

2000

Case study : the KJEF student video news

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Case study : the KJEF student video news

Abstract

The purpose of this study was to analyze the impact and effectiveness of a student video news project that was initiated in the fall of 1998 as the result of receiving a McElroy Trust Fund grant. A secondary purpose was to determine whether the student video news production was more effective than the traditional approach where the principal used the public address system. Three questionnaires were used to solicit input from school staff and students. The staff was surveyed in the spring of 1999 and 2000 whereas students were surveyed in December 1999 after one year of production. Results were conclusive that the student video news production was more successful in year two than in year one in 1) informing, 2) educating and 3) entertaining viewers. Also approximately four-fifths of all staff and students surveyed indicated that the student video news production was more effective than the principal communicating to students via the public address system.

CASE STUDY: THE KJEF STUDENT VIDEO NEWS

A Graduate Research Paper

Submitted to the

Division of Educational Technology

Department of Curriculum and Instruction

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts

UNIVERSITY OF NORTHERN IOWA

by

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July, 2000

Titled: CASE STUDY: THE KJEF STUDENT VIDEO NEWS

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Introduction

Following the award of a McElroy Trust Fund Grant in August, 1998, Jefferson Junior High School in Dubuque, Iowa, began its journey into student-directed video news production. Two of the long-term goals of the \$10,000 grant were to: (a) develop a school news program to inform, educate and entertain the school's audience, (b) complete a studio and control/editing room where students could produce quality video programming using the latest technology. The first actual telecast began in December 1998 with daily productions continuing throughout the 1998-1999 school year and the 1999-2000 school year.

This study is intended to examine two aspects of this project. The first component is to determine whether the daily video news productions were more successful in year two (1999-2000) as compared to the first year (1998-1999) in: 1) informing, 2) educating and 3) entertaining viewers. The second component seeks to determine whether the communication of student announcements, via the video news production, was more effective than the more traditional approach of the principal using the public address system to make school announcements. The study investigated these two issues in order to resolve these areas of inquiry.

As was stated, one of the long-term goals of the grant project was to develop a school video news program that would inform, educate and entertain the school's audience, who were the students and staff at Jefferson Junior High School. The video news was a daily vehicle for making announcements, sharing the school lunch menu and airing news features and programs. KJEF are the fictitious call letters for the news video production program and are not registered through the FCC or recognized as an official

broadcasting station. The five-minute live newscasts were not transmitted over the airwaves but instead through coaxial cable to all classrooms and offices in the building with approximately 45 television receiver sites.

The main viewers in this study are the student body, homeroom teachers, administrators, and the office support staff. The student body includes approximately 750 seventh and eighth graders. Approximately 40 homeroom teachers view the program daily with their students. There are three full-time administrators in the building and there is always one administrator watching in the main office, usually the principal. In the office, there are 3 secretaries, a guidance counselor, and occasionally parents or other community members. Overall, the average number of total viewers on any given day is approximately 800.

Before the inception of the KJEF News, the traditional method of communicating the daily announcements to the students, faculty and staff was the public address (p.a.) system. This audio only arrangement, which also functions as an intercom system, and is typically found in most schools. It consists of a main control unit positioned in the office where the messages originate, and a network of approximately 50 speakers located throughout the school. This public address format has served well since the school was built 75 years ago.

Review of Research

It appears from reviewing the literature that the amount of research regarding the role of video-telecast technology and student learning is limited. Glennan and Melmed (1996) in their study of educational technology and the elements of a national strategy state “While these few examples of schools providing technology-rich learning environments are in our view, encouraging, they are scant” (p. 114). Likewise, the amount of research is scant. Specifically, there is a need for more quantitative and qualitative research on the effects of educational technology on learning. The literature review begins with an examination of the learning effects of technology in a U.S. Department of Education sponsored study. That review is followed by two studies that investigate the effectiveness of technology in dealing with teacher behaviors and adult learning.

A review of two additional studies relating to student learning in the classroom provides a perspective of the research dealing with multi-media and video. Very little could be found in the literature that examines specifically the learning effects of a student-directed video news production program similar to the project that is the subject of this study.

