

Presentation Skills: Working With Secondary Students

Author: Kathleen L Spitzer

New York State students are required to take a course titled “Participation in Government.” This is a one-semester course and most of the students are seniors. The purpose of the course is to prepare students to participate as New York state and U. S. citizens. To meet course requirements, students must write a letter to a government official, attend a series of meetings of a government body, and research and prepare a 45-minute presentation to the class on a public policy issue.

When students at Cicero-North Syracuse High School (Cicero, New York) undertake the latter assignment, they work in a group of three or more students, spend a number of weeks researching and preparing a presentation, and write a paper on a public policy issue. They research the background of the issue including any previous legislation, investigate the various sides of the issue, conduct a survey, and propose a solution. During the 45-minute presentation of the issue to the class, each student group is required to use a chart or graph as well as at least one multimedia component. To fulfill the multimedia requirement, many of the students search through the film library available through our Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES). Students preview the film or films and select a portion of an appropriate video. Other students use simple overhead transparencies of political cartoons. Another popular choice is to prepare interview questions and do a “person on the street” video interview with students, teachers, and/or administrators in our school.

During the 1998-1999 school year, more than 600 computers were installed throughout the classrooms, offices, and the library media center at Cicero-North Syracuse High School. Students have access to the entire suite of Microsoft programs as well as an impressive array of online information resources (see [Figure 4](#)). Since the installation of the new computers, there’s been an explosion in the popularity of developing *PowerPoint* presentations throughout the curriculum. During the fall semester of the 1999-2000 school year, some of the social studies teachers suggested that their students use Microsoft PowerPoint for at least part of the Participation in Government presentation. Teachers noticed that the student groups who used PowerPoint during the fall semester were successful, so all of the social studies teachers required their spring semester Participation in Government students to incorporate a PowerPoint presentation as part of the final project.

Instructional Support

To provide appropriate instructional support, the library media specialists analyzed the needs of the students who were being challenged by this complex culminating group project. The library media specialists decided that students would need to do the following things to successfully complete the project:

- Incorporate group dynamics into the task definition
- Use images, sounds, music, and quotations appropriately within the guidelines of copyright and fair use
- Identify the best information sources from the variety of print, electronic, and human sources available through our library and elsewhere
- Use video wisely
- Create a *PowerPoint* project that used good presentation skills.

The two latter needs were further sub-divided because they involved a variety of skills. In the area of using video wisely, the library media specialists had several concerns. In the past, many students had waited until the last minute to come to the library media center to request assistance in (1) finding a video that they could borrow from BOCES or, worse yet, (2) creating a videotaped interview. Sometimes students who created a videotaped interview had problems with poor sound quality. The library media specialists and students learned that when videotaping at home there is usually an abundance of sound-absorbing material such as carpeting and upholstery. At school, students had difficulty with sound quality when videotaping in rooms where there is a lack such sound dampening materials. Videotapes that were created in the hallways or the cafeteria were full of muffled and/or reverberating sounds that overshadowed or drowned out the interview. In several instances, students who created poor quality videotapes at the last minute, felt compelled to show their inferior videotapes to their classmates to use up part of the 45-minutes set aside for their group presentation. The library media specialists sought to remedy this frustrating situation.

The library media specialists identified a number of possible pitfalls that students should avoid when creating *PowerPoint* projects. These included:

- Using motion and sound where it was inappropriate or distracting
- Incorporating too many colors
- Placing too much text on a slide
- Using too many font styles and sizes
- Creating a slide show that didn't flow logically
- Incorporating copyrighted materials without proper citation.

After thoughtful consideration, the library media specialists decided one way to instruct students was to devise a *PowerPoint* "model" presentation. The model would incorporate the various aspects of the instruction and would do so in an engaging manner. In addition, the library media specialists decided that since most of the videotaped interviews were done in school with school equipment, students would need to attend a brief, individualized orientation session about the use of videotape equipment and sound recording equipment before the equipment could be borrowed.

The library media specialists found that putting together the *PowerPoint* presentation and incorporating the various instructional outcomes took several days. However, the individualized orientation sessions for using videotape equipment and the video editing software posed more of a challenge. There are approximately 200 students who take the Participation in Government course during a semester and all of the group projects are assigned at the same time. This meant that library media specialists would need to devise a scheduling system for the individualized orientation sessions. And, since there are only three video editing stations, a management system was needed for the video editing stations. (This was necessary because these videotaping stations are used by students other than those in Participation in Government and because the file storage for the videotape editing process is very large. As the videos are being edited, they might take multiple gigabytes of storage space. Since the videotape editing stations, all Macintoshes, had 9 gigabytes of storage space, it was necessary to devise a system to manage their usage.)

***PowerPoint* Instruction: Using a Model**

In developing the model for *PowerPoint* instruction, the library media specialists used an example public policy issue: Do school uniforms help prevent crime? The *PowerPoint* opened by emphasizing the need to plan ahead and to identify, subdivide, and distribute the tasks among the group members. Students were provided with a Pathfinder of the most popular information sources (see [Figure 2](#)). Since the Pathfinder included check boxes, the library media specialists pointed out that the Pathfinder could easily be used by the group to identify which sources had already been used.

Using the sample topic of school uniforms, the library media specialists provided some quick instruction on how to use some of the electronic sources. These electronic sources were hyperlinked from the *PowerPoint* presentation. Returning to the *PowerPoint* presentation, the library media specialists used a slide to introduce the instructional media services available to students. These included borrowing films from BOCES, using digital and/or video cameras, and using videotape editing stations. Students were also told that the library media specialists could assist them to create a chart or graph or to create a transparency. Students were also told about the required orientation session that would be necessary prior to using the school's equipment.

