



Educommunication and Storytelling for Gender Equality: European Institutions and NGOs' Case Studies

Isabel Palomo-Domínguez

Mykolas Romeris University, Lithuania

Abstract

This research examines the effectiveness of educommunication in promoting gender equality and the broader Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). It begins by establishing a theoretical foundation for this interdisciplinary field, based on the intersection between communication and education, while also emphasizing the ethical, transformative, and purposeful dimensions of the storytelling narrative strategy when applied to real-world social issues. Drawing on these concepts, five case studies focused on storytelling-based educommunication projects developed by public institutions and non-governmental organizations from Europe are presented. All the initiatives share a common commitment: to foster awareness and critical reflection among younger generations—specifically the Alpha and Zeta cohorts—on gender equality and related global challenges within the framework of the SDGs. Through qualitative analysis, the study examines the narrative strategies and digital formats employed across various platforms, including workshops, interactive content, immersive digital storytelling, gamified learning experiences, and participatory media production. Findings reveal an expanding repertoire of narrative techniques shaped by the opportunities of the post-digital world, emphasizing user agency, emotional engagement, and co-creation. The results underline the effectiveness of these projects in creating more resonant and inclusive educational experiences. In conclusion, the research argues for the increasing relevance of storytelling as a means of educational engagement to raise gender awareness. It poses recommendations to enhance interactive and participatory formats that resonate with digital-native generations.

Keywords: gender equality, educommunication, storytelling, NGOs, institutions

1. Introduction

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, offers a comprehensive blueprint for global peace and prosperity. Central to this agenda are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which promote inclusive strategies to enhance health, education, and economic growth while addressing inequality and environmental challenges. Among these goals, gender equality, as outlined in SDG 5, stands as a critical pillar, recognizing that empowering all genders is essential for inclusive and sustainable development (United Nations, n.d.). Achieving this goal requires the active participation and responsibility of institutions across sectors, calling them to contribute meaningfully to efforts aimed at making gender equity a reality.

SDG 5 targets gender equality through six critical outcomes. It calls for ending all forms of discrimination (5.1) and violence against women and girls (5.2), including harmful practices such as child marriage and female genital mutilation (5.3). SDG 5 also emphasizes the recognition and valuation of unpaid care and domestic work (5.4), which disproportionately affects women. Additionally, it seeks to ensure women's full participation in leadership and equal opportunities across all sectors (5.5). Ultimately, the goal is for universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights (5.6), affirming women's autonomy and well-being as essential to sustainable development (Leal Filho et al., 2023).

Achieving SDG 5 requires targeted means of implementation to effectively empower women and girls. This includes undertaking legal and institutional reforms to ensure equal rights to economic resources, including ownership and control over land and property (5.A). Enhancing the use of enabling technologies, particularly information and communication technologies, is also vital for advancing women's empowerment (5.B). Furthermore, adopting and strengthening sound policies and enforceable legislation across all levels of government plays a crucial role in promoting gender equality (5.C). Together, these measures create an enabling environment for sustainable and inclusive progress toward SDG 5 (Roy & Xiaoling, 2022).

Among the means of implementation, enhancing the use of enabling technology, particularly information and communications technology (5.B), is intimately connected to the concept of educommunication. Rooted in the intersection between education and communication, educommunication emphasizes the integration of communicative tools and practices into learning processes to foster critical thinking and media literacy. Its central aim is to empower individuals and communities in their relationship with media, enabling them to derive educational value from and through it. By promoting participatory learning and critical engagement, educommunication supports the broader empowerment goals of SDG 5 in the contemporary media landscape, referred to as the post-digital age.

The concept of educommunication was born in the pedagogical philosophy of Freire (1970), who emphasized dialogue, critical consciousness, and the transformative power of education. Building on this foundation, educommunication has evolved into a multifaceted approach characterized by several key dimensions. These include interdisciplinarity, technological integration, and the promotion of critical thinking and media literacy. It also values dialogue and participation, fostering inclusive and democratic educational environments. Crucially, educommunication is guided by a transformative purpose—seeking not only to inform but to

empower and enact social change (AlAhmad, 2021; Echeverría Maggi et al., 2024), aligning closely with the aims of gender equality within SDG 5.

