

CORE CONCEPTS OF MEDIA LITERACY: IMPORTANCE OF MEDIA EDUCATION

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Summary

The aim of this paper is to differentiate the notions “media literacy” and “media education” as the main terms of a contemporary dominated field of research which study mass media and its influence on society. The article reveals different approaches of scholars on media literacy and media education as specific and autonomous field of knowledge in pedagogical theory and practice. It also reflects various definitions of these terms and the way they developed through the rapid evolution of digital technologies and mass media means. Media education is based on the study of five core concepts, which are considered in the article. The authors also review some new trends of media literacy education development, its social and academic importance and rapid growth around the globe. Considering the importance of teaching media literacy in the Ukrainian higher education institutions, the authors give the part of the practical lesson in the discipline “Info-Media Literacy and Critical Thinking” to show how students can reflect on the personal media consumption and footprint.

Keywords: media literacy, media education, critical thinking, media consumer, media footprint.

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1. Introduction

The rapid development of information and communication technologies and the mass media system in the modern world makes fundamental changes in the general philosophy of education, sets new tasks and at the same time opens new horizons of psychological and pedagogical research in the sphere of media education. Education now sets itself a new task – to form the child's ability to learn. The educational field is currently dominated by such trends as: the introduction of the main core of knowledge, a kind of basic minimum, on which a further set of knowledge, skills, inclines, skills, competencies is built; formation of a holistic perception of the world. In connection with the change in the content components of education, there are changes in the technologies of their implementation. Information technologies, distance learning, which cover networks of universities, schools, pre-schools, after-school activities, training and advanced training systems, are used in the field of pedagogical information exchange.

2. Different approaches on Media Literacy and Media Education

The UNESCO documents define that media education is the teaching of theory and practical skills for mastering modern mass media, which are considered as part of a specific, autonomous field of knowledge in pedagogical theory and practice; it should be distinguished from the use of media as aids in teaching other fields of knowledge, such as mathematics, physics or geography (UNESCO, 1982). So, UNESCO experts clearly distinguish media mastery from their usage as tools in teaching other sciences.

According to UNESCO experts, media education is part of the fundamental rights of every citizen of any country in the world to freedom of expression and the right to information and is an instrument of support for democracy. At the same time, media education is recommended for the introduction into the national curriculum of all states, in the system of additional, informal and "lifelong" education (UNESCO, 2015). What is especially important here is the idea that media education belongs to fundamental human rights and that it should continue, improve throughout life.

According to L. Masterman, "the central and unifying concept of media education is representation. That is, according to this view, the media do not reflect reality, but represent it. And the main goal of media education is the "denaturalization" of the media. Media education is primarily a research process based on key concepts, which are mainly analytical tools rather than alternative content. These key concepts include: denotation, connotation, genre, selection, nonverbal communication, media language, naturalism and realism, audience, construction, mediatio, representation, code/encoding/decoding, segmentation, narrative structure, ideology, rhetoric, discourse, and subjectivity (Masterman, 1989: 40-42).

L. Masterman identified and justified seven reasons for the relevance of media education in the modern world. 1. High level of mass media consumption and saturation of modern societies with their products. 2. Ideological importance of the media and their influence on the consciousness of the audience. 3. Rapid growth in the amount of media information, strengthening of its management mechanisms and its spread. 4. The intensity of media penetration into the main democratic processes. 5. Increasing the importance of visual communication and information in all industries. 6. The need to teach schoolchildren / students with a focus on compliance with modern requirements. 7. National and international processes of rapid information privatization (Masterman, 1989).

