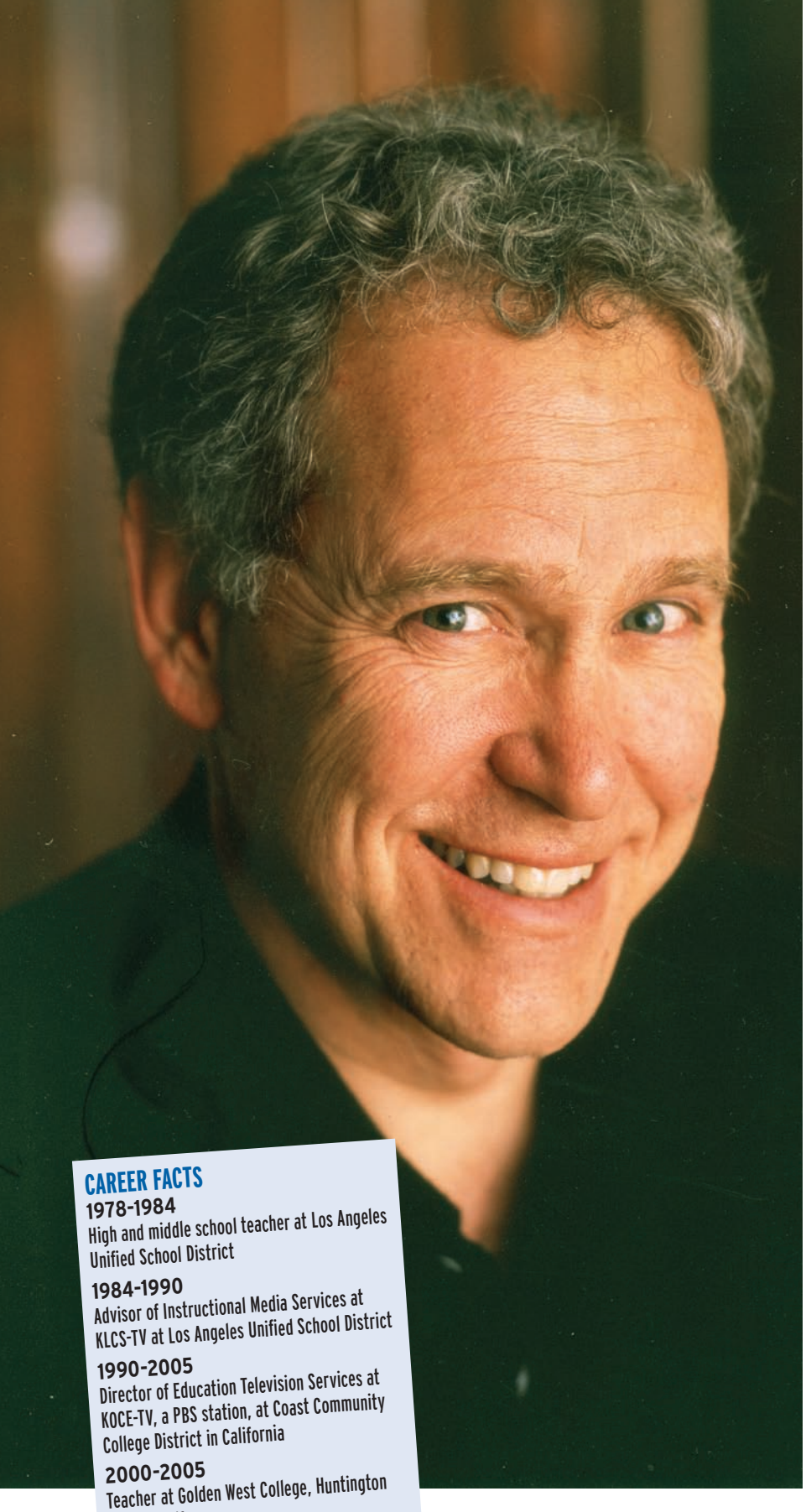

CAREER FACTS

1978-1984
High and middle school teacher at Los Angeles Unified School District

1984-1990
Advisor of Instructional Media Services at KLCS-TV at Los Angeles Unified School District

1990-2005
Director of Education Television Services at KOCE-TV, a PBS station, at Coast Community College District in California

2000-2005
Teacher at Golden West College, Huntington Beach, Calif.

June 2005
Director, Discovery Educator Network

Hall Davidson of the Discovery Educator Network chats with District Administration's Senior Features Editor Angela Pascopella about multimedia and mashups

Edited by Angela Pascopella

Hall Davidson, a director of the Discovery Educator Network, has always known the power of media in academics.

