

# Fostering Media Literacy through Digital Content Creation: An Educational Initiative at the Buck Festival of Foggia

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## Abstract

In the contemporary educational landscape, digital citizenship and media literacy constitute essential competencies for preparing students to engage critically and consciously with digital media. This study describes an experimental educational initiative conducted at the Buck Festival in Foggia, aimed at developing digital competencies and multimedia expression skills among middle school students. Drawing upon the Theory of Change framework proposed by McDougall & Rega (2022) the project identifies the interventions required to foster transformative learning, whereby students acquire not only technical skills but also civic awareness and autonomous expression capabilities.

The project's primary objective was to actively engage students in creating digital content, including podcasts, blogs, and web TV reportage, connected to festival events. The adopted methodology, both experiential and collaborative in nature, employed focus groups with guiding questions to gather data on students' perceptions regarding the project's educational impact.

Preliminary findings indicate enhanced digital competencies and civic engagement, aligning with the transformative perspective proposed by the Theory of Change. Future research directions encompass a longitudinal analysis of the same student cohort and comparative studies with other educational institutions to assess the model's applicability across different contexts and evaluate the effectiveness of the educational pathway.

**Keywords** *Digital content creation, Podcasting, Citizen journalism, Media literacy, Media education, Digital skills*

## 1. Introduction

For fourteen years, the city of Foggia has hosted the Buck Festival, an event entirely dedicated to children's and young adult literature. Each October, for one week, the city's cultural heritage sites – libraries, museums, art galleries – welcome hundreds of children and young people as protagonists of educational activities and events. National and international authors and illustrators enliven the Festival through animated readings, creative workshops, theatrical performances, and a publishing fair. In 2024, the overarching theme was storytelling, featuring over one hundred and fifty scheduled events, involving twenty-two guests and numerous local associations and volunteers.

The Festival is not merely a cultural event but functions as an educational platform aimed at promoting literacy and reading among younger generations. Reading and narrative play crucial roles in young people's cognitive, emotional, and social development. Recent studies demonstrate that early and continuous exposure to meaningful narratives correlates with enhanced comprehension abilities,

enriched language skills, and more developed empathic capabilities (Suggate, 2016). Furthermore, storytelling serves not only as an effective educational tool but also as a practice that strengthens cultural identity and belonging (East et al., 2010). In an increasingly digital world, traditional and multimedia narrative modes integrate to support the development of transversal competencies and multilevel literacy.

The initiative to connect the Buck Festival with an educational activity designed for middle school students aligns perfectly with these dynamics. The project, focused on creating multimedia communication content and promoting digital literacy, corresponds with European Union recommendations (2018) on developing digital and cultural competencies as fundamental pillars of active citizenship. According to TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) principles, integrating digital tools in cultural and creative contexts enhances not only students' technical abilities but also their capacity to interpret and produce meaningful content (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

In designing the activity, the Festival was not conceived as a mere backdrop but as a structuring element of the educational intervention. The connection with real-world context is recognized as a crucial lever for motivation and meaningful learning. As Fredricks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2006) assert, student engagement is maximized when educational activities are perceived as relevant and connected to their world. Involving young people in local cultural heritage sites, combined with direct experience of a public event like the Buck Festival, enhanced their interest by providing an authentic and stimulating learning environment.

The multimedia content produced by participants served a dual purpose: documenting and communicating Festival activities while demonstrating how cultural heritage can be enhanced through contemporary languages and tools. This approach aligns with recent theories on situated and collaborative learning, which emphasize the role of social interactions and context in acquiring new competencies (Bloch et al., 1994) (Gee, 2003).

The Buck Festival demonstrates how local events can transform into powerful educational tools, capable of uniting creativity, technology, and cultural heritage. Such projects not only address the educational needs of new generations but also strengthen the bond between youth, community, and territory, promoting integral development that combines cognitive, emotional, and social competencies.