The final part of the *PowerPoint* presentation was a discussion of copyright. Students were shown a couple of images from Internet Web sites and library media specialists discussed fair use, copyright, and citation. Students were informed that they should not use images that had been illegally posted to the Internet. The presentation concluded with a picture of a person carrying a large sack and the words, "Don't get stuck holding the bag." This was shown to encourage students to plan ahead and to divide up assignments.

Soon, the students were ready to create their *PowerPoint* presentations. The library media specialists created a second *PowerPoint* to model the elements of a good *PowerPoint* presentation. Students were asked to think about two questions prior to creating their *PowerPoint*:

- Who is your audience?
- What is the purpose of your presentation?

In answering these two questions, students should be able to determine the tone of the presentation they will create.

The use of a consistent color scheme was demonstrated as well as how to use motion for effect. Students were provided with examples of motion used effectively such as bringing in each bulleted item in a list or each element of a chart. They were also shown an example of a slide where motion was distracting. To show students how sound could influence a person's viewpoint of a particular image, they made four slides all containing the same picture of one of the library media aides who was standing by the magazine/reserve room. The introductory slide read, "Would you borrow a magazine from this lady?" A different copyright-free music clip was played as each of four slides flashed on the screen. These four clips included music that was circus-like, classical, majestic, and ghostly. Students seemed to enjoy the experience of thinking about the image in a different way each time a different music clip was played. Students were encouraged to use copyright-free music that is available in the library. They were informed of fair use and told that they could use up to 10 percent or 30 seconds of a particular copyrighted song whichever was less.

To show how images and fonts could influence the tone of the presentation, the library media specialists created four slides that contained the identical wording but used different fonts and clip art. Again, this seemed to be a good way to make the point.

At the conclusion of the *PowerPoint*, the library media specialists worked with students who had not ever used *PowerPoint* or who were unsure about how to use the program. Students learned how to:

- Create a new slide
- Move slides
- Add text
- Add WordArt
- Import pictures from the Internet
- Add clip art
- Add motion and sound.

They were also shown how to save their *PowerPoint* presentation and how to reopen the file to work on it.

Both of the *PowerPoint* presentations created by the library media specialists were well received by the students. The presentations were well organized and delivered in an interesting manner. This helped to hold the students' attention.

Using Video: Some Solutions

The individualized orientation session for using the school's video camera equipment included the following information:

- How to use the camera only on school property and in such a way that it would not distract others from learning
- How to use the various features of the video camera such as zoom, record, pause, pan.

As part of these individualized orientation sessions, library media specialists discussed with students what they hoped to accomplish on the videotape as well as where they planned to do the videotaping. Students were made aware of the sound limitations of videotaping in the school environment. In most cases, the library media specialist arranged to set up a portable sound system with a microphone in a small room in the library media center. This allowed students to obtain acceptable sound quality during an interview.

Students who used the school's videotape editing software were required to view the *Avid Cinema* tutorial. Following the tutorial, a library media specialist interviewed the students to determine what type of project they were attempting to accomplish and made suggestions regarding feasibility and time management. Students were advised that they would need to plan ahead and sign up for time to use the videotape editing stations. The library media specialists also made sure that students using the videotape editing stations were introduced to using a Macintosh computer and advised them to save their work often. As students worked on their videotape editing projects, the library media specialists checked with them frequently to coach them.

Conclusion

One of the frustrations of being a library media specialist is that we rarely get to see the final product. It was especially fulfilling to hear positive reports relating to the success of the student presentations and videos from the social studies teachers. In addition, it really made our day to overhear a senior (grade 12), who had seen the

introductory *PowerPoint*, advise two sophomores (grade 10) who were discussing which images they should use in a *PowerPoint* for a health class, that they needed to pay attention to copyright and cite their sources. This was truly the ultimate reward!

The individual orientation sessions for students who were using the school's videotape equipment or videotape editing software, were successful. There were no instances of poor sound quality in the videos that were produced following the initialization of these required orientation sessions. The *Avid Cinema* software takes anywhere from a few minutes to more than an hour to compile all of the effects, titles, and clips that have been added through the videotape editing process. A few students did procrastinate when editing their video. However, the majority of the students did plan ahead.

The management system of using a calendar to reserve videotape editing time on the various stations did not serve its purpose. In addition, it seemed evident that a file management system must be put into place to coordinate the storage and deletion of files on the hard drives of the videotape editing stations. The library media specialists also thought that students should sign an agreement about how to use the video camera, digital camera, and videotape editing equipment. The library media specialists have devised drafts of three documents to help with management issues during the upcoming school year. These include:

- Avid Cinema Editing Sign Up Sheet (see [Figure 3](#))
- Avid Cinema Project Tracking Sheet (see [Figure 4](#))
- Digital and Video Camera User Agreement (see [Figure 5](#)) These drafts are awaiting approval by the Cicero-North Syracuse High School administration. When they are put into place, they should simplify management tasks.

Considering the rapid changes in information technology, it is difficult for library media specialists to remain current and to be aware of the latest innovations. With help from our in-service workshops and conferences, as well as students and staff members, we can strive to bring our students the best instruction possible whether that instruction involves print or media resources.

Bibliography

Becker, G. H. (1997). © *Copyright: A guide to information and resources*. Lake Mary, FL: Gary Becker, Consultant. Available from: Gary Becker P.O. Box 951870 Lake Mary, FL 32746-5360 Phone: (888-333-2037)