

STUDENT-PRODUCED MOVIES AS A MEDIUM FOR LITERACY DEVELOPMENT

Chase Young ■ Timothy V. Rasinski

Researchers agree that new literacies have broadened literacy practice to include innovative technology-based literacy instruction (Kist, 2000; Lapp, Moss, & Rowsell, 2012; Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, & Cammack, 2004). In this article, we explore the connection between classroom-based technologies and research to create movies and inspire literacy development.

Recent revisions to Bloom's taxonomy posit the act of creating, making something new from what has been learned or read, as the highest form of learning (Krathwohl, 2002). As we describe the creative process of student-produced movies (SPMs), we connect the production process with research-based literacy practices such as reflecting on reading preferences (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006), comprehending text through summaries (National Institute of Child Health and Human Development [NICHD], 2000), sequence (Naughton, 2008), and genre (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2011), as well as engaging students in meaningful writing (Culham, 2011; Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007; Smith, 1994).

In addition, the Common Core State Standards (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010) expect elementary students to use technology to creatively produce and publish writing. Thus we offer this activity to teachers and students as an approach for meaning making through creative expression (Burnett, 2010).

Student-Produced Movies

SPMs involve students in transforming mentor texts into Readers Theatre scripts and eventually into motion pictures. The transformational processes involved in SPMs leads students into deeper levels of content analysis and comprehension of the original

Chase Young teaches at McKinney Independent School District, Texas, USA; e-mail chaseyoung@unt.edu.

Timothy V. Rasinski is a professor at Kent State University, Ohio, USA; e-mail trasinsk@kent.edu.

text. Although the end product is an SPM, the process requires a remarkable amount of critical reading and writing. Moreover, the production of the SPM requires students to engage in rehearsal, an authentic form of repeated readings, an established approach to fluency instruction (Rasinski, Reutzel, Chard, Linan-Thompson, 2011).

Chase (first author), a second-grade teacher, has implemented SPMs with his students in eight phases. He describes the process in first person. The 2-week (20 minutes per day) process starts with establishing groups and developing an idea to develop into an SPM. After students commit to a group, they work through the process of movie production. It begins with script treatments and ends with postproduction editing. Before starting the strategy, secure a video camera, and make sure that student computers are equipped with movie editing software.

Phase 1: Grouping

I (Chase) give the students the opportunity to create their own groups. Before the configuration of their groups, I lead the class in a brainstorm of possible genre options and ask students to think carefully about which genre best suits them. The preconception of the students' preferred genres helps provide a foundation for grouping. In this phase, students not only have to identify different types of genres (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2011), but reflect on their own personal preferences as readers and authors (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006).

After students have identified their preferred genre, I give ample time to configure their own groups. As one may expect, it begins rather chaotically. Students tend to start by interrogating their friends, but move on if they disagreed on genre or vision. As the

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teacher, I play mediator and help students discover the focus of other groups. In the end, the students form into four groups of four to seven students, each group possessing similar cinematic visions. The visions often include the mood and genre of the text, important literary concepts (House, 1979).

After the room is settled, I ask each group to share their intentions. This helps students become aware of other groups' goals. If any student prefers a different genre, or was already experiencing artistic differences, then the students were free to change groups.

Phase 2: Idea Development

Most students developed their scripts from mentor texts they had previously read (Culham, 2011; Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007; Smith, 1994). For example, one grouping used mentor texts to script an entire short, scary story. Another group chose a short scene from a popular novel. Some groups used parody; for example, the popular children's book *The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog!* (Willems, 2004) was transformed into *Sophia Finds a Turtle*. Once students have identified a solid idea and style, they develop their script for teacher approval.

Phase 3: Script Treatment

The students next create a script treatment. The treatment includes a movie title, characters, and a brief summary of the production. Students list characters to get an idea of how many actors will be needed. They develop a summary that is an undetailed

description of the beginning, middle, and end of the potential movie. Developing and writing summaries is an instructional proven method for enhancing reading comprehension (NICHD, 2000), and this step makes writing summaries authentic and meaningful for the students. Finally, students audition and take roles, including director and gripper (camera person). The students meet with me once more, and I make sure they have enough students in the group to complete the SPM, as well as an overall understanding of the production content and duties.

Phase 4: Storyboard

Students begin to storyboard their SPM to get a visual idea of the possible scenes in the film. The storyboard, in terms of reading strategies, requires students to

<i>Pause and Ponder</i>	
●	■ What literacy-related processes do students use when creating student-produced movies (SPMs)?
●	■ What preparation is necessary before beginning SPMs with your students?
●	■ What are the potential problems facing the use of SPMs in the classroom? How can they be overcome?
●	■ How might you modify the plan outlined in this article to make SPMs work in your own instructional environment?

visually represent the sequence of events (Naughton, 2008). In terms of writing, it serves as a visual plan (Dunn, 2011). The storyboard used in my classroom has several key features (Figure 1). First, there is an area to draw what the scene would look like on camera. This includes characters, props, and filming location. The characters have to be employable, the props obtainable, and the locations achievable. Besides the drawing section, there is an area on the storyboard to list details, such as scene number, materials needed, and the exact filming location on the school property.