## **2. Media Literacy and Digital Cultural Heritage Education**

Cultural heritage represents a strategic educational resource for student development, capable of enriching the learning journey through authentic and contextualized experiences. Integrating digital technologies in the appreciation and enhancement of cultural heritage transforms education into a process of knowledge co-construction, based on students' active participation and civic engagement (Borgia et al., 2019) (Luigini & Panciroli, 2018). Contemporary pedagogy recognizes how these digitally-supported experiences can foster not only cognitive learning but also experiential and reflective learning, wherein students can "dialogue" with culture, exploring and reinterpreting heritage elements through a modern and participatory lens (Giglietto et al., 2019) (Casonato et al., 2022).

This approach aligns with Jenkins' (2008) concept of "participatory cultures," which centers educational experience on students' ability to utilize digital tools such as web and social media for creative expression and development of civic responsibility and belonging. Through these tools, young people become conscious actors and protagonists of their own education, experiencing learning as a social and cultural experience connected to contemporary world issues.

In this context, media education and digital literacy emerge as key competencies for understanding and responsibly utilizing technologies applied to cultural heritage. Media literacy, as described by Potter (2004), refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, and create content—essential skills for critical and conscious interpretation of media and digital content. In educational settings, this competency enables students to develop analytical and reflective abilities that help them evaluate information reliability, understand production dynamics, and question source origins.

New media literacy enriches the educational journey with additional expressive tools, enabling students to develop and produce interactive and multimedia content. It introduces an encoding aspect that extends beyond information decoding, encouraging students to create original content, shaping their vision through video, images, and sound. This competency stimulates creative expression and supports autonomous knowledge construction, fundamental for learning that values each student's unique contribution and ensures genuine inclusivity (Rivoltella, 2022).

Digital media literacy encompasses three principal dimensions essential for building digital cultural heritage education: critical, ethical, and aesthetic (Valgolio, 2021) (Rivoltella, 2022). The critical dimension enables students to exercise thorough and conscious content interpretation, developing the ability to evaluate information reliability and source authenticity. The ethical dimension refers to awareness of one's digital actions and the importance of maintaining respectful and responsible behavior. The aesthetic dimension promotes appreciation of digital expressive forms, encouraging youth to use images, video, and sound to communicate effectively and express their vision creatively.

In secondary education, these competencies are crucial not only for navigating the digital context safely and critically but also form part of civic education aimed at developing informed and responsible citizens. Information technologies have revolutionized civic participation, giving rise to digital citizenship, which implies using digital technologies for active and responsible engagement in social, political, and cultural dynamics (Sudulich, 2008).

Internet has become a crucial resource for accessing civic and political information, providing content from governments, community organizations, interest groups, political campaigns, and media outlets. However, this increased accessibility requires specific competencies for responsible digital navigation and informed decision-making (Hobbs, 1998). These competencies, essential for digital citizenship, enable individuals to benefit not only personally and professionally but also socially, accessing reliable news that creates opportunities for themselves and their families.

Media literacy and digital literacy education address these needs by providing students with fundamental competencies for active and responsible participation in contemporary democratic society.

These skills include reading and writing, listening and dialogue, knowledge of new technologies, critical viewing of visual content, and the ability to create messages through various digital tools (Potter, 2004). Digital messages or “texts” may include languages, images, graphic design, icons, sounds, and music, representing a complex form of symbolic communication requiring a critical and conscious approach for full comprehension and ethical use (Buckingham, 2003).

Furthermore, media literacy and digital literacy education, with its emphasis on critical and reflective competencies, provides students with tools to evaluate messages concerning public agenda and engage with philosophical, social, and democratic values. These reflective abilities not only promote critical thinking but also encourage the formation of an informed and active citizenship, capable of participating in social life constructively and responsibly.

### **3. Fostering Media Literacy through digital content creation**

Research has demonstrated that one effective approach to promoting digital literacy involves direct experimentation with digital communication content creation tools, such as podcasts, radio broadcasts, TV programs, and blog articles (Rivoltella, 2020). This approach consequently fosters the development of critical thinking and responsible consumption regarding similar content created and distributed by others (Hobbs & Jensen, 2022). In a society where individuals are increasingly interconnected from an early age, and where ambiguous and disinformative media content proliferates (Buckingham, 2019), such strategies for promoting informed communication are fundamental, particularly in educational contexts.

