In the Classroom 4

Exploring the Concepts of Multimedia Literacy and Multimedia Learning

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Stan Skrabut: Welcome back. Thanks for joining me. In today's episode, I'm going to discuss why we as educators should be concerned about multimedia literacy, why we should practice and teach multimedia learning and how to incorporate multimedia learning in your classroom. Let's get started. In my office, as I look around, I have a museum or maybe a graveyard of all these different multimedia machines. I have laserdiscs, laserdisc players, slide projectors, where you put those slides in the carousel one at a time. I have film strip projectors, if you remember back in school, you feed that filmstrip in. I have projectors, I have overheads.

I have all kinds of different devices that were once used in the classroom and we spread this out everywhere. Well, now we have the internet and with the internet, we have an explosion of resources that we can use. All these different multimedia assets that we can put our hands on. Previously, when we had these other devices like film projectors, trying to get your hands on a film that you wanted to show in your classroom was much harder and much more difficult. As a result, it dictated how we taught the class. Well, this has changed because we have digitized content and we put it all over the internet, our classrooms should change with the times.

We have all this content, are we smarter? That's where this idea of multimedia literacy comes in. Picked up a definition multimedia literacy and I picked it up from Wiki University. Multimedia literacy is the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and communicate messages in a wide variety of forms. These wide varieties of forms can be anything from print to these rich media like video and audio that we can find on the internet, or even create ourselves. I'm a huge advocate of being a creator, as opposed to just a consumer. With all this multimedia that's out there, it certainly shapes our lives, it shapes the messages. If you were to put a message just in print, you would get one version of that message.

If somebody was to speak that message, you'd get another version. When you start throwing imagery on top of that, the message becomes more complex and it may not be the same intended message as when it was initially put in print. This creates a problem in our society. According to Seth Ashley, he's an Assistant Professor of Communication at Boise State. He said, "Today's students are not being equipped with the critical thinking and analysis skills they need to successfully navigate our media-saturated environment." Well, if the students are not getting those skills, critical analysis and critical thinking, then much more of our population is also not getting that.

That could have detrimental consequences for our society. Where am I going with this? Well, when we're looking at this idea of multimedia literacy, the Center for Media

Literacy in Santa Monica, California, created five core concepts of media literacy. These concepts are, the first one, all media messages are constructed. Somebody is out there is intentionally putting together a media message. It could be you as the instructor that you're crafting this message. I'm working on this podcast, I'm crafting this message, but it could be someone else. One of the things that we have to do is help determine or help our students learn who is crafting these messages? What's their intent behind them?

Second, the media messages are constructed using creative language with its own rules. Copywriting is certainly a part of this and that has its own rules. When you're creating video, you have certain rules that you should be following. If you use those principles well, it helps to get the message across better and more effectively. Number three, different people experience the same media message differently. That you and I could be watching the same message but because of our experiences and our biases, that we are interpreting the message differently. This is happening in the news cycle constantly.

That the same message goes out, but it can be seen from two different sides or multiple sides in different ways. But then when you run it through the filters of the different news organizations, they put their biases on it and that further distorts the message. Which brings us to number four, media have embedded values and points of view. Everything that's selected, when I put this podcast together today, I went in and pulled out my research, but I did it from my perspective. There was messages that I wanted to make sure that I shared, I put it together in this podcast. If you were to create a podcast on the same topic, I'm very confident that you would have different messages to share.

Lastly, most media messages are constructed to gain profit and or power. Well, I'm not sure if necessarily my messages to get profit or power, but I do have, trying to have certain influence. There are certain principles that I want to share. At this time in my life, there are certain ideas and concepts that I want to share. I want to make sure that I get the word out about those things. Those are the five core concepts that the Center for Media Literacy wanted to put out. When we're thinking about messaging or interpreting messaging in our classroom, this can be a framework that you can use to help students. When we come talking about students, they are overwhelmed with all this messaging.

