



# INNOVATION ABSTRACTS

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## CLASSROOM PROJECT TO COMMUNITY SERVICE PROJECT: THE FACES OF AIDS

In late October 1998, one of my mass communications students informed me that he would like to do a feature on AIDS for our student TV news magazine, *The Campus Edge*. December is National AIDS Awareness Month, and the student, who was working as a nurse's aide in a Wichita hospital, regularly produced a medical-related segment for the show. His question was about a unique "hook" for the story.

After a little thought, I suggested that if he could find a Caucasian, heterosexual female with the disease—the antithesis of the stereotypical victim—and if she were willing to talk on-camera, he would indeed be able to take a fresh approach. Frankly, I did not really think the idea would go any further.

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I did not count on the student's resourcefulness! He located a subject who turned out to be an intelligent, articulate young woman with a very intense story to tell. Her husband had experimented with drugs in college, but had been clean and sober for many years before they were married. He had no idea he was infected, nor of the risk he posed to her. A short time after their wedding, he became ill and eventually died, but not before passing AIDS on to her.

Her calm recital of those facts and the horror of watching him die—as she stated it, "Knowing I'll die the same way"—was more than compelling. It was an outstanding segment for our show and went well beyond the typical news that we, and most shows like ours, feature.

The segment was excellent. Another talented mass communications student had joined the team and filmed the interview in an autumnal park setting in the subject's community. The aesthetics were lovely, serving as counterpoint to the tragic content of her story. Of course, there was considerable footage that went unused in the two-minute TV bite. Almost casually, I suggested that with a little work, this could probably

turn into an interesting documentary.

During the semester break, the students shot more interviews with other victims, relatives of victims, and caregivers for those stricken with the disease. They put together an almost Gothic studio setting for the interviews and decided to title their half-hour video documentary, *Faces of AIDS*.

Though our technical resources are quite limited, Butler County Community College had recently purchased a Media 100 nonlinear video editing system for the Radio-TV Department. It is cutting-edge technology. The third team member had an avid interest in editing and wanted to be the first to learn how to use this new equipment, using *Faces of AIDS* as the project.

Radio-TV and BCCC provided encouragement, advice, and facilities, but the students supplied the creativity and considerable physical effort required to produce a program of both insight and depth. It did not preach; it simply allowed the *faces* to speak of their personal experiences with AIDS—average people living nightmares in various ways and surviving them as best they could. It was an approach an audience might truly hear.

At the same time, the production values of the show were quite excellent—especially from students in a relatively new program at a two-year school. I honestly feel that *Faces of AIDS*, from a combined content and technical standpoint, is the best student-produced project I have been involved with in over 20 years of teaching.

We scheduled a premiere on the BCCC campus and invited college trustees, administrators, faculty, students, and community members, including people in the health-care professions. Local television attended the event and gave us good air coverage, including interviews with the student producers. The program ran on our local cable system and won recognition in the area of Public Affairs Programming from the Kansas Association of Broadcasters.

Following the premiere, several requests for copies of the tape arrived from city and county health departments throughout the area. Word-of-mouth information was spreading. Direct feedback on the show's dramatic





nature, production value, and educational benefit was quite good. With such positive response, it occurred to me that a good target audience could be high school students. Again, rather than the "Don't do this!" dictate that youth usually will ignore, this program simply describes the consequences of high-risk behavior in an unemotional, undemanding tone. We distributed flyers describing the tape and offered copies free to Kansas high schools.

This experience is more than just a student video project or a vehicle to help curb a dreaded disease. It is a synergy of learning. Three college students were able to incorporate meaningful content into a unique message

## SHARING STORIES: USING THE NARRATIVE METHOD IN FACILITATING CULTURAL AWARENESS

I have been facilitating a sociology course in cultural awareness for several years and have tried a variety of methods to assess course objectives. The course goal is "to assist students in developing an awareness of cultural backgrounds, attitudes, and experiences...[and] to create an awareness of one's own individual respect for human dignity and individual rights, both for oneself and others in our increasingly pluralistic society." This goal poses a significant educational challenge since students come to class with schematic structures about "self" and "others" firmly in place. Many of these preestablished concepts are negative; and as cognitive psychologists tell us, once a schema has been created, it can be highly resistant to change, especially from traditional teaching methods.

The primary learning method I am currently using to achieve the course objectives is having each student write a narrative paper in which he or she describes his/her own cultural identity and its development through personal experiences, including the ten aspects of cultural identity defined and discussed throughout the process of the class: ethnicity, race, religion, gender identity, sexual orientation, age cohort, body image, socioeconomic status, regional diversity and speech patterns, and family background. As the students are constructing this narrative, they share their experiences regarding each aspect with one another in class, providing a feedback loop for the project development.

I was inspired to try this method by psychologists and educators writing about the constructivist perspective and transformational learning. This growing trend toward constructivism in education is helping us

and then use the audio/visual media to communicate that message in a poignant and effective manner. *Faces of AIDS* has become a valuable educational tool for the larger Kansas community.

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understand that there is an inevitable link between *what* we know and *how* we came to know it. Narratives are becoming a respected teaching method, as well.

The cultural awareness assignment is designed to accomplish two primary purposes: (1) focus student attention on their own (possibly unconscious) cultural-identity schema and (2) create an opportunity for learners to be exposed to the new data (experiences) supplied by their fellow learners. While there are never any guarantees that learning will occur, creating the narrative opens up the possibility that our concepts of "self" and "other" may be expanded and/or altered as we create and share our own story and listen to the stories of others. I have found the learners in my classes to be highly receptive to this type of project and increasingly enthusiastic about it as the term progresses. Many have described it as a transformative experience. The discussions are lively and, at times, heated; but so far, each group has grown into a true learning community.

If we agree with Maslow that self-actualization is a goal of education, then articulating who we are is a necessary part of the process. And because humans are social creatures, we cannot come to understand who we are without first listening to the voices around us. It is my goal that listening, telling, and becoming are encouraged in my classroom; evidence encourages me to believe that the narrative method facilitates this objective.

To view some of the results, join us at <http://members.tripod.com/Lheanna/cca.htm>. Some of the learners have allowed me to post their narratives.

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