
Media Production at Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School

—Kevin Matsunaga

I got my start in video production as a high school senior in 1987. My high school social studies teacher had us create some sort of project based on the culture of a nationality of our choice. The group that I was in procrastinated and so at the last minute, we decided to shoot a video spoofing the popular television show at the time, “Magnum P.I.” We called our movie, “Manong P.I.,” and based our project on the Filipino culture in Hawaii. At that time, the VHS format was fairly new and one of the guys in the group borrowed a camera from his dad. We all had bit parts in it and I edited the final footage with two VCRs doing linear editing in which one VCR played the original footage and the second VCR recorded selections. The video quality was poor and there were times that the video clips didn’t always blend in with each other but we made it humorous and ended up getting a B for our efforts.

Now, fast-forward 11 years to 1998, when I was the technology coordinator at Lehua Elementary School in Pearl City, Hawaii. At that time, the all-in-one G3 from Apple Computer had just come out preloaded with a program called Avid Cinema. With an AV in/out card and this program, you could now do nonlinear video editing on your computer. This marriage of Apple’s new G3 computer with Avid Cinema marked the rebirth of my interest in video production. The program was easy to use and already came with the computer so all I needed was a camera to begin the very first edition of the “Lehua Leopard News.”

The “Lehua Leopard News” was a show that we aired once a month, if we were lucky. To produce the show I recruited some fifth- and sixth-graders who were motivated and willing to come during their own free time to produce their videos. I worked with them before and after school and during recess to teach them basic camera and interviewing techniques. At the time all I knew about video production came from watching movies and the local news. There were no books and no workshops to attend, so we had to make things up as we went along. We filmed school events and together with the short videos the kids created, we produced our show. We aired it at specific times over our closed-circuit television system, and it became very popular. Students at every grade level enjoyed seeing themselves on the air; so it wasn’t difficult to keep their attention. I did that for two

years before I changed positions and became the technology coordinator at a brand new middle school on Kauai—Chiefess Kamakahelei Middle School (CKMS).

When I interviewed at CKMS, the principal, Maggie Cox, informed me that in addition to being the technology coordinator, she also wanted me to create a program that would run the daily morning announcements shown live via the school’s closed circuit television system. I told her about our school’s show and said that I could do what she wanted with no sweat. Well, I was confident of my abilities but I had never done a live show before so I had to do some research. I contacted Pat Lee, a rep from the Audio Visual Company in Aiea, and we met and mapped out the basics of a system that I would need for a live show. I also visited some schools on Oahu to see what I could learn from their programs.

The support that I received from Ms. Cox was phenomenal. When I approached her about what my budget would be to purchase all of the equipment we would need, she said that I had no limit. She wanted me to purchase whatever I needed, within reasonable cost. Being that we were a new school, we received quite a bit of startup money from the state and she felt that while we had the funds it made sense to purchase quality equipment that would last (we are still, five years later, using the cameras that we purchased then.) I realized that I was in my dream job!

We opened the school in August 2000 and the morning show has been making progress ever since. I’ve kept the enrollment in my class to about 16 students a year because I have such a small room to work in. We also changed the class from a regular elective to an honors course. To sign up for this class, students now have to be nominated, fill out an application, get a teacher’s recommendation, and meet with me for an interview. By making the students go through this process, we get students who are motivated, committed, and have a sincere interest in video production.

The students in my class have two basic responsibilities. The first is to produce the live daily morning announcement show. With 16 students, I’ve created two teams of 8, each of whom run the show every other day. Each team has a director, a technical director, a title maker, a person in charge of sound and music, a person to run the Elmo or visual presenter, a floor manager, and two camera people. The

students rotate amongst the different jobs every two weeks so that they become comfortable in each position. By the time they make a full rotation they can run the show themselves without any assistance from me.

The second task of the class is to produce videos. For this we meet every other day for 90 minutes. Throughout the year we create a variety of video projects such as public service announcements (PSAs), news shorts, feature stories, and mini documentaries that we combine to produce CKTV. CKTV is a quarterly show aired on our local cable access channel on Kauai. It ranges in length from 20 to 45 minutes depending on the stories we air for each show. Each show is hosted by two students who are also responsible for writing the script and editing the entire package. We make every effort to include a video from each student so it's also a way for the parents to see what we've been doing over the quarter.