At no time ever before have they had so much media put in front of them. They carry a device typically in their pocket that gets them video and audio and images and text and constantly 24/7. Anytime they pull it out, they have this media. For a large part, they just take it for granted and take it for fact that that's what it is. Well, this media is also affecting the classroom. There's a lot of students that do not watch TV. They go to YouTube to get the information that they want, to subscribe to the channels that they're interested in. Matter of fact, I spend more time on YouTube than I have ever done previously. That also affects the classroom where you have an instructor.

At any time, students can reach out to the internet to find ideas and concepts that may challenge what you are saying in the classroom. As educators, we have to be aware of that. Students may prefer this media, the media that they're getting outside of the

classroom over what's being presented in the classroom. Fortunately, as educators, you can also take advantage of this multimedia and put it to your advantage. We need to get past the instruction where things are right and wrong and flesh this out. Ways that you can do that, for example, history class is you could tap into especially, talking about the 19th century, 20th century.

Tapping into audio files and video of famous speeches that happened or famous events. It brings that textbook to life. If you are working with OER content, which we talked about in the previous episode, you can start enriching your instruction with these different media clips. I would encourage that you do this. If you were talking about economics, there are all kinds of famous economists that are out there, talking about different principles. Bringing that into the classroom just brings your class to a new level, but more importantly, we have to work with our students to get them to be able to sit through this media in this world that they live in.

Here's an example of how we can change this model. Right now, in a lot of classes, we have students going to the library and we're forcing them to go through academic journals because we want them to use peer-reviewed journals in their writing, which is great, absolutely great. The problem is if we rely only on peer-reviewed academic journals and we don't touch on the resources that are being created and help them critically analyze those resources, we may be missing out on something that's really important. In the fact that, when they leave academia, they no longer have access to these peer-reviewed journals unless they spend a crazy amount of money.

We need to also incorporate resources that they are going to get their hands on that are accessible in the real world. That's one of the things that we could do in academics-

-a little better is break away thinking that everyone will soon be a professor. Because the reality is that's not going to happen. We have to make sure that they can critically analyze materials that are accessible to them every day. The other part of this is we need to create projects where students are creating assets on their own. That they are creating video and they are creating audio, imagery because this the world that they would be living in. They need to be able to create these types of assets for a multitude of different jobs that they may have.

This is when we're moving from media literacy into media learning, this is something that we need to work on is building these projects where they have to demonstrate their knowledge in different ways. Have them create a video instead of just doing a classroom presentation which is absolutely critical. I'm not saying getting rid of classroom presentations. I'm saying that we also should create projects where they step it up to the next level and create a presentation that's a video presentation or some other project where it's going to live in the real world and add to the world's knowledge. A little scary, right? It could be a little scary because you have no idea. Well, maybe you do know the quality of products that are produced. I think you raise the level when you ask them to do it in the real world.

Let's move on to multimedia learning. Multimedia learning very simply is learning from both words and pictures. That's it. Words and pictures multimedia learning. One of the things the researches coming out and determining is learning from words and pictures

is significantly better than just learning from words alone. Adding imagery to what you do is absolutely important. Part of this with the imagery using video and imagery it can enhance interest. That the topic can be brought alive just a little more than just talking about it. They would be able it better because what's happening is it's mapping in different parts of the brain and therefore it's increasing the likelihood that they will remember what you're talking about.

This is also consistent with this idea of universal design for learning where you are providing choice over materials. In your instruction, you may the classroom lecture and also reading the textbook and other textual resources that you're providing. If you can also weave in video and weave in audio files, this starts to reach more people in your classroom than keeping it very narrow. Keeping it very narrow is very convenient for the instructor. If you want to move to a student's center learning, then you need to increase choice for the assets that you are providing in your classroom. They certainly reinforce each other.