Educommunication is closely related to media literacy—terms that are often used interchangeably, although they are not exact synonyms. Media literacy refers to the ability to access, analyze, evaluate, create, and act using all forms of communication. It empowers individuals to critically engage with media content and understand its role in society. Despite its growing importance, media literacy is not a standalone subject in many countries. According to Glas et al. (2023), it is formally integrated into school curricula in countries such as Finland, Sweden, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom but remains underdeveloped in other regions. Understanding media dynamics is especially vital in today's post-digital era, where digital technologies are deeply embedded in everyday life to the point of becoming invisible. This context is marked by datafication, algorithmization, personalization, analog-digital hybridity, transmediality, participatory culture, and new perceptions of time, identity, and memory (Llamas Ubieto et al., 2022).

In today's post-digital media environment, storytelling remains a powerful tool for communication, education, and social engagement. While post-digital storytelling reflects a hybrid media context shaped by interactivity, personalization, and algorithmic logic, transmedia storytelling involves narratives that unfold across multiple platforms and symbolic languages—verbal, visual, interactive—without being mere adaptations (Scolari, 2009). Meyerhofer-Parra et al. (2024) highlight the nuanced distinctions between the two, emphasizing their relevance in contemporary media. These narrative forms foster emotional resonance, critical reflection, and participatory learning, making them particularly effective for educational and empowerment purposes within complex digital ecosystems that are increasingly shaped by user interaction and media convergence.

This study aims to explore educommunication initiatives based on storytelling that have been developed to promote gender equality by European institutions and non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Through this analysis, the research aims to understand how storytelling is utilized within educational communication frameworks to support the advancement of SDG 5 and related goals. Specifically, the objectives are: (1) to identify the types of organizations that promote these initiatives; (2) to analyze the narrative strategies employed; (3) to determine which SDGs are addressed in addition to SDG 5; and (4) to propose recommendations for effective communication that support the SDGs.

2. Methodology

The research unfolds a qualitative, multiple-case study. Qualitative methods enable deep exploration of storytelling practices within real-life contexts, aligning with the interpretive nature of social science (Creswell, 2013). As defined by Yin (2011), the case study methodology enables rich, contextual analysis using diverse data sources. Employing multiple case studies enhances external validity through cross-case comparison and replication logic (Baxter & Jack, 2008). This approach is suitable for revealing how institutions and NGOs employ narrative strategies to promote gender awareness, providing nuanced insights into diverse European sociocultural settings and educational communication practices.

A set of inclusion criteria was applied to ensure relevance and analytical consistency when selecting the case studies. First, each project needed to exhibit an educommunicative nature aimed at fostering gender equality, combining educational intent with participatory communication strategies. Second, the initiatives had to incorporate storytelling as a central element in their design or implementation. Third, all selected cases were required to operate within the contemporary media landscape—specifically, the post-digital age—beginning in the second decade of the 21st century. Fourth, the target audience had to include Gen Z and Gen Alpha. Fifth, projects were to be developed by European institutions or NGOs. Lastly, cases were chosen from different countries to ensure territorial diversity and provide a broader, comparative perspective across various sociocultural contexts in Europe.

A total of five case studies were selected. Data collection was conducted through document analysis, drawing from diverse sources, including peer-reviewed scientific articles, journalistic reports, official organizational websites, and social media profiles. According to Bowen (2009), this multi-source strategy enhances the depth and credibility of findings.

Each case was examined according to a predefined analytical framework designed to facilitate systematic cross-case comparison. Analysis focused on five dimensions:

- Project creators: organizational background and expertise.
- Project description and aims: scope, objectives, and target audiences.
- Educommunicative approach: educational strategies and participatory mechanisms employed.
- Storytelling strategies: narrative forms and functions in advancing gender equality.
- Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs): primary SDGs addressed, with particular attention to SDG 5 on gender equality.

Data were manually coded using a thematic synthesis approach (Thomas & Harden, 2008) combining inductive identification of recurring themes with deductive alignment to the analytical framework. Cross-case analysis enabled the identification of convergent and divergent patterns, which were interpreted in light of existing literature on educational storytelling and gender equality communication.

3. Findings

3.1 Machofabriken (Sweden, 2009)

Creators. The Machofabriken project was initiated in Sweden in 2009 by the media content firm Amphi Produktion in collaboration with three prominent NGOs: MÄN (Men for Gender Equality Sweden), a national NGO founded in 1993, renowned for engaging men and boys to challenge masculinity norms and prevent gender-based violence (Män för Jämställdhet, n.d.); Unizon, which represents over 130 women's and youth shelters in Sweden; and ROKS, the national organization for women's shelters and youth support centers (Sweden Herald, 2023).

