

Fairbury students become roving reporters

BY KEVIN ABOUREZK/Lincoln Journal Star
Monday, Dec 17, 2007 - 12:21:54 am CST

FAIRBURY — Jordan Johnson writes in a notebook, seemingly oblivious to the typically chaotic sixth-grade scene surrounding her.

Two boys tease each other as other students chat between classes at Jefferson Intermediate School.

Jordan stays focused.

"I am on location at Jefferson Intermediate School in Fairbury, Nebraska," she writes. "I'm here to put you in the shoes of a sixth grader."

Later at home, she'll type up a playful description of what happened that day for the daily online feature she and other students in Karen Dux's homeroom class have come to know as Roving Reporter.

She'll also record herself reading her description of the day's activities on a digital recorder.

The recording, along with her written article and three photos, will be added to her school's Web site for all to hear, see and read.

Dux, a sixth-grade teacher, began the Roving Reporter feature four years ago after hearing a Millard teacher speak at a teachers' convention about a similar project he started in his classroom.

She had been looking for a way to teach her students the six traits of writing — characteristics like word choice and voice the state uses to judge writing skills.

"I had a hard time getting kids to write for a purpose," she said. "This way, they have an audience."

Here's how it works:

* Each morning, a student is assigned the task of being the Roving Reporter for the day.

* The student receives a digital recorder, camera and notebook divided into class subject areas, with space for students to write notes on classes and other activities.

* After school, the student writes a description of the day's activities and records himself or herself reading the description.

* The next day, the student gives Dux the recording and written description to post to the school's Web site, along with photos.

Looking around Dux's classroom, it's easy to see she has an interest in technology.



Jordan Johnson takes pictures during reading class as part of the Roving Reporter project. (Robert Becker)

A large TV hangs over her desk. A digital video projector hangs from the center of the room, while a stereo and VCR sit on a shelf in the back of the room.

Tools of a tech-sawy educator.

Dux said the Roving Reporter feature teaches the students a variety of skills beyond writing. They learn organization and multimedia skills that will serve them later in school and life, she said.

The students, she said, also teach her by sharing what they've learned from producing the feature.

"I teach them a little, and they teach me a lot," she said.

This year, Dux also started doing videos, or vodcasts, with students in her reading class. That feature, called Jefferson Snoops, involves each student having a beat, such as homework tips.

So far, her reading class has produced one Web page full of videos for the feature and is working on a second.

Christine Welsch took part in the first Jefferson Snoops, helping edit and design pages for the feature. She also offered an advice column on how students could stay out of "think time."

She said it's fun to shoot and edit videos, though it's sometimes difficult to watch herself in one.

"A lot of people don't like to hear themselves talk," she said. "It doesn't sound like how you think you sound."

The Jefferson Snoops and Roving Reporter features provide those outside the school a glimpse into life for sixth-graders, Dux said.

Parents and other teachers and school administrators have commented on Dux's Web site about the features.

Among their comments:

"You have some very talented writers in your class! I can tell from all the descriptive writing exactly what a day in your class is like."

Taking the tone of a on-the-scene news reporter, Jordan ended her Nov. 29 roving report this way:

"So there you have it folks. Now you have solved the mystery of what really goes on in sixth grade. ..."

"Until next time, this is Jordan Johnson reporting from Jefferson Intermediate, sixth-grade news."

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