Also, looking at the resources that we create as educators in the classroom. I'm going to pick on PowerPoint because there is a saying out there Death by PowerPoint. Well, it is absolutely true. More people probably hurt themselves watching a PowerPoint presentation than anything else. First of all, bullets kill. Bullets not used well will kill people. Death by PowerPoint is usually because we're using far too many bullets. I know this because I could slay with the best of them. I was a master at using bullets to the point that I just overwhelm people and hurt them. That was until I picked up this book called *Beyond Bullet Points* by Cliff Atkinson.

From that moment I have not done a PowerPoint using bullets since. That has been now probably 10 years. This ties into the research that Richard Mayer had conducted on this cognitive theory of multimedia learning. What they've come to realize that if you reduce the words on the page on your presentation and increase imagery, you will improve learning. The reason is because you're reducing the cognitive load for the learner. What I mean by that is, typically, when we have bullets on there and somebody is narrating what's going on, the student is reading them a slide and on the audio channel, they're having a collision because they've subvocalized what's written on the slide and you had this narration going on at the same. There's just too many things going on in one channel. They end up with cognitive overload.

By increasing imagery, you balance this out much better. We're processing things on two different channels. The visual channel that's taking in all this imagery and this audio channel which is handling the narration. I'd like to challenge you to find a documentary that uses bullet points to get their message across. I have not found one yet. There may be one out there but I just have not found it. In most cases, there is imagery and there is narration going on. What you don't have is this redundancy of written texts along with the narration creating this overload.

If you want to improve your instruction right away, go ahead and improve your PowerPoint presentations, your slide decks. It doesn't matter if it's Google Slides or Prezi or PowerPoint. Go ahead and simplify them. Remove the text. One way of removing texts is you may say, "Well, I need those eight bullets. I got to talk about those eight things." Well, great. Make eight slides instead and support each of those

slides with images. That way you're talking about one thing. The way the mind works is it pulls all this information into the sensory memory, sends it through the working memory which only can handle a couple of things at a time and then tries to get it into the long-term memory and get that all mapped out.

Start there. Increase the amount of imagery that you're going to put on your slides. I hand out my slides as a handout. Well, stop that. if you want to create a handout for your class, create a handout. Do not try to repurpose a PowerPoint slide deck as your handout. That is not what PowerPoint was designed to do. PowerPoint was designed to help support a presentation. A handout is something entirely different. Change how you were doing that. I would also encourage you to start using more media in the class. Find videos that work or create your own videos. Make sure that you're keeping them short.

One of the first things that people do when they look at a video is see how long the video is. I'm very confident you do it. I do it. People are looking for ways-- They certainly would love to see the video but it has to fit into their time schedule. Going out and recording your lecture is not a good idea. Recording a separate lecture breaking it into learning objectives is a much better way of doing it. Make sure that it's just not a talking head. Make sure that you are supporting it with good imagery to keep things interesting.

There is a book out there called *Video Script Writing* by Jonathan Halls. Jonathan Halls he's quite good at this. What he does is he goes ahead and prep videos. What he starts with is the storyboard. He gets the imagery right because everything else is that foundational. Everything else is based on the imagery. Then later he writes the script. Those are the same things that you should do. I would also encourage you to increase the amount of audio that you're putting into your class. Improve that. It could be a sign in podcast. It could be creating your own audio instructions to support written instructions that you're providing. Very easy to do. Very easy to weave into your courses.

If you're looking for a nice guide, the University of Delaware has a guide for multimedia literacy in the video. I will include that in the show notes because I think they put some good advice in that guide. Basically, talking about planning, what you plan to do, what your intent is, figure out with this idea of a storyboard, what you're going to need, and then go ahead and gather that information and then pull it all together. Then finally do the edits to clean everything up. They provide that guidance, so then I think that will help you out.

This idea of multimedia is not going away. You're going to be using it more and more as part of your class. It's essential that we get students to be able to critically analyze what's happening. Some of the discussion that is happening in my class this week, we're going to touch on these things. I'm glad that you came to be part of my discussion. Before I go, here's a quick plug for my book.