

Media Literacy as the 4th R: Engaging all students

Helping IPS Schools

Black & Latino Policy Institute

Issue: Preparing all students for career, college and citizenship

This begs the question: How will they reach all students?

Answer: Media Literacy: Art as the 4th R

Most schools discuss what foreign language the school will teach. Spanish, French, Japanese...are mentioned. Curiously, “the arts” are not. Yet, that’s what “the arts” are, another language. Dance, sculpting, weaving, pottery, drama and screen/play writing, poetry, singing, playing and composing music, drawing/painting/animation, movie and video making are now ways of self expression, expressing ideas, understanding and expressing understanding—making them invaluable classroom tools. Presently, what is absolutely astounding, is that this point of view is being expanded, mostly due to desktop publishing—creating the concept of **media literacy**.

In an era when students design Web sites for projects and integrate video, graphics, and animation into their presentations, **art is fast becoming the new literacy of our times:** To be fully literate, art must be included. Easy-to-use multimedia computer technology has open up the world of the “artist” in us all.

Redefining Literacy (Scherer, 1999)

Multimedia communications is spreading throughout the internationally connected world of the Internet—citizens of the world are moving away from “**text-centric**” communications and towards **pictures, diagrams, sound, sculpture, movement**, and other more **universal forms** (Mahiri, 2004) of communication.

For many students, multi-media opportunities in school can provide for:

- Improved expression and communication—the arts increase a student’s ability to express themselves because it provides more ways for self-expression and increases the spectrum of people with whom now can communicate.
- Alternative assessments—what students know but are unable to show, express, prove, via other forms, if provide options for success, can show they know/understand.
- Cognitive and attitudinal improvement—due to art requiring expertise in synthesis and evaluation, being active in the arts improves cognitive functions. In addition, **the many arts are learning’s best friend**—inducing student to come to school and be receptive to learning.
- Multi-cultural awareness and personal growth—there is no better way to understand and appreciate the diversity and commonality of people than through art. Also, the arts provide an opportunity for self-knowledge through self-expression, motor skills development, creativity, and working with others.
- Improves teaching—the adage, “If students do not learn through the way you teach, then teach them through the way they learn” applies here. Learning in and through the arts provides instructors a multitude of ways to get students to understand facts, ideas, and concepts, and to demonstrate understanding.

Media literacy can be defined as: how to read and write text; how to give and receive communications in all forms of the arts; how to discern, appreciate, and critique all forms of the arts, and commercial and political advertisements, and government communications including laws, policy, legislative and public meetings; how to evaluate teachers and how they teach; how to research and evaluate political, economic, social-cultural issues; and, how to present arguments and debate a variety of issues with other community members and elected officials.

Thus, since media literacy is how to use any/all of the arts to communicate, how to understand, teaching students to evaluate the many media images that surround them, will give students tools to make responsible choices about what they see and here. This empowers students to take control of their reactions and to see the effects that media messages, especially advertising, have on their emotions, desires, and beliefs.

Finally, **different ways of teaching** are illustrated in *Postmodern Educator: Arts based inquiries* (Diamond & Mullin, 1999) teachers are encouraged to promote the development of arts-based narrative inquires/research by their students by using artistic forms (stories, poems, narratives, visuals) as instructional devices. The arts allow both teacher and student to “become” within the environment of the curriculum where they are free to access a variety of media for self-expression. This also allowed students to pick/use different media to learn from/through and to show/assess what they learned.

References

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- Diamond, C. and Mullin, C. (1999). *Postmodern Educator: Arts based inquiries in teacher education*. New York City: P. Lange Publishers.
- Scherer, M. (Ed.). (1999). *Redefining Literacy. Educational Leadership*. 57, 2. Alexandria, VA: ASCD.

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