Project description and aim. The project is structured around the premise that traditional masculine norms—such as emotional suppression, dominance, and the normalization of violence—contribute to gender inequality and interpersonal harm. Its core aim is to challenge

and transform these norms by fostering awareness and encouraging alternative, equitable expressions of masculinity. Machofabriken is accessible online via its official website (machofabriken.se) and is freely available to women's shelters affiliated with Unizon and local youth groups connected to MÄN. Additionally, the toolkit can be purchased by schools and other organizations interested in implementing its gender equality framework (MÄN & Unizon, n.d.).

Educommunicative approach. Machofabriken 2.0 is structured into four main chapters: "Norms and Boxes," "Violence and Consent," "Power and Relations," and "To Feel." Central to the program are sixteen short films, each paired with reflective exercises designed to stimulate discussion and critical thinking. The toolkit includes a methodological guide with practical advice, as well as a theoretical section that provides context for each theme. A key pedagogical element is the 'Man Box,' a metaphorical tool used to illustrate how rigid masculine expectations can restrict emotional expression and life choices (Birging, 2020; MÄN & Unizon, n.d.). Figure 1 shows a scene from a role-playing workshop. The Man Box can be seen imprisoning the feet of one of the participants. It symbolizes a burden that oppresses men, anchoring them in a toxic model of masculinity that leads to violence.

Figure 1. Machofabriken role-playing workshop



Source: machofabriken.se

Storytelling base. Through scenario-based discussions and role-playing exercises, participants are encouraged to explore real-life situations that reveal how gender norms shape behavior, relationships, and emotional expression. This method fosters empathy and self-awareness by allowing individuals to step into diverse perspectives and question internalized ideals of manhood (Birging, 2020). Storytelling in this context aligns with broader educational research, which highlights narrative and role-play as practical tools for challenging hegemonic masculinity and promoting social change (Taylor & Voorhees, 2018).

SDGs scope. Machofabriken directly contributes to several United Nations SDGs, particularly SDG 5: Gender Equality. It aligns with targets 5.2 and 5.3, which aim to eliminate all forms of violence and harmful practices against women and girls. The project also supports SDG 4: Quality Education by providing inclusive, rights-based educational content that fosters critical thinking and promotes the values of equality and non-violence among young people. Furthermore, Machofabriken advances SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions by

promoting non-violent conflict resolution and cultivating a culture of respect and inclusion, which are crucial for building peaceful and just societies.

3.2 The Manifesto (Italy, 2017)

Creators. The “Manifesto della Comunicazione Non Ostile” was created in 2017 by the nonprofit association Parole O_Stili, founded by communications expert Rosy Russo. Drawing on her creative communication background, Russo initiated the project in response to the rise of hate speech and fake news on social media (Belletti, 2019). Parole O_Stili is a cross-sectoral community of journalists, educators, politicians, influencers, and digital professionals committed to promoting respectful online communication (Linkiesta, 2017).

Project description and aim. Il Manifesto della Comunicazione Non Ostile offers a ten-point manifesto translated into 45 languages that outlines principles for non-hostile language use, aiming to counteract hate speech and foster empathy, inclusion, and dialogue online (Parole O_Stili, 2025). Its broader goal is to create a safer and more welcoming digital space by encouraging individuals and institutions to reflect on the ethical implications of their words and adopt a more conscious communicative style. Although its approach is general, it has a direct application to gender equality since violence on social media is one of the most prevalent forms of violence experienced by women, with studies showing that in some European countries, nearly 88% of women report encountering different forms of online gendered violence (Martínez-Bacaicoa et al., 2024).

Educommunicative approach. The educational strategy of Il Manifesto della Comunicazione Non Ostile is rooted in an educommunicative approach that integrates media literacy with civic engagement to promote responsible digital behavior. The initiative employs a diverse range of tools, including interactive workshops for schools and companies, digital campaigns, a regularly updated blog, and community-based initiatives (Parole O_Stili, 2025). A notable component is the annual festival, which brings together experts to discuss communication ethics and digital culture. The project also operates two significant online platforms: #ancheioinsegno, developed in collaboration with the Italian Ministry of Education and freely accessible to schools, and Dubby, a joint initiative with the media channel Sky that offers a dynamic, inclusive vocabulary aimed at combating stereotypes and promoting social change, particularly about gender identity (Parole O_Stili & Ministero dell’Istruzione, n.d.; Parole O_Stili & Sky Italia, n.d.). These activities are designed to engage a broad audience—students, educators, professionals, and institutions—through participatory learning and ethical communication practices. This approach aligns with broader educommunication frameworks that emphasize dialogue, co-creation, and active citizenship in media environments (Mateus de Oro et al., 2024).