Phase 5: Scripting

Students transform the mentor text into a script (Culham, 2011; Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007; Smith, 1994; Young & Rasinski, 2011). All the students

decide what to include in the script, but after the major decisions, individuals in each group rotate through particular jobs. One student writes, another spot-checks the writer for grammatical and spelling errors, a third student reads the text to be scripted, and any remaining members keep the group on task and wait for their turn as writer, spot-checker (editor), or reader. I inform my students that, on average, one page of text equals one minute of video. The groups usually write approximately

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1–3-page scripts, and thus the SPMs typically last one to three minutes.

The process of transforming a mentor text into a script is an excellent way to deepen comprehension and improve writing (Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007; Smith, 1994; Young & Rasinski, 2011). As students work at transforming the original text, they are constantly referring back to the original in meaningful ways, attempting to maintain the essential meaning of the original text in their new creation (see Figure 2 for an excerpt). Moreover, as students create their scripts, they are analyzing the original text from the point of view of the writer (Beck, McKeown, Hamiton, & Kucan, 1997). What did the author do to make his or her writing so engaging? How can we incorporate those features into my script?

Phase 6: Preproduction Conference

After the groups complete their storyboards and scripts, they meet with me for final script editing (writing conference) and discussion and to set a date for filming. I make light edits to the script, as the goal for the SPM is not perfect spelling and immaculate grammar, but the telling of a good story in a new medium. During the discussion, I again make sure that the materials are obtainable and that the ambitions of the production group do not extend into the realm of impossibility.

The groups are also asked to think about a timeline. Producing movies takes

Figure 1 Storyboard

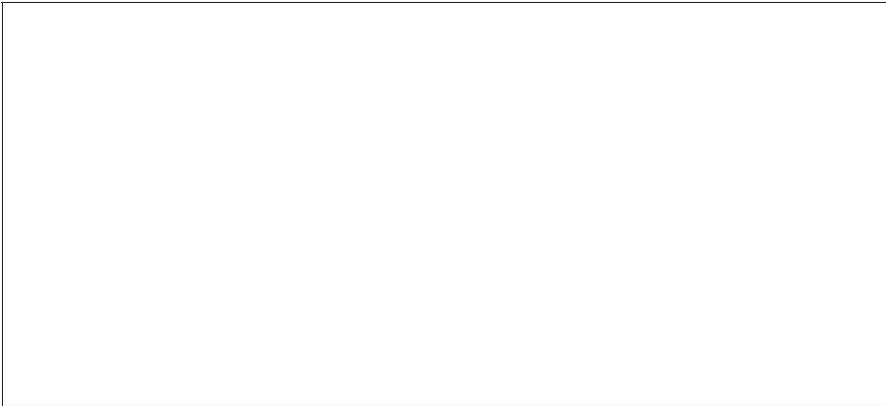
Movie Title: _____		Scene: _____
Camera View		
		
Additional Information		
Characters:	Materials:	Filming Location:

Figure 2 Student-Written Script for the Playground Scene From *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever*

Kid 1: Where's the slide?

Kid 2: Where's the monkey bars?

Kid 3: Where's the climbing mountain?

Teacher: We're afraid that people will get hurt.

Kid 4: No! No! No! Why'd you have to do this to me?

Kid 4: Let's go watch the testing kids.

Kid 3: Yeah, it's way more fun than recess.

instructional time, and it is important to remind students to be efficient. The discussion also covers which students are responsible for bringing additional materials, if any. A date is set for filming, and I add the date to the class production schedule. If any students are assigned to bring additional materials, the students write a note to their families including the filming date and item(s) needed. Finally, and importantly, I ask the students to learn their lines and rehearse them during the next scheduled whole-class production time.

The rehearsals resemble our Readers Theatre practice. To enhance the entertainment value, the students focus on three components of reading fluency: automaticity, rate, and prosody. Scholarly reports over the past decade have demonstrated the power of Readers Theatre and the performance of scripts for enhancing reading fluency, comprehension, and attitude toward reading (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez, Roser, Strecker, 1998; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011; Worthy, 2005; Worthy & Prater, 2002). I encourage students to build automaticity through practice, read at an appropriate pace, and attend to prosody, ensuring that their expression reflects and enhances the meaning of the text.

However, SPMs require students to extend Readers Theatre by memorizing lines and using props.

Phase 7: Filming

On the date of filming, I include filming times in the schedule of the day. In an effort to limit groups to one day of filming, I set filming times between formal instructional periods (Figure 3). The number of scenes we film at any time period depends on the number of total scenes in the movie. Sometimes groups film one scene at a time; others film multiple scenes.

The student director runs the production of each scene, with input, of course, from other members of the production (and me). The director carries the storyboard and script, leads the class to filming locations, makes sure all props and materials are ready, and directs characters' actions and assists with their lines. Once the filming is complete, the students download the video clips to the PCs in the classroom.

