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Analyzing California Student Media Festival Winning Videos

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Abstract: *The researchers conducted an extensive examination of winning student videos from the California Student Media Festival (CSMF) spanning the years 2009 to 2023. This content analysis aimed to gauge the quality of these videos and shed light on the diverse participation of schools in the festival. By scrutinizing high-quality videos across different school levels and years, the researchers sought to identify common technical and content factors, particularly those that reflect media and information literacy. The analysis also examined the patterns of participating schools. The analyzed videos not only provided insights into the evolving interests and agendas of students but also showcased their adeptness in embracing emerging technologies and employing a variety of digital tools. Notably, the presence of media assignments and teacher guidance underscored the vital role of school support and instruction in nurturing students' media production skills. However, the study also revealed that there remains untapped potential for growth in the realm of media literacy education.*

Keywords: *video, media literacy, student productions, media festivals*

Introduction

Today's K-12 students live in a video-rich world. Besides watching television, children and teenagers watch online videos, particularly on YouTube and TikTok, and they play video games. K12 students use videos for academic purposes and well as for socializing, relaxing, and self-expression.

However, video consumption does not guarantee media literacy. To accurately comprehend, evaluate and interpret videos requires not only knowledge about the content itself, but also how the video format shapes the content's meaning and implications: media literacy.

Nor does video production guarantee media literacy. With the advent of smart phones, K12 students have much greater access to video production tools and social media platforms to host those videos. Production requires just basic technical skills to create a video, but understanding visual and aural communication principles demand much more learning and application.

Society as a whole is starting to realize the importance of media literacy, if for no other reason than the manipulation of media, be it broadcast or online, that can mislead audiences. With that regard, state education offices are beginning to introduce media literacy into K12 curriculum where before it was not thought necessary.

While consuming video media critically is an important aspect of media literacy, producing video offers a concrete and authentic way to gain media literacy skills, analogous to the act of writing as a way to improve reading. To continue with this analogy, just as the process of writing usually requires formal guidance, so does media literacy.

In that spirit, since 1966 the California Student Media Festival (CSMF) has provided a public venue for K12 students to submit their original media projects for professional review and public recognition. Over the last 25 years, the Festival has awarded more than $165,000 to California schools and judged more than 6000 student contestants' media, which almost always take the form of videos.

In judging the student videos, the reviewers look for technical quality, content quality, creativity and innovation, and copyright. In the last couple of years, a special award has been given explicitly to recognize exemplary media and information literacy. CSMF's website

mediafestival.org/resources also provides information about copyright, digital citizenship, and media production resources.

The Festival has archived these videos since 2009, and now wanted to analyze them in order to identify significant factors for participation and for winning videos. focusing on media literacy and its instruction in K12 school settings. Specifically, the Festival wanted to identify student video trends over time relative to:

- media literacy attributes of winning videos
- number of winners by school
- number of winners by level (elementary, middle school, high school)
- relationship between winning videos and school academic achievement rating
- comparison of winners and their video attributes between Title 1-eligible and non-eligible
- number of winners by level (elementary, middle school, high school)
- media literacy attributes by year
- media literacy attributes by level (elementary, middle school, high school)
- themes/topics (e.g., curriculum, SEL, social justice) by level (elementary, middle school, high school)
- themes/topics (e.g., curriculum, SEL, social justice) by year

Literature Review

Media Literacy

Media literacy is a subset of information literacy, and may be defined as the ability to access, analyze, evaluate and act using all forms of communication (NAMLE, 2023). The key concept is that the medium shapes the message (. For instance, a photograph captures one instant of a snippet of the visual world, as opposed to a painting for which a painter applies colored liquid to a relatively flat surface with varying relationship to the world as the eye experiences it. Radio captures just sound. Film and video employ images and sound along with motion, which highlights processes.

While language is given detailed attention in terms of how words and their combinations communicate not only concepts but also tone and rhythm, generally speaking, formal K-12 education tends to ignore non-linguistic sound and visual “languages” (Anderson et al., 2021). Nevertheless, media literacy is gaining recognition of its importance, particularly as students access information in many formats from around the globe (Huguet et al., 2021). Such surfeit of media messages and the ease of content generation leads to a loss of quality control and a rise

in its manipulation. The learner has to employ critical thinking, and needs to draw upon past knowledge and experience to determine the validity, relevance and significance of information accessed as well as ascertain how the medium impacts the message. To that end, media literacy education can teach students to examine media messages critically by considering the process by which the message is made, the message's framework and content, and the production value of the message. Fortunately, state lawmakers are starting to take steps to ensure that students are prepared to contribute positively to society via media; Media Literacy Now publishes an annual report on U.S. media literacy policy, and their 2022 report (published in 2023) noted that eighteen states are addressing this need in K-12 education.