Glennan and Melmed (1996) reported on the use and effectiveness of educational technology in a U.S. Department of Education study. A study by Means and Olson (1995) examined eight schools, five of which were termed technology rich because they had student-computer ratios of less than 2 to 1. Their research did not emphasize student outcomes or standard test scores but looked more closely at student motivation, collaboration and acquisition of skills not measured by normal tests. The study focused

on how technology cultivates education reform, specifically constructivist teaching rather than student-based outcomes. It was found that technology supported improved instruction by: (a) adding to students' perceptions that their work is authentic and important, (b) enhancing student motivation and self-esteem dramatically, (c) making obvious the need for long blocks of instructional time, (d) instigating greater collaboration with students, peers, and teachers, and (e) giving teachers additional impetus to take on a coaching or advisory role. Teachers also talked of increases in their technology skills and increased collaboration.

A 1999 study by Chamberlain examined teacher behaviors that contribute to academic success in a two-way interactive video environment. Twelve specific teachers behaviors (e.g. wait time, frequency of teacher questioning, use of advanced organizer, etc.) were found to significantly contribute to student academic success. It was felt that the study would contribute to the improved preparation of interactive television instructors. Instructors were provided with recommendations of specific teacher behaviors that can be used to increase student academic success and satisfaction.

A similar study in 1998 by Campbell investigated the effectiveness of two methods of delivery of teacher professional development. It also reviewed the teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of the training. The two methods of delivery were video-based instruction with a trained on-site facilitator and live face-to-face instruction. The experiment, which involved 123 teachers from a rural school district, was designed to answer two questions:

1. Is there an effective and efficient alternative to traditional live face-to-face delivery?

2. Do teachers perceive alternative methods of professional development delivery as effective?

Both quantitative and qualitative types of data analyses were performed – a pre-test, post-test, and a perception questionnaire. The results obtained from this study suggest that video-based instruction with a trained on-site facilitator may be considered an effective alternative method of instructional delivery of professional development for teachers. The implications of this study, and the previously documented Allen study, show the valuable function that technology, and specifically video, can have in improving teaching instruction and adult learning (Campbell, 1998).

In the U.S. News and World Report issue of January 11, 1993, “The Perfect School,” District Superintendent Jeffery Heier stated that “today’s technology offers opportunities for less teacher lecturing and more hands-on interdisciplinary learning of the sort advocated by curriculum reformers” (Toch et al, 1993, p. 55). The article continues to emphasize the importance of video appeal and how multimedia materials make learning more fun. It also helps educators eager to improve the quality of instruction in their classroom and Heier states that students became “active rather than passive learners” (p. 55) in many high-tech classrooms.

With the continued emergence of new and more affordable multimedia technologies, K-12 educational institutions are using these tools to increase the effectiveness of the student learning process. Video and other media are used not only by the instructor in the presentation of information but also by the students in a constructivist learning environment. Visuals and other media can benefit students at any age in the preparation for writing, especially students with limited literacy skills or prior

knowledge in a particular area because of an educational disability or a different cultural and linguistic background (Daiute, 1992). Daiute reported on a multimedia project with students with poor writing skills. The students used simple multimedia software to combine images and sounds with their text. The study gave anecdotal evidence that multimedia can motivate students to write more and help them find new ways to express themselves (MacArthur, 1996).

This researcher believes multimedia technology, and the use of this technology for production, fosters higher level problem solving skills and collaborative skills in the learners. Examples of multimedia productions that utilize a project-centered learning approach are CNN Newsroom and CNN SB, short for CNN Student Bureau. CNN Newsroom is a free, commercial-free news and features program, designed specifically for classroom use. In existence for over ten years, it is committed to informing students and teachers, and providing materials such as daily teachers' guides that give curriculum connections and lead-in discussion questions. CNN SB, the official student newsgathering and reporting bureau for CNN, gives student news reporters/producers the chance to be published on the CNN Newsroom website and possibly on the worldwide CNN News Group (Turner Learning, 2000). "CNN SB takes the concept of news created for students to the next level by now giving students a forum to report the news from their perspective" (Richards, 1998, p. 56).

In concluding the review of literature, Means and Olson (1995) note:

We believe that the difficulty we experienced in finding schools with large numbers of classrooms incorporating technology-supported constructivist teaching and learning approaches is in itself a

significant finding. The scarcity of these classrooms testifies to the magnitude of the change we are looking for and the challenges--individual, organizational, and logistical--to making it happen.

(p. S-5)

Methodology

Surveys (Appendix A and B) were distributed throughout the school in spring 1999 and again in spring 2000.