Direct content production offers additional benefits. First, it promotes reflection on the mechanisms underlying various phases of media content ideation, structuration, and distribution. Second, by directing efforts toward culturally or educationally relevant topics, it can spark creators’ interest in promoting these themes, potentially leading to future independent engagement in citizen journalism, blogging, and podcasting. However, merely encouraging young people to freely create and publish media material is insufficient. Without guidance on good online communication practices, there is a risk of inadvertently contributing to disinformation or unethical practices. Instead, a specific curriculum is essential for effectively teaching virtuous communication strategies (Rivoltella & Rossi, 2024). Simultaneously, technical and accessibility components cannot be underestimated. Teaching content creation methods that are not easily replicable, either due to resource availability or difficulty level, would preclude the possibility of stimulating autonomous continuation of learned practices. Focusing on free, open-source, and user-friendly tools helps ensure that individual educational experiences transcend their specific context and become the foundation for future established practice.

Specifically, podcasting represents one potential theme for such an initiative. By nature, podcasts are purely auditory content, often organized into episodes, characterized by primarily narrative or opinion-based structures (McHugh, 2016). Positioned between talk shows and radio programs, they have gained recent popularity through streaming platforms, particularly among younger generations (Van den Bulck & Roskos-Ewoldsen, 2020). Writing and designing podcasts requires multiple digital

competencies. Basic storytelling structure is essential: distinguishing one's podcast and making it engaging requires clear identity and effective narrative techniques. Beyond this, podcasting demands performance skills: clear and pleasant voice, functional content presentation, and engaging personality are just some success conditions. Accurate research for content development is also indispensable, especially for narrative podcasts. Technical skills include basic recording techniques, audio editing (including music selection and mixing), and online publication through streaming platforms. For videopodcasts, additional video recording and editing competencies are required. Fortunately, minimal requirements include modern smartphones capable of effective recording, potentially aided by low-cost portable microphones, and high-quality video recording. Free and open-source editing software is available for both PC and smartphone platforms, and online content publication is simple and cost-free.

Web TV content follows a similar nature. As a digital evolution of cable television, web TV offers the advantage of free online availability through simple internet access. Content-wise, it differs from videopodcasting primarily through more predominant visual medium utilization: reports, in-depth analysis, and interviews can be conveyed naturally visually, while podcasts must consider their audio-only audience.

Blogging, while structurally different, yields similar results. Among the earliest forms of digital self-expression, it involves publishing brief articles on an online platform (Nardi et al., 2004). Social media's advent has reconceptualized it: platforms like Twitter essentially represent collective microblogging environments where users share ideas and opinions in brief formats on a common platform. Required competencies primarily involve writing: blog posts share formal requirements with newspaper articles.

Interviewing serves as a common thread among these formats: whether audio or video, it represents an excellent opportunity for dialogue, where the interviewer must engage with external perspectives to enrich their podcast, program, or blog content. This requires considerable preliminary research to ensure interesting and relevant interviews, along with strong presentation, improvisation, and entertainment skills.

The educational experience of digital content creation can be enriched by framing it within a context of interest to participants. Emotional and intellectual engagement, crucial in education generally (Tyng et al., 2017), can develop intrinsic motivation potentially making the educational project more fruitful (Howard et al., 2021). This perspective underlies the initiative to establish a youth multimedia editorial team documenting the 2024 Buck Festival events in Foggia.

#### **4. Implementation of a Digital Content Creation Workshop: A Case Study with Middle School Students**

Drawing upon the aforementioned theoretical principles and practical considerations, a theoretical-practical educational activity was designed for middle school students centered around the Buck Festival context. Specifically, 11 students from 2 schools in Foggia participated in the project. The students, informed by their referring teachers, volunteered spontaneously to participate in the activities.

The overall project was developed using McDougall and Rega's (2022) theory of change as a theoretical framework of reference. Details are outlined in Table 1.

