

Spice Things Up With Multimedia

by Kevin T. Brady

Incorporating Web-based and interactive media into your lesson plan can be one of the best things you do for engaging your students. Particularly when it comes to teaching history, short video clips, judiciously used to supplement lecture, can provide meaningful impact. But how do you define "judiciously"?

Multimedia content must always augment and clarify classroom lecture and reading history, never replace it. If you become over-reliant on video, without the context of historical works, primary sources, activities and lecture, then you're only providing a partial picture.

The American Institute for History Education offers the following five things to consider before incorporating interactive media into your curriculum: **How much multimedia is too much?**

Forty minute movies are not effective, but a five-minute video clip, along with reading, processing exercises, audios, performing art or writing activities,

or for publication? Does the provider have any reason to distort or hold back any information? How often is the material updated? A textbook becomes dated once it's printed; a website can constantly revisit and upgrade information. But websites can also become stale. See if the website has a date showing the last update, or look for copyright dates on the materials.

How do we determine budget for content, and is free content acceptable?

Budget should be considered in three ways: First, look at immediate needs of both the teacher and the district. There's a lot of technology that's already budgeted for (e.g. DVDs, CDs, primary sources, document readers, physical equipment), many of which are already included in some resources. When you consider that these tools are available not only to the individual teacher but to the entire department, and maybe even the students, there's no comparison in terms of cost.



brings variety to the lessons while still providing the consistency and stability that comes from focused objectives. You always want to make sure you're giving students a digestible piece that they can focus on, and one that will stimulate thought.

Which source of content is right for my classroom? What should we look for in content, specifically?

Teachers always need substantive, quality content, along with methods to help students organize, analyze and process that content. Sources of content should satisfy at least three criteria. They should be reliable, meaning that the source is reputable. They should be accessible, meaning that students can get to it, and that the content is intellectually accessible (for example, the language is age-appropriate). And the content should be appropriately challenging; good history content should help students improve in areas such as reading, writing and geography.

How do we know whose content is trustworthy?

Educators must apply the same rules as in the days before the Internet: look for the use of both primary sources and secondary sources, and judge those sources by who they are, and how well known they are. Then try to answer internal questions about the material—was it written for the author's own infor-

Secondly, consider time requirements. Any teacher who's pored over a video catalog knows that it can be time-consuming to pull together all the required resources. Wedded to that is wait time for delivery of the material, and availability issues. You want to be able to say, "I can count on that video, that website, or that document being there next year."

Finally, budget in the drain on your school's current technology infrastructure. You don't want to commit to a resource that will crash your system, nor spend money on increasing your infrastructure to accommodate that system.

The biggest problem with free content is that you often get what you pay for.

School media specialists should be involved in the process from the very beginning in determining what database or resource to use.

Does the school have enough bandwidth to accommodate multiple classrooms at the same time?

The school's IT personnel will need to be involved, to ensure sufficient bandwidth so as not to slow down or grind to a halt if multiple teachers attempt to stream video at the same time.

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