Storytelling base. Storytelling plays a central role in Il Manifesto della Comunicazione Non Ostile as a means of fostering empathy, reflection, and ethical awareness in digital communication. The project encourages individuals to share personal experiences as a way to humanize online interactions and minimize the depersonalization often associated with digital discourse (Parole O_Stili, 2025). By inviting people to narrate their own stories, the initiative creates a space where emotional resonance and mutual understanding can emerge—key components in reducing hostility and promoting respectful dialogue. This approach aligns with

narrative inquiry in education, which views storytelling as a powerful tool for constructing meaning and reshaping social behavior (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000).

SDGs scope. Similarly to the previously analyzed Machofabriken initiative, Il Manifesto della Comunicazione Non Ostile aligns with three SDGs. It supports SDG 5, Gender Equality, particularly targets 5.1 and 5.2, by promoting respectful communication and combating all forms of discrimination and verbal gender violence. It also contributes to SDG 4, Quality Education, through inclusive, values-based learning resources, and to SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, by fostering non-violent dialogue and civic responsibility in digital spaces.

3.3 Project 4 Gender Equality (Netherlands, 2019)

Creators. Project 4 Gender Equality, part of the In Europe Schools educational series, was developed by VPRO International, the international arm of the Dutch public broadcaster VPRO (VPRO International, n.d.). VPRO International is known for producing socially engaging documentaries and interactive educational kits designed for young Europeans.

Project description and aim. Within the In Europe Schools program, middle and high school students across Europe produce short documentaries addressing issues of gender and LGBTQ+ inequality, fostering historical understanding, media literacy, and cross-cultural dialogue. Project 4 Gender Equality's aim is not only to enhance awareness but also to encourage students to use film as a civic engagement tool, contributing to a pan-European discourse on equality (VPRO International, n.d.). By framing media creation as civic action, the project aligns with UE's media literacy mission to develop informed, participatory citizens in democratic contexts (Directorate- General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture of the European Commission, 2023)

Educommunicative approach. The pedagogical approach combines collaborative learning, guided media production, and critical analysis. The curriculum unfolds over four stages: an introductory video clip and group discussion; contextual lessons enriched with historical fact sheets; documentary production guided by role-specific tutorials (researcher, interviewer, filmer, editor); and final sharing with partner schools across Europe. Previous on critical media literacy underscores how guided peer-based inquiry and content creation fosters both critical thinking and empowerment, particularly when students reflect on media representations and power structures (Gainer, 2011). Additionally, the project provides training materials for teachers that address some of the needs identified by educators when promoting gender equality in the context of media literacy skills (Aydemir & Demirkan, 2018).

Storytelling base. In Project 4 Gender Equality, students engage in structured storytelling through the production of short documentaries. This process includes selecting a gender-related topic, conducting research, interviewing peers or community members, developing a narrative script, and editing audiovisual material to craft a coherent story. These films are then shared with partner schools across Europe, facilitating dialogic exchanges. The storytelling approach aligns with participatory filmmaking, where students act as co-authors of their own social narratives rather than passive recipients of content (VPRO International, n.d.). According to Lee et al. (2023), students utilize digital storytelling to foster critical thinking, engage more

deeply with gender issues, and express their identities. Story creation fosters reflection and structured reasoning, while personal narrative production increases emotional investment and topic retention (Yang et al., 2011). Moreover, storytelling empowers students to analyze social norms and voice their perspectives (Hull & Katz, 2006), making it a transformative pedagogical tool for exploring gender equality.

SDGs scope. As in the previously analyzed projects, Project 4 Gender Equality addresses the same triad of Sustainable Development Goals: SDG 5, Gender Equality, SDG 4, Quality Education, and SDG 16, Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions. A notable distinction, however, is its more holistic engagement with SDG 5, as it encompasses a broader range of the United Nations' targets, promoting respectful communication as a foundational element in preventing all forms of gender-based harm and fostering inclusive social norms.

3.4 FemSTEAM Mysteries (Cyprus, Germany, Greece, and Spain, 2020)

Creators. The European University Cyprus coordinated the FemSTEAM Mysteries project (2020–2022) under the Erasmus+ program (European University Cyprus, n.d.). The project brought together five additional partners: American Academy Nicosia (Cyprus), Cologne Game Lab (Germany), Challedu and Doukas School (Greece), and La Salle Buen Consejo (Spain), combining expertise in education, game design, and digital storytelling (Erasmusly, 2022).

