

6-20-1999


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Recommended Repository Citation

Jones, M. Susan and Koetke, Carol A., "Photonovels: Educational Resources to Prevent Agricultural Illnesses and Injuries" (1999). *Nursing Faculty Publications*. Paper 17.
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Paper No.

99 7

PHOTONOVELS: EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES TO PREVENT AGRICULTURAL ILLNESSES AND INJURIES

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Written for Presentation at the
1999 Summer Conference
National Institute for Farm Safety, Inc.

Sheridan Fantainbleau Hotel
Ocean City, MD
June 20-21, 1999

SUMMARY: Photonovels use photographs and a story featuring people from the community, familiar settings, and a simple text to deliver an educational message. This unique educational tool lends itself to a wide variety of topics and to target audiences including farmers, farm workers and their families. Information on how to design, create and use photonovels to prevent agricultural injuries and illnesses will be presented.

National Institute for Farm Safety
COLUMBIA, MISSOURI 65211

**Photonovels: Educational Resources to Prevent Agricultural Injuries
and Illnesses**

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Introduction

Photonovels—or photo novellas, as they are sometimes known—are booklets, comic books, or similar brief publications that use pictures and a story featuring known, local people, familiar local settings, and simple, straightforward text to deliver a message. Photonovels have been used to deliver safety and health information to people in many countries and cultures on topics as diverse as environmental sanitation, prenatal and postnatal nutrition, malaria control, and family planning in Ecuador (Weaks, 1976), alcohol prevention for Hispanic youth and their families (Lalonde et al., 1997) and reduction of asbestos health risks in the building trades (Roter, et al., 1986-87). In a somewhat reverse role, photonovels have been used to deliver information to policy makers about rural women's lives and their reproductive health concerns in rural China (Wang and Burris, 1994).

Photonovels have also been used by farm women in the U.S. to teach about agricultural health and safety. The Kentucky Partnership for Farm Family Health and Safety, Inc., a community-based, grassroots organization founded to promote occupational health and safety in the agricultural community, has developed a series of seven photonovels. Each photonovel focuses on a health or safety topic of concern to local people working on farms in the community. These photonovels, ranging in length from 16 to 28 pages, include: *Pesticide Safety*, *Farming and Hearing Loss*, *Safe Tractor Operation*, *Proper Lifting*, *Stress and Stress Management*, *Safety Around Grain Bins*, and *Protection from Skin Cancer*. The purpose of this paper is to share the lessons learned from the Kentucky process (The Kentucky Partnership, 1998) to facilitate the adoption of this educational resource to other communities and audiences.

Photonovels: An Educational Resource

Photonovels present an effective format for an educational message because the visual content attracts attention, the characters and their language create realism, and the familiar simple dialogue is conducive to learning and message retention (Weaks, 1976). With their abundance of pictures and their short length, photonovels are inviting to readers. Well-known local characters and the familiar settings capture the attention of the potential local readership and add to their value as educational tools. Furthermore, the involvement of the people who produce the photonovel—who can themselves be members of the target audience—has great appeal to the intended readership. When readers know that the people who designed, wrote, and photographed a photonovel are

members of their own community and share work, problems, lifestyle, and concerns that they themselves have, the message gains credibility and added value.

Photonovels lend themselves to a wide variety of topics and target audiences. They can also be tailored to a specific age or cultural group, written at a designated reading level, written for a low-literacy audience or for well-educated readers, and aimed toward specific groups such as farmers and their families.

Photonovels can be used effectively in teaching about agricultural health and safety in a number of ways and in a variety of settings. They are good starters to kick off group discussions. They can be used as handouts at local meetings, fairs, or other community gatherings. They are useful as "textbooks" for educational programs. They can be distributed widely as take-home reading for interested readers.

Beginning a Photonovel Project

Recognizing a Need to Educate

A photonovel project grows out of the need to educate---in the case of the Kentucky Partnership, the need to bring messages on health and safety issues to farm families in a specific local area. As one of the objectives of the Partnership, a core group of leaders identified topics of concern in safety and health within their community. These topics were gathered in several ways: (1) as a starting point, the leaders organized and attended a retreat at which they shared personal stories about farm illnesses and injuries and discussed the causes and consequences of those events; (2) later they conducted focus group interviews with groups of farm women from locations throughout their county and identified many specific areas of health and safety concern to farm families; and (3) to confirm and add additional weight to their findings, as well as to collect additional data, the Partnership women conducted a survey of more than 200 farm women throughout the community

Resources Needed to Produce a Photonovel

A core group of people is the catalyst for beginning a photonovel project. In the case of the Kentucky Partnership, this core group was composed of the women who had served as community coordinators and members of the Board of Directors of the Partnership. Early in the process of thinking about photonovels, the core group will want to establish the partners it will need to help make the project a success. Essential partners include:

- Someone to serve as leader, or producer, to oversee and tie together the development of the actual product, the photonovel
- People to help generate ideas
- Writer(s) and editor(s) for the script of the photonovel
- Photographer
- People to act as characters in the photonovel
- Experts in the topics to be covered by the photonovel

In addition, the group will need other resources such as money to support the project including film, film processing, photo printing, printing company and a way of warehousing and distributing the photonovel.