Focusing on Video

As noted above, video electronically blends image, sound and motion. The first form of video encoded images with analog electromagnetic signal waves that were recorded as a continuous line onto magnetic tape. Digital video encodes digital data as images displayed sequentially, so many frames per second. Digital video is much easier to edit, copy and store than analog video. With today's equipment and software, the barriers for creating videos have greatly diminished, which has enabled schools to significantly increase its incorporation as a learning tool.

While critically consuming video helps develop media literacy, students who produce their own videos gain even more media literacy skills. For instance, in his study of marketing students, Greene (2014), discovered that learning was enhanced when college students created content videos to explain course learning objectives – and they enjoyed it more – than when they watched video. Students were more engaged and actively learning with an authentic audience when they produced videos.

In scoping the research literature between 2006 and 2017 about student video production, Snelson (2018) found that such projects met several learning outcomes: content knowledge, composition, literacy, performance, and creativity. Student videos also facilitated evaluation of student learning: through analyzing video production processes and products, and culling students' perceptions of the activity (Green, Besser & Donovan, 2021).

Similarly, in reviewing the literature about undergraduate student's video productions, Miskam and Saidalvi (2020) discovered that student video productions improved oral presentation skills aspects: content knowledge (the biggest factor), fluency (the most significant factor for language learners), pronunciation, accuracy, richer vocabulary, organizational skills to

assemble content and prepare speech), and emotion in terms of increasing self-confidence and a sense of achievement). In analyzing students' perception of making video, the researchers saw students' positive experiences in using video technology; the usefulness of peer feedback, which was made easier with video peers could view and assess videos conveniently and with the advantage of stopping and rewinding videos to observe details; self-awareness of strengths and weakness; and increased practicing opportunity through re-recording presentations. Respondents noted the challenges of accessing equipment and video-editing facilities, uploading video, and students' stress of speaking to cameras.

Focusing on science students, Kleftodimos and Triantafillidou (2023) stated the need for students to develop communication and presentation skills: understanding the audience, using appropriate language for audiences, storytelling, incorporating style elements (humor, anecdotes, image), and choosing relevant broadcast platforms. The researchers noted that these skills tended not to be addressed in the science curriculum because of time so video helps hone these skills, not only in since but also in language, medical, engineering, economics, and social studies curriculum. Video's ease of use leads to the perception of its usefulness and ultimate satisfaction on the part of learners.

Student Video Production in K-12 Settings

Student video productions are particularly useful in K-12 education to provide a foundation for critical information, media and digital literacies. For instance, Norton and Hathaway (2010) surveyed K-12 teachers about their incorporation of student-produced videos into the curriculum. The respondents indicated that this activity increased learning as measured by tests, rubrics and anecdotal data. They also commented that the videos increased students' motivation and engagement, and helped them connect to the subject matter. Teachers also identified challenges: equipment, logistics, and time. They also pointed out the need to focus on using video to learn content rather than focusing on studying video production itself: a means rather than an end. More specifically, Tarr (2016) asserted that student-produced video documentaries helped high school students to form arguments and defend them differently by leveraging media literacy elements.

Student video productions also model universal design for learning. For instance, Mackey and Strickland (2018) found that middle school students connected home and school when teachers used a culturally responsive teaching approach as they had students produce

videos. Leach (2017) noted that, while teacher preparation and access issues can be challenging, digital video productions offered students with disabilities a rich, interactive environment that modeled open communication and scaffolded comprehension.

Positive outcomes of student video production were experienced even in primary grades. Gaston and Havard (2019) surveyed and interviewed students in grades 2 through 5 about their perceptions of collaboratively producing videos. The students thought that they learned more, and were able to connect content areas to other experiences and maintained their interest throughout the activity. Students also enjoyed collaborating. The novelty of producing a video also increased interest and positive engagement. Teachers commented that students not only gained content knowledge but also practiced and improved their communication and interpersonal skills.

