

Chapter 4.5

Creative Remixing and Digital Learning: Developing an Online Media Literacy Learning Tool for Girls

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ABSTRACT

This chapter explores how media literacy education may continue to be responsive and relevant to the continually changing nature of popular culture through the development of innovative online multimedia educational programs. Because pre-adolescent and adolescent girls are actively involved in the consumption of popular music, competitive performance television programs like American Idol as well as online social networks, it is important to examine the constructed nature of these new types of messages and experiences. My Pop Studio (www.mypopstudio.com), a creative play experience for girls ages 9 to 14, was developed by the authors to address the need for

media literacy skills among this group. We present a model for assessing the impact of the program on learning that incorporates the dimensions of pleasure, a sense of mastery, participation in an online community, media literacy skills, and other outcomes. Online games that use creative remixing techniques may promote metacognition, reflection, and critical analysis skills. Girls need opportunities to strengthen critical thinking skills about mass media and popular culture and the use of online learning environments may support the development of adolescents' media literacy skills.

INTRODUCTION

An important challenge facing educators today is the need to keep education relevant to the con-

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tinually changing media environment of the 21st Century. Media literacy education, while still at the margins of mainstream educational practice, has made some significant inroads in a number of nations, as educators develop approaches to strengthen students' critical thinking and communication skills through activities involving critical inquiry, media production, discussion about media and society, and close analysis of media texts (Dickson, 1994; Felini, 2004; Hart, 1998; Hobbs, 2004). Of course, in some schools, teachers hesitate to explore topics related to popular culture, a phenomenon which may diminish one of the major strengths of media literacy: its perceived relevance in bridging the gap between the classroom and the culture. This problem is challenging to address, because teachers who have fears about the perceived value of popular culture may not want to continually adapt their curricula to match the changing media environment. With the intense schedule of teaching as many as 150 students per day, most teachers do not have the luxury of modifying their curriculum extensively. In some schools, teachers use video and print artifacts that are nearly 10 years old (Hobbs, 2007). There is a need for curriculum resources that can help educators incorporate media literacy into the curriculum with materials that represent the rapidly-changing world of technology, media, and popular culture.

Recently, there have been some explorations as to how to help educators introduce media literacy through the use of online media. This chapter explains one example of this new work: the development, implementation, and assessment of My Pop Studio (www.mypopstudio.com), an online creative play experience developed by the author under a contract from the U.S. Federal Government, Office on Women's Health. This chapter examines how online games can introduce key ideas of media literacy by taking advantage of the unique characteristics of the online environment's capacity to blend play and learning in a creative play environment where users can experiment

with the processes of creating media, remixing existing content, and analyzing messages. This chapter examines how creative play, combined with metacognitive modeling, may promote learning of key media literacy concepts through activities that include media analysis and media production.

Targeting Adolescent Girls

Adolescence is a challenging time of life. Between age 10 and age 15, many girls in both developed and developing nations lose confidence and diminish their health outcomes as they move through puberty. At age 10, girls are confident, spunky, outspoken, and see themselves as healthy, capable, and strong. By age 15, 30% of American teen girls are smokers (Gidwani, Sobol, DeJong, Perrin, & Gortmaker, 2002). Many have chosen to avoid more rigorous courses in math and science, even when they have the capability to perform well in these classes. In the United States, teen pregnancy rates, while declining since the 1990s, are still high, especially among young women living in poverty. Tween and teen girls experience psychological depression. More than 4 million teen girls shoplift. Nutrition and body image create problems for the health of teen girls (Jones, Bennett, Olmsted, Lawson, & Rodin, 2004; Kilbourne, 1999; Lazarus et al., 2000).

For girls, life during adolescence can be especially stressful in the intense peer culture of adolescence. Expectations from peers and family, the pressure for material possessions, and social relationships take center stage. An online survey commissioned by Girls Incorporated and Harris Interactive between March 14, 2006, and March 30, 2006, examined opinions of more than 2,000 U.S. youth to focus on the ways gender stereotypes and expectations shape the lives of girls and boys (Girls Inc., 2006). The survey data reveal that there are persistent gender expectations being compounded by a growing emphasis on perfection, resulting in mounting pressure on girls to

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