Searching for Steven Spielberg:
Introducing iMovie to the High School English Classroom

A Closer Look at What Open-Ended Technology Project Designs Can Do to Promote Engaged Learning

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Summary of Findings

Through the course of the iMovie projects, the students in the high school English classes we studied demonstrated several key attributes of our engaged learning framework. In terms of our first category of analysis, the vision of learning, the iMovie project and software allowed the students to take ownership over the direction of their work. With the exception of the general boundaries set up by the teacher at the beginning of the assignment, the students were independently responsible for the scope of their iMovies and controlled most of the ongoing project decisions themselves.

In terms of the learning task and context, we found that the making of the movies was authentic and challenging for the students. The open-ended storytelling nature of the iMovie project allowed them to be generative and creative. There was a great deal of literature content learned in the project. Indeed, the constraints of the iMovie task and tool required them to internalize the story and understand it more completely. Their assessment was performance-based, generative, and seamless. Further, the students did most of the assessment themselves.

In terms of teacher and student roles, we noticed a dramatic shift from a teacher-centered to student-centered environment during the course of the projects. We argue that these levels of engagement and learning by students in this non-traditional instructional activity could not have occurred, and could not have been observed so readily, without the use of the iMovie software tool.

Acknowledgments