Project description and aim. FemSTEAM Mysteries targeted students aged 12–15, educators, and STEAM professionals, offering innovative tools to promote gender equality in Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics (STEAM). Through a digital mystery game featuring role models, the project challenges gender stereotypes and highlights women's contributions to STEAM. By engaging youths and their teachers in inclusive learning environments, the project fosters equitable attitudes and inspires girls to consider STEAM careers (European University Cyprus, n.d.).

Educommunicative approach. The project uses a four-phase educational strategy: (1) role-model discovery via game introduction; (2) collaborative inquiry-based tasks across STEAM subjects; (3) game-based digital problem-solving; and (4) teacher training to support gender-aware facilitation (European Commission, n.d.) Previous research confirms that game-based learning enhances motivation and learning outcomes, especially among girls, and collaborative tasks promote engagement and critical thinking (Khan et al., 2017).

Storytelling base. Using interactive storytelling, FemSTEAM Mysteries immerses students in eight escape-room scenarios featuring female STEAM professionals whose “memory” must be restored (Vekiri et al., 2024). This narrative structure promotes empathy, problem-solving, and role-model identification. Scholarly evidence suggests that narrative-based learning with relatable characters can enhance empathy and motivation, particularly for girls in STEAM contexts (Tripon, 2024).

SDGs scope. This project continues the pattern of addressing SDG 5, Gender Equality, with a particular emphasis on 5.1, which aims to eliminate all forms of discrimination against women and girls, and 5.5, which promotes their full participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels. SDG 4, Quality Education, is also addressed through inclusive and empowering

learning strategies. Additionally, the project incorporates SDG 9, Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure, by fostering inclusive digital and communicative tools and SDG 13, Climate Action, likely through awareness-raising and responsible communication practices that support environmental sustainability.

3.5 A Gender Story (European Union, 2020)

Creators. A Gender Story was developed in 2020 as part of the GET UP (Gender Equality Training to Overcome Unfair Discrimination Practices) project by the European Institute for Gender Equality (EIGE), an EU agency based in Vilnius, Lithuania. The EIGE produces high-quality research, data, and policy tools to support gender mainstreaming and monitor discrimination throughout the EU. Its contribution to this project ensures academic rigor and reliable data delivery through engaging interactive storytelling for teenagers (Switch ASBL, 2019; European Institute for Gender Equality, 2024).

Project description and aim. A Gender Story is an interactive graphic novel designed for teenagers, aiming to challenge gender stereotypes and discrimination by immersing users in the stories of Anna and Tom as they uncover gendered biases in life choices through quizzes and visuals (see Figure 2). By targeting youth, the project raises awareness of how stereotypes impact personal and professional development during formative years. The project's core aim is to foster critical awareness and self-reflection in adolescents, promoting gender equality in decision-making and empowering them to question societal norms (Switch ASBL, 2019).

Figure 2. Examples of a plot choice and a quiz in A Gender Story



Source: agenderstory.eu

Educommunicative approach. The educational strategy relies on digital storytelling, interactive learning, and self-assessment. Users engage with a narrative across multiple chapters, interspersed with quizzes and decision points that prompt reflection on gendered assumptions. This aligns with research indicating that interactive digital narratives, combined with self-assessment tools, can reduce bias and enhance critical thinking, particularly when participants analyze their own content choices (Rubegni et al., 2022). The strategy thus encourages learners to identify stereotypes actively and assess their own perceptions, fostering metacognitive growth and awareness.

Storytelling base. The project employs interactive storytelling, weaving a visual narrative featuring relatable teen characters facing gender-related challenges. Decision points and quizzes engage users actively in the story, prompting empathy and personal connection. Scholarly work confirms that multimedia narratives with interactive elements enhance empathy

and reduce stereotypes—especially in adolescents—by enabling users to reflect on character experiences and compare them with their own (El Chaabi & Younes, 2025). Other authors argue that graphic novels and comics combine visual and verbal storytelling in a powerful, intersemiotic form, making them especially effective for addressing complex or sensitive social issues in an engaging and thought-provoking manner (Mota Roboredo Amante, 2023).

SDGs scope. A Gender Story aligns with several key SDGs. It takes a holistic approach to SDG 5, Gender Equality, addressing multiple dimensions of gender-based discrimination and empowerment. The project also supports SDG 4, Quality Education, by promoting inclusive, rights-based learning that fosters awareness and critical thinking around gender issues. Additionally, it contributes to SDG 10, Reduced Inequalities, by challenging social and cultural barriers that marginalize individuals based on their gender identity and by advocating for equal opportunities and representation across all sectors of society.