As a rookie math teacher in the Los Angeles Unified School District in the 1970s, during a math teacher shortage, he and three other teachers created a live, interactive television show, called "Homework Hotline," answering math and language arts questions for students. It eventually won an Emmy award. He and another teacher also created 90 episodes of a middle school math curriculum for teachers, named "Video Mathematics," covering math lessons for every day of the school year. In 1984, he became advisor of Instructional Media Services at KLCS-TV, a Los Angeles Unified School District station, and handled staff development for K12 instructors.

Then just two years later, the state of California recognized

MULTIMEDIA MAN

the potential of multimedia and pushed teachers and educators to start applying technology to class work. So Davidson ran statewide technology training for teachers to help them assimilate technology into lessons. "Those of us who implemented the project recognized that media making was a tool that K12 teachers could use," he recalls.

LA Unified also implemented video making classes, using Davidson's expertise, and started the Video in the Classroom awards to encourage K12 students to make videos for school projects.

In 1990, Davidson became director of Education Television Services at KOCE-TV, at Coast Community College District, which includes three California colleges, overseeing K12 instructional programming.

Four years later, he started a 10-year stint directing the California Student Media and Multimedia Festival, which was created in 1965 by what is now the California School Librarian Association. It started as a film festival for students to show off their high tech projects. It soon morphed into featuring any kind of video or multimedia project.

Davidson was early to recognize the power of media in schools. "The impact was clear in terms of what you could do," he recalls. "And to create a resource that could reach hundreds of thousands of kids was really clear."

Now Davidson is overseeing partnerships and projects at Discovery Educator Network, a global community of educators who are enthusiastic about digital media and want to collaborate with others.

Davidson will help lead the way for more educators to participate in online communities where they can share resources, lesson plans, and information through wikis, blogs or Web sites, including Discovery Education's unitedstreaming.com program, a 24/7 online digital video clip library for educators.

We recently caught up with Davidson to gauge where multimedia stands in classrooms today and in the future.

DA: What are the biggest trends in multimedia in K12 districts today?
Davidson: I would say one trend is the acknowledgement of multimedia as a valid means of expression. Teachers and students can integrate media into the curriculum in an online environment.

Teachers will create a product, like a PowerPoint presentation in earth science for sixth-graders or use a Google Earth site with imbedded images on Yosemite [National Park in California], and not just have to be in a classroom or at a [multimedia] festival. They can create it at home.

A teacher with a tablet PC

DAVIDSON snaps a shot of students taking part in KOCE-TV's "Beat the Greeks" program last June.

can create a video using color and music and when he or she is done, can convert it to an [Adobe] Flash document and students can go online to see it. That exists now in a product called Cosmeo.com [Discovery Channel's online homework help service].

DA: What are the greatest challenges/obstacles of multimedia in schools today?
Davidson: A great challenge is a teacher's understanding of effective multimedia use. They are not resisting it, but if you never used a computer to edit videos before and you've been teaching for 10 years, you might feel, "Why learn new tricks?"

But that's what Discovery can do—it can provide teacher training on that level, the appropriate uses for it in the classroom, and show other teachers across the nation who are using it and saying, "Here's how I use it and how easy it is to do it."

Every year it gets easier to teach new teachers. From the first group [I taught] at Golden West College five or six years ago to the last group, it was night and day as far as the ability of teachers to grasp the concepts and do multimedia work. California requires technology proficiency of its credentialed teachers, such as knowing beyond e-mail and spreadsheets. Students just coming out of high school now know how to do that. Not everyone could even click and drag five or six years ago.

DA: Mashups, which are Web sites or applications that combine content from more than one source, are being used in schools today. Can you further explain mashups?
Davidson: One of the things we did is that we recognized early that there was a kind of paradigm shift. You can make a good video without a video camera using mashups. There are mashup environments, such as the authoring environments of Apple's iMovie [video editing software], or Windows Movie Maker [for digital home movies], or Adobe Premiere Elements [to create and share home movies]. In a classroom, if you have a media asset like a series of still photographs on the westward expansion, for example, you can turn that into a video with narration and music, or video clips. There are other places online where mashups can be made.

And unitedstreaming.com allows you to put that into a video production. It's a place where content is freed up for editing by teachers and/or students. It's a fee service so a district or a school site can get a license and any teacher in that district or school can use it. There are some state licenses, such as in Kentucky, where every teacher in the state could use it.

> "You want the ability to create content, not just passively accept content."

The first online mashup site was KitZu.org [which was created four years ago and allows users to find a kit for the appropriate grade, research a topic, and build a video or media project].

