Chapter 4

Developing and Assessing Media Literacy Through Digital Storytelling

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ABSTRACT

Digital Storytelling is an effective tool to develop Media Literacy skills in educational settings. This chapter will analyze and present current research/literature on Media Literacy through Digital Storytelling in regard to developing and assessing media literacy skills. Authors have been implementing an instructional project called Digital Storytelling Contests (DISTCO) since 2008 (http://www.distco.org). DISTCO reached out to more than 10000 K-16 students and teachers over the years. The goal is to relay the experiences on how media literacy has been developed through Digital Storytelling activities with DISTCO. In addition, the current DISTCO rubric for assessing digital storytelling projects is modified to include a version assessing Media Literacy through digital storytelling.

INTRODUCTION

What Is Media Literacy?

The common definition of media literacy is “the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and effectively communicate in a variety of forms including print and non-print texts” (Considine, 2009). However, in a world where the means of delivery of information is changing very rapidly, the definition is extended to include all the new media forms including new ways of interactions, and new ways of understanding the information. Some of these new media forms include video-based products, online tools, and social media. The new media formats present enormous opportunities which were not before available. Consumers of media can now reach more information from numerous sources faster and easier than...
ever. However, this may also introduce some risks. For instance, some media formats may have biased, persuasive, and misrepresented information. Also, the variety of media sources can pose a challenge to critically select truthful and accurate content. Media literacy may help people to understand and use all the opportunities presented by the new media forms but also may help them protect themselves and their families from potential risks that come with the new media opportunities (Ofcom, 2017).

**Why Is Media Literacy Important?**

According to the Center for Media Literacy, there are five main reasons why media literacy is important (Thoman & Jolls, 2003). These include:

1. *The influence of media in our central democratic processes.* In today’s world, people need two core skills to be engaged citizens of a democracy: critical thinking and self-expression. Media literacy helps people by instilling these skills and enable them to understand the political messages and participate in by making informed decisions.
2. *The high rate of media consumption and the saturation of society by media.* Owing to all the new forms of media, people are exposed to more variety and a larger amount of media in one day than people were exposed to in one year two generations ago. Media literacy teaches skills so that people can safely navigate through these myriad images and messages.
3. *The media’s influence on shaping perceptions, beliefs, and attitudes.* Media experiences create a significant impact on how we understand, interpret, and act on the world. Media education can help us separate ourselves from our dependencies on media influences by helping us to understand them.
4. *The increasing importance of visual communication and information.* Learning to “read” the multiple layers of image-based communication is a necessary addition to traditional print literacy as our lives are increasingly dominated by visual images.
5. *The importance of information in society and the need for lifelong learning.* Even though information processing and information services are very important for the nation’s productivity, the growth of global media industries is also challenging independent voices and diverse views. Media education can help people, including teachers and students, understand how to differentiate the information coming from different sources, whose interests may be served and how to find alternative views.

Similarly, Livingstone (2007) argues that media literacy is important for a skilled, creative, and ethical society. It also contributes to a full and meaningful life at a personal level. She stresses that media literacy can contribute to three broad purposes. These are:

- **Democracy, Participation, and Active Citizenship:** A media and information-literate individual is capable of gaining informed opinions on matters that are relevant to our society and our personal lives and is able to express his/her opinion freely in every domain in a democratic society.
- **Knowledge Economy, Competitiveness, and Choice:** A media and information-literate individual will be more successful in a market economy increasingly based on information. Such individuals are likely to contribute more, achieve at a higher level, and therefore will make the society more innovative and competitive.

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