Another American scholar, R. Kubey, regards the purpose of media education as "giving students an understanding of how and why media reflect society and people", and what is the most important, "developing analytical abilities and critical thinking in relation to media" together with the learning their language (Kubey, 1997: 1-11). A prominent media theorist J. Gerbner understood media education as forming a broad coalition "to expand freedom and diversity of communication, to develop a critical understanding of the media as a new approach to liberal education" (Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, Signorielli, 1994: 17-42). C. von Feilitzen points out that media education means critical thinking, an essential element of the development of which is the creation of students' own media production. In his opinion, media education is needed for active participation both in the democratic process and in the process of globalization. It should be based on the study of all types of media (Feilitzen, 1999: 24-26). The interesting statement here is that the creation of media product is a necessary element in the process of media education. Indeed, desacralizing the media, acquiring students' journalism skills as they learn about the mechanism and "inside world" of how media are created, should help establish an independent and critical view of their content.

There is also an opinion that media education is the study of media. And it is different from learning through the media. Media education is simultaneously associated with the knowledge of how media texts are created and distributed, as well as with the development of analytical abilities for interpreting and evaluating their content. For comparison, the study of media, as a rule, is associated with the practical work of creating media texts. Both media education and media studies are aimed at achieving the goals of media literacy (*Dorr, Graves, Phelps, 1980*). The construction of media education both from media training and from the study of the media itself looks natural here. A clear indication is also the goal of media education: achieving media literacy.

3. Core concepts of Media Literacy

British scientist A. Hart believes that media education should be based on the study of six key concepts: "media agencies" (analysis of the functioning system, goals, sources of information that create and distribute media texts), "media categories" (analysis of media text types – by types, genres, etc.), "media technologies" (analysis of the technological process of media text creation), "media languages" (audiovisual means of expression, codes and signs, style, etc. of media texts), "media audience" (analysis of audience typology, level of media texts perception), "media representations" (analysis of specific presentation by authors / sources of information / content agencies in media texts) (*Hart, 2002*).

J. Francis Davis continued the development of the media literacy concepts that Masterman and Duncan distinguished. He wrote an article that first cited five ideas to teach children about media, based on the Key Concepts from the Association for Media Literacy (*Davis, 1989*). In 1993, Elizabeth Thoman, who founded the Center for Media Literacy in 1989 and published *Media & Values*, expanded on these ideas in the article for the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (*Thoman, 2002*). Thoman stated that "At the heart of media literacy is the principle of inquiry," and she developed Five Concepts (*Jolls, Wilson, 2014: 68 – 78*):

1. All media messages are 'constructed.'
2. Media messages are constructed using creative language with its own rules.
3. Different people experience the same media message differently.
4. Media are primarily businesses driven by a profit motive.
5. Media have embedded values and points of view.

So, we can state that media education is the process through which individuals become media literate – able to critically understand the nature, techniques and influence of media messages and productions.

Media education acknowledges and builds on the positive, creative and pleasurable dimensions of popular culture. It includes production of media texts and critical thinking about mass media to help us make our way through the increasingly complex media fields. These fields include not only traditional and digital media, but also popular culture texts such as toys, fads, fashion, shopping malls and theme parks. Teachers don't have to be media experts to incorporate media education in the classroom, because it is all about asking questions.

4. New Trends in Media Literacy Education

Media literacy education is a developing field of study and research. Its social and academic importance has been well recognized in recent years, and it is rapidly growing around the globe. There are some new trends of its development (*Abreu, Lee, McDougall, Melki, Mihailidis, 2017*).

The first trend comprises focusing from mass media to new media. It means that nowadays people are living in a mobile-networked society, youth are growing up digitally and they have become prosumers. They are constantly online and permanently connected. In other words, they live a media life (*Weslund, Bjur, 2014: 21-41*). So, if we look at the development of media education today, we see that it is an educational response to communication technology advancement. Therefore, in the new participatory media environment, media literacy education naturally had a paradigm shift. The hypothesis, goals and curriculum design of media literacy practical classes have shifted to the new media (*Abreu, Lee, McDougall, Melki, Mihailidis, 2017: 7-10*).

The second trend comprises a shift from an entirely analytical approach or production approach to combined analytical-production approach. The critical analytical approach may reject the entertainment that students get from social networks or mass media in whole, and the simple production approach also has its measurements of losing sight of the larger socio-political context. Therefore, more and more media educators are supporting the integration of the two approaches.

