

EDUCATOR SPOTLIGHT

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Rae C. Stedman Elementary
Petersburg, AK
Cable provided by GCI

Tracey Butler
Language-arts teacher; ELA coordinator
Arlington Middle School
Poughkeepsie, NY
Cable provided by Time Warner Cable

Claire Casaccio
Language-arts teacher
East Islip Middle School
Islip Terrace, NY
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Kelly O'Connor Demko
Fourth-grade teacher
Rae C. Stedman Elementary
Petersburg, AK
Cable provided by GCI

Michael O'Connor
Digital media teacher, grades 10–12
Waianae High School
Oahu, HI
Cable provided by Time Warner Oceanic

David Tarpinian
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Tamalpais High School
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Cable provided by Comcast



READING & WRITING 2.0

Language-arts classes are incorporating multiple forms of media to engage students and expand their opportunities for self-expression. **by Keri Callahan**

Teaching language arts today involves more than using the printed page. Students not only *expect* to learn how to use various forms of media, they *need* to in order to be equipped for our 21st-century world. William Kist, an associate professor at Kent State University in Kent, Ohio, and a member of the National Council of Teachers of English, explains that reading and writing are now multi-modal. “It involves more than decoding print and writing print. We’re moving from a page-based society to a screen-based society. We want teachers to embrace these multi-literacies, rather than leave them behind in the classroom.”

Many teachers already use cable programming and digital technology to assist in their lessons. The following projects and programs are examples of taking language-arts lessons to the next level in a digital world.

THE CULTURE CLUB



Using iMovie and green-screen technology, the students enthusiastically brought their stories and their artwork to life.

At Rae C. Stedman Elementary School in Petersburg, Alaska, fourth-graders practice oral storytelling through hands-on experience with audio and video production. The Stories of Culture and Place project, created with the help of University of Alaska professor Dr. Jason Ohler, pairs library-media specialist Mary Ellen Anderson with social studies teacher Kelly Demko to address both literacy standards and cultural learning.

Anderson says the students' work began by creating an outline of literary elements, such as character development, setting, events, problem and resolution, and theme. "They then created three pieces of art that illustrated their stories," which were about special places they were familiar with, she says.

After rehearsing their storytelling within small groups, students were asked clarifying questions and were given feedback. They then had a chance to refine their stories and practice orally five or six times. From there, Anderson explains, "students told

their stories for their parents and peers in front of a green screen and were videotaped by their peers, with each student taking turns as the stage manager, camera operator, and sound technician.

"Then we formed a tech team to import and craft the final product, using a scanner for the art, iMovie, and the green-screen technology," which uses a blank green screen behind the actual filming so that images can be digitally inserted during editing.

The result? "Their enthusiasm was through the roof," says Anderson, "and they often stayed in during recess and came in after school to work on it." Students not challenged enough by standard lessons were able to form a technology team that was pushed further, while students who are accustomed to other languages or traditions—and therefore often struggle with writing—were much more comfortable in this format, she notes.

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DIGITAL MEDIA

In teaching his students lessons in scriptwriting and creating storyboards, Michael O'Connor developed a digital-media project at Waianae High School on the island of Oahu, Hawaii. Using Flash software and animation, students created public-service announcements and short videos that addressed community issues.

"I think that students have a better chance at being successful in life if we extend the concept of 'literacy' to include the modern media that dominates the entertainment and communications industries today—media like video, animation, video games, and audio production/music recording," says O'Connor. "Of course, the basic concept of literacy—reading and writing—is still an important component in all of these newer media. That's one thing my students gain as they create animations in my classes—an appreciation for the importance of reading and writing.

"Being able to critically read as they research a story and being

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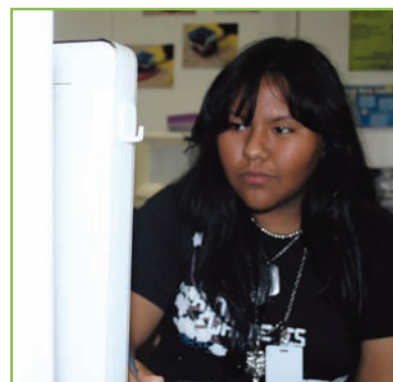
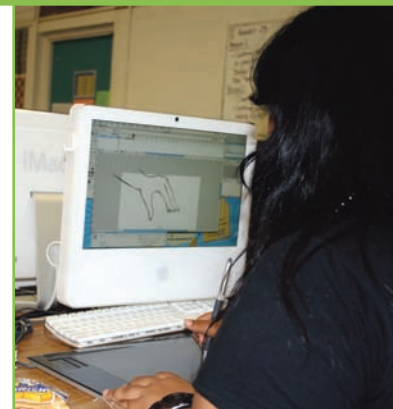
able to take ideas and write them into scripts and storyboards," he says, "have a direct bearing on the quality of the final product. And [students] can share this new media with a wide audience through the Internet and cable-casting."

