**Educational editing in an electronic world: the journey from concept to website**

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As Program Officer: Publishing for the South Australian Department of Education and Children’s Services it was my role to provide high quality resources to our educators. Our curriculum is birth to year 12.

**Introduction**

This paper describes the possibilities of the changing role of the editor in electronic educational publishing.

The paper will

* detail the importance of the relationship between the educational publisher and the editor in the development of an interactive educational sub web
* outline the development of the website from conception of the original idea to final publication online
* provide ideas for editors looking for new challenges
* describe new ways of working in the area of educational publication.

This website describes case studies which outline the journey that I took with an editor to collect stories of best practice from a range of educational sites and to recreate all the information we collected into an interactive, practical sub web. Why a website you could ask and the simple answer is that Government Policy in SA is recommending more and more resources to be web based?

This process took the editor away from the computer and into sites to work in close relationship with me to collect the stories and then to use her editing skills to create stories succinct enough yet rich with useful information for a web format. This is an example of how in an electronic age when educators are more readily using web based resources, editors can increase their repertoire of skills to truly collaborate from inspiration to publication.

To make this an entertaining story for you, every good plot includes characters, a complication and a resolution. I’d like to be able to add some gory details as well but it really was a story with a happy ending!! This paper will deal with how all these elements came together to create an informative and popular educational website.

In South Australia we have a Birth to year 12 Curriculum Framework which runs to thousands of pages long yet is just a ‘framework’ so our characters were the teachers/ educators because we include child care workers needing to make sense of the framework. It is called SACSA which stands for The South Australian Curriculum Standards and Accountability Framework. Janet Mackenzie in the *Editor’s Companion* describes the elements of the Project Plan; this includes the readership – teachers eager for resources.

The complication involved the number and complexity of outcomes the teachers were required to teach to and report against. This defines the purpose of the publication, to reduce this complexity into achievable chunks of information.

As for the resolution, I knew that some sites were working really confidently with their students and it became my job to publish this good work so other educators could learn ways of working. The following list describes the constraints, because I knew that it would take me far too long to:

* visit the sites
* collect the information
* prepare the manuscript
* hand it over to an editor
* involve a web developer to complete the project.

I would have missed the boat in helping the educators. So I decided a different approach would save precious time and result in a better product. I employed an editor to visit the sites with me and to work with me as project manager to collect the information we needed.

**Setting the boundaries**

It was important from the beginning to select an editor with experience in the field of educational editing. But it was equally important to select someone who understood that I had the curriculum knowledge and would be the project manager and as such the editor needed to work with me but also under my guidance. It was important to respect each other’s skills and qualities as we would be spending long periods of time together. As for all Government work for this project I had to prepare an editor’s brief to secure 3 quotes. The brief specified that the project had to be carried out under the following conditions which provided the opportunity to negotiate the tasks and responsibilities.

The editor would need to:

* be an experienced educational editor
* have web development experience
* be prepared to travel with the project manager on dates specified by the schools
* charge differing rates according to time for travel, site visits and writing summaries of the visits
* be available with flexibility between certain specific months.

Important aspects here for editors looking for this kind of challenge involve being:

* prepared to charge varying rates (although the editor’s travel was paid for travelling time was at a much reduced rate)
* organised to keep track of other jobs in the times we were not travelling as well as write up the notes from each visit.

Once the successful editor was selected we set out planning our journey. This was as complicated as any part of the project because we had to combine my schedule, the editor’s schedule and the times when the sites were prepared for us to visit. I first had to find sites that were working with the SACSA Framework with their students and communities and negotiate visits. With the assistance of advice from colleagues in my Curriculum Group I selected 8 sites from a babies’ room in a child care centre to a Japanese class in a country high school.

Out of a choice of over 1,000 sites, the sites across a range levels of schooling from birth to year 12 were identified because they were:

* using with the SACSA Framework through exploring Key Ideas and Outcomes
* involving learners and communities in working with Key Ideas and Outcomes
* planning, programming and assessing using the SACSA Framework with learners and communities
* exploring ways to monitor learner achievement and inform planning.

These sites were visited by the project manager (me) and the editor, where, through conversations with educators, learners and parents/caregivers, successful practices were observed and documented. We also asked permission to tape record sessions and thankfully each site agreed, sometimes reluctantly but nevertheless they did agree.

Our meetings had to be very carefully planned.The teachers were given only a certain amount of release time from the children so we had to be set up and ready at the agreed time. This release time had to funded from the project budget.