Phase 8: Postproduction

Students are given time to edit and produce the movies during class. The students use Windows Movie Maker, which that was previously installed on all the student computers. I model the use of the editing software before the students begin editing. Students learn how to upload the movies into the software, drop clips into the editing line, delete unused takes, reorder and cut clips, configure special effects, use transitions, add music, and create title and credit sequences.

Although this may seem like a lot of tasks to master for a second grader, I spend 10–15 minutes working through all of the aforementioned Windows Movie Maker functions. The students pick up on the task quickly and spend

Figure 3 Sample Filming Schedule

Morning Announcements
Film Scenes 1 and 2
Reading
Film Scenes 2 and 3
Specials
Film Scenes 4 and 5
Writing
Film Scenes 5 and 6
Literacy Workstations
Film Scenes 7 and 8
Lunch/Recess
Film Scenes 9 and 10
Math
Film Scenes 11 and 12
Science
Film Scenes 13 and 14

minimal time in the postproduction phase. After all the edits are complete, the students have the option to create a DVD, save the SPM in a PC-viewable format, or upload the video to the web.

Second Graders Making SPMs

A group of my second graders decided to script a scary story entitled *The Hotel Room* (1 minute and 40 seconds). It is a gripping story about a man who finds himself eye to eye through a keyhole with a ghost. The students employed the strategy just described, step by step, to create a creepy second-grade rendition of the terrifying tale. For added effect, the students carefully chose an equally terrifying soundtrack (Figure 4).

Another group scripted and produced a short scene from *Diary of a Wimpy Kid: Cabin Fever* (Kinney, 2011). In this movie (1 minute and 41 seconds), the school has removed all the playground equipment, and they students are bored at recess (Figure 5). In the end, the students decide it is more fun to watch the kids taking a standardized test through the window.

The last example comes from a group that created a parody entitled *Sophia Finds a Turtle* based on Willems's (2004)

Figure 4 The Ghost in the Hotel Room



Figure 5 Students Inquiring About the Missing Playground Equipment



The Pigeon Finds a Hot Dog! In the movie (two minutes and five seconds), Sophia finds a turtle, and the other girls try to trick Sophia into sharing the turtle. In the end, the girls outsmart Sophia and they all enjoy the amphibian treasure (Figure 6).

The Big Premiere

After all the movies were completed, the students gathered on the rug to view their masterpieces on the big screen. The room was filled with laughter and

intrigue and especially feelings of pride and accomplishment. The teacher, however, saw a group of students who engaged in high-level, creative, complex, and technology-based literacy work (National Governors Association Center for Best Practices & Council of Chief State School Officers, 2010), reflected on their reading preference (Pachtman & Wilson, 2006), identified different genres (Risko & Walker-Dalhouse, 2011), composed summaries (NICHD, 2000), drafted sequences (Naughton,

2008), used their knowledge of story structure to deconstruct text and turn it into a new creation (Culham, 2011; Dorfman & Cappelli, 2007; Smith, 1994; Young & Rasinski, 2011), rehearsed the script focusing on expressive and meaningful reading (Griffith & Rasinski, 2004; Martinez, Roser, Strecker, 1998; Young & Rasinski, 2009; Vasinda & McLeod, 2011; Worthy, 2005; Worthy & Prater, 2002), proficiently wielded multiple technologies (Lapp, Moss, & Rowsell, 2012), and offered their unique understandings to an eager audience.

Figure 6 Final Scene From *Sophia Finds a Turtle*

Student Reflections

When a student was asked what she learned about reading and writing while creating SPMs, she responded, "You have to use expression when are reading like you were acting." Another student responded similarly, "I learned how to change my voice to become a character. I also learned how to remember what I read by playing that character." Not only did he learn to vary his expression to match meaning, but also his expressiveness helped deepen his understanding of the text. He concluded by mentioning that it "helped me memorize the book." This memorization may have been the result of constantly

revisiting the sequence of the story during production.

Another student emphasized that the writing was slightly different when scripting for a movie: “When you write a movie you have to include stage directions in your writing.” The drama genre is being pushed in writing, and this type of activity could provide an authentic means for deeply analyzing genre through composition. An equally important question asked by the teacher—“Did you have fun?”—elicited an emphatic “yes” from 100% of the respondents, and thus the motivational component of this activity should also strengthen the argument for SPMs. Finally, a student put the whole project in perspective when she said, “I think I am going to be famous.” As with most teachers, we hope she will not forget us when she is rich and famous, but it’s OK if she does.

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TAKE ACTION!

1. Provide an overview of the SPM process for students.
2. Group students into production teams.
3. Have students generate an idea for their SPM.
4. Have students write a brief summary describing their SPM vision.
5. Have students create a storyboard to visually represent the scenes in their SPM.
6. Have students script each scene.
7. Have students rehearse, focusing on conveying meaning to a viewing audience.
8. Have students film their SPM.
9. Have students download, edit, produce, and distribute their SPM for viewing.