Cross-Curricular Connections: Video Production in a K-8 Teacher Preparation Program

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to describe the attempts of faculty members in one teacher education program to foster integration of content and skills across courses, prepare teachers for the diverse classrooms they will encounter, and connect course content to real life experiences. This paper describes the design of a cross-curricular video production project for undergraduate elementary teacher education. Four faculty members collectively created a video production project that would count as a major assignment in either three or four courses, depending on the students' choice of topics. Our intent was to help the students understand the enmeshed nature of the content in the special education, social foundations, ESL methods, and educational technology courses. Students demonstrated the abilities needed to conceptualize, organize, and carry out a digital video production. The video project personalized situations and circumstances once known only abstractly through discussions and texts. Faculty members learned that students are able to think deeply and critically about a topic in a multilayered synthesis of course content, their own experiences, and issues around schooling. A clear understanding of how content can be included in quality student productions will enable faculty members to better scaffold the experience for students.

Now picture this. Thirty -four children in an urban third-grade classroom, one third of whom live in poverty. Six live with grandparents, and three are in foster care. Five come from homes in which a language other than English is spoken, two children do not speak English at all. Seven, six, five, three, two, and one are African American, Hispanic American, Korean, Russian, Haitian, and Chinese, respectively. Six are new to the school and four will relocate in a different school next year. Only five of the 34 students are at or above grade level in reading. Ten are two or more grade levels below. There is a five-grade spread in reading achievement. In addition, three students have been certified as learning disabled. One is severely mentally retarded, and another is deaf (Fuchs, Fuchs, Mathes, & Simmons, 1997, p. 176).

This classroom is imaginary, but arguably representative of the type of classrooms teachers experience, especially in urban areas. The teaching and learning challenges caused by this student diversity due to language differences, poverty, and disability are tremendous and require high-quality teachers who are well-prepared to teach all of the children in their classrooms. According to the National Clearinghouse for English Language Acquisition (NCELA) and Language Instruction Educational Programs (2005b), approximately 5 million English language learners attended public schools in grades pre-K through 12 during the 2003-04 school year.

Since 1990, English language learner enrollment has increased at nearly seven times the rate of total student enrollment (NCELA & Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2005b). Nationwide, English language learners speak over 400 languages (NCELA & Language Instruction Educational Programs, 2005a). Many of these students are also living in poverty. In 2002, 16.7% of children under 18 (just over 12 million) lived in poverty. For Latino children, that percentage rose to 28.6% and for Black children, it rose to 32.3% (National Center for Education Statistics, 2005). There are also many students with disabilities in today's general education classrooms, many of whom are also speakers of a language other than English or living in poverty. They, too, require excellent teachers. In 2004, about 6 million students were being served on Individual Education Plans (U.S. Department of Education, 2005a). Most students with disabilities (about 96%) are being educated in their neighborhood school buildings, and just over half of all students with disabilities are educated in the general education classrooms for most of the school day (U.S. Department of Education, 2005b).

In contrast to this picture of many classrooms, the diversity of classroom teachers is not keeping pace. Only 13% of teachers are from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, and over 40% of U.S. schools have no teachers of color on staff (Gay & Howard, 2000; National Education Association, 2002). In addition, many preservice teachers do not appear to have the necessary skills and knowledge to work effectively with diverse students. Larke (1990) found that preservice teachers often lacked knowledge about people from various backgrounds or were unwilling to teach students from backgrounds different than theirs.

Milner, Flowers, Moore, Moore, and Flowers replicated this study in 2003 to determine if attitudes and knowledge among preservice teachers had changed. Although they found that the teachers' attitudes about cultural diversity had improved, the large proportion of preservice teachers reporting neutral responses about their knowledge and willingness to work with diverse students and families remains troubling.

The purpose of this article is to describe the attempts of faculty members in one teacher education program to foster integration of content and skills across courses, prepare teachers for the diverse classrooms they will encounter, and connect course content to

real life experiences. We will describe how we, as faculty members in Block III, sought to accomplish this through an integrated video project developed for telling stories about diverse learners.