Producing the photonovels

After a core group has determined the topic for a photonovel, the process of producing the photonovel can move forward. Typically, the next steps involve generating ideas for the story and characters of the photonovel and identifying the people who will work on the writing, editing, and photography for the story.

Ideas are generated.

In the Kentucky Partnership's project, ideas emerged in many different ways and from different sources. Often the ideas for a story and characters were generated collaboratively at meetings of the Partnership leaders. In some cases an individual in the group had experienced a life event that made that person or her family a first-hand source for situations and characters. Occasionally ideas for a story and for characters were generated by one or two individuals and were later expanded and enhanced by others in the group.

Writing of the story and dialogue begin.

Writing can proceed in many different ways. For one of the Partnership's photonovels, a woman volunteered as writer for the script because of a special interest in the topic---hearing loss---and because her father was to be the main character in the story. In other instances, local experts on the topic or students from one of the affiliated universities were selected to write the scripts for the photonovels. In all cases, the writers researched the topic, met with the people who were to become characters for the photonovels, and worked with the characters and content experts to refine the story.

Writing, editing and revising continue the process.

The Partnership's writers worked closely with additional people who served as editors and consulting experts. Editors usually were people with a special interest in the topic that had emerged from the core group. Often the characters in the photonovel took on an additional role as editors, offering their suggestions concerning dialogue and realism and helping to refine the script.

Typically, the writer completed an initial draft and referred it to one or more editors and to the expert consultants. These editors and consultants reviewed the draft, offered comments, and suggested revisions. The writer then considered the comments and made appropriate revisions, submitting the revised draft again to the editors and consultants. This circular process of writing and editing continued until the members of this writing group were satisfied with the script. The finished script was then typed in a format suitable for the finished photonovel.

The reading level of a photonovel can be an important concern in terms of the targeted audience. The writers and editors can use any of several standard measurements of readability to assist in determining the level of readability of the photonovel script---the

McLaughlin SMOG Grading (McLaughlin, 1969), the Fry Graph Reading Level Index (Fry, 1968), the Flesch Reading Ease Formula (Flesch, 1948), the Dale-Chall, (1948). Any of these, or other standard index, may be applied to a photonovel in development. If the group producing the photonovel chooses not to use a grading formula, an informal process can be applied, and the writers, editors, and/or producer can agree informally that a script needs to use simpler language or that a more sophisticated level of vocabulary, work usage and syntax is required.

The completion of the script is a convenient time for the design and writing of additional pages for the photonovel. The front and back covers are designed and typed as they are to appear in the finished photonovel. Similarly, additional pages that the planners wish to include can be designed and typed in their final format. Typically these pages consist of the front and back covers and pages that include information such as: an introduction to the topic; name, address, and telephone number of the sponsoring group; a logo; acknowledgments of the people involved in producing the photonovel; and information for readers who wish to obtain additional copies of the photonovel.

Characters are brought into the process.

By this time, people will have been chosen as characters for the story and these characters plan ways they will walk through the scenes of the story line. It is important to obtain signed photo release forms, or consent forms, from each person who will appear as a character in a photonovel. In the case of a minor child appearing as a character, a parent or guardian should sign the consent form on behalf of the child.

Photographs are added to the story.

The person serving as the photographer prepares for the photo shoot by reading the script and becoming thoroughly familiar with the story line and the dialogue of the characters. The photographer then walks through the action with the characters, script in hand, and photographs the characters as they enact each scene.

Photographs are added to the script and layout is completed.

"Laying out" the photonovel consists of designing a "paste-up" or mock-up of how the photonovel will look. The person assuming the responsibility of "laying out" selects and places the photographs in the appropriate locations in the script. Blocks of text and their accompanying photographs are then carefully arranged in the exact order in which they are to appear in the photonovel.

The mock-up goes to the printer.

The finished layout, or mock-up, of the photonovel is taken to a local printer, who typically uses a photographic typesetting process to photograph and print the pages. The printer usually completes production by assembling and stapling or binding the printed pages into the finished photonovel.

Conclusions

Because of their unique features---among them simple text, realistic characters, and relevant message---photonovels can be an effective medium for messages concerning

occupational health and safety to workers in many workplaces. Additionally, since they can be produced by workers themselves, and not by professional writers and publishers, they can engage workers in the production process. This involvement can enhance a photonovel's acceptance and credibility among the target audience in a given occupation such as farming. Photonovels can be relatively inexpensive to produce and to distribute, and this factor too, can make them an attractive option for delivering information to some groups. Their flexibility in terms of topic, emphasis, reading level, and audience can make photonovels an ideal vehicle for farmers, farm workers, and their families.

Acknowledgments

The authors thank The W.K. Kellogg Foundation for providing funds for the development of the photonovels in Kentucky.

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