Chapter 7
Putting *Me* in Media:
Communicating and Creating Screen Media with a Purpose

Christine Wells
Carthage College, Rosebud Institute, USA

ABSTRACT

Like learning to read or write, or acquiring the fundamentals of mathematics, screen media literacy is rapidly becoming an essential life skill. This dominant and expansive interface for contact, culture, and commerce has become the way we communicate now. Given the power and reach of the screen, it seems essential that as with any other fundamental skill, we must begin to understand and create within this medium in a more foundational, intentional way. But the language of the screen is complicated, rapidly becoming almost as multidimensional and multifaceted as the number of users it encompasses. Additionally, given its reliance on technology, it is an ever-changing landscape fraught with the challenges of chasing the elusive cutting edge. This chapter looks at a more back to basics approach to screen media literacy by offering instruction in what screen media really is and how to create it in a more foundational and transferable fashion. Using simple, accessible technology, people become more screen literate and the creation process enables deeper, more authentic learning, with the credence and accountability of a potentially world wide audience. Focusing on an integral part of a process developed by the Rosebud Institute – an organization committed to making screen media literacy more broadly understood and accessible – this step-by-step, integrated method delivers a new understanding of media literacy. Using simple, accessible technology, participants create dynamic, original ePortfolio websites themselves and distribute their work to an ever-expanding audience. Developed along with Rosebud's founder and director, Paul Chilsen, the process encourages individuals to find their own voice and embrace the me in media, moving us towards a future where people will instantly capture, identifiably own, intelligently store, and instinctively know what to do with their digital assets, allowing us all to communicate more effectively and thrive in a media-saturated world.

INTRODUCTION

What do you look like to the online world? Did you know anyone was watching?

Media Convergence – the coming together and overlapping of film, television, websites, social media, news, and advertising – is changing the way we communicate and interact at an alarming rate. Every day we are engulfed in video, images, and text, and most of it is coming to us on a screen. Screen media is everywhere and the "noise" it is delivering at an increasingly feverish pace is more and more becoming a desensitizing hum. How do we begin to deal with this? We could continue to let it wash over us, becoming more and more detached, allowing what Mike Wesch references as a "whatever" feeling towards screen media to take over, a general sense that we are "increasingly disconnected, disempowered, tuned out, and alienated" (Wesch, 2012). But a more progressive answer seems fundamentally rooted in *understanding*. If we are to understand how screen media works, and more importantly, if we are to have a personal voice that rises above the desensitizing hum of the screen, we need a more back to basics approach that strips away the "sexiness," and the bells and whistles that we see in commercial screen media. Like learning to read or write, acquiring the fundamentals of mathematics, or even learning to play a musical instrument, the screen is another medium of communication, and we need to learn to understand and create using a more foundational, building blocks approach. This chapter discusses an intentional, focused, adaptable exploration of screen media in a more deliberate, screen-savvy, engaged fashion, and presents part of a programmatic method to increase screen media literacy through the design, development and publishing of a unique online presence through the creation of an ePortfolio.

Technology continues to evolve and change at lightning speed, warping our definition of "educational technology" and what defines effective technology education, both in K-12 institutions and higher education. Is it simply learning to organize files, navigate software, word process documents, or press buttons on the latest gadgets we bought yesterday that are now virtually obsolete today? Is it learning an interface? Learning to type? Technology will always change, will continue to advance and evolve, and there will always be some new tool or app or something expensive that will claim to solve all of our technology needs. But at its core, what does technology help us to accomplish? What does it do? What are the advantages to having screen-based, constant, overwhelming access to information that may or may not be accurate? What do we do with the ability to over-inform people we are barely connected to, with endless status updates? If we pare all that away and walk behind the "curtain" comprised of gadgets, functionality, and "new"ness, technology can become a more effective way for us to communicate and connect with each other.

So what do we do? How do we change course and choose not to simply consume and be manipulated by commercial screen media? Rather than assuming the role of uninformed media consumers, we need to be brave enough to harness the control, the opportunity, and the basic skills in creating an intentional digital presence. We must learn to "manage" our digital selves, the information we choose to share, and the original work and opinions we *do* create, so that what we share online is unique, appropriate, and *real*. We must recognize the importance of teaching the younger generations that come behind us, evermore besieged by pervasive access and opportunity to the screen not to be swallowed by screen media, but to share carefully, to write appropriately, and to learn to express a clear voice that rises above the din. And most importantly, we must come to understand and accept that in the online world, the personal has become public, and *now*, with the world as the audience, it matters so much more that we manage our individual online presence.

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