Responding to Changing Demographics

With funding from a Title II Teacher Quality Enhancement grant from the U.S. Department of Education, the College of Education at Washington State University began a major revision of teacher education programs in 1999 in order to prepare new teachers better for the diversity in language, culture, social class, and special needs they will encounter in classrooms (for a full description, see Shinew & Sodorff, 2003). Information from multiple sources revealed that the students did not readily connect university coursework with classroom experiences, and after completion of a program focused on issues of diversity and social justice the students still did not feel prepared to work in schools with multiple layers of diversity. Two goals of the Title II grant were to partner "with high-needs schools across the state of Washington to develop quality placements for preservice teachers and authenticity for the teacher preparation program" and to revise "programs in elementary and secondary education to respond to the changing demographics and needs of K-12 schools" (Shinew & Sodorff, p. 25).

All students in the teacher education program complete a multicultural education course at the beginning of their program. Although such a standalone multicultural education course is important and builds the necessary foundation for shifting preservice teachers beliefs, knowledge, and understandings, the faculty of Washington State University joins many others (e.g., Cochran-Smith, 2003; Gay & Howard, 2000) in thinking that ongoing integration of these issues into each course in multiple ways throughout the program is necessary for creating teachers who are truly prepared to meet the needs of all the students in their classrooms.

The four-semester undergraduate elementary teacher preparation program was structurally reorganized into blocks of courses. Each contained scaffolded field experiences that increase in length, intensity, and responsibility as the students moved through the program. The content in Block I covered literacy and instructional planning; Block II covered content methods and literacy; and Block III covered sociocultural issues and instructional strategies and included a 6-week, full-time field experience.

Students were placed in schools across the state of Washington with an emphasis on placing students in schools with culturally and linguistically diverse students in high-need communities. This full-time field experience meant that the traditional course content of the semester was covered in 10 weeks. The two-semester-credit courses in Block III during the time period reported here were (a) Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms, (b) Introduction to ESL Methods for K-8 Teachers, (c) Elementary Methods of Educational Technology, (d) Social Foundations of Elementary Curriculum, (e) Principles of Classroom Management, and (f) Classroom Assessment. The final semester of the program consisted of a full-time internship (Shinew & Sodorff, 2003).

Curriculum Integration, Discipline Knowledge, and Community

Themes of diversity and social justice run throughout the elementary teacher preparation program. Beane (1995) stated that curriculum should be based in either "self- or personal concerns" or "issues and problems posed by the larger world" (p. 1). Given the demographics of current classrooms, these themes serve two purposes in integrating the curriculum (Roberts & Kellough, 2000). Our elementary preservice teachers mirror the

national population of teachers—white, female, middle or upper middle class. Developmentally, the themes of diversity and social justice help them become more familiar with social issues they may not have faced but their future students will have likely encountered. The themes of diversity and social justice also provide preservice teachers with tools to begin identifying emancipatory and reproductive aspects of schooling in curriculum content and classroom practices.

Most of our undergraduate elementary preservice teachers are between 20 and 24 years old. Prior to entering the College of Education, their experiences with courses are primarily with disconnected subjects that have little to do with each other. Part of this problem is the structure of K-12 education and general education courses required for an undergraduate degree in which disciplines are taught as separate subject areas. When students take individual courses without explicit integration of discipline-specific information and ways of thinking, it is difficult for them to see that a course in social studies or science, mathematics or language arts is part of a larger discipline with distinct ways of formulating and answering questions about the world. When students learn facts, principles, and skills to pass a course, their knowledge is often disconnected and seemingly irrelevant to other intellectual or practical experiences (Beane, 1995).

One area of recent attention is the retention of our teaching force. One part of the problem with keeping teachers in the classroom is that beginning teachers often feel disconnected from their new communities (Dyal & Sewell, 2002, Knox, 2005). This is true especially if the community demographics are very different from the novice teacher's home community. But teaching also involves making relationships with students, parents, and the community (Delpit, 1995). It takes an unusually mature young teacher to venture into relationships with families and communities that are unlike their own.

