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Videostories: Using technology to give voice to adolescents with disabilities

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Thinkfinity Final Report

Title of the Project: ***Videostories*: *Using technology to give voice to adolescents with disabilities***

Cornerstone #: **2 – Community Outreach and Empowerment**

Principal Investigator: **Leslie Soodak, Ph.D.**
School of Education

Date: **April 29, 2010**

A) Goals and Objectives of the Project

1. To demonstrate the benefits of *Videostories* to students and their families
    a. To secure equipment for producing high-quality videotapes of students with disabilities.
    b. To identify training needs and provide staff development.
    c. To create *Videostories* for individual students to view, edit, and possibly archive.
    d. To obtain baseline data on students' self esteem and advocacy (i.e., self determination).
    e. To conduct interviews with students to explore expectations and outcomes associated with video stories.
2. To demonstrate the efficacy of the narrative format in the preparation of current and future educators.
3. To disseminate findings regarding the use of oral histories to benefit individuals with disabilities and in the preparation of professional educators.

B) Progress made towards original goals

There has been progress toward each of the goals. The benefits of *Videostories* to students and families have been revealed, with evidence of both expected (e.g., individual empowerment and satisfaction) and unexpected outcomes (e.g., enhanced use of narratives and technology in teaching and learning). Dissemination of the findings has begun within the university and there are plans to present the findings at professional conferences in the fall of 2010.

C) Activities completed

1. To demonstrate the benefits of Videostories to students and their families

a. Equipment to produce high-quality videotapes was secured
b. Training needs were identified and staff development was provided. Faculty members from Columbia University's Departments of Oral History and Narrative Medicine were enlisted to provide training. Multiple opportunities for staff development have taken place over the past year.
c. Individual students have recorded, viewed and edited their "stories" in multiple formats. Some students have opted to use audiotape while other s were videotaped. Similarly, a

few family members (i.e., mothers) recorded their stories on audio or video tape. The choice of format proved to be an important learning outcome to the project.

d. Formal and informal measures of student responses to *Videostories* were obtained.
e. Interviews were conducted with a sample of students and family members after they had recorded their stories.

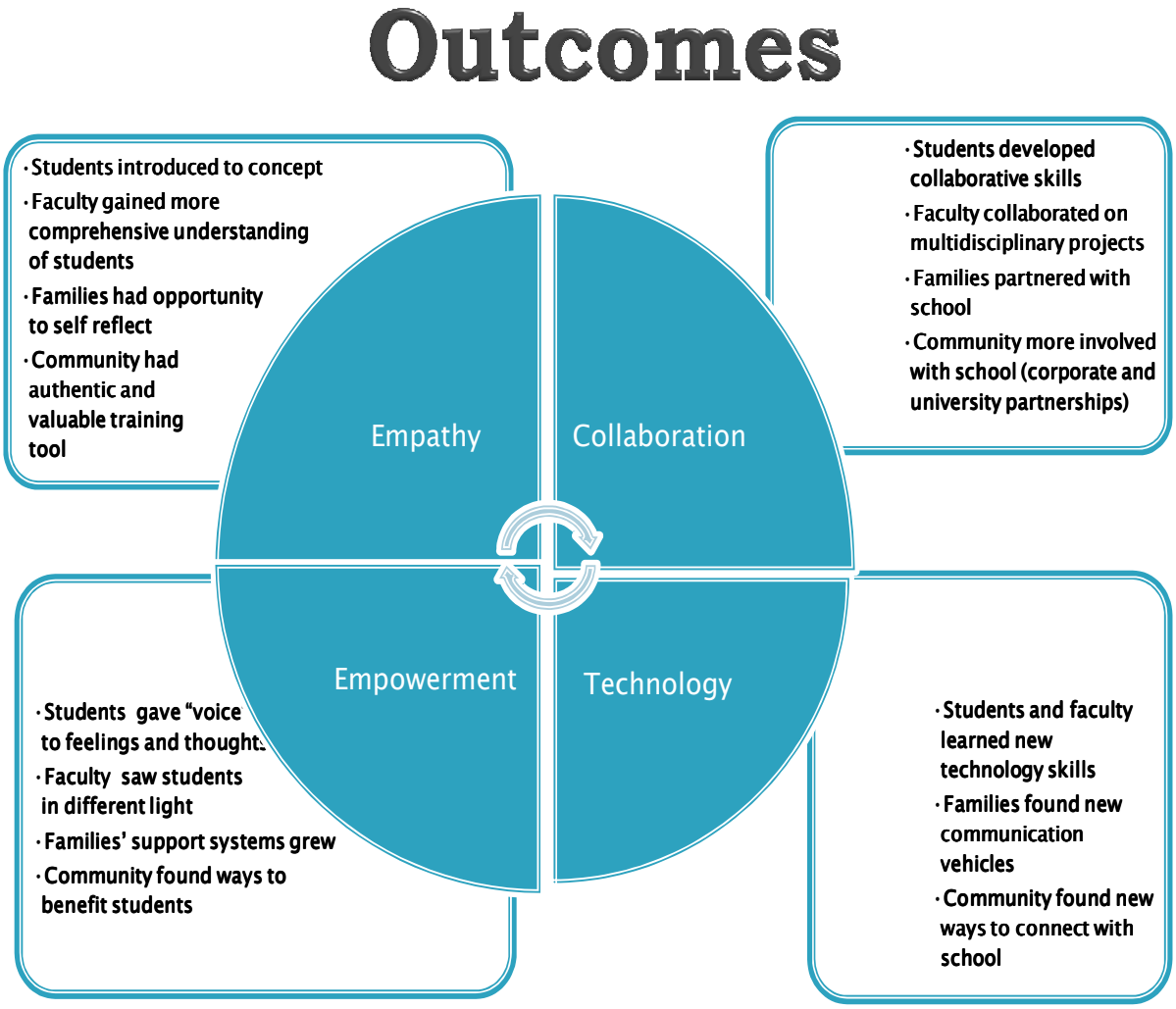
2. *To demonstrate the efficacy of the narrative format in the preparation of current and future educators*
   a. A pilot study of the effects of narrative on teacher preparation has been conducted. This part of the project was somewhat revised as the scope of the *Videostories* project at Blythedale expanded into a curricular initiative (see below).
   b. Faculty members at Pace are planning to incorporate and/or study the use of oral narratives in teacher preparation. Toward this end, one faculty member participated in training through Columbia University's Oral Narrative program in March 2010.