**Table 1. Theory of Change framework**

	Needs	Inputs	Outputs	Outcomes	Impacts
<b>Access</b>	Students need access to digital content creation tools and platforms; opportunities to engage with cultural events and digital media production; guidance on using digital tools effectively	Access to University web radio and TV equipment; Training on software (Audacity, DaVinci Resolve, WordPress); Access to Festival events and cultural spaces; Technical guidance from educators	Technical projects made by students: podcasts, interviews, blog articles	Students gain practical experience with digital media tools, develop technical skills in audio/video production, learn to navigate digital publishing platforms; Increased confidence in using digital media tools	Sustained access to digital creation tools through knowledge of free/open-source options; Long-term engagement with digital content creation; Bridge built between students and cultural institutions
<b>Awareness</b>	Students need critical understanding of digital media, awareness of content creation processes, understanding of media representation	Theoretical training on media formats; Guidance on content planning and production; Exposure to professional authors and cultural events; Mentoring on media literacy concepts	Reflections shared during focus group	Enhanced understanding of media production processes; Improved critical analysis skills; Greater awareness of content quality and credibility; Better understanding of different media formats	Development of critical media consumption habits; Increased awareness of media representation issues; Long-term engagement with cultural content
<b>Capability</b>	Students need practical content creation skills, collaborative work experience, autonomous decision-making abilities	Hands-on training sessions; Group work opportunities; Independent project choices; Technical and creative guidance	Technical projects made by students: podcasts, interviews, blog articles	Developed technical production skills; Enhanced collaborative abilities; Improved creative expression capabilities; Increased autonomy in content creation	Sustained content creation practices; Development of personal media projects; Enhanced digital citizenship capabilities
<b>Consequences</b>	Students need to understand impact of media creation; Community needs quality cultural content; Festival needs documentation and promotion	Guidance on ethical content creation; Platform for publishing student work; Connection with cultural events; Real audience engagement opportunities	Public sharing of created content as official Festival news	Understanding of content impact; Contribution to cultural documentation; Enhanced community engagement; Development of ethical content practices	Long-term cultural participation; Sustained ethical media practices; Positive contribution to digital ecosystem; Enhanced cultural documentation practices

The project included an initial theoretical training phase, followed by substantial practical experience. The first day, lasting approximately 5 hours, was conducted at the University of Foggia's Web Radio and Web TV facility. During this session, participating students first received general information about the characteristics of podcasts, television programs, and blogs. They then utilized available equipment to familiarize themselves with technical aspects of digital content creation. Specifically, they experimented with audio recording using professional microphones, video recording with cameras, direction, audio editing (using Audacity, open-source software), video editing (using DaVinci's Resolve, free software), and blog management (using Wordpress.com, also free). Participants also practiced program and podcast design, dividing into three groups. This division was encouraged to promote active participation according to individual interests and aptitudes in content creation.

The following two days took place across various locations in Foggia: using a computer lab as an operational base, where content was edited and uploaded online, groups moved between different cultural venues (museums, art galleries, libraries) where Buck Festival activities were occurring. Demonstrating considerable autonomy, they freely chose events aligned with their interests. Visiting authors, festival staff, and even passersby were involved in content creation. Among the interviewed authors of national and international renown were Simone Rea, Gek Tessaro, Sonia Maria Luce Possentini, and many others. The second practical day was entirely dedicated to the Festival's roundtable discussion, attended by all guests and organizers.

The final day was primarily devoted to finalizing content recorded during previous activities. Additionally, in the project's last hour, a focus group was conducted with all students, aiming both to gather information about participants' opinions of the project and to obtain feedback for future activity modifications. Complete content was published partly on the University of Foggia's Web Radio and Web TV platforms, and partly on the Festival's dedicated blog. Students were provided with access credentials for the latter, with encouragement to continue freely publishing content related to children's literature.

## **5. Qualitative analysis**

Building on the detailed account of the workshop's design and implementation, it is essential to further explore how these innovative educational interventions resonated with the participants. The previous sections have delineated the strategic integration of digital tools and cultural contexts aimed at fostering media literacy and civic engagement. In order to comprehensively assess these outcomes, the subsequent qualitative analysis delves into the nuanced reflections, emotional responses, and collaborative dynamics manifested during the project. This integrative discussion not only contextualizes the technical and pedagogical achievements described earlier but also illuminates the emergent personal and collective perceptions that underscore the transformative potential of digital content creation in educational settings.