We would do our students a disservice if we did not provide learning experiences with national, state, and local educational and social issues that arise from diversity and social injustice. The faculty members responsible for the content in Block III wanted our preservice teachers to engage with these issues on more than an intellectual level in preparation for their field experiences and teaching positions. The video production project offered one solution.

Technology in Teacher Education

Digital technologies have not worked as the catalysts for change in teaching and learning that they were predicted to be in the 1980s and early 1990s (Milken Exchange on Education Technology, 1999). One recommendation to enhance technology integration in K-12 settings is to make technology integration more authentic in teacher preparation programs. As discussed earlier, without explicit linkages across courses many preservice teachers have difficulty synthesizing course knowledge into discipline knowledge. Researchers in educational technology have called for technology use across teacher education programs in addition to or in place of the stand-alone technology course (Baldwin & Sheppard, 2003; Brush, 1998; Russell, Bebell, O'Dwyer & O'Connor, 2003). Russell et al. (2003) found that beliefs about technology were the best predictor of technology use in the classroom. Albion and Ertmer (2002) noted, "If beliefs are formed and developed through personal experience then it seems logical that changes in beliefs should also be affected through experience" (p. 35).

The video production project, based on themes of diversity and social justice, allowed us to provide an experience deliberately designed to integrate learning across several areas of teacher preparation—social foundations, ESL methods, special education, and

educational technology — that are often perceived as not sharing objectives in teacher preparation (Damarin, 1998).

Theodosakis (2002) noted that inexpensive digital video cameras and easy-to-use editing software make video production in the classroom easier than ever. He offered ideas for video making in social studies, foreign language, English/language arts, and mathematics. The key, of course, is to allow the content of the project and not the technology to take center stage (McLester, 2003).

High school students addressed a question of personal significance by producing a short video narrative (Kajder, 2004), while middle school students used video production to tell the stories of five Japanese American veterans of World War II—all Medal of Honor recipients (McLester et al., 2003). In another video project, children from Alaska, California, and Mexico connected through digital video to document and share their local environments at various times of day throughout the year. The technology made differences in length of day, native flora and fauna, and weather more relevant (Yerrick, Ross, & Molebash, 2003). Students at Creekside Elementary School in San Diego developed language arts skills to write scripts and conducted interviews for student produced live news shows (Erpelding, 2003). The personal experiences of video production during their elementary education program may lead our preservice teachers to use similar technology projects in their K-8 instruction.

Storytelling and Making Meaning

People often associate storytelling and meaning making with children and their efforts to understand the world (e.g., Bettelheim, 1989; Styles, Bearne & Watson, 1992; Zipes, 1995). However, personal narrative and storytelling have played powerful roles in teacher education. Storytelling allows veteran teachers to reflect on their professional knowledge (Xu & Stevens, 2005), to reflect upon and understand personal teaching environments (Li, 2005), and to reveal beliefs about students and learning (Rex, Murnen, & Hobbs, 2002).

Teaching stories offer preservice teachers opportunities to explore personal identities and the ways in which their identities will impact their teaching (Gomez, Walker, & Page, 2000). Gomez (1996) found that weekly storytelling sessions about teaching enabled undergraduate preservice teachers to relate experiences of working with children from cultural and economic backgrounds different from their own. Our video production project provided the preservice elementary teachers with media and opportunities for storytelling about the lives of students different from themselves and for making connections between student experiences and classroom contexts. We hoped it would prove to be "a living context for making meaning" (Barton & Booth, 1990, p. 13).

Cross-Curricular Video Project

Because of natural content connections and collaborations between faculty members, four courses were involved in the video production project—special education, English as a second language (ESL), social foundations, and educational technology. The faculty members teaching these courses were from very different educational disciplines that often do not interact except when necessary in faculty meetings. Because of this, the first task we engaged in was learning about each other's content areas, essential content, and learning goals in order to coordinate the courses in the Block and ensure no overlap of content. As a part of these meetings, we established a common interest in visual media as a means of representing knowledge and a common focus on issues of social justice and

themes of difference, equity, and instructional methods to meet the needs of diverse schools. As a result, we collectively designed a video production project that would count as a major assignment in either three or four courses, depending on the students' choice of topics. Our intent was to help the students understand the enmeshed nature of the content in the special education, social foundations, ESL methods, and educational technology courses.