4. Conclusions

The analysis encompassed five case studies promoted by diverse European institutions and NGOs, both public and private, predominantly non-profit in nature. These entities span sectors such as government administration, education, media, and social advocacy, reflecting the interdisciplinary essence of educommunication. The initiatives originate from various European regions: Sweden (North), Italy and Greece (South), Germany and Netherlands (Central), Spain (West), and Cyprus (East), alongside a pan-European contribution from the European Union. This geographical diversity underscores a continent-wide commitment to gender equality. Notably, the global sustainability challenge necessitates a shift in values and behaviors. Although there is still a long way to go in achieving global gender equality, it seems clear that positive steps are being taken. European public institutions and civil society actors actively engage with the United Nations' call for collaborative action, demonstrating a shared responsibility in fostering inclusive and transformative educational practices.

The case studies analyzed reveal a diverse range of narrative strategies rooted in storytelling, each tailored to foster educational impact and critical engagement. Techniques such as role-playing, interactive digital storytelling, escape-room scenarios, graphic novels, and personal testimony are employed to stimulate empathy, reflection, and active participation. These strategies are not only pedagogically effective but also resonate with the media habits and cognitive styles of Gen Alpha and Gen Z, enhancing motivation and retention. The storytelling base across the projects emphasizes relatable characters, real-life scenarios, and decision-making moments, encouraging learners to question norms and internalize values. As a positive outcome, storytelling-based educommunication emerges as a powerful tool for teaching the SDGs and empowering youth in the post-digital era, marked by interactivity, co-creation, and emotional engagement.

Across all case studies, SDG 5 (Gender Equality) emerges as the central focus, except for *Il Manifesto della Comunicazione Non Ostile*, where it plays a significant yet indirect role. Some initiatives address specific SDG 5 targets—such as 5.1 (ending discrimination), 5.2 (eliminating violence), 5.3 (ending harmful practices), and 5.5 (ensuring full participation)—while others adopt a more holistic approach to gender equality. Additionally, the projects engage with other SDGs, including SDG 4 (Quality Education), SDG 16 (Peace, Justice, and

Strong Institutions), SDG 9 (Industry, Innovation, and Infrastructure), SDG 10 (Reduced Inequalities), and SDG 13 (Climate Action). This multidimensional engagement reflects the interconnected nature of sustainability challenges, highlighting how educommunication through storytelling can serve as a powerful strategy for fostering systemic awareness and transformative learning.

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations can be made to guide future educommunication initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality and the SDGs. It is essential to emphasize the value of empathy as a catalyst for participation, reflection, and social awareness. Empathy-driven storytelling fosters emotional engagement, helping learners connect personally with complex social issues. Furthermore, the integration of playful and gamified elements—such as interactive narratives, digital games, and decision-based scenarios—proves effective in enhancing user interaction and reinforcing learning outcomes. These strategies not only align with the communicative preferences of digital-native generations but also support the creation of inclusive, participatory, and transformative educational experiences that are vital for addressing the multifaceted challenges of sustainability.

Acknowledgments

The paper was prepared as part of a project funded by the State Budget titled “Establishment of Centers of Excellence at Mykolas Romeris University,” which is implemented under the initiative “Centers of Excellence Initiative” initiated by the Ministry of Education, Science and Sports of the Republic of Lithuania.

References

- AlAhmad, H. (2021). The role of educational communication in promoting a student-centered learning style in multicultural classrooms: A reflective essay on learning and teaching in higher education. *International Journal of Research in Education and Science (IJRES)*, 7(3), pp. 838–851. <https://doi.org/10.46328/ijres.2374>
- Aydemir, S., & Demirkan, Ö. (2018). Gender-Aware Media Literacy Training: A Needs Analysis Study for Prospective Teachers. *Educational Policy Analysis and Strategic Research*, 13(1), pp. 6-30.
- Baxter, P., & Jack, S. (2008). Qualitative case study methodology: Study design and implementation for novice researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 13(4), pp. 544–559. <https://doi.org/10.46743/2160-3715/2008.1573>
- Belletti, P. (2019). In rete non cresce solo la violenza. Parole O_Stili: da un’idea di Rosy Russo. *Aleteia*. Available: <https://it.aleteia.org/2019/04/24/progetto-sociale-comunicazione-non-ostile-manifesto-rosy-russo/>
- Birging, A. (2020). Men as victims and invisible women: The link between destructive male norms and violence. A discourse analysis of Machofabriken 2.0 (Master’s thesis,