The third trend comprises focusing from media literacy to digital media literacy and media and information literacy (MIL). As we live in the digital age nowadays, the definition of media literacy should be expanded. Many media literacy scholars and practitioners have developed the concept of digital media literacy. (*UNESCO, 2015*) led its way to support a new concept of media and information literacy. Media and information is a holistic concept combining media literacy, information literacy and ICT skills. Growing up a media- and information-literate population becomes significant for the development of society as a media- and information-literate person should be able to handle messages from different sources: mass media (TV, radio, newspapers, magazines), the Internet, social networks, libraries, archives and databases. The whole world is shifting from being an industry society to a digital society.

The fourth trend is the transition of media education from the West to the East. Media literacy education appeared as a field of research and developed in Canada and Britain, so we can state that these countries were pioneers in media literacy. But now media-literacy education curriculum are all over the world. And recently, eastern countries are developing media literacy education in their societies, for example such countries as Thailand and China, and what is more, their programmes and curricula have unique cultural characteristics. For example, in Thailand local media educators proposed the integration of Buddhist concepts into media literacy education. This reflects that media literacy education needs to be contextualized in its socio-cultural location so that it can take a firm foothold in a country.

The fifth trend comprises focusing from schools to families in regard to media literacy education. A family-centered approach to media literacy can make ways to meet the media literacy needs for an individual child. As some scholars suggested, this approach is useful for emphasizing parent-child discussion and bi-directional socialization (*Abreu, Lee, McDougall, Melki, Mihailidis, 2017: 7-10*).

5. Practical implementation of teaching Media Literacy in class

We have developed a lesson in the discipline “Info-Media Literacy and Critical Thinking” for our bachelor level students and there is a presentation of the part of this lesson in which we can see how students can reflect on the personal media consumption and footprint.

Module 3: Media Literacy for Life-Long Learning.

Topic 12. Information and Media literacy concepts.

Content

- the notions of “personal media day”, “media and news bubbles”, “media footprint”;
- the core concepts of information and media literacy;
- importance of being media literate and promoting media literacy.

Language

- improve reading comprehension and speaking skills;
- learn related terms and phrases to discuss the issues of media literacy;

Critical thinking

- personalize the use of key concepts;
- reflect on the personal media consumption and footprint.

PART 1. ACTIVATING PRIOR KNOWLEDGE

What is Media?

- Advertisements ● Commercials on TV
- Flyers ● Commercials on Radio
- Posters ● News ● Magazines

What is Media Literacy?

Being able to read and view media critically.

Purpose: To inform, entertain, or persuade the reader about a topic.

How do writers influence us?

- Sounds - Sound effects, jingles and dialogue
- Movement - Action and actors
- Graphics - Images and Pictures
- Color - Bright or Dull

Ex. 1. Answer the questions:

1. Why is Media so important nowadays?
2. What impact on people does Media have?
3. What array of Media sources can you name?
4. How often do you personally take in touch with:

Print media _____

Broadcast media _____

Social media _____

Compare your answers in the group.

Ex. 2. Watch the video “Introduction to Media Literacy: Crash Course Media Literacy” to activate your prior knowledge and answer the questions.



1. What is the difference between media and medium?
2. Name as many types of media as you remember from the video.
3. What does Media Literacy comprise as a field of study?
4. What are media messages and media effects?
5. What does encoding and decoding of messages mean?

PART 2. PROVIDING AND ENCOURAGING OUTPUT

Ex. 3. Watch the video “What is media education?” and answer the questions.



1. What does Media Education mean?
2. Is media a focus or a tool in Media Education?
3. What do you think about Media Education as subject at school?
Is it important for children to be media literate?

Ex. 4. Read different definitions of Media Education. Working in pairs choose the best one. Give your reasons.

