Student-made Movies as a Literacy Strategy

Summary: Teachers regularly use activities like Reader's Theater to build literacy, and in an article for the *Reading Teacher*, expert Timothy Rasinski and a second-grade teacher discuss ways to take those activities to the next level by having students develop and film their own mini-movies.

Practical Applications

Student-produced movies (SPMs) were developed by using the following steps. These occurred in 20 minute per day chunks over two weeks. To prepare, ensure that there is a video camera on hand and that student computers have basic movie editing software (Windows MovieMaker, etc.) installed:

1. **Grouping** – the class is led in a brainstorm of different genres and then allowed to choose their own groups, with the teacher acting as mediator
2. **Idea Development** – "most students developed their scripts from mentor texts the had previously read"; other groups used scenes from a longer novel, or even parodied children's books.
3. **Script Treatment** – students wrote a script treatment, including the title, characters, and a summary of the beginning, middle and end of the movie. Students then hold 'auditions' for the different parts, and also choose production roles such as director and grippe (camera person); they meet with the teacher to ensure that all the necessary roles are filled
4. **Storyboard** – students create a storyboard by drawing what the different scenes will look like, and taking into account the props needed, location, characters in the scene, etc.
5. **Scripting** – "students transform the mentor text into a script," working together and rotating through different jobs. The scripts tend to end up being 1-3 pages, representing a 1-3 minute movie.
6. **Preproduction Conference** – the groups conference with the teacher, who makes "light edits" to the script, ensures the props, etc. are feasible, and sets a timeline for filming. Students are then encouraged to practice their lines.
7. **Filming –** groups get one day of filming, usually between "formal instructional periods"; they then download the clips to a computer
8. **Postproduction** – students edit and produce their movie on the computers; the teacher does a brief lesson on how to use the software ahead of time.
9. **Premiere! –** the students premiere their videos in front of the whole class.

Conclusion and Citation

Although this may seem like a lot for students as young as 2nd grade to take on, with the right scaffolding, student-produced movies can incorporate a huge number of literacy skills and higher-order thinking skills, as well as being a project students love.

Rasinski, T. & Young, C. "Student-Produced Movies as a Medium for Literacy Development." *The Reading Teacher 66.8* (May 2013), pp. 670-675. http://bit.ly/12h6ZDQ (subscription only).