The qualitative analysis of the focus group conducted in the present project revealed a series of significant reflections on the techniques of interviewing, podcasting, and editing. Through targeted questions, the aim was to explore the level of digital competencies and media literacy, as well as to collect feedback regarding the overall experience and the value of the activity for the local community. This approach is in line with Hobbs (1998), who emphasizes the importance of developing critical skills in young people for responsible media navigation.

The focus group was structured around specific questions, including those concerning the perception of the techniques learned and their usefulness. The questions included: “What do you think of the techniques you have learned (interviews, podcasts, articles, editing)?” This question enabled the participants to reflect on the characteristics of the various formats and on their level of digital competencies, in accordance with Rivoltella’s (2020) guidelines on the importance of direct content production.

Other questions, such as “What did you like most about the overall experience and what would you change?”, were intended to gather useful information for potential future modifications of the project. Additional inquiries addressed the difficulties encountered during the creative process and the interest in pursuing similar experiences independently, thereby contributing to an exploration of the potential for developing new content. Finally, attention was given to group work and to the impact of the festival on the city, with the intention of assessing cultural awareness and the importance of communication.

The primary objective of the investigation was twofold: on the one hand, to assess the effectiveness of the communication techniques learned by the participants, and on the other, to understand the impact of the activity on their approach to citizen journalism and cultural awareness. It was also intended to gather indications for any potential future modifications of the project.

The categorical analysis was carried out in several steps, inspired by Grounded Theory Charmaz (2006). Initially, familiarization with the data was achieved through repeated readings of the focus group transcripts. Subsequently, codes were generated by identifying significant segments of text. These codes were then grouped into themes, leading to the emergence of the main categories. Finally, the themes were defined and named to accurately reflect the content expressed by the participants.

The categories that emerged from the analysis are as follows:

- Inclusion and Participation

The focus group evidenced a strong sense of inclusion. The participants felt welcomed and actively involved in the project. The expressions of enthusiasm and active participation suggest that the environment was conducive to cooperation, in line with Jenkins’s (2006) theories on participatory cultures.

- Difficulties/Successes Encountered During the Process

The narratives reveal both difficulties—such as the initial anxiety when conducting interviews—and successes, such as the creation of engaging and significant content. The testimony of overcoming



anxiety demonstrates how the group supported its members in becoming more confident, in accordance with the change theory of McDougall and Rega (2022).

- Activities

The activities undertaken—such as the creation of articles, podcasts, and video editing—are described with enthusiasm. This suggests that the various techniques had a positive impact on the participants' learning and creativity, as evidenced by Rivoltella (2020).

- Emotions and States of Mind

The emotions shared by the participants reveal a mix ranging from joy to satisfaction. The repetition of phrases such as “it was very enjoyable” underscores the importance of fun in the learning process, a crucial aspect according to Deci and Ryan's (1985) intrinsic motivation theories.

- Impact of the Festival on the Territory

The festival is perceived as an opportunity to enhance the city's reputation, countering negative prejudices. The participants recognize the cultural significance of the event and its potential for social inclusion, in line with Sudulich (2008) ideas.

- Ideation/Innovation – Inspiration

The discussions reveal that the participants felt inspired by the activities undertaken. The idea of producing podcasts and interviews is seen as a way to express individual creativity and acquire new skills, supporting Rivoltella's (2022) recommendations on education for digital citizenship.

- Cooperation/Confrontation

Group work is emphasized, with the participants feeling more connected through collaboration. However, there are also moments of tension, highlighting the complexity of group dynamics, as described by Vygotsky (1978).

- Self-Perception

The participants express an increased awareness of their own abilities. Personal growth is a recurring theme, with some feeling more comfortable in public speaking and collaboration, reflecting the importance of agency as proposed by Bandura (1999).

- Practical Feedback from the Podcast

The practical experiences with podcasting are described as formative. The participants acknowledge both the utility of the created content and its capacity to reach a broader audience, thereby supporting the idea that the production of digital content can amplify educational impact (Hobbs & Jensen, 2022).