1. The process of teaching and learning about media by means of critical thinking.
2. The systematic instruction of media critical analysis and production skills through various media contents and technologies.
3. Activities taking place in education to teach the use of means of mass communication (video production, use of multimedia, digital newspapers, etc.).
4. Term often used as a synonym for Media Literacy. However, its strict sense makes much reference to the process developed for making a citizen medially literate and the skills to understand and manage the media.
5. Activities taking place in education to teach the use of means and critical thinking of mass communication (video production, use of multimedia, digital newspapers, etc.).

Ex. 5. Group work. Split into groups of 3. Now look through the reasons of teaching media literacy that are given by Canada’s Centre for Digital and Media Literacy. Do your reasons coincide? Do you agree with the reasons given below?

1. Media literacy encourages young people to question, evaluate, understand and appreciate their multimedia culture. It teaches them to become active, engaged media consumers and users.
2. Media education brings the world into the classroom, giving immediacy and relevance to traditional subjects such as History, English, Health, Civics and the Creative Arts. It serves as a perfect bridge for subject integration and interdisciplinary studies.
3. Media education embodies and furthers current pedagogy, which emphasizes student-centred learning, the recognition of multiple intelligences, and the analysis and management – rather than just the simple storing – of information.
4. Media education is grounded in the sound pedagogical approach of starting learning *where kids are at*. The media – music, comics, television, video games, the Internet and even ads – are a part of life that all kids enjoy. Media create a shared environment and are, therefore, catalysts for learning.

5. Media education encourages young people to use multimedia tools creatively, a strategy that contributes to “understanding by doing” and prepares them for a workforce that increasingly demands the use of sophisticated forms of communication.

6. In a society concerned about growing youth apathy to the political process, media education engages young people in “real-world” issues. It helps young people to see themselves as active citizens and potential contributors to public debate.

In a diverse and pluralistic society, the study of media helps youth understand how media portrayals can influence how we view different groups in society: it deepens young people’s understanding of diversity, identity and difference.

7. Media literacy helps young people’s personal growth and social development by exploring the connections between popular culture – music, fashion, television programming, movies and advertising – and their attitudes, lifestyle choices and self-image.

8. Media literacy helps children critique media representation, teaching them to distinguish between reality and fantasy as they compare media violence and real-life violence, media heroes and real-life heroes, and media role models and real-life roles and expectations.

9. With most Canadian students turning first to the Internet for research, media education is an essential component of Information Communications Technology education, assisting young people in developing critical thinking skills and strategies for optimizing searches, evaluating and authenticating information and examining issues of plagiarism and copyright.

PART 4. GUIDING TO MORE CALP

Ex. 16. a) Watch the video “Filter Bubbles and Echo Chambers”. How do you understand the terms “filter bubbles” and “echo chambers”?



b) Open YouTube on your phones. What are the recommendations that you have there? Write out three topics of your interests from the recommendations:

c) Open Google on your phones and write down the word “news”. What news is recommended especially for you? Write out three recommendations:

d) Open Facebook on your phones and follow the instructions. Tap on “Account” and find “Settings and privacy”. Tap on “Settings” and find “Ads”. You can see here Advertisers you’ve seen most recently. Write out three points from “Ads”.

e) All the points that you have just written out make up your personal media bubble. Working in groups share it with your groupmates and compare your bubbles. Do you have any similar points?

f) Tell about your partner’s media bubble. Do you have anything in common?

6. Conclusions

To conclude, media literacy education is now developing in a new technological age. In a mobile-networked society, learning is not limited to the classroom as with the help of digital tools students can get information and knowledge wherever they want or have an access to the Internet. Nowadays media education is very significant as people all over the world should be media literate and develop their critical thinking not to be fooled by any fake news and also to stay safe surfing the Internet (have cyber safety).

Therefore, regarding future media literacy education, whether it is for students, teachers or parents, media educators should consider new curriculum design and a new pedagogic approach, which also fits outside school settings. Regarding research, building independent theoretical concepts and research methods are the urgent tasks for media literacy education researchers.

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