Copyright law allows a person to use almost anything that is legally acquired. Section 107 of the U.S. Copyright Act, section 8 clause 8, places two things higher in importance than property rights: one is the oppressed and the other is education. So a teacher can take environmental images from Time magazine, for example, scan them, and have students in class do a video project on the environment, as an example. Educational institutions are now beginning to apply the provisions of fair use to video mashups.

KitZu.org and unitedstreaming.com have the ability to download a clip, pull it into an authoring environment, like iMovie, and create your own version of that video. Rather than watch a classic film presentation where you sit and watch it, you create. You can download the video, strip out the narration, then change the order of the video clips and create something, like a kid's travel ad as to where to go on vacation. "We're cool, we're stellar," can be voiced over. You're creating. And you're using a video that's already there. You want the ability to create content, not just passively accept content. It's repurposed and thrown all together.

DA: Can you offer a few examples of mashups and how they relate to multimedia in the classroom?
Davidson: A great one was on Stonehenge. This kid used a collection of several videos and allegedly 'solved' the mystery of Stonehenge. Essentially, the kid pieced together a history of the place, hypothesizing that a series of tribal units built it over a long period of

time. Basically, each group added to the place for different reasons. He had some basis for all his conclusions and probably was relying on previous hypotheses. He took visuals from different sources and created his own content. He used animations that were from other sources, maybe a PBS show, and information from the BBC. The piece was wonderful. He used classical music as a sound track to add authority and narrated it with an English accent.

In another project, a kid took old footage of WWII, stock footage, and mixed that with the WWII Medal of Honor winners in his own community. It was an effective look at people who joined the U.S. Army while their families were in internment camps in California during WWII.

The best [mashup projects] are done in high school where students take video classes that teach them innovation, but the most energetic are found in middle school. Primary grade mashups tend to use the most original material.

> If [students] come to school and you just give them books, that's not the way to keep them liking school.

One elementary school teacher in Desert Sands, Calif., did a project on worms. The kids and teacher used artwork like the Worma Lisa [in lieu of the Mona Lisa] and General Wormington [in lieu of General George Washington] traveling across the Delaware River, and included live pictures of worms and of "talking" worms. They mashed up all that in a single video. It's great. They were mashing up their own work and not the work of others.

DA: What is the rationale for students repurposing content, other than it being fun?
Davidson: It goes back to the Secretary of Labor's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills report of 1991. It said that in order for kids to work as productive citizens in the current environment they need to be able to use technology, to work together and have organizational skills. Video making does all those things. The working world of the 21st century demands having the ability to find meaningful resources, as opposed to junk resources, and having information literacy and becoming information literate. And schools need to have curriculum goals that acknowledge these newly important resources. Mashups are a nice way to kill all those birds with one stone.

The work from some of the teachers is absolutely heroic. And they're not getting pressure to do it. It's certainly not mandated under the No Child Left Behind law and it's certainly not in the state standards. They're doing it because they know

it works for their kids. The students of today are not text-based learners. They come from game and TV environments. And if they come to school and you just give them books, that's not the way to keep them liking school.

DA: What are the educational benefits of mashups?
Davidson: Learning in general is better when kids are creating content. You're at the highest level of taxonomy in education, which is to be able to synthesize information, when you have such an understanding of content that you are able to create it.

DA: Any cons you can offer on using mashups in schools, either for students or for administrators?
Davidson: The cautions are that you want to make sure kids stay on task. Kids will wander. You have to make sure they stay on the curriculum goal. And it does take time to create mashups. If you're a teacher, be prepared to stay after school because kids will want to stay [to finish projects]. Some projects can be done in one class period or they can last a full semester. If you want to have the satisfaction of creating something quickly, you can finish a project in one classroom period or over a week.

DA: Is this a realistic form of multimedia now?
Davidson: That was certainly our goal—to have it used in every classroom, and our goal was to have it in every workstation in every school. It can be done. They are good alternatives to text-based learning. You see what's happening in the real world and you'll notice it's the way to go.

I was watching the Jay Leno [Tonight] talk show recently. The last time I saw the show it was with Johnny Carson. Back then it was all word-based humor with more human interaction. I noticed that now, about 12 percent of the show used visual humor with the use of computers. I realized it had become a part of the mainstream media. This change ought to be reflected in our classrooms. **DA**

RESOURCES

ccMixter
www.ccmixter.org

Discovery Education,
www.unitedstreaming.com

Eye:Spot
www.eyespot.com

Findsounds
www.Findsounds.com

Flickr
www.flickr.com

JumpCut
www.Jumpcut.com

Library of Congress
www.loc.gov

Pics4learning
www.Pics4learning.com