organizing.

## Discussion

Online content creation by college students continues to grow each year (Lenhart et al. 2007). However, very few academic disciplines have successfully integrated these skills into their coursework. The effectiveness of our approach, we believe, is a result of several key factors. First, a close cooperative relationship exists between the faculty and the Media Center staff with respect to production and post-production instruction and support. The Media Center is responsible for teaching the production and editing skills, loaning the equipment and supporting the students with their hands-on work in the multi-station media lab. This level of interdisciplinary integration requires a course (re)design that links video production skills and theoretical class work in such a way that the topics become mutually inclusive. That is, in a very real sense, the Media Center becomes part of an extended classroom.

Second, theory–practice linkages are reflected in all aspects of the students' work from designing interview questions and drafting video scripts to editing the final videos. The process demands a constant reflection and evaluation by both the instructor and the students that promotes a deeper understanding of the connection between the course and the video topics. To achieve this, current and past student video projects are regularly used as examples to explain and clarify various health promotion topics – theories, models, ethics, needs assessment, etc. In concert, the students are required to apply appropriate theories and concepts, with justification, when producing their videos.

A third factor is time allocation. 'Time' is a scarce commodity in academic courses with extensive learning objectives. Class time must be planned carefully to cover course objectives, to promote efficacious learning, and to ensure successful completion of the video projects. We dedicate one class period a week (50 minutes) to the technical aspects of the projects. Since students often have a tendency to procrastinate until the final weeks of the semester to work on their videos, already a complex process, we set specific

benchmarks at increments to ensure successful completion of all videos. Special attention is given to editing and production aspects which are the most challenging and time-intensive part of the project and require between 20 and 40 hours of work.

For us, it is not a question of *if* but a question of *how* media production can be integrated effectively in a traditionally ‘non-media’ discipline such as health promotion. Incorporating video production into a health promotion curriculum has not been easy. It has been an evolutionary process where we use what we have learned from one semester to refine and improve the process in the subsequent semester. Clearly, we believe this is a worthwhile exercise, one with potentially strong learning benefits. We have recently completed a study that evaluates the efficacy of our approach in fostering multiple literacies (forthcoming article). We realize our experiences may not be universal nor fit neatly into a traditional classroom teaching format, but we hope this discussion provides a framework to begin a dialogue about the *how*, and proves useful to other instructors wishing to follow suit.

### Notes on contributors

Mitch Shuldman, MLS, EdD, has been a Media Librarian at University of Massachusetts at Lowell for 28 years, collaborating with faculty to facilitate the academic use of technologies (whatever they happen to have been at the time) into teaching and learning. He is the creator of a website of online instructional video modules that focus on teaching students basic library and information literacy skills (<http://library.uml.edu/knowhow>) and continues to work with faculty integrating the video/media production process into courses across the curriculum.

Mansoureh Tajik, PhD, is an Assistant Professor in the Department of Community Health, School of Health and Environment, University of Massachusetts at Lowell. Her primary approach to teaching and research in community and environmental health is participatory education, community-based participatory research and education with a basic focus on environmental and social justice issues.

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