There are two groups of subjects in this study:

- Seventy teachers, support staff and administrators who were surveyed (Appendix A) with an identical survey in the spring of 1999 and again in the spring of 2000. Thirty of the 70 surveys were returned and completed satisfactorily in the spring of 1999 (43%). Thirty-six of the 70 surveys were returned and completed satisfactorily in the spring of 2000 (51%).
- A random group of 64 grade seven and eight students from three different homerooms (24-grade 7, 40-grade 8) that were surveyed with a different survey instrument (Appendix B) approximately one year after the inception of the video news programming (December 1999).

The results of the staff surveys in the spring of 1999 and 2000 were compared.

Specifically, a comparison of results was made as to how successful KJEF was in 1) informing, 2) educating and 3) entertaining viewers. A comparison of the results was also made as to which method of communicating the announcements was most effective with students-KJEF or the public address method.

Results

The initial hypothesis of this study was that the KJEF video news production was more successful in year two (1999-2000) than in year one (1998-1999) in 1) informing, 2) educating and 3) entertaining viewers.

The results (See Appendix, Tables 1-3) of the comparisons of three questions from the 1999 and 2000 staff surveys are conclusive as to the above hypothesis. As to the question of whether "KJEF succeeds in INFORMING viewers," 97% of the staff responded "yes definitely," "most of the time," or "usually" in the spring 2000 survey compared to 74 % to the same responses in the spring 1999 survey, an increase of 23%. Only three per cent of all respondents answered "sometimes" in the spring of 2000 compared to 26% in 1999.

For the second survey question "KJEF succeeds in EDUCATING viewers," the increase of positive responses went 63% from 26% in 1999 to 89% in 2000. In contrast only eleven per cent in 2000 responded "sometimes" compared to 41% in 1999. Fifteen per cent of all 1999 respondents chose the "not at all" response to KJEF EDUCATING viewers, while there were no such responses in 2000.

Did KJEF succeed in ENTERTAINING viewers? The third question of staff also showed a considerable increase of positive responses in 2000. Almost eighty per cent (79%) answered "yes definitely," "most of the time" or "usually" compared to 41% in 1999. Only three per cent responded "sometimes" and no one responded "not at all" compared to 33% and four per cent respectively, in 1999.

The secondary hypothesis was that the KJEF video news production was more effective than the principal's public address announcements in communicating to students.

The results of question four of the staff survey (See Appendix, Tables 4 and 5) indicated both a considerable increase in favor of the KJEF video production approach vs. the public address approach from 1999 to 2000. In 1999, only 26% of staff indicated the KJEF form of communicating announcements was the most effective with students. Twenty-two per cent indicated the public address approach was more effective and 44% were "not sure" in 1999. The following year, 2000, had 83% of staff respondents choosing KJEF as most effective compared to 3% with the public address system and 11% "not sure."

In analyzing the student survey given after one year of KJEF video news production, nearly eighty per cent (79.6%) indicated they preferred the principal communicating to students via the KJEF television network rather than the public address system.

The survey technique was effective and appropriate as both the staff and student surveys were short (five and four questions, respectively) and did not require a large amount of time to complete and return. A response of 43% in 1999 and 51% in 2000 by busy staff members at the end of a school year was adequate to receive the necessary information for comparing program improvements. All surveys also provided respondents with the opportunity to list suggestions or comments. As a result, excellent and valuable feedback was provided especially from staff members.

Discussion

The findings reveal significant implications with regard to the professional practice of more widely used student-directed technology in general, and video production specifically. The results of the survey show that the staff was very skeptical of the program the first year. The first year results were much more negative and many of the comments centered on whether the news program should be entertaining, time constraints, the mistakes by the anchor people and the technical difficulties endured by a live broadcast. Obviously, from the survey results and the comments, the first year was less successful and more of a learning experience. From the findings, especially year two versus year one and from the student survey, it is clear that there is great potential and overall benefits to be gained by such a student-focused news production project.

Recommendations

The following recommendations can be made as the result of this study:

1. The KJEF video news program at Jefferson Junior High School should be continued into the future. Data show that both staff and students agree that KJEF succeeds in informing, educating and entertaining its viewers. It also shows a much more positive response by staff to those stated goals after a second year of programming.
2. Second year staff results also were significant, as were student survey results as to the KJEF form of communication announcements being the most effective approach. This indicates that the video news program should be used in the future as the main communication device for the daily announcements.
3. Further studies should be done to evaluate the effectiveness of the KJEF video production project at Jefferson Junior High School. In addition, further investigations are needed on the effectiveness of student-focused video production and student use of technology and their effects on student learning.