- Södertörn University). DiVA Portal. <https://www.diva-portal.org/smash/get/diva2:1447919/FULLTEXT02.pdf>
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), pp. 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027>
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2016). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage publications.
- Echeverría Maggi, D. X., Dután, W., Orrala, L., Santa-María, G., Avilés, M., Matamoros, Á., Macías, M.-J., Suntaxi, M., Molina, L., Arroba, G., & Clery, A. (2024, March). Educommunication as a Communicative Strategy for the Dissemination of Cultural Programs. In *Future of Information and Communication Conference* (pp. 76-83). Cham: Springer Nature Switzerland.
- El Chaabi, M., & Younes, R. (2025). The effect of digital storytelling on middle school students' interests in STEM fields and stereotyping. *Eurasia Journal of Mathematics, Science and Technology Education*, 21(4), p. em2621. <https://doi.org/10.29333/ejmste/16220>
- Erasmusly. (2022, September 14). FemSTEAM Mysteries: A Role- Model Game- Based Approach to Gender Equality in STEAM [Project summary]. Available: <https://www.erasmusly.com/femsteam-mysteries-a-role-model-game-based-approach-to-gender-equality-in-steam-erasmus-project-12618.html>
- European Commission. (n.d.). FemSTEAM Mysteries: A Role- Model Game- Based Approach to Gender Equality in STEAM (Project No. 2020- 1- CY01- KA201- 066058). European Innovative Teaching Award. Available: https://innovative-teaching-award.ec.europa.eu/projects/femsteam-mysteries-role-model-game-based-approach-gender-equality-steam_en?prefLang=da
- European Institute for Gender Equality. (2024). European Institute for Gender Equality [Webpage]. Available: <https://eige.europa.eu/>
- European University Cyprus. (n.d.). FemSTEAM Mysteries [Project details]. Available: <https://steaminsdgs.eu/es/projects/femsteam-mysteries-5/>
- Directorate General for Education, Youth, Sport and Culture (European Commission) (2023). Digital Education Action Plan 2021–2027: Improving the provision of digital skills in education and training. Publications Office of the European Union. <https://doi.org/10.2766/149764>
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Herder and Herder.
- Gainer, J. S. (2010). Critical media literacy in middle school: Exploring the politics of representation. *Journal of Adolescent & Adult Literacy*, 53(5), pp. 364-373. <https://doi.org/10.1598/JAAL.53.5.2>

- Glas, R., van Vught, J., Fluitsma, T., De La Hera, T., & Gómez-García, S. (2023). Literacy at play: An analysis of media literacy games used to foster media literacy competencies. *Frontiers in Communication*, 8, p. 1155840. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fcomm.2023.1155840>
- Hull, G. A., & Katz, M.-L. (2006). Crafting an agentic self: Case studies of digital storytelling. *Research in the Teaching of English*, 41(1), pp. 43–81.
- Khan, A., Ahmad, F. H., & Malik, M. M. (2017). Use of digital game-based learning and gamification in secondary school science: The effect on student engagement, learning and gender difference. *Education and Information Technologies*, 22(11), pp. 5175–5197. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-017-9622-1>
- Llamas Ubieto, M. et al. (2022): Corpus de narrativa postdigital (2022). [Base de Datos de investigación]. Available: <https://docta.ucm.es/entities/publication/20e85c31-19b1-4310-99d1-15549d22a6e9>
- Leal Filho, W., Kovaleva, M., Tsani, S., Țîrcă, D.-M., Shiel, C., Alzira Pimenta Dinis, M., Nicolau, M., Sima, M., Fritzen, B., Lange Salvia, A., Minhas, A., Kozlova, V., Doni, F., Spiteri, J., Gupta, T., Wakunuma, K., Sharma, M., Barbir, J., Shulla, K., Bhandari, M. P., & Tripathi, S. (2022). Promoting gender equality across the sustainable development goals. *Environment, Development and Sustainability*, 25, pp. 14177–14198 <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10668-022-02656-1>
- Lee, A., Chu, D., & Wang, C. (2023). Digital storytelling and critical reflection: Exploring student agency in participatory media production. *Journal of Media Literacy Education*, 15(2), pp. 27–41. <https://doi.org/10.23860/JMLE-2023-15-2-3>
- Linkiesta. (2017, January 18). “Parole Ostili”, la prima community contro lo hate speech. Linkiesta.it. Available: <https://www.linkiesta.it/2017/01/parole-ostili-la-prima-community-contro-lo-hate-speech/>
- MÄN & Unizon. (n.d.). Machofabriken. *Machofabriken*. Available: <https://machofabriken.se/>
- MÄN för jämställdhet. (n.d.). Om oss [About us]. Available: <https://mfj.se/>
- Martínez- Bacaicoa, J., Henry, N., Mateos- Pérez, E., & Gámez- Guadix, M. (2024). Online gendered violence victimization among adults: Prevalence, predictors and psychological outcomes. *Psicothema*, 36(3), pp. 247–256. <https://doi.org/10.7334/psicothema2023.315>
- Mateus De Oro, C., Jabba, D., Erazo-Coronado, A. M., Aguaded, I., & Campis Carrillo, R. (2024). Educommunication and ICT: From a corpus to a model of educational intervention for critical attitude. *Technology, Pedagogy and Education*, 33(2), pp. 235-254. <https://doi.org/10.1080/1475939X.2024.2309950>
- Meyerhofer-Parra, R., González-Martínez, J., & Peracaula-Bosch, M. (2024). Postdigital storytelling: Storytelling (within or across) the digital and transmedia field. *Postdigital Science and Education*, 5, pp. 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s42438-024-00476-2>
- Mota Roboredo Amante, F. S. (2023). In her hands: navigating [sexual] identity and gender roles in a Portuguese graphic novel for young adults by Joana Estrela. *Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics*, 15(4), pp. 600–611. <https://doi.org/10.1080/21504857.2023.2292065>