- Hobbies

Extracurricular activities and personal interests emerge in the discourse, suggesting that the project stimulated curiosity and creativity beyond the school context—a key factor for student engagement (Tyng et al., 2017).

It is thus possible to highlight that the analysis demonstrates how the experience of citizen journalism can not only enhance the practical skills of the participants but also stimulate a deeper reflection on their own cultural identity and on the value of information within the community, in line with the recommendations of the European Union (2018) for the development of digital and cultural competences.

## 6. Conclusions and future perspectives

The educational project developed for the Buck Festival in Foggia represents a significant milestone in the evolution of pedagogical practices aimed at promoting digital and multimedia citizenship competencies among middle school students. The direct involvement of students in creating digital content linked to a real event enabled the integration of technical, communicative, and critical dimensions into a unified educational experience. This approach responds to the principles of “new media literacy” (Rivoltella, 2020), which advocates the need to educate young people to understand and use digital media not merely as passive consumers but as conscious and creative content producers.

The educational activity encouraged active participation, enriching the learning journey with an authentic and meaningful experience that promotes responsible digital citizenship development (Sudulich, 2008). The project aligns with social constructivist theories, emphasizing the importance of situated learning and collective knowledge construction (Vygotsky, 1978); through group work and interaction with adults and peers, students developed a sense of agency—awareness of their power to act and impact reality (Bandura, 1999). The opportunity to explore and utilize digital technologies for self-expression fostered the development of fundamental transversal competencies such as collaboration, problem-solving, and critical thinking. These competencies, often overlooked in traditional educational contexts, prove essential for civic education and democratic participation, providing students with necessary tools for active and responsible societal interaction (Hobbs, 1998).

The Buck Festival experience also demonstrated the importance of stimulating students’ cognitive and emotional engagement through authentic and situated tasks. Aligned with intrinsic motivation theories (Deci & Ryan, 1985), the project leveraged activity meaningfulness, contributing to active involvement and personal fulfillment. Students had the opportunity to report on their immediate reality, assuming roles as reporters and critical observers of their environment. This facilitated not only content learning but also the development of intrinsic motivation which, according to recent research, is crucial for long-term success and meaningful learning (Hattie & Donoghue, 2016).

In light of preliminary results, the project's next steps will be fundamental for consolidating and deepening emerging conclusions. The first subsequent phase will involve analyzing data collected through a focus group conducted with participants, using ten structured questions on key themes to evaluate experience perception and acquired competencies. This focus group will be analyzed through thematic analysis and sentiment analysis techniques, utilizing advanced tools like T-Lab and Python, which enable exploration of affective and cognitive dynamics in student feedback. These tools will allow a more nuanced understanding of their experience, highlighting not only acquired competencies but also emotions and reflections arising from the project.

From a longitudinal perspective, the project plans to repeat the experience with the same students over time, monitoring their competency evolution and personal development. This longitudinal approach is supported by psycho-pedagogical studies demonstrating how long-term educational experiences can promote stable and profound growth in socio-emotional and digital competencies (Zimmerman, 2000). Through continuous monitoring, it will be possible to evaluate not only the immediate impact of the experience but also its potential contribution to individual growth and responsible digital citizenship construction.

Simultaneously, the project will expand transversally, involving students from other educational institutions. This comparative approach will explore how different educational contexts may influence digital competency and citizenship learning. Comparing student groups from different schools will help understand whether and how factors like locality, school resources, or socio-economic level may affect learning modalities and outcomes. Such data will offer valuable insights for developing educational interventions adapted to various contexts' specificities, aligned with principles of educational equity and inclusivity.

In this scenario, adopting a psycho-pedagogical approach focused on promoting digital citizenship and students' intrinsic motivation represents an important step toward education that not only values technical competencies but promotes personal growth and social participation. The Buck Festival project could thus constitute a replicable model of digital civic education, contributing to the formation of aware and active citizens. In an increasingly digitalized world, where technologies transform ways of communicating, gaining information, and participating in public life, this educational initiative represents an essential investment for developing a democratic and inclusive society.

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