Canopy in the Clouds: Integrating Science and Media To Inspire a New Generation of Scientists

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Innovative approaches to science education are critical for inspiring a new generation of scientists. In a world where students are inundated with digital media inviting them to explore exciting, emerging disciplines, science often lags behind in using progressive media techniques. Additionally, science education media often neglects to include the scientists conducting research, thereby disconnecting students from the excitement, adventure, and beauty of conducting research in the field. Here we present initial work from a science education media project entitled Canopy in the Clouds. In particular, we address the goals and approach of the project, the logistics associated with generating educational material at a foreign field site, and the challenges associated with effectively integrating science and media. Canopy in the Clouds is designed to engage students in research, motivate a new generation of young scientists, and promote conservation from the perspective of a current research project being conducted in the canopy of a tropical montane cloud forest located in Monteverde, Costa Rica. The project seeks to generate curriculum based on multiple, immersive forms of novel digital media that attract and maintain student attention. By doing so from the perspective of an adventurous research project in a beautiful and highly biodiverse region, we hope to engage students in science and enhance bioliteracy. However, there are considerable logistic considerations associated with such an approach, including safety, travel, permitting, and equipment maintenance. Additionally, the goals of both the scientific research and the educational media project must be balanced in order to meet objectives in a timely fashion. Finally, materials generated in the field must be translated to viable final products and distributed. Work associated with Canopy in the Clouds will thus provide insight into this process and can serve to inform future science education and outreach efforts.

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