

RTNDF's Teacher-to-Teacher Guide

Reflections "Feeling Naked on Main Street"

By Janet Kerby

A principal once called my class "organized chaos." I thanked him. He was perceptive enough to see the organization. He knew that class management is not measured by peace and quiet and that project-based learning is not always glitch-free and according to plan in my broadcast journalism classes at Roane County High School in Spencer, WV.

Broadcast journalism is both the easiest and the hardest class I've ever taught. The students are the driving force, with their energy, curiosity, and excitement — it seems that in a class like this, the teacher needs only to organize the opportunity and then hang on while the students take advantage of it. What a deal! Motivation is included at no additional charge. Thus, it's the easiest of classes to teach.

But, as with all "great deals," there's risk. When I taught English, my students' tests were not mailed to every household in town. But our shows are sent to every living room that subscribes to cable. And many shows we do live. There's no "undo" button in live TV. My students' work, and thus MY work, is constantly up for public comment. I think I know what it would feel like to be naked on Main Street.

In the end, the risk is educated and necessary. Any good broadcast journalism class serves an audience. Everything your students produce should be for an audience. Start simple but start with an audience. Learn to do it, then learn to do it better, because if you remove the audience, you remove your reason for being good.

With the added risk of being public, the teacher must be responsible and is held

lunchtime to work. Time "on task" won't be just between bells, and you'll see each other tired and frustrated, relieved and elated. The overtime pay you won't collect will be six figures.

I've learned a few survival tips. First of all, it's OK when a student knows an answer that you don't. Actually, it's better than OK. Don't deprive your students of the opportunity to show you what they know—it really doesn't detract from your position as teacher. Instead, you get credit for what John *learned* in your class, whether you *taught* it to him or not.

Next, don't let anyone convince you that the quality of learning is directly related to the budget you have for equipment. Yes, technology is important. It attracts students. Tools are needed in any job and they should allow the user to create a good product. But this is not a spectator sport. At the high school level, I would always opt to have more students working at the same time on equipment that's less expensive than to have a few high-end pieces of equipment and a line of impatient, bored students waiting their turns. Concepts don't have brand names—they can be taught without always having the best and biggest.

Another important tip: from the beginning make it clear what your expectations are, but don't ask a student to give more effort than you're willing to give. Model the work ethic you expect from them. Be aggressive and ambitious in your planning. Meet deadlines. Be a team player, helping when they need you, staying till the last job is done. I don't expect my students to make sacrifices that I'm not willing to make myself and they know that. I think this

accountable – more so than in other subject areas. At the same time, the teacher must lead students into being good decision-makers. It is the teacher's job to provide an environment that is nourishing yet challenging, unrestrictive yet guided, teacher-planned yet student-produced. Sounds impossible but it's not. It is, however, a teaching tightrope.

People who face risk together and depend on each other within a team build a special rapport. Get ready to *really* know your students and don't be afraid to let them know you. They're going to be waiting at your door when you unlock it in the morning and they're going to be asking to come into your room at

does more to gain students' respect than anything else I could do.

Taking risks, dodging blows to the ego, and working insane hours with kids make broadcast journalism a physically and emotionally hard subject to teach.

But then there's the reward. Glory happens. Provide the opportunity and hang on. The students learn and produce and serve an audience. Grades become secondary. Student ownership of a successful show allows pride and team spirit to punctuate (perhaps even dominate) the academics. Then when the "ratings" come out and someone tells your student anchor, "Hey, I saw you on TV last night," you'll have to hang on a little tighter.



Janet Kerby teaches broadcast journalism and advanced communications at Roane County High School in Spencer, WV, where her broadcasting classes are responsible for a 24/7 community access cable channel. Janet was one of the first group of RTNDF Teacher Ambassadors, and is a major resource for the RTNDF LIST. This year, Janet's students won the Annual Robert F. Kennedy Journalism Award as well as First Place in the on-site broadcast competition at the Student Television Network Convention in Anaheim.

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