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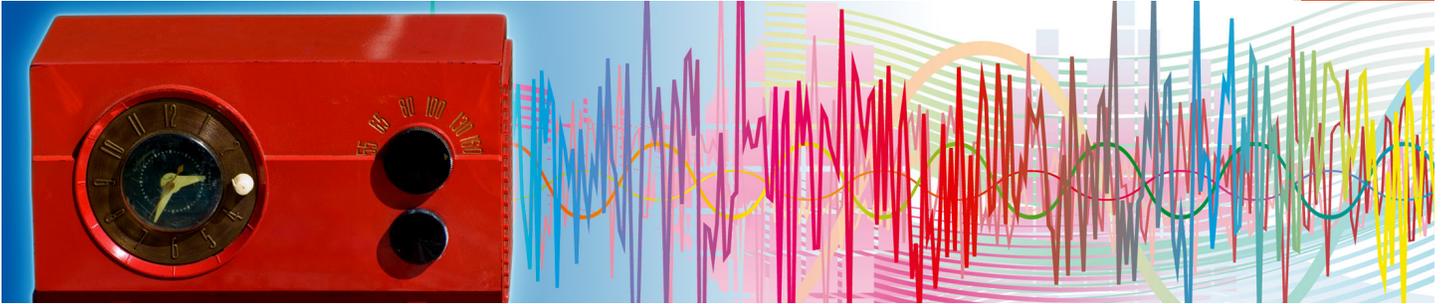
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PRODUCING A RADIO DOCUMENTARY ON MENTORING CHILDREN: A SUMMARY OF REFLECTIONS ON A STUDENT PRODUCED LIVE BROADCAST

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INTRODUCTION

This project involved producing a radio documentary exploring how college students build relationships with kids in an after-school mentoring program in Delaware, Ohio. Willis Intermediate is a middle school where the local Big Brothers/Big Sisters Organization partners with student volunteers from Ohio Wesleyan University to provide support and guidance to 5th and 6th graders. The documentary covers some challenging aspects of mentoring including: building trusting relationships with mentees, enforcing disciplinary rules, and keeping the students engaged and motivated during weekly meetings.

I wrote, produced, and edited the documentary. After it was completed my radio production class aired the full documentary on Otterbein University's college radio station as part of their on-air training. A radio podcast of the documentary was also produced as part of a blog. Once

the broadcast was aired, I presented the project to coordinators, school officials, and participants of the program. I've also adapted my course syllabus to reflect the lessons I've learned from completing the project.

PURPOSE

One of the main reasons for producing this project is to show how effective the medium of radio can be for displaying different aspects of human relationships. Federman (2004) debunks a common misconception about the oft cited phrase "The medium is the message," which was inspired by influential media scholar Marshall McLuhan in his classic book entitled *"Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man [sic]"* (1964). Federman says the phrase is often mistaken to mean the medium of communication often assumes more importance than the content of a message. In his view, this is not what McLuhan was trying to convey. To demonstrate this point, Federman's essay refers to an analogy McLuhan uses in his book that is based on the idea that

tools extend the capabilities of humans.

Right at the beginning of *Understanding Media*, (McLuhan) tells us that a medium is “any extension of ourselves.” Classically, he suggests that a hammer extends our arm and that the wheel extends our legs and feet. Each enables us to do more than our bodies could do on their own. Similarly, the medium of language extends our thoughts from within our mind out to others. Indeed, since our thoughts are the result of our individual sensory experience, speech is an “outering” of our senses... (para. 7).

Federman rightly describes McLuhan’s view as the medium and the message being in concert and not in conflict. In similar fashion, media channels that are used to tell stories can also become “extensions” of a variety of human thoughts and experience. In this context, I see the radio documentary as an ideal medium to express many kinds of human experience. This is particularly appropriate for the kinds of human experience conveyed in mentoring relationships. In her article tracing the evolution of the radio documentary, Madsen (2010) shows how different producers gradually began incorporating conventions that effectively featured real people living their lives. In her work, she points out that the radio documentary proved to be effective at creating “scenes of life” captured by sounds through microphones. In addition, the medium was adept at provoking the audiences’ imagination by appealing to sensory description. It was also especially suitable for using natural sound, narration, and actualities to convey the perspective of authorship. The main purpose of producing this documentary is to show how the radio medium can effectively



feature the development of real mentoring relationships, which contain an abundance of really compelling human experiences.