Group-produced videos serve as an effective and authentic way to help learn a new language, as investigated by Green, Inan, and Maushak (2014). K-12 Students had to communicate with each other and negotiate meaning. This activity became more effective when students had repeated opportunities to create videos and change production responsibilities. Students also appreciated the freedom to create a unique video that draws upon their skills and experiences.

Nixon (2021) focused on the value of peer assessment in student video productions. Students used feedback to incorporate elements into their final products. The discourse of critique helped students gain media literacy skills as they actively processed peer input.

To help K-12 teachers incorporate student video production activities into the curriculum, specifically in STEM disciplines, Campbell, Heller and Pulse (2022) asked pre-service K-12 student teachers to create short videos to demonstrate their STEM content and technical learning. the students were actively engaged and gained self-efficacy in the process along with learning content concepts In designing video projects, the researchers recommended providing a video development model, providing extra time to gain content knowledge, and incorporating peer assessment.

The recommendation of using a video development model partly drew from Campbell and Cox's model that they developed in a 2018 study. The ICSDR model consists of identifying an idea, conceptualizing and connecting it, storyboarding the idea, developing the video, reviewing and reflecting on it, and reviewing the video product. Testing this production model

with graduate education students, the researchers discovered that the model helped students focus their ideas and motivated them. The students thought that producing a video was an authentic and personalized learning experience that fostered collaboration and gave them more choice and voice.

Student video production can transcend school curriculum learning to become school-based social action. For instance, Wargo and Clayton (2018) investigated a high school digital media elective course in which students used video production as a political tool. As students designed their videos jointly, they voiced personal and social injustices within their community. The students' produced PSA videos were broadcast to show how community issues affected them. The participating teachers pointed out how video production mobilized students to engage with local issues and participate in civic action.

In short, student-produced videos increasingly constitute an effective and authentic way for students to demonstrate content and technical knowledge. In Australia, for instance, a Curriculum Connections STEM YouTube channel was developed as a repository for student-produced science videos that teachers could draw upon as an instructional tool (Lisec & Dezuanni, 2018).

Associated Theories

Student-produced videos most closely exemplify Kolb's experiential learning theory (2014). Kolb posited four stages of learning: concrete experience, abstract conceptualization, reflective observation, and active experimentation. Learning is facilitated by demonstrations and applications of theory, and when material is relevant to students. This approach increases students' motivation and enjoyment. This theory.

Another relevant theory for student video production is constructivism, whereby students construct knowledge and meaning from their experience. Students use the process of creating video to comprehend concepts and figure out ways to communicate that knowledge using the properties of appropriate media (Bada, 2015).

Methodology

To answer the research questions, the researchers accessed the California Student Media Festival (CSMF) winning student videos from 2009 to 2023 that were available from the Festival's website http://mediafestival.org. The website listed the winning videos from 2009 to 2023, which resulted in 682 videos to be analyzed. None of the 2009 videos were available, and a few of the videos from other years were private or removed.

The researchers developed the following criteria to code and analyze the videos, based on the Festival's criteria, criteria mentioned in the literature review, and criteria that the Festival wanted to investigate: e.g., school, school level, locale, teacher mentioned, school status, and content. The resulting variables consisted of: title, year, award, school, teacher (if mentioned), public or non-public status, Title 1 eligibility, school academic ranking (1-10), class task status, number of creators, focus, setting, topic, purpose, tone (1-5 Likert scale from silly to serious), information literacy (1-5 Likert scale of competence), media literacy (1-5 Likert scale of competence),, visual elements, sound elements, production value (1-5 Likert scale of competence), accessibility (1-5 Likert scale of accessibility), length of video, and number of views.

The two researchers calibrated their content analysis, noting that competency would be determined in terms of developmental appropriateness. That meant, for instance, that an exemplary production of a second grader would differ fundamentally than that of a twelfth graders because of physical, intellectual and emotional maturity levels. Settings, topics, and purposes were coded and then clustered manually for easier comparisons.

The coding was recorded in an Excel spreadsheet and imported into SPSS version 28 to analyze. Descriptive statistics and correlation statistics were employed to identify patterns and trends of the winning videos.

