

Media Literacy Is Essential for Public School Curriculum

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My current position is teaching videography through the Career and College Promise Program at Alamance Community College. I have been teaching filmmaking in public classrooms since 1987. Nothing could have prepared me for our current media landscape. Students now have “the whole world in their hands.” The internet and innovations in technology allow digital media into every area of a student’s life. Looking up information at the library is part of our past, as are all outdated modes of communication. As adults, we must face and address this reality if we are to shepherd our students into their future as capable citizens.

What Is Media Literacy?

Media literacy is a series of concepts and questions that strive to deconstruct our media culture. It provides a means of understanding our digital landscape and is, by definition, nonpartisan. (For a list of core concepts and questions that define media literacy, please see the Center for Media Literacy’s “[MediaLit Kit](#).”) This education brings literacy into the 21st century. Media literacy provides the foundation for making sense of the complex audio/video composite that drives educational tools, social media, and most building blocks of our society. While methods and structures for teaching traditional literacy skills have been employed for centuries, media literacy is a recent discipline and must become a fixture in education if students are to have the ability to

deconstruct and work within our new mediacentric culture.

Media Literacy through Filmmaking

Videography students are forerunners in the push to bring multimodal tools and student created materials into the lexicon of a media literacy foundation, and this push is gaining force with each new advance in technology. Film, video, photography, audio, and animation are among the media formats my students use to create fiction, documentary, and experimental work. While the subject matter modern students choose to portray has not changed, their projects illustrate our changing media culture in fundamental ways. In early student projects, for example, the instant playback feature inherent to video formats was as astonishing as it was helpful. Today student productions are reflections of new technologies but also of changes in the ways students are able to see and express themselves. Videography brings student ideas into a visual platform that can be shared virtually. Students create work that reflects their personal experiences as well as a shared cultural reality.

Media literacy through filmmaking builds knowledge and skills as each new invention enters our world. Media creation, though just a facet of the wider media literacy curriculum, creates producers instead of mere consumers of digital media. This creator approach can be utilized in any subject or discipline. Lessons which utilize media production can be included in regular course design, and media literacy programs can be created and implemented in many creative contexts.

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Widening the Scope of Media Literacy Education

As our media landscape evolves along with new technologies, student work reflects these changes. This evolution can be likened to the movement from still to moving pictures. Inside the moving picture is the still image. Inside the student work from 2022 is the work from 1987. Young people have the same human impulses and issues, but changes in our digital world cannot be quantified. Just as the still photo is inherent in the moving picture, the student working with media can be characterized similarly. The seed is inside. Our media literacy programs contain the history of our changes in technology, but they also include the same human desires and dilemmas that existed the day that moving pictures were invented.

Students have shown resilience as their world has both shrunk to the size of a cell phone and expanded to a global reach. This conundrum brings all the obvious contradictions, and along with those contradictions comes the inability for students to differentiate documentary from fiction and many other issues. Media literacy curriculum steps are designed to shore up those contradictions and attend to this dearth of skills in an effort to help students navigate our digital world.

I have witnessed the transformation from hands-on analogue to digital through my years teaching student media production, and this work has a place in the continuum of our wider media landscape. Media literacy through filmmaking is material to current media literacy practices, and this instruction brings context and clarity to lessons from a variety of subjects. The inclusion of film or video into lessons builds essential media literacy skills through the practice of creating content. Media literacy disciplines are crucial to comprehending the elements working in our media landscape to create meaning beyond the written word.

Literacy, which includes media literacy, must evolve to stay relevant as part of our public school curriculum. In addition to resources that are becoming widely available, our digital media classes, especially those in videography, are essential to developing and disseminating best practices for this important discipline. With a strong foundation in media literacy, our students will be able to take the best of what our digital world has to offer and will create content as empowered and media literate citizens.

Reference

Center for Media Literacy. (2005). Five key questions that can change the world [Fact Sheet]. https://www.medialit.org/sites/default/files/14B_CCKQPoster+5essays.pdf

Author's Note

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