- Parole O_Stili. (2025). Il Manifesto della comunicazione non ostile [The Manifesto of Non-Hostile Communication]. Available: <https://www.paroleostili.it/parole-ostili-eng>
- Parole O_Stili & Ministero dell'Istruzione. (n.d.). #AncheIoInsegno. Available: <https://www.ancheioinsegno.it/>
- Parole O_Stili & Sky Italia. (n.d.). Dubby – Inclusione senza termine. Available: <https://www.dubby.it/>
- Roy, C. K., & Xiaoling, H. (2022). Achieving SDG 5, gender equality and empower all women and girls, in developing countries: How aid for trade can help? *International Journal of Social Economics*, 49(6), pp. 930–959. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJSE-12-2020-0813>
- Rubegni, E., Landoni, M., Malinverni, L., & Jaccheri, L. (2022). Raising awareness of stereotyping through collaborative digital storytelling: Design for change with and for children. *International Journal of Human-Computer Studies*, 157, p. 102727. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijhcs.2021.102727>
- Scolari, C. A. (2009). Transmedia storytelling: Implicit consumers, narrative worlds, and branding in contemporary media production. *International Journal of Communication*, 3, pp. 586–606. <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/477>
- Sweden Herald. (2023, May 12). Women's refuges: Lack a zero vision against men's violence. *Sweden Herald*. Available: <https://swedenherald.com/article/womens-refuges-lack-a-zero-vision-against-mens-violence>
- Switch ASBL. (2019). A Gender Story [Interactive graphic novel]. Available: <https://agenderstory.eu>
- Taylor, N., & Voorhees, G. (Eds.). (2018). *Masculinities in play*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-90581-5>
- Thomas, J., & Harden, A. (2008). Methods for the thematic synthesis of qualitative research in systematic reviews. *BMC Medical Research Methodology*, 8, 45. <https://doi.org/10.1186/1471-2288-8-45>
- Tripon, C. (2024). Bridging Horizons: Exploring STEM students' perspectives on service-learning and storytelling activities for community engagement and gender equality. *Trends in Higher Education*, 3(2), pp. 324–341. <https://doi.org/10.3390/higheredu3020020>
- United Nations. (n.d.). The 17 goals. United Nations. Available: <https://sdgs.un.org/goals>
- VPRO International. (n.d.). Project 4 Gender Equality – In Europe Schools. Available: <https://www.vprobroadcast.com/titles/in-europe-schools/project-4-gender-equality.html>
- Vekiri, I., Meletiou-Mavrotheris, M., & Mannay, O. (2024). Using Role Models and Game-Based Learning to Attract Adolescent Girls to STEM. *Education Sciences*, 14(8), p. 836. <https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci14080836>
- Yang, Y.-T. C., Chuang, Y.-C., Li, L.-Y., & Tseng, S.-S. (2011). A blended learning environment for individualized digital storytelling. *Educational Technology & Society*, 14(4), pp. 225–235.

Yin, R. K. (2011). *Qualitative research from start to finish*. The Guilford Press.