Findings & Discussion

The content analysis of the 2009-2023 winning CSMF videos generated a rich set of findings.

- Top curricular disciplines: English language arts, science, social studies; top crafts: animation, cinematography, editing, special effects (FX); top genres: yearbook, news, documentary

- Top settings: the majority were set in schools (especially in the early years), home, outdoors, public (in town)
- Top topics: curriculum, social-emotional learning (SEL) (especially more recently), school, stories
- Top purposes: inform, SEL, entertain
- Tone: median 4, Info lit: median 3.5 (usually because of citations), media lit median 3, production quality median 4, Accessibility median 2 (mainly through closed captioning)
- Video views (N=290): maximum 128,460 mean 2237

Between 2009-2023 682 students had winning videos. Of those schools 229 schools had winner videos. Three-quarters of the winning schools were public and a quarter were non-public. The California Department of Education stated that 40% of public K-12 schools were Title 1 eligible. Of the winning schools, 47% were Title 1 (free and reduced lunch) eligible and 52% were not Title 1 eligible. No significant correlation existed between winning videos of public and non-public schools, between Title 1-eligible and non-eligible schools, or relative to school rankings.

In the last fifteen years, the California Student Media Festival has awarded 682 students from 229 schools for their high-quality videos. Generally, school participation correlated with regional population, although suburban schools were over-represented and large cities and rural areas were under-represented. High schools were over-represented, and elementary schools were under-represented, although more middle schools were expected to be represented. Non-public schools were over-represented, which could have stemmed from more flexible scheduling and curriculum that are typically found in public schools. It should be noted that about 40% of California public schools are Title 1 eligible, so Title 1 schools were slightly over-represented overall, but not significantly; this finding is very encouraging because it is evidence that socio-economic status (SES) does not pose a significant barrier to student production. Similarly, there was no significant correlation between Title I status and school's achievement, which is evidence that some level of equity exists in providing quality education where students can succeed; nevertheless, the mean rating (on a 1-10 scale) was 8 across the board, indicating that the winning students' school were generally high achieving. Over time, an increasing number of schools were represented in the winners' list, which was evidence of greater access to video production tools, greater incorporation of video production in schools (Snelson, 2018), and greater awareness of this competition.

As for the quality of the winning video submissions, all exhibited excellent technical skills, knowledgeable and compelling content, innovation and creativity, and proper attribution for intellectual property. It must be mentioned, though, that no video was universally accessible; indeed, not a single video included transcripts that explained visual elements. No significant correlation existed between public and private schools relative to video quality. There were no significant differences by most variables measured, such as media literacy, video and sound elements, whether the video was a class assignment or not, number of creators, topic, or number of views. A few differences existed by school level, but they were generally not significant. One of the few correlations was that of purpose to tone; entertainment purposes tended to have a less serious tone than videos whose purpose was to inform. This finding demonstrates that students understood the media literacy principle of matching tone to objective. In general, the tone was somewhat serious, but that could well be accounted for in that at least half of the awards reflected curricular content that demonstrated academic knowledge. The fact that the Festival's website lists and links to past winning awardees, in their categories, might also influence the choice of videos to submit. Additionally, the fact that all videos had to be submitted via a school teacher also influenced the types of videos that won. Nevertheless, a teacher's name was seldom mentioned in the video credits, indicating that the students were the creators, not the teachers.

Media attributes varied somewhat by school level. It was expected that technical skill, content knowledge, and performance would increase with age, so the researchers assessed information literacy, media literacy and production quality as developmentally appropriate. Not surprisingly, elementary videos were more likely to have been class assignments (22%) than for middle school students (16%) or high school students; usually older students are given more autonomy in their projects. That autonomy is likely to result in more sharing of work online, especially as Facebook and other social media platforms state that users must be at least 13 years old, so it is reasonable that the highest number of views for an elementary video was 4500, 15,900 for a middle school video, and 128,460 for a high school video – and concomitant mean values (628, 1051, and 3296). On the other hand, the video length, setting, subject matter, topic, purpose, and tone did not differ significantly by school levels.

