

Making Media That Matters In Minutes

How MemeFILMS Merges Media Education and Video Production ... and How You Can, too!

Who is MemeFILMS?

As a media literacy educator, **Dr. Rob Williams** works extensively with young people in and out of classroom. Director/cameraman/producer **James Valastro** brings more than sixteen years of camera, lighting, and filmmaking experience to his production work, from concept to completion.

For more MemeFILMS information, visit www.MemeFILMS.org

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a tiny bit of information – a word, an image, a phrase, a logo
– transmitted virally through media channels...

by *Rob Williams, Ph.D.*

HERE'S A PUZZLE FOR YOU ... Imagine walking into a classroom full of the latest video production gear: Mac G4 laptop with a 200 gig external drive, a three-chip professional camera and monitor, LCD projector, stage lights, boom poles, and shotgun and wireless microphones to match. Even better — this same room is full of young people, and they, in turn, are full of energy, creativity, and ideas. Some of these kids like to act, others are writers, while still others are interested in all things technical. Most of them like to laugh, and all of them love media: music, movies, video games, magazines and the like. You have a whole day, or one morning, or maybe only an hour, to make movies with this group, using only the gear, talent and time you have available.

Now what do you do?

This is a familiar challenge for all of us who make media with children and teens. Questions abound. How to render order out of chaos? How to channel our kids' fabulous ideas in workable directions with the limited time and money at our disposal? How can we use media to teach about media? How can we make a movie that is actually watch-able (and isn't about skate-boarding?)

Now, step back for a moment. As anyone who hangs out with American kids will tell you, our children are growing up in the most media-saturated society in world history. In many ways, this is exciting news, as podcasting, web blogs, IM'ing, e-gaming, and digital video production offer unprecedented opportunities for kids to express themselves and tell

their own stories.

The flip side, of course, is more ominous,— a handful of multinational media conglomerates own the companies and outlets that produce and distribute most of our media content targeted at children. And make no mistake — I use the word "target" deliberately. Each week, American kids spend more money on more stuff than any other single consumer group, and corporate advertisers and brand marketers work ceaselessly to influence children's youthful consumer tastes, build their budding brand loyalties (often around sugar, soda, alcohol, tobacco, and other addictive products), and separate them from their money.

As a result, our children are influenced by a diet of as many as 3,000 discrete corporate commercial messages daily via the Internet, television, video games, mass magazines, and other forms of corporately-owned media that shape "popular" youth culture. While young people impress adults with their "tech-savvy" skills (many parents I know let their kids program their iPods), our children often don't fully appreciate media's power to shape their thinking and behavior, especially with regard to the consumer-based, civic-minded, and health-related choices that accompany childhood and adolescence.

This paradoxical situation poses an important challenge for all of us who work with community media and young people. As our children grow up in the world's most mediated society, how can we as educators and independent media produc-