"The majority of the students in this community live below the poverty level," O'Connor says. "These students struggle in core subjects such as language arts and math, but excel in courses that allow them to express themselves, like art and music. This project was effective because the students were allowed to choose an issue that interested them. This, in turn, helped with the writing and research, because students were intrinsically drawn to the subject matter. It became a labor of love instead of an academic assignment."

One two-minute video, created by at-risk and special-education students, was entitled "I'm Just Like Everyone Else." It not only allowed students to express their feelings and become genuinely interested in school, but also won several state competitions and is often screened at events demonstrating what special-education students are capable of when given the chance.

Another film, "Nani's Struggle," a story about a homeless girl on the beach and the daily trials she experiences, won first place in two video competitions.

An unexpected result of the project has been higher class attendance. "Now they attend class regularly," says O'Connor, "because it is a place where they feel they can be successful."



Michael O'Connor's students used video and Flash technology to create animation shorts, including the award-winning "Nani's Struggle," pictured above.

AIMING HIGH

English teacher David Tarpinian is one third of the team that educates students in Tamalpais High School's two-year Academy of Integrated Humanities and New Media (AIM) program in Mill Valley, Calif. Initially built for struggling students, the program—which incorporates English, social studies, and media applications—now attracts overachievers too. In fact, Tarpinian says, unlike a large number of their peers, the AIM students tend to stay in college once they are there. "We have received letters from college administrators who have acknowledged how impressed [they] are by our program and the students who have come out of it," says Tarpinian.

During their two years in the program, AIM students acquire marketable skills in digital video and audio production, as well as Web design, through the use of such software as Final Cut Pro HD, Soundtrack, LiveType, GarageBand, Dreamweaver MX, and Adobe Photoshop and Illustra-

tor. "The narrations for the documentaries go through a rigorous editing process," says Tarpinian of the project's background in language arts, "perhaps more rigorous editing than anything else students do in high school."

Tarpinian also stresses that adding technology to English lessons does not exclude the fundamentals. "Students will be reading lots of non-fiction, learning to identify and use rhetorical strategies, and writing several process pieces ... all in addition to their film work. The [technology] simply becomes another tool for them to use to put it all together."

The extended class time (three periods in a row) allows the 70 students—who are admitted via a competitive, open process that includes two adult references and a possible interview—to receive guidance from professional experts and to conduct research in the community to create their films.



Tamalpais High School's AIM program teaches digital video and audio production, as well as Web design.

"The carrot at the end is the film festival," Tarpinian says, and Comcast has offered to air student films on a regular basis. Tarpinian is excited about this sign of support from the cable company, and going forward, students will be encouraged to use copyright-free music in their films. As soon as that happens, the world will be their audience.

A NOVEL IDEA

Two New York-based, middle school language-arts teachers, Tracey Butler (a 2007 Cable's Leaders in Learning Award finalist) and Claire Casaccio, use technology to deepen their lessons about the books their students read.

"The book report—a staple of all language-arts classrooms—has been revolutionized through technology," says Casaccio, who teaches at East Islip Middle School in Islip Terrace, N.Y. "Students are invited to display their understanding of a text through recording themselves acting out a scene from the novel, making a musical soundtrack that reflects the plot and characters, or creating a product that has a real-world application. The result is the teaching and fostering of critical-thinking skills, rather than the recitation of facts and plot."

After her students at Arlington Middle School in Poughkeepsie, N.Y., were done reading a novel, says Butler, they would discuss the literary elements they were going to focus on in their presentation, write the script/narrative for the

PowerPoint or PhotoStory slides, and scour the Internet to find images "that would highlight, capture, [and] enrich the literary elements they were explaining to the class." She notes that this project was based on part of their state standard: "Speaking and writing for literary response involves presenting interpretations, analyses, and reactions to the content and language of a text. Speaking and writing for literary expression involves producing imaginative texts that use language and text structures that are inventive and often multilayered."

"The two 'R's of language arts—reading and 'riting—have been expanded to include media literacy," says Butler. "Students need support and guidance in analyzing and evaluating the wealth of information available to them. Language-arts instruction not only provides students with evaluative and analytical skills, it also provides students with emerging opportunities to create and communicate their thinking to others."

One student, Casaccio says, often came to

class late and unprepared. When reading the novel *Stargirl* and taking this technological approach, the boy suddenly began reading ahead, participating in class discussions, and coming to class on time and fully prepared. Casaccio attributes this positive response to him being a "strong auditory and visual learner." Proudly, she says, "I firmly believe that this project awakened an appreciation for literature within this student that will remain with him for years to come." ■■

Keri Callahan is a former senior associate editor of Cable in the Classroom Magazine.

RELATED RESOURCES

AIM: Academy of Integrated Humanities and New Media
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EducationMatters.TV
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