My favorite part of summer break? The reprieve from sounding bells or laborious grading are certainly tempting choices. Honestly, though, it is the uninterrupted time I have to reflect on what flourished and what failed during the previous school year. Like so many others in our field, I love that summer affords me the opportunity to review my syllabus and investigate ways to improve my craft.

Two summers ago, as I started my annual revamping, I noticed a disconcerting pattern. In spite of multiple efforts to readjust my instructional approach to the research process, many of my students continued to submit final drafts littered with unreliable, poorly cited sources. If this cycle was going to stop, I had to face some humbling realities. First, I had to acknowledge that the choice of topics I offered may not have been engaging. As I grappled with how I could redesign this part of my curriculum, I simultaneously started Dreamland: The True Tale of America’s Opiate Epidemic by Sam Quinones, a book that had been on my summer reading list for months. Within the first few pages, I was struck by how many of my students were from the types of communities ravaged by the opioid addiction Quinones described. I felt hopeful that this text chronicling the epidemic’s origin and potency could provide an entry point for my student researchers that would allow them to confront an issue that was more meaningful than what I had assigned in the past.

Next, I had to own up to my tendency to perpetuate a disconnect between my instruction and my expectation. As an AP Language and Composition teacher, I constantly remind my students to thoughtfully consider their audience when they write. Too often, though, I assign essays that are written for an audience of one. What better way to emphasize the ways in which awareness of audience can shape an argument than to change the audience? I recognized that I should not be the only reader for their research regarding the opioid crisis. The topic felt urgent. This was research that needed to be public. This led me to question what type of product could replace the essay, enlarge the audience, and still reinforce rigorous inquiry.

My quest to refine instruction is certainly not atypical. For decades, researchers and teachers have focused on determining best practices for marrying content and pedagogy effectively (Shulman 9). Today’s teachers, though, would be remiss to disregard technology’s influence on learning. As I discussed my plans to revitalize my research approach with a colleague, he introduced me to a theory that helped me reconceptualize my lesson design. The Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) model asserts that “quality teaching requires developing a nuanced understanding of the complex relationships between technology, content, and pedagogy” (Mishra and Koehler 1029) and a careful consideration of the “complex interactions among these elements in specific contexts” (Koehler and Mishra 66). Students are reading, composing, and producing on platforms such as Twitter; avoiding interaction with such tools is to discredit a great...
deal of what constitutes literacy for today’s youth. Andrea Gumble conjectures that by not incorporating projects that make use of digital tools teachers may “limit students by refusing to acknowledge the strengths they possess” (436). TPACK (see Figure 1) invites educators to thoughtfully consider how and when technology can best extend both pedagogical practice and content understanding.

ADAPTING THE RESEARCH PRODUCT

For many years, I have had my students read a text, formulate a stance, and compose a written response that incorporates evidence to support their opinions. Although I still see immense value in such a task, the TPACK framework caused me to question whether an essay should be the singular research product deemed an acceptable measure of mastery. The framework solidified the idea that technology affords teachers opportunities to consider new strategies for conveying content knowledge, and it also provides students new ways to showcase their understanding of that content.

With this in mind, I chose to replace the research essay with a researched video production. As I sought examples from teachers who had attempted such a project with their students, I was reminded that video production reinforces critical literacy skills such as “planning, organizing, producing, polishing, and evaluating texts while employing reading, writing, speaking, and listening skills, group dynamics, aesthetic judgment, and media literacy” (Lund 79), and that through such an inquiry, students “gain confidence in using their voices to explore the relationship between information, knowledge, and power” (Hobbs et al. 232).

For most of my juniors, uploading and viewing videos is an everyday practice. As Diana Graber articulates, “young people don’t just use media, but help shape it” (84). On their social media accounts, teenagers edit videos by adding filters, overlaying text, and embedding music. In a way, they are all self-made video producers. Whether creating or critiquing, high schoolers are often well-versed when it comes to producing footage for others to view. By providing students “a clear and motivating purpose for their research and writing,” Jason Ranker argues that incorporating a video into the inquiry process can shape the way students read and evaluate information (79). Because the final product implies a larger audience, video production enables research to become a more public affair, and students potentially become more reflective as they collect support for their claims.

