Most educators agree that students should be given opportunities to engage in meaningful experience and practice within a learning community and the development of concepts and understanding should be supported by specific instruction as needed.

Learning with deep understanding – Knowledge is more than the ability to remember; deeper levels of understanding are required to transfer knowledge from one context to another. This implies that instruction for critical understanding involves the development of critical literacy (reading between the lines) rather than literal comprehension of text.

Promoting active learning – Learners should be supported in taking control of and self-regulating their own learning. When students take ownership of the learning process and invest their identities in the outcomes of learning, understanding will be deeper than when learning is passive.

Project-based learning as undertaken in the RSOE/IML collaborative is one way to put this concept into effect. Learning is not simply a cognitive process that takes place within individual students; it also involves socialization into particular communities of practice. Within these learning communities or what Gee (2001) terms affinity groups, students are enabled to participate in the practices of the community from the very beginning of their involvement. The learning community can include the classroom, the school, the family and broader community and virtual communities enabled through electronic communication and multimedia.

Multiliteracies approaches normally entail one-size-fits-all learning. These approaches are in most cases unable to accommodate the diversity of culture and language that are represented by the new mainstream in urban schools. For example, within a transmission approach it is almost impossible to enable beginning second language learners to participate effectively in classroom life when their knowledge of the language of instruction is at best limited. By contrast, a multiliteracies approach that attempts to incorporate students’ culture and language into the curriculum, that provides alternative methods for expression such as multimedia, is more capable of including all students successfully within the learning community. Language minority students can express their intelligence, imagination and literary/artistic talents.
Most educators agree that students should be given opportunities to engage in meaningful experience and practice within a learning community and the development of concepts and understanding should be supported by specific instruction as needed.
through writing in their home language or collaborating with pro-
duction teams on multimedia projects to create quality offerings.
The conceptual frameworks that lie beneath this type of
approach have been highlighted in instructional frameworks that
focus on building students academic expertise through project-
based, authentic learning.

Expanding the Framework

This emphasis on critical literacy, active learning, deep under-
standing and building on students’ prior knowledge places sig-
nificant emphasis on identity negotiation and identity invest-
ment in teaching for deep understanding. Teacher-student inter-
actions, and other interactions within the learning community,
create an interpersonal space within which knowledge is gener-
ated and identities are negotiated. Studies suggest that identity
investment is a central component of learning for deep under-
standing and the negotiation of identities is a primary determi-
nant of whether or not students cognitively engage the learning
process. Learning will be optimized when these interactions
maximize both cognitive engagement and identity investment
(Cummins, 2004).

We extend that students commit their identities to these
multimedia projects (which contain written, spoken, visual,
musical, dramatic or combinations in multiple forms) and
review and reflect on efforts in which their identities are re-
lected back in a positive light, desirable academic outcomes
can be expected. When students share these projects with
peers, teachers, family, other classes and community, they are
likely to receive positive feedback and self-affirmation in inter-
action with these audiences. Multimedia can enhance the
process of identity investment and affirmation. It facilitates
the production of these projects, makes them look more accom-
plished, and expands the listeners and potential for affirmative
feedback for student voices.

National, state and local standards guide educators and many
of the standards focus specifically on helping students use tech-
nology and multimedia wisely. The RSOE/IML collaborative
explores appropriate ways to integrate technology, multimedia
and literacy using project-based instructional units that lead to
productive standards-based outcomes for students. As an exam-
ple, both the International Society for Technology in Education
(ISTE) and the International Reading Association (IRA) each
have standards that call for literacy experiences that fit together
nicely with both sets of standards (Valmont, 2003).

Multimedia Projects

Currently many social scientists, including educators, employ
video ethnography, a multimedia visual observational approach
to human behavior. It starts by watching people at school, work or
play, followed by interviews, review of documents, artifacts and
personal histories to which you can react. The process continues
until you’re sure you have something that makes a significant
contribution, or not. Finally you tell the story, visually, graphi-

cally, scientifically and artistically (Genzuk, 1999).

Ethnographic research methods help attain local points of
view – in schools, classrooms, households and community “hands
of knowledge” (Moll et al., 1992). It is a means of identifying sig-

nificant categories of human experience up close and personal by
which ethnographers may inform others of their findings to
derive, for example, policy decisions or instructional innovations.

When we are young, watching the world around us was a nat-
ural, enjoyable way to learn and remember. Video ethnography is
an efficient mode of recording and presenting research. Now that
the technology is no longer as complex and cumbersome, it is
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cation, these experiences can provide feedback to help teach-
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part of their professional development and growth.

The RSOE/IML collaborative teacher education candidate

effort has adopted video ethnography with its Video Ethnography

Project. The project uses multimedia to create video ethnogra-
phies that tell important stories about the students in local class-
rooms, teaching and learning in the classroom and communities
and schools, and the environments where students live. These sto-
cies can be used and shared by teachers, their colleagues, parents
and school administrators as a part of “reflexive practice” and
ongoing professional growth and development.

This particular project is for teacher candidates. It uses video
desktop movies to help students see and analyze the diverse
kinds of learning, growth and social interactions that occur in the
classroom and other learning environments in the home and com-
munity of language minority students (students who come from
homes where a language other than English is spoken).

Teacher candidate teams use digital movie cameras and mul-

timedia labs at the university to create video ethnographies to
capture aspects and characteristics of both classroom and commu-
nity teaching. The emphasis of this exercise is on the process
rather than the final product. One of the main objectives is for
teacher candidates to operationalize or pass along this multimedia
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We have begun to gather examples of student made movie
projects from 4th graders who have used this same process in their
classrooms. Students are divided into production teams. Collaborative
strategies begin with group discussing the focus of the self-selected
topics of the projects. Topics usually focus on one or a combina-
tion of curriculum areas being covered during the current academic year. The video ethnography template culminates in a
script and a “project pitch” to present to a “Project Approval Committee” consisting of the teacher and a hedgehog designer. Once the project has been approved the stu-
dents gather information online, communicating with classmates
by searching for information in libraries and other sources. Production team “jobs” are applied for and assigned. Sites, scenery, costumes and other logistics considerations are now
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Many traditional literacy skills contained in state and national
standards are enhanced through this process. The process con-
tains the traditional literacies emphasized in state and national
teaching standards – reading, writing, measuring, calculating,
music, art, physical movement, as well as planning, oral language,
etc. The process is especially good for highlighting the kinds of


discussions and interactions that occur among students as they
engage in different kinds of learning, and for helping teachers
find evidence of learning that does not always appear on stan-
dardized tests or other assessments.

Teaching future teachers to use multimedia means making sure
they have the skills to use the technology and multimedia effec-
tively as a teaching tool to inform their instructional decisions and
practice so students in their classrooms utilize the power of multi-
media to learn.

Conclusion

A radically different image of the student is implied in the class-
rooms described than in more traditional-prepared-oriented class-
rooms. Within the framework of multimedia pedagogy, broadly

defined, educators expand the opportunities for students to express themselves, particular their intelligence, imagination and

talent. When this kind of expression is enabled, stu-
dents see themselves as intelligent, imaginative and talented. It
is essential that the concept of literacy be expanded to include
visual, audio, interactive and combined media, and that we con-
stantly ask ourselves what it means to be truly literate and, by
extension, educated in the 21st century.

Dr. Michael Genzuk is an Associate Professor of Clinical Education in
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