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# Using Television News With Students

## Rediscovering an Old Technology

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by Michael Parrish and Wilma Bates

**F**rom the coverage of the war in the Middle East to controversial offers to schools by television companies, television news is itself making news. The technology of television keeps on getting better and better at bringing world events to us, but the use of television as an effective information source for students has raised some questions. Is television news geared too much for an adult audience to appeal to students? Are the stories too sensationalized or too superficial to be appropriate for school use? What about commercials? Should students even be allowed school time for watching TV? How do teachers

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know what in today's news relates to what they are teaching? Who will record the news everyday so it can be used at the appropriate time? Is copyright a problem?

Weaver Education Center in Greensboro began a project in October 1989 that brings television news to the schools each day. While this ongoing project does not answer all the questions raised about using television newscasts with young adults, it does demonstrate how to reduce some of the problems and has renewed interest in

using this medium that is well-suited to increased global awareness.

The project involves the cooperative efforts of Weaver Education Center, Cablevision of Greensboro, Cable News Network, and the media centers of the Greensboro Public Schools. It provides daily student-oriented, commercial-free television news, complete with a study guide, which teachers can use at any time through the school media centers.

The project originated with the Television Department at Weaver Education Center, an extension of Greensboro's high schools. Television programming classes have been offered since the school opened in 1978. High school students from the four high schools may enroll in classes that are based on a three-year sequence planned to develop extensive skills in television production. The curriculum includes a combination of theory and hands-on experience. Students create news, educational, sports, and documentary programs. Each student is fully trained to operate every piece of equipment and perform in front of or behind the camera in any assigned crew position. The classroom is a fully equipped studio utilizing four color cameras and state of the art graphics and special effects.

The partnership between Cablevision and Weaver Center was initiated in 1984. It was then that the school began developing and originating programming which Cablevision carried on its community programming channel for the school system and the general public. The school uses WEC-TV as unofficial call letters and has

access to the cable channel for five and one-half hours daily. In 1988 the school system invested \$35,000 in new equipment, including a \$6,000 message generator and a video control unit that can operate four video tape players, run a television announcement bulletin board, and transmit programs to Cablevision. Cablevision provided the \$10,000 that paid for installing Cablevision in all the Greensboro Public Schools not already on cable.

In the summer of 1989, Cablevision of Greensboro proposed that the schools use Turner Broadcasting's innovative newscast, *CNN Newsroom*. This fifteen-minute weekday program on CNN is designed specifically for young adults by Turner Educational Services and educators. In describing this new service, Bill Butts of American Television and Communications Corporation's Greensboro office explained that *CNN Newsroom* represents the company's effort to develop an awareness of world news, admitting that encouraging young people to watch the news everyday is good for CNN, as well as other television news networks. He also emphasized that keeping students aware and interested in the arts, economics, the sciences, and current events is an important part of education.

Educators may record and exhibit *CNN Newsroom* in classrooms at no charge and without the usual copyright restrictions that apply to off-air recording. By completing a simple registration card,<sup>1</sup> schools are granted a specific license to use and retain the program for purposes of exhibition and research by students and teachers through the school library or archives.

Each program begins with a review of

the day's top news stories, including at least one major story in depth. A second segment deals with a different discipline each day. For example, Monday focuses on global issues and the trends and developments anticipated in the week ahead. Tuesday explores selected international events. Wednesday features reports from the CNN Business Unit. On Thursday, the featured report comes from CNN'S Science and Technology Unit or the Nutrition and Medical Unit. The *EDITOR'S DESK* on Friday provides a focus on the week's biggest story.

The classroom guide that accompanies *CNN Newsroom* is the element that really sets it apart from other newscasts. Written by professional educators in consultation with CNN, it provides teachers with a run-down and summary of the program, supported by questions and concepts for discussion. A suggested reading list, background information, classroom and homework activities, and suggestions for incorporating the news program into the subjects taught in middle and secondary schools are also supplied. This valuable guide is available from three sources: X\*PRESS X\*Change, a cable-delivered information service; the GTE National Education Network, an online electronic mail service; and the Fred Mail Network School Computer Bulletin Board Systems, a free BBS network available in many North Carolina counties. The fees for these services are the only ones required for *CNN Newsroom*, and they are modest—less than two hundred dollars.