Summary

The specific finding of this study is conclusive in that the daily KJEF video news production became significantly more effective in year two (1999-2000) compared to the first year (1998-1999). The criteria for such determination, linked to the goals of the original grant, were whether KJEF succeeded in 1) informing, 2) educating and 3) entertaining viewers. The 97%, 89% and 79% positive responses, respectively, in the spring of 2000 represent an increase for those three areas.

The second specific finding of this study is also conclusive. Both staff and students agree that the KJEF video news production was more effective in communicating student announcements than the public address system approach of the past, primarily by the principal. The second year (spring 2000) revealed 83% of staff respondents agreed that the KJEF form of communicating announcements was most effective. Similarly, in the student survey nearly eighty percent (79.6) preferred KJEF over the public address system for announcements.

The general finding of this study is that programming, such as the KJEF video news project, will improve as staff resistance and/or concern diminishes and as technical and organizational features are more thoroughly addressed.

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Appendix

A. KJEF Survey on the effectiveness of our program.

For the Jefferson Faculty and Staff

Spring 1999 or Spring 2000

The main goal for this project is to produce a school video news program that will inform, educate and entertain its audience. Keeping in mind that roughly 85 % of the viewing audience is 7th and 8th grade students, how effective do you feel we have been in these areas?

Directions: Circle one choice for each of the questions or responses.

1. KJEF succeeds in INFORMING viewers.

1	2	3	4	5
yes definitely	most of the time	usually	sometimes	not at all

2. KJEF succeeds in EDUCATING viewers.

1	2	3	4	5
yes definitely	most of the time	usually	sometimes	not at all

3. KJEF succeeds in ENTERTAINING viewers.

1	2	3	4	5
yes definitely	most of the time	usually	sometimes	not at all

4. Which form of communicating the announcements is most effective with the students?

KJEF	PA	Not sure
------	----	----------

5. Would you recommend more stories or features in the program?

Yes	No	Not sure
-----	----	----------

Include any suggestions you may have to help improve our program.

B. Student Survey of Administrative Expectations communicated using the KJEF News.

Questions are given orally with students answering with by raising hands.

1. I listen closely to the KJEF News

Yes

No

Not Sure

2. I heard what Mr. Frick was saying today during the video news.

Yes

No

Not Sure

3. I listen more closely to Mr. Frick when he is see over the TV.

Yes

No

Not Sure

4. Which do you prefer when Mr. Frick wants to communicate to all students at Jefferson?

Yes

No

Not Sure

Additional Comments from Students:

Table 1

This table shows in percentages the comparison of faculty responses in 1999 and 2000 to the statement; "KJEF succeeds in INFORMING viewers."

	1999	2000	% Difference
Yes definitely, most of the time or usually	74	97	+23
Sometimes	26	3	-23
Not at all	0	0	0
None response	0	0	

Table 2

This table shows in percentages the comparison of faculty responses in 1999 and 2000 to the statement; "KJEF succeeds in EDUCATING viewers."

	1999	2000	% Difference
Yes definitely, most of the time or usually	26	89	+63
Sometimes	41	11	-30
Not at all	15	0	-15
None response	18	0	

Table 3

This table shows in percentages the comparison of faculty responses in 1999 and 2000 to the statement; "KJEF succeeds in ENTERTAINING viewers."

	1999	2000	% Difference
Yes definitely, most of the time or usually	41	79	+38
Sometimes	33	3	-30
Not at all	4	0	-4
None response	22	18*	

*Three surveys stated that the news did not need to be entertaining. Some of the faculty may have felt that this question was not applicable.

Table 4

This table shows in percentages the comparison of faculty responses in 1999 and 2000 to the question; "Which form of communicating (KJEF or PA) the announcements is most effective with the students?"

	1999	2000	% Difference
KJEF	26	83	+57
PA	22	3	-19
Not sure	44	11	-33
None response	8	3	

Table 5

This table shows in percentages the comparison of faculty responses in 1999 and 2000 to the question; "Would you recommend more stories or features in the program?"

	1999	2000	% Difference
Yes	74	67	-7
No	22	11	-11
Not sure	0	17	+17
None response	4	5	