

Researching, Producing, Presenting: Students' Use of Technology for Global Advocacy in the Social Studies

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In order for students to become effective citizens in a globally connected era, they need to know about different parts of the world, and to think about the ways they are tied to other culturally and geographically diverse populations. Research has pointed out that an over reliance on textbooks and lecturing in the social studies often devolves instruction into narrow perspectives and uninspiring activities.¹ Thus, we allowed our students to use something they were interested in, technology, to access a wide range of resources for a class project.

This assignment, entitled the Global Advocacy Project, offered our high school students an opportunity to research, create, and present potential solutions to important global issues by using technologies that included Skype and iMovie and culminated with students posting class videos on YouTube and, in a number of cases, Facebook and MySpace. In order to clarify the assignment for students, we broke the project into three different stages: (1) students as researchers; (2) students as producers; and (3) students as presenters. Throughout these different stages, students were directed to use technology to access and think through information, to communicate, and to showcase their learning.

Stage 1: Students as Researchers

In the first part of the project, students were asked to research a particular global issue. Having just completed a unit on the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals (the collaborative agreement to reach devised goals

by 2015 on some of the most pressing global concerns), students had an initial understanding of some of the major challenges currently faced by human beings.² Issues such as the protection of human rights, access to clean water and sanitation, conflict, disease, and climate change proved to be the most popular topics among students. Students then had to research their selected issue by using online databases, newspapers, journals, and webpages. They were then directed to locate credible data sources that addressed the significance of the problem, ways in which the problem had evolved over time, and any previously offered solutions to the problem. Throughout their research, students recorded and analyzed specific data and studies.

After collecting data on the significance of the problem and the effects of any previously offered solutions, students were asked to locate experts at universities or other organizations in order to schedule and conduct digitally mediated discussions. While most of these interviews were conducted using

Voice Over Internet Protocol (VOIP), namely, Skype, some students resorted to both e-mail and telephone interviews. Having already accessed many primary and secondary sources via the Internet, this online communication allowed students to build off of their initial understanding.

Stage 2: Students as Producers

After researching their global issue, students identified and developed a probable solution to an associated problem. We requested that these solutions be very specific, and build off of weaknesses and strengths of past solutions. These proposed solutions, all of which were multilayered, were to be substantiated by their research. Students were asked to defend why their solutions would be the best course of action. Using the multiple pieces of research they had already collected, students described the potential social, political, environmental, and economic benefits of their suggested solutions. Students began the process of creating a 10- to 15- minute digital documentary that visually depicted their research and proposed solutions.

Using iMovie, students embedded audio, images, text, and movie footage to convey their research and proposal. Learners were given the task of creating a narrated track that accompanied video footage to outline their proposal.³

Using charts, photos, graphs, and video, students were able to explain the significance of their selected issues, past policies enacted to address these issues, and the advantages of their own proposed solutions. The use of audio and visuals enabled students to more effectively communicate their message to audiences by appealing to their multiple senses. We required that all charts, photos, graphs, movie footage, and audio be either self-produced, available under free commons, or that students gain the written consent from authors/publishers to use copyrighted materials.⁴ Many of the learners used a digital video recorder to create their own footage and images. All audio, video, and images needed to align with the message students were trying to communicate. For instance, after gaining permission from a university expert he interviewed, a student researching women's rights embedded audio sections of the interview with the professor of women's rights.



Stage 3: Students as Presenters

After researching a global issue and constructing a digital documentary that outlined the significance of the issue, past policies developed to address the issue, and proposed solutions, students began the process of using their work for advocacy and to promote greater awareness. After creating one classroom YouTube account, whereby all the students used one user ID and password, we required them to upload their videos to YouTube. The videos were available for public viewing, and online audiences soon joined in on discussions about students' work and ideas.⁵ (Online discussions continue today on the documentaries posted to YouTube.) Besides fielding questions from their classmates, many students also answered questions from the general public. While most of the comments have been constructive, we are sure to monitor these comments closely for suitability. Students also presented their research and videos to a live audience. Parents, administrators, community leaders, university experts, and neighbors were invited into our classroom to watch and discuss students' work. Even though a few invited guests could not attend, many guests were still able to view and comment on student work by accessing the movies through YouTube.

Many of the students embedded their videos on social networking websites, like Facebook and MySpace. Sarah, an 11th grader, commented, "This is a way for me to really get my video out there.... My friends and family can view it, and

it might just change their minds." For students, the Internet was a means to research global issues, communicate with experts, and to advocate solutions to some of the world's most pressing challenges. 🌐

Notes

1. Studies that describe the abuse of lecture and textbook centered instruction in the social studies include: John Chiodo and Jeffrey Byford, "Do They Really Dislike Social Studies? A Study of Middle School and High School Students," *Journal of Social Studies Research* 28, no. 1 (Spring 2004): 16-26; Larry Cuban, "History of Teaching in Social Studies," in *Handbook of Research on Social Studies Teaching and Learning*, ed. J. Shaver (New York: MacMillan, 1991): 197-209.
2. To learn more about the eight United Nation's Millennium Development Goals see www.un.org/millenniumgoals/bkgd.shtml
3. To learn more about how to create an iMovie see www.ischool.utexas.edu/technology/tutorials/graphics/imovie/1create.html. Or see the following link to learn about using Microsoft Movie Maker www.microsoft.com/windowsxp/using/moviemaker/default.mspx
4. For a listing of Creative Commons music and songs see www.jamendo.com/en/, www.pdsounds.org or music-for-video.com/free-sound-effects-for-video-makers.html
5. To view and comment on some of the students' work, see: www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ww-TIMFtPT4 or www.youtube.com/watch?v=QQYCdCwLm8c&feature=related

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