

Students Show Off Skills with Public Service Announcements

By KRISTINE HUGHES
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The dangers of AIDS, animal abuse, drunken driving and gangs are pretty hard to tackle in 60 seconds or less, but Roxanne Penz's students gave it a shot.

The students at Richardson West Junior High School produced video public service announcements – from concept to storyboard to editing – for their final semester grade in communications applications.



Public Service Announcement

Although their finished works may not be quite ready for prime time, they got their points across. The experience also gave them valuable training in media arts, several students said.

“If I’d had the tools at their age like they do, I’d be fighting with Peter Jackson to do Lord of the Rings right now,” said Daniel Penz, the teacher’s husband and a professional video producer and editor. Mr. Penz attended the students’ presentation recently so he could see what his “competition is going to look like.”

He said the videos may have not had professional production quality, but the concepts are the same and the project management skills the students acquired are priceless.

All they lack, he added, is “a level of refinement they’ll get working in a professional studio.”

The project sprouted from a MediaWorks software pilot program being carried out in the Richardson school district. Richardson West was one of the schools that received the computer program, and Mrs. Penz got the training to teach and use it.

For the final class project, she took them through seven steps: forming groups and deciding on a topic; creating storyboards – a series of picture panels telling the tale scene by scene; turning the storyboards into PowerPoint™ presentations; shooting video; learning the MediaWorks software; transferring video to the computer and editing sequences and adding sound and data; and finalizing the pieces for public presentation.

The video was shot in and around the school, using props the students found. They used Mrs. Penz’s car and used other students as cast members. They even called on the school resource officer, Bruce Adair, to use his handcuffs. During filming, some of the neighbors called because they weren’t used to seeing gunplay and arrests on the school lawn, principal Margie Nancarrow said.

Once they learned what the activities were about, though, they were impressed with what the students were taking on, she added. The ninth-graders said the subjects they chose were ones they felt strongly about.

Maria Gonzalez, 14, speaking for sixth-period's Team Two, said alcohol abuse is a major issue for teenagers. All her team's members said they had attended parties where alcohol was available. Sixth-period's Team Four addressed the AIDS epidemic.

"It seems to be growing every day," said Rachel Burger, 14. The group's service announcement is meant to discourage people from doing things that put them at risk, such as having unprotected sex and using contaminated needles to inject illegal drugs.

"They know about that, but some do those things anyway," she said.

Other teams addressed:

- Pollution, touting hybrid cars on the "Speed Channel" news
- Drunken driving, showing a mock accident
- Animal abuse, using graphic photos of injured animals
- Gang violence, acted in Spanish with English subtitles
- The importance of thinking before acting



Mrs. Penz said she simply guides the students through the process. "This is a big project for my ninth-graders, but the results are worth it."

After seeing their finished products, a representative of MediaWorks gave each student a copy of the software so they can make their own movies at home.

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