Teaching a class like this is quite different from teaching a traditional class. For one thing, it's project based. The students work together to complete their projects and videos. They start with an idea and follow it through to the final product, and then they start all over again. I compare it to doing a science project. Each project involves many steps to reach the final outcome. Secondly, the students take charge of their own learning. I don't stand in front of the class and say, "This is what we're doing today." I stand off to the side, offer my advice, ask questions, provide feedback, conduct mini-lessons on editing or camera techniques, and even act in their videos if asked. In the beginning of the year, we do have some formal training in the basic operation of the camera and editing software (Apple's Final Cut Pro). However I also teach mini-lessons on specific things, like interviewing techniques, whenever they come up in a project. I also give returning students the opportunity to take on the role of teacher in training new students. The students catch on really quickly and usually end up teaching me a few things by the end of the year.

A new project in my class involves eight steps. I've created a project checklist to help the students (and myself!) keep track of their progress. We start the quarter off by brainstorming. We throw out as many topics or ideas as possible. I usually choose the type of video they will work on (PSA, news, feature, sports, documentary, etc.) but the students determine the topic. In the first half of the year, they work with a partner, and, if possible, I pair returning students with new students so that the returnees act as mentors. During the second half of the year, after they have learned

the ropes, they are free to work individually.

After each group has chosen a topic, the students move on to the second step, which is to conduct their background research. They are asked to find out the 5 W's and the H (who, what, where, when, why, & how). They need to become experts on their topic and to accomplish this level of expertise they look for information in the library or on the Internet, conduct phone or on-camera interviews, and gather information from other sources. Once they can answer the 5 W's and the H, they move on to the third step, writing the script.

After I have approved their script, they move on to the fourth step—creating the storyboards from the first title to the ending credits, the storyboards will plot out what their video will eventually look like. We use a four-panel storyboard, which requires the students to think about all of the different camera shots they are going to need. I don't require the storyboards to be extremely detailed but I do need to be able to visualize what they plan to do by looking at their scenes. This is a very important step in the process, and I require them to get final approval from me before moving on to filming (I have found that if they don't have their storyboards done, they make shots up as they go along and usually end up taking much longer to produce their video than they would if they had planned out the shots ahead of time.) Of course I do allow for changes to be made to the storyboards so that if they go out and film and experiment with a different idea or angle that really works, they have the chance to add it to their final product.

Planning and scheduling the filming of their scenes is the fifth step, which actually involves many smaller steps to accomplish. They need to meet with their partner and other actors to plan the shots, determine the location, gather their props, schedule their date(s) to film, and finally gather and prep the equipment that they need. Once that's done, they move on to the actual filming of the scenes.

Step seven involves postproduction. Once the students have filmed their scenes, it's time to import them onto the computer and begin the editing process. Postproduction also involves many smaller steps. They import their video to the computer, arrange the shots in the timeline to match their storyboard, add titles, voiceovers or background music, re-film scenes if necessary, and review video selections for any mistakes.

The final step involves submitting their project for grading by turning in all paperwork (e.g. the WWWWWH

research assignment, script, and storyboards) and letting me know which computer their project is on and what it is named.

Using a rubric created with the students input, I judge each video and give it an appropriate grade. I then meet with each group to watch their video again and ask them what they thought of their project. What did they like or not like about it? I add my thoughts and, if necessary, ask the group to go back and make improvements. We also discuss areas to work on for the next project which is probably already under way, and then we go through the process all over again.

In the four years since I began teaching this class, we've been fortunate to be recognized for some of our video projects. In each of the first two years, we were able to place first in the middle school category in the Hawai'i Student Film Festival. In 2003 one of our projects on what to do in a lockdown emergency procedure won first place in the "Teach Me Something" category of the middle school division of the Hawai'i Department of Education's First Annual Island-Movie contest. One of our public service announcements on reading was a finalist in the "Reel Teens" student film

festival in New York in 2003. In 2004, the same public service announcement on reading placed fourth in the high school division in the Student Television Network's Fall Nationals contest, and won first place in the public service announcement category in the middle school division for 'Olelo Community Television's *Youth Xchange* student video contest. We also placed first again in the "Teach Me Something" category in the second Annual HIDEOE's IslandMovie contest and first in the "Environmental/Social Concerns" category.

Media programs are gaining in popularity and have popped up in just about every state and at all grades levels. If you're just starting out, look for established programs for some assistance. I didn't know anything about creating a media program when I started and was very fortunate to hook up with Candy Suiso and John Allen III from Waianae High School's Searider Productions. They went out of their way to share what they had learned through the years and to help me help my students. I don't think we'd be nearly as successful as we've been without their assistance. Their students are setting the standard that we strive for everyday.