In the course Elementary Methods of Educational Technology, the philosophy of technology integration was that technology provides a medium for allowing students to engage with content and, more importantly, to produce evidence of their learning. Engaging with content knowledge should drive the choices and uses of educational technology. Throughout the 10 weeks, preservice teachers used content-free software and production hardware. Software employed in the course included illustration, word processing, spreadsheet, desktop publishing, video production and editing, and multimedia and Web authoring applications. In addition to computers, hardware utilized included still digital cameras and digital video cameras. This technology-as-general-purpose-tool approach in the technology course made it possible for the students in Block III to learn the basics of storyboarding, shooting video in the field, and editing the raw footage in the computer lab.

Approximately 4 weeks into the 10 weeks of course content, students formed production groups of two to three people. Each group decided on a topic and the courses for which members wanted to receive credit for the video project. For example, students who chose the topic of the over-identification of ESL Latino children for special education could receive credit for the project in all four courses—ESL methods for the link to English language learners, special education for the link to identification of special needs students, social foundations for the link to potential discrimination and social justice issues, and educational technology for the actual production. The topic of school programs for ESL migrant children could receive credit in ESL methods, social foundations, and educational technology. A story focusing on the family and schooling experiences of a child with autism would receive credit in social foundations, special education, and educational technology. Choosing topics encompassing content from multiple courses required the preservice teachers to formulate and answer questions about education as it exists in real-world contexts (as in Beane, 1995). Table 1 shows the titles of selected video projects and the courses in which they received credit for the production.

 Script writing necessitated the weaving of information from class lectures, textbooks, and independent research into the telling of stories, which facilitated connections to larger discipline knowledge (as in Beane, 1995). Research responsibilities fell to each student as determined by the group, and storyboards linked scripts with visuals and locations. After receiving signed waivers from participants and their families when appropriate, students checked out digital cameras and began shooting raw footage. In the computer lab, groups chose to edit and assemble their work in either iMovie on the Apple computers or in MovieMaker on the PC computers. Videos were to be 5 to 7 minutes in length.

Table 1
Video Title s and Courses in Which Students Received Credit

Video Title	Inclusive Classrooms[a]	ESL Methods[b]	Social Foundations[c]	Educational Technology[d]
Deaf Students in Education	X		X	X
ESL and the Immigrant Child		X	X	X
Gifted Education	X		X	X
Free Appropriate Public Education	X		X	X
No Child Left Behind	X	X	X	X
[a]Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms; [b]Introduction to ESL Methods for K-8 Teachers; [c]Social Foundations of Elementary Curriculum; [d]Elementary Methods of Educational Technology				

Groups often chose topics with meaning for one or more group members. Interestingly, many of the students who chose to focus on special education issues told the story of family members with disabilities, while remarking that they gained a newfound understanding of the life experience of their family member. For example, one group told the story of an uncle of one student who has had cerebral palsy since the 1950s through the lens of inclusive schools and communities. Several groups of students volunteered as mentors during a weekend of events for children with disabilities and their families during the semester. Their video projects used footage from the activities and interviews from that weekend to profile one or more children and their parents. Also, interestingly, the types of disabilities the preservice teachers chose to engage with were either visible disabilities, such as cerebral palsy and Downs Syndrome, or disabilities that interfere with communication, such as hearing loss and autism. "Invisible" disabilities such as learning or behavioral disabilities did not appear to engage them as deeply for reasons we can only speculate about.

Processing these topics and experiences through the video project allowed the preservice teachers to engage on personal levels with students, parents, and communities (as found by Delpit, 1995). In another example, a group described what many immigrant families experience when they enter the United States from a historical perspective, incorporating still photos and music from the era being represented. It was a powerfully moving representation of the experience from the early 20th century to the present.