The teachers had to have all the resources they needed at their and our disposal so that we could collect as much information in the agreed time frame. Even then the editor still needed to revisit or contact sites again for additional information and clarification.

To be this organised meant preliminary teleconferences between the site personnel, the editor and me, to discuss what we would be talking about, what resources they would have ready to share with us and any other important information from their perspective that made the program a success.

I will now show you the finished product before we continue on with the journey.[**www.sacsa.sa.edu.au**](http://www.sacsa.sa.edu.au/)

We visited the following sites and if you are not from South Australia I can assure you we went from the north to the south, traveled by car and by plane to reach our destinations.

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Here are the sites we visited and the range of topics we covered. | | |
| **Band** | **Program** | **Site** |
| Birth-Age 3: Early Years | Building relationships, attachment and trust | Lady Gowrie Child Centre |
| Junior Primary: Primary Years | Morning talks | Paringa Park PS |
| Primary and Middle Years | Creating learning communities for students with learning disabilities | John Morphett PS |
| Upper Primary Middle Years | Round Table Assessment | Athelstone PS |
| Upper Primary Middle Years | Personal learning plans | Bridgewater PS |
| Upper Primary Middle Years | Using SACSA charts and books | Hamley Bridge PS |
| Upper Primary Middle Years | Catering for diversity | Hampstead PS |
| Junior Secondary Middle Years | A learning map | Grant HS |
| Junior Secondary Middle Years | Layered curriculum™ | Port Augusta SS |

**What the editor brought to the project and how we worked in collaboration**

As we visited each site and listened to their stories and toured their sites I knew what I needed to see and hear to make the web site achieve its planned objective. I knew the language I was looking for, the interactions with the children and what the teachers and children needed to be doing and saying in authentic ways. In the initial phases the editor knew the objective but concentrated on collecting as much information as possible and relying on me to guide the questions and lead the visits. As teachers revealed aspects of their programs I would indicate to the editor how important that specific information was to the project. It was in this collaborative way of my highlighting what was useful that the editor began to develop her own sense of what information we needed from each site.

The editor brought

* Cognitive skills
* Imagination and initiative
* Concentration, perseverance and attention to detail
* Team skills.

Mackenzie, J 2004, p2.

The publisher/editor relationship was crucial as we needed to discuss aspects of what we had seen and heard to decide what was valuable and what was information that we did not need. We needed to be regularly and openly communicating during and between site visits.

We obviously left each site with both far too much information and pieces of the puzzle missing, which we did not realise until we went to another site or until the editor started to write up the case studies back in her office. The skills I valued so much from the editor were her substantive editing skills.

The following list taken from the Canberra Society of Editors [**Commissioning Checklist**](http://www.editorscanberra.org/resources/commissioning-checklist/) clearly demonstrates what amazing skills I was relying on the editor to bring to this project.

**Structural review**

* Assessed conceptual integrity, and whether additional material or reader aids such as illustrative material was required.
* Checked whether document fulfilled intended objectives.
* Determined whether any rearrangement, expansion or summarising of sections was required to achieve the most logical structure for a website.

**Language and style editing**

* Ensured language and form were appropriate to readership and to the medium.
* Ensured there was a logical flow and appropriate weighting of discussion for each site.
* Deleted any unnecessary repetition, as well as redundancies, contradictions and irrelevant material.
* Provided consistency in style and tone especially when negotiating with the web developer.

**Clarity of presentation**

* Checked presentation on website was simple and effective.
* Ensured document title and all headings accurately reflected contents.
* Checked appropriateness, placement and clarity of tables, figures and other illustrative material.

The copy edit, web design and web development were outsourced to other contractors but the editor and I liaised with all other contractors. This liaison was another important element of her role.

As we visited sites and then talked about what we had seen and heard either while were traveling or at set meeting times common themes began to emerge. The editor called these Emerging Voices and each site reflected these ideas in some way to provide a common thread. I do not think without the editor’s ability to ‘see the structure emerging’ the website would have been as powerful and informative as it has become.

The common themes were:

* Unpacking the SACSA Framework
* Programming
* Lifelong learning
* Learning communities
* Inclusive pedagogy
* Increasing learner engagement
* Recording and reporting progress
* Visions for the future

It was an exciting project with a great outcome that has become one of the most popular hits on our curriculum website and a wonderful example of from inspiration to publication.

**References**

Mackenzie, J 2004, *The Editor’s Companion*, Cambridge University Press, UK.