3. To disseminate findings regarding the use of oral histories to benefit individuals with disabilities and in the preparation of professional educators.
   a. A presentation of the *Videostories* project to faculty at Pace university was made early in the spring semester.
   b. A proposal to present "*Videostories*: *The Power of Technology in Giving Voice*" at the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) conference in October 2010 was submitted.

D) Activities that have not been completed

The formal study of demonstrating the efficacy of the narrative format on the preparation of teachers was not conducted. Although a pilot study did indicate that teachers held higher expectations when information about students included their video- or audio-taped personal stories, the formal study was postponed due the time we needed to spend preparing students and faculty to interview and record their stories and the lack of permission to use videotapes for this purpose.

E) Outcomes



F) Project impact on students

This project has impacted between 75-100 students at Blythedale School.

G) Impacted of project on other faculty members

This project has impacted the Pleasantville SOE faculty and staff (n=20)through the presentation that was given. In addition one faculty member has gone for training in Narrative Medicine since the presentation and an informal research group has been formed to explore further uses of *Videostories* in teacher preparation.

H) Unintended outcomes

Some of the "unintended" leanings were as follows:

a. Students need preparation
b. Interviewers need training
c. Audio-taping is perceived as less formal
d. Video may be intimidating; time and experience needed
e. Need to focus on the story not the media
f. Students need practice with technology
g. The project drives staff development
h. Be careful about assumptions

I) Summary of outcomes

Yes and in many ways the outcomes of the project exceeded our expectations. What began as a vehicle for transition planning for students with disabilities and training for future educators has evolved into a catalyst for change in instruction and empowerment for families.

J) Project role in furthering Thinkfinity Cornerstone

The project further community outreach and empowerment through its impact on the students at Blythedale School, all of whom are students with disabilities are receiving intensive rehabilitation services. In addition, family members were given a "voice and faculty members were given a "tool" to enhance student empowerment and learning.

K) Future plans for sustaining the project

Videostories is an ongoing collaborative between Pace University and the Blythedale School; with regular meetings of faculty from both schools held throughout the school year. During the 2010-2011 school year we plan to expand record and archived additional *Videostories* with students, parents, and faculty; further develop interviewing skills; and more explicitly explore the use of narratives in teacher preparation.