Example videos from this project can be viewed online (URLs can be found in the Resources section at the end of this paper):

- Keep Students Rolling (Video 1)
- How Did You Discover the H. E. P. Program? (Video 2)
- Washington State's H. E. P. Program (Video 3)
- The Hispanic Culture in Education (Video 4)

Assessment of student learning in this format was challenging. The two aspects of content and technique were intertwined. Without sufficient video skills, otherwise excellent

content is almost unintelligible. Without sufficient content, there is nothing to be skillful with. However, we did try to untangle the two in order to provide assessments of what was taught in each of the classes. Each course created a rubric focusing on the content of the course. As an example from one of the content courses, the grading rubric in Appendix A was used in the Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms course. In the Educational Technology course, content was not explicitly considered; instead, the students' production skills were assessed according to the rubric in Appendix B.

What We Learned

What the Students Learned

One outcome is a demonstration of the abilities of the students to conceptualize, organize, and carry out a digital video production. In general, the technical aspects of the student video projects were well done. Considering that this was the first video production for most of the students, technical skills evident in the projects exceeded expectations the first semester and continued to improve over the next two semesters.

Another positive outcome of the video production projects was that students "got it." Several voiced frustration that they were near the end of their elementary teacher preparation program and had not learned about the variety of students they would need to accommodate in their classrooms. Knowing that issues of social justice and diversity were covered in all courses of the program, it appears that storytelling was "a living context for making meaning" (in the words of Barton & Booth, 1990, p. 13) for the preservice teachers. The video project personalized situations and circumstances once known only abstractly through discussions and texts.

In addition to synthesis across courses, the video production experience provided our preservice elementary teachers with firsthand knowledge of a technology integration project commonly implemented in K-12 settings (Erpelding, 2003; Kajder, 2004; McLester et al., 2003; Theodosakis, 2002; Yerrick et al., 2003). We hope that the authentic uses of technology in which our students engaged will change how they teach their students in the classroom.

Albion and Ertmer (2002) stated, "If beliefs are formed and developed through personal experience then it seems logical that changes in beliefs should also be effected through experience" (p. 35). We expect that the preservice teachers will continue to seek opportunities to synthesize experiences into their discipline knowledge and that they will comprehend the deeper connections between course knowledge and lived experience to integrate video production into their own classroom instruction.

What Faculty Members Learned

We learned that students are able to think deeply and critically about a topic in a multilayered synthesis of course content, their own experiences, and issues around schooling. The video production experience allowed our preservice teachers to connect personal concerns about teaching diverse students with issues, problems, and real children found in the larger world (as also described by Beane, 1995). Storytelling through digital video production encouraged our students to consider carefully how to portray others' experiences fairly while connecting those experiences to larger issues of

teaching and learning. This cross-course investigation required complex discipline knowledge, not simply principles and skills learned in each of our courses.

One of the largest gains for one of the instructors was learning how to work with others who had different perspectives of schooling, students, and essential knowledge. The ability among the faculty members to cross disciplinary distances and incorporate content from other courses was critical. Initially, the content area faculty members were not as pleased with the first video projects, partially due to a lack of involvement of the content area instructors in the video aspects of the project during the first semester. They thought that all aspects of the production would be covered in the educational technology course, so they did not realize what an important role they played in helping students think about the content and in carefully reading and editing students' scripts for the video. Because only two instructors had video production knowledge, the first semester was a learning experience for the others about how to support the students in their work.

One sizeable area of learning for another instructor was learning about how content and form intertwine and how important it was for her to be involved in the planning stages of each video that included special education content. In the second and third semesters, content area instructors included a lot more time in their courses for discussion and feedback about the content of the videos. Presenting knowledge in a visual medium was new to both the students and the instructors, and it took time to learn.

