

Lessons from Lessons: Making Climate Impact Videos with 9th Grade World Geography Students

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Short videos are an increasingly popular venue for climate change communication and an accessible option for K–12 student projects. Video projects can focus student learning while developing authentic peer voices for climate change communication with other young, tech-savvy audiences. The purpose of this presentation is to review a recent student video project effort, including successes, caveats, and recommendations for future efforts.

During the winter and spring of 2016, a teacher at Westwood High School in Richland Two school district (South Carolina [SC]) engaged 9th grade honors world geography students in a 9-week project to produce short videos on climate change impacts to SC. The project engaged partners including professors and students from the University of South Carolina as well as staff from Congaree National Park. Students were divided into groups and assigned a mentor. Mentors and students met in class every Monday for eight weeks, though students also worked additional days in and out of class. The school's recording studio, computer lab, and media staff were available to help support technical aspects of the project.

Project results were mixed. In terms of successes, the physical geography standards were ideally suited to studying climate change, while the wider course context provided rich opportunities for exploring human connections. Interview subjects reported that the students were well-prepared and asked excellent questions. The students all completed the project and produced a range of videos on topics from shoreline change to the October 2015 floods to farming to wildlife (from sea turtles to deer). In terms of caveats, an initial public “kick-off” event, intended to engage the community on the topic of climate change, was poorly attended. The project time demands were intense for both students and mentors. The overlapping requirements for students to master climate change science, research local impacts, arrange interviews, and learn video editing software proved challenging. Climate change literacy gains and perceptions were not systematically evaluated, but the videos displayed some gaps. For example, one group attributed shoreline change to melting glaciers but did not make the connection to carbon emissions; this was not an intentional framing choice. Other videos focused more broadly on food sustainability and global (non-SC) climate issues. Students required significant coaching on professional correspondence. Video editing skills varied greatly. Image quality and sound editing issues were common. Usage rights were not systematically addressed. The project timeline also did not allow for extensive storyboarding and revision of videos.

Suggestions for future efforts include (1) a longer time frame (perhaps a half-year) to spread out the time demands for mentors, student research, professional correspondence, expert interviews, video editing, and revision (including peer feedback); (2) improved coordination of an initial public “kick-off” event to engage the community and generate discussion; (3) a more structured assignment outline with milestones, rubrics, guidelines for professional correspondence, and guidelines for video production; (4) firmer mentor guidance to engage the students' creativity and autonomy while focusing on complete research questions and storyboarding; (5) firmer mentor guidance in providing resources, contacting local experts, and pre-viewing videos.