

Teaching Media Production Online During a Pandemic

Brief Report Submitted to PBS NewsHour
Student Reporting Labs

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Teaching Media Production Online During a Pandemic

The coronavirus pandemic has challenged the world and the U.S. with a health, financial, and information crisis. Starting in March, with a quarantine in place to stop the spread of the virus, millions of students and teachers found themselves suddenly locked at home as they try to find ways to continue the school year. This short report highlights the ways in which secondary educators teaching the PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs taught media production through remote instruction. Teaching media production during the pandemic is not easy, and both educators and students experienced challenges, as documented by interviews and focus groups with 16 educators and analysis of artifacts created by students during the pandemic. But there are certain best practices that greatly helped educators in teaching media production online in times of uncertainty.

PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs is a national initiative supporting secondary educators to practice news reporting mainly based on video production. The ten lesson plans of the curriculum offer a pathway for students and educators to enhance production skills through a process of research, brainstorming, planning, documenting, interviewing, and editing. The news reports are available within the school community and often local PBS station broadcast the students' work, while sometimes it airs nationally. Beyond honing journalistic skills of research and reporting, students learn to be civically engaged with their community and enhance their media literacy skills.

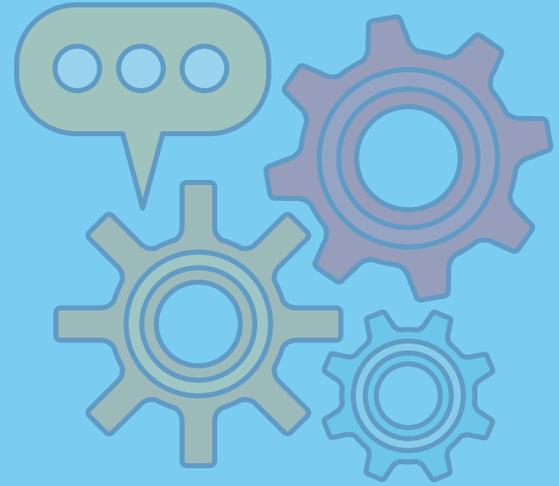
This research shows that the interruption of the forced quarantine starting in March 2020, shifted the instructional methods to online, causing educators to make changes to address student engagement, the process of production, and even the learning outcomes. In order to conceptualize the findings, instructional methods were examined in three areas: (1) social connections and relationships; (2) the application of inquiry and synthesis; (3) the creative discovery process. Based on brain research and the universal design for learning model, this model is rooted in the three aspects of affective, recognition, and strategic networks in the brain (Rose, & Strangman, 2007; Schreiner, Rothenberger, & Sholtz, 2013).

The challenges for media educators during the remote instruction ranges from issues of digital divide, such as disparities in physical access, use of media, motivations to be engaged in the class, and the benefits of being part of what became an online community of learners. PBS NewsHour Student Reporting Labs provided support for educators in forms of frequently updated curriculum materials and instructional guides, access to a network of fellow educators, and one-on-one coaching sessions with media producers. Still the most challenging issues teachers identified were students' engagement and motivation to take part in class. Without access to school-provided video production equipment, students were easily able to transition to the use of smartphones and online editing software. However, racial inequalities and socio-economic status together with school administration policy to waive the grades for the rest of the spring semester hindered participation dramatically.

CONNECT TO LEARN

Why engaging in remote media production class?

- Personal Check-Ins
 - A. Short 1:1 Video Conferencing
 - B. Phone Calls/Text Messaging
 - C. Emotional Check-Ins for Online Class
- Reflective Diary
 - A. Video/Audio Documentations
 - B. Blogging (Privacy)
 - C. Social Media (Image or Meme)
- Clear Expectations & Standards
 - A. Standard-Based Grading
 - B. Instructions in 1-Paragraph & Stages Numbered
 - C. Short Online Quizzes/Survey



GUIDE TO LEARN

What inquiries are needed for remote media production?