Similarly, few trends emerged over time in terms of video length, setting, subject matter, topic, purpose, or even media literacy. Nor was there a trend in terms of the number of students who logged their videos' views – or the number of times a video was seen, controlling for the

number of years passed. On the other hand, a greater expansion of participants and production logistics were noted. For instance, a greater number of schools had winning entries over time, and fewer schools dominated the competition. Earlier on, the majority of videos appeared to be produced in school and used school as the setting. As access to video production tools increased and equipment became more portable over time, a smaller percentage of videos were school-based and settings became more varied. Likewise, teacher-based hosting services dominated in early years and more public platforms such as YouTube have taken over; TikTok had a small but growing hosting role. Interestingly, the number of visual and sound elements did not increase over time; if anything, earlier videos seemed to be more experimental in their technical choices. For instance, stop motion animation was used in several elementary videos in the early years, less so more recently; video apps such as ChatterPix that can make objects "talk" by moving mouths have replaced the labor-intensive of moving an object manually. Similarly, scene transitions and graphic special effects were faddish for a while, but with increased familiarity, they have been used more intentionally in recent years.

Kolb's experiential learning theory and constructivist learning theory were exemplified in the students' video productions. Indeed, some of the videos explicitly explained how they produced their products, be they an animated video or a musical performance. Students drew upon their own concrete academic and personal experiences to concrete experience to conceptualize how to present their knowledge using media and information literacy in a video format. They reflected upon their design and actively created the videos; their submissions for the Festival included their reflections upon their efforts. In the process, students used a constructivist approach to not only find meaning in the video production but so also express that meaning in a unique fashion.

Conclusions

This research affirms that the California Student Media Festival has provided a long-term significant and sustainable venue for showcasing and awarding K-12 student video productions. By listing the schools of the winning students and awarding those schools financial prizes also supports those schools and may motivate them to continue their efforts. This research can be used by CSMF to publicize their current impact and to improve their in-house efforts.

By analyzing high-quality videos by school level and year, the researchers can verify the opportunities and participation of a broad range of schools. The videos too reflect students' range of interests and agendas as well as students' adoption of emerging technology and their craftsmanship using a variety of technology tools. The presence of media assignments and teacher guidance also testifies to the importance of school support and instruction; this was particularly evident in the technical quality and students' accurate inclusion of credits such as the use of existing resources, even for elementary productions.

It should also be noted that there is still room to grow – and media literacy principles to be taught. This effort entails pre- and in-service teachers' own professional development (e.g., Campbell, Heller & Pulse, 2022). To that point, the Festival currently provides some online resources for teachers to help them guide student video productions, and more resources are needed such as in-depth media literacy content, citation style, and specific guidance on making videos universally accessible; similar developmentally-appropriate resources could also be provided for K-12 students. The Festival could also establish a teachers' online community of practice for mutual support and networking.

More generally, the Festival might encourage more literary videos such as original stories or adaptations of existing stories; similarly, they might encourage genre pieces such as adventure, satire or "noir." To affirm the idea of video as activism, the Festival might offer awards for social justice or participatory politics. Speaking of participatory action, the festival should also pro-actively reach out to under-represented large urban school districts and rural schools, each of which can bring important new voices.

It should be noted that CSMF is limited to California entries, largely because of its capacity to get sufficient numbers of judges. As a result, this research might not be generalizable to other states. A few other factors limit the study's rigor: a few schools had the same name but were located in several regions but there was not enough information to identify the right school, some videos were removed or were private, no academic rates were available for non-public schools, possible coding errors or inconsistencies may be occurred, and SEL as a topic was not designated as such in earlier years, but likely topics were interpreted as such to facilitate comparisons across the years.

Furthermore, this research could be continued and deepened in several ways: comparing winning videos to non-winning videos – and their associated schools, linking students' reflections to the video products, surveying participating students and teachers (both

winners and non-winners) about their video production experiences and associated impact on their academic and personal growth, investigating associated class assignments and media-centric curriculum, investigating the career trajectory of winners (e.g., it was discovered that one of the winners who had his own YouTube channel as a teenage subsequently had success in the film industry), and comparing other state student media festivals in terms of structure and the quality of winning videos. At the least, the research methodology can be replicated for other student video showcases.

In any case, the California Student Media Festival has proven to serve as a rich source of primary source data about student videos and the media literacy aspects thereof, and can serve as a model for other student video showcases. Within the media saturated society, media literacy is vital and student video productions offer an authentic and meaningful way to gain media literacy and empower students to express their perspectives through media.

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Biography

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