As I approached this unit through the lens of the TPACK framework, I found myself motivated, inspired, and recharged. I hoped that changing the means of the task would empower learners to invest in the research process with greater interest. My aim was to align the project more closely to their experiences, which can often feel disconnected from the world of the classroom. This is perhaps one of the greatest joys of an English teacher and perhaps the reason so many of us are passionate about our content area. Studying literature and language affords both teachers and students the unique opportunity to bridge this divide.

Dreamland artfully exposes the roots of America’s current heroin epidemic by presenting information
from various vantage points such as grieving parents, disillusioned medical professionals, overwhelmed law enforcement officers, and recovering addicts. As our school is situated in a suburban area, our students are not immune to the effects of the growing drug problems facing our nation. Furthermore, knowing that “adolescence is a critical at-risk period for substance use” and that “prevention must be a central component of a long-term solution” made this text a timely choice (Levy et al. 154). If students could see their voice as having greater significance and their product as having a larger audience, I felt their research could be more productive and purposeful.

Ultimately, I challenged students to create a ninety-second public service announcement (PSA) to educate their peers about the dangers of opioid abuse. Since the students were required to take a technology course in a prior grade that covered many of the basic skills necessary for editing and finalizing films, I asked for volunteers who felt especially versed in video production, and these volunteers became the group leaders. The TPACK framework presents a “learning-technology-by-design” approach where “emphasis is placed on learning by doing” and proposes that such an approach “affords students the opportunity to transcend the passive learner role and to take control of their learning” (Mishra and Koehler 1035). Research indicates that in addition to enhancing research skills, video creation can encourage critical thinking and collaboration (Colwell and Hutchison 60; Spires et al. 484), and I expected that giving my students more autonomy over their production would strengthen these skills.

MODELING THE RESEARCH PROCESS

Before handing the reins to the students, I first led the class through an interactive research lesson that helped them identify mistakes that inexperienced researchers tend to make in their quest for information. I strive to build rapport throughout the year by reiterating the value and power of making mistakes. I model this for my students by talking through my own mishaps. For example, when reviewing multiple-choice tests, I disclose my wrong answers to explain where my logic faltered. In doing so, I believe my students feel more comfortable taking risks. Empirical studies recounting students’ often misguided or inappropriate browsing strategies are well-documented (Beckman et al. 359; Bilal 130; Ellis et al. 514), so I asked for three student volunteers to model how they would begin researching information on a topic. More than a dozen hands shot up. As the students demonstrated their research process for the class, I asked questions about why they chose a particular link or why they avoided another article. Their classmates contributed direction when the volunteers hit a dead-end. For many of my students, simply articulating the steps helped them recognize that their research methods were at times superficial or even careless.

Surprisingly, even as eleventh graders, many of my students did not know about search engines that weren’t associated with Google. Like most school libraries, ours offers digital access to scholarly journals and databases, but many of my students were unaware of these gems. I introduced students to the Gale Student Resource Center, Britannica School Encyclopedia, and JSTOR. By examining the ways the databases display search results (often by genre), I was able to ask students which types of evidence could enhance their PSA. This is where I most clearly saw the change in product affecting a change in their process. Students commented that they had never considered referencing a podcast or a recorded interview in a research paper. Contemplating the possibility of embedding audio files into their videos helped them see such a source as more valuable. They talked about newscasts and documentaries as if they were discovering them for the first time. Our discourse surrounding source relevance broadened in ways that it had not with previous assignments.

To further exemplify the quality and organization of these research databases, I had the students
More important than cautionary tales are carefully planned instructional activities that emphasize “the value of intellectual property” (Pearson 58).

After the homework assignment on paraphrasing and quoting, the next class period began with a discussion of the sources students had collected individually. Each group met, shared their evidence, and selected what they felt was the group’s strongest source. We then analyzed each example, and I asked classmates to offer feedback about whether the proposed quotations would result in plagiarized material. After some initial guidance, students easily pointed out concerns regarding contextualization and citation errors. Since we had previously reviewed the Modern Language Association (MLA) guidelines, the students had an opportunity to apply their knowledge in a new context. I stressed during this stage that the video would require in-text citations and a works cited page, just as a traditional essay would. When a few students questioned how they would accomplish this, I asked for ideas from the class. The students suggested overlaying text to embed citations throughout the PSA and having the works cited page scroll slowly at the conclusion of the video. This discussion allowed us to address the power of ethical appeals. I reminded students that including in-text citations would not only prevent them from plagiarizing their sources; more importantly, it would also increase their video’s credibility.

