

**Being Human through Bits and Bytes**  
**Professor Michael Meimaris**

The common place where MOOCs, Mobiles and the Cloud converge is DATA in general. Indeed, in the core of the Massive Open Online Courses concept lies the cloud. The very existence of anything that is both “massive” and “online” needs the interconnected resources which cloud computing provides nowadays. Using innovative combinations of cloud, mobile, and collaborative technologies, MOOCs are able to deliver entire curricula at little or no cost to education consumers.

All these data, the interminable lines of 0 and 1, more and more often constitute a multimedia product in our mediated era. A product comprised of still images, video, music, sounds, text, graphic designs etc. And all these data that is now stored in the cloud, accessed usually through mobile devices, uploaded to MOOCs, is a set of information that we are expected to understand as the “primal matter” that will ignite the necessary engagement of both teachers and students of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In education, the term *student engagement* has grown in popularity in recent decades, most likely resulting from an increased understanding of the role that certain intellectual, emotional, behavioral, physical, and social factors play in the learning process.

Engagement is thought to be a sine qua non aspect of our mediated time, not only for digital natives, but for digital immigrants and foreigners, as well. So what we are expected to do is use a highly personalized way that stirs up engagement in every single one of them.

At the Laboratory of New Technologies in Communication, Education and the Mass Media at the University of Athens, by embracing this line of thinking, we put forward theory as well as applications in the areas of Serious Games and Digital Game-Based Learning, of Adaptive and Personalized Systems and Networks, of Digital Storytelling.

Digital Storytelling, that through the use of free of charge or really cheap software, the use of the internet, digital photos and videos –easily accessible features on any smartphone– allows us to create our own multimedia story, thus transforming us into creative storytellers, and what is more, with digital skills. Digital storytelling is available to everyone: from school to university students, from intellectuals to even illiterate people (and we know how important this can be for a large number of the 194 member states of UNESCO), younger or older citizens, men or women, without any cultural or other boundaries, discriminations or limitations.

In a learning environment, capturing the interest of the learners is the first step towards

achieving knowledge. The contribution of Digital Storytelling to this end can take two forms: it can either derive from the educator/facilitator or from the learners themselves. Stories created by educators aspire to increase the curiosity of the learners in the exploration of new topics, concepts and ideas, while laying the field for a free and productive discussion on the issues addressed. When learners are assigned the creation of their own digital stories, their active involvement enhances their research skills and critical ability, helps them improve the way they organise, express and communicate their ideas, as well as evaluate without judging their own work as well as that of others.

The process of creating digital stories, equips learners with the so called “21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills” –also known as “Digital Age Literacies”– that is the digital, global, technology, visual and information literacies. Acquiring this set of skills is considered crucial for today’s citizens who are expected to meet the highly demanding requirements of our interconnected societies and markets.