RESEARCH

Research for this project was mostly gathered from the disciplines of education and social work. These fields of study provided a lot of data, insight, and explanations about the lives of children being mentored. Two academics with professional experience in the education field provided important perspectives on mentoring young students. Tracey Stuckey-Mickell, a senior lecturer in the department of education studies at Ohio State University, described some of the factors affecting student performance and behavior in school (T. Stuckey-Mickell, personal communication, November 16, 2012). JoNataye Prather is a former school social worker and a professor conducting research on non-academic barriers to learning. Drawing on her professional experience (J. Prather, personal communication, December 10, 2012) and her dissertation research (Prather,

2010), she explained how beleaguered school administrators had to be creative in finding ways to provide after school activities like the mentoring program featured in this documentary.

Other studies referenced in the documentary include research showing how mentoring helps students show better outcomes in self-esteem and life satisfaction (DuBois and Silverthorn, 2005); in addition, the documentary references research demonstrating how important bonding is for fruitful mentoring relationships (Herrera, Sipe and McClanahan, 2000); and the documentary also features research concluding that mentored youth showed stronger positive effects when the relationship persisted over longer periods of time (Grossman and Rhodes, 2002).

PRESENTATION/DISTRIBUTION OF FINAL PROJECT

The completed documentary consists of an introduction and 4 segments lasting a total of 71 minutes. A rough edit was submitted to colleagues with professional broadcast experience for the purpose of getting suggestions for improvement. The final version was uploaded as a series of podcasts onto <http://frustrationfunfulfillment.wordpress.com> with corresponding pictures and text. Shortly after completing the documentary, I returned to the middle school to present the final project to the students, mentors, and administrators featured in the documentary. I received mostly positive feedback while facilitating a brief question and answer session. For example, the coordinator of the program indicated to me that the podcast was useful for her because it revealed the mentors' candid expressions about their experiences. Whether they were positive or negative experiences, the mentors' testimonies seemed to provide her with feedback she found useful in advising her mentors. The documentary was also aired as part of a live broadcast on WOBN, 97.5fm, - Otterbein University's student-run radio station. Students enrolled in my audio production class performed as hosts, board ops, and promoters for the program. The final project was also shown in the form of a poster presentation to Otterbein University's board of trustees. The event was a "Sabbatical Showcase" and my work was presented along with the poster presentations of five other colleagues. The event was designed to showcase some of the most successful sabbatical projects on campus. Interested observers had questions focusing on classroom

implementation, downloading the podcast, and mentoring impact.

APPLICATION TO THE CLASSROOM/STUDENT INVOLVEMENT

In March of 2013, the full documentary was aired on Otterbein University's student-run radio station. As the professor of the radio production class, I recruited some of the students enrolled in that class to help plan, promote, host, and board op the live broadcast. In this radio production class, students spent a significant amount of time completing various learning experiences

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that trained them to become proficient at live radio broadcasting. This live broadcast was an opportunity for these students to apply the lessons they were learning in class to a real live studio production. The oft-cited

taxonomy of learning tasks created by Bloom, Englehart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl (1956) provides the explanatory framework for utilizing different modes of student learning involvement in classroom teaching. Bloom's taxonomy helps educators distinguish between simple learning tasks like recalling information and more involved learning tasks like synthesizing information. The live broadcast allowed students to engage in the more involved learning tasks for this class. When the show aired, students applied many of the lessons they learned about operating the console as board-op technicians, performing as on-air personalities, and selling the program to the campus and community as promoters. The program began with one of the students conducting an interview with me asking background questions about the production of the documentary. After the interview, students

aired all four parts of the documentary in order. During the breaks in the documentary program, students played the radio public service announcements that they produced earlier in the semester. Being in charge of airing this program enabled students to learn the valuable skills of audio editing, live interviewing, and monitoring sound levels. These are all skills that require the extremely involved learning task called synthesis on Bloom's taxonomy.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION

Completing this sabbatical project enhanced my professional development in many ways. The skills I acquired by creating the podcast enabled me to start the process of teaching my students how to effectively use the radio medium in cyberspace. Students are now required to complete a podcast project for the class. Recruiting people to be interviewed for this documen-

tary enabled me to meet new professionals that I can consult about the practice of mentoring. The reflection and time spent writing and producing this documentary has made me a better mentor. It has made me more aware of the common obstacles to mentoring practice and the strategies that help improve mentoring relationships. After completing this project, I have also become a much better writer. When I listen to the documentary now, I criticize the work because it was overwritten in some spots. I now realize that sometimes it's best to just let the natural sound speak for itself.

At the time I started this project, I had just earned tenure at the associate professor rank. So this project was not instrumental to me becoming an associate professor. But it could count as credit toward my application to full professor, provided that it meets certain department and university criteria. 📡



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