The offer of an innovative presentation of television news for students was exciting, but a significant problem emerged in planning to use *CNN Newsroom* with the Greensboro schools. Many of them lacked the computer with a modem necessary for receiving the valuable printed study guide; they also lacked the funds for purchasing this equipment and would have difficulty budgeting for the user fees required for receiving the guide in each school. Although the media center at Weaver does have a computer with a modem and is able to receive the guide by electronic mail, there was no timely way to share the printed guide with other schools before the daily airing of the program.

Because the media centers in all of the schools are equipped to receive and record via cablecast, this communication link provided a solution to the problem. It was decided to create a video edition of the study guide, with student reporters giving the vocabulary and sources and explaining the study questions. The idea was to combine this addition with a tape of the

corresponding newscast, and cablecast the expanded version of *CNN Newsroom* to the schools.

Before proceeding with this idea, Weaver checked with CNN for permission to adapt and rebroadcast their program. They responded favorably to the idea and noted that Weaver was the first school in the nation to plan this unique approach.

The television students, under the direction of their teacher, the television coordinator, and an intern from the Broadcast/Cinema Department at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro, produce opening and closing cut-ins daily for each newscast. They add these to the *CNN Newsroom* program recorded off the air at 3:45 a.m. each weekday at Weaver.

The intern begins work in the media center before 7:30 each morning. She first retrieves the guide by electronic mail and studies it to see what elements should be used for the visual guide. Often she needs to check pronunciation of vocabulary words in a dictionary. She produces a script that turns the discussion topics, suggested activities, reading lists, story introductions, and recaps into a visual version of the study guide. After making script copies for the students, she leaves the media center for the television studio, where she supervises students in the advanced television class in producing the day's program.

The finished program is taped and fed directly to Cablevision and aired at 8:30 a.m. and again at 9:00 a.m. It is aired twice to facilitate convenient recording by the media centers in the schools.

In addition to recording Weaver's enhanced version of *CNN Newsroom* each day, media coordinators in the schools contribute to effective utilization of the newscast. They serve as the information link between Weaver and the teachers in the system, informing them about the program in general, providing scheduling information, and assisting teachers with utilization of this resource in much the same way that they do with other information resources.

Since media coordinators are knowledgeable about the entire curriculum of the school, they alert teachers when topics of interest about their subject appear on *CNN Newsroom*. For instance, teachers at Allen Middle School in Greensboro thought they had a prob-

lem when they were planning a social studies unit on the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe in the fall of 1989. Because things were changing rapidly in that part of the world, their 1988 textbook adoption was already out-of-date. Sylvia Meisner, the school's media coordinator, assured them that they did not have an information problem; they could use the newscasts. The day the Berlin Wall came down, Greensboro students saw it immediately.

An obvious benefit of the *CNN Newsroom* program is the permission to keep and use the tapes of the programs. A video library of programs about current world events, new advances in science, future trends, and information from the business world is a boon to any school media center, especially when it is free. A common request from students is for illustrations, such as photos, charts, and maps to use with projects. Now they can have video. A student in Weaver's marine science class came to the media center specifically looking for video footage to illustrate a report on oil spills. We were pleased that we could fill her request.

Using this resource for library research is not easy without indexing, but a date for an event is a good clue. (An indexing project is under consideration.) Also, space to store many video tapes is a problem for some school libraries, but they can get the programs from Weaver if they do not have them. The Weaver Television Department stores tapes of all the programs and also notebooks containing the printed study guide information. Weaver now has more than three hundred individual programs on file.

