

READING WRITING IN THE DISCIPLINES

Using Technology to Develop Writing Skills Video Transcript

Jane Cunningham:

What do you want your listeners to be thinking about at the end of your podcast? Whatever comes to mind right now, put an A on your paper, find a blank spot and write it down.

Mike McSweeney:

We started to hear a lot in education about the 21st century skills, which amounted to an initiative to sort of get kids involved in more collaborative projects that had a usefulness in the moment or in the community that might be of value to a wide audience.

Student:

Should we say, "On this episode of This Reading Life, we are going to be breaking down stereotypes to their fundamental elements, thus enabling us to get a basic understanding"...

Cunningham:

So you know how you were asking me about where would be a place to put yourself in? That's where you want to put yourself in.

Mike McSweeney, the department head, created a proposal, and it was really a way to deal with 21st century skills.

McSweeney:

In English, it dawned on us that journalism was a place where the 21st century skills intersect traditional English language arts instruction in a pretty reasonable way.

Student:

What do we want them to be thinking about when they're done?

McSweeney:

I think we knew we wanted some kind of project where kids had a lot of choice in choosing the topic, and we thought journalism would allow that, and feature journalism especially. It goes by the title "The Power of Narrative."

Student:

So what would you say your least favorite part about Reading is?

Student:

I would say the social life in Reading is pretty dull.

McSweeney:

We thought, let's challenge the kids to go into this town that they think is pretty boring and pretty mundane, and challenge them to find some interesting stories to tell within our town's borders. And then it was a matter of giving them some help with how do you choose a compelling topic? How do you choose the kinds of interview subjects you might want to pursue? Work with them on developing questions that will yield helpful and interesting insights from the people that we interview.

Cunningham:

For some students, writing and reading is difficult. So for them to be able to conduct an interview that goes really well is huge for them. I think it's an important skill to be able to go and interview somebody and think of questions to ask, and then follow-up questions and be at ease. I also think figuring out how to approach people, making an appointment for an interview and following through with an interview and actually being courageous enough to ask somebody. I'm hoping that they'll walk away with those skills.

(recording):

Have you ever been to another town where it has more things to do, like...

Student:

We should probably redo that part, like the part where I ask her what her least favorite part is, and then, like, ask another follow-up question about that, you know what I mean?

Student:

So you think we should get rid of that? I like the neighboring town questions.

Student:

Yeah, it's good, I think we just have to add something in.

Student:

Okay.

Cunningham:

Technology plays a big role in this project.

Lexi:

Play that back and make sure that sounds okay.

Student:

Yeah.

(recording):

Throughout our interview...

Joe:

Well, Miss Cunningham, she's been showing us Audacity, which is the recording program. She showed us how to cut and paste, how to put in music.

Student:

And we have the music that we use for *James and the Giant Peach*.

Joe:

Before she kind of taught us we were all lost, we didn't know what Audacity was all about. But now we just kind of do it like a second nature. We're just doing all the editing and cutting and all that.

Lance:

This is the ending, this isn't like... We're skipping to the ending now.

Writing a script with a partner, I guess is a lot different than writing it just like solo because you get two people's perspectives, and basically with today's technology we can do it both at the same time on like Google Docs.

Joe:

Google Docs is actually pretty easy because when someone is making an edit, you can see it on your screen. So you know exactly what's going on. There's no, like, lagging. So it's easier to have it on that rather than one Word document where you have to keep switching computers. You can talk back and forth, have them both edit the Google Doc and it's really efficient. It's a good way to communicate with your partner about the final draft.

Cunningham:

I didn't tell them they had to use Google Docs, but it's becoming a thing where they can sit side-by-side and they can each type, and they can see what the other person is doing. So I think that that's useful.

Lance:

I would do it the other way around. I would say period, then comma here.

McSweeney:

The 21st century skills, they're really the skills that are necessary to have kids who are engaged citizens. And I think that's what we want, we want them to be good citizens who ask good questions, who have a thirst to get answers, who appreciate quality journalism. What is really fascinating, I think, is that they're producing a historical document for the town, for the community that will live beyond the school year.

Cunningham:

When you talk about how you react. So instead of telling what he does, because he can tell what he does, you talk about how students react to him.

Student:

Yeah, I could do that.