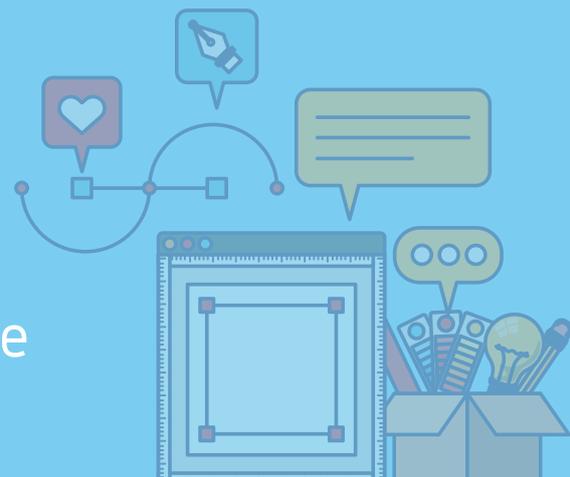


- Evaluate Professional Media
 - A. Critique Mainstream & Alternative Media
 - B. Conduct Media Literacy Analysis
 - C. Synthesize Basic Storytelling Structures
- Examine Your Current Interests
 - A. Brainstorm Ideas with Mind Maps
 - B. Reflect Upon Intended Impact
 - C. Study Peer Students' Work From SRL
- Outreach for Content
 - A. Survey Family & Friends
 - B. Interview Beyond your Network
 - C. Provide Master Class/Guest Speakers

CREATE TO LEARN

How to explore media production remotely?

- Digital & Online Practices
 - A. Mobile Phones as Cameras
 - B. Online Collaborative Editing Software
 - C. Cloud Sharing, Recording & Automated Transcription
- Collaborative & Online Teamwork
 - A. Anytime & Realtime Workflow
 - B. Collaborative Troubleshooting
 - C. Video Annotation for Feedback
- Modeling Flexibility in The Routine
 - A. Balance Predictable & Unexpected in Online Lesson
 - B. Share Personal Struggles
 - C. Demonstrate Adjustments to Production Plan



BENEFITS OF BEING PART OF PBS NEWSHOUR STUDENT REPORTING LABS



The synthesis of the interviews and students' artifacts shows five benefits of being part of SRL network:

1. **Adjusted Curriculum** – Constantly updated lesson plans address current issues and offers how to use accessible equipment and resources;
2. **Mentorship** – Youth media producers from SRL support educators and students by providing professional feedback;
3. **Community of Learners** – Access to other teachers enables participants to be part of a national network for information sharing;
4. **Exposure to Local & National Models** – Examples of student work on the SRL website provided models of reporting and production, helping participants use mobile devices on news topics related to the pandemic;
5. **Prestigious Affiliation** – In times of uncertainty, having the affiliation with PBS supported the pride and motivations to produce high-quality news reports.

WHAT IS NEXT?

As the pandemic still impacts schools in the U.S. and online or hybrid models, especially in secondary education continue, this brief report comes to offer strategies for media educators to apply best practices of media production at a time of remote instruction. Participants suggested additional policies that may further support these methods to address issues of inequality in access:

1. Providing hot spots for students to have broadband internet access in the community on an as-needed basis
2. Encourage student use of mobile devices for all aspects of the production process
3. Providing access to online editing software free of charge for students
4. Inviting professional guest speakers or offering master classes via video conferencing
5. Adopting inclusive policies to offer various way for students to engage and for teachers to be able to be flexible following school guidelines



SUGGESTIONS FOR PBS NEWSHOUR STUDENT REPORTING LABS

The analysis of the findings suggests four areas of SRL leadership to focus on:

1. **Support Curriculum** – The biggest asset of SRL is their constantly adapted and free curriculum for educators around the world to use.
2. **Support Instruction** – Educators and students highly appreciate and find it effective to have the possibility to brainstorm and advice from professionals outside the school.
3. **Support Equipment** – More help is needed to address disparities in access to equipment from both policy and grant writing.
4. **Support Network** – More efforts and funding should be allocated to support the growing network of educators via regular online convening, social media and yearly events.

MEDIA EDUCATION LAB

The Media Education Lab advances media literacy education through research and community service. We emphasize interdisciplinary scholarship and practice that stands at the intersections of communication, media studies and education. Our staff and fellows range from scholars to educators, practitioners, community members and policy makers. Learn more: MediaEducationLab.com

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