The pilot program during the month of October 1989 was considered a great

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success by all involved. The program was shown in 275 class periods for a total of 9,057 viewings. In addition, it could be seen by viewers in the 45,000 homes equipped with cable. Informal conversations with students revealed that they liked

the fast-paced newscasts that were on their level; they said they could relate to them much better than regular newscasts. They also liked seeing their peers work as news anchors. Parents responded favorably, also. One mother wrote, "I've had five students go through the public schools, and this is the first time one of my children has come home and talked to me about the news!"

In December 1989, Weaver issued a press release to describe the success of the pilot program to the community and to announce that the daily broadcasts of Weaver's version of *CNN Newsroom* would be ongoing. Superintendent John A. Eberhart's enthusiasm for the project was obvious. "What pleases me most is that the city schools are on the cutting edge of this really significant effort that uses technology to enhance and expand the learning process."

The first year of any experiment is usually the most difficult, but as might be expected, the daily retrieving of the guide, turning it into video, and rebroadcasting it to the schools became routine. In an effort to continue meeting the needs of the schools, our program looked for new approaches the second year. Several schools mentioned a desire for current state and local news information. We then decided to add a state and local segment to our program.

The cooperation of Weaver's English and Drama Departments and the local newspaper, *The Greensboro News and Record*, made this addition possible. The newspaper agreed to provide subscriptions and allow us to use their coverage of the news. Each morning a member of the English Department assists students from a new class, Media Performance, in transforming print journalism into television journalism. By shortening and transforming selected stories, state and local news is added to the *CNN Newsroom* program. This collaboration not only provides the local news portion of the program, but it also provides additional performance opportunities for students in this new class.

Schools are free to use *Newsroom* as a flexible teaching tool. Innovative use of the program is encouraged by CNN. In fact, they provide a free video that offers a variety of effective strategies for incorporating the program into the classroom.

In Greensboro, some classes use the program on a daily basis, some weekly, and others as the news fits into their curriculum. For example, a music teacher, though not a regular participant in the program, planned a lesson using a story

about hearing loss due to loud music for all of her students.

At Jackson Middle School, a creative approach has been under way for more than a year. Students in a social studies class watch *CNN Newsroom*, compare it to that day's newspaper, and take the local TV station's weekly news quiz. This procedure enables the students to explore the many ways in which news is covered. Also at Jackson, the media center puts the information from the visual guide back into a written format as an aid for teachers. At Kiser Middle School, the media center provides pertinent clipped and laminated newspaper articles to accompany the video and equipment when it is sent to the class. Bluford School, a magnet specializing in communications, is the first elementary school to incorporate use with fifth graders. An outstanding aspect of this project

is the variety of approaches and uses of television news as a valuable source of information.

Television, especially television news, is fast becoming a remarkable addition to the growing list of tools made available to educators through the resources of their libraries. This "new-old" technology, with its ability to deliver current information instantaneously to the classroom, is helping young adults learn to live in a society thrust from the industrial age into the information age.

#### References

<sup>1</sup>*CNN Newsroom*, c/o Media Management Services, Inc., 10 North Main Street, Yardley, PA 19067-9986. Phone 1-800-344-6219.

## NOMINEES NEEDED FOR TECHNICAL SERVICES AWARDS

The Executive Committee of the Resources and Technical Services Section is seeking the names of promising and practicing librarians for its Student and Significant Contribution awards. The two winners will receive plaques and \$250 cash awards during the RTSS business meeting at the NCLA Biennial Conference.

The **STUDENT AWARD** is open to students actively enrolled in library education in North Carolina as of July 1, 1991. Recent graduates who are North Carolina librarians are also eligible. Nominees must show a potential for contributing to technical services and must intend to pursue a technical services career. Self-nomination is permissible.

The **SIGNIFICANT CONTRIBUTION AWARD** is open to North Carolina librarians who have made an important contribution in technical services, either to their institutions or to the profession in general. At least part of the nominees' current work must involve an aspect of technical service. Applicants must be nominated by a current member of NCLA.

The nomination deadline for both awards is **August 31, 1991**.

To submit nominations for either award, please contact:

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