Fall 2006

Utilizing Filmmaking to Advance Generation Y's Information Fluency

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Over the last several years, a variety of articles have been written about Generation Y (also known as the Millennials). As this generation enters the gateways of higher education and now employers' doors, much of the discussion is around their work and learning preferences as well as their behavioral tendencies. While college and university administrators examine and explore GenY's learning, technology, and communication preferences, they struggle with effectively modifying curriculum to meet these preferences. Library professionals see great potential in the types of instructional programming we can provide for GenY. However, as with any new generation of students there is concern about meeting the challenges. Reliance on sound instructional practices and effective instructional design models is as important as before. The key is finding the successful combination that works for students' needs and institutional learning outcomes. Filmmaking or digital video production is one of many technological options for creating a connection with students in the classroom and still promoting information fluency.

Being broadly aware of this new generation and their preferences and characteristics are important facets to associate with them during their college learning experience. In their article, *Born With the Chip*, Abram and Luther (2004) identify nine behavioral aspects of the current generation of students. They are:

1) Format Agnostic
2) Nomadic
3) Multitasking
4) Experiential
5) Collaborative
6) Integrated
7) Principled
8) Adaptive
9) Direct.

Two themes, in their article as well as other scholarly works, are that these students have a preference for an active, group-based learning environment and for the use of technology in the classroom. While academics still consider course-management systems, searching electronic sources, and delivering electronic presentations as effective and innovative use of technology, GenY does not agree and would prefer the use of newer technologies. Clayton-Pedersen and O'Neill note this gap in perception

of what is new and innovative has today's students holding low expectations for technology use in the classroom (2005). Slow response to using newer technologies will only create more barriers and obstacles to its system-wide integration.

Apart from the perceptual gap of innovative technology use in the classroom, other issues exist that contribute to the existing gaps. Lack of true integration of technology into curricula is often linked to the absence of technical support, time, and resources (Bates & Poole, 2003). Elimination of these barriers provides the opportunity to use technology as a tool for learning in a collaborative, engaged environment. Application of the Information Fluency model, created by the Associated Colleges of the South, is one way to improve technology integration without sacrificing information literacy and critical thinking. Dede (2005) supports the theory that as students experience learning in a technological immersive environment, there will be a shift from individualized learning to "neomillennial learning styles." Specifically, students will show "fluency in multiple media, [while] valu[ing] each for the types of communication, activities, experiences, and expressions it empowers" (p. 15.15). Filmmaking projects incorporate information literacy skills, active learning, critical thinking, and use of technology. Additionally, these types of projects appeal to the following Abram & Luther's behavioral aspects:

1) Format Agnostic: Digital formatting allows for a variety of information sources to be used and incorporated into projects.

4) Experiential: Most students haven't created films in a formal matter. The best way to learn how to create a film is to immerse oneself into the process & experiment with presenting information in a new way.

5) Collaborative: It is very difficult to create a quality film by oneself. The idea and concept of creating film is, at its core, collaborative.

6) Integrated: The very nature of filmmaking is the blending of content and technology. Film is entertainment as well as a communication method.

7) Principled: Allowing students to choose a current or hot topic gives them the opportunity to express their ideas and opinions, in addition to expanding their depth of knowledge about a particular topic.

The diverse nature of filmmaking creates a large spectrum of integration possibilities for projects and curricula. At the Purdue University Libraries, one application of filmmaking to advance information fluency is the final project of the introductory information literacy course. For the final project, the students work in groups of 3 or 4 to create a 7-minute documentary on a current topic of their choice. Over eight weeks students follow the basic film production phases of development, pre-production, production, post-production, and distribution. These phases are interwoven with teaching information literacy skills, such as developing effective research strategies, evaluating sources, and differentiating between types of information, and critical thinking. Throughout the course students explore a variety of filmmaking skills and concepts such as the foundations of documentary film, using digital camcorders, and editing film footage with Movie Maker or iMovie.

The specific requirements for the final project create the foundation for the grading and assessment rubric as well as reinforce the concepts covered during the class. Using feedback and observations from previous classes, the following specifications are in place.

Each group needs to ensure that the final project:

- is saved in a standard video file format of .mpeg, .wmv, or .mov and is burned to a CD; PowerPoint and Flash files will not be accepted

- includes common filming techniques and production processes found in documentary films (e.g. interviews, live film footage)

- is no more than 7 minutes long

- has a clearly stated thesis statement or purpose

- uses multiple types of information sources to present the argument/analysis and must include:

  - 1 book

  - 2 articles, one of which is scholarly

  - no more than 2 web sites

  - digital images, audio files & video files are not limited but should contribute to the overall film

- uses MLA citation style for all sources, including video, audio, and still images

- has a description explaining how and where each source was used in the film -- handed in as a word-processed document

- includes a reflection piece about the project and your experiences with it (Sharkey, 2005)

While some of the completion criteria may seem overly specific, past experience has shown that unless clearly stated in the homework description and expectations, students typically do not use any sources other than free web sites. The incorporation of this type of project may lead some to believe the class is more focused on filmmaking rather then information fluency. In contrast, a standard film production class embeds technology, information literacy and critical thinking skills in a different way such as having students write traditional research papers, conduct film sequence analyses, and extensively practice filming techniques.

Apart from aligning class activities and projects with GenY learning and behavioral preferences, aligning learning outcomes and objectives with an instructional model is also a key element of developing effective projects and assignments. Using a simple charting technique helps to determine what elements of an assignment meet the components of the information fluency model. Table 1 is an example chart for the filmmaking assignment.

Table 1: Example for charting the assignment

Applying the Information Fluency Model		
Component	**Description**	**Broad Outcomes**
Information literacy	Students actively build skills for finding, accessing, and evaluating information.	• finding multiple types of information sources • developing a thesis statement or purpose • using MLA citation style for sources used
Technology literacy	Students actively build skills for using a variety of hardware and software.	• creating a video file in a standard format • utilizing a digital camcorder • using film editing applications
Critical thinking	Students actively build skills to deeply analyze and evaluate problems, situations, or information	• applying the 5 stages of the filmmaking process • writing a reflective piece • presenting a clear argument or analysis of a topic

Conclusion

While the literature indicates it has not been widely used, Team-Based Learning can be an effective teaching paradigm for use in library instruction courses, especially for teachers that enjoy utilizing pre-conceived frameworks, such as Michaelson's, and can design effective assignments. As library instruction increases in importance, it is vital new strategies are explored, utilized, and refined in order to continue to provide the best learning environment for students.

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An important aspect to remember is that all elements of the model need to be clearly present in the assignment or project. The assignment should help move students beyond basic skill sets to applying higher level analysis to the final outcome or product.

As instruction librarians rise to meet the challenge of the new generation entering colleges and universities, barriers and obstacles will undoubtedly be present. While keeping an eye on the Millennials' preferences for learning and technology, utilization of various learning and instructional models, such as the Information Fluency model, can help minimize road blocks. Using creative and innovative approaches to teaching the foundations of information literacy, technology literacy, and critical thinking will ensure students have an engaging and relevant learning experience. The filmmaking process is one way professors and instructors can bridge the generational gaps and propel college students towards information fluency.

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