The groups had chunks of uninterrupted class time over two weeks to work on their PSA. They were required to submit their works cited page a week before their videos were due. Grading the list of sources in advance allowed the groups to correct mistakes in the final editing stage and eliminated any incidences of plagiarism. This step in the process changed the conversation surrounding plagiarism from a “gotcha!” approach to a “you got it” approach. The final step in this lesson involved discussing with students the ways they generate a digital trail as they research. I asked for examples of how students keep account of their digital breadcrumbs, and students shared various methods: hyperlinks on a Google Doc and bookmarks under a new file, for example. I asked students to explain why their methods were useful, and as they defended their processes, I was excited to hear them express interest in trying a new approach based on their peers’ recommendations.

I provided students a rubric that detailed the project expectations, and I highlighted the requirement that each group incorporate at least five relevant and reliable sources to support their PSA’s message (see Figure 2). For homework, students located one strong source and then extracted a meaningful portion of the text to paraphrase or quote, which they were required to justify during the next class meeting. Modeling the research process also created space for honest conversation about the pitfalls of plagiarism.

## ADDRESSING PLAGIARISM

It’s possible that many students copy and paste because they do not possess adequate research skills or sufficient knowledge regarding what constitutes plagiarism. In her article addressing how teachers can discourage plagiarism, Nancy Guillot Pearson proposes that students “need practice in paraphrasing, quoting, and citing sources while still in high school” mainly because they do not fully understand the concept (54). Various studies have cited the benefits of explicit instruction regarding plagiarism (Barry 381; Curtis et al. 286; Klausman 209).
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Element of PSA</th>
<th>Novice (1–5 points)</th>
<th>Apprentice (6–10 points)</th>
<th>Proficient (11–15 points)</th>
<th>Distinguished (16–20 points)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Target Audience and Rhetorical Appeals</strong></td>
<td>The PSA was not designed with a specific audience in mind. The PSA is not persuasive enough to motivate people to adopt behaviors that will mitigate opioid use. It fails to effectively incorporate rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos, and pathos).</td>
<td>The PSA was designed with a specific audience in mind, and some but not all elements target that population. The PSA is somewhat persuasive, but not enough to motivate people to adopt behaviors that will mitigate opioid use. It incorporates rhetorical appeals sparingly (ethos, logos, or pathos).</td>
<td>The PSA was designed with a specific audience in mind, and most elements target that population. The PSA is persuasive and may motivate people to adopt behaviors that will mitigate opioid use. It incorporates some rhetorical appeals (ethos, logos, and/or pathos).</td>
<td>The PSA was clearly designed with a specific audience in mind and all elements aid in convincing that target population. The PSA is persuasive enough to motivate people to adopt behaviors that might mitigate opioid use. It incorporates all rhetorical appeals effectively (ethos, logos, and pathos).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Content Accuracy</strong></td>
<td>The PSA communicates an incomplete understanding of the opioid epidemic in America. It fails to raise awareness about the causes and consequences of opioid use. The PSA fails to incorporate relevant and accurate research.</td>
<td>The PSA communicates understanding some aspects of the opioid epidemic in America. Some elements raise awareness about the causes and/or consequences of opioid use. The PSA incorporates accurate research inconsistently.</td>
<td>The PSA communicates an understanding of the opioid epidemic in America and raises awareness about the causes and consequences of opioid use. The PSA incorporates some relevant and accurate research.</td>
<td>The PSA communicates an accurate and in-depth understanding of the opioid epidemic in America and raises critical awareness about the causes and consequences of opioid use. The PSA incorporates relevant and accurate research that adds to the strength of message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cohesion of Message</strong></td>
<td>The sounds, images, and words fail to create a clear message. Various elements are disjointed and may even create confusion for the viewer.</td>
<td>The sounds, images, and words combine to create a somewhat disjointed message. A few elements are disjointed and may even create distraction for the viewer.</td>
<td>The sounds, images, and words combine to create an adequate message. Some elements work in concert to create a logical claim that viewers can follow.</td>
<td>The sounds, images, and words combine to create a unified, effective message. All elements work in concert to create a cohesive claim that viewers can understand.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Production Quality</strong></td>
<td>The final product is unacceptably brief, as it is less than 40 seconds in length. The PSA reflects little to no quality in its production; the camera work fails to include techniques such as framing, rule of thirds, focus, shot variety, or lighting. The PSA reflects careless editing that results in a disjointed narrative with frequent errors.</td>
<td>The final product is not within the required 60–90 second range, but it is no more than 20 seconds shorter or longer. The PSA reflects inadequate quality in its production; the camera work includes minimal techniques such as framing, rule of thirds, focus, shot variety, or appropriate lighting. The PSA reflects inadequate editing that results in a narrative undermined by distracting errors.</td>
<td>The final product is not within the required 60–90 second range, but it is no more than 10 seconds shorter or longer. The PSA reflects adequate quality in its production; the camera work includes some techniques such as framing, rule of thirds, focus, shot variety, or appropriate lighting. The PSA reflects adequate editing that results in a narrative with minimal errors.</td>
<td>The final product is within the required 60–90 second optimal range. The PSA reflects effective video production; the camera work includes a variety of techniques such as framing, rule of thirds, focus, shot variety, or appropriate lighting. The PSA reflects polished editing that results in a compelling and convincing narrative with no obvious errors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>MLA Citations</strong></td>
<td>The PSA fails to meet MLA standards. In-text citations from at least five sources are missing throughout the PSA. Resubmission will be necessary to correct plagiarism issues.</td>
<td>The PSA has some MLA errors. In-text citations are inadequately embedded from a few of the five required sources. Resubmission may be necessary to remedy plagiarism concerns.</td>
<td>The PSA meets MLA standards. Correct in-text citations from a minimum of five sources are adequately embedded. There is no cause for concern regarding plagiarism.</td>
<td>The PSA exceeds MLA standards. Correct in-text citations from five enriching sources are effectively embedded in the PSA. There is no cause for concern regarding plagiarism.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**FIGURE 2.**
The rubric for the PSA focused on developing students’ research and video production skills.
to how they found the right format for their entry with confidence. The assignment challenged them to properly cite audio clips, songs, interviews, podcasts, and speeches—many of which they admitted to never having considered including in a research essay. Beyond making the discourse surrounding plagiarism more transparent, this project also helped students expand their understanding of what constitutes a convincing source.

