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What Is Multimedia?

There are probably as many definitions of multimedia as there are technology-using educators, but the definition that fits the examples in this book, also fits practical uses in real classrooms. Multimedia literally means "many, or more than one, media." Many people think of videodiscs and computers as multimedia, but a broader definition based on example would serve us better. Most of the projects in this book have been done using *HyperStudio*. However, other programs such as *Link Way*, *Digital Chisel*, *HyperCard*, *Multimedia Workshop*, etc., can be substituted in place of *HyperStudio*. It all depends on what software you or your school has available.

Below are several examples of multimedia programs.

A *Kid Pix 2* drawing would not be multimedia in and of itself; but, if a student brings in an image from a photo CD or creates a *QuickTime* movie in *Kid Pix Studio* and puts the photo and/or movie into the picture or a slide show, that would qualify it as multimedia. Using one or more media in the creation of the final product helps to broaden the definition.

What about *HyperStudio* stacks? Again, let us look at what goes into the creation of the stacks. The simplest stacks containing just clip art and text would not generally be considered a multimedia project, since today's word processing programs can accomplish the same thing. However, once you add buttons to link a stack to videodiscs, sound, animation, photos, and/or *QuickTime* movies, you can very easily call that a multimedia project.

The same criteria can be applied to "slide shows" which are now incorporated in programs such as *ClarisWorks* and *Microsoft Works* or to programs like *Persuasion* and *Power Point*. Many teachers receive the *ClarisWorks* or *Microsoft Works* when they get their computers, so without further expense, a teacher can have his or her students creating slide shows containing *QuickTime* movies, photos from CD-ROM or photo CD technology, sound, and more.

You will find included in the Student Projects section of this book simple multimedia ideas using videodiscs. Students create reports/oral presentations on word processors, then take bar codes they have created with a bar code program (e.g., *Bar 'n' Coder*) and copy and paste those bar codes into their reports in the appropriate places to add visuals to their reports. For example, in a report on whales, a student might take a photo of a whale from a CD-ROM encyclopedia and place the photo into his/her report. Then, in his/her written report where he/she explains the whale breaching, he/she pastes a bar code for a videodisc movie, which shows a movie of a whale breaching. The bar codes do not even have to be created by the student. It is easy enough to copy bar codes from those which are included with many videodiscs now, cut the appropriate ones out, and literally paste them into the report. Imagine students going to a station, reading the report about whales created by a classmate, and using a bar code reader to see the illustrations for the report from the videodisc displayed on the TV screen. Using the above examples as a basis, let us assemble a definition or two of multimedia.

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Why Use Multimedia?

1. Appeal to different learning styles
2. Provide variety of means of expression for students
3. Give students more real-world presentation experience
4. Tap into student's creativity

We know that not all students are auditory learners. We also know that not all students learn best from printed materials alone. Multimedia experiences appeal to all the senses and appeal to learners the way they learn best: with colour, pictures, text, sound, movies, animation, illustration, and, perhaps above all, the ability to learn in their own fashion. Students can explore in a non-linear manner and easily circle back to pick up information they missed the first time through. One may argue that they could do that with books as well, but well-designed multimedia makes it more convenient for the learner—thus more likely that this review of information will take place.

Word processing has an edge for student writers when it comes to editing and layout over pen and paper. Research shows that students write more and edit more when writing with a computer. Multimedia takes this edge one degree further. Students can now express themselves more like a professional, by adding characteristics to their presentations which make them more enlightening and informative. Students can add animation, sound, graphics, videos gleaned from a variety of sources, including the Internet, to express themselves better. A written report about bats may contain one picture and lots of facts, but a multimedia report about bats may contain movies of bats flying, feeding their young, buttons that play the sounds bats make, animations of bat radar, student narration, as well as text. Which report sounds more interesting to you? With today's new multimedia computers, the latter report takes little more time to complete than the written report. The most important part, however, is the process each student goes through in deciding the elements of his/her stack, and how to best represent the information to the audience. Students who have grown up with television and CD-ROMs have an uncanny sense of these elements and do very creditable jobs. We all know some students who would rather draw than write if given a choice and others who would do just the opposite. Some would rather discuss and some would prefer to dramatise. Multimedia is simply another means of expression for students that excludes none of these others, but rather supplements them. It also gives students yet another choice. Everyone who works with students from years five to eight knows that they are in an age group where choice in the mode of presentation allowed by the teacher can mean the difference between radiant success and marginal completion.

If students who go on a field trip are given camcorders or cameras to "capture the moment," because they know they will put those images or movies into a multimedia report which portrays their impressions of the items which most intrigued them, they will be actively seeking out information on that field trip. Students can be given a choice between doing videos with narration, multimedia reports, or photographic essays, perhaps to allow them choice in their means of expression to best get their points across to their audience.