Recommendations From Our Experiences

What we thought would reduce stress in a shortened amount of time for course work—creating an assignment common to several courses—actually increased the stress of some students. With such a high portion of their grades in multiple courses resting on one project, some students and faculty members felt that stakes for the project were too high. A great deal of new learning — video production skills and content knowledge — went into a single project within a short timeline. Students knew that with a poorly done project that would lower their grade in several classes, they risked not being allowed to student teach the following semester. Teaching video production techniques and requiring students to use them immediately in such a high-stakes project is not recommended.

Although our students created some amazingly well-done videos for novice videographers, the stress level was simply too high. After students learn basic video production skills and gain confidence, more advanced projects such as what we describe could be incorporated in subsequent courses. Because of these issues, we decided to discontinue the video production project after three semesters and think more deeply about how we can incorporate a similar type of project in a semester with a longer time frame. Two of the faculty members who participated in this project have since left the department, but still maintain connections with their colleagues and are thinking about how to incorporate visual presentation of knowledge in their courses.

Digital video production offers a medium for synthesis across content areas. Our students demonstrated a deeper understanding of social justice and diversity issues through the project than various faculty members had seen previously through traditional forms of assessment, such as papers and exams. It is unclear why this seemed to be the case. Perhaps it was the work the faculty members put in to coordinating content and reinforcing the common strands among our courses. Perhaps it was the novelty of representing their thinking in a new medium that inspired students to dig deeper into topics, or perhaps the high-stakes nature of the project created sufficient external motivation to lead to excellent thinking. Or perhaps it is the power of storytelling, of

creating a visual narrative to tell a personally meaningful story, that helped the preservice teachers dig deeply into issues such as overrepresentation of culturally and linguistically diverse students in special education, experiences of new immigrants in local schools, and the life experiences of bilingual people or people with disabilities.

The video production project proved to be a large learning experience for the faculty members involved. We recommend viewing multiple student video projects on the Web or from other sources to see how the medium affords or does not afford the same opportunities for displaying learning and analysis as does writing. A clear understanding of how content can be included in quality student productions will enable faculty members to scaffold the experience better for students. Following these recommendations should increase the powerful role video production can play in teaching and learning for both students and faculty members.

Resources

Keep Students Rolling - http://www.educ.wsu.edu/coe/tl/lhall/Orthopedic Impairment_0001.wmv

How Did You Discover the H. E. P. Program? - http://www.educ.wsu.edu/coe/tl/lhall/Why HEP_0001.wmv

Washington State's H. E. P. Program - http://www.educ.wsu.edu/coe/tl/lhall/3 Students_0001.wmv

The Hispanic Culture in Education -http://www.educ.wsu.edu/coe/tl/lhall/Hispanic Students_0001.wmv

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Appendix A

Video Assignment for Teaching in Inclusive Classrooms Course

Criteria	Points	Evidence
Technical Proficiency	25	• Mix of media to convey the content (i.e., text, images, music, interviews, video, or audio). • Film is well organized, flows, and presents a clear message that is easy to understand. • Tells a comprehensible "story". • Carefully proofread with fewer than 3 mistakes.
Content	50	• Clear explanation of the topic (i.e., definition of disability; common characteristics of people with the disability; perspective of a person with a disability or a family member, e.g., schooling, growing up, society at large, learning about the label). • Explores important issue(s) related to disability or schooling of diverse students. • Shows an understanding of the issues and information presented and discussed in class.
Referencing of Course Material	25	• Shows thoughtful use, analysis, and integration of information from class and own research. • References quotes and ideas from the text, class lectures and discussions, and videos to show understanding of course content.

Appendix B

Video Grading Rubric for Elementary Methods of Educational Technology Course

25 Points Possible	Excellent	Very Good	Good	Average	Below Average	Not Evident
Shot Composition	5	4	3	2	1	0
Sound Quality	4	4	3	2	1	0
Editing	5	4	3	2	1	0
Camera Angles	2	2	1	1	0	0
Shot Length	2	2	1	1	0	0
Transitions	2	2	1	1	0	0
Text	4	4	3	2	1	0
Credits	1	1	1	0	0	0