WITNESSING THE POWER OF PEER FEEDBACK

With traditional research papers, the audience is perhaps a classmate who serves as peer editor and ultimately a teacher who assigns a score. Typically, a major assessment such as an essay may involve a two-week turnaround before students receive feedback on their final product. As I had placed so much emphasis on the consideration of audience throughout this assignment, I wanted this concept to resonate. On the day of the screening, I laid out a makeshift red carpet and had popcorn on hand. The entire class session was devoted to watching and analyzing the class’s research efforts. I gave each group a small stack of index cards. After we viewed a video, the groups were to discuss and record three to four compliments they had regarding the PSA’s content or quality. We then shared a few of these comments aloud before the index cards were delivered to the producers. It was wonderful hearing the students say things like, “That’s what we were going for!” as they listened to their classmates offer meaningful praise.

Requiring students to give and receive feedback after viewing the PSAs encouraged a more reflective approach to this assessment, one that may not be as feasible with a one-dimensional piece of prose.

In creating PSAs that required careful research, awareness of audience, and manipulation of digital tools, I hoped the students would produce pieces that enlightened their peers about the opioid epidemic’s severity. Their work exceeded my expectations. Their videos were thought-provoking, unique, even haunting.

One group metaphorically turned heroin into a monster. Their PSA felt like a trailer for a horror film as the monster “attacked” innocent teenagers. Between each attack, the screen darkened, revealing statistics regarding overdoses occurring in our school district. Another PSA started with a close-up of hands untwisting a bottle of pills. After swallowing a handful, the camera followed the hands out the front door of a house, to the driver seat of a car, and then through the hallways of our school. Indistinguishable background noise was interrupted as the camera’s perspective jerked toward the ceiling and the body belonging to the hands fell to the ground; ambulance sirens carried the scene to an empty screen. Following this dramatic opening, the group incorporated dozens of audio clips with news anchors offering staggering death tolls and descriptions of devastated parents as a series of black-and-white still shots of students in our school flashed on the screen. As the voices sped up, so too did the correlating in-text citations. The flashing faces faded to black just as the voice of a mourning father is heard saying, “You have to get it out of your head that it can’t happen to you.”

Overall, their final projects reflected purposeful decisions regarding the selection of information to highlight, sounds to emphasize, and images to include. The PSAs indicated a depth of understanding about the opioid epidemic that I do not believe would have been communicated as powerfully or succinctly within the confines of a traditional research essay. I asked students to reflect on what they felt this assignment taught them. They shared that the project exposed them to more effective

FIGURE 3.
The opening scene of one group’s PSA dramatized a heroin overdose.
research strategies, pushed them to be more precise with their citations, encouraged them to diversify their evidence, and invited them to be more discerning when selecting sources. One student stated, “It made me push harder to find more reliable sources rather than just the first things that pop up.”

Another student asserted, “It taught me to dig deeper.” At the conclusion of this project, my juniors expressed a newfound desire to be seen as credible, and they voiced a newfound confidence in their ability to effectively persuade an audience.

**HIGHLIGHTING TPACK’S POTENTIAL**

Tackling this approach to research was new territory for me. As I tried to apply the tenets of the TPACK model, I could not help questioning whether this lesson would have been as effective without trading out the final product for a technology-enhanced task. I continue to reflect on the concept of audience. I believe the public nature of this assignment helped the students better understand the significance of choices related to organization, diction, and evidence.

Although I was impressed with my students’ PSAs, I do not want to imply that the project was seamless. A few students felt that though they had one strong video producer in their group, that instigated a bit of an imbalance in the workload. These students expressed regret that their skills were not developed enough to assist with the editing process. In the next iteration of this lesson, I plan to incorporate video production lessons with the assistance of our school’s technology specialist. I also intend to ask students who feel equipped to lead mini-lessons on video editing. Additionally, the PSA assignment offered the students too few choices; this restriction may have stifled some students’ voices. In hindsight, I believe I should have offered my students more options for the final product: pamphlets, zines, FAQs for the school website, infographics, newscasts, or documentaries, for example. This kind of project could easily be adapted for different texts or adjusted to fit a cross-curricular unit. We tackle many social issues in the class, so the project did not have to be limited to one topic to strengthen the students’ research skills. This kind of critical examination of the entire instructional process is the primary reason I find the TPACK framework so empowering. It invites reflection.

TPACK challenges educators to carefully consider whether the ink pen or the mouse will best complement methods for delivering specific content knowledge. Technology offers students the opportunity to become insightful researchers. As more English teachers apply the TPACK framework to their lesson designs, they can guide learners toward more productive research that is both rigorous and relevant. When I consider adaptations of this assignment, I’m excited by the idea of what students may create as I offer more freedom regarding their topic and their product. If the first round of PSAs serves as an indication of what strong research could look like in my classroom, then I would say this lesson taught me just as much as it taught my students.

Admittedly, it can be scary to step away from a more traditional approach, fearing that it might not best prepare students for their future. In this case, though, the ends seemed to strengthen the means. Some of the students may not remember the three-page essay they wrote that synthesized a handful of outside sources, but I am confident that most will remember the image of the heroin zombie who “sucked the life” out of their classmates and the harrowing statistics that flashed across the screen informing them how serious the opioid epidemic is in their own community. And I will certainly treasure the sense of empowerment that this project inspired in my students. For the first time in years, I not only enjoyed teaching the research process, but, more importantly, my students were also invested in carrying out an inquiry project with greater integrity, creativity, and enthusiasm.

**WORKS CITED**


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**READWRITETHINK CONNECTION**  Lisa Storm Fink, RWT

Chances are that your students are all watching and enjoying videos found on YouTube. Take advantage of their interest—and practice important critical thinking and literacy skills—by having them make and edit their own videos that deal with important social, economic, and political topics. First, students watch examples of online public service announcements (PSAs) and probe the multiple meanings of these video texts by asking challenging, open-ended questions. They use their responses and an online tool as a basis for writing scripts for their own PSAs. Students then create short video clips and use software to edit their videos. [http://bit.ly/2